The Analysis of Marvel (Disney) Marketing Strategies
——Based on the Comparison between Marvel and DC Case

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, some Cultural Corporations are doing successfully. There are two outstanding examples: Marvel Entertainment and DC Entertainment. Our research is about the analysis of the marketing strategies used by Marvel Entertainment based on the comparison of Marvel and DC. According to the results of our questionnaire survey from the Chinese Mainland and Canada, our research conducts the concurrent mainstream cultural corporations' strategies of advertisement and their respective shortages and refinements. The questionnaire displays the significant problems. To begin with, the disproportionate influx of audiences coming from different platforms indicates that Marvel focuses too much on the production of movies. Also, the sticky age period of the audiences that restricts Marvel from exploring a huger market. Besides, Marvel has fewer well-known characters than DC. Moreover, even though Disney acquired Marvel, it has not efficiently utilized the resources from Disney. There is a common problem for both companies— some audiences did not realize that these two companies produced the superhero movies they had seen. In our discussion part, our research concluded that Marvel comics should diversify the platforms to advertise. As a result, Marvel gains new ways to spread their less eye-catching cultural products, bringing profits. Besides, our research propose that Marvel develop peripheral products instead of putting too much effort into the cinematic series. Because the marginal revenue is decreasing, Marvel should multiply their product lines by selling the distribution rights or making mobile games. Moreover, Marvel should break out their limitation on the ages of their superheroes and extend the adult markets. Our research has thoroughly analyzed several aspects of the differences between Marvel and DC and provides a new perspective for the cultural corporations to develop their companies.

Keywords: Marketing, Marvel, DC, Entertainment, Cultural Corporations

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

Marvel Studio is one of the most successful instances of crossover companies, which introduces its fiction comics into movies. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has become the highest-grossing franchise and film series, which have outweighed the second one by more than 12 billion dollars. And the highest-grossing movie in this series— Avengers: Endgame, has achieved the box office of $2,797,501,328, which is only a little lower than Avatar. The Walt Disney Company is a multinational corporation run business of mass media

and entertainment. Since Disney was founded, it has been established as the leader in the animation industry of the United States. In order to diversify the brand, Disney has acquired an abundance of corporate divisions like 20th Century Studios. In 2009, The Walt Disney Company acquired Marvel Entertainment for $4 billion and started to build the MCU. And the fact shows that the deal is very worthy because Disney earned $23 billion from the worldwide box office and created huge profits from Disneyland Theme Parks over the world and the derivative products. How did Disney make the series of MCU so successful? And did it make any mistake or error during the advertisement? Compared to other companies

in the industry, what kind of strategies are not Disney's but other companies?

1.2. Literature Review

Ritu analyzed that Marvel successfully advertises with four main strategies. First of all, Marvel knows their target audiences. Since plenty of companies manufacture high-quality products, only when the corporations find a proper target audience and generate the expected impact on them can they get a great sale? Besides, Marvel always leaves Easter Eggs at the end of the movies, including information about the next film to attract audiences to watch the whole series. This strategy can keep the audiences excited and keep purchasing the products in the series. Moreover, Ritu states that Marvel has established a stable relationship with its audiences. Therefore, they would keep supporting the corporation. Last but not least, Marvel uses communication with audiences which helps them cut the cost of advertisement. An interaction between the company and the consumers is very valid for building brand awareness [1]. John found that Marvel used some strategies when they released the movie, Black Panther. Marvel tried to evoke people's sympathy and empathy for African Americans through this movie. Firstly, this movie was the first movie directed and played by black people. Moreover, Black Panther was launched in the month that has significant meaning to African Americans in the United States history. Also, the movie lands at a time when the Black Lives Matter movement become popular. As cultural incorporation, Marvel uses these strategies to make the brand more compelling [2]. Benyamin proposed that Marvel stably establishes an unshakable brand by combing movies together. Through the case of Ant-Man, a less well-known character in MCU, Marvel earned more money than one of the most famous superheroes Captain America. It shows that this high-risk strategy enables Marvel to gain a large base of fans, which helps the brand become more and more popular [3]. To generalize all comparative research that has been done, most of the researchers have focused on how Marvel is marketing in how it forms its Marvel universe, and how it is promoting itself in the movie business. Put in another way, and the research has mainly been done by analyzing what marketing strategy Marvel has used to let itself become the powerhouse of the movie industry. Not many have to pay attention to the marketing strategy differentiation between DC and Marvel, and only brief research has been done. However, the two companies are significant opponents and having different approaches in marketing. In addition, the marketing of peripheral products of the Marvel universe has rarely been analyzed, and researchers are not aware of the capacity of profit in the peripheral products derived from the movies.

