



# Research on How Can Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Gain Advantages in the Future in the Era of Streaming Service

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**Abstract.** With the increasing popularity of streaming services, it is essential to determine how major film studios such as Warner Bros. can gain advantages in the era of streaming services so that the studios can generate higher revenue by generating more profit from their streaming services. Utilizing literature research methodology, this paper will discuss how the huge film franchises dominate the film industry, the flourishing of streaming services, then point out the film franchises and the streaming service that Warner Bros. owns and the dilemmas that Warner Bros. is facing. Furthermore, the paper will conclude with the solutions for the dilemmas, namely building an appealing structural storyline for future DCEU projects, checking the actors' background during the casting process, and increasing competitive advantages among the steaming service industry by developing more series on HBO Max.

**Keywords:** Warner Bros. · Film franchises · Streaming service

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Hollywood film studios have always played an important part in the entertainment industry. Among hundreds of film studios in Hollywood, five major players are known as the 'Big Five', namely Disney, Paramount, Sony, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (Warner Bros.), and Universal [1]. The film productions from the 'Big Five' has significantly influenced the way people are entertained by producing and distributing hundreds of films each year. Even recently, some of the audience tend to stay home and watch movies on streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video due to the change of habit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional Hollywood film studios such as the 'Big Five' are still major players in the film industry, dominating approximately 81 percent of the movie market in the U.S. and Canada by September 2021 [1]. With such a large percentage of the movie market, it is important to understand the advantages and dilemmas that 'Big Five' such as Warner Bros. Based on the Warner Bros. analysis, the major film studios can generate better strategies for their future production and eventually reach a

higher revenue. On the other hand, the public can better understand how the film studios should do if the public, as the audience, wants to see top-quality movies.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the film industry in many ways. Streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Apple Plus have become competitive rivals to the traditional Hollywood film studios since many of the audience prefer to stay home to enjoy films via the streaming mentioned above services instead of going to the movie theatre. A study held in June 2020 shows that only 14 percent of adults said they preferred seeing a movie for the first time in a cinema, while 36 percent claimed they would much rather watch the film at home via streaming services than visit movie theatres. Preferences for watching a new release film on streaming services instead of in cinema in the United States (U.S.) have changed significantly, indicating a shift in consumer behavior in the film industry [2]. Therefore, it is essential to determine how major film studios such as Warner Bros. can gain advantages in the current time when streaming services are flourishing. So the studios can further maintain their loyal customers while gaining new customers and eventually generate higher revenue. On the other hand, the public can further understand how streaming service has changed their lives and why streaming services appeal to many audiences.

## 1.2 Literature Review

Chen, Gan, and Wan argued that as one of the biggest entertainment corporations globally, Warner Bros. has outstanding brand recognition, profound knowledge of film production, and insights into how the film industry works. Additionally, as a major film studio, Warner Bros. has an excellent workforce since the company has more than 8,000 employees and partnerships with some of the best directors, screenwriters, and actors worldwide. With such a great human resource, Warner Bros. has produced multiple Hollywood blockbusters over the years, such as *The Hobbit Trilogy* and the *Harry Potter* series. Furthermore, one of the strategies that Warner Bros. has applied is to collaborate with other media enterprises actively. For example, a profitable business deal that Warner Bros. has is the contract with Netflix Inc., allowing Netflix to stream various movies of Warner Bros [3].

In terms of digitalization in the film industry, Hennig-Thurau, Ravid, and Sorenson proposed that of all the technological revolutions. Such the invention of on-screen color that the film industry has witnessed, digitalization has the most profound impact on the industry since it has altered not only the way of producing films but also the business of distribution. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these impacts. When the audience has to stay home because of the pandemic, streaming services have gained much attention from the audience by providing films on digital devices. By December 2020, among the 'Big Five' film studios, only Sony has not yet introduced any streaming service to its audience [4].

Johnson Jr. pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the decline of the audiences' choice to watch movies in the cinema. On the other hand, since people had to be quarantined at home during the pandemic, Netflix's financial income increased. In contrast, Netflix's other rivals, such as Amazon and Apple Plus, also witnessed increases financially, indicating that the streaming service has become popular among the audience and there is a high demand for home entertainment [5].

### 1.3 Research Gap

Most of the previous research has discussed the overall business model that Warner Bros. has applied to achieve a high revenue while analyzing the company's strengths in terms of its global brand recognition and outstanding human resource. However, previous research has rarely discussed how Warner Bros. should take advantage of its huge film franchises, such as the DCEU, to improve its performance. In addition, most of the previous research has focused on the significance of digitalization and how the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the popularity of streaming services. In contrast, previous research rarely focuses on how major film studios such as Warner Bros. should update their production strategies with the audience's high demand for streaming services.

