

The CULTURE PAGES

What Makes a Star Valuable in 2015?

Likability, for one thing, which is why Chris Pratt rose so high on our list. *By Adam Sternbergh*

ONCE UPON A TIME, the Hollywood math was straightforward: The most valuable stars were the ones who were (a) paid the most money because (b) they could reliably “open” a movie. This gave rise to the so-called \$20 Million Club: actors like Robert Downey Jr., Sandra Bullock, and Denzel Washington (and before them, Tom Cruise and Julia Roberts). In 2015, however, the calculus is different and a lot more complex. Stars don’t open movies anymore—brands like *Star Wars* and *Transformers* do—and now studios are asking actors to accept some of their financial risk, eschewing huge up-front payments in favor of back-end bonuses if, and only if, their films are profitable. A star’s value is no longer something we can measure just in salaries—which might help explain why the actress who tops *Vulture’s* fourth annual ranking of Hollywood’s “Most Valuable Stars” is someone who recently spoke very publicly about being *underpaid*.

These days, a star’s worth can be affected by many intangible factors. To determine our valuations, we combined simple metrics, such as domestic and international box office, with more ephemeral ones, such as Twitter mentions, Oscar nominations and wins, Metacritic scores, desirability to a panel of anonymous studio executives and gossip editors (who told us whom they’d hire first and whose news attracts the greatest number of eyeballs), and, perhaps most crucially, a star’s overall “likability.” Celebrity appeal can be both easy and obvious to detect—for example, that involuntary face you make when you find out so-and-so (Yay! Right on!) or such-and-such (What! Why?) is starring in an upcoming film. But likability is also notoriously tricky to quantify; thankfully, we’re able to utilize data collected by E-Poll Market Research, a company that exists in part to measure precisely that elusive asset, asking thousands of regular folks to rate the appeal of celebrities. With all the information tallied, this year’s most valuable star may not surprise you. The case for Jennifer Lawrence—Oscar winner, perennial award nominee, franchise anchor, and social-media darling—is fairly self-evident.






























































This year’s most likable celebrity, though—well, that person might be a little more unexpected. Not because Chris Pratt is unlikely—to the contrary, it’s actually incredibly likely that you like him, given that he is, by our metric, the most likable actor in Hollywood. But it seems unlikely, or at least surprising, that Pratt—a guy who’s recently starred in huge blockbuster movies such as *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Jurassic World*, yet is still unfamous enough that Billy Eichner can

Vulture’s Most Valuable Stars

TO CREATE OUR list, we collected data on each of these stars—including their domestic and overseas box office for the past five years, number of Oscar nominations and wins, Metacritic scores, Twitter mentions over the past year, rankings from major studio executives and gossip editors (who were asked to rate each star’s appeal on a scale of one to ten), and likability data from E-Poll Market Research—and asked FiveThirtyEight statistician Harry Enten to plug the numbers into his special formula to determine their rank. For further explanation of our methodology, visit vulture.com.

 1. Jennifer Lawrence (change from last year: 0)	 2. Robert Downey Jr. (0)		
 12. Tom Hanks (+5)	 13. Matt Damon (-2)		
 21. Charlize Theron (+29)	 22. Denzel Washington (-17)		
 28. Christian Bale (-10)	 29. Mark Wahlberg (-6)		
 37. Natalie Portman (+4)	 38. Jennifer Aniston (-5)		
 48. Will Ferrell (-2)	 49. Ryan Reynolds (+45)	 50. Julia Roberts (-14)	 51. Reese Witherspoon (-3)
 59. Justin Timberlake (+17)	 60. Keira Knightley (+25)	 61. Joseph Gordon-Levitt (+5)	 62. Kristen Wiig (*)
 70. Henry Cavill (+19)	 71. Cameron Diaz (-17)	 72. Tina Fey (+9)	 73. Jason Statham (+7)
 81. Tyler Perry (+14)	The Studios’ Favorites		 82. Mark Ruffalo (+8)
 90. Eddie Redmayne (*)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Jennifer Lawrence Bradley Cooper Leonardo DiCaprio Chris Pratt Tom Cruise Channing Tatum Scarlett Johansson Tom Hanks Kevin Hart Amy Schumer 		 91. Anna Kendrick (+7)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PATRICK McMULLAN

