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The Magic Behind the Magic: Discovering Why The Walt Disney Company is so Successful

Chloe Becker
Dominican University of California

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Abstract

One might not realize the empire standing behind the brand name “Disney” and what has gone into the creation of such a multifaceted business model that is leading the industry. While Disney, officially called The Walt Disney Company, has hand-crafted every element of the magical experiences and creations they put forward, there is an underlying business model and leadership skill-set that has brought the company ahead of the rest. It is within the social sciences that we can focus on this model and how it affects the rest of the film and mass media companies who strive to mimic the enterprise that is second to none. I argue that there is a “magic,” a defining factor, behind the constructed ‘magic’ Disney puts forward. Concepts from both disciplines, communications, and leadership studies, can be examined and applied to the enterprise by looking at what sets it apart, defining it as the most powerful entertainment brand in the world. According to Business Insider and extensive research, “Disney is not only powerful because of its recent purchases: It benefits from a long and established history.”

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Chloe Isabella Becker

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Second Reader: Nnekay Fitzclarke Reference and Instruction Librarian

Honors Director: Dr. Gigi Gokcek Department of Political Science/International Studies

ABSTRACT

One might not realize the empire standing behind the brand name “Disney” and what has gone into the creation of such a multifaceted business model that is leading the industry. While Disney, officially called The Walt Disney Company, has hand-crafted every element of the magical experiences and creations they put forward, there is an underlying business model and leadership skill-set that has brought the company ahead of the rest. It is within the social sciences that we can focus on this model and how it affects the rest of the film and mass media companies who strive to mimic the enterprise that is second to none. I argue that there is a “magic,” a defining factor, behind the constructed ‘magic’ Disney puts forward. Concepts from both disciplines, communications, and leadership studies, can be examined and applied to the enterprise by looking at what sets it apart, defining it as the most powerful entertainment brand in the world. According to Business Insider and extensive research, “Disney is not only powerful because of its recent purchases: It benefits from a long and established history.”

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Introduction

Why do families from around the world go to Disneyland? Why do they watch the 'Disney Classics' time and time again? What factors make The Walt Disney Company the most a world famous brand in entertainment? (Haggert, 2008) The reason behind being attracted to the number one media conglomerate in the entertainment industry is innovation. There has been timeless and continuous innovation from the beginning of the establishment of the company. It is therefore extremely important to understand what aspects of The Walt Disney Company sets them apart and ahead of the rest, how this is linked throughout all aspects of the enterprise, what acquisitions Disney has partnered with that have grown the company, and how it stacks up to other companies in entertainment. For example, Beattie (2011) focused on the risks that Walt Disney himself took that influence the success today: "Only by constantly innovating and pushing the boundaries of not just animation, but what Disney was as a business, did the company go from a moderately successful animation studio, to a complete entertainment experience, with theme parks, merchandising, cruise ships and on and on." (Beattie, 2011, para 22) The beginning of the Walt Disney Company started when Walt Disney himself wanted to take his animation to the next level with Steamboat Willie and bring Mickey Mouse into people's families. As Walt Disney famously said, "I only hope that we never lose sight of one thing - that it was all started by a mouse."

Studying the foundation of the company and its business practices can give an idea of what elements play a part in the creation of the most powerful company in the world. This paper will explore the beginning stages and foundation of The Walt Disney Company, while

simultaneously examining the newest practices in action at the enterprise. “Walt Disney had his own formula for creating a magic entertainment kingdom” (Mink, 2016, para 1). The rise of The Walt Disney Company has played a part in its successful application of the equation for magic, and this paper will examine the elements of; innovation, ‘world building’, and timelessness which contribute to what the magic behind the “Magic of Disney” is. By clearly identifying these three elements of Disney’s magic, this paper will dive into how these elements help create; Disney parks (particularly Disneyland), Disney movies (both old and new), and Disney acquisitions (particular focus on Pixar). Noting these three elements, in these three categories, it is clear the rest of the entertainment industry strives to be as successful as The Walt Disney Company. This paper will analyze and link three crucial aspects of what magic truly is for The Walt Disney Company. Synthesizing the information from the foundational core of the company to the rise of the new, innovative techniques is the missing puzzle piece in the equation. The ultimate question to ask is “What is the real *magic* behind ‘The Magic of Disney’?” The Walt Disney Company has used world-building to set the stage for a quintessential equation for magic; *timelessness plus innovation*, naming this company one of the most powerful entertainment companies in the world, and with good reason.

Where are we now?

The Walt Disney Company has gone through many stages in business to get to where it is today. From the days of sketches on the blank paper to seeing re-adaptations of some of the Disney Classics, what makes The Walt Disney Company so successful? Why does most of the entertainment industry strive to be like Disney? Why should consumers care about this - isn't it

just a children's brand? Disney has created a brand, that in and of itself has the classic 'fairy dust' magic throughout, but what is the magic that lies behind the acquisitions, parks and movies? I argue the true Disney magic is *timelessness plus innovation*. This elemental equation has caused the brand to skyrocket to the top of the industry, making a record breaking \$7 billion in 2016 (BasuMallick, 2016), despite the ages of cable cord-cutting, media pirating, and economic downturn (Lafayette, 2016). The aspects of The Walt Disney Company that are failing, causing issues for the entertainment empire, are additions such as ESPN, which has been missing earnings and revenue targets by double digits (Ingram, 2016). This type of network is not part of the equation that creates magic, due to its lack of timelessness. This network fault in the company shows that the elements to our equation for magic play large part to the success of the business.

