

# Media Transformation and Brand Reinvention at Marvel Entertainment in the Attention Economy

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## Abstract:

In today's digital era, news coverage is expanding and media companies will require the creation of more creative technologies to sustain their market presence. Especially the film and television industry, they are facing increasing pressure because these companies not only have to produce high-quality stories, but also generate more innovative experiences that can span between platforms. This paper adopts Marvel Entertainment as the primary case study and Legendary Entertainment as the contrast example and discusses the new brand image and content strategy brought by digital transformation. This study adopts a mixed methods approach, with analysis of industry reports, platform data and media theory. While Marvel creates a connected content world through data analytics and verticalised stories, Legendary is centred around flexibility, cross-border alliances and localised story themes. Both have responded to issues of content fatigue and unethical data. This study helps us understand how media companies could evolve into platform and ecosystem-type ventures by capturing the interest of their audiences.

**Keywords:** Attention Economy; media convergence; brand reinvention; intellectual property strategy; digital streaming platforms.

## 1. Introduction

The idea of the "attention economy" has become a powerful concept in changing the media industries around the world in today's digital age. Scholars like Herbert A. Simon first used this term, and subsequent digital theorists made it more well-known [1]. This term describes a marketplace in which human attention becomes the scarcest and most valuable com-

modity. Media firms are no longer only competing for audience loyalty but also battling for their time and emotional involvement. This is because there is so much content available now on streaming services, social media, and mobile apps. Netflix, YouTube, and TikTok are all platforms that use algorithmically produced feeds to keep their audiences on their sites for as long as possible.

For entertainment companies to stay in the market,

they need to create more content ecosystems that are not only compelling and interesting but also sustainable and cross-platform. In this kind of environment, classic films and TV series that are only broadcast once may be eliminated unless they can be integrated into a larger narrative universe or have a strong brand strategy that can attract their audiences. According to Statista, the global number of streaming service users reached 1.2 billion by 2024 [2]. Meanwhile, Grand View Research reported that the digital media market reached \$832.99 billion in 2024 [3]. These figures show how big the competition is and how important it is for these companies to come up with new ways to make and distribute their content.

Marvel Entertainment is a successful example of a company that works in today's media world, where people are always looking for new things to watch. The corporation has made a huge and interrelated collection of movies, TV shows, toys, and digital experiences with its Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). Instead of putting out separate pieces of material, Marvel creates extended, cross-platform stories that keep people interested all the time. This method looks at how media companies can do well by making attention into an ecosystem.

This paper focuses on Marvel Entertainment as its primary case study because of its remarkable financial success, with over \$30 billion in global box office revenue as of 2024, and also for its significant influence on storytelling, marketing, and audience engagement [4]. Marvel's strategy is based on a connected IP universe and better data for distribution.

In contrast, Legendary Entertainment's strategy is more flexible and adaptable to different parts of the world. It is based on standalone franchises and collaborations with other companies throughout the world. This difference lets us compare two different but important ways to change the media.

This study uses a comparative case study method through industry reports, academic literature, and examples of content strategy to explore how these entertainment firms deal with problems such as transmedia integration, content saturation, and ethical data use. The purpose is to find out how media firms change from making content to telling stories across platforms for a long time.

## 2. Marvel and Legendary Entertainment's Industry Position and Development Path

### 2.1 Marvel and Legendary's Origins and Growth

Timely Publications started Marvel Entertainment in 1939.

At first, Marvel only published comic books. In the early 2000s, it started to change from a regular print corporation into a multimedia empire. In 2009, The Walt Disney Company bought Marvel for \$4 billion, which was a big change. This purchase provides Marvel with the financial funding, global distribution capabilities necessary to grow its cinematic ambitions. Under Disney, Marvel launched its Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), beginning with *Iron Man* (2008). The MCU is a cohesive storytelling framework in which individual superhero films and series are interconnected within a shared universe. Characters cross over between titles, and events in one storyline affect others. It creates a unified experience for audiences. The MCU set the blueprint for a unified and serialized superhero film universe. It establishes a long-term, multi-phase storytelling strategy in which individual superhero films are interlinked. This allows characters, plots, and themes to cross over and evolve across different installments. As of 2024, the global box office of the MCU has crossed \$30 billion, making it the highest-grossing film franchise in history [4].

