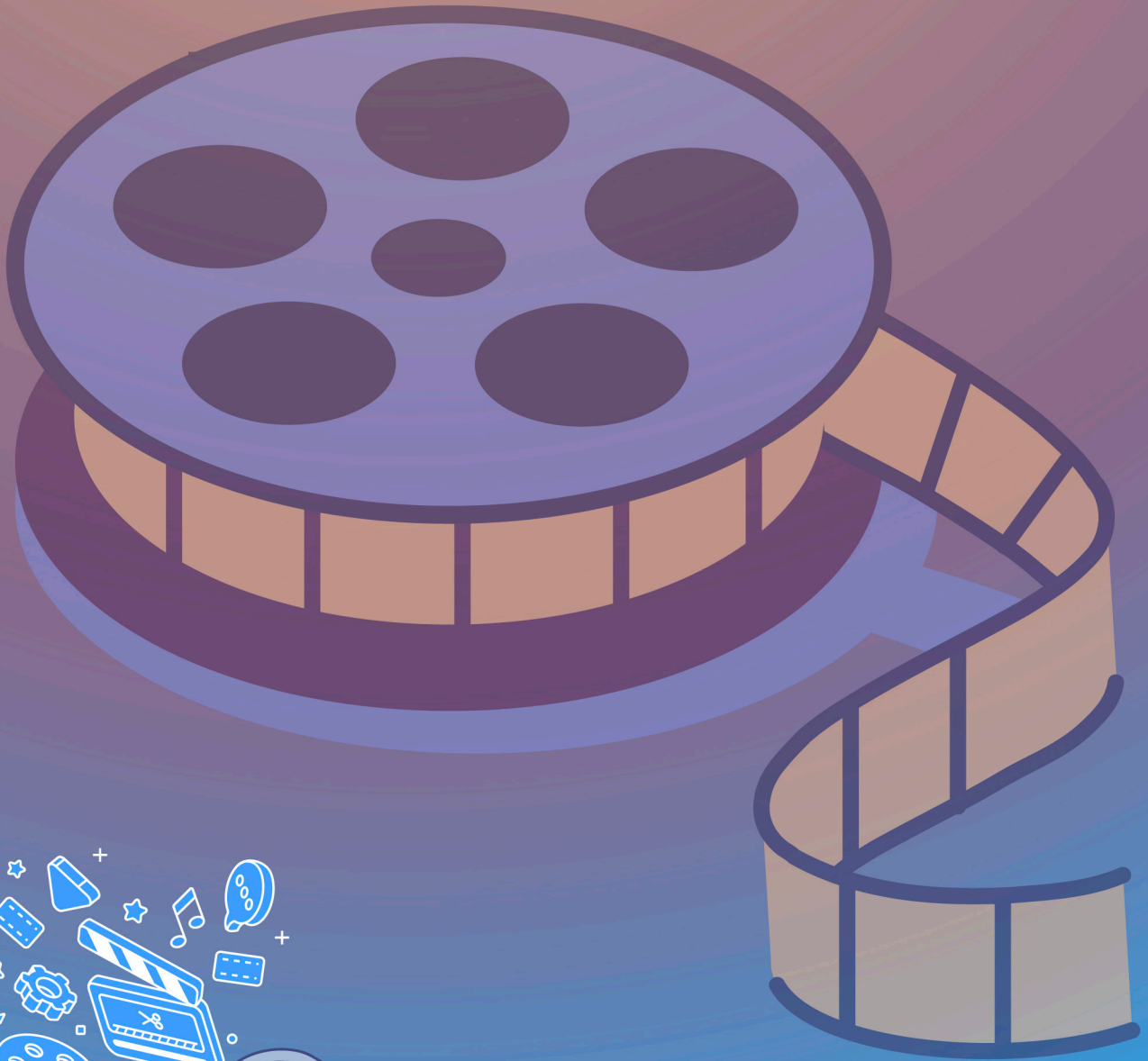




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Awards as Economic Signals: A Comparative Analysis of Film Award Recognition and Box Office Revenue Trajectories Across Domestic and International Markets

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ABSTRACT

This study finds that film awards function as a geographical economic signal, amplifying domestic box office performance over time. Using domestic multiplier analysis and OLS regression across 47 Oscar-nominated films released between 2016 and 2023, this investigation isolates the independent impact of award recognition on revenue trajectories. This study controls for opening weekend gross, production budget, franchise status, and release timing. Films with higher award scores show stronger domestic multipliers. This shows that awards extend theatrical longevity instead of creating immediate demand. The bivariate correlation between Award Score and Domestic Multiplier is positive and significant ($r = 0.44$, $p = .002$). This is where the top-quartile award films show mean multipliers of 112.2x compared to 11.5x for bottom-quartile films (Cohen's $d = 1.16$). In the full OLS regression model, Award Score has a positive coefficient on Domestic Multiplier after controlling for all covariates ($\beta = 1.707$, $SE = 0.592$, $p = .006$). A supplementary bivariate correlation between Award Score and International Revenue Share was positive and statistically significant ($r = .30$, $p = .042$), but the association was not statistically significant in the controlled regression model ($p = .118$).

