Research on Marvel Studios' Product Marketing Strategy in the New Media Environment

Liting Jiang†
†Binhai College, Nankai University, Tianjin, 300270, China

Abstract. With the end of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide and the rapid development of the film and television industry in the new media environment, it is valuable to study how to conduct targeted product marketing strategies in the new media environment. This paper takes Marvel Studios, which is well-known worldwide, as the research object, and analyzes it through the SWOT analysis method and with actual cases. Multi-faceted linkage, new media promotion, and cross-cultural communication are all means of Marvel's marketing in the new media environment. It has fully used I.P. advantage, egg marketing, new media publicity, and cross-cultural communication strategies to create a sustained appeal and influence the film brand. The Chinese film and T.V. industry can learn from the successful experience of Marvel Studios and work on building a linkage platform, strengthening new media promotion, improving story quality, and creating globalized films to achieve better development.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research background

As the impact of Covid-19 gradually becomes smaller, people's lives gradually return to the normal track. Marketing film and television products in the new media environment in the post-epidemic era have become a new topic. According to Lighthouse Data, at 10:00 a.m. on November 7, 2020, the cumulative box office of China's movies in 2020 exceeded 15 billion yuan, with 403 million moviegoers and 38.09 million cumulative shows. From these figures, it is easy to see that not only has the Chinese film market not retreated in the post-epidemic era, but the entire film and television industry has gradually recovered under the guidance of strong national policies, and everything has gradually returned to the normal track [1]. The powerful user aggregation and speed of new media have injected new vitality into movie marketing and brought new challenges to movie marketing. As a representative of successful movie marketers, Marvel has enjoyed a long history of sustained success. A superhero movie, The Avengers, released on May 4, 2012, swept the world, collecting more than $1.5 billion at the box office, the first Marvel superhero movie to gross more than $1 billion, and ranked sixth in the global box office rankings (as of October 14, 2018). In addition to Black Panther, Avengers 3: Infinity War has made it to the top 10 global box office charts. Marvel Studios has an unobtainable and important position in the global film and television market. Its huge volume and international influence can serve as a typical case to provide experience for product marketing in China's new media environment.

1.2 Literature review

Qiu proposed that Marvel's strong narrative capabilities and a series of marketing have enabled it to gain an advantage in the market. And Marvel applies its comic book resources to carry out a super-media narrative. While integrating marketing resources, cross-border cooperation with multiple brands, and leveraging publicity are important factors for its success [2]. Dai analyzed the marketing techniques of Marvel Studios from the perspective of "4I", that is, the principles of interesting, interests, interaction, and individuality [3]. Dong & Wu proposed that the success of The Avengers series did not happen immediately, instead of ten years of hard work. Finally, Marvel built into a masterpiece. Firstly, Marvel's various movies all have eggs at the end of the show, hinting at the movie's direction, which can continue to attract the audience's attention; secondly, The Avengers series blends several heroes into one movie, which crosses the audience base. Thirdly, The Avengers series has a good team and a high level of work, which exceeds similar products in terms of technology [4].

1.3 Research gap

Most scholars have studied the reasons for Marvel's success in the pre-epidemic era, including the related industrial marketing promotion, publicity, and corporate strategies. These scholars have analyzed the reasons...
why Marvel has achieved long-lasting success from the perspective of different aspects. However, very few scholars have examined whether Marvel films and T.V. can still sustainably rely on these strategies to succeed and dominate the new media environment at a new stage and whether there are changes in Marvel's marketing strategies in the post-epidemic era. The investigation of these issues is of great interest to the development of China's film and television industry.

