**An analysis to how the Marvel cinematic universe became successful**

I will be exploring how the comic company Marvel has become successful with their cinematic universe since they began. I will be talking about the films and how their trans media narrative approach to storytelling bridging the gap between television and films have changed the way cinema has been viewed, the struggles they have faced and the impact they have now. I will also be talking about the massive universe they have created and how they did this without confusing the audience.

Marvel was the first company to make a cinematic universe starting with Iron Man released in 2008. This became the eighth highest grossing film of 2008, making $585 million worldwide, “The movie was a hit beyond all expectations and kicked off the Marvel Cinematic Universe properly, grossing over $585 million worldwide and raising Iron Man into the top tier of superheroes.” (Pratchett, 2022.) becoming the start of the Marvel cinematic universe and opening the door to the future. “Tony Stark is in many ways the beginning of the MCU, even though his own story came to an end in Avengers: Endgame.” (Grace, 2019)

“In May 2008, Iron Man introduced rich jerk Tony Stark to the public — and changed the entire superhero industry in the process.” (Crump, 2018).

Iron Man (2008) is the most pivotal movie, not only was this the start of the MCU, but it also changed the way superhero movies were viewed by hinting at future crossovers. This also gave viewers a post credit scene which hinted at a bigger universe altogether. “The first Marvel post-credits scene was attached to Iron Man, the studio’s first movie. After watching Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) become a hero, audiences were treated to a 36-second tease. Tony walks into his home and is greeted by a voice in the shadows telling him he’s part of a bigger world. He isn’t the only super-powered man on the planet; in fact, there’s an entire universe he hasn’t even begun to scratch the surface of.” (Abad-Santos, 2022)

Despite the success of Iron Man, Kevin Feige was worried that Iron Man would not make it to cinemas, thankfully he was wrong. "There were days when I wasn't sure we would be able to get Iron Man in theaters. There were days when I thought [The] Avengers was a pipe dream. And there were days after Avengers where I thought, 'Well, where do we go?' (Feige, 2019).

The MCU is one of the world’s biggest film franchises, with 30 movies as of January 2023. “As of June 2022, the [Marvel Cinematic Universe](https://www.statista.com/topics/5313/marvel/) series was the highest-grossing film franchise with total worldwide box office revenue of 26.6 billion U.S. dollars.” (the numbers ,2022)  One of the biggest reasons for the success of the MCU is the interconnected stories and the consistency of having a story within a story. “That consistency is due in no small part to the way that Marvel develops its movies, planning multiple films years in advance and treating each story as a strand in a shared narrative universe.” (Suderman, 2016)

Another reason the MCU is successful is because of the superhero formula and the marvel formula which gives an action/ adventure/ comedy film all in one.

“Movies that grossed higher usually opened with an action sequence. That allowed writers to follow it up with a lot of exposition without boring the audience. This exposition would introduce the ultimate boon from the Hero’s Journey and explain why the hero needs it. Then, cut to a secondary narrative, which was usually an emotional conflict the main character was having. Another action sequence follows, and then the villain is introduced.” (Bajer, 2022)

“Marvel movies are largely structured around the same plot, filled with the classic literary archetype — a lost, relatable hero fights a villain that aims to bring destruction to the world.” (Chong, 2022)

“The MCU struck a careful balance between thrilling action and great comedy that keeps audiences in their toe while laughing their bellies off.” (Mayorca, Fede, 30th April 2019)

Another reason to why the MCU is successful with audiences is because they tell stories that are relatable even if they are superhero movies. They manage to create stories that the audience can empathise with. “These movies teach something, Marvel teaches us and shows us that our heroes are us, and they have flaws and need to overcome them. They’re not gods trying to be human, they’re just people who want to try and do the right thing and do their best to protect those they care about.” (Hidalgo, 2019)

This also creates a more diverse story for everyone and the more inclusive it becomes which is what the audience needs.  “While organizations, in general, are still stuck with the notion of hiring women to improve gender diversity, Marvel has shown that it is not only about gender diversity, it is about creating an inclusive culture where everyone is recognized and appreciated.” (Rai, 2019)

The MCU is also successful because of its ability to have standalone films been connected to each other whilst still been able to watch it as a standalone film this is one of the reasons why it was so successful especially in Hollywood as it is rare to build such a huge universe and keep the consistency as well as the originality of the films. “it’s the combination of a self-reinforcing set of connected activities that make the MCU so successful, legitimately innovative and even somewhat insulated from the problems that do exist.” (Hutcheson, Scott, 2017)

Marvel has a certain genius when making these films with three rules they follow which is how they have continued success with the universe they created.