Disney is a vast empire, including affiliate television and film companies, merchandise sales, international theme parks, worldwide vacation clubs, classical and innovative movies, and interactive gaming sites. In order to understand my objective argument, I will redefine Disney to reduce complexity. Disney and The Walt Disney Company will further be recognized in three facets: movies, parks and acquisitions. These three facets will be used to examine the elements of the equation for magic. Looking deeper at how timelessness and innovation play part to the success of The Walt Disney Company will be vital for other companies to understand, as well as their consumers. Rival production houses, theme parks and entertainment companies attempt to hit the same mark that the Walt Disney Company is able to reach. So, what makes Disney tick?

How do they hit the mark every time and lead the market so consistently? Why are they the leading entertainment company in the world? Magic.

History

The multifaceted empire came from ‘humble beginnings’ in the 1920’s as a small cartoon studio to its preeminent name in the entertainment industry today. The Walt Disney Company made the list for Fortune's World's Most Admired Companies, coming in at #5 on the list, and the first entertainment company on the list. (Most Successful, 2017, para 1) What roots in this company grounded their continuous success? Walt Disney, the mastermind behind the powerful company known today, is the first part in understanding the history of The Walt Disney Company. His roots are the beginning of the empire, which grew with his movies and animation, and later was turned into some of the most successful international theme parks in the world. Looking back into the history of Disney gives a more comprehensive understanding for the ground in which the empire has been built.

Walt Disney Himself

Walt Disney himself became a household name once Mickey Mouse was successful. His roots were simple, being raised on a farm with four siblings. Roy Disney, Walt’s older brother, stated that “He had that way about him that you like him. Everybody took to him, and he was always so earnest about everything he did... We had a wonderful family home life.” (Marceline, para 2)With these easy beginnings, Walt had early influences from his father's wife, Margaret.

She used to bring him drawing tablets and pencils so he could draw and create at an early age. After moving away from the farm, Walt went to Kansas City where he discovered the world of movies and vaudeville, creating dreams to become an entertainer himself. Walt Pfeiffer, entertainment enthusiast and friend to Walt Disney when he was in Kansas City, recalls that the two of them would perform at local amateur nights as “The Two Walts.” (The Entertainer, para 1) After this introduction into the entertainment business, Walt and his family moved to Chicago where he drew for his high-school newspaper and pursued the dream of becoming a newspaper cartoonist. He then went into the army as an ambulance driver for a short while, from 1917-1918. Afterwards he moved back to Kansas City where he started working for Pesmen-Rubin Commercial Art Studio for a small paycheck, however, Walt was so excited at the time, stating “Somebody was paying me \$50 a month to draw pictures!” (The Dawn, 2017, para 1). In 1920, Walt met Ub Iwerks, who became a lifelong friend, who would be with Walt for most of his career. They worked together at the Kansas City Slide Company and would work on animation together, where Walt borrowed one of his bosses stop motion cameras to experiment with other ways of doing the drawings he was creating for animation. Walt Disney stated “I got very intrigued with the mechanics of the whole things... we work out tricks that they hadn’t done.” (The State of the Art, para 1) In 1923 Walt left Kansas City after the failure of his company Laugh-O-Grams and he moved to Hollywood.

The move to Hollywood in 1923 was when Walt and his brother, Roy, created the Disney Brothers Studio. (The Move to Hollywood, para 4) This new company landed a contract with the ‘Alice Comedies’ which was Walt Disney’s first hit. The series featured a young girl in live

action and her interactions with animated characters. This technique was seen in movies later such as *Mary Poppins*. After the success of *Alice*, Walt and Roy renamed their studio to Walt Disney Studios and moved into a new building on Hyperion Ave, which later housed many of the great Disney movies of today. Walt Disney then struggled after Charles Mintz, his distribution representative. Mintz successfully made deals with Universal Studios to take Walt's animators and his prized character, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. (Creative Difference, para 1) For many animators, this would have been the end of their career, however this was just the beginning of the empire Disney created. As an answer to the tragedy of Oswald being taken, a year later in 1928, Mickey Mouse was born. His innovative style made Mickey stand out above the rest, especially with *Steamboat Willie*, which was a revolutionary animation, with the first synchronized sound animation ever brought to the big screen. (Animated Steamboat Willie, para 1) Mickey's success grew exponentially and became a household name with Walt Disney. The two of them grew together.

Only nine years later, Walt Disney released his first feature-length film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (Lev-Ram, 2014). This film was the jumping point for the rest of Disney's growth, whether success or failure, Walt was learning about the best leadership practices and approaches for the company. The first few feature-length films were not massively successful in commercial theaters, but this did not stop Disney. They re-released some of the movies in hopes for more success and this launched The Walt Disney Company into the entertainment industry. Disneyland opened in 1955 and over one million people entered through the gates of Disneyland in the first two months.

Movies and Animation

Walt Disney did not start his animation process alone. He and longtime partner, Ub Iwerks, had been partners when they worked together at Pesmin-Rubin Commercial Art Studio, in Kansas City (Ub Iwerks, 2014). After an attempt at starting a business for themselves, they moved to the Kansas City Film Ad Company and found that their partnership meshed perfectly, initiating conversation for their own company together. This led to Disney later inviting Iwerks to work with him after the move to Hollywood in 1924 for Disney Brothers Studio, which he co-owned with his brother Roy (Walt Disney, 2010). They began working on state of the art animation projects such as the *Alice Comedies*, using live action actresses with animated background and co-characters (Contributor, 2016).

After a few years, they renamed the company Walt Disney Studios, and Walt wanted something new. “Walt wanted to eliminate the live action components that defined Alice”, said animation historian Russell Merritt, so changes were in the works (Contributor, 2016, para 3). Charles Mintz, the film distributor for *Alice Comedies*, entered negotiations with Universal Pictures, promising that the animation would bring the studio back into the long abandoned game. Mintz told Disney that they wanted a character that wasn't a cat since Felix the Cat was dominating the animation field. This led to the creation of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. Oswald was a hit, quickly becoming one of the most popular animated characters of the 1920's.

