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The Impact Of Well-Established Source Material On The Financial Success Of Comic Book Movies

Joseph Gregov

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Joseph Gregov
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Abstract

Six of the 16 comic book based movies produced in the U.S. between August, 2000, and June, 2004, were based on characters that have been published since the 1960s and grossed over $100 million. These comics have been read by multiple generations. This research analyzed what extent, if any, those comic books and television shows featuring superheroes had on individual decisions by audiences to see films featuring the characters Spider-Man, X-Men, the Hulk and Daredevil.

A sample of college students ages 18-34, the comic book industry’s target audience, was taken to find out which factors most affected their decision to see a comic book based film. Data was gathered via a short questionnaire, which inquired about individual television viewing habits and comic book reading habits, as well as the effects of various movie marketing techniques.

The research showed that while a large percentage of respondents have in the past read comic books and watched television shows which featured the characters from the films, this familiarity with the characters did not influence the majority of respondents to see the film. Rather, it was traditional movie marketing tactics such as movie previews, television commercials and word-of-mouth reviews that motivated most respondents to see not just these comic book films but any movie in general. It appears that the attractiveness of producing a comic book movie, especially one based on an older title, is that its many years of publication have provided filmmakers successful, market-tested characters with a myriad of plot/story ideas to choose from.
Chapter I
Introduction

Since the release of the financially successful 20th Century Fox movie *X-Men* in 2000, to the 2004 release of Sony Pictures’ *Spider-Man 2*, there have been 16 movie adaptations of comic books released by various Hollywood studios (Holson, 2004). Out of those 16, eight went on to gross over $100 million with six of those films featuring characters created by Marvel Comics in the 1960s. With the exception of *The Punisher*, which was rated R, movies featuring mainstream Marvel characters have all been domestic blockbusters: *Spider-Man* grossed $403.7 million, *Spider-Man 2* grossed $372.9 million, *X-Men United* grossed $214.9 million, *X-Men* grossed $157.3 million, *Hulk* grossed $132.1 million and *Daredevil* grossed $102.5 million (All-Time Box Office, 2004). Did the fact that these films have strong source material impact the financial success of the film adaptations?

The seven other comic book movies that failed to reach the $100 million mark were all based on books published by alternative or independent publishers, meaning DC Comics or Marvel Comics did not publish them under their “main” imprints, or they were published by a third company. In addition, they may have featured characters that have only been around a relatively short time. There are two outliers worth mentioning though. The first is *Men in Black II*, the sequel to a 1997 hit starring Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith. The other outlier is *Road to Perdition*, which starred Tom Hanks, Jude Law and Paul Newman. Both of these films, despite not having source material that was published by a major comic company or containing characters that have been around over
40 years, grossed over $100 million; however, they may have ridden the wave of their star power.

The tidal wave of comic movies does not seem to be slowing down. In the year 2005, studios are scheduled to release big budget films based on the long-standing characters from the comics Batman and the Fantastic Four. Getting to the root of how much draw these characters have before any marketing is even begun will greatly affect the campaign strategies of studios. With an emergence of a new film genre, studios will need to see if the tried methods of marketing can still be applied with great effectiveness or if adjustments need to be made in the way these films (and characters) are presented. In addition, the more popular comic book movies become, the greater impact this is going to have on the future business dealings of comic book companies, as they shift priority from being publishers to being licensees.

Research Question

How much of an impact does well-established source material have on the financial success of movies based on comic book characters? For example, does the fact that the character Spider-Man was created in 1963, and has 40 years of readership and viewership behind him, contribute to the overwhelming financial success of the picture?

Subsidiary Questions

1. If source material does have an impact on the success of the film, how great of an impact does it have? Would audiences have flocked to the theater to see Spider-Man based in large part on the comic book and cartoon shows or did traditional marketing
campaigns have a bigger effect? Both sides of this argument will be explored with close attention being paid to the motivations of audiences for seeing certain movies.

