

Brand Building and Commercialization Strategies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe

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Abstract. This paper will explore how the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), has built a brand and earned a living through it; first, the competitive environment of the market and the characteristics of its audience will be introduced, and then it will be shown that the MCU has set itself apart from other works by establishing a distinct brand image and content plan, while also presenting a system for content production and brand construction. For commercialisation, this study has examined the sources of income and pricing strategies for film and television distribution, developed spin-off products based on intellectual property, formed cross-industry partnerships, etc.; however, there are still some problems in running the brand and commercial operations, such as the content starting to look the same, over-promotion of IP monetisation, difficulty adapting culturally when going global, and obstacles in entering new markets. Finally, this paper has presented the main ideas that guide the MCU's brand-building and commercial efforts, offered some management views on how to balance the operation of an entertainment IP with the demand for revenue generation, suggested ways to maintain the freshness and innovation of content over time, and proposed some thoughts on controlling the intensity of commercialization so that the value of the brand can be preserved in the long run.

Keywords: Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), film and TV IP, brand positioning, commercialization and monetization

1. Introduction

The Marvel Cinematic Universe has done very well around the world, and a large part of this success is due to how it has organized its content in phases and managed the life cycle of each product with considerable care; this phased approach to storytelling keeps the material fresh and extends the commercial life of individual movies and series, but at the same time, releasing too many films and TV shows simultaneously may cause viewers to feel overwhelmed and tired of it, thereby shortening the overall life cycle of the Marvel IP [1]. The MCU keeps trying new ideas for creative development and storytelling; for example, it takes the classic superhero movie formula and adds elements of science fiction, adventure, comedy and romance to make the stories more colourful and give them different tones [2].

In terms of content, the MCU has adopted an all-encompassing multi-phase system; first, there were stand-alone movies, then a large-scale series, and finally, the multiverse expanded; all these

stages have been planned to align with market demands and what audiences are interested in at that time. In short, the plan for all content projects in the product life cycle management covers how they are developed, released, promoted, and later maintained and updated after release.

In the field of superhero films, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has created a relative difference strategy to lead the pack; in the face of competition from the DC Extended Universe and others, Marvel has carved out its own niche by taking several key actions: it has invested a considerable amount of effort in creating stories with depth and continuity, ensured that each film can stand alone while also belonging to a large-scale universe, and attracted viewers by making them feel part of something grander. The concept of a shared universe is also one of the main reasons why Marvel, in both its comics and in the production model that Marvel Studios has since used, focuses on the development and evolution of characters to keep the audience interested and increase their emotional attachment to these characters, thereby building brand loyalty. In the early days, Marvel kept the audience interested by using many different types of stories and frequently switching between comedies, science fiction and dramas; however, since the beginning of the Multiverse Saga, storytelling patterns have become more standardized, and the effect of this stylistic diversity has gradually diminished [3]. The MCU builds brand loyalty among the public through an integrated story system, making viewers feel they are part of the whole world when watching a movie in the MCU universe, and thus motivating them to keep watching due to plot twists and character development. The above cross-narrative structure is based on the concept of a shared universe; each movie is regarded as one part of the whole universe's story, and thus, viewers are eager to know what will happen next in subsequent films while watching the present one, thereby fostering a sense of narrative dependence.

The first group of consumers for the Marvel Cinematic Universe is young people and adults, who are highly passionate and devoted to superhero stories; they are influenced by all sorts of factors in their lives, such as their own tastes, social groups, and culture.

Social media has also altered the behaviour of the main group of fans as consumers; for instance, fans have posted movie reviews and shared their thoughts on the MCU on these platforms, formed a sense of community among themselves, and perhaps motivated other potential viewers to watch the movies. All of the above show that the main audience of the MCU is very diverse, and their consumption patterns are influenced by many factors; therefore, in order to serve this group effectively, Marvel needs to continuously adjust its content and marketing strategies to keep the brand popular and even more so.

The aim of this paper is to explore in detail the brand-building strategy and all kinds of monetization models employed by the MCU, understand why it has achieved a different level of cross-narrative operations and multi-channel revenue, investigate problems such as content homogeneity and over-commercialisation, compare the market entry barriers of various regions, analyse the adaptation strategies taken by Marvel in response, and finally provide some practical references for film and television intellectual property that aim to balance commercial advantages with long-term brand construction..

2. Commercialisation strategies of the MCU

2.1. Core content monetisation: revenue model and pricing strategy for film and television distribution

2.1.1. Global distribution channel layout and box office revenue-sharing model

The reason for its commercial success is the global distribution strategy of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and how it has been distributed; after joining forces with Disney, Marvel has been able to achieve wide coverage in all regions around the world, such as North America, Asia and Europe, by using Disney's extensive worldwide distribution network. Thus, the popularity and box office success of Marvel's films have soared, and a multi-channel distribution system of cinemas, streaming services, and merchandise sales has been built to generate multiple revenue sources. Despite the large production and distribution costs of high-end visual effects and top-tier talent, Marvel has still achieved a relatively high gross profit margin.