Because of the success of Oswald, Disney wanted a larger budget for more shorts and was willing to make a deal with Universal Pictures (Galindo, 2014). However, Mintz had already

started creating “back-door deals” with many of the animators at Walt Disney Studios to start a new studio and continue producing Oswald shorts without Disney (Timeline of Disney, 2017). In February 1928, Mintz made a deal with Universal Pictures to continue creating shorts without Disney’s involvement. This led to Disney losing all of his animators and his lucky rabbit. He was left with his lifelong friend, Iwerks, and they began crafting the new idea Disney had: Mickey Mouse. In late 1928, Disney released the first cartoon that synchronized sound and animation, causing Mickey Mouse to be on the rise of popularity. He created a story around Mickey Mouse that led to an open world for Walt Disney Studios for animation, which later led to much of their business successes with parks and other movies. “One of the things that Walt brought was to have the characters have real personalities that the audience could identify with,” according to Walt’s nephew, Roy E. Disney (Contributor, 2016).

Disneyland Parks

In Griffith Park, while watching his daughters on the carousel, Walt Disney came up with the idea of Disneyland. This revolutionary idea was brought to light in the early 1950’s, where Disney wanted to build a park that was safe and inviting for families while also allowing people to meet his cartoon characters and ride his trains. “The idea for Disneyland was a completely original concept in entertainment — one that expanded the Disney brand from the silver screen to a magical in-person experience” (Doyle, 2014, para 9).

Walt Disney created an alternate universe of nostalgia, fantasy and futurism. Opening day was July 17th, 1955. The \$17 million theme park was built on over 160 acres, which steadily

brought in staggering profits (History.com Staff, 2009). Disneyland has grown exponentially and hosts more than 14 million guests a year, which spend close to \$3 billion. In the summer in 1955, prior to opening, Disneyland sent out special invitations for opening day to the park. This pass was counterfeited and thousands of uninvited guests arrived at the park and were admitted on opening day. The park was not yet ready for the capacity of people that arrived and they ran out of food and drinks. A woman's high heels got stuck in the wet asphalt of Main Street and the Mark Twain Steamboat nearly capsized from too many people on board the boat (History.com Staff, 2009).

This beginning was daunting for many of the park employees at the time; later Disney referred to it as the “Black Sunday.” After the negative responses and reviews from the unsuccessful opening, Walt himself invited attendees back for a private ‘second day’ to experience Disneyland the right way. The success rate went up steadily from then on. When the grounds started to become too small to house all of the amenities and attractions, Disneyland started to expand. Disneyland changed its name in the 1990’s, from Disneyland to Disneyland Park, to distinguish it from the surrounding area and resorts. Disneyland started as a much smaller park, and it has undergone many renovations and expansions since its creation. They added the New Orleans Square in 1966, Bear Country (now called Critter Country) in 1972, Mickey’s Toontown in 1993, and have recently announced the creation of Star Wars Land in 2019. Disney’s California Adventure was added in 2001, at the location of the original parking lot. With influences from the animation and movies of Disney, the park has potential to continue expanding for years to come.

World-Building

World-building is defined as “the art of creating a new fictional world” (Merriam-Webster, 2016). With this definition, one could argue that many authors who write fiction and movie scriptwriters are involved in world-building. They have created characters and storylines that their audiences believe in. The Walt Disney Company has taken the action of world-building to a whole new level. “Rather than draw the consumer into the Disney world, the Disney world was propelled outward into the real world of the consumer” (Anderson, 1994, pg 155). This construct is what much of the Disney world is built on. Though elemental characters such as Mickey Mouse and the ‘Sensational Six’, Disney has been world building in movies and animation. Disneyland has an “other-world” feeling, in which there are street names and districts to the parks that build a fictional world in which one exists in whilst in the park. The Walt Disney Company has also made company buys strategically because of this world building idea, such as Pixar did with their small but comprehensive movie universe, and Marvel with over 5,000 characters. Both of these acquisitions have world building built into their framework, with character or object appearances in multiple movies.

Movies: Mickey Mouse and Family

Starting early on, Walt Disney created the character of Mickey Mouse. Mickey is the most classic example of world building of characters for Disney audiences. Mickey made it big in Hollywood with his first big hit being *Steamboat Willie*. *Steamboat Willie* was the first

animation to have synchronized sound, which made it an instant hit (Califore, 2014). Though the animation was a hit, there was a magic around the world built around the successful mouse. His friends and family made up a group named “The Sensational Six.” These six characters were Minnie Mouse, Pluto,

Donald Duck, Daisy

Duck, Goofy, and of

course Mickey Mouse.

These characters were

featured in many of the

Mickey Mouse shorts, as

well as the Donald Duck

shorts. Though they were considered the main characters of Disney’s world he was creating, they were never pictured all together in the theatrical originals but were all together in later additions.

The universe did not stop with these six. It also included characters such as Horace Horsecollar,

Clarabelle Cow, Mickey’s arch enemy Pete, Chip n’ Dale, Goofy’s son Max Goof, and the

nephews of Donald Duck - Huey, Dewey and Louie. There were many others that came and went throughout the series, however, the group only grew as the company expanded.