 3. Leonardo DiCaprio (0)	 4. Bradley Cooper (+6)	 5. Dwayne Johnson (+24)	 6. Tom Cruise (+13)	 7. Hugh Jackman (+7)	 8. Sandra Bullock (-4)	 9. Channing Tatum (+2)	 10. Scarlett Johansson (+21)	 11. Chris Pratt (+57)	
Stars Who Rose the Most			 14. Matthew McConaughey (+3)	 15. George Clooney (-2)	 16. Brad Pitt (-7)	 17. Angelina Jolie (-11)	 18. Liam Neeson (+4)	 19. Ben Affleck (-3)	 20. Chris Hemsworth (+1)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chris Pratt (57 places) 2. Ryan Reynolds (45) 3. Kristen Wiig (39) 4. Chris Evans (32) 5. Ryan Gosling (31) 6. Charlize Theron (29) 7. Jake Gyllenhaal (26) 8. Keira Knightley (25) 9. Zach Galifianakis (24) 10. Dwayne Johnson (24) 			 23. Vin Diesel (+2)	 24. Melissa McCarthy (+6)	 25. Johnny Depp (-17)	Most Discussed on Social Media		 26. Will Smith (-11)	 27. Meryl Streep (-1)
			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Angelina Jolie 2. Emma Watson 3. Zac Efron 4. Jennifer Lawrence 5. Justin Timberlake 6. Johnny Depp 7. Kevin Hart 8. Leonardo DiCaprio 9. Will Smith 10. Brad Pitt 			 35. Emma Stone (-8)	 36. Benedict Cumberbatch (-1)		
 30. Kevin Hart (+9)	 31. Jake Gyllenhaal (+26)	 32. Chris Evans (+32)	 33. Daniel Craig (+11)	 34. Shailene Woodley (-10)			 35. Emma Stone (-8)	 36. Benedict Cumberbatch (-1)	
 39. Amy Schumer (*)	 40. Ryan Gosling (+31)	 41. Zach Galifianakis (+24)	 42. Emily Blunt (*)	 43. Anne Hathaway (-15)	 44. Michael Fassbender (+15)	 45. Chris Pine (-7)	 46. Cate Blanchett (+10)	 47. Seth Rogen (-2)	
 52. Jonah Hill (-18)	Most Critically Respected			 53. Jeremy Renner (-6)	 54. James Franco (+6)	 55. Jamie Foxx (-13)	 56. Zoe Saldana (-7)	 57. Helen Mirren (*)	 58. Tom Hardy (+3)
 63. Daniel Radcliffe (-31)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ben Affleck 2. Joaquin Phoenix 3. Amy Schumer 4. Michael Fassbender 5. Andrew Garfield 6. Leonardo DiCaprio 7. Tom Hardy 8. Jake Gyllenhaal 9. Jennifer Lawrence 10. Daniel Day-Lewis 			 64. Emma Watson (-1)	 65. Amy Adams (-45)	 66. Mila Kunis (-29)	 67. Daniel Day-Lewis (-9)	 68. Andrew Garfield (-28)	 69. Charlie Hunnam (*)
 74. Jason Segel (+5)	 75. Colin Firth (-2)	 76. Robert De Niro (-33)	 77. Ben Stiller (-25)	 78. Bill Murray (*)	 79. Russell Crowe (-28)	Most Likable		 80. Zac Efron (+4)	
 83. Paul Rudd (+14)	 84. Liam Hemsworth (*)	 85. Clint Eastwood (+7)	 86. Jessica Chastain (-9)	 87. Joaquin Phoenix (+1)	 88. Margot Robbie (*)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chris Pratt 2. Sandra Bullock 3. Tom Hanks 4. Denzel Washington 5. Hugh Jackman 6. Will Smith 7. Amy Adams 8. Liam Neeson 9. Idris Elba 10. Robert De Niro 		 89. Kate Winslet (-36)	
 92. Steve Carell (-37)	 93. Miles Teller (*)	 94. Naomi Watts (+5)	 95. Jennifer Garner (*)	 96. Nicole Kidman (*)	 97. Idris Elba (*)	 98. Jamie Dornan (*)	 99. Julianne Moore (-12)	 100. Lupita Nyong'o (-18)	

★ Blue stars indicate new to this year's list.

drag him around on *Billy on the Street* asking New Yorkers to identify him and at least some of them will say he's that guy "from VH1," "Chris Evans," or "Liam?"—should suddenly be more likable than Tom Hanks, Denzel Washington, or Meryl Streep. And yet, according to our data, Pratt has the highest "appeal" rating of anyone on the list, with 86 percent of respondents expressing a favorable view of him.

We can likely lay part of the credit for his outside likability at the webbed feet of Eagle the penguin. Because of all the awesome, adorable, and/or hilarious things you can see Chris Pratt doing on the internet—*GQ* ran an article listing 41 separate reasons that "Everything (Chris Pratt Does) Is Awesome"—perhaps the most likable thing is a video of Pratt, along with his famous and well-liked wife, Anna Faris, and their by all evidence extremely adorable 3-year-old son, Jack, announcing, in a video posted to YouTube, that they'd been asked to name a new baby penguin born at the Seattle zoo and decided on "Eagle."

