



Cinematic Universes: The Business and Cultural Impacts of Franchise Films in the 21st Century

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Abstract

the advent of cinematic universes and the way they have changed the face of the film industry in terms of both money and culture in the modern day. The rise of interconnected franchise films, like the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in the superhero genre, has revolutionised the film industry from start to finish. how cinematic universes have changed the way films are made, impacting everything from developing multi-film projects to handling intellectual rights over the long term. Also, the financial success of franchise films is worth noting because of the dominance these projects have on merchandise, digital platforms, and worldwide box offices. This has opened up new channels for branding and income. Film viewers now want more than simply isolated films; they want vast, interwoven worlds, and cinematic universes have changed that. Concerns about content homogeneity and the difficulty of sustaining story continuity across several media formats are some of the ways in which franchise filmmaking affects artistic expression. This article delves into the financial tactics, societal upheavals, and creative issues that come with the emergence of cinematic universes by looking at important case studies like the MCU, Star Wars, and the DC Extended Universe (DCEU).

Keywords: Cinematic Universes, Franchise Films, Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), Business of Film, Film Industry

Introduction

Thanks in large part to the proliferation of cinematic universes, the production, distribution, and viewing of films have all undergone radical changes in the last decade. One of the most powerful forces in the entertainment industry today are the massively popular film franchises that span numerous films, TV series, and other forms of media. The most well-known example is the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), which has revolutionised storytelling by connecting previously standalone films into a single, continuous tale. Not only has this phenomenon changed the way films are made and seen, but it has also impacted the entertainment industry as a whole, impacting financial structures and cultural dynamics in profound ways. Storylines in cinematic universes are typically designed with the long haul in mind, with individual films and series seen as connecting threads in a tapestry that spans many mediums. Modern cinema franchises are structured to have multiple instalments, including prequels, sequels, spin-offs, and even crossovers with other mediums like comic books, video games, and even theme parks. Studios now prioritise extensive intellectual property management,



interconnected stories, and long-term planning as a result of these series' success. The commercial paradigm of the film industry has been significantly altered by the emergence of cinematic universes. When it comes to box office receipts, product sales, streaming subscriptions, and licensing deals, franchise films frequently rank among the top earners globally. These days, studios are more likely to put money into cross-universe projects because they see them as long-term, multi-channel money-makers. A new paradigm in fandom has emerged as a result of the cultural impact of cinematic universes on audience expectations and interaction. Nowadays, audiences want films that aren't just about one thing; they want to be a part of a larger story that all the films and series contribute to. This change has also led to a more engaged following all over the world, who talk about the films and come up with hypotheses and speculation even before the films come out. Creative obstacles, such as the possibility of formulaic storytelling and homogeneity, have emerged alongside the proliferation of cinematic universes. Filmmakers face the continual challenge of reconciling the demands of long-term world-building with the necessity for individual creative expression within each production, all while trying to maintain narrative consistency across various films, television episodes, and media types. Furthermore, the rise of high-budget franchises has made many wonder what will happen to independent, non-franchise filmmaking in the face of this industry's infatuation with franchises. the commercial and cultural effects of fictional worlds in modern theatre. This article will analyse the strategies used by big franchises like Star Wars, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), and the DC Extended Universe (DCEU). It will then evaluate the ways in which these cinematic universes have impacted the modern film industry, both financially and culturally. It will also look at the creative obstacles that come with this new way of making movies.

Creative Challenges in Building a Cinematic Universe

Constructing an entire film franchise comes with its own set of creative obstacles that go well beyond those of making a single feature picture. An complicated balancing act of forward planning, creative flexibility, and cohesive storytelling is required to develop interconnected narratives that extend over several films, television series, and media platforms. Consistency and originality, while making sure each picture adds something significant to the bigger story, becomes an increasingly challenging undertaking as studios pour money into massive, multi-film franchises. Here we'll take a look at a few of the main creative obstacles that studios and directors encounter when creating and maintaining a cinematic world.

Maintaining Narrative Cohesion Across Multiple Films and Media

Assuring that the story stays consistent across different media formats is one of the biggest problems of building a cinematic universe. A cinematic universe spans years, characters, and stories, unlike standalone films where the plot is restricted within a single project. Take the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) as an example. It boasts more than 20 interconnected films and TV programs, all of which contribute to a bigger storyline while retaining their own unique identities. Producers have a responsibility to keep the storylines and continuity consistent from one installment to the next, while also giving credit where credit is due.



The fact that different directors and writers work on different parts of the franchise adds another layer of complexity to this problem. Maintaining cohesion throughout the whole world while honouring each director's distinct perspective calls for a solid creative backbone. By directing the interrelated story and giving directors like Ryan Coogler (Black Panther) and Taika Waititi (Thor: Ragnarok) creative freedom, Marvel's Kevin Feige has played a significant role in keeping the films together. Nevertheless, it is still a delicate balancing act to make sure that every film fits in with the overall universe plan without compromising the stories within.