Although the friends and family aspect of Mickey Mouse could be attributed to a classic world-building technique, Disney took it one step further. He was able to push the limits of what was seen as ‘characters.’ People used Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse as household names. They have become integral parts of one's childhood and growing up and they move past the point of



Sensational Six; Goofy, Donald Duck, Minnie Mouse, Mickey Mouse, Daisy Duck and Pluto

being just characters on a screen. For instance, in 1978, in honor of his 50th anniversary, Mickey Mouse became the first animated character to get his own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Walt also references both Mickey and Minnie Mouse as having ‘private lives.’ In a 1933 edition of *Film Pictorial* magazine, Walt Disney said “In private life, Mickey is married to Minnie. A lot of people have written to him asking this question because sometimes he appears to be married to her in his films and other times still courting her... In the studio, we have decided that they are married already.”

Parks: The ‘Other World’ of Disney

Disneyland, the original Walt Disney Company theme park, has established a sense of hyperreality. Hyperreality is “an image or simulation, or an aggregate of images and simulations, that either distorts the reality it purports to depict or does not, in fact, depict anything with a real existence at all, but which nonetheless comes to constitute reality” (hyperreality, 2012).

Disneyland is able to change in many ways the reality that people believe. With a few simple changes in the surroundings, their guests are viewing a different world than what was outside the gates of Disneyland. With a clearly changed skyline, sound effects, and physical environment around the guests, visitors are viewing the world they live in with new eyes. Baudrillard (1983) says that although Disneyland is fantasy, it also functions “to make us believe that the rest is real when in fact, all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but the order of hyperreal and of simulation” (Storey, 2015, pg 136). He also claims that Disneyland is the best example of hyperreality due to it being a real, physical environment to be in, in addition to

being a fictional, representational world. “Pure” reality becomes replaced with the hyperreal Disneyland, where any boundary between the ‘real’ world and the imagery is obsolete.

Throughout the park, Disney has crafted a true sense of “another world.” This stretches from calling all of their employees ‘cast members’, giving a magical illusion that they are putting on a show throughout the park when guests visit, and the music distribution around the park with over 10,000 speakers to create believable worlds of sound, as to not combine any realms together or make you realize that the world you are in ‘might not be real’. The surroundings, food options and cast members change drastically from one sector of the park to another. Keeping this in mind, it is easy to get lost in the ‘magic’ Disneyland has carefully crafted. “Above the small tunnel in which guests walk through to get from the main entrance to Main Street, Disneyland, there reads a small sign with a direct Walt Disney quote stating, “Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy.”

This experience has been kept alive for many years. Walt Disney he stated “To all who come to this happy place; welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past...and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams and the hard facts that have created America...with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world.”

Acquisitions: Alternate Realities of Disney

Pixar is famous for many successful films in which the creators have partaken in traditional world-building techniques. The Walt Disney Company, with their clear goal of

crafting and delivering magic to their audiences, would not make a business choice that would alter their core equation of magic. The purchase of Pixar was strategic and made with the understanding that Pixar has already started illustrating ‘magic’ world building, as The Walt Disney Company had been doing for years. Pixar is so excellent at formulating the magic through world building, that many believe in something known as “The Pixar Theory” (Negroni, J, 2013). This theory states that all Pixar movies exist within the same universe and are in a



chronological order. There are also many instances throughout the movies where there are repeated logos, photographs and symbols that would insinuate that the movies are in the same world.

This is the ultimate world building technique, seeing as it spans throughout many films made by Pixar. Two of the most recognizable symbols to this theory are the ‘Luxo Ball’ and the code ‘A113.’ The ‘Luxo Ball’, a small blue and yellow ball with a red star, is best known for being in *Toy Story*, however this famous bouncy ball originated elsewhere. The Luxo Ball has history with Pixar, appearing in its first animated short, *Luxo, Jr.* with the, now iconic, playful desk lamp. This ball has grown to become a classic symbol to Pixar. The Pixar Theory has the added element of ‘mystery’ which is intriguing to guests as well as theorists. This also suggests, to one

that knows about the theory, that they might see or hear something that denotes a secret or hidden element of the grand storyline that one hadn't seen before.

In addition to this Pixar Universe that many theorize might be the glue that holds Pixar together, there is also the addition of Disney's newer acquisition purchase of 2009 (Cieply, 2009). Marvel Studios has a sense of "stickiness" which keeps its audiences engaged and almost has audiences "stuck" with them (Beggs, 2017). Marvel is able to pull off this sticky sensation because it has characters that are interlocked in story lines together. For instance, Iron Man was extremely successful and his story included other super heroes such as Thor, The Hulk and Captain America. Though these movies independently were not as successful as the original Iron Man movie, they have expanded the fandom for each hero and have therefore expanded the universe in which Marvel thrives in. This is seen in grand increases at the box offices for each extension of this super hero universe. The other component to the stickiness that Marvel has is the plot information. "Each Movie overlaps with the others in a way that makes investing in only one hero impossible. Guardians of the Galaxy is the least connected, but it was still sold as a chance to further the Thanos plot and learn more about Infinity stones" (Beggs, 2017, para 12). This ever expanding universe Marvel has crafted is part of the world-building that The Walt Disney Company strives for. Having this quality woven into the franchise made for an easy purchase idea and therefore was an educated purchase for Disney. The success could grow with the MCU (Marvel Comic Universe) and therefore could bring more success to the successful entertainment empire. The Marvel Universe collaboration network has also been viewed as an 'almost real social network', giving the comic book universe more 'world-building' credit to its

audiences (Alberich, 2008). Through a study conducted at University of the Balearic Islands, it has been found that to a certain extent, the Marvel Universe tries to mimic human relations. This shows that there are many similarities between this ever expanding network and the real world, which makes their story line of superheroes and fictional characters more believable, or relatable, to audiences around the world.