1.3. Research Framework

In our research, our research are analyzing the marketing strategy of Marvel (Disney) based on the comparison with DC. Above all, our research are starting with presenting the marketing strategy of Marvel (Disney) since the merger and show how numbers reflect the outcome of all the strategies. Furthermore, our research are using the data collected from surveys and interviews to show the illustrate effects on people of different marketing strategies of Marvel and DC. At last, our research are comparing the marketing strategies of Marvel and DC in multiple areas based on the data, see which surpasses another and how those approaches can be improved.

2. METHODS

To analyze Marvel's (Disney) marketing strategies and give our suggestions, our research did some research. In our study, our research used both qualitative and quantitative research methods: questionnaires and interviews. our research also used some secondary data from different websites and articles. Finally, our research used DC Comics' marketing strategies to compare with Marvel.

2.1. Survey

In our questionnaire, it consisted of 12 multiple-choice questions and 1 open answer question. our research aimed to run the survey with 100 people of different races in China and Canada from September 4 and September 11, 2021. our research shared our questionnaire in WeChat Moment, Instagram, Twitter, and email. In Canada, our research used Google Form to run our questionnaire, and in China, our research used So jump to run our questionnaire. our research surveyed 103 people who are interested in superhero movies. Participants had no time limit to fill in our survey anonymously, and finally, 103 people did our questionnaire, and 103 surveys were fully completed. According to our analysis of the questionnaire, there were 2 surveys that were useless because these were not fully completed and were made of chaos. As a result, 101 survey results were included in the analysis.

2.2. Interview

In order to better analyze Marvel's marketing strategy, know people's loyalty to Marvel and DC Comics, interviews were conducted with 4 people who are known Marvel or DC Comics. The people who are known as Marvel or DC Comics were defined as someone who has already watched the movies from Marvel or DC Comics. The interviews were used to select the people who are generation Z (6-24 years old). Our interviews were run online through Zoom and were lasted about 25 minutes

each. The answers were recorded by one of our group members, and finally, our research have done 3 interviews. All of our interviews were recorded.

2.3. Literature analysis method

For our secondary data, our research analyzed some articles that are related to our research from the Internet. our research found some finance information on Marvel and DC Comics from their financial report to compare the effect on different marketing strategies during a different period or after a decision was made.

Before analysis, the research data was prepared by our group. The questionnaire and interview results were checked for missing and abnormal data. The result was then analyzed using the software Microsoft Excel. Each interview was analyzed to understand the participants' opinions and motivations.

The results of these experiment-based questionnaires cannot accurately reflect the situations and behaviors in real life, but they are adequate for our study. Our interviews may not produce sufficient effects, but they can further understand the emotions and opinions of participants.

3. RESULT

3.1. The current state of the comic industry-Marvel versus DC Comics (based on survey)

Marvel began as Timely Comics, created by magazine publisher Martin Goodman in 1939. Timely Comics featured various superheroes like Human Torch, Sub-Mariner, and more typically, our famous Captain America. From 1940 to 1950, things seemed not to go well for Timely Comics, and in 1951, Goodman started his own distribution company and changed Timely Comics' name to Atlas Magazines. Then finally, during the early 1960s, Atlas Magazines' name changed to the famous Marvel Comics as our research know it today[4].

Some people find that Marvel creates great superhero series, and extensive cinematic universal, marvelous film scenes are the important strategies to attract the audience and succeed. So they do not think Marvel needs to focus on some marketing strategies such as advertisements, co-branded products, and social media posts because Marvel has a strong reputation. According to Benyamin Elias's opinion: "If Marvel was going to compete with the likes of Superman and Batman, it needed to be smart. In a head-to-head battle based on straight popularity, its characters would probably lose at the box office. So Marvel avoided a head-to-head, instead opting to build its overall brand. With a strong brand behind them, relatively unknown characters could be made more visible and compelling —not to mention profitable [5]." As a result, based on different opinions for the marketing

strategies of Marvel, we conducted a questionnaire survey and interviews about how people know Marvel and their feeling about Marvel's movies, our research also compared with Detective Comics.

Through the questionnaire survey and our analysis, our research found that about 80% of the participants know or ever watched the superhero movies made by Marvel and Detective Comics. Almost most of them prefer Marvel. Comparing with Detective Comics, although Marvel is doing better, there is still needed to improve and a long way to go.

"The precursor to Marvel Comics was founded in 1939 by pulp magazine publisher Martin Goodman. To capitalize on the growing popularity of comic books—especially those starring superheroes—Goodman created Timely Comics [6]." In the early years, Marvel mainly created comic books, and in 1998 Marvel made the first movie-Blade. In the following decades, before Disney bought Marvel, Marvel made some superhero movies such as Iron Man, The Incredible Hulk. Still, only a small number of people pursued and were not famous. After 2009, Disney bought Marvel. Marvel started to mainly focused on making superhero movies and built a cinematic universe. So more than 60% of the respondents started to follow Marvel between 2009-2021.