### 1.4 Research Framework

This paper will firstly introduce how the huge film franchises play an important part in the current Hollywood film industry, then discuss the flourishing of streaming services such as Netflix and Disney Plus. Secondly, as this paper concentrate on Warner Bros., an overview of the main film franchises and the streaming service owned by Warner Bros. will be provided. Secondly, this paper will provide a detailed analysis of three main dilemmas of Warner Bros., namely the lack of an appealing structural storyline, The personal issues of the actors working for Warner Bros., and the competitive rivals among film franchises and streaming services. Thirdly, the paper will provide strategies to solve all three main dilemmas. Specifically, the strategies are: building a clear and appealing structural storyline for future DCEU projects, checking the actors' backgrounds during the casting process, and increasing competitive advantages among the steaming service industry by developing more series on HBO Max.

## 2 Methods

Literature research methodology is reading through and analyzing literature to identify the materials' essence [6]. In this paper, the author will examine various literature from sources such as Hollywood news websites and academic journals to provide detailed information on film franchises in Hollywood. In addition, this study will examine the advantages of streaming services and point out some of the most significant dilemmas of Warner Bros. by researching and providing the above information. This paper will eventually analyze how Warner Bros. can walk out of its dilemmas and stand out among its rivals by taking advantage of the huge film franchises and the company's streaming service.

Furthermore, the case study is a research approach to generate an in-depth understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context [7]. By utilizing the case study of Warner Bros., this paper will analyze some of the key elements of Warner Bros., such as the major film franchises and the streaming service that the company owns, and discuss how major film studios in Hollywood can achieve greater success in the era of streaming service.

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Major Film Franchises and the Flourish of Streaming Services

##### 3.1.1 Major Film Franchises Dominate the Film Industry

As part of the Intellectual Property (I.P.), film franchises are often defined as a film series, or a collection of films, that which all stories share the same fictional universe [8]. Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), D.C. Extended Universe (DCEU), the MonsterVerse, and Harry Potter are some of the most popular film franchises. Specifically, MCU, owned by Walt Disney Company, is a fictional superhero universe that includes some of the most popular superheroes such as Iron Man, Thor, and The Hulk. Disney produces several solo movies for these popular characters each year while putting all these heroes together in one movie series every couple of years, namely The Avengers series, as crossover events for all heroes. Similarly, DCEU, owned by Warner Bros., is a fictional world of superheroes adopted from the D.C. comic. It includes well-known characters such as Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. On the other hand, owned by Warner Bros., the MonsterVerse is another fictional universe that features Godzilla, King Kong, and other fictional ancient monsters. Additionally, as a huge I.P. of Warner Bros., the Harry Potter series has eight movies. The story continues as Warner Bros. keeps producing the prequels, namely the Fantastic Beast movies.

While the reasons why an audience chooses to see movies may vary, there is no doubt that these huge film franchises attract most audiences. In 2019, the top 5 highest-grossing movies were Avengers: Endgame, The Lion King, Spider-Man: Far From Home, Captain Marvel, and Toy Story 4 [9]. Among these 5 movies, The Lion King is a re-make film based on a Disney classic animated film; the rest belong to film franchises. On the other hand, in 2021, a year when people's life has been changed in many ways because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 12 highest-grossing movies at the global box office includes Black Widow, Eternals, Godzilla vs. Kong, F9: The Fast Saga, No Time to Die, Spider-Man: No Way Home [10], all of them belong to film franchises. Therefore, it is clear that huge film franchises such as MCU and MonsterVerse have become one of the most popular choices when audiences decide which film they want to see. Additionally, after producing multiple stories of their most popular characters, MCU is introducing its new heroes, such as Ms. Marvel, as a way to keep expanding the MCU. Therefore, as most film studios expand their film franchises, the audience's passion for huge film franchises is expected to grow.

##### 3.1.2 The Flourish of Streaming Services

Years ago, only movies released in the cinema, such as Mission Impossible and Transformers, could be considered 'massive hits' among the audience. However, with the success of streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, series like House of Cards, Stranger Things, The Boys, etc., are gaining a huge amount of attention and becoming extremely popular among the audience. Additionally, the subscription numbers of each major streaming service are increasing. Owned by Warner Bros., HBO, and HBO Max ended 2021 with a combined 73.8 million global subscribers, while Disney-owned streaming service Disney Plus has earned 129.8 million subscribers by

2021. In addition, there are more than 200 million Amazon Prime members worldwide as part of Amazon's fourth-quarter earnings in 2021, while Netflix ended 2021 with 221.8 million subscribers globally [11]. With such a huge number of subscribers from various platforms, it is no doubt that streaming service is becoming a powerful player in the film industry.