Legendary Entertainment was founded in 2000. It has followed a different but notable path. Known for producing large-scale genre films, Legendary has built its reputation through high-concept franchises such as *The Dark Knight* trilogy (in partnership with Warner Bros.), *Pacific Rim*, and the ongoing *MonsterVerse* series, including *Godzilla* and *Kong: Skull Island*. Unlike Marvel, Legendary doesn't have a parent conglomerate like Disney, but instead uses strategic partnerships with film studios such as Warner Bros. and streaming services such as Netflix. These blockbusters usually combine Western narrative structures with international aesthetics. Although Legendary's IP is not presented in a serialized form like Marvel, they have achieved huge cultural and commercial influence around the world.

### 2.2 Brand Logic of the IP Universe

Marvel's main strength is that it can create a story universe that is linked together. This IP-based model enables content to be modular, which means that each part (a film, a series, a special episode) works as a separate unit but also adds to a bigger, changing story. People can enjoy movies like *Doctor Strange* on their own, but they can also see how they fit into a larger timeline. In the same reality, each character or series (like the *Avengers* or *Guardians of the Galaxy*) exists. It enables storylines to converge and evolve. It also makes it possible for Marvel's material to be shared and expanded across different media, which is called cross-platform synergy. It includes theatrical releases, streaming platforms, comics, merchandise, and interactive experiences. For example, a character introduced in

a streaming series can show up in a film later on. This approach allows stories to be commercially exploited again and again through content streaming.

In contrast, Legendary has adopted a more decentralized model for IP development. Its franchises, including Pacific Rim, Godzilla, and other film series, typically run as separate businesses. This makes it harder for the story to link with other stories, but it gives writers more freedom to be creative and explore different genres. Legendary's universe is more selective and less episodic than Marvel's. This strategy doesn't produce any continuity fatigue and allows audiences to try other styles. Legendary's success also lies in its cooperation with many international film companies to create films with different styles. Cooperations with Chinese companies such as Wanda Group also facilitate its entry into the Asian market. Marvel was only able to make this move after years of slowly getting in. Even while its IPs may not be as integrated, they benefit from being culturally specific and having localized marketing strategies.

### 3. Digital Innovation in IP Expansion and Marketing

#### 3.1 IP Expansion through Streaming and Immersive Content

With the launch of Disney+, Marvel extended its IP from cinematic releases to digital streaming. It launched series such as Loki, WandaVision and Hawkeye. These shows combine cinematic production quality with episodic storytelling, often running for six to nine episodes per season. They are characterized by high-concept narratives, genre experimentation, and deeper character exploration that films may not allow due to runtime constraints. These shows not only enrich the MCU storyline but also provide deeper character development. For instance, Ms. Marvel, which introduced the MCU's first Muslim superhero, attracted 775,000 U.S. households in its first five days of release, according to Samba TV. It over-indexed among Gen Z, Black, Hispanic, and Asian households, highlighting Marvel's success in reaching underrepresented demographics through streaming [5]. By 2024, Disney+ had accumulated more than 180 million subscribers. It shows that there is a huge built-in audience for such content.

In contrast, Legendary has been more cautious with its digital growth. Its partnership with Netflix to launch anime series Skull Island and Pacific Rim: The Black shows that more and more people are interested in developing IP that works well on many platforms. These animated spin-offs target younger audiences and markets with strong anime followings, such as Southeast Asia and Latin Amer-

ica.

While Legendary lacks its own proprietary platform, its licensing deals have allowed it to diversify its formats and test serialized storytelling in lower-risk environments. For example, Skull Island, which came out on Netflix, introduced new characters and extended the MonsterVerse without relying on theatrical investment.

#### 3.2 Data-Driven Creation and Marketing Strategy

Marvel uses data analytics to optimize creative direction and marketing effectiveness. Disney+ audience engagement metrics such as watch time, rewatch frequency, and audience segmentation inform character arcs and content release strategies.

Marketing campaigns are similarly data-enhanced. Marvel uses algorithmic targeting on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to tailor trailers and promotional content to different demographic groups. According to a study by Parrot Analytics showed that Marvel content dominates global audience demand expressions, and Disney+ also uses its own analytics to help with A/B testing of trailer versions, thumbnail images, and platform placement [6]. These insights help optimize long-term engagement.

