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Content Ecosystem Construction and Transmedia Storytelling Strategies of Marvel IP in the Media Convergence Era

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Abstract. Given the new circumstances of media convergence, in light of which this paper will explore how to build content systems and cross-media strategies to advance the development of intellectual property. Taking Marvel as an example, this paper will examine a successful cross-media platform in the world; it has built an extensive network encompassing movies, television series, short videos, games, theme parks, etc., and is actively engaging in localised marketing for the Chinese market. According to the research results, Marvel's main plan is to create an all-encompassing world system as the foundation, use actors' cooperation and movie trailers to gain fans' attention, and spread the brand by having fans share various contents. It has been found by this study that Marvel is facing many problems in China, such as difficulties in cultural adaptation, superhero content fatigue, and a loss of interest in social media. Based on the research results above, this paper puts forward some suggestions for the development of intellectual property in China, such as the construction of cross-media narrative frameworks, design of cultural adaptation strategies and interactive fan community construction. Theoretically and practically, this paper presents the IP content development in the age of media convergence.

Keywords: Content ecosystem construction, marvel IP, media convergence era

1. Introduction

With the advent of media convergence, there has been a change in the form of cultural content production and consumption. As Henry Jenkins put it, it is a cultural change that makes people more eager to learn new information and make connections among media [1]. In this environment, content is spread via all sorts of channels, and the divisions among traditional and new media, as well as between producers and consumers, have gradually faded. Therefore, the use of intellectual property by media and entertainment enterprises has become an economic benefit. The building of an ecosystem of various platforms and the maintenance of a continuous story have gradually become reasons for different levels of success in recent years. Marvel has achieved good results in the development of cross-media IP among all the world's entertainment franchises. Marvel was founded in 1939 as a comic book company and did not launch the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) until 2008; since then, all kinds of media under this system have been continuously developed. Marvel superhero films have led the box office in China from 2016 to 2019, and Avengers: Endgame was one of the top performers at that time. However, in recent years, the box office of new Marvel

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superhero movies in mainland China has been dropping sharply and the popularity of the film has decreased. The two are at odds: although there are a large market and a growing number of fans, the audience is also getting weary. Thus, China has become an interesting study of how to manage cross-media intellectual property in different cultures under such circumstances.

Martinez and Parkfurther pointed out that the short video platform has been utilized to promote the marketing of Marvel; they have taken Marvel's activities on TikTok as an example and found that by tailoring different types of content for the platform, such as special information, role-playing challenges, interactive live broadcasts, etc., Marvel has increased fans' sense of participation and expanded its user base, thus adding a new form of social communication to its cross-media ecosystem [2]. Esser, Bernal Merino and Smith have studied how different kinds of audiovisual works, such as television programs, films and games, are localised and adapted for overseas markets in "Media Across Borders" [3]. It can offer support for research on the problems of cultural adaptation, localisation effectiveness and content modification of Marvel for the Chinese market.

This paper will also be of reference for the following reasons. Firstly, it will help people learn how media convergence changes the management and distribution mode of intellectual property (IP) and content. Second, based on this, this paper will investigate the operations of Marvel in China to gather some empirical data on how culture and institutions affect the effectiveness of cross-cultural and cross-media narratives. Thirdly, the research results offer some ideas for building world-class IP ecosystems by going global in the process of developing the Chinese cultural and creative industry.

2. Literature review

The theoretical foundation of this paper is the concept of convergent culture; that is to say, it is not only about technology convergence but also about the cultural changes that occur through it. Jenkins thinks that convergence is the conflict in the efforts of the industry to spread content via various channels and the public's demand for coherence in fragmented media. Cross-media storytelling is closely related to media convergence; that is to say, it is the work of telling stories or providing story experiences across many platforms, and each platform makes its own contribution to the whole. Driscoll has compared the cross-media storytelling of Marvel and DC and put forward that both could use guest stars and post-credit scenes; however, Marvel has taken a staggered approach to the construction of its universe and designed an organised plan to add more layers for fans and ensure stable long-term market performance [4]. Recently, a large number of studies have been published in recent years on the media strategy of Marvel. Ma analysed the marketing strategies of Marvel Studios to understand how the studio can continue to maintain narrative consistency in the series and keep the audience interested [5]. The basic content of this paper is to explore reasons why people continue to watch movie trailers and their other links. Hernando Velasco and others have carried out more in-depth studies on the digital strategy of Marvel by analysing the Spider-Man movies [6].