Think about that: What in the world could possibly be more likable than a video in which an adorable 3-year-old child announces the name of a baby penguin? I'll tell you what: a video in which an adorable 3-year-old child announces the name of a baby penguin while seated next to Chris Pratt. You're probably jamming your thumb against the page on which you're reading this right now, in a manic, reflexive effort to "like" it. Which, if you're Pratt, is a very valuable reaction indeed.

AN ASTUTE COLLEAGUE of mine, when considering Pratt, describes him as a "value-added star." Which is to say: Yes, he's coming off a remarkable run of super-successful movies, yet it's hard to argue that any of these films were huge hits solely, or even mostly, because of Pratt. We're talking about a totally different kind of star power—or "value"—than what Tom Cruise evinced in the 1980s, when entire films were basically marketed as "Tom Cruise as a bartender" (*Cocktail*) and "Tom Cruise in a race car" (*Days of Thunder*). While Pratt certainly did a bang-up job in *The Lego Movie*, that film would likely have been a big hit even if Seth Rogen (appeal: 59 percent) had lent his voice to the lead character. *Jurassic World* was huge, but it arrived in theaters like a rampaging franchise-o-saurus, with Chris Pratt riding on a tiny saddle on its back.

None of which is to diminish Pratt or the remarkable position to which he's ascended. You could make the argument that, in an age of social media and carpet-bomb-style media campaigns, when the membrane

between us and the stars of our favorite movies is as thin as an iPhone screen, "likability" is a more valuable commodity than ever. In E-Score polls, the two phrases most associated with Pratt are "approachable" and "down to earth." It seems safe to say that no one would have described, say, Humphrey Bogart with either of those terms 75 years ago. Back then, movie stars depended on the illusion of mystique: the impression that they occupied a slightly more rarefied realm than our own. It's hard to imagine even Jimmy Stewart ever being described primarily as "approachable." Then again, he never had an Instagram account.

Pratt has one, of course, @prattprattpratt, where he posts things like his school

biggest things for him," says E-Poll CEO Gerry Philpott, "are that guys see him as someone they'd like to have a beer with, and women see him as that guy who's attractive and a little bit dangerous but still a good catch. It's really rare to have people whose appeal crosses over like that."

BUT WHY DO WE CARE SO MUCH if a star seems like someone we'd want to hang out with? It's likely owed, in part, to the fact that we spend so much more time with them now. No longer is it enough to simply hold our gaze for the two-hour duration of a movie. There are endless trailers, and leaked footage, and Comic Con panels, and talk-show appearances, in the months running up to a film's release. All of which amounts to dozens of hours' worth of free advertising—so you better have a likable pitchperson to front your campaign.

Another oft-remarked aspect of the rise of the franchise blockbusters is that they seem to be actorproof. No longer is the formula "Get me Tom Cruise as a bartender"; now it's "Get me whoever can plausibly and pleasingly fill out Thor's costume." Yet the right actor—likable, relatable—is more crucial than ever, as our tour guide/surrogate/stand-in through a three-hour onslaught of \$300 million CGI explosions. *Guardians of the Galaxy* may be the most potent recent argument for this: A tentpole movie built around an unfamiliar comic property, it benefited mightily from Pratt's cockeyed smile, beckoning us inside the tent.

Younger stars tend to have lower awareness scores," says Philpott. "But people who know who Chris Pratt is tend to like him a lot." So a newly minted star like Pratt offers better value in many ways than a marquee name. The longer you've been in the public eye, the more time you've had to compromise, or complicate, our adoration. Tom Cruise's awareness score is 79 percent, but his current appeal rating is only 41 percent. One of the two words most commonly associated with him is "creepy." (The other is "handsome.")

It's true that movie stars are no longer franchises, not in the way they once were; franchises are the new stars. But these franchises still need stars in the way that battleships still need captains. And if that captain is someone just likable enough, just accessible enough, just relatable enough that we can almost imagine ourselves in his or her place, all the better. (After all, who among us isn't just a few sit-ups away from becoming Chris Pratt? Well, all of us, actually.) To be valuable in 2015, keep that Instagram account updated and that Twitter timeline upbeat. And name a baby penguin if you can. ■

CHRIS PRATT ON INSTAGRAM



photo from when he was 13 years old. (Adorable!) He also has a Twitter account with a bio that reads, "Laughing with you, not at you." (Likable!) And unlike other celebrities, he does not use Twitter to rail against NSA overreach or endorse Trump for president. Instead, he retweets photos of little kids dressed up like him in *Jurassic World* for Halloween. (Down to earth!) Recently, he hung out with real-life BFFs Amy Schumer, Jennifer Lawrence, and Aziz Ansari—basically, a Mount Rushmore of internet likability—then posted all about it online. This is the key to Pratt's likability, which is, in turn, the key to his appeal: He'd be your coolest friend if you actually knew him, which you almost feel like you do. His storied transformation from doughy Everyman to sculpted superhero is relatable, or at least aspirational, to doughy Everyone everywhere. "The two