### **3.2 The Film Franchises and the Streaming Service of Warner Bros.**

As one of the most powerful film studios in the world, Warner Bros. produces dozens of original films every year and owns many popular film franchises such as the DCEU and all the characters from D.C. comic, Harry Potter, and the MonsterVerse. DCEU is the biggest film franchise since hundreds of characters and storylines can be adapted from the original D.C. comic. Many DCEU films, such as Wonder Woman and Aquaman, have already gained remarkable success. Additionally, Warner Bros. recognizes the potential of DCEU and has continued to make new D.C. productions, such as the upcoming Green Lantern series set to release on HBO Max.

On the other hand, following the success of Netflix and Amazon, Warner Bros. opened its streaming service, HBO Max. The audience often sees it as a platform where people can enjoy almost all of the Warner Bros. production since it includes many of the series from HBO, previous films produced by Warner Bros., and all the series produced by HBO Max itself. It is considered a huge success for Warner Bros. since HBO and HBO Max has gained a combined 73.8 million global subscribers by the end of 2021 [11].

### **3.3 The Dilemmas Within Warner Bros.**

#### **3.3.1 In Lack of an Appealing Structural Storyline**

However, with all the success that HBO and HBO Max bring, and the valuable ownership of huge film franchises such as DCEU, Harry Potter, and the MonsterVerse, Warner Bros. is currently experiencing several issues. For example, the lack of structural storyline within its film franchises. Like the DCEU, Disney-owned MCU is also a superhero film franchise considered one of the biggest film franchises nowadays; one of the reasons it has gained so much success is because its story always follows a clear main storyline. Specifically, MCU introduces the main heroes in their solo films while coming up with crossover events every several years that eventually bring all of its heroes together, namely The Avengers movies. Each MCU character is connected to this storyline structure that MCU has applied. For example, the audience gets to see references about Iron Man in Thor while seeing some information about Thor in an Iron Man movie. All these stories about different characters are related to one another. After the audience has become familiar with these main heroes, Disney produces The Avengers movies, bringing all the heroes together so the audience can see all the main heroes all at once. In this way of storytelling, a movie is no longer a single movie; it has become a piece of a bigger story. A solid MCU fan base is created since the audience understands whether the next MCU film is a sequel of an already-known hero or an original story of a new hero. The upcoming film is part of a bigger story, and to understand the full story, and

it would feel necessary to keep watching the forthcoming MCU productions. In other words, one may not be the biggest Captain Marvel fan or the biggest Thor fan, but when the latest Captain Marvel movie and the Thor movie are released, one will still watch them keep up with the latest events that happened to MCU. This structure of storytelling has been proven successful with all the high box office of the MCU films. Specifically, in 2019, Avengers: Endgame passed 'Avatar' to become the biggest movie in history [12].

However, in terms of D.C., the Joker is one of the ultimate villains from the Batman comic. Still, the story of the Joker movie released in 2019 has nothing to do with the new Batman movie released in 2022 or the previous Batman that appeared in the Justice League movie in 2017. In addition, Disney has produced four Avengers movies by far, and each is a crossover event for all MCU main heroes. However, since the first DCEU movie, Man of Steel was released in 2013, Warner Bros. only released one crossover-event type of movie in the cinema, namely the Justice League. Furthermore, even though the Aquaman and Wonder Woman movies have gained high box office, these two films stopped from achieving further because of the very little connection to the other DCEU films. Therefore, even though Warner Bros. has produced several DCEU films by now, the audience would not likely be thinking of these films as part of a bigger story, and a solid fan base for DCEU is not likely to be created. Hence, Warner Bros. fails to earn greater success since DCEU fails to connect all the main heroes and create an effective structural storyline despite all its appealing characters.

### 3.3.2 The Personal Issues of the Actors Working for Warner Bros.

For any film franchise welcomed by the audience, the actors, especially the actors who play main characters in films, has always been considered one of the most important parts of a film franchise. However, some of the actors who work on Warner Bros. projects are becoming controversial, which could affect the overall performance of future Warner Bros. projects. Actor Johnny Depp and his ex-wife Amber Heard have been involved in lawsuits for years, accusing each other of misbehaving in their marriage. Considering the negative effects that these lawsuits could bring to the film projects, Warner Bros. asked Depp to "resign" from playing Grindelwald in the third "Fantastic Beasts" film [13]. Even though Warner Bros. later hired another actor to play the role, the voice of letting Jonny Depp back has never stopped, indicating that this decision has upset some of the audience.