Balancing Individual Creative Expression with Franchise Continuity

Filmmakers must both stay true to the overarching storyline and tone of the cinematic world and express themselves creatively. The danger of content homogenisation exists in cinematic universes, particularly ones structured with multiple films, where each episode adheres to the same narrative formula or aesthetic. Filmmakers must discover ways to present new viewpoints while remaining faithful to the overarching course of the cosmos.

Particularly in the superhero film genre, where characters are frequently legendary and have a long history in the medium (thanks to comic books or previous films), striking this balance becomes more difficult. Filmmakers face a delicate balance between living up to fans' expectations of these iconic characters and bringing in fresh ideas to keep them interested. In contrast to other Marvel Cinematic Universe films, such as *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) introduced a more humorous tone and distinctive visual style, reshaping the standard superhero film. *Wonder Woman* (2017) also stood out from the DCEU for its concentration on interpersonal drama and mythological epic storyline, which gave the film a new angle.

But there's always the chance of formulaic storytelling or creative exhaustion. With so many films and TV shows coming out every year, it can be tough for filmmakers to stay true to their unique vision while also following the rules set by the franchise.

The Risk of Homogenization and Formulaic Storytelling

The temptation to consistently deliver box office hits under established formulae can stifle originality as movie worlds grow. Studios frequently put profit above quality, which means they may fall into the trap of using tried-and-true storylines, character arcs, and aesthetic choices. For instance, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has taken a lot of heat for using the same tired plot devices in each film: heroes are introduced, they encounter some problems, and then they finally band together to vanquish the enemy in the final showdown. Although this formula has achieved phenomenal success, there is a danger that it may become monotonous and unoriginal, which would disappoint audiences.

A lack of variety in story styles is another consequence of the dominance of franchise filmmaking. In an age where the success of existing intellectual assets is becoming more important in determining box office receipts, the rising popularity of franchise films may eclipse independent, original efforts. Since independent films are frequently pushed out of mainstream distribution channels in favour of high-budget franchise entries, this move has caused filmmakers and consumers to worry about the future of non-franchise filmmaking. Filmmakers need to discover ways to make their stories interesting and new because the



industry is putting more emphasis on establishing franchises. Films like *Black Panther* and *Thor: Ragnarok* offered fresh takes on superhero storytelling through unique visual styles, cultural settings, and character arcs, departing from the norm. The films stayed true to the bigger universe while offering viewers something fresh by playing around with various genres, tones, and styles. Directors have a tightrope to tread when they veer from the formula in order to stay within the confines of the overarching story.

Managing Spin-offs, Sequels, and Prequels within a Larger Narrative Framework

Keeping track of all the spin-offs, sequels, and prequels that are a part of the bigger story is another major problem when making a cinematic universe. In a cinematic universe, every film has to do double duty: tell its own story and advance the plot of the entire universe. Even while spin-offs and prequels might introduce new characters and plot arcs, they still need to thematically and narratively integrate into the primary universe. *Prequels Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018) and *Star Wars: Rogue One* (2016) introduced new characters and timelines to the Star Wars canon, but they were careful not to deviate from the canon's established mythology in any way. In a similar vein, Disney+'s *The Mandalorian* series refocused Star Wars storytelling by introducing new characters and plotlines that were both distinct from and complementary to the existing canon. Filmmakers need to craft captivating storylines that mesh with the larger mythology without deviating too far from audience expectations; this involves meticulous planning and organisation to ensure that these spin-offs feel integral rather than peripheral.

Conclusion

There are a lot of new possibilities and a lot of new creative problems in the film industry because of the advent of cinematic universes. With these interconnected franchises, directors now have to balance audience expectations across several media platforms, their own creative expression, and long-term narrative planning. *Star Wars* and the *Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)* have been enormously successful at the box office, but they also show how formulaic narrative can be dangerous and how creativity can become homogenised. The filmmakers must walk a fine line between making sure the story flows together and letting each episode stand on its own. Cinematic worlds have changed the way the film industry makes money from a business standpoint. In addition to ticket sales, merchandise, streaming subscriptions, and licensing opportunities, they usher in a new age of branding and income. Audiences prefer more immersive, interconnected universes over solo films, which reflects the cultural impact of these series, which are popular around the world. Furthermore, the influence of fans has revolutionised the marketing of franchises, increasing interest and buzz even after the premiere of an individual film. The pressure to keep innovating creatively while still adhering to a bigger narrative framework is one of the obstacles that comes with these triumphs. Filmmakers must constantly challenge themselves to avoid creative stagnation and the dangers of tale repetition and homogenisation. There are concerns regarding the future of independent and original cinema as franchise films continue to rule the box office. Smaller, non-franchise films are



frequently overshadowed by these big-budget hits. The future of cinematic universes rests on the industry's capacity to change and adapt. In order to keep the story moving forward, filmmakers must strike a balance between letting their imaginations run wild and adhering to strict narrative continuity. The story possibilities are limitless as cinematic worlds grow into new media types, digital platforms, and interactive experiences. The capacity of cinematic universes to maintain financial success while also creatively innovating and providing new, engaging stories that connect with viewers throughout the world will determine how long their influence lasts.

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