Marvel's box office revenue-sharing model is both flexible and profitable; prior to Disney's acquisition of the company, Marvel was distributed by third parties and received a relatively small share of the revenue, but after being acquired, it leveraged its own worldwide distribution system to significantly increase the studio's share of box office income, although theater chains still take a fixed amount from the top [4].

2.1.2. Streaming platform licensing and secondary distribution revenue

After the closer cooperation between the Marvel Cinematic Universe and various streaming platforms, its works have been widely distributed to increase revenue, and Disney+ serves as a primary distribution partner to provide a stable income for the MCU and extend its commercial scope through additional distribution agreements [5]. The two types of primary licensing models for MCU content on streaming platforms are direct-to-consumer streaming rights and advertising-supported streaming rights, and stable income can be generated through subscription and ad-sharing agreements. Disney+'s original Marvel series have attracted new subscribers to the platform and increased the scale of the audience, but at the same time, the continuous release of numerous episodes has exacerbated the problem of formulaic storytelling.

3. Significant problems with the MCU brand and commercial operations

3.1. The impact of content homogenisation on brand freshness and user retention

3.1.1. Diminishing marginal utility due to converging narrative patterns

After constructing such a vast narrative ecosystem, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has gained the affection of people around the world; however, as the stories begin to repeat and resemble each other increasingly, the expectations of viewers for new works have gradually declined. Economically speaking, this phenomenon is known as the law of diminishing marginal utility, which indicates that as one consumes more and more of a particular good or service, the extra satisfaction derived from each successive unit tends to be smaller. The way narrative patterns have become more uniform in the MCU can be seen in the following aspects: most movies follow a relatively similar story structure, using set formulas such as the hero's awakening, encountering conflict, achieving victory, and making sacrifices, and there is little in terms of fresh or varied development; in an attempt to

maintain continuity and complexity across the universe, too many characters and factions have been introduced, making the plots overly complicated and difficult to follow, thereby undermining both the storytelling flow and its depth. All the above reasons show that audiences are gradually losing their sense of newness and interest in MCU works; they may be tired of the continuous release of new works and thus lose the enthusiasm to watch them. The law of diminishing marginal utility will reduce the box office performance of individual films and harm the long-term development of the MCU brand; thus, new narrative directions and content innovation strategies must be explored by the MCU to attract audiences' attention and remain popular in the market [6].

3.1.2. Quantitative analysis of audience churn risk and declining repurchase rates

To quantify the risk of audience attrition and a decrease in repeat viewing rates for the MCU, this study has collected and analysed data from all available sources, such as box office figures, audience demand indices, return on investment, critical reviews, etc., to provide a reference basis for assessing the current situation of the MCU. The risk of losing viewers is evident in the year-on-year decline of worldwide box office revenue, as well as the gradual drop in ratings and viewer comments on major film and television platforms; for example, IMDb scores and Rotten Tomatoes freshness ratings show that the MCU's scores have generally been falling in recent years, which is related to a decline in audience desire to continue watching. An increase in the risk of audience loss is reflected in a decline in both box office revenue and public reception of MCU films; thus, for example, the general trend of lower IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes scores over recent years suggests that fewer people are enthusiastic enough to be interested in returning to the MCU. Excessive commercialisation and a decline in production quality have also driven away viewers, and together these factors have increased the MCU's risk of audience loss and a drop in repeat purchase rates. Therefore, the problems of audience churn and a decline in repeated views for the MCU are serious; as a result, several steps have been taken to restore audience trust, improve content quality, and adjust the business model.

3.2. The erosion of core content value due to excessive IP commercialisation

3.2.1. Disruption of narrative integrity by product placement and the priority on merchandise

Marvel Cinematic Universe's commercialisation strategies, especially in terms of product placement and prioritising merchandise development, have brought in significant short-term profits for the company; however, these practices have had a noticeable negative impact on narrative integrity over the long run, and these effects can be observed in the following ways: In order to increase revenue through merchandise, Marvel films have added too many commercial advertisements, and excessive product placements have interrupted the narrative flow; for instance, easter eggs are intended to connect different stories in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and are not considered commercial product placement, but their overuse has reduced the depth and richness of the narratives [7]. Viewers are left feeling that the plots are shallow and uninteresting; due to the dual pressure of a large number of derivative works and multi-threaded storytelling, some supporting characters have had their development simplified, and a reduction in their depth has been observed [8]. Therefore, the characters are flat and one-dimensional; little attention has been paid to exploring their inner worlds or demonstrating how they change and evolve over time.