According to the research, one way to use TikTok as a marketing tool is to select a time that can increase fan participation and take advantage of actors' fame to boost the awareness of fans. From the above results, it can be seen that Marvel is employing transmedia storytelling on the new short-video platform. Based on the above, Marvel's strategy will be to be more flexible, enhance fan engagement through interactions, explore new content forms, etc. It is the general trend of changes in audience content. The cross-cultural aspects of Marvel have drawn the attention of scholars around the world. Xi has analysed the successful cross-cultural export strategies of Marvel from three aspects: film production, film content and marketing and promotion, and believes that Chinese films can learn from Marvel's way of crossing cultural boundaries [7]. Song and Klaysung have used a combination of methods to research Marvel films in China and concentrated on Captain America

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[8]. According to the above research results, although the technology and story systems of Marvel have been widely accepted, cultural symbols such as Captain America and Iron Man are also facing various kinds of interpretation, which goes beyond the scope of universal heroism and Western-centricity. Domestic audiences are unhappy with the superficial localisation of Marvel and hope that a full-featured story in line with local culture will be added to the main plot, instead of only adding Chinese props to highlight market demand and tension. DeFelice and Stanley have investigated the discourse of fans on social media regarding Marvel's Phase 4 diversity initiative [9]. Their analysis of Twitter dialogue texts shows that there are more conflicts among fans, based on their reflection of self-identity, the absolutism of diversity and closed myths. The problems of incorporating diversity and meeting the demands of fans in the study are shown. Jassenov has also offered some ideas for the digital marketing of Marvel Studios [10]. The main results are that Generation Z likes short, interesting and visually appealing content; they need to feel authentic in their interactions; they are more receptive to influencer collaborations; and they want to participate actively and have immersive experience. Based on the above results, people can know more about Marvel's market strategy in China and how to appeal to young people via platforms such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu.

Although there has been some study of the strategy and marketing of Marvel in previous years, it is not extensive. First, there are not many studies on how Marvel has combined its global cross-media strategy with its local Chinese market strategy. Secondly, users in Marvel China are not paid much attention. Thirdly, there are some problems in the Chinese market for Marvel, especially considering its poor box-office results recently.

3. Marketing communications of Marvel in the era of media convergence

3.1. MCU cross-media unified narrative core

The core of the Marvel content is the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which has been a continuous story spread across films, television series, etc. The world is interconnected, and this is a trait of all cross-media. Marvel's MCU has established a consistent long-term story framework, connecting all its film and television works, and story coherence is one of the reasons it is so successful. Marvel Cinematic Universe is a case of strategy in narrative. The design of each stage is to build towards a climax in a series of movies, such as "The Avengers" and "Avengers: Endgame", and to introduce new characters and stories that will be featured in the following series. As Ma mentioned, this way raises the audience's expectations and makes them want to consume all the content in the universe. The end credits can connect the movie with the audience and reward their support. Marvel has done a good job of changing its content to meet the needs of various platforms in the media age and has maintained a coherent story at the same time. Many places and websites have posted them.

3.2. Content strategy for platform adaptation

Movies and television shows have presented the Marvel Cinematic Universe through films and Disney media series. Every film is its own world and an essential one. It can give ordinary people the joy of a movie and satisfy the demands of long-time fans. TikTok and Instagram Reels are short-video platforms that have been added to the modifications of Marvel's marketing plan. The company has begun to utilize short-form video content, communicate with fans on the platform, explore various new types of content, and work with internet celebrities. Hernando Velasco and others have conducted studies on Spider-Man to provide some data supporting the above strategies, showing that

