

WJEC GCSE Media Studies, Unit 2, Section B

Contemporary Hollywood Film – Narrative

Transmedia storytelling



Telling a story across **multiple media platforms**. New stories in the franchise may be created for a specific platform. For instance, *The Mandalorian* series on Disney+ is a new story set within the wider *Star Wars* universe. This maximises revenue and gives audiences more content on different platforms.

Chief Creative Director of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* Kevin Feige said “If you want to understand everything in future *Marvel* movies... you’ll probably need a *Disney+* subscription, because events from the new shows will factor into forthcoming films.”

Shared Universe

Also known as a ‘fictional universe’ or ‘cinematic universe’. Defined by *Wikipedia* as “a set of creative works where more than one writer (or other artist) independently contributes a work that can stand alone but fits into the joint development of the storyline, characters, or **world** of the overall project.”

e.g. The *D.C Universe* is the shared fictional Universe of the characters and worlds created in *DC Comics*.

The *DC Extended Universe (DCEU)* refers to the *DC* films distributed by *Warner Bros*.

Adaptations

Most film franchises are based on successful **pre-existing properties**.

Examples include popular literary fiction (e.g. *Harry Potter*), comic books (*D.C*), video games (e.g. *Resident Evil*). This minimises risk as the franchise already has a fanbase.



Case study:

Narrative and the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*

- The narrative structure of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* mimics the narrative structure of a television series as each film can be viewed as a standalone episode, building to a season finale with *Avengers Infinity War* and *Avengers Endgame*.
- Even though many *Marvel* films can be enjoyed as a **self-contained narrative**, they often feature a post-credit sequence that ties into the wider **story arc** of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. These post-credit sequences provide suspense and lack narrative closure, building anticipation for the next film release.
- Most of films reward both **casual** spectators, who may enjoy a standalone film and **loyal fans**, who enjoy the references to the wider *MCU* and character and narrative development across the series of films.
- Each main **character’s arc** is often developed over a trilogy of films within the *MCU*. E.g. The character of *Captain America* begins as a loyal patriot in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), then becomes more cynical of America in the next two films, *America: The Winter Solider* (2014) and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016).

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Contemporary Hollywood Film – Audiences

Participatory cultures

- Media scholar Henry Jenkins argues that fans are not passive audiences but “**active producers** and manipulators of meaning” (1992:23).
- The way fans behave is an example of a ‘**participatory culture**’. This is where fans both produce and consume media texts – they are ‘**prosumers**’.
- Digital technology and the internet facilitates participatory culture as fans can create and share fan art, fan fiction, memes, reactions, etc.
- Fans may subvert the original texts by creating their own versions. Jenkins argues this can be a form of ‘**resistance**’ against the dominant norms of sexuality and gender in the original texts. An example is female fans of the Harry Potter franchise creating Ron and Harry adult fanfiction. This is an example of **slash fiction** and ‘**shipping**’, where fans create and share stories of same sex relationships between two characters.

Case Study: *Justice League* (Snyder, 2017)

- 5th film in the the *DC Extended Universe*.
- Cost \$300 million to produce.
- Made \$657.9 million at the global box-office.
- Opening weekend US box-office \$96 million (considered a low opening weekend).
- Low audience rating of 40% on *Rotten Tomatoes*.



Director Jack Snyder stopped work on *Justice League* after the death of his daughter. *Warners* handed over the project to Joss Whedon to complete. Many fans were dissatisfied with the film and campaigned for a cut of the film in line with Snyder’s original vision. They used **social media** with the hashtag *#releasethesnydercut*. In response, *Warners* are releasing *Zack Snyder’s Justice League* as a four-part mini-series on HBO, a subscription channel owned by *Warners*. This is an example of the **convergence** of film and television. It demonstrates the power of **active audiences and media ownership**, as *Warners* hope to recoup losses from the original film by releasing the mini-series.

Diversification and audiences

Studios aim to **maximise audiences** by offering **diverse** films in the franchise that appeal to different demographics. E.g. *Joker* (2019) is an adult film and appeals to fans of indie films. It is very different to the traditional superhero ‘family friendly’ films.



Superhero franchises have traditionally focused mainly on white male heroes. However, after social media campaigns raising awareness of **gender and racial inequalities** (e.g. *#metoo* and *#oscarssowhite*), *Disney* and the *MCU* are starting to include more **diverse representations** and **expand the fanbase** for their films. Recent successes are *Black Panther* (2018) and *Captain Marvel* (2019).