1.4 Research framework

This study is based on Marvel's marketing strategy changes in the post-epidemic new media environment. Based on objective data analysis, this study attempts to combine the success of Marvel's films and T.V. with the actual market situation in China. Firstly, this study will use SWOT analysis from the perspective of the strength of Marvel Studios in the new media environment, its internal weaknesses, the current opportunities in the post-epidemic era, and the current threats. And then, this study refines the differences between the international and Chinese markets. By comparing the data of the international film and television market with the data of the Chinese market, it shows the difference in different marketing directions corresponding to different markets. In addition, this study discovers the commonalities between the international market and the Chinese market and finally combines the marketing strategies of Marvel Studios. As a result, these marketing strategies can be flexibly applied to the Chinese film and television industry. The research on the marketing strategy of Marvel Studios in the new media environment has a vital inspiration for developing the Chinese film and television industry.

2 Case Description

Marvel is a worldwide American brand originally referred to as Marvel Comics. It was created in 1939 and named Timely Comics. Marvel Comics underwent a series of mergers and acquisitions, resulting in Marvel Entertainment L.L.C. And its subsidiary Marvel Studios, L.L.C. [5]. With the rapid development of the film industry, the comic book industry was hit, and in the 1990s, Marvel's performance declined so badly that it had to sell some of its superhero rights to the big movie studios. The film companies make huge profits, but Marvel returns very little. It cannot support the company to continue to develop. Then Marvel began to learn to develop their own film and television companies. And it rose rapidly under the leadership of Disney, Iron Man, X-Men, and other workers to further develop the Marvel company. From 2008 onwards, Marvel began to develop the idea of making The Avengers series, which combines the heroes of Captain America, Thor, Fantastic Four, X-Men, and many other comics, called "The Avengers". In 2019, the release of The Avengers 4 was a huge success, topping the global box office with $4,238 billion [4]. However, with the arrival of the covid-19 in 2020, the film and television industry in China and the world has been greatly impacted. The influence of various reasons, Marvel also suffered from its difficult period in the Chinese market. On February 7, 2023, Black Panther 2 was released in mainland China, and in 10 days, another Marvel film, Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania was released in mainland China at the same time as North America. After Spider-Man: Far from home in 2019, the Marvel movie did not appear in front of mainland Chinese audiences.

The time interval led to the interruption of appreciation. Black Panther 2 was already released in the U.S. in November 2022. Many Chinese fans had already seen it on the Internet before, so mainland theaters lost part of the audience at the beginning of the release, resulting in the box office of Black Panther 2 on the first day of release, which was only 2001.8 million yuan. And the single-day box office on February 8 was cut, compared to the previous day. In terms of ranking, the film accounted for about 19% on February 7, and on February 9, it slipped to 16%. After February 16, the film's box office dropped to less than 5%. Marvel lost its previous popularity in mainland China. This has been unprecedented since Marvel landed in China [6]. This shows that Marvel's market in China has been affected because of covid-19. Marvel has occupied an important position in the world film and television market for a long time. Exploring its successful experience and combining it with the actual Chinese market has a vital role in the marketing development of Chinese film and television products in the new media environment.

3 Analysis of Problem

3.1 SWOT analysis of Marvel in China

This section uses SWOT analysis, combined with the introduction of the current situation of Marvel's development, to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of Marvel's marketing strategy in the Chinese market and the potential opportunities in the future market. This is helpful to Chinese film and television marketing development.

3.1.1 Strength

Marvel has high-quality and rich assets, including many well-known I.P.s (more than 2587), many new comics published monthly, and a continuous development rate of new characters. Marvel is known for its efficient, creative approach, using Marvel Comics as a base to attract the attention of movie consumers and raise brand awareness worldwide. The partnership between Marvel Studios and Marvel Entertainment further captures commercial value by creating a lifestyle consumer scene through cross-brand collaboration. Comic-Con has a mature business operation model, in which Comic-Con Movie and Comic-Con Entertainment represent two different business concepts of innovation and risk control, respectively. Marvel focuses on accumulating content talent and efficient and robust company operations, which help capture commercial value in the U.S. domestic market and solidify global expansion. Disney's parent company provides Marvel with tangible
assets, including a sound funding system and rich integrated marketing channels. The sound funding system enables Marvel to obtain a diversified financing background to support its guard extension development. Disney's integrated marketing channels built in China facilitate Marvel's international marketing [5].