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Marvel has used a certain schedule for releasing the film, a trailer and star power from actors to attract fans [6]. The company will post about the new release and answer questions from fans on Twitter/X. On the Twn Instagram, character posters, behind-the-scenes pictures and actor interviews have been posted to attract more followers. In China, Marvel has used the same way to work with local platforms such as TikTok, Xiaohongshu and Bilibili. Game Industry: Marvel has also created its own games and collaborated with others in the video game industry. NetEase has worked with Marvel Entertainment to develop various forms of original works based on the Marvel universe, such as games, TV series and comic books; it is a typical case of such a strategy. As the platform for Marvel content ecosystems, the construction of this platform through attractions is one of the various ways to promote the cross-media development of the theme park. The theme park of Spider-Man at Shanghai Disneyland is about to open and will be the first large-scale Marvel-themed immersive amusement project in the park. This way of expansion can give the fans a sense of the Marvel Universe. The company has increased its cooperation with TikTok, Xiaohongshu and Bilibili, and now conducts continuous promotion well before the film is released. Marvel has used the fame of some people in China to generate interest. The return of Hollywood stars to China for promotional activities, such as the Shanghai premiere of films starring Timothée Chalamet, Meryl Streep and Anne Hathaway, is a new attempt by the company to gain the attention of the Chinese public through celebrities. Marketing Activities Are Now Immersive Experiences. The creative advertisement for the movie Venom 3 gave people the first sense of a Dolby audiovisual experience. This Way combines the Internet and real life. The construction of the Spider-Man-themed area at Shanghai Disneyland is a very good sign for Marvel in China. The theme area is a kind of digital and on-screen space for interaction in the film series.

3.3. Local UGC fan ecosystem

User-generated content is also one of the parts of the Marvel ecosystem in China. Chinese fans have created and shared a lot of Marvel-related content on all sides:

TikTok: Role-playing, reaction videos and other creative works based on Marvel have received much attention. In 2025, the short-video platform will enhance copyright management of secondary works based on films and television, and as a result, many Marvel-edited works will be taken down from the platform; at the same time, related UGC output is expected to fall by about 41% each year. There is a fan group for Marvel on Chinese Twitter, and an account named "Marvel Joke Collection" has gained over 437,000 followers. Fans share memes, talk about the plot of Marvel films, and continue to chat about them.

Bilibili is Marvel's detailed analysis of short videos, timelines, explanations, etc. It is for the older fans.

Fan discourse and controversy. Social media has also been the subject of many debates. The release of the film "Shang-Chi" brought about some conversations in China about culture, and "Captain America" was also the subject of controversy; some Chinese social media users have even called for the film to be "taken off the shelves of China". The above conflicts show that the construction of the acceptance of Marvel films in China is not simple. In order to understand better what kinds of content the users want from the Marvel universe, this study has conducted a content analysis of user-generated content about Marvel on Chinese social media. The first is:

There are all sorts of user-generated works based on Marvel, such as fan illustrations, role-playing videos, plot analysis, timeline explanations and film reviews. All of the above show that fans are participating in the film series.

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Nostalgia-oriented short videos from Avengers: Endgame are very popular and engaging, but due to the strong emotional pull of old classics, they have inadvertently cooled down the conversation about new movies in the fourth and fifth phases; thus, one can see that nostalgia can also be a powerful force for community cohesion. Fans will share their memories of the first show and talk about the feelings they experienced at certain times, thus creating a collective cultural memory.

The newest works of Marvel have been talked about on the Chinese side recently. According to the film reviews of 'Thunderbolts', it has shifted towards more dialogue and character development at the expense of action. Some fans are tired of the direction of the series' development and think it "cannot keep up with the times".

The kinds of contents on various platforms are all different. TikTok is mainly for short videos and has some role-playing and other types. Weibo has gathered many kinds of emojis, news and discussions. The nature of Bilibili is that it is content-driven. The platform division of Marvel is a move to meet different people's needs and is likely that the audience will be able to select the platforms they enjoy.

4. Problems and issues

Although Marvel has achieved great success in China and around the world, it still has some problems in the Chinese market; this will offer some references for other intellectual property. Marvel has disclosed the basic problems in cross-cultural communication in China. Song and research show that although Marvel has high technological value and character-driven stories, it is also a cultural symbol, such as Captain America's shield, which has been interpreted differently; some consider it an ideal of universalism and Westernisation [8]. It is not only a single symbol but also a general way of expression. Chinese viewers have pointed out that it is merely superficial localisation and lacks deep cultural incorporation. Localises the content for different markets and does not infringe on intellectual property rights. Marvel has learned that shallow localisation, which is to add Chinese cultural elements as an external overlay, may be even worse than not localising at all; it is regarded as culturally insensitive and out of step with the local people. Some observers have said that the Chinese audience is suffering from "superhero fatigue" in the post-apocalyptic era. The traits of the Marvel Cinematic Universe are a higher level of story structure, more characters, and stories spread across many. Although these changes have won over the core fans, they have lost the support of the general public who account for most of the Chinese box office. The case of the movie Thor is an example of this. The film has a high proportion of dialogue and character development; it is more than 70% dialogue and significantly differs from the action-oriented "popcorn movie" style that was once popular in China for Marvel films. Chinese audiences are used to Marvel's typical combination of action, humour and visual effects, and they are not happy about what they believe is a "betrayal" of the brand. With the rise of domestic blockbusters such as Nezha: Son of the Demon 2, competition has increased and audience expectations have been raised. The marketing communications of Marvel in China have lacked cultural specificity. Marvel has generated a lot of buzz across all parts of China, but its new films have not gained the same popularity from the public. It can be seen that Marvel's Marketing in other regions may not be suitable for China. Due to regulations and competition in China, there will be frequent changes to the platform's operating rules, so it is one of the more vulnerable, and thus, users are distributed across many Chinese short-video, long-video, and graphic-seeding platforms. Marvel needs to develop special materials for all platforms, and as the standard marketing template cannot be used abroad directly, operating costs will be much higher. Its experience on TikTok shows that, although they use the same technology, the audiences are different. Marvel's business in China is subject to the changing times. Some social

