

Brand Analysis: Marvel

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Overview

Marvel's first comic was published in 1939 by Martin Goodman, under Timely Comics. Timely Comics eventually canceled its superhero comics in 1950, and in 1951 Goodman created Atlas Magazines, a distribution company. Eventually in the 1960s, Atlas Magazines became Marvel Comics, and has continued to create stories about the beloved characters. In 2008 Marvel released its own Marvel Universe film, Iron Man. Then in 2009, Marvel was bought by the Walt Disney Company for \$4 billion along with the rights of over 5,000 Marvel characters. Since Disney purchased Marvel, 24 MCU movies have been released, collectively grossing \$21.9 billion. Marvel is now valued at \$53 billion, contributing to approximately 16% of Disney's market value.

Offerings

Marvel's main offering is entertainment, whether it be through comic books, films, TV shows, video games, podcasts, toys, or other merchandise. The main attraction to this entertainment is the characters created and depicted by Marvel. Some of the more notable characters include Iron Man, Captain America, The Hulk, Black Panther, Thor, Loki, Black Widow, Spider Man, Captain Marvel, and many more. The personalities depicted in these characters are unique and many fans relate to their stories, admire them, and grow emotional connections to them as well as offering an escape from reality. Throughout the comic books, films, and TV shows, fans have seen these characters be challenged and persevere.

Another offering is the cast who plays these characters, who are very good at promoting Marvel content. They attend Comic-Con events and interact with fans, answering questions, signing merchandise, and taking photos. They have donated \$5 million in money, toys, and merchandise to hospitals around the world, as well as to the nonprofit Give Kids the World Village. The relationship between the characters, actors, and fans creates a strong brand loyalty in the consumer. The relationship is something that feels personal to the consumer meaning they will spend their time and money supporting the brand.

Merchandise is also a major offering from Marvel. They offer all kinds of costumes, toys, clothing, and more. Due to the strong relationship between the characters and the fans, the merchandise gives fans a way to express their interests. When fans see other people, it can create a talking point between fans building the community within the fandom. Children also love the action figures offered by Marvel, as it is a way for them to act out their own "stories" for the characters again strengthening the emotional connection to the brand.

Marvel TV shows and movies are available to stream on the platform Disney+. They offer older Marvel films, TV shows only available on Disney+, as well as premieres of the new Marvel films, which do cost extra to view. Marvel also has created an app subscription that makes it possible to access over 29,000 Marvel comics. It costs \$9.99 a month and does offer a seven-day free trial. Both offerings build on convenience, with

the COVID-19 pandemic many people do not want to go out to the theatre or go to the comic-bookstore so both make the consumer able to enjoy Marvel from home.

Competitive Landscape

Marvel's main competition appears to be itself, as it is owned by Disney. With all the content produced by Disney including Star Wars, Pixar, and more, Marvel has to set itself apart to draw fans in to spend their time enjoying the content and their money on the merchandise. Marvel is also competing with itself quality-wise. As it is a box office giant, it must continually put out better content, which can be draining mentally on the makers and cast as well as financially for the company. Eventually when a movie comes out that is not up to the fans extremely high standards it could cause a lack of trust in fans.

DC Comics would be a direct competition with Marvel in the aspect of selling superhero comics as well as TV shows and films. DC has an array of superheroes, including Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, Aquaman, the Flash, and more. DC Comic films are sold and produced by Warner Bros. Picture Group, which is owned by Time Warner. These films tend to have a darker atmosphere than the Marvel films, and very rarely cross over, missing out on bringing the DC Universe together. When it comes to consuming the DC entertainment, the films and TV shows are spread out across streaming platforms such as HBO Max, Amazon Prime, and Netflix meaning it may not be as convenient as Marvel entertainment all being in one place. These films are also darker thematically and may not be as attractive as a family film compared to Marvel as they are films that the whole family can enjoy.

Key Audience

Marvel has several key audiences. They cater specifically to comic book readers, men, and individuals who fall between the ages of 18 and 34.

Comic book readers, particularly those who enjoy reading about superheroes, are a target audience for Marvel because they most likely already know the history of the Marvel Universe from their reading. Marvel targets these individuals to help them further build upon their love of the comic book by adding a movie, merchandise, a video game, and any other promotional medium the brand distributes to its fanbase. Comic book readers are already loyal fans to the stories in the books, so Marvel utilizes this in order to draw them into their platform of movies and merchandise.

Based on targeted ad results on Facebook for the Marvel Universe, 73.5% of the audience was male and only 26.5% of the audience was female. Marvel markets their movies and merchandise to males in order to appeal to a common interest because men love action and superheroes. Most Marvel superheroes are men, so this directly caters to the male audience. It is through Marvel's advertising and marketing that the male audience can relate and resonate with the superhero.

