

Operational Issues and Creative Solutions to the Marvel IP about Superhero Fatigue

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Abstract. Marvel has been the highest in the world in the audiovisual sector due to the established and interconnected movie universe. However, the brand has reached a stage where mass production has been happening for decades, and the audience is fatigued with superheroes. The issues related to the operations of the IP of Marvel as a research topic will be explored in this paper, possible foundations on which superhero fatigue can be founded, and particular optimization strategies will also be provided. In terms of the market performance, customer response, and the content quality, the development of the Marvel intellectual property is defined as four stages and the multidimensionality of superhero fatigue is described. The report also mentions some of the core reasons behind the loss of competitiveness of Marvel including the inflexibility of the creative process, hyper growth due to capital, higher degree of industrial standardization, and the ever-changing preferences of the audience. To counteract this, it is proposed that different ways are used to create content, build stories, and engage with audiences to counteract IP fatigue and revitalize the fall of Marvel. The current article explains internal factors that contributed to the market failure of Marvel, gives useful suggestions about reorganization of the industry of the company, and gives valuable lessons to the long-term work of the same film and entertainment IP.

Keywords: Operational issues, Marvel IP, superhero fatigue

1. Introduction

Superhero movies and TV shows have taken up the world of culture and entertainment during the past twenty years. Nothing has ever come close to the Marvel Cinematic Universe in terms of cross-media IP commercialization. The history of many decades of comic creation has enabled Marvel to offer a common storyline framework of their cinematic universe by using individual superhero films, exclusive-streaming programs, cartoons, and other supplementary products, and integrate them into an effective and lucrative industrial complex. The previously formed adult-oriented business plan resulted in a stream of box office blockbusters, large fanbases and guaranteed future development of cultural intellectual property. However, after the debut of *Avengers: Endgame*, there has been a slow decline in the box office figures and audience ratings on the new Marvel films, and the concept of superhero fatigue has gradually found its place in the minds of the people in the industry and the fans.

In recent times, most of the scholarly works have been focused on successful marketing approaches of Marvel at the height of its golden age of growth that does not shed light on the drawbacks in its subsequent IP management. Most of those talks about it are superficial since they only pay attention to the dynamics of the market statistics and do not provide an overall view of the evolution of creative innovations, corporate actions, industry competition, and even the shifting tastes of the audiences.

The present discussion will make up this gap by first outlining the four stages in the complete development of the Marvel IP and also discussing the different types of superhero fatigue. It is also identifying the four underlying causes that hinder the long-term development of Marvel and offers particular transformative and innovative strategies depending on the nature of the creation of the content, the creation of the story, and the control of the audience. There is an insight into the internal processes that drive the erosion of the market power of Marvel and offers considerable theoretical and practical implications to the other serialized superhero IPs to help them minimize the risks of homogenization and appeal to the masses.

2. The evolution of Marvel's intellectual property and the current state of superhero fatigue

2.1. The four major development stages of the Marvel IP

The evolution of Marvel IP, which is grounded on many years of comic books, has slowly become a movie and TV franchise, and is a viable direction in development with a long-term investment. It can be divided into four separate stages depending on the market situation and specific characteristics [1]. The initial exploratory phase marked the beginning of the cinematic Marvel growth. At that point, Marvel had not established any unified plan to control its universe of film and television. Most of the films made had been independent superhero movies, and they lacked any strong storyline connection to each other hence, the overall consistency was not very high. However, a lot of valuable experience was accumulated by Marvel during that time, which became a strong foundation of the further evolution of the Marvel Universe. When Marvel reached the stage of rapid development, the notion of Marvel Cinematic Universe was introduced in a formal sense. The brand has effectively constructed one integrated and networked fictional world using the means of post-credits scenes and crosscasting of characters in other films [2].