INTRODUCTION

Every year, the film industry treats award season like a second box office. Studios campaign for nominations while distributors plan releases around Oscar announcements. The evidence for that is messier than the industry likes to acknowledge. The question of where exactly awards generate financial value has never been clearly answered. This study started from a specific gap in the existing research. Not many works have compared how award recognition affects domestic versus international revenue trajectories after controlling for the other factors that cause box office performance. That distinction matters because international markets now account for over 70% of total box office revenue for major Hollywood productions (Motion Picture Association, 2022), yet awards like the Oscars are fundamentally American institutions. If awards are primarily a domestic signaling mechanism, then the conventional assumption that they are a global revenue driver must be revised.

Prior research shows a positive correlation between awards and revenue, as 'What's an Oscar Worth?' shows (Nelson *et al.*, 2001). Nelson found that Oscar nominations and wins are associated with higher domestic revenue and longer theatrical runs. Zhuang *et al.* (2011) found that the signaling purpose of awards is most useful for films that lack previously-built franchise audiences. These findings line up with signaling theory (Spence, 1973; Akerlof, 1970). The signaling theory is when quality is hard to evaluate before purchase, so credible signals reduce consumer uncertainty.

The complication is that critical acclaim and commercial success are frequently inversely correlated in Hollywood (Simonton, 2009). Ravid (1998) similarly found that

production budget and star power are stronger predictors of box office revenue than critical recognition. What the existing literature does not cleanly resolve is whether awards are generating a specific type of value that total revenue figures obscure.

The theoretical framework that guides this investigation is signaling theory (Spence, 1973; Akerlof, 1970), combined with Straubhaar's cultural proximity hypothesis. Straubhaar's hypothesis helps to determine whether the domestic award effect will replicate internationally. These frameworks help form the prediction that Oscar recognition will function as a stronger economic signal in domestic American markets. This is because the institutional legitimacy of the Academy Awards is culturally embedded compared to the way international markets are organized.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question for this study is: To what extent do film awards influence changes in domestic and international box office revenue after accounting for pre-award performance?

Three hypotheses guide this investigation. First, Award Score will be positively associated with Domestic Multiplier performance after controlling for established financial predictors, reflecting the staged theatrical expansion mechanism through which award recognition converts to sustained domestic revenue. Second, the award effect will be stronger in domestic markets than international markets, consistent with the cultural proximity hypothesis (Straubhaar, 1991). Third, the award-multiplier relationship will be non-linear. This is because high-recognition films will benefit a lot more

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than moderately recognized films. This indicates the visibility necessary for award signals to shift consumer behavior at scale.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation for understanding awards as economic signals is from two works. Michael Spence created signaling theory to explain how information asymmetry gets resolved in markets. Signaling theory specifically explains how job applicants signal quality to employers who cannot directly observe it (Spence, 1973). Akerlof explains that without credible quality signals, high-quality goods are undervalued because buyers assume average quality (Akerlof, 1970). Film consumption is a perfect example of this. Audiences invest money and time before knowing whether a film is worth either. This is exactly the market condition where credible quality signals carry economic weight.

Nelson provided quantitative evidence of the Oscar effect. This effect is when nominations and wins are associated with higher domestic revenue, expanded theatrical distribution, and wins producing effects 2.5 to 3 times larger than nominations (Nelson *et al.*, 2001). Zhuang *et al.* (2011) showed that the effect is most pronounced for films without pre-existing franchise audiences. Pangarker and Smit (2013) replicated similar findings in the South African market, suggesting some generalizability across cultural contexts.

The complication in the existing evidence is from two sources. Simonton (2009) documented that critical acclaim and commercial success are usually inversely correlated in Hollywood, especially in the drama genre. This is consistent with my study's finding where heavily awarded films have small opening weekends while also having exceptional domestic multipliers. Ravid established that budget and star power are the dominant financial predictors of box office performance (Ravid, 1998). This positions the award effect as real but secondary. This study addresses the gap by using domestic multiplier instead of total gross as the primary dependent variable. This study also controls for genre and budget in the regression model.

Promotional strategies may also shape commercial outcomes, as research on small businesses has linked the use of social media trends with customer engagement and business growth (Akon *et al.*, 2025). Similarly, research examining Netflix highlights the importance of organizational innovation and adapting to changing competitive conditions (Dimitrakaki, 2025).

One underexplored area in the prior research is the threshold of the award effect. Spence argued that signals are economically effective only when they cross a minimum visibility threshold to change receiver behavior (Spence, 1973). A single nomination, without wins, could create insufficient media coverage to trigger the distributor behavior that produces revenue growth.

The international dimension of the award-revenue relationship is the most significant gap in existing

research. The Motion Picture Association explains that international markets account for over 70% of total global box office revenue for major Hollywood productions (The Motion Picture Association, 2022). This is due to audience growth in China, India, South Korea, and Southeast Asia from the last decade (The Motion Picture Association, 2022). But, most of the important studies in film economics, like Scott and De Vany and Walls, rely on domestic data.

Straubhaar's cultural proximity hypothesis is the most useful tool for predicting whether the domestic award effect will replicate internationally. Audiences engage strongly with cultural signals embedded within their own institutional context (Straubhaar, 1991). The Oscars have authority in American markets because decades of cultural exposure have made them a prestige institution (Straubhaar, 1991). The Oscars signaling authority does not automatically transfer like in the Golden Rooster Awards in China, the Baeksang Arts Awards in South Korea, or the European Film Academy Awards. This creates the prediction that award score will be more strongly associated with domestic multiplier performance than with international revenue share.