Timelessness

Timelessness has no beginning or end. It is an eternal and everlasting force. It could be viewed as unattainable or impossible; however, in a sense, The Walt Disney Company has carefully crafted timelessness in multiple facets of their company. Their parks are meticulously created with rides, characters, and attractions which enhance the timeless factor of the park. The movies and their characters are seen in a different unique light, causing some of their movies to be seen as “Disney Classics.” There also were careful business and leadership practices in place to make the decisions to buy franchises such as Marvel, Pixar and Lucasfilm; one main idea behind the business purchases is the ‘timeless factor’ that was created prior to the purchase of the company, and Disney wanted in on that timelessness.

The ‘Classics’

Timeless film is a feat many movie creators strive to accomplish. NPR movie critic Bob Mondello was asked "What makes a timeless movie timeless?" He answered saying, "Man, I'd love to say quality and universal themes and leave it at that, but I think it can be equally a matter

of audience affection, of when in your life you see a film, and of the ever-changing zeitgeist." (as cited in Weeks, 2014, para 13). The article argues that a timeless movie could have one of four elements which play a part in the timelessness of it. These elements are strong directors, gripping stories, audience affection, or period pieces (Weeks, 2014), and this applies to all movies. With Walt Disney himself at the foundation of Disney movies, a clear, strong direction was taken throughout his work. He also was able to foster the other elements brought to light; gripping stories, audience affection and period pieces. Being able to achieve and balance all of these elements created a sense of timelessness in Disney Classic movies, whereas most movies are able to only successfully achieve one at a time.

Disney was building a world in which his characters lived, which leads into the element of gripping stories. This could be anything from following a storyline from start to finish, taking the audience through the ups and downs, just as many Disney movies do. Mia Mask, professor of film history at Vassar College, stated in an NPR article that in certain occasions "a director with a distinctive — or recognizable — style" creates a more timeless film (as cited in Weeks, 2014, para 22). The next piece is that a film cannot be too much its own age, which leads to the audience affection. This is an easy to accomplish task for many Disney films due to the animation element. There are no constraints on what is real or attainable in animation, so they can stretch beyond the time they are made.

The final addition to what makes a movie timeless is the period pieces that are created. For Disney, this could include the many masterpieces he created, deviating from around the world. His movies such as *Mulan*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *The Jungle Book* are just some of

the movies which have more clear international locations and different times in history. The Walt Disney Company has films that are already considered ‘classic’, or of the ‘classic’ nature, before they have been part of the Disney world for very long. *Frozen*, for example, has already been adopted into some princess story lines and is listed with many of the classics, even though it only came out in 2013, dwarfing many of the original classics of the 1940’s and 1950’s.

The overarching view of timeless Disney movies represents the magic that is being created on screen. The makers of *Tangled* say they were extremely aware of the responsibility they were taking on when they were creating the Rapunzel story for Disney. Byron Howard stated in a one-on-one interview for The Telegraph, “What happens with a Disney film, when they make a classic tale, that version of the story becomes the definitive version. For instance, when you think of the *Little Mermaid* now, you think of [Disney Animator] Glen Keane’s version of Ariel - Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast - same thing” (as cited by Lee, 2011, para 5). Howard also made note that the goal with *Tangled* was to make a contemporary film that was also “so timeless that, 200 years from now, it would still be the definitive version of Rapunzel” (as cited in Lee, 2011).

In addition to the creation of truly timeless movies Disney takes this timeless feeling a step further. With the knowledge that many of their movies carry a ‘classic’ feel, in which the movies become inherently timeless, Disney has created “The Disney Vault.” This vault is a figurative space where classic Disney movies live when they are not “on release”, therefore giving these movies a more exclusive relationship to their audiences. According to Robyn Miller, former Head of Product Development of Buena Vista Home Entertainment (Disney’s home

video division unit), the 'vault' is a marketing campaign all about younger generations, and not just as a tactic to make customers feel like they have to buy it now before it's gone forever, creating a sense of scarcity (as cited in Mullins, 2015) . These classic Disney movies are released from the vault about every seven years, in hopes that newer generations appreciate and enjoy the films. "It's Disney's way of making sure classics like *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Cinderella* don't go forgotten" (as cited in Mullins, 2015, para 5).

With this in mind, we have to really look at what Disney considers their own classics. Though there is no direct definition of what makes a Disney movie a classic, the general consensus is that a Disney Classic must be animated and is not any of their live action films with actors. With this in mind, some state that each year, when a Disney animated feature is released, it can be added to the list of classics. Some terminate their ever-growing collection in the early 1980's and stop adding films to the list of 'classics'.

Disney Parks Above the Mark

Disney Parks, especially Disneyland, led the market for what a theme park should be. When looking at the best theme parks in the world, Disneyland is almost always in the top 10 and notoriously remains in the top five more times than not. Timelessness plays a large part in this phenomenon. "The original park envisioned by Walt Disney, Disneyland perfectly balances nostalgia with cutting-edge technology" (Laks, 2016, pg 9). So what does this balance look like to guests? It keeps rides like *Autopia* and *Mad Tea Party*, which have been loved since the first day Disneyland opened in 1955. It also updates rides on a consistent basis, taking away rides that

might become outdated or taking out rides to make way for newer additions. They removed a guest favorite, *Twilight Zone: Tower of Terror* in January of 2017. This announcement and change enraged a lot of guests; however it is speculated that Disneyland hopes this will start a new wave of Marvel themed additions to the park. They also are changing the content of the ride, to be more innovative. This is a drastic change, however Disneyland has to remain in the constant balance of timeless rides and attractions in addition to new, more risky advances, otherwise they test the limits on what rides begin to feel 'dated'.