2. What does have the biggest impact on people’s decisions to specifically see a comic book movie? There are many factors that can play into people’s decisions, and the answer will probably result in a combination of results. This research hopes to isolate the most influential factors.

Hypothesis

It is the author’s hypothesis that well-established source material does not have a substantial impact on the financial success of films based on comic books. An examination of top-selling books from 2003 shows some interesting data. Marvel saw the greatest market share of the comic book industry that year at 33.24 percent with DC grabbing 29.89 percent (2003 Year in Review, 2004). In addition to having the greatest market share in 2003, Marvel also saw three of its comics, including Hulk, Daredevil and X-Men, turned into feature films. Out of the top 100 selling comic books of 2003, Marvel-brand comics made up 80 percent of the list. However, out of those 80 books, 74 were books that contained the characters of Spider-Man and the X-Men (Top Comics of 2003, 2004).

Out of the 35 Spider-Man books that made the list, only 11 were from the title Amazing Spider-Man, which has been publishing continuously for 40 years. Twenty-three of the books were Ultimate Spider-Man or a mini-series starring the main character from Ultimate Spider-Man. This book, published since 2000, is a re-imagining of the Spider-Man character, which has been updated for the new millennium. Spider-Man is
clearly living off a new, younger book, which had a great influence on the origin tale they used for his first movie. Spider-Man's presence on this list could also have something to do with the fact that the character just came off a successful film (*Spider-Man*) and was only a year away from another movie (*Spider-Man 2*).

For two of the films actually released in 2003, *Hulk* and *Daredevil*, there was no such comic book success. The character Daredevil saw no books in the top 100, and the only time the Hulk appeared was in a book called *The Ultimates*, which began publishing in 2002. This book saw five issues in the top 100, and like *Ultimate Spider-Man*, it re-imagines old heroes, updating them for the new millennium. Even though an up-coming movie does not guarantee an increase in sales for a character, relative to other books on the market, Marvel still launched two new series for Spider-Man in the months leading up to his sequel film: *Marvel Knights Spider-Man* and *Marvel Age Spider-Man*, which saw modern writers and artists retell classic Spider-Man stories. In April 2004, *Marvel Knights Spider-Man* #1 debuted at number three in the top 100 selling books. That same month *Marvel Age Spider-Man* #2 was the 69th best-selling book (Previews Top 100-Comics- April 2004, 2004). By September 2004, three months after *Spider-Man 2* debuted in theaters, the title *Marvel Knights Spider-Man* dropped to number 18 on the top 100, and *Marvel Age Spider-Man* dropped off the list (Previews Top 100-Comics-September 2004, 2004).

Even with a strong share of the market, Marvel films have not proven to spike sales for a character significantly, or increased readership in the comics industry as a whole. It may, however, draw more attention to Marvel comic books in general, as loyal readers of the competition's material may switch to the Marvel brand. In September 2004, Marvel
grabbed an even bigger share of the market by drawing 45.67 percent of sales with DC’s share only growing to 31.88 percent (2003 Year in Review, 2004) In any case, publishers are turning to promotions like Free Comic Book Day, whereIssues of comics featuring the likes of Spider-Man, Superman and Lara Croft are given away free to comic shop patrons (Ness, 2002).

The amount of money that these films are grossing is clearly above and beyond what readers of comics are capable of generating. Although this author does not doubt the fact that many people, especially older people, have in their lifetime read a comic with Spider-Man, Hulk, Daredevil or the X-Men, it is unlikely that this was a strong enough factor to influence people’s decisions to see the films. Movie studios use so many different marketing techniques (preview trailers, TV ads, video games, merchandise, billboards, etc.) that playing off the timelessness of the characters does not seem to be a sure enough way to raise box office revenue.