On the other hand, Amber Heard also played a major role in a Warner Bros. project, namely the Aquaman, and she is set to return in the sequel as one of the major characters. However, Johnny Depp has recently prevailed in the Amber Heard defamation lawsuit [14]. As the voice of supporting Jonny Depp is getting higher and the fact that Amber heard lost the lawsuit, Warner Bros. may be forced to reconsider her role in the sequel. However, since her role plays an important part in the movie, if her scenes were deleted, there is no guarantee whether the overall quality of the movie will be affected or not.

Additionally, actor Ezra Miller, set to play the protagonist in the upcoming Flash movie, was arrested by law enforcement in Hawaii and charged with disorderly conduct and harassment [15]. Because of this scandal, a public voice is stopping him from appearing in the Flash movie, and Warner Bros. may have to consider recasting a new

actor for future Flash movies, which adds more difficulties to the production of the sequel of the Flash movie.

### 3.3.3 The Competitive Rivals Among Film Franchises and Streaming Services

As mentioned earlier, many major film studios are actively developing their film franchises. Franchises such as the MCU and Star Wars from Disney and The Boys series from Amazon have received much attention from the audience, and the film industry has become more competitive than ever. However, as one of the biggest film franchises that Warner Bros. owned, the second movie of the Fantastic Beasts, namely *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*, was significantly underperformed when the film was released in 2018. Grossing only \$654 million globally, this film was the lowest take of the “Wizarding World” movies when it was released [13].

Furthermore, despite the streaming service industry’s competitiveness, Warner Bros.’s productivity is underperformed. Many major studios are actively producing series on their streaming services with an emphasis on expanding their film franchises. For instance, Disney has produced four MCU series and three Star Wars shows on Disney Plus in 2021, all of which have gained a positive reputation among the audience, and Disney expects to produce more MCU series in 2022, such as *She-Hulk*. Specifically, one MCU series, *WandaVision*, has also received several Emmy nominations. However, with all the huge film franchises in hand, HBO Max only produced one D.C. series by far, namely *Peacemaker*, and there is no guarantee whether there will be another D.C. series in 2022. Furthermore, there is currently no plan to produce a *Harry Potter* or a *MonsterVerse* production on HBO Max.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Building an Appealing Structural Storyline for Future DCEU Projects

Like the MCU, the DCEU also has hundreds of appealing superheroes and storylines to develop. Specifically, DCEU also includes one of the most popular superhero team of all time, namely the Justice League, which include seven famous superheroes: Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern, Cyborg, and Aquaman. Originally created for comic books, these characters already have a solid fan base between comic book readers and teenagers even before they are adopted into live-action movies. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, it has been proven to be a huge success when Disney moves forward with its MCU projects with a solid structural storyline. Therefore, when Warner Bros. produces upcoming D.C. films, it should build up a structural storyline as the stories of each hero go on.

Specifically, while each character should have their storylines, the DCEU movies should show the audience that each hero’s stories intertwine with one another. For example, letting the Flash makes a short appearance in the new *Aquaman* movie or having Batman as a special guest in a new *Wonder Woman* movie. Furthermore, the *Joker* movie in 2019 and *The Batman* movie in 2022 are both based on D.C. comics. Still, these two films are solo projects without connection with previous DCEU movies such as *Justice League* or *Aquaman*. Warner Bros. should ask their screenwriters to merge the stories

of these two films into the previous DCEU films while ensuring that future D.C. films will be part of the DCEU. After spending the next two or three years introducing new characters and making sequels of previous characters, Warner Bros. should produce the crossover-event type of movies, such as the new Justice League movie, to bring all its main characters together in one scene. In this way, the audience would know that when they watch a DCEU film, it is not simply a solo film but also a story that belongs to part of a bigger fictional universe. The audience would keep watching the upcoming DCEU films to discover what will happen next in a big film franchise like DCEU. By drawing more attention from the audience, it is no doubt that the revenue, whether that may be the box office of a theatrical-released film or the subscription fees from subscribers of HBO Max, will be higher.