One famous attraction at Disneyland which was removed is the *Main Street Electrical Parade (MSEP)*. This parade included many favorite Disney characters, covered in electrical lights synced with music, which then go through the park after dark. Though popular, Disneyland removed the parade in 1996. They worked on replacing this parade with newer versions and attractions of the light show, since the *Main Street Electrical Parade* was still a fan favorite. Much like the Disney Vault, Disneyland played a similar game by bringing the MSEP to life again, for a limited time only. This draws audiences in that haven't seen this parade in over 20 years. This exclusivity is seen through Disneyland's marketing of the parade, in hopes to have people return with newer generations of children. Walt Disney created Disneyland in hopes to have an alternate, physical space to immerse visitors in the animated world he had crafted. The Disneyland website (2017) states: "Visit Walt Disney's original theme park and celebrate the worlds of yesterday, fantasy and tomorrow with timeless attractions, dazzling entertainment and magical moments that last a lifetime."

Timeless Acquisitions

LucasFilm, Marvel and Pixar are the strongest, most timeless acquisitions in which Disney has. LucasFilm had created *Star Wars* long before the acquisition of the company in 2012 for over \$4.5 billion. George Lucas, the CEO and chairman of LucasFilm, said "For the past 35 years, one of my greatest pleasures has been to see *Star Wars* passed from one generation to the next, it's now time for me to pass *Star Wars* on to a new generation of filmmakers" (As cited by Adding Multimedia, 2012, para 4). Robert Iger, was delighted in the acquisition for The Walt Disney Company. "This is one of the great entertainment properties of all time, one of the best branded and one of the most valuable and it's just fantastic for us to have the opportunity to both buy it, run it and grow it." (As cited by Krantz, 2012, para 5). Soon after the purchase of the company, Disney announced they were going to be adding onto the *Star Wars* story line, which was a successful launch into what Lucasfilm could become as being part of The Walt Disney Company. *Star Wars* was already a successful franchise, chock full of 'world-building' and character development which initiated much of the love for the company. This buy for the Walt Disney Company was beneficial because the timeless factor, which is hard to create from scratch without the time involved, was already there for its loyal fan base. They would already be making money off of merchandise, park additions and attractions as well as new movies.

The purchase of Marvel set The Walt Disney Company ahead as well. The buying of Marvel for \$4 billion was seen as an opportunity to plug Marvel into its vaunted global marketing and distribution system, in addition to their timeless addition into the Disney Universe (Cieply, 2009). The intellectual property of Marvel, gave The Walt Disney Company an edge.

There are over 5000 characters in the Marvel universe, and only more to come. Jim McLauchlin, newspaper, magazine and comic book writer and editor stated, “When Disney bought Marvel, they bought half the world. They already had the other half” (McLauchlin, 2015, para 13). In his piece on the purchase of Marvel, he illustrates the successes of buying this already timeless movie franchise that had room to grow and innovate. “I think Bob Iger is a genius,” Alex Peters, entrepreneur who started, built and sold companies for over 20 years, says. “When he took over Disney, the other premium assets in entertainment were Pixar, Lucasfilm, and Marvel. And look at what he’s bought in the last 10 years. Iger’s play for these three companies was brilliant. You can’t look at Marvel as just Marvel. You have to look at all three of these together, and how this solidifies Disney as the absolute brand in entertainment...I might be naïve here, but I think \$4 billion is cheap. “He went on to say that Bob Iger more than likely knew the potential that Marvel had, probably prior to Marvel knowing its own potential for Hollywood. He noted that knowing the industry is critical, and Bob Iger perhaps knows the entertainment industry better than anyone. Bob Iger is someone that knows when to pay premium prices on companies such as the ones Disney has acquired. “They might know that the book value is X, but they’ll pay one-and-a-half times X because they know what the asset’s value is to *them*, to Disney as an entertainment leader. And Bob Iger can probably eyeball that” (McLauchlin, 2015, para 24).

Last, but certainly not least, is the timelessness of Pixar. Pixar is timeless due to the relatability factor that animators have played into each of their seventeen movies. Pixar, though not nearly as large as Disney nor as powerful, has created some clearly classical timeless movies. The first Pixar movie was *Toy Story*, the first completely computer-animated film. Since the

creation of Toy Story in 1995, Pixar has continuously picked up innovation and success rates. Through the less than 20 films they have created, there have been arguments that the buy and their innovation has brought Disney some of its classic magic. Bob Iger, Disney CEO, took a huge risk investing \$7.4 billion into a company when it did not have much history at the time of purchase

Innovation

From the beginning of Mickey's success, there has been constant innovation. From the synchronization of music and sound to an animated film, to the simple Disney infiltrations into our modern day society such as the Mickey Mouse face on the Apple Watch, the Walt Disney Company has not stopped working towards new and creative breakthroughs. The movies have all had animation innovation as the years have gone on and now, Disney has made the move to live action and CGI animation. *Here and Beyond Magazine* (2015) speculated that Disney Parks are going to be seeing more innovation of technology as the years come, such as elements to rides and new sectors of the park having more technological advances. The three major acquisitions, Star Wars, Marvel and Pixar, brought Disney to the forefront of the entertainment world. "This strategy has been, in itself, Disney's great breakthrough innovation" (Govindarajan, 2016). The innovative business tactics are changing the game for Disney, and putting this empire at the top of the totem pole of the entertainment industry.