Having a well-established comic character is only beneficial because you have 40 years worth of stories to tell. The source material provides a catalogue of ideas. Robert Levine (2004) wrote in a New York Times article, “The central plot of the second X-Men movie was taken right from a graphic novel that came out in the 80’s, Daredevil didn’t so much adapt a comic as borrow a specific 80’s storyline by writer-artist Frank Miller, who created the Elektra character.” The article goes on to quote Avi Arad, producer of Spider-Man 2 and a top executive at Marvel Comics, as saying that in order to appeal to a wider audience, often changes have to be made to the character, sacrificing a literal translation from book to screen in favor of being “thematically the same.” Earlier in that same article, Arad said that while they enjoy trying to make the movie as close to the
book as possible, to please comic book fans, the reality is that this audience is just not large enough to produce blockbuster numbers.

Sub-Hypothesis

Source material springing from television shows will have a stronger influence on a person’s decision to see a comic book movie than the actual magazine itself. In addition, this source material will be more influential among males. Respondents should be able to remember the Spider-Man and Hulk cartoons of the 1970s, the live-action Incredible Hulk television show or the popular Spider-Man and X-Men cartoons of the 1990s. The author hypothesizes that television was and continues to be a more popular medium than comics; therefore, it will exert a greater influence over audiences. However, source material, even in the electronic form, will not be a main influence.

Rather, some main influences in people’s decisions to see a comic book film will come from movie trailers, word-of-mouth recommendations and TV commercials.

According to a 2002 Internet poll conducted by E-Poll, a Los Angeles-based research company focusing on media and entertainment, frequent movie-goers said they relied on trailers to decide which movies to see out of 10 tested factors. Other top factors included word-of-mouth recommendations, which placed second, and television commercials, which placed third (W. Friedman, 2002). Among infrequent movie-goers, these three factors still remained in the top three, except word-of-mouth placed first, television commercials placed second and trailers placed third. However, in terms of overall exposure to a film, 86 percent said they felt that television was the most influential in getting the word out, but mainly serves a reinforcement tool. Other values of lesser
importance that were measured in the poll included television new stories about the film, critics' reviews, newspaper ads, the Internet and outdoor ads.

Limitations

In order to properly investigate the impact of source material on the financial success of comic book films, it will be necessary to investigate only movies whose starring characters have had many years of publishing and television exposure. Therefore, only the following blockbuster films will be examined: X-Men, X2: X-Men United, Spider-Man, Spider-Man 2, Daredevil and Hulk. All of these films have characters that have been consistently published in comic books since the 1960s.

Also, these films were all released in the year 2000 or later, and are based on characters published only by Marvel. This research will not concentrate on movies before this year or films based on comics from other companies. This study will end with Spider-Man 2, which as of 2004, was the last movie based on a long-standing, mainstream comic character to generate over $100 million at the box office. Comic book movies before the year 2000 were not as numerous, and usually limited to one character in a series of films. For example, the Superman series starring Christopher Reeve released all four of that character's films before the 1989 movie Batman was released, launching that film franchise. Since Warner Bros. did not make any films based on mainstream DC characters, which generated over $100 million, between August 2000 and June 2004, this research will not look at movies starring that publisher's characters. In addition, characters from independent publishers will not be examined because they do not have sufficient source material to properly gauge the impact.
All of the films to be included in this study were rated PG-13; therefore, they still appeal to a sufficient population of movie-goers to accurately gauge audience behaviors. The movie *The Punisher*, which was a rated R film based on a popular Marvel character created in the 1970s, will not be included in this study because films rated R do not traditionally do as well at the box office due to the limited audience potential.

Source materials will strictly be limited to comic books and television shows based on the characters from the films. Television shows based on comic characters will be included in the study and considered source material because they can have great impact on the film’s story. For example, the plot for the movie *X-Men* was based heavily on the pilot episode of the X-Men cartoon series.

Finally, this study will only cover the U.S. market and survey respondents in that market. Since these characters and the comics they appear in are most popular in the United States, it will be assumed that the source material would have the most impact there.

Definitions

*Blockbuster:* A film that grosses over $100 million in the United States market.

*Comic movie/comic book movie:* Movies whose characters are based on comic books or graphic novels.