However, the empirical results complicate this prediction. The bivariate correlation between Award Score and International Revenue Share is positive ($r = 0.30$, $p = 0.42$). This contradicts the cultural proximity hypothesis. My Discussion addresses why this association is better understood as a confound artifact that is driven by European co-production structures and internationally prominent director brands. When confounds are controlled in the regression model, the award-international share association is non-significant ($p = .118$).

Research Gap

The existing literature establishes three things clearly: awards correlate with post-release domestic revenue (Nelson *et al.*, 2001; Zhuang *et al.*, 2011); international markets now dominate global box office performance (Motion Picture Association, 2022); and critical recognition and commercial success are frequently in tension rather than alignment (Simonton, 2009; Ravid, 1998). What the existing literature does not establish is how these three facts interact. No prior study has directly tested whether the award-revenue relationship operates differently across domestic and international markets within the same controlled regression framework. Studies that examine award effects rely heavily on domestic data and treat international performance as secondary. Studies that examine international market performance focus on production budget, genre, and franchise status as predictors without isolating award recognition as an independent variable. The result is a gap at the intersection of these two bodies of work: the geographic specificity of the award effect has never been empirically tested with cross-market comparison. If awards are primarily a domestic signaling mechanism, as the cultural proximity hypothesis predicts, then studios and investors

who treat Oscar recognition as a global commercial asset are misallocating resources. If awards do drive international performance, then the localized signaling model is incomplete and needs revision. Resolving this question requires a study that examines both domestic and international revenue outcomes for the same films using the same control variables, which is the design that this study employs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a mixed-methods research design. It combines quantitative regression and correlation analysis with qualitative case analysis. The quantitative component identifies statistical relationships between award recognition and revenue trajectories across 47 films. The qualitative component explains the mechanisms through which those patterns operate and ensures the numerical findings are interpreted within industry context. This design is consistent with the frameworks established by Nelson *et al.* (2001) and Yang (2015). It extends their methodology through cross-market comparison and mechanism analysis. Signaling theory serves as the theoretical framework throughout (Spence, 1973; Akerlof, 1970). Awards serve as credible quality signals that reduce consumer uncertainty in a highly informational market. The cultural proximity hypothesis (Straubhaar, 1991) sets

up the prediction that these signals will be geographically bounded. Every finding is interpreted through these frameworks, including the findings that complicate them. The primary dataset comprises 47 films that received at least one Academy Award nomination between 2016 and 2023 and had complete domestic and international box office records publicly available through Box Office Mojo. The initial pool of Oscar-nominated films across this period is around 210 titles. Films were excluded under four criteria. The excluded contains incomplete international box office records ($n = 47$ excluded). Animated films whose only nomination was Best Animated Feature were also excluded ($n = 18$ excluded). Documentary films ($n = 14$ excluded) and foreign-language films that did not receive a wide U.S. theatrical release, with the exception of *Parasite*, were excluded ($n = 14$ excluded excluding *Parasite*). The resulting 47-film sample represents the full population of Oscar-nominated live-action feature films with complete financial records released.

A seven-film comparative subset was selected for the qualitative case analysis. It was chosen to represent informative positions in the Award Score and Domestic Multiplier distributions. All inferential statistics are drawn from the full 47-film dataset.

The Award Score is this study's primary independent

Film	Year	Award Score	Opening Wknd (\$)	Dom. Total (\$)	Intl. Total (\$)	Dom. Multiplier	Dom. Share %	Intl. Share %
<i>Parasite</i>	2019	34	\$393,216	\$53,369,745	\$199,898,113	135.73	21.1%	78.9%
<i>The Shape of Water</i>	2017	59	\$166,564	\$63,859,435	\$131,384,029	383.39	32.7%	67.3%
<i>Moonlight</i>	2016	30	\$402,075	\$27,854,932	\$37,317,679	69.28	42.7%	57.3%
<i>Bohemian Rhapsody</i>	2018	38	\$51,061,119	\$216,303,339	\$694,148,558	4.24	23.8%	76.2%
<i>Get Out</i>	2017	11	\$33,377,060	\$176,196,665	\$83,658,579	5.28	67.8%	32.2%
<i>Barbie</i>	2023	28	\$162,022,044	\$636,238,421	\$796,102,064	3.93	44.4%	55.6%
<i>Rogue One</i>	2016	4	\$155,081,681	\$532,177,324	\$523,879,949	3.43	50.4%	49.6%

Figure 1: Award Score = (wins $\times$ 3) + (nominations $\times$ 1) aggregated across Oscar, BAFTA, and Golden Globe categories. Domestic Multiplier = Total Domestic Gross / Opening Weekend Gross. Dom. Share = domestic gross as a percentage of total worldwide gross. Financial data sourced from Box Office Mojo. Award data collected by the researcher from official institutional records. Screenshot taken from Excel.

variable. It is calculated as: Award Score = (Oscar wins $\times$ 3 + Oscar nominations) + (BAFTA wins $\times$ 3 + BAFTA nominations) + (Golden Globe wins $\times$ 3 + Golden Globe nominations). The 3:1 weighting ratio for wins versus nominations reflects Nelson *et al.*'s (2001) finding that wins produce revenue effects approximately 2.5 to 3 times larger than nominations. A sensitivity analysis using Oscar-only nominations and wins produced qualitatively identical bivariate results ($r = 0.38$, $p = .008$), confirming the composite score does not introduce systematic bias. In the full dataset, Award Score ranges from 0 (*Spider-Man: Homecoming*) to 91 (*Oppenheimer*), with a mean of 30.19 (SD = 21.82).