3.1.2 Weakness

In the initial stage of entering the Chinese market (2000-2009), Marvel faced the problems of a weak fan base and low brand relevance. As the rights of some early Marvel characters had been sold to Sony and Fox, many audiences did not know that Marvel created characters such as Spider-Man and X-Men. In addition, the early Marvel Cinematic Universe was not able to produce characters that had lost their rights to stand-alone films for distribution. In addition, the early marketing strategy was more limited, targeting an audience that was primarily male, and the communication channels at the time were relatively homogeneous, limiting the promotion of the brand. At the stage of officially entering the Chinese market (2010 to present), firstly, the homogenization of the subject matter of the Marvel series of movies, with simple storylines and shallow plots, may cause aesthetic fatigue for consumers who continue to pay attention to Marvel. Secondly, the rights of some popular characters still have not returned to Marvel, such as Spider-Man, and the dominant power of cooperation with third parties is not in the hands of Marvel or its parent company Disney. This has led to copyright disputes with Sony, affecting Marvel's limitations in terms of profit sharing and creative freedom [5].

3.1.3 Opportunity

China has a good policy of inclusiveness for overseas films, providing opportunities for overseas brands such as Marvel to enter the Chinese market. China's cultural industry is developing rapidly, and cultural trade brings economic benefits and can meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of Chinese people. Chinese residents' disposable income and consumer spending are rising, with the share of consumer spending on education, culture, and entertainment also increasing. Population mobility has increased, and the influences of local consumers and social network K.O.L.s from third and fourth-tier cities who are flowing into first-tier cities may increase the demand for cultural products, services, and innovative technology products [5].

3.1.4 Threat

Marvel faces competition in the Chinese market from similar related companies at home and abroad, such as D.C. Comics in the U.S. and related industries in the same cultural circle and neighboring countries, such as the Japanese anime industry. Consumers' saturation of superhero titles has increased, and Marvel needs to face up to consumers' tendency to diversify consumption in order to cope with the homogeneous competition. The lifecycle issue of Marvel products is also a threat. The lifecycle of some cultural products is short, and I.P. operators need to choose appropriate business strategies to extend the market life of their I.P.s. The Marvel Cinematic Universe series entered a turning point after Avengers 4, with the departure of movie stars and a changing audience reflecting the end of an era, which may have a short-term impact on Marvel. In the Chinese market, Marvel needs to focus on consumer enthusiasm and tolerance for its I.P. while also being mindful of Chinese consumers' support for domestic film and T.V. productions and their interpretation of corporate marketing campaigns. These factors can affect the realization of the value of Marvel's I.P. in the Chinese market. On the business side, Marvel needs to balance the trade-offs between fan demand and communication reach while properly handling negative events that could otherwise negatively impact the brand [5]. It can be concluded that Chinese film and T.V. products must simultaneously analyze their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to stand out in the new media. By combining its own huge market and excellent cultural base, it can play to its strengths. The disadvantage of facing the gap with large foreign companies needs to be reasonably avoided. Chinese film and T.V. companies should seize the opportunities in the post-epidemic era and the new media environment and secure positive and healthy competition at home.