The main characters such as Iron Man and Captain America were launched with their own standalone movies and later added to a coherent portion of the Avengers movies. Flexible and interwoven plotlines represent the greatest competitive advantage of Marvel. Its advanced technology in special effect generation and its global marketing strategy have enabled it to increase its fan base significantly and dominate the world of intellectual property. The golden age of development - Peak Dividend - is the moment when the movie universe structure was increasingly becoming more complex and additional spheres of business, such as theatrical and streaming media products, goods, and offline cultural tourism, were developed simultaneously. Back then, the big Marvel blockbusters tended to perform well in the theaters. The more unsuccessful solo hero movies targeting a smaller audience tended not to make the intended revenue that the producers had planned. All of these films helped to develop an international enthusiasm in terms of viewership, with every subsequent release of the studio, and not only in promoting the creation of other similar artistic works in the superhero genre, but also in using all the commercial potential that could be used by this IP. Marvel is currently in the middle of a new wave of development. Two of the biggest challenges of this wave are the aesthetic exhaustion of the audience and the necessity to rebrand. The brand has entered the so-called transformation window stage after many consecutive years of

continuous mass-production of film and television content. The film division of Marvel has also revealed a great number of vulnerabilities in the company: the spin-off histories are too complicated and redundant, and the majority of the work is plot-driven and storytelling is formulaic, and it is difficult to interest the masses. Aesthetic exhaustion of the audience cannot be addressed by a small conceptual innovation in the concept of multiverse and will result in the long-term erosion of the audience engagement [3, 4]. After the post- Avengers: Endgame period, viewership of other Marvel films and TV series has declined significantly and the expansion of the IP faces serious bottlenecks that made Marvel admit the need to transform urgently.

2.2. Multidimensional manifestations of superhero fatigue

Aesthetics fatigue of the superhero genre is not an individual problem but rather a trend in the industry that has affected various areas such as commercial, images, and production of materials. It has gradually undermined the growth prospects of the Marvel IP. In the market, it is also significantly more difficult to earn money with Marvel Studios: The box office receipts of big theatrical live action films would often fail to meet the projections of the producers. However, the related TV shows produced by Disney and animated movies offered on streaming services have mostly maintained the same level of audience enthusiasm. To begin with, the new releases of Marvel could now be placed ahead in the prime screening slots in cinemas. In comparison with this, the zeal of viewers to most of the films disappears soon after their release. It should be noted that IP alone does not ensure the success of the films at the box office. There is no captive audience, when all rushed out to watch the films and the audience grew, the same popularity of the brand can be reached. When it comes to assessing the popular opinion, the rating of the films continues to decrease over time and the volume of negative online discussions about them increases exponentially. Older Marvel films used to receive a large amount of praise simply because their characters were extremely developed and their plot lines were original and smooth; however, most of the recent ones are greeted with laughter by the audience because of their simplicity in the storyline and overdone logical errors [4].

The lack of the narrative structure, excessiveness and repetitiveness of the special effects sequences, the fragmentation and discontinuity of the character development process, which is patched together, leads to the endless mocking of the audience. Recently, there has been a severe division in the reputation of the Marvel industry. This film and TV IP have been viewed in extreme criticisms that are contrary to the old uniformity of praise. The overall positive impression of the brand amongst the population has continued to decrease. The only classic characters that remain popular derivatives are Iron Man and Spider-Man and most of the feedback is positive. The audience has continually exhibited a high level of tolerance to, as well as expectedness of such content based on the past foundations of the audience that was built. Going back to the roots, the weakness of Marvel is the inadequacies of the creative environment. The current constraints on the development of the superhero IP are threefold: topics are too standardized, the structure of the plots is all the same, and there are no innovations in the presentation of characters. Majority of the theatrical live-action films have the same narrative rationale: the protagonist is in danger, and he or she requires other characters to help him confront the antagonist and save the world; a few derived series attempt to alter the traditional narrative genre by trying to differentiate it. By definition, films are highly visual special effect-oriented and do not care about the complexity of the script and the intricacy of the plots; the evolution of the established classic characters is static and the development of new characters lacks memorable moments. All this has contributed to the last phase of creative exhaustion that has characterized the entire creation of content.