The primary dependent variable: Domestic Multiplier = Total Domestic Gross / Opening Weekend Gross. This measures how many times a film earns back its opening weekend revenue over its full domestic theatrical run. In

the full dataset, multipliers ranged from 1.83 (*Nomadland*) to 383.4 (*The Shape of Water*). The mean was 52.02 (SD = 85.13), with a median of 6.84.

The secondary dependent variable is International Revenue Share = Total International Gross / Total Worldwide Gross. This serves as the geographic distribution of a film's revenue. It is basically a direct test of whether award recognition is differentially associated with domestic versus international performance. The numbers range from 0.08 (*American Fiction*) to 0.94 (*Roma*). There are five control variables. Opening weekend gross (natural log-transformed), is a proxy for pre-award demand. Production budget (natural log-transformed) and franchise status (binary: 1 = established franchise or IP, 0 = original property) were also controlled. Awards season release (binary: 1 = released October through February, 0 = March through September); and drama genre (binary: 1

= primary genre is drama, 0 = all other genres) were also controlled (Yang, 2015; De Vany and Walls, 2021).

Methodology Justification

The mixed-methods design was chosen because no single analytical approach could answer the research question on its own. Regression analysis identifies whether award recognition predicts domestic multiplier performance after controlling for confounding financial variables, but it cannot explain why the relationship exists or why specific films deviate from the trend. Qualitative case analysis fills that gap by examining the release strategy decisions that translate award recognition into measurable revenue change. The domestic multiplier was selected as the primary dependent variable rather than total gross because it captures post-release revenue growth relative to opening weekend demand. A film like *Avengers: Endgame* grosses \$858 million domestically with a 2.4

multiplier; *Moonlight* grosses \$27.9 million with a 69.3 multiplier. The multiplier correctly identifies which film demonstrates the domestic engagement that award-driven expansion produces. The cross-market design directly addresses the primary gap in prior literature. Nelson *et al.* (2001) and Yang (2015) establish that regression analysis is appropriate for isolating award effects on box office outcomes, but neither study compares domestic and international markets simultaneously (Nelson *et al.* 2001; Yang, 2015). This study extends their framework, adding geographic specificity to a methodology that prior research has already validated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Award Scores range from 0 to 91, with a mean of 30.19 (SD = 21.82) and a median of 26.0. The Domestic Multiplier distribution is severely right-skewed: mean of 52.02 (SD = 85.13) versus median of 6.84, driven by

Variable	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
Award Score	30.19	21.82	26.00	0	91
Domestic Multiplier	52.02	85.13	6.84	1.83	383.4
International Revenue Share	0.62	0.18	0.64	0.08	0.94
Opening Weekend Gross (\$M)	\$46.3M	\$78.9M	\$0.66M	\$0.07M	\$357.1M
Production Budget (\$M)	\$78.2M	\$92.8M	\$26.0M	\$3.5M	\$356.0M

Figure 2: Financial data sourced from Box Office Mojo and The Numbers. Award data collected from official Oscar, BAFTA, and Golden Globe records. Screenshot taken from Word Documents and Excel.

extreme outliers. International Revenue Share: 0.62 (SD = 0.18), indicating that on average, 62% of the sample's box office revenue came from international markets.

The correlation between Award Score and Domestic Multiplier across all 47 films was positive and statistically significant ($r = 0.44$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.65], $df =$

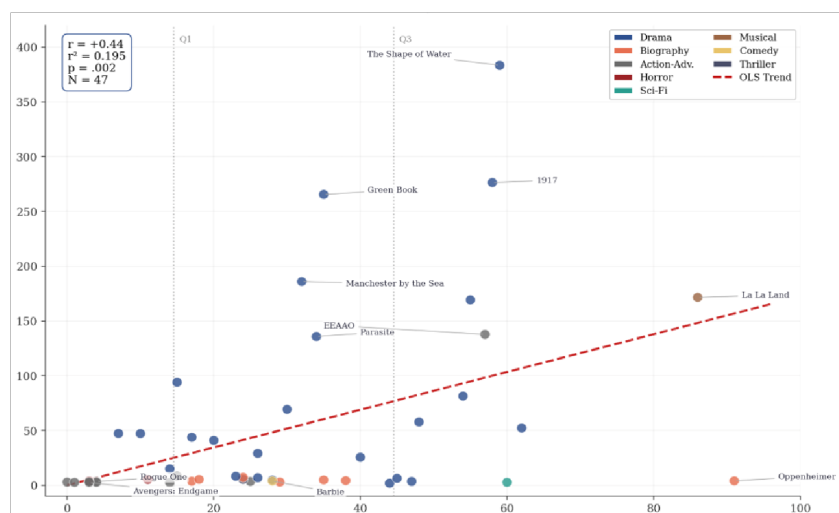


Figure 3: Award Score vs. Domestic Multiplier, N = 47 films, 2016-2023. Each point represents one film, colored by genre. Dashed line = OLS trend ($r = 0.44$, $r^2 = 0.195$, $p = .002$). Vertical dotted lines indicate Award Score quartile boundaries (Q1 = 14.5, Q3 = 44.5). Financial data: Box Office Mojo. Award data collected and then put into Excel.