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media platforms have been very critical of Hollywood Marvel films and domestic mythological intellectual properties, considering them to be direct competition or even an attack on each other; most ordinary viewers can distinguish between the two types of themes independently, and there is no general agreement on who should be excluded. The controversy over 'Shang-Chi' has raised questions about cultural representation and whether it should be considered offensive to Chinese audiences, revealing the underlying cultural politics that affect the acceptance of Marvel. The problems arising from the tense relationships are not to be addressed by marketing and content. They are the general trends of cultural exchange between China and the United States, and they will affect the absorption of American culture in China.

5. Suggestions for the development of intellectual property in China

Marvel has learned a lot from this to build the cultural and creative industries of China into all-weather assets for the world's intellectual property. Chinese intellectual property developers need to start planning systematically for all media and go beyond producing a single movie or TV show. Inspired by the Staged Universe model of Marvel, Chinese intellectual property can take advantage of it to build a comprehensive narrative system and integrate many works into one world. As Driscoll shows, this way has enabled the success of Marvel. Cross-platform narrative integration: The content of various platforms should be able to contribute to the overall narrative in a complementary way and not be the same story repeated multiple times [2]. All the Platforms need to provide some benefits for the public. Narrative Hooks and Rewards: Add some endings, Easter eggs and intertextual references to motivate the audience to continue participating in the work. Given the variety of China's digital platform environments, different kinds of content strategies for intellectual property development should be chosen according to the characteristics of each platform. TikTok is for short videos, Weibo is used for real-time discussion, Bilibili has detailed analysis, and Xiaohongshu combines life and products. Adjust the content in accordance with the characteristics of the platform and maintain brand consistency. Short-video content should be designed for the characteristics of TikTok and not merely adapted from other sources. Creator Ecology Cultivation: Support and promote the creation of cross-platform user-generated original works. "Marvel Showdown" is a typical case, and the role-playing content has accumulated more than 420 million views due to the creator's promotion.

6. Conclusion

The subject of this paper is the content ecosystem and cross-media narrative strategy of Marvel in the era of media convergence, especially for the Chinese market; first of all, the success of Marvel can be attributed to the organised way in which cross-media narratives are created to maintain narrative consistency across all platforms via a single cinematic universe. The infrastructure will apply platform-specific content strategies and maintain the consistency of the overall brand; at the same time, Marvel has seized the short-video wave by producing short-form content on such platforms to interact with fans, try out all kinds of new content, and collaborate with internet celebrities. Thirdly, the high level of popularity in China during the Avengers: Endgame period has faded, and there are now problems such as a decrease in box office revenue and reduced social media buzz. Fourthly, based on the analysis of Marvel-related content on various platforms in China, different patterns of participation have been observed. Interesting content can attract people's attention, otherwise, they will be bored and stop watching. This research has also provided some theoretical support for the development of media convergence and cross-media narrative. Given the

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multi-platform media environment in China, a case study will be taken in this paper to show how to apply Jenkins' theory of cultural integration to the localisation of Hollywood cross-border entertainment intellectual property. It has also enriched the growing body of research on cross-cultural intellectual property management by putting forward specific problems and opportunities in the process of going global for franchise operations in culturally diverse regions and provided some references for the content of various platforms in China. TikTok, Weibo and Bilibili all offer different types of content; thus, the enabled marketing and user-generated content of enterprises will also differ.

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