3. Analysis of the causes of Marvel's IP management challenges

3.1. Creative dimension: rigid storytelling and lack of innovative capability

The comic giant has been in line with the conventional storyline of superhero stories over a long period, and the narrative system cannot accommodate any radical or revolutionary change. Creative group was overly reliant on the successful instances of the previous generation adults, who took the classic narrative of good and bad and large-scale battles, but failed to explore other narrative possibilities. Multiverse is a concept that has some potential that may be expanded, but most of the Marvel movies fail to apply the concept of parallel time-space to explore the issues of human nature and destiny. Nevertheless, they have also just taken advantage of this narrative tool in order to plug up the gaps in the earlier works plot and get rid of the seams between different parts of the material.

Due to the continuous growth of the taste of the audience, the shallow pictures become unpopular to the contemporary audience. However, Marvel cannot meet all the new requirements of the modern age. Most mass-produced movies will possess a couple of these typical features; they are saturated with special effects and lack substance. There are a few excellent dramatized movies and theatrical productions that examine human nature and real social issues. They have old-school story structures and dull and non-stimulating themes because the public can guess the plot and thus the charm and novelty are lost, which is the main weakness of the Marvel content mix.

3.2. Operational level: capital-driven, blind overextending of IP value

Disney has been a sponsor of Marvel, and most of its business endeavors have been grounded on the commercial success of capital [5]. After having reached the pinnacle of intellectual rights, the company opted to make rapid profits through reduction of time invested in production cycles alongside increase in the amount of produced content by mass producing films, television shows, and cartoons. One may name it as an assembly line production which significantly influenced the overall quality of labor since most of the projects were hurriedly done during the process of scriptwriting and they were poorly done in postproduction because there was not enough time to do them properly [6].

Meanwhile, many other works appeared to be contrived as cameos and sub-plots to enhance the illusion of inter-series connectivity, and this was very distracting to the main plot line and it interfered with the story in unanticipated ways. Marvel has also been accused of exploiting the nostalgia of the fans regarding its legendary superheroes and the fans themselves by featuring them through outdated characters that would evoke a feeling. The abuse and redundancy of the old heroes and excessive nostalgia gradually ate away at the emotions of the fans and tarnished the reputation of the IP that was earned throughout the years.

3.3. Market level: the sector is highly competitive, with intensifying industry rivalry

The great popularity of the Marvel franchise has inspired many foreign film and TV companies to enter the superhero genre, which resulted in the growth of the number of films related to this genre and raised the level of competition in the industry [7]. In addition, the audience has grown tired of the process of standardizing topics, it becomes increasingly boring to the audience because the audience is getting bored of the typical special-effects battle scenes and the elementary story of good vs bad. At the same time, other genres like thrillers, realistic dramas, and dark fantasy become popular as they offer the viewers more diverse and complex viewing experiences [8].

Not only does the contemporary viewer appreciate the large-scale productions with all the dazzle of special effects, but they also appreciate the films that have powerful plots and new ideas. The superhero genre market is very diverse; therefore, the overall customer rating of this genre has gone down. Nonetheless, though the Marvel brand and its special effects are not considered as the final competitive barrier, it is still one of the most successful companies in the market.

3.4. Audience level: evolving demands and rising consumer awareness

The requirements of the audience in respect to movies have dramatically changed due to the transformation of the digital era. Besides being entertained by the visuals, people pay attention to the elaborate narrative logical elements, captivating emotions, and the properly developed themes. Over the years, the idea of superheroes has been created among audiences as an accumulation and purification so that the spiritual needs of audiences cannot be met based on conventional and simplistic stories.

The traditional Marvel character of a pure heroic prototype and a blown up yet hollow narrative does not fit the preferences of contemporary audiences anymore [9]. The modern audience is also more likely to value characters that are imperfect as well as conflicted inside their heads and actual human depictions. However, there are still several Marvel heroes who are excessively good and romanticized to be very realistic to the audience. The response of the audience has been radically transformed to the point where the traditional formula of the content has lost its charm entirely.