#### **4.2 Check the Actors' Background During the Casting Process**

As mentioned earlier, one of the dilemmas Warner Bros. is facing is that the leading actors' issues have recently been getting in the way of future productions. Warner Bros. may often have to consider switching or firing actors if their actors are involved in scandals. However, firing actors after they are cast often leads to dissatisfaction among fans. Therefore, Warner Bros. need to ensure that a long-term partnership with its leading actors is achievable without firing them because of actors' personal life. Indeed, the company cannot control actors' personal lives, and there is no guarantee whether actors will be involved in problematic situations such as being arrested or the defendant in a lawsuit. But Warner Bros. can still minimize the chances of having problematic actors by paying extra attention during its casting process. For example, a great way to examine if actors are potentially problematic is to check on what they have said in the past. Very often, actors would have multiple social media platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter, and they would set their pages on these platforms as open pages, which means everyone can view them. They often post pictures or comment on their pages to connect with their fans. Therefore, when Warner Bros. cast actors, it is recommended to view their pages, ensuring there are no photos with misbehaviors from actors or aggressive comments that could lead to scandals.

Furthermore, interviews can often show the personalities of the interviewee. Before casting a major role in the productions of Warner Bros., it is likely that actors have been cast in multiple movies and have done many interviews to promote their movies. Hence, Warner Bros. should also view actors' past interviews, checking if the actors showed any misbehaviors or commented inappropriate comments. If yes, then Warner Bros. should consider not starting partnerships with them.

#### **4.3 Increase Competitive Advantages by Developing More Series on HBO Max**

As mentioned earlier, with the increased competitiveness in the streaming service industry, many major film studios have produced multiple series on their streaming service to expand their film franchises. At the same time, Warner Bros. underperformed in this area despite the company's huge film franchises. Therefore, Warner Bros. should be more productive in making series to expand its huge film franchises on HBO Max before the company is left behind among all the rivals in the streaming service industry.



While planning on producing a series on HBO Max, Warner Bros. can take advantage of the fact that there are many great villains and secondary heroes in their film franchises. Specifically, in DCEU, many audiences would argue that some of the villains in D.C. are just as interesting as the heroes. For instance, the Joker, the main villain from the Batman comic books, has always been considered one of the best comic-book villains. Before the Joker solo movie, this character had already been in several movies such as *The Dark Knight* and *Suicide Squad* and had received much attention from the audience each time. Warner Bros. saw this character's potential; therefore, the company released the Joker solo movie in 2019, becoming one of the most successful movies in 2019. One of the reasons this movie has gained huge success is because this character, an ordinary man with no super-power but a twisted mindset, is a villain with depth. Furthermore, there are other great villains with depth from D.C. For example, Lex Luthor, a wealthy, intelligent man with no super-power, is determined to go against Superman; the reverse-flash, a brilliant scientist, eventually becomes the greatest enemy of the Flash because of the jealousy he has of the Flash. As mentioned earlier, rivals such as Disney have continually developed their film franchises on their streaming services. At the same time, the productivity of HBO Max is not as competitive as other streaming services. Therefore, all these interesting villains with depth should be considered a fortune, and Warner Bros. should actively develop their stories on HBO Max. It is a great way to add more content to the streaming service to attract more viewers while increasing the competitiveness among the major film studios and expanding its film franchises.

## **5 Conclusion**

### **5.1 Summary of the Key Findings**

This paper discusses the significance of huge film franchises such as MCU, DCEU, *MonsterVerse*, and *Harry Potter* in the current film industry, while pointing out the increasing popularity of streaming services. Furthermore, the paper introduces the film franchises and the streaming service owned by Warner Bros. It has identified the three main issues of Warner Bros.: the lack of an appealing structural storyline for its huge film franchises, production difficulties due to the actors' problematic personal life, and the increasing competitiveness among film franchises from different major studios and streaming services.

The paper has also discussed the solutions for each identified problem. Specifically, since DCEU is one of the most popular film franchises Warner Bros. has, the company should build a solid structural storyline for future DCEU projects to attract more new viewers while maintaining its old audience. Secondly, the company should check the actors' backgrounds during the casting process to avoid hiring potentially problematic actors. Lastly, Warner Bros. should increase its competitive advantages over its rivals in the streaming service industry by developing more series on HBO Max.

### **5.2 Research Significance**

This paper has a significant business value to Warner Bros., since it indicates how Warner Bros. can become a leading company among all the major film studios by utilizing its

major film franchises and taking advantage of the popularity of the streaming service. On the other hand, the public can better understand why streaming service has become popular recently and why the audience would keep watching movies from huge film franchises.

### 5.3 Limitations

This paper has used secondary data such as Hollywood news websites and academic journals to complete the analysis. However, it lacks the utilization of primary data. Therefore, future research should use various methods to collect primary data, such as designing a survey and conducting interviews with Warner Bros.'s audience to receive more up-to-date information.

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