3.2 Analysis of the cross-cultural communication of Marvel

Marvel movies originated from Time Comics. The first few heroes, including Captain America, inspired Americans at the time with their anti-war theme and established Marvel's position in the market—audiences around the world. Audiences worldwide also believed the anti-fascist heroes created by Marvel, and Marvel's cultural output began to emerge. Marvel adopts cross-cultural communication to build audiences' cultural identity, and the Chinese market has become an important area for the development of Marvel movies. Through silent transformation, Marvel films have opened a gate in the Chinese market, which lacks an audience base, and won many fans through high-quality film content. The cross-cultural communication strategy of Marvel movies includes diverse promotion methods and integrated communication methods. Marvel targets the Chinese market in its productions and incorporates Chinese elements into its films, bringing it closer to Chinese audiences and easing the barriers posed by cultural differences. Marvel uses local Chinese communication channels for cross-cultural communication, including new media platforms such as the official Weibo and TikTok accounts in China, and communicates with audiences online. Marvel also attracts a highly bonded audience through diverse offline activities, such as fan meetups and movie premieres. Marvel movies focus on creating a blend of different cultures, and through the participation of global creatives, the local cultures of different countries are incorporated into the movies, making them more accessible to cross-cultural audiences. By adopting a
civilian and humanistic hero image, Marvel movies are free from the traditional elite culture, expanding the audience and solving the problem of mutual understanding in cultural differences, creating conditions for cross-international communication. Overall, Marvel movies have succeeded in the Chinese market and built a wide audience base worldwide through cross-cultural communication strategies and diverse promotional methods [7].

Therefore, Chinese film and television products should also be based on cross-cultural communication strategies and diversified promotion in the new media environment. One of the problems of Chinese film and television products is that they do not have enough international markets. Most films and T.V. products sell well in China but are not well known in the larger international market. This is one of the reasons why most Chinese films and T.V. productions cannot maintain a sustainable, high-quality output. In the context of the new media environment, Chinese film and T.V. products should be based on cross-cultural communication and create products with a wider audience. By producing excellent content, Chinese films, and T.V. productions can continue to attract global customers.

4 Suggestions

4.1 Multi-faceted linkage

Marvel can take full advantage of its many I.P.s and combine them with the "Marvel Universe" it has built. Through the egg unites a movie or other film and television works so that after watching a movie, the audience can hold the suspense and guess the next direction of the "Marvel Universe", so that the film will continue to be popular and can continue to receive attention. For example, Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D., a live-action science fiction action series produced by Marvel TV, is part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and although the two are in the same story structure, they carry different forms of media. However, Marvel's cross-media narrative approach to the overall story structure does not set a high viewing threshold for consumers, who do not need to watch each Marvel movie or comic once but can understand a relatively complete set of storylines according to their interests in independent media platforms. Once consumers on a single platform have developed a desire to watch derivatively, the series of movies belonging to the same overall story structure will add more story details to their missing in the T.V. series, attracting consumers to continue to pay attention to more related works [5]. This also makes Marvel movies will continue to attract traffic. Because each work is interconnected, it will not be finished just because one is finished. Movie eggs are gradually becoming a mature movie culture and are increasingly used in domestic and international movies. The "Marvel Cinematic Universe" series of hero movies have formed a "colorful egg culture", and fans will wait for the brain-burning eggs to pop up at the movie's end. Eggs can entertain the audience and enhance their viewing pleasure; create suspense and enrich the image of movie characters; influence the audience and build the world view of the movie; carry forward and backward to promote the next movie; create topics and expand the influence of the movie; drive the peripheral industries and feed the movie industry". These roles make the viscosity between the audience and the hero stronger and stronger, and the fans are naturally willing to pay for all the peripherals of comic book movies [8]. At present, China does not have a big I.P. that the global market can welcome, and it does not make good use of the marketing tool of colorful eggs. However, many cultural elements can be linked in China, and as long as the capital market pays attention to building this platform, it can promote the development of China's film and television industry to a certain extent.

4.2 New media promotion

The comic book has been fully utilized in the context of new media through the use of new media with the characteristics of comics as the blueprint, which has played a huge role in the padding, promotion, and subsequent production of the movie, bringing objective income to the movie. Its greatest success lies in the film's organic integration of comic book elements and bold film and television adaptations made in line with the world's cultural commonality, and then using the advantages of new media for positive use. First, Marvel releases the latest trailers on Weibo and other major media in advance at every stage, indicating the direction of the next plot and the fate of heroic characters. Unlike the trailers of other movies, the trailers of Marvel movies often play the role of carrying forward and backward, bringing a new public opinion environment for the upcoming movie after taking up the plot of the previous one, and the audience forms white hair speculation about the movie after watching the trailers This has even led to the emergence of self-published media dedicated to speculating on the direction of the plot. Comic book movies are constantly mentioned and discussed in self-media, posting bars, and topic maps, thus forming a benign public opinion atmosphere and causing the expected heat, which is very beneficial to the next promotion and marketing of the movie and creates a good environment for the commercialization of the movie.