4. Innovative strategies for Marvel IP management amid superhero fatigue

4.1. Content innovation: premium content creation to break content homogeneity

The content constitutes the most crucial part of the long-term development of IP. The initial approach to addressing the issue of aesthetic fatigue is to come up with a successful creative plan [10]. Marvel should be actively reducing its workload slightly, making fewer outputs in their films, distribute the large assembly line manufacturing system, however it has to make sure that the duration allocated to edit and revise the script, and the rest of the processes is sufficient. The producers should consider socially relevant issues and humanist beliefs, which help them create a story and get rid of unnecessary extended stories and focus on the essential interesting details that should become the part of character building and the storyline itself. It will also be feasible to a certain degree to tie superhero tales to the present-day reality, and that will allow the studio to add more thematic variety to the output.

Being an author of character arcs, people should not attempt to produce the ideal avatar of a hero. Instead, the defects and inner struggles of the protagonist can be used to produce a realistic and complete character that will have a more profound effect on the audience. It is also useful to avoid repeating character designs by introducing new design elements to old characters due to their racial and cultural differences, thus increasing the number of heroes. The method is highly successful in working with different character profiles and narrative techniques since it interrupts the monotony of sameness inherent in the material and brings back the spirit of the audience to participate in it.

4.2. Narrative innovation: optimizing the cosmic system and reconstructing narrative logic

MCU will have a large variety of subplots and many subplots. The fictional universe has been developed in great detail and has boosted the number of viewers of the new audience significantly.

In order to resolve the problem at its source, Marvel needs to carefully analyze its stories, eliminate extraneous and unnecessarily elaborate secondary plots, simplify the building of the universe and make it less complicated to understand as an overarching plotline. At the same time, it should avoid the artificial cooperation of media but can provide a closed cycle of the main line in only one film and its only connection with Easter eggs and secondary characters, links between films can be established. Therefore, the new people will understand the general storyline without watching all the episodes.

In addition, Marvel is supposed to be eliminating restrictive genres and exploring other fields of storytelling such as a tension mystery, emotional expression and black comedy. The business may reinvigorate certain its IP with different storytelling methods: it has an opportunity to break the conventional superhero narrative model and experiment with new narrative and cinematography methods, which will allow reducing the viewer fatigue.

4.3. Audience operations innovation: precisely targeting audiences to achieve cross-circle dissemination

The audience is an initial stage of the sustainable development of IP and Marvel must acquire adequate knowledge regarding the tastes of aesthetics and emotional needs of various generations [11]. It needs to be able to maintain old characters and history so as to ensure the exclusivity of the world in its storytelling, but on mass terms it is meant to lower the entry barrier through simple information that can serve a variety of watching experiences.

Creating various types of online and offline interactive platforms is also essential at this time to hold regular meetings with fans and thematic events to enhance the level of involvement and belonging of fans [12]. The core idea is to stimulate the secondary creation by fans, enhance the reward structure of the user generated content, and establish extremely strong emotional connection and association between the IPs and the target audience. Circles crossing interaction must be formed, the communication between hardcore fans and the ordinary cinegoer has to remain accessible, and the amount of IP out-of-circle communication ought to be increased.

5. Conclusion

The article presents the history behind the Marvel intellectual property as a whole and the stages of development into 4 distinct periods, beginning with the initial attempt at producing standalone movies to the contemporary era of the aesthetics oversaturation and attempts to alter it. The author also looks closely at each example of superhero fatigue, i.e. the drop in the box office, the negative reaction of the audience, and even the fact that the content of Marvel films and series is alike. It can be explained by four major causes, such as the lack of originality in the stagnant creative scene, Disney turned into a capitalist-oriented company, and it resulted in the manufacturing of large amounts of assembly-line material, the competition in the superhero market is very fierce, and the viewers wish to see complicated plots and living characters.

The targeted and special recommendations such as creation of high-quality content, efficient and varied storytelling approaches and precise implementation of multi-channel interaction with the audience were proposed to restore the waning spirit of Marvels IP. In addition to providing specific recommendations on Marvel transformation, this paper also reveals a number of threats behind highly commercialized serialized cultural IPs. The study could be used in practice with other famous film and TV franchises across the globe to ensure that it does not become boring but rather generates a steady and sustained increase.

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