By contrast, Legendary has historically relied on more conventional forms of data analysis, such as box-office results, critic reviews, and broad audience surveys. These technologies offer useful information, but they don't have the real-time feedback loops that streaming services do. But Legendary is starting to use more modern methods. Its partnerships with platforms like Netflix give it access to statistics on how many people watch its shows, which helps it make animated spin-offs like Skull Island. According to a 2023 report by Variety, Legendary has also cooperated with third-party analytics firms to assess social media sentiment and trailer engagement metrics before the release windows [7].

### 4. Cross-Platform Communication and Fan Engagement

#### 4.1 Social Media and Short-Form Video

Marvel dominates platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Its official Instagram account has over 70 million followers, while TikTok has over 15 billion views of MCU-related content. Marvel can use these platforms to provide previews, behind-the-scenes videos, and interactive campaigns that get people involved in real time. For instance, the Loki series' marketing campaigns had countdowns, live Q&A sessions, and content that could

be turned into memes. It kept users interested before and after the series was out. Marvel's strategy is very closely tied to how fans act. Content is often released at the same time around the world and is tuned for the algorithms of each platform. There are additional teaser loops and vertical video formats for content. Before big releases, Marvel Studios also uses influencers and fan accounts to share content naturally.

Legendary also uses social media but focuses primarily on promotion. For example, *Godzilla vs. Kong* has been promoted on both social platforms in conjunction with IMAX or local marketing firms. The partnership with games companies and foreign streamers has helped the company reach a global audience online. In contrast, Legendary tends to focus on visuals over interactivity. While promotional clips are widely shared, less attention is paid to building ongoing, continuous engagement or narrative-based campaigns.

## 4.2 Fan Interaction and User-Generated Content

Marvel promotes a rich environment for a user-generated content (UGC) ecosystem. Fans are encouraged to create artwork, fan fiction, memes, and analysis videos. These kinds of participatory culture can enhance fans' emotional investment. Marvel often amplifies these creations through official reposts and fan competitions. This relationship deepens viewer loyalty and makes them feel like they are part of the creative process.

Legendary's fan ecosystem is active, but it is less formally integrated into its marketing pipeline. User-generated content tends to arise organically. Cosplay, fan art, and talking about the lore are all big things. But these attempts don't get as much support from institutions. Recent projects have revealed that things are changing. For instance, after the release of *Skull Island*, Legendary only reposted fan art on Instagram a few times and co-hosted a Reddit AMA with the creators. These actions show that people are starting to see the value of participation, even though they aren't yet organized.

## 5. Challenges and Strategic Responses in the Attention Economy

### 5.1 Content Fatigue, Homogenization, and Data Ethics

Even though it has been successful, Marvel faces increasing criticism for content saturation and formulaic storytelling. The idea of "superhero fatigue" is becoming more common. Nielsen's 2024 report says that interest in superhero material has dropped by 15% [8]. The Marvel Cin-

ematic Universe has so many interrelated storylines that it can be hard for casual viewers to keep up, which might make it less accessible and engaging. In contrast, Legendary's lower-frequency release model helps it avoid similar fatigue. But this more cautious approach also restricts its ability to make money over time and keep people interested compared to Marvel's ambitious output.

Another major challenge is the ethical issues of Marvel's data-driven strategy. Data analytics can help deliver content that is more tailored and useful, but they also raise worries about user privacy, algorithmic bias, and digital spying. In 2025, the European Union fined the media business a total of €5.88 billion for violating the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This showed that the EU was paying more attention to the media [9]. Legendary has fewer direct data privacy issues because it doesn't have easy access to private streaming platforms. But this also makes it harder for it to get consumer feedback and improve its content strategy to the same level as Marvel.

### 5.2 Strategic Recommendations for Sustainable Growth

To address content fatigue, Marvel could tell more stories from different cultures and genres that aren't often seen. Both artistically and economically, movies like *Shang-Chi* and *Black Panther* showed how powerful inclusive storytelling can be. Making this strategy bigger might give the brand new life and make it more popular around the world.