Rule 1: They find the best directors. While they do not have the greatest history in hiring the right directors, they have certainly made small time names bigger and although the directors where small time at the start, with marvels help they have unleashed their creative flair into the movies making them instant hits with the audience.

"[We're] honest about: does this work? Is this good for the character? Does it give me a good feeling when I watch it? And that’s all that matters…" (Farrow, 2018)

“Jon Favreau, the Russo Brothers, James Gunn, and Taika Waititi are all significantly bigger names now, but they still bring their own creative juices to their MCU films.” (Hood, Cooper, September 2nd, 2019)

Rule 2: Continuity. To maintain continuity marvel has managed to keep a small team from one MCU project to another. This helps keep the story connected but not obvious in the standalone films and make it obvious later in future films. “Marvel retains a small percentage of staff from one movie to another, allowing them to build continuity across films whilst also allowing fresh talent to come through.” (Priyesh, April 18th, 2021)

Continuity was a key part of storytelling withing the marvel cinematic universe did not fall in place if one part didn’t fall in place then the whole story could fall apart and the interconnected stories would fail, luckily this did not happen as marvel was extremely careful with the placement of the movies.

“Continuity is the principle of making sure that all details in a film or TV show are consistent from shot to shot and from scene to scene. If a scene upholds the standards of continuity, each shot feels as though it seamlessly flows from the previous shot, reinforcing a sense of realism in the story” (Masterclass, 2021)

Rule 3: Keep challenging the formula. Most films, especially superhero ones, usually have a protagonist that appears weaker than the antagonist and then in finale part of the film the protagonist defeats the antagonist. Marvel changed this by having a deeper look into the lives and the emotions they are feeling and setting up more stories within the main story to give their films more depth. The more depth they put into their films the more interesting the film becomes because it gives a deeper connection between the characters and the audience making the audience immersed in the story telling of not just the film but the entire universe.

“Marvel movies showcase differing emotional tones (the balance between positive and negative emotion verbally expressed by the characters).” (Harrison, Spencer, July – August 2019)

Marvel also became successful by building a trans-media bridge and finally linking their movies with tv shows. This built a connection between cinema and television changing the way viewing was made for everyone. This was the second time marvel had influenced such a massive change in the cinematic and television industry, the first been an interconnected cinematic universe. “This study found that the MCU is indeed saturated with connections between its individual stories, across all media platforms. This evidences the grand extent to which Marvel has crafted a transmedia universe” (Menard, 2015)

In conclusion, Marvel has been extremely successful by building a franchise full of interconnected stories, keeping the continuity, choosing the right people and challenging the formula. They also were successful by influencing cinema by building a franchise that works and bridging the television and cinematic industry together expanding the way we view the films. They made the characters depth and inclusive so everyone can relate to them, and they made sure that people from all backgrounds can relate to the Marvel cinematic universe. This has made Marvel the biggest, most successful cinematic universe in the world with 30 movies and more on its way and several shows streaming on Disney plus, Marvels ever expanding universe will carry on being just as successful as they have been by upping the ante. A small word from stan lee on how marvel is inclusive and why it is important, a premise that built the marvel cinematic universe and the Marvel comics brand. This is one of the most important thing about marvel as the cultural opinion adapts so does the marvel cinematic universe which is another reason why they are successful.

“Those stories have room for everyone, regardless of their race, gender, religion, or color of their skin, The only things we don’t have room for are hatred, intolerance, and bigotry.” (Lee, 2017)

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