Secondly, many We-Media are senior comic book fans, so their interpretation will often be mixed with elements and plot direction in the comic book surface. In this way, it will make many comic book movie fans turn to its comic book, from fans of the movie to fans of the comic book, to complete the conversion and expansion between different types of groups, which is very beneficial to the in-depth promotion of the comic book movie industry (peripheral, theme park, novel This is very beneficial to the in-depth promotion of Marvel Studios (peripherals, theme parks, novels, etc.). Simply put, the emergence of new media has provided an effective space for Marvel comic book movies, and the comic book movies have given great play to their characteristics under the east wind of new media [9].
This phenomenon illustrates the importance of living its resources for product promotion in the new media environment, and Chinese film and T.V. works can also learn from this operation of Marvel and put more effort into promotion.

4.3 Cross-cultural communication

For a film or T.V. work to be universally recognized on a global scale, it means that the cultural values it wants to express are in line with the trend of the world public. One of the major reasons for the success of Marvel movies, which are well-known and highly acclaimed worldwide, is their successful cross-cultural communication. As a propagator of American culture, Marvel movies subconsciously spread American values, but the construction of its characters is very successful. Heroes with superpowers also aspire to what ordinary people aspire to, freedom, peace, and justice. This fits well with contemporary social values and can easily resonate with the audience. As a part of cultural propaganda, movies should take responsibility for cultural export. In addition to making the characters come to life, it is more important for films to fit the current context and social appeal so that audiences can fully and comprehensively immerse themselves in the story [10]. Chinese film and television products are not without material but lack works that tell the Chinese story well. Chinese film and television works should be expressed in a way acceptable to all cultures worldwide, which is a key factor in penetrating the global market.

5 Conclusion

Marvel's success is the result of a combination of many factors. And in the new media environment, its development and adjustment are still worth learning from. By making full use of many well-known IPs and establishing a complete story structure of the Marvel Universe, Marvel Studios is able to unite different film and television works through egg and other means to provide audiences with a cross-media storytelling experience, thus attracting their continuous attention. The egg marketing strategy can entertain the audience, create suspense, and enrich character images to expand the influence of the film, generate audience interest, and drive the development of peripheral industries. On the other hand, new media publicity uses social media platforms to release trailers and interact with audiences to form a favorable public opinion environment and create a favorable environment for the commercialization of the film. Cross-cultural communication is one of the successes of Marvel Studios, whose superhero character images fit contemporary social values and resonate with audiences, achieving universal recognition worldwide.

Marvel Studios' marketing strategy fully uses I.P. advantages, egg marketing, new media promotion, and cross-cultural communication to create a sustained appeal and influence the film brand. These marketing techniques have played a positive role in guiding the Chinese film and television industry's global development. In the new media environment, the Chinese film industry can learn from the successful experience of Marvel Studios and work on building a linkage platform, strengthening new media promotion, improving story quality, and creating global films to achieve better development. However, the author's limited experience makes it difficult to study all aspects of Marvel's marketing strategy in the new media environment. This paper mainly uses secondary data and lacks the use of primary data. In addition, this paper does not have specific graphs to visualize the data. In the future, it can obtain primary data and more visual charts through statistics and research surveys.

References

3. D Weizhan. Integrated marketing "4I" principle to explore the marketing model of the U.S. Marvel Universe movie. Modern Marketing (Vol. 05), 80.(2019)
6. Z Yao. The market advantage and artistic model of Marvel movie types of production. Learning and Exploration (03), 168-173.(2023)
8. X Nuan. The inspiration of Marvel's "cosmic thinking" to Chinese film series. Masterpieces (23), 140-142.(2022)