Movies Moving Forward

To illustrate the endless innovation that The Walt Disney Company has seen, one must look at the beginnings of Disney animation. This demonstrates the continuous and vital part that innovation has played in the growth of the entertainment empire. *Steamboat Willie* was cutting edge technology in 1928, with animation and music synchronization. Less than a decade later, Walt Disney made the first-ever full feature-length animated film. Due to the fact that this was the first of its kind, many thought it was foolish and Hollywood referred to the feature as “Disney’s Folly.” Once released, critics claimed it an instant classic and audiences everywhere were out to see it, at the time it was the highest-grossing sound film of all time. If theater grosses were adjusted for inflation, *Snow White* would still be in the all-time top ten. Drew Taylor, of Disney Insider, stated “Again, technology was just one hurdle to jump; Walt and his team had to figure out a way to engage an audience for a prolonged amount of time through strong emotional undercurrents, believable characters, and an engaging narrative” (Taylor, 2016, para 5).

The next movie that really changed the game for animators and the process of creating one of our ‘classic’ Disney movies was *Sleeping Beauty*. This movie revolutionized how the animated films were seen on the big screen. It was the first animated film which had been photographed with the super-wide Technirama 70mm widescreen process, with six channel stereoscopic sound. This process took so long however, to animate and shoot, that once the film was ready to hit theaters, many of the theaters had been retrofitted and the movie became truncated. Only later did they re-released in 70mm film, giving the grander presence Walt Disney wanted on screen. Moving on just a few years after the release of *Sleeping Beauty*, *101 Dalmatians* changed the game quite a lot for animators. Instead of drawing hundreds of

thousands of drawings for an animation, the new technology of Xerography was presented. Xerography is a “dry copy process in which black or colored powder adheres to parts of a surface remaining electrically charged after being exposed to light for an image of the document being copied”(Oxford Dictionary, 2017). This process allowed animators to have a clean production style that would replicate their work. Animators, for the first time in history, could see their individual strokes on film- which led to a charmingly successful style of animation. The Walt Disney Animation Studios used this technique as a standard for many years. Perhaps one of the more successful renditions of mixture of live action and animation was *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* due to its use of realism and character interaction. The postproduction process, after filming, was extensive and time consuming- taking almost a year to complete. The animators and creators of the movie were pleased with the results however, due to the work being awarded Academy Awards for Best Visual Effects, Best Film Editing, Best Sound Editing and nominations for Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction and Best Sound; it also received a Special Achievement Academy Award for animation direction and creation of the cartoon characters (Fuller, 2017).

The Walt Disney Animation Studios started using a new process by the end of the 1980's, The Computer Animation Production System, (CAPS). The system was developed by Pixar and was originally used for digital inking and painting processes. They tested this system with the rainbow at the end of *The Little Mermaid*, but the first movie to use full CAPS colored and composited scenery was *The Rescuers Down Under*. With their animators' work now being digitally manipulated in computers, it was much easier for seamless animation. *Beauty and the*

Beast was the first movie to move this animation style to both scenery and characters. The multiplane camera was used only eight years later, moving through multiple panes of classic glass. This technique was used in *Tarzan*, *Bambi*, *Pinocchio* and *The Little Mermaid*. With the newest movies that are being added into the Disney movie library having such complex special effects, as well as their additional affiliate film companies, it is easy to see the advances they are making. Disney takes this drive for innovation to many other aspects of the empire, constructing magic.

Parks: What's New in Disney

The Walt Disney Company has many timeless rides in their parks, however the innovative and new rides that are added into the park give variety and depth to the theme parks. Since Disneyland opened in 1955, the one park alone has welcomed over 700 million guests, and it launched a worldwide phenomenon. Almost two billion guests have been to Disney parks around the world (Steinberger, 2015). Prior to 2015, which was the 60th anniversary of the park's opening, Bob Iger stated, "Few companies have both a legendary past as well as a limitless future...But we had the great fortune to be founded with a spirit of creativity and innovation — one that continues to define this phenomenal company, allowing us to keep moving forward to meet the future without ever losing sight of who we are and where it all started. We're thrilled to usher in Disneyland's Diamond Anniversary and celebrate the triumph of imagination in a place where dreams really do come true" (Glover, 2015, para 3). Disney Parks are in a constant state of innovation, and have been slowly evolving since the park's

opening. One of the largest issues when the parks were first opening were the long lines (Schmidt, 2010). This led to the innovative creation of ‘switch-back’ lines, where lines double back on themselves to condense the crowds into smaller spaces. With this change, Walt Disney also added in the features of interactive lines, where you are able to partake in the experience of the ride, even if you are just waiting for it, such as puller levers, seeing scenes from the movie or animation come to life in with figurines or animatronics, or watching television screens which ‘introduce’ you to the ride (Yaylaian, 2013). This was extremely helpful for rides that had 90+ minute waits at one time, and has been used ever since. In addition to these minor changes, Disneyland and other Disney parks have been able to add in new technological advances to their rides and parks. One of the most well-known rides that used technological innovation to its advantage was “Soarin’ Over California”, now known as “Soarin’ Around the World”. When it was first built, back in 2001, “Soarin’ Over California” used the most state-of-the-art equipment to film, and had ‘high-definition film project, dimensional sounds, scents and more.’ The Walt Disney Imagineering team decided this ride needed an upgrade. In 2016, Disneyland and Walt Disney World released “Soarin’ Around The World”, however the advances they wanted to make for this ride were not available, so, they invented them. “Just as Walt did with Circle-Vision and some of the other unique formats in the parks, we often custom-design projection and screen technology to create the immersive story environment that we want,” says Tom Fitzgerald, Portfolio Creative Executive, Walt Disney Imagineering (Frye, 2016, para 2). “The beauty of being Imagineering is that we have an R&D team here, and our Disney Imagineers and researchers developed a state-of-the-art digital camera, one of the highest

resolution cameras in the world” (Frye, 2016, para 3). The team of creators went great lengths to film and produce this ride, with over a year's worth of filming and editing. The 80-ft projection screen is the window to one of the most realistic and spectacular rides, with laser-powered digital projection and high frame rate and high quality resolution. “It will stay pristine for every guest who rides it as time marches on,” Fitzgerald notes. “It does what we like to do at Imagineering, which is raise the bar and the quality of an immersive experience for guests. So when you see the new projection system, you absolutely believe you’re in those scenes now. It’s astonishing” (as cited by Frye, 2016, para 3).