Individuals who fall between the ages of 18 and 34 are highly targeted by Marvel because they are the younger generation; they are at the age where they start their own families and have their own kids. If an individual who did not grow up with Marvel is exposed to the brand through targeted marketing and they become a fan, there is a chance that as they have their own family, they will pass that love on to their kids, and their kids will be fans as well. By marketing towards this age range, Marvel is creating opportunity for longevity among their fan base, an audience that will exponentially grow over time as families extend and develop.

Positioning

Marvel has separated themselves from the competition (primarily DC) in the sense that they have stories of hope, lighthearted fun, bright and colorful concepts and scenes, well written humor, and great movie directors/writers who are fans themselves. Marvel has made their brand appealing, fun, and humorous (Penwick). DC, Marvel's main competition, tends to take a more serious approach, much darker color tones to continue the serious vibe. Only recently with Aquaman did they break their status quo. DC seems to be taking cues from Marvel when it comes to appealing to an audience and strengthening their brand.

Marvel is the brand a family turns to. The characters are relatable and admirable, and that's what people like to see. That's what parents like to introduce their kids to. Families enjoy good-hearted entertainment with some action and humor, and that's what Marvel brings, in comparison to the competition. Marvel is positioned as funnier, brighter, and more colorful with more depth of character and more inclusion of gender.

Brand positioning statement: "Marvel believes in standing out from the competition by employing a strong hero, a good story, some action and adventure, and some laughs along the way."

Messaging

Marvel has strong connections to their fanbase and employees, which create a sense of community. Marvel's consumers are their key audiences within that community, and they depend on that community to help their brand be successful. Therefore, Marvel uses the cocreation theory when developing and marketing a new product. The cocreation theory talks about how brand loyalty falls to consumers instead of those who are marketing the actual product. In this case, it becomes a joint effort for a product to succeed. Marvel applies this theory by using their social media accounts and having cast members from the films and TV shows post to their personal social media accounts using certain hashtags that represent the product at that time.

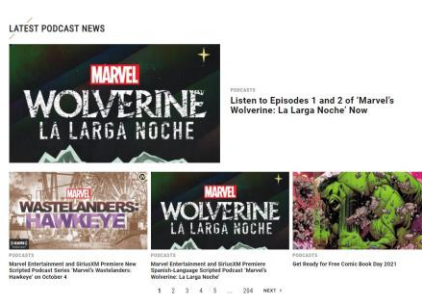
As seen below, some of these messages are “Whatever it takes”, #AvengersEndgame, #BlackWidow, #Sweepstakes, and #Shangchi.



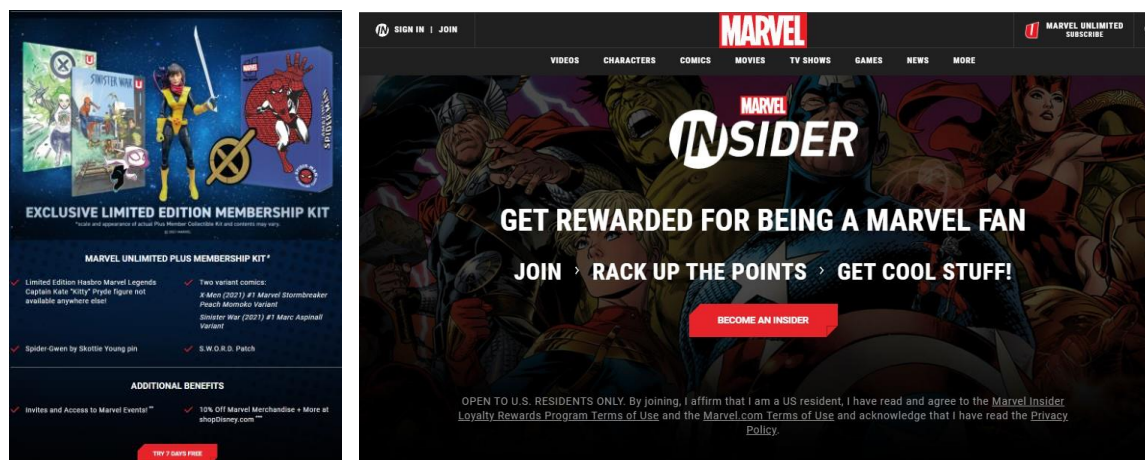
These messages and posts allow Marvel to generate interest towards the current project that they are working on. It also allows their community to stay connected and feel like they have the latest updates on their favorite Marvel characters. Due to the cocreation theory, Marvel's success depends on how well these messages connect with their key audiences.