45, $r^2 = 0.195$). Approximately 19.5% of the variance in domestic multiplier performance is associated with award recognition in bivariate analysis.

The scatterplot shows heterogeneity around the trend

line. The dataset mean multiplier of 52.02 is pulled far above the median of 6.84. This is because of films like *The Shape of Water* (383.4x), *1917* (276.3x), *Green Book* (265.5x), *Manchester*

by the Sea (185.9x), and La La Land (171.5x). All high award-score films with small opening weekends expanded following nominations or wins. Franchise blockbusters cluster near 2–4x regardless of award recognition. Award Score is positively correlated with Metacritic score ($r = 0.26$, $p = .077$), confirming that awards and critical reception are associated but not identical. The correlation

between Domestic Multiplier and International Revenue Share is zero ($r = 0.01$, $p = .937$). This means that sustained domestic performance and international revenue concentration are structurally independent outcomes.

Films in the top Award Score quartile (Award Score > 44.5, $n = 12$) show a mean Domestic Multiplier of 112.2

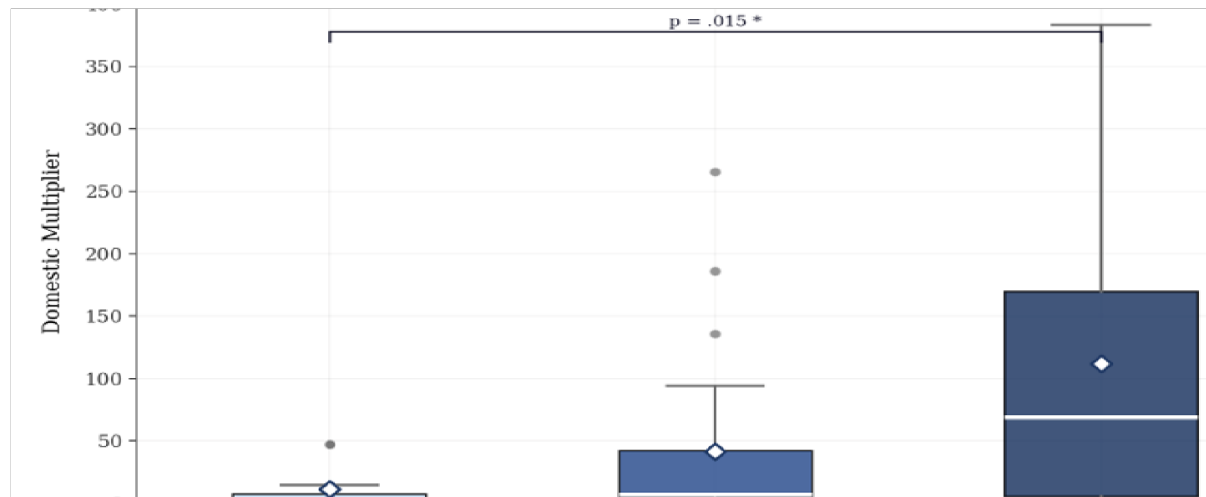


Figure 4: Boxes show quartile range; horizontal white lines show median; the diamonds show mean. Top vs. bottom quartile: Welch's $t(11.4) = 2.84$, $p = .015$, Cohen's $d = 1.16$. Outliers were plotted individually. Financial data: Box Office Mojo. Screenshot taken from Word Documents and Excel.

($SD = 121.4$, median = 69.6), compared to 11.5 ($SD = 17.0$, median = 3.2) for the bottom quartile (Award Score ≤ 14.5 , $n = 12$) and 41.8 ($SD = 68.3$, median = 7.2) for the middle range. The top versus bottom quartile difference is statistically significant by Welch's t -test ($t(11.4) = 2.84$, $p = .015$, 95% CI for difference [23.5, 177.8], Cohen's $d = 1.16$), representing a large effect size.

The middle versus bottom quartile comparison is non-significant ($t = 2.01$, $p = .055$, Cohen's $d = 0.51$). This means that the structure of the award effect is more of a gradient. The distinction between moderate and low recognition is less sharp than predicted. The award-multiplier relationship strengthens as award recognition increases.

The correlation between Award Score and International

Revenue Share was positive and important in bivariate analysis ($r = 0.30$, $p = .042$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.54], $df = 45$). This result contradicts the signaling hypothesis at first. However, examination of the films shows that the correlation is not the only result of Oscar signals driving international consumers. *Oppenheimer* (91), *Poor Things* (62), *The Shape of Water* (59), *1917* (58), and *Three Billboards* (55) all have high international revenue shares reflecting European co-production agreements rather than award demand. On the other hand, high award-score films with specifically American subject matter like *American Fiction* (intl. share = 8.4%) and *Judas and the Black Messiah* (22.3%) show lower international shares.