*Graphic Novel:* A term often used interchangeably with “trade paperback.” It refers to comic books or several issues of comic books that are bound together in much the same style of a book. Each installment usually contains one story or story arch.
Impact: The influence a factor has on a person’s behavior to see or not see a film. The greater the influence a factor has on a person’s behavior to see a film, the greater the impact.

Marketing: The overall components that movie studios use to promote a film.

Source Material: The actual comic books from the 1960s and beyond, and television shows from the 1960s and beyond that feature the characters from the study films.

Study Films: An alternate term used for the films Spider-Man, Spider-Man 2, X-Men, X2: X-Men United, Hulk and Daredevil when referred to as a collective group.

Success: The amount of money a film grosses in the United States market. The greater the gross, the more successful the film.

Trade paperback: A term often used interchangeably with “graphic novel.” It refers to comic books or several issues of comic books that are bound together in much the same style of a book. Each installment usually contains one story or story arc.

Trailer: A collection of organized clips from an upcoming movie shown to audiences in the hopes of generating an interest or buzz among viewers. They are usually shown before a feature film, or found on the Internet. Typical run times include either 90 seconds or two minutes.
Chapter II

The State of Marvel Comics

With 50 percent of comic book movies earning nine digits at the domestic box office, the genre of comic book movies is proving quite lucrative for both film producers and publishers. In fact, these movies are changing the way that comic publishers do business. Examine one of the largest comic book publishers, Marvel. In January of 2000, with only the *X-Men* movie having been made, shares in Marvel’s stock hovered around $4. Just before the start of 2002, shares were below $2, after dipping below $1 at the beginning of 2001. In May 2002, around the release date of *Spider-Man*, shares went to $6. Since then, the shares continued to climb and by mid-2003 they were at $16. Recent stock has not dropped below $10, and it reached its peak at over $22 in March 2004, which would have been two months prior to the release of *Spider-Man 2* (Chart-MVL-Marvel Enterprises, 2004).

Clearly this is a sign of growth in an industry that has seen little of it in the last 10 years. However, it is unlikely that publishers such as Marvel are attracting or replacing the readers they lost in the early 1990s. In fact, at the end of last century, total comic book sales for the entire industry was only $275 million, which is down from the $850 million it saw in 1993 (Groh, 2000). This decline is due to several factors. First, the price of a regular 22-page comic book can range anywhere from $2.25 to $6, turning off children and young adults in favor of the new target audience ranging from 18-34 years of age (Groh, 2000). Brian Groh (2000) notes in his article from *New Republic* that the traditional places where comics have been found, such as grocery stores, toy stores and
drug stores, rarely stack the books anymore. Also, the number of comic shops nationally fell from 10,000 in the mid-1990s to under 4,000 less than a decade later.

While Groh (2000) shows support for the benefit of comic book readership in children, James Poniewozik (2002) focuses on a couple of other reasons why comic book readership among youth is down. First, comics have not supplied children with anything new since Marvel deconstructed the superhero in the 1960s (Poniewozik, 2000). While there have been many critically acclaimed superhero stories over the last 40 years, Poniewozik’s article (2002) points out that comic creators today are just regurgitating the same ideas over and over. In addition, the technology of comics has not changed much in 40 years. Aside from sharper colors or computer graphics, comic books remain a paper and ink medium (Poniewozik, 2000). Meanwhile, video games have been constantly evolving and are stealing away the young population that comics used to cater to. Scott McCloud (2000) sums it up in his book *Reinventing Comics*: “(Video) gamers really know how to do power fantasies right, and they’re riding a wave of technological progress.”