Communication

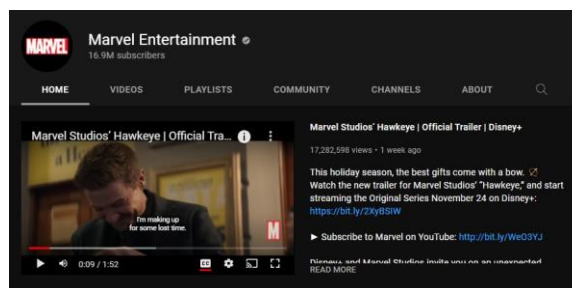
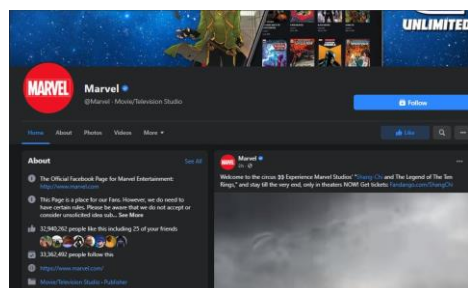
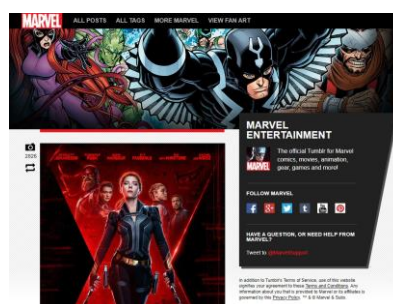
Marvel has many channels of communication that impacts its community. The most straightforward ones would be their comic books, movies, TV shows, podcasts, website, and video games. Fans see, hear, or play these channels and instantly connect to the characters and storylines being portrayed. For this reason, Marvel uses the relationship theory to form connections between their consumers and their brand. Customers build relationships towards certain brands based on two theories, brand loyalty and brand personality. For brand loyalty, it is the interaction that a consumer has had with a brand over time. Customers will buy brands that they have before because they are familiar with the brand and know that it meets their needs. The brand personality is how consumers see a brand being marketed and how the company is viewed by customers. The examples below show how Marvel connects to its consumers through strong brand personality and loyalty.



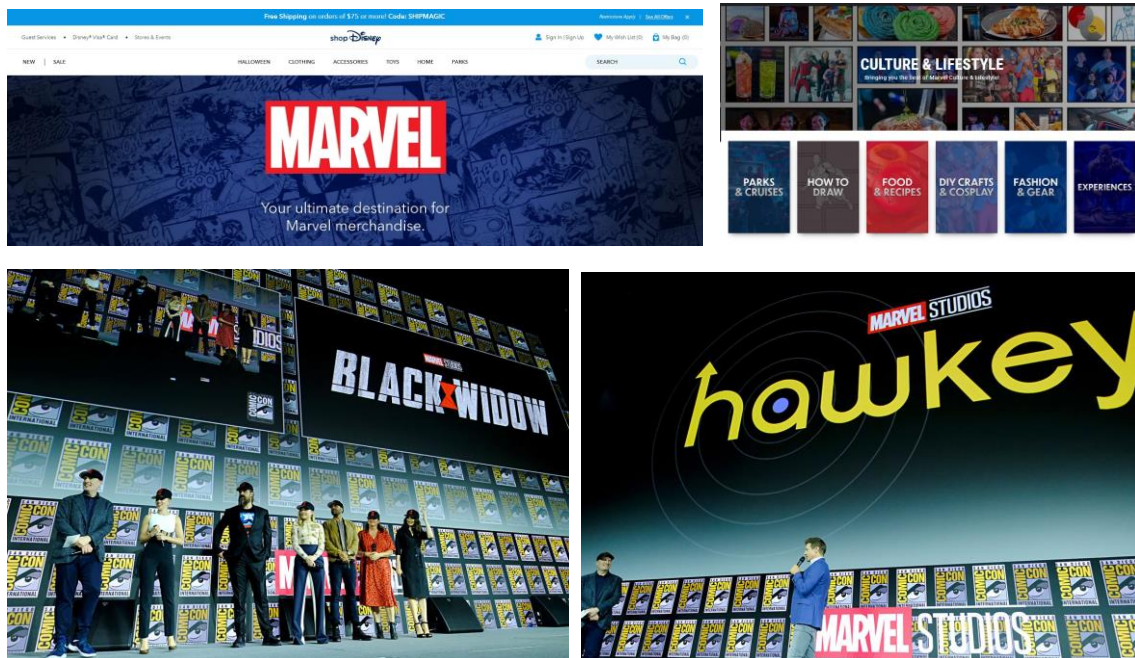
To take it a step further, Marvel has a new app called Marvel Unlimited. The app gives its members access to over 29,000 digital comics. Marvel also has a rewards program called Marvel Insider. The rewards program allows members to build points to collect special items. The images below show the perks that a member would receive once joining Marvel Unlimited and Marvel Insider.