Table 1. is significant overall ($R^2 = 0.376$, adjusted $R^2 =$

Table 1: $N = 47$. $R^2 = 0.376$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.282$, $F(6, 40) = 4.017$, $p = .003$. Shapiro-Wilk test on residuals: $W = 0.890$, $p < .001$, indicating significant departure from normality driven by right-skewed outliers. VIF for log opening weekend = 6.05; all other VIFs < 3.3. † $p < .10$. ** $p < .01$. Screenshot taken from Word Documents and Excel.

Variable	β	SE	$t(40)$	P	95% CI	VIF
Award Score	1.707	0.592	2.884	.006**	[0.511, 2.903]	1.48
Opening Weekend Gross (log)	-17.607	9.208	-1.912	.063†	[-36.217, 1.002]	6.05
Production Budget (log)	3.696	13.965	0.265	.793	[-24.529, 31.920]	3.11
Franchise Status (0/1)	63.819	46.572	1.370	.178	[-30.306, 157.944]	3.28
Awards Season Release (0/1)	-11.580	38.226	-0.303	.764	[-88.837, 65.677]	3.18
Drama Genre (0/1)	17.348	34.767	0.499	.621	[-52.918, 87.614]	2.73
Intercept	184.416	245.766	0.750	.458	[-312.3, 681.1]	—

0.282, $F(6, 40) = 4.017$, $p = .003$). Award Score keeps a positive and statistically significant coefficient after controlling for all covariates ($\beta = 1.707$, $SE = 0.592$, $t(40) = 2.884$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [0.511, 2.903]). Each one-point increase in Award Score is associated with a 1.71-point increase in Domestic Multiplier, holding all other predictors constant.

Opening weekend gross (log) shows a negative and significant coefficient ($\beta = -17.607$, $SE = 9.208$, $p = .063$). This is consistent with the front load pattern where films with larger opening weekends have lower multipliers. This means the audience saturation happens early on. The franchise coefficient is positive and not significant ($\beta = 63.819$, $p = .178$). The drama genre shows a positive non-significant coefficient ($\beta = 17.348$, $p = .621$). This is likely because the genre effect is captured by Award Score, where drama genre correlates

($r = 0.36$).

The Shapiro-Wilk test on regression residuals is significant ($W = 0.890$, $p < .001$), indicating a meaningful departure from normality. This departure is driven by extreme outliers in the Domestic Multiplier distribution. Consequently, t -statistics and p -values are less precise than they would be with normally distributed residuals. The Award Score coefficient remains significant at $p = .006$ despite this limitation, but coefficient magnitudes should not be over-interpreted.

A supplementary regression model with International Revenue Share as the dependent variable was not statistically significant overall ($R^2 = 0.215$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.097$, $F(6, 40) =$

1.828, $p = .118$). The Award Score coefficient in this model is non-significant ($\beta = 0.002$, $SE = 0.001$, $p = .118$). This is the key controlled result supporting the localized signaling hypothesis: when production-related

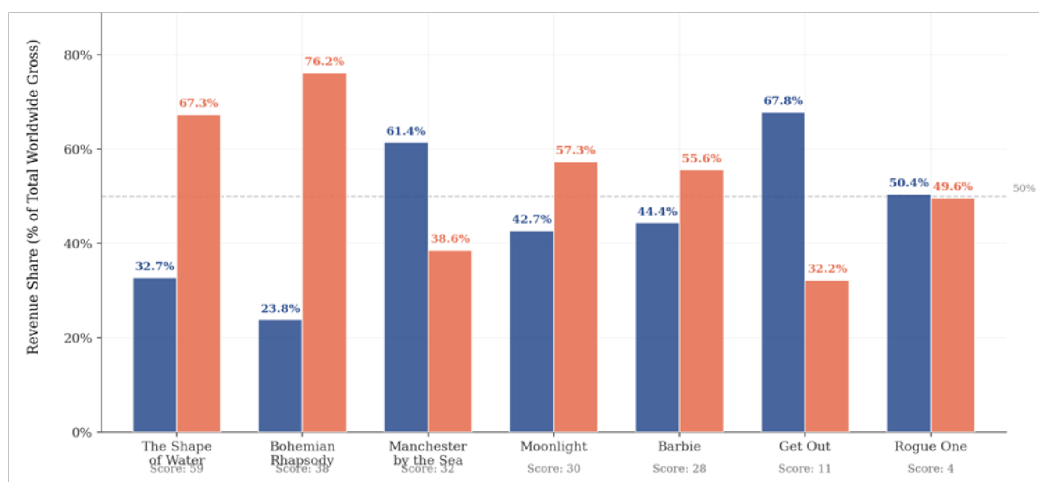


Figure 5: Boxes show quartile range; horizontal white lines show median; the diamonds show mean. Top vs. bottom quartile: Welch's $t(11.4) = 2.84$, $p = .015$, Cohen's $d = 1.16$. Outliers were plotted individually. Financial data: Box Office Mojo. Screenshot taken from Word Documents and Excel.

confounders are held constant, award recognition is not independently associated with higher international revenue share.