The majority of respondents' exposure to Marvel came from movies, accounting for 65 percent of respondents. No one came across Marvel from Disneyland in mainland China, but in contrast, 32 percent of people surveyed in North America came across Marvel from Disneyland. The overall percentage of people who start with Marvel from games, TV shows, and comics is very low, less than 10%.

Audiences are most likely to hear about new Marvel films through theatrical trailers and social media when they are released. This was followed by advertising and recommendations from relatives and friends. In the Chinese mainland survey, people were least likely to learn about new movies from official websites, as official websites are no longer popular in the Chinese mainland, and people prefer WeChat official accounts. But in Canada, 39 percent of people get their latest movie information from the website.

According to the survey, about half of people found marvel's scenes shocking compared to DC's. About 33 percent think Marvel has a bigger cinematic universe than DC. Marvel needs to improve its film details, co-branding with third-party brands, and corporate culture construction.

3.2. The Developable Problems of Marvel's Advertisement (Based On Survey)

First of all, Marvel is facing a significant problem that over 71% of Marvel's followers are attracted by the

movies produced by Marvel, which shows that Marvel has a weaker inclination to develop other platforms and caused the different categories of entertainment under the brand to become less influential. On the other hand, among the 74 participants who have a stronger interest in Marvel Entertainment, only 3 were drawn by Marvel's video games. "The answer to the future of MCU games is likely still a bummer one."[7] Caty McCarthy, an editorial writer, comments on the video games from MCU like this. Marvel Entertainment does not leave a good impression of video games on the public. Marvel should not be limited by a single platform to spread their distinguishing novel culture as a multicultural corporation.

Besides, most of the audiences of Marvel is between the age of 11 to 20, which occupies nearly 68% of Marvel's followers. Also, according to the data collected by Statista, people age between 18 and 34 have a comparatively high proportion of viewing the Marvel series movies[8]. Even though Marvel is a company that initiated its business with comics that have intimate associations with the young, cultural companies should own followers from different ranges of age. Marvel has a strong tendency to focus more on teenagers. However, if Marvel did not diversify its target audiences, it might face the problem of fixed consumers, which solidifies consumption habits. Also, due to the low age group, the content of works would be gradually hardened, which may eventually cause the company to transform to other industries or enlarge the market hardly.

Furthermore, according to our survey data, our research have concluded that one of the most competitive advantages for DC is its well-known characters. Our data collected in China's mainland especially shows the shortage of Marvel that over 80% of DC followers consider that characters from DC are more famous than the Marvel's. This data supports that DC had earlier entered foreign markets and left a good impression. The domestic surveys conducted by Onepoll[9] and 72Points[10] News also both illustrate that Superman is more welcome in the State. The problem Marvel is facing is how they can overcome the problem under the relatively backward situation of building several household superheroes. Moreover, for cultural companies like Marvel, it's necessary to build an impressive image before the rival companies, which progressively form a cognitive bias that leads people to favor the brand.

Last but not least, compared to DC, Marvel has better resources for advertisement. For example, Disneyland can be used to create theme parks and promote tourists to become Marvel's fans. However, from China, nobody was attracted by the Disney theme parks, and overall only approximately 10% of the followers have been influenced by Disneyland. After being acquired by Disney, Marvel gained a huge opportunity to bring itself to the front. But the abundant resources cause a new problem to Marvel that how can they manage and distribute the new resources properly. This comparative strength can help Marvel in some way. On the other hand, Marvel would mistakenly ruin the brand by concentrating too much on only one resource.

3.3. The Common Issue of the Comics Transform Industry (Based on Survey)

After Marvel and DC, the two most well-known comics transform companies, realized that the industry of comics started to decline, they chose to put their efforts on other compelling industries. Both companies were respectively acquired by a giant in the industry—Walt Disney and Warner Bros. However, Marvel and DC are both trapped in a problem that not all the audiences notice the origin of the movies. As a result, the audiences do not know some famous movies created by Marvel or DC. Over 87% of the audiences have seen Marvel's or DC's movies like Batman, Superman, Iron man, or Captain America, but they have no idea that these films are from Marvel or DC. This is an enormous problem since if the corporations use the more proper advertising method, they would gain more followers and bring the brand more popularity.