Legendary might do something similar by creating additional IPs that are culturally relevant. Legendary is in a good position to look into stories based on regional myths or less well-known cultural genres because it has a history of doing well with global aesthetics, like the East-meets-West tone of *Godzilla vs. Kong*. Working with creators from Asia, Africa, and Latin America might help Legendary build new content pillars that are popular all across the world and set itself apart from stories that are mostly about Hollywood.

### 5.3 Responsible Use of AI and Data Technology

Marvel should lead the industry in ethical AI adoption. It can use machine learning to improve scripts, pre-visualize, and divide audiences, all while making its data rules clear. MarketingProfs says that by 2025, 75% of the time content will be created with AI-assisted tools [10].

Legendary may use AI for localized dubbing, sentiment analysis, and predictive performance modelling in a smart way, especially in markets where box office returns are hard to anticipate. Legendary can do better at what it does without spending a lot of money on new infrastructure by sharing analytics with third-party tools or platforms from



partners like Netflix. Being open about how these technologies are utilized could also help build trust with both audiences and collaborators.

## 6. Trends and Futures in Media Transformation

### 6.1 The Inevitability of Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is no longer an option for media companies that want to do well in the attention economy; it's a must. People get information faster, in more tailored ways, and with more algorithmic filters, so studios need to modify how they think about and develop stories as well as how they communicate them. The shift from discrete content kinds to IP ecosystems that are linked to each other is what makes this transition. Changing from episodic storytelling to continuous narrative engagement is now a very important strategy to keep people interested and loyal across all types of media.

Marvel exemplifies this transformation. Its platform-based, integrated approach has helped it evolve from a regular film studio into a cross-media brand network that communicates with consumers through movies, streaming services, digital marketing, and goods marketplaces. Marvel keeps people interested in numerous ways by putting all of its stories in the same realm. In contrast, Legendary Entertainment has a distinct way. Legendary wants to be flexible, change with the times, and use selective serialization. This approach is a good way to deal with a content market that is getting more transnational, even while it is less centralized and broader. It relies on co-production, licensing flexibility, and cultural localization.

### 6.2 Rebuilding Brands through Diverse and Ethical Innovation

To rebuild media brands in the digital age, these companies can accept a variety of content and make sure that new ideas are ethical. As competition gets harder and audiences want both representation and accountability, companies need to find a way to reconcile story growth with data openness and cultural relevance.

In this balancing act, Marvel and Legendary show various strengths. Marvel's focus on immersive world-building has created a vast transmedia universe, but it now faces challenges such as content fatigue and over-serialization. For Legendary, it has more creative freedom and works with people from other countries. This gives them more freedom to try out other styles and genres.

For both players to overcome those limitations, however, we believe each one needs to further invest in diversity. Marvel should expand further on how it launched an al-

ready successful path with its culturally diverse stories like Shang-Chi, Black Panther. Legendary is positioned to forge the same path. It can further explore partnerships with IPs that are rooted locally, as well as creators and talents in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Moreover, ethical data practices will be essential in shaping future audience relationships. As studios increasingly adopt AI for content creation, sentiment analysis, and user targeting, transparency around data use and algorithmic decision-making becomes vital.

Ultimately, the future of media belongs to those who can combine innovation with inclusivity, and technology with trust. The brands that thrive will not just entertain, but also reflect and co-create with their audiences across a dynamic, participatory media landscape.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper, we analyzed how Marvel and Legendary Entertainment faced issues of digital transition in the attention economy. Marvel has created a highly connected, data-driven entertainment ecosystem that keeps viewers coming back for more. In contrast, Legendary focuses on global collaboration and creative freedom. Both companies highlight the importance of brand reinvention via the use of digital innovation, audience engagement and responsible data use, albeit in different styles and scales. Marvel's approach is suitable for relating to audiences as a sustained narrative across platforms, and Legendary's approach works well for translating to regions and genres. In the future, media businesses that do well will be the ones who use technology and cultural understanding to tell stories, come up with new ideas, and build trust with their audiences. People who can turn short bursts of interest into long-term engagement across platforms will own the future of entertainment. But this study is limited because it only looks at two case studies, which may not show all the many techniques used in the media sector as a whole. Future studies might look at more than just the differences between media in different countries, look at how audiences react to new media, or look at new players in non-Western markets to get a better picture of how global media is changing.

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