3.2.2. Consumers' negative perception of excessive commercialisation and declining brand loyalty

With the increasing commercialisation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe in recent years, people have begun to feel that it is becoming too commercialised; at the same time, they have also noticed a decline in brand loyalty due to this. Generally speaking, the negative reactions that consumers have towards over-commercialisation fall into a few categories: first, there is a mismatch between the quality of content and commercial interests; second, due to continuous demands for high profits from MCU new films and merchandise, the original quality and novelty of the content may decline, making audiences feel let down and losing their enthusiasm for the brand. Another issue is that some movies have become too commercial; although many brand-endorsed products are used in films to boost income, they are often overly placed and thus annoying to viewers. Overproduction of merchandise is also a problem; although it brings in some revenue, too much of it can lead to an oversupply in the market, and thus consumers' enthusiasm for these products will gradually wane.

3.3. Cultural adaptation and market entry barriers for global communication

As the Marvel Cinematic Universe expands in various parts of the world, it has to meet all kinds of policy requirements and competition pressures; as shown in Table 1, these problems include censorship rules, cultural differences, and fierce local competition. Marvel has cast actors of many nationalities, ethnicities and skin colours to portray its characters, and in combination with the work on character development, these movies are more familiar to people around the world, thus helping to promote the global expansion of the Marvel franchise [8, 9].

Table 1. Regional market features, expansion effects and countermeasures

Market Regions	Policy and Environmental Characteristics	Impact on Brand Expansion	Countermeasures
Mainland China	Strict censorship and high cultural sensitivity	High box office volatility; some films are pulled from release or edited	Strengthen the localization of IP narratives and focus on social issues
North America/Europe	Intense competition in the streaming market	Slowing growth in traditional box office revenue	Pushing the Disney+ DTC strategy to build a home entertainment ecosystem
Emerging Markets	Rising Internet Penetration, Limited Payment Channels	Significant growth potential, but severe piracy issues	Utilizing social media marketing and exploring low-cost distribution channels

In addition to content censorship and cultural differences, the mainland Chinese market has begun to produce more local superhero films and TV shows that are gradually eroding Marvel's market share and raising the barrier to entry [10]. It will affect the release plan of the film and may have to be cut, thus harming the brand's general image and market influence.

Due to the rise of streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime in North America and Europe, the traditional distribution model for theatre has changed; thus, Disney has begun to develop its own Direct-to-Consumer strategy with Disney+ and is now also constructing a complete entertainment system for family audiences. Although the new-market countries have good growth prospects, there is a problem of MCU piracy due to increased internet access and limited payment options; therefore, to address this issue, social media marketing and flexible, low-cost distribution paths need to be strengthened for MCUs. Therefore, as the MCU expands around the world, it

should take corresponding measures according to the policies and competitive environments in different areas to ensure the long-term development of the brand and its market competitiveness.

4. Conclusion

The brand construction and commercial operation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe are highly systematic and forward-looking, and based on the analysis presented above, this paper draws the following conclusions: In terms of content development, the MCU uses a product line strategy based on a multiverse narrative framework, and through phased content planning, product lifecycle management, and cross-narrative storytelling, it has been able to significantly enhance brand loyalty.

In terms of income sources, films and television programs are collected, licensing agreements with streaming platforms are signed, merchandise related to the intellectual property is sold, collaborations with companies in other industries are carried out, and so on; all aim to maximise the commercial benefits of the property. Marvel's commercial success is due to a clear and distinct market position, phased storytelling across various media, a system of multiple income sources, etc.; however, there are also long-term problems such as formulaic plots, over-reliance on intellectual property, a lack of adaptation to different cultures around the world, and difficulties in balancing how much commercial focus to give with the quality of content, as well as problems with maintaining cultural sensitivity in its global operations.

Film and TV IP brands need to remain popular by releasing new works regularly; therefore, they should not only use novel narrative techniques and high-tech special effects, but more importantly, they need to explore different cultural environments and understand what people are truly interested in so that the works can appeal to various groups of people with different tastes and preferences. Another problem is that the brand should not become outdated over time; therefore, people need to build a system to keep things fresh and relevant so that people do not view the brand as old news.

If people want to keep lead in the race for brands and increase it, here are a few practical steps people can take. The first is to keep releasing new films and shows at a regular pace; otherwise, people will lose interest and stop paying attention to the brand, and it may seem old-fashioned or irrelevant. Another way is to introduce new production technology, filming techniques and visual effects to create a novel viewing experience for the audience, and in this way, make the brand more popular. In addition to making improvements to traditional long-form content, many other kinds need to be created to attract different groups of people with different viewing habits, such as short videos and live-streaming. At the same time, people need to build a good system for collecting user feedback, and based on the analysis of this data, learn what the audience is interested in, and then make some adjustments to ensure that all new releases meet the demands of the market. In addition to the content of things, many fans have also gained a deeper sense of connection with the brand through increased interaction on social media, enhanced their sense of belonging, and motivated them to spread positive experiences voluntarily. Work with other brands and IPs in different areas to create new sources of influence and offer consumers new experiences. If people can implement the above strategies in practice, they will provide real support for strengthening the innovative edge of film and TV IP content and refresh the brand's overall image; thus, stable and long-term growth can be achieved.

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