With sales of individual comic books not posting the numbers it used to, and video games taking away the youth audience, Marvel had to rethink its strategy. In 1996, Marvel filed for bankruptcy. The company stayed in Chapter 11 until 1998 when they were pulled out with the help of “turnaround pro” Peter Cueno, who shifted Marvel from a publisher to a licensor (Marcial, 2003).
Marvel has a library of 4,700 characters, and according to David Kerr, money manager for Axe-Houghton Associates, which owned 820,000 shares of Marvel stock, licensing these properties is what drives Marvel’s profits (Marcial, 2003). In addition, when movie studios push Marvel films, this increases the awareness of characters and helps promote the sales of DVDs, toys and publishing materials (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004). When Marvel enters a licensing agreement, it typically requires multi-year agreements, specifying minimum royalty payments and a significant down payment (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004). The company also expanded its licensing business overseas with offices in London and Tokyo (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004).

For Marvel’s third quarter 2004, April 1 through September 30, the company reported increases in all areas of its licensing segment, with the exception of toys, as compared to the same quarter one year ago (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004). Apparel and accessories brought in $24.2 million in 2004 compared to $9.9 million in 2003 (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004). Entertainment (including studio-themed attractions and electronic games) was reported at $19.7 million in 2004, which was up sharply from $5 million in 2003 (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004). Master toy licenses were $4.9 million in 2004, as compared to $19.6 million in 2003, but the decrease in this area can be attributed to the fact that in 2003 Marvel saw the release of three movies based on its characters, whereas only one film was released in 2004 at the time these figures were reported (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004).

In terms of Marvel’s net sales for the same quarter, there was a 60 percent increase for the company, as it drew $135.2 million in 2004 compared to $84.5 million in 2003 (10-Q:...
Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004). This was fueled by a 66 percent increase in licensing, a 15 percent increase in publishing and an 86 percent increase in toys (10-Q: Marvel Enterprises Inc., 2004). It is important to note that Marvel owns the toy company ToyBiz so this would account for the increase in toy sales, whereas the decreases in toys reported earlier were for the licensing of characters, not the actual sales of toys. Taking into account the two previous quarters, Marvel's total net sales are $413 million, which is up 58 percent from $261.9 million a year ago (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004). This is due to a strong performance from its toy sales, which saw a 204 percent increase (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004). This increase most likely related to the new Spider-Man movie that debuted in 2004. Licensing was up only 14 percent, which can be attributed to the fact that the merchandising for Spider-Man 2 was recorded at equity in joint venture with Sony, rather than licensing sales. The company's publishing was up 18 percent with comics, advertising income and trade paperbacks driving sales in that area (10-Q: Marvel Enterprise Inc., 2004).

With increases in the sale of licenses, especially those that result in blockbuster movies, Marvel finds itself shifting company practices. In the area of publishing, there has been a dramatic increase in the output and sales of trade paperbacks (or graphic novels). In an article from Marc Flores (2003), Marvel spokesman Michael Doran said that the success of the Spider-Man movie helped energize sales of Spider-Man comics and trade paperbacks. In fact, sales of graphic novels in bookstores grew 228 percent from 2001 to 2002 (Flores, 2003). Part of the reason for the increase in sales may certainly be due to feature films, but it also may be that graphic novels provide a complete story all in one sitting. In many modern comics, story arches tend to stretch out
from six months to a year. These stories will then be collected into a single volume trade 
paperback within a month or two for often an equal or lower price than the original 
comic. Brian Cunningham of the trade magazine *Wizard* said, "A growing number of 
fans wait to buy a collection rather than the individual comics." (Flores, 2003)

Even with sales of trade paperbacks helping to revive its publishing segment, it is 
clear from sales figures that the company's current interest lie in the licensing segment.