This ride is not the only innovative step that Disney Parks have made. The new rides that have been brought into the park have only advanced further and further each release year. With the plans for *Star Wars Land*, in conjunction with to the new Marvel additions, Disneyland Parks are set to see some new rides and new innovation for years to come. The *Guardians of the Galaxy: Mission Breakout* is one of the new additions for 2017. This ride is updating the ride which it replaced, *Tower of Terror*. The creators and Imagineers for this new ride have noted that there are new audio and visual additions to this ride, which create a new experience for their riders. In addition to the new technology brought into the ride, the ride will be different each time . There are going to be six randomized storylines, and each adventure is going to be self-contained, giving the rider a different experience each time. This is a new idea for Disney parks, however they foresee that this will amplify the new technology and attraction to their first Marvel addition to Disney parks (Tong, 2017).

Acquisitions: Marvel of Marvel

In the vein of the new rides and additions to Disney Parks, Marvel has done a brilliant job in innovation and creation for their franchise for quite some time. Disney has executed ‘brand-snatching’ so well, that many people are thinking that Disney just likes to buy ‘popular’ characters and the franchise that goes with it. However, Disney has been able to build on vast possibilities of multiple lines, spinoffs and character team-ups, and buying a dense universe built over decades allows and encourages constant innovation. This “Marvelization” of movie franchises has rewritten the rule book, giving new opportunities to the Walt Disney Company to build on characters that are both top-tier and second-tier, however always adding to the Marvel Universe. The Walt Disney Company

“knows something it took even the cinematic keepers of DC Comics characters longer to fully realize: Fans may come to see the super suits and helmets, but they return for the infinite possibilities of thoughtfully woven mythologies. (In the case of “Rogue One,” they will even follow filmmakers off the beaten franchise, as the first Star Wars stand-alone movie — led by new characters — enjoys the second-biggest debut of the year.) Treat the properties respectfully, and thoughtfully — with genuine creative care amid the profiteering — and the masses will stay *loyal*” (Cavna, 2016, para 4).

This loyalty gives Marvel and Disney the ability to innovate and try new things, due to their constant successes and almost guaranteed return audience. Since the 2012, The Walt Disney Company has had Oscar nominations in ‘Best Visual Effects’ every year, either for a Marvel movie or *Star Wars*. This consistent basis of nominations shows dedication to innovation and a constant push to be the best in the industry, even within Disney acquisitions.

Opposing Forces

Wouldn't timelessness and innovation be opposing forces? Timelessness asks for nostalgic experiences, and something that will never go out of date. Innovation asks for the exact opposite; something that is new and has never been seen before, which gives guests a craving for ‘newness’ or ‘mystery.’ So how could these two factors be the basis to the equation for magic? Within the equation, “timelessness + innovation = magic”, it must be recognized the grounds on which the equation is set. World-building plays a large part in this equation, making one believe in a fictional reality, whether it be on screen or displayed in the park right before your eyes. World building holds this magic in place. With this basis, the real magic is developed in the balance between constant innovation and a ‘forever’ timeless experience. This is what sets The Walt Disney Company above the rest. Other parks and entertainment companies have tried to maintain the highest level of innovation, and are always moving to the future. This is where they miss out on the opportunity of magic. They lose the world-building factor, or the timelessness; they have lost the magic. Yes, a park or a movie can still be successful without this balanced equation, however they will miss what Disney magic really is. This magic keeps a company alive

and thriving, because it never loses sight of the beginnings of the company and the newness that innovation brings to the future. Disney's success derives from a crafted culture. Doug Lipp, author of *Disney U*, states that in 1955, Disney University founder Van France, made a promise to Disney himself which has influenced millions of Disneyland employees and ultimately the experience of hundreds of millions of guests (As cited by Economy, 2015). Van France helped build a culture at Disneyland based on four values: innovation, leadership, education, and entertainment. Innovation plays a large part in how Disney has continued successes; however the element of our equation that many miss is timelessness.

...And They Lived Happily Ever After

Magic Never Dies

In conclusion, the crafted magic of The Walt Disney Company is not what sets them apart. The true testimate to Disney magic is their carefully balances equation of timelessness + innovation = magic, with groundings in world building. This powerful entertainment empire is able to string these three factors into all aspects of their company, creating one of the most powerful entertainment companies in the world. The Walt Disney Company successfully provides a promise of a magical experience, which is a key component to its parks. Disney has stayed true to its mission and values (Hill, 2010). Mickey Mouse is a constant reminder of the roots of the multifaceted company and constantly growing and innovating to the future.

Recognizing that the components that make The Walt Disney Company successful work together, and are intertwined throughout the entire company is what creates success in the company. "His (Walt Disney) work demonstrates that business and technology can be aimed at

fulfilling shared desires, dreams and values. In the end, Disney took it upon himself to assume a leadership role, as ‘uncle’ to the world, and the world was- and still is- a better place for it” (Linetsky, 2009, para 27). Timelessness and innovation are the two key elements to creating the magic which all entertainment companies strive for. This equation for magic has set The Walt Disney Company apart from the rest of the entertainment industry, and provides a framework for why The Walt Disney Company is so successful.

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