Manchester by the Sea (61.4%), Moonlight (42.7%), and American Fiction (91.6%) show the highest domestic revenues. This is consistent with the cultural proximity

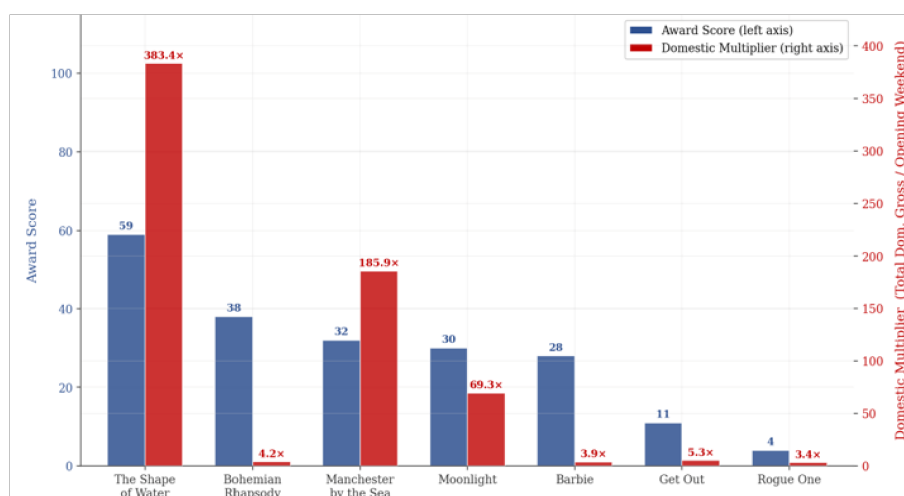


Figure 6: Award Score vs. Domestic Multiplier - Seven-film Case Subset. Dual y-axes: Award Score (blue, left); Domestic Multiplier (red, right). Films ordered by Award Score descending. Note that Bohemian Rhapsody (Score=38, Multiplier= 4.2x) is the primary exception, as discussed in the qualitative analysis. Financial data: Box office mojo. Screenshot taken from Excel and Word Documents.

hypothesis. In contrast, international films reflect pre-existing distribution structures. The Shape of Water (international share 67.3%) and 1917 (59.1%) show high international shares regardless of their award recognition. This reflects pre-existing distribution structures instead of Oscar-driven international demand. Barbie (domestic share 44.4%) and Rogue One (domestic share 50.4%) show balanced splits driven by global franchise marketing instead of award signaling. The three highest award score films are The Shape of Water (383.4x), 1917 (276.3x), and Manchester by the Sea (185.9x). These films have the highest domestic multipliers. The two near zero award films are Rogue One (3.4x) and Barbie (3.9x). They show the lowest domestic multipliers. Bohemian Rhapsody is the exception. It has an Award Score of 38 and Multiplier of 4.2x. Bohemian Rhapsody has high award recognition but a multiplier comparable to zero recognition blockbusters. Its international revenue share of 76.2%, the highest in the subset, is because of Queen's status as a global music IP rather than award driven demand. Across the 47-film dataset, top-quartile award films made around 9.75 times more revenue per opening-weekend dollar than bottom-quartile films (mean multipliers 112.2 versus

11.5). This advantage is the mechanism where awards create commercial value for limited-release films. Avengers: Endgame grossed \$858 million domestically with a 2.4x multiplier, while Moonlight grossed \$27.9 million with a 69.3x multiplier. The difference is between revenue scale and revenue efficiency.

The qualitative analysis identifies the staged theatrical expansion as the primary mechanism translating award recognition into domestic multiplier performance. The Shape of Water opened on 2 screens by Fox Searchlight. Following its 13 Oscar nominations, the film expanded to 2,341 screens and sustained a 22-week theatrical run. The domestic multiplier of 383.4x is entirely the result of this staged expansion.

1917 followed an almost identical domestic trajectory. It had a 4-screen opening, Golden

Globe Best Picture win, 10 Oscar nominations, wide expansion, 18-week run, and a 276.3x multiplier. Manchester by the Sea had a 4-screen opening, 6 nominations, 2 wins and a 185.9x multiplier. Moonlight had a 4-screen opening, 8 nominations, 3 wins, and a 69.3x multiplier. These films' limited openings, award triggers, and high multipliers is the clearest evidence available that the award effect operates through a specific distribution mechanism.

Barbie (2023) demonstrates that high domestic multipliers can be achieved through different mechanisms. Its 3.93x multiplier on a \$162 million opening weekend reflects a cultural moment driven by an estimated \$150 million marketing campaign, extensive social media engagement, and franchise-related cultural saturation. The mechanism is different in kind, not just in scale: Barbie's extended run reflects audience demand sustained by culture; award films' extended runs reflect a

niche audience expanded through institutional credibility. Bohemian Rhapsody is the most informative mid-tier case. Its Award Score is 38 and includes four Oscar wins, yet its domestic multiplier is only 4.24. Its commercial trajectory was dominated from the start by the global recognition of Queen as a music IP, which drove a \$51 million opening weekend that precluded the staged expansion mechanism. An opening weekend that large signals a film that has already reached most of its domestic audience. Award-driven expansion cannot meaningfully extend what a massive opening weekend has already saturated.

Discussion

The findings support the primary hypothesis: Award Score is positively associated with Domestic Multiplier performance after controlling for established financial predictors ($\beta = 1.707, p = .006$). The mechanism identified through qualitative analysis is the staged theatrical expansion: award nominations and wins function as re-launch triggers that enable distributors to expand a film's screen count from limited to wide release, generating domestic revenue over an extended theatrical run.