4. DISCUSSION

By viewing the data collected from the survey, and what our research observed of Marvel. our research can grasp a general idea of Marvel's marketing strategy. First, the main channel of Marvel's pre-screening promotion is through trailers on an advertisement or social media. From the data, our research can see that most of Marvel's viewers are not that sticky and keep track of Marvel's latest movements. So, our research can see the trailers are focused on the special effects in the film, which attracts a more normal viewer who is not a hardcore fan of Marvel. This is entirely different from DC's moves, which are more focused on holding the hardcore fans. DC's trailers, including their moving, are less concentrated on effects but storytelling and exaggerating the atmosphere. Second, since Marvel now owns a vast fans or viewers group, Marvel is putting effort into the Universe and Sequels. By merging all the stories and superheroes of the Marvel Universe, Marvel can increase its viewer's group one more step further. Making all the superheroes featuring in each other's series meets the expectations of viewers.

To start with improvements that can be done, the way of Marvel's promotion can be improved. Usually, the trailers our research see on social media are not from the official account of Marvel Studio. So, a substantial portion of the propagation was done by people's reposting and sharing. Marvel's strategy is keeping is the distance from the viewers, especially in China. Marvel has an

official account on YouTube with 16 million subscribers, and however, in China, the biggest non-short video platform-Bilibili-is does not even have an official account. It makes it hard for Chinese viewers to notice Marvels and gives up a potential advertisement platform with 200 million users. An account set in such a platform is a good way to attract new viewers and keep the fans. For example, according to the survey, our research can notice that most Chinese Marvel viewers have only watched Marvel movies and not in other media forms like the comic. So sometimes, the story of some characters is not aware by the Chinese audience. By uploading introduction videos of certain characters of their stories in the Comic, it might offer viewers a better image of the superhero. Also, some interviews with the actors will increase the adhesion between the audience and the actors. Furthermore, for Tick Tok China, although Marvel has an account, the update rate is relatively low. The only function is just uploading movie trailers without other interaction with the fans. To other television works by Marvel, are not that well-known as the movie works.

Not even near the renown of the Marvel movies. All Marvel Television work you see in China is illegal since there is no Disney+ Service in China. There is no television channel buying the broadcast right because The State Administration does not approve of China's Radio, Film, and Television. With the success of the Marvel universe, the television series could have been popular in China, and the enable of putting those into the Chinese market is a significant loss in Marvel's marketing strategy. Marvel could just make an edited version of the series and make them approved and broadcast in China.

As for the Marvel Universe is that Marvel is gaining almost all its income from the box office. The other peripheral products of the Marvel Universe are not that well known. From a particular point of view, Marvel characters have many figures, a kind of showpiece of characters with many details. Figures are expensive, Marvel earns copyright fees from the products, but Marvel is not promoting them. Instead, the manufacturers are doing their work in marketing. This can be very simply done by Marvel to repost some of the news in figure products. In addition, a relatively important part of the peripheral products of Marvel is video games. Recently, the game Spider-Man 2 on the PlayStation 5 platform has been a huge success. Most Marvel games on consoles are receiving positive reviews.

Nevertheless, Marvel has not had a successful game on mobile platforms. Marvel should be collaborating with other mobile game companies, and they can either make one together or add marvel characters to existing games. Mobile online games are very successful in China. Around 60 million people are playing them. It is a huge market, and our research believe that it will have its share in the Market with Marvel's influence.

At last, Marvel's audience is very specified. our research can see that most Marvel audiences are below 30 years old, and people beyond that age are not that acknowledged with Marvel Universe. In contrast, those between 30-50 are really known with those classic DC characters, like Superman and Batman. The DC's stories are targeting audiences who are grown-ups. But Marvels should try to get influence in that group. Some Marvel characters in comics are suitable for making movies for grown-ups or young adults. Marvel should consider adding more comic characters to the movie universe since there will be an end for all those heroes at last. Starts to create new characters now can maintain Marvel's current influence even years later.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. The findings of the study

Marvel has a relative disadvantage in audience stickiness and fans interaction comparing to DC. Also, it lacks to create more profitable peripheral products and promote certain media products in the Chinese market. The study can give a hint to other movie production corporations. It is showing that even one of the biggest companies in the industry has shortcomings in marketing strategies.

5.2. Limitations and future studies

There are still some limitations in our research. First, in our questionnaire survey side, because of the limit of our time, only 103 people completed our questionnaire survey, and most of them are students, and they are 15-25 years old from China and Canada. During our questionnaire survey, few people have not completed the survey, so that the actual number of effective participants and data is only 102. Second, our research only did three interviews in our interview, and they are all grade 12 students in Canada. In the research, our research also used fewer citations and references. When our research do the questionnaire survey in our future experiments, our research will make more people participate. our research will also add more about the age group and job occupation category to make the research topic more comprehensive, persuasive, and scientific. our research will conduct surveys in more different countries to complete the survey data more trustworthy and more accurate.

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