Another major channel of communication for Marvel is social media. Marvel has accounts with Facebook (33,362,492 followers), Twitter (12.3M followers), Instagram (55.5M followers), Tumblr, YouTube (16.9M subscribers), Snapchat and Pinterest (791 followers). Marvel uses these accounts to connect with their community and advertise their newest products. They do this by providing teasers from the movies or TV shows and supplying Easter eggs that keep the fans wanting more. Marvel also maximizes user generated content by using hashtags like #TeamCap or #TeamIronMan to see which characters fans are loyal to and support. Below are examples of how they execute this method.



The last communication channel to be discussed is merchandise. Marvel uses all platforms available to them to sell merchandise that relates to its brand. Some examples of merchandise would be books, toys, costumes, clothes, and accessories. These items give fans and the Marvel community the ability to connect and express how they relate to the characters and storylines. A big event that allows Marvel to sell merchandise is Comic-Con, a multi-day comic book convention. These events are held all over the country in different cities. Fans can always find the newest items on Marvel's website along with other fun experiences to buy and enjoy. The images below provide examples where fans can buy merchandise.



With this being said, Marvel depends on the attachment theory for its community to buy its products. The attachment theory explains how people have relationships over their lifespan and how the role of those relationships shape who they are. Marvel's community consist of fans that have gorwn up with it throughout their whole life. By having products for all age ranges, Marvel can start the bond between its characters and fans at a early age. Therefore, as the fan grows they will have the ability to buy differnt merchnasie for their evolving age group. Hence, the reason why there are diehard adult fans.

SWOT analysis

Strengths:

- Loyal fanbase: Marvel fans are very dedicated when it comes to supporting the brand, they spend their time and money supporting the brand.
- Well established characters: The characters created by Marvel are iconic in pop culture, they are well known and beloved.

- Strong brand: The Marvel Brand has been around since 1939, the brand is world renowned meaning that brand identity and brand awareness are strong.

Weakness:

- Repetitive story line: Many people have complaints about the repetitive nature of the films and how they only build on each other. This could cause people to lose interest in films resulting in a loss of film revenue.
- Lack of diversity: The lack of diversity in superhero's could cause fans to look elsewhere for heroes that they feel represent them in better ways.
- Conflict between company and actor: Scarlett Johansson is suing Disney over a contract breach. Issues between actors and Marvel as a company could cause a loss of fans as the fans may side with the actor as they represent their favorite character.

Opportunities

- Growth on streaming services: Having a platform such as Disney+ creates endless opportunities to produce and conveniently share exclusive Marvel content driving up subscriptions increasing sales.
- Video games: With the vast number of strong characters, and the crossover between comic book fans and video game fans it would be beneficial to take advantage of this opportunity.
- Marvel expansion in Disney Theme Parks: A larger Marvel section could increase attendance to the Disney Parks increasing revenue and giving fans another way to interact with the characters they adore building customer relationships.

Threats

- Release on streaming services: Releasing films on streaming services may not draw as many people in to pay extra, they may wait till the films are streaming for free resulting in a loss of revenue.
- COVID-19 pandemic: Some Theatres are still closed; people may not be comfortable going out to see releases.
- Copyright Issues: Marvel has had issues with owning the copyrights of certain characters, if Marvel loses these characters the fans may support whatever brand obtains them.

Branding Recommendations

Upon reviewing and assessing the Marvel brand and its IMC practices, we suggest the following brand recommendations:

- Marvel doesn't have enough diversity in their movie characters. They could create a new superhero to add to their franchise with a more diverse cast. Marvel should post a poll on social media asking qualities and characteristics their fanbase thinks should be in the next movie.
- There is a conflict between Marvel and Disney, who owns Marvel. Marvel should produce a short video including Marvel movie stars (out of character) sharing their history with Disney (if they grew up with Disney movies, what's their favorite, etc). Marvel should then form a partnership with a national movie theater chain and have them play the video as a preview to the movie.
- Marvel needs to create more user activity and interaction on their app; they need to acquire more regular users. They should run a promotion where if you subscribe to the app for a full year, you're entered in a drawing for limited edition comic books.
- Marvel can engage more with their cosplay fans. They can have a social media contest where on the premier streaming night, fans dress up as their favorite character and take a picture in front of their streaming device screen, with the hashtag #Marvelpremierstreamfans. The top 10 posts with the most likes get featured on Marvel's social media platforms.

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