The secondary hypothesis is that the award effect would be stronger domestically than internationally. This hypothesis receives support, but requires careful statement. The bivariate award-international share correlation is positive and significant ($r = 0.30, p = .042$). But the multivariate regression model for international share is not significant ($F(6, 40) = 1.83, p = .118$), and the Award Score coefficient in that model is non-significant ($p = .118$). When co-production structures, budget levels, and other predictors are controlled, award recognition is not independently associated with international revenue share. The domestic effect remains significant in the full controlled model. This distinction, significant domestic, non-significant international after controls, is the most defensible empirical support for the localized signaling hypothesis available from the data.

The third hypothesis is predicting a threshold effect. It receives partial support. The top quartile outperforms the bottom ($p = .015, d = 1.16$) and the multiplier advantage is 112.2x versus 11.5x on average. The distinctions between middle and bottom ($p = .055$) and top and middle ($p = .083$) are only marginally non-significant. This explains why the relationship is described as an accelerating gradient.

The two revenue model structures that emerge are front-loaded blockbuster models and delayed-return award models. These are fundamentally different commercial strategies with different risk profiles, geographic revenue distributions, and different relationships to award recognition. Front-loaded films depend on pre-release demand from franchise IP and marketing; their multipliers are low (2–5x) and their revenue is driven by international markets (65–75% of total). Delayed-return films depend on post-release demand generated by word-of-mouth and award recognition; their domestic multipliers are high (50–400x); their financial success is

concentrated domestically. Understanding which model a film is positioned for is more useful for investment and distribution planning than any single financial predictor. These findings confirm and extend the existing literature. Consistent with Nelson *et al.* (2001), award recognition is positively associated with post-release domestic revenue performance. This study extends that finding by demonstrating the association is geographically bounded by identifying the staged expansion mechanism through which the domestic effect operates. Simonton's (2009) finding that critical acclaim and commercial success are inversely correlated in Hollywood is consistent with the finding that heavily awarded films have small opening weekends. Award films achieve exceptional domestic revenue efficiency over time despite weak opening weekends. The inverse correlation Simonton identified reflects the opening-weekend dimension of commercial success; the domestic multiplier captures the dimension he did not examine. The unexpected positive franchise coefficient in the regression ($\beta = 63.819$, $p = .178$), while non-significant, is inconsistent with the prediction that franchise films front-load. Top Gun: Maverick's 8.35 $\times$ multiplier is the most likely driver. It is a film that achieved sustained domestic performance through a long theatrical window. This case suggests that some franchise films can achieve delayed-return performance through non-award mechanisms.

For studios and distributors, award campaigns should be evaluated as long-term domestic revenue strategies instead of global demand generators. Independent filmmakers benefit most from high award recognition, which triggers the staged expansion mechanism that is unavailable to moderately recognized films. For investors, the key implication is model alignment.

Award-oriented productions carry higher initial risk but greater domestic revenue efficiency, while blockbuster investments depend on international scalability that award recognition does not significantly influence.

The most significant limitation is residual non-normality in the regression model. The Shapiro-Wilk test is significant ($W = 0.890$, $p < .001$), driven by extreme right skewed outliers in the Domestic Multiplier distribution. This reduces the reliability of p-values and errors, though the Award Score effect remains at $p = .006$ despite the violation. Future research should log-transform the Domestic Multiplier or apply robust regression methods such as Huber M-estimation. The moderately elevated VIF for log opening weekend (6.05) limits the interpretability of the opening weekend coefficient but does not affect the Award Score coefficient ($VIF = 1.48$), which is the primary predictor of interest.

Two data constraints bound the generalizability of the findings. First, marketing expenditure data are unavailable publicly, meaning the Award Score coefficient likely captures some marketing-driven variance and should be understood as a potential upper bound on the pure signaling effect. Second, post-theatrical revenue, like streaming viewership, is not captured. The domestic

multiplier identified here is a partial rather than complete measure of the award effect's economic value. Future research incorporating data from services such as Luminate would address this directly. Finally, the 47-film sample reflects a bias toward commercially distributed films, as those with incomplete international records were excluded. Future research with more complete tracking data would provide a more representative sample.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether film award recognition is associated with domestic and international box office performance across 47 Oscar-nominated films released between 2016 and 2023. Award Score was positively associated with Domestic Multiplier in both bivariate analysis ($r = .44$, $p = .002$) and the controlled regression model ($\beta = 1.707$, $p = .006$). Films in the top award-score quartile also demonstrated substantially higher mean domestic multipliers than those in the bottom quartile (112.2 versus 11.5). These findings are consistent with the possibility that award recognition supports sustained domestic theatrical performance, particularly when limited releases expand following nominations and wins. Internationally, the positive bivariate association between Award Score and International Revenue Share ($r = .30$, $p = .042$) was not statistically significant after controlling for other predictors ($p = .118$). The results therefore suggest that award recognition is more consistently associated with domestic revenue efficiency than with international revenue concentration in this sample. However, the observational design, right-skewed multiplier distribution, and absence of direct marketing expenditure data limit causal interpretation. Future research should use larger samples, robust regression methods, and more comprehensive measures of promotional activity and post-theatrical revenue to test whether these relationships persist across different distribution environments.

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