Sam Mamudi (2004) reports that post bankruptcy, Marvel repositioned itself from being a 
comic book publisher to a character-based entertainment company, with its blockbuster 
films leading the way. In three years, Marvel's licensing revenue jumped from $19 
million in 2000 to $190 million in 2003 (Mamudi, 2004). This success is quite new for 
the comic industry. Mamudi (2004) states that in the 1940s, comics were read by 50 to 
70 million people each month. Coupled with the occasional radio or television show, 
comics were cemented in the minds of the general public. However, companies did not 
recognize the potential of their characters. From the 1960s through the 1980s, when 
Spider-Man had a firm grasp on the industry, the company managed meager television 
products for the character. A cartoon ran on ABC from 1967 to 1970. From 1977 until 
1979, the character had on CBS a live-action show, which is generally considered a low 
point for the character. From 1981 until 1987, NBC also produced a cartoon based on 
Spider-Man. In terms of other licensing deals, Marvel was coming up short. By the late 
1990s, several movie studios claimed licensing rights to the Spider-Man character, and 
Marvel signed a deal with Universal Studios for a Marvel-themed section of a park, in 
which it would only see $500,000 a year for 10 years.
Mumudi (2004) reports that post-bankruptcy Marvel took a more organized approach to licensing its properties, building strong quality control agreements, which are comparable to Disney and Jim Henson’s properties. The characters from the *X-Men* had been Marvel’s highest selling book since the 1980s, yet it wasn’t until the 1990s that the characters were first made into a cartoon with a highly successful series on the Fox television station. So watched was the show that Marvel credits it for building a bigger fan base for the movie *X-Men* than the comic book.

Some in the comic community said that Marvel’s licensing of its characters is having an impact of the very content it publishes. According to Mumudi (2004), a movie based on the Marvel character Nick Fury was in development with George Clooney in the title role. However, after a violent miniseries that saw Fury engage in much gore and blood splatter, Clooney withdrew from the project, possibly costing Marvel another blockbuster and leading Arad to exert greater control on Marvel’s publishing segment. This leaves many insiders complaining that Marvel’s licensing segment is dictating editorial policy, allowing some low-selling titles to stay in publication in the hopes of landing a feature film deal for the main character. Meanwhile, other books are canceled due to fears of jeopardizing a film deal. This has lead some comic creators like Josh Dysart to comment that comics are now only moving in the direction of what makes the best movie, not the best story.

Marvel disagrees. Arad states in Mumudi’s article (2004) that it is the biggest publisher of comics in the world and will never lose sight of the responsibility that comes with that. In addition, Arad stated that the company prides itself on lending so naturally to movies, saying that it has over 40 years of free research and development working for
it. Also, Marvel still enjoys at least another 40 years of copyright protection for even its earliest and lesser-known characters.

**Licensing Lessons from Other Companies**

Other industries have had tremendous success licensing their characters and have been doing it much earlier than Marvel. Tom Soter (1992) reports that *Star Trek* was a flop when the original show initially ran in the 1960s; however, Paramount Pictures has reaped huge benefits from the rerun of the show and merchandising tie-ins. In 1991, sales from *Star Trek* merchandise were estimated at $2 billion. In addition, Pocket Books have published more than 100 *Star Trek* novels, producing 64 *New York Times* best sellers.

According to Soter (1992), long before *Star Trek*, the Walt Disney Company was perfecting the art of licensing in the 1930s when the rights to Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and other staple Disney characters were licensed for creating storybooks, clothing and apparel. In 1955, Disney started its own television show where it promoted the company’s new films and California theme park, Disneyland. It was Disney that first saw that there was more to a movie than just ticket sales.

This spirit would help save the company 35 years later. Soter (1992) reported that by 1986, Disney was facing severe financial problems and a downturn in its movie releasing. The company had to revitalize its efforts and create franchise pictures. This idea went beyond just making a single film and hoping audiences were attracted to it. The concept was to create characters that could be marketed for other products, and a film that would
be a classic for 50 years. Adopting this strategy paid off well as by 1992 the company was among the top five studios in Hollywood.

While comic books to movies might be an idea that has exploded in the last few years, video games are also turning toward Tinseltown. In an article by Scott Bowles (2004), the year 2004 saw Resident Evil: Apocalypse debut in theaters. This film was the follow-up to the surprise-hit 2002 film Resident Evil, which grossed $39.6 million domestically. Both of these movies are based on the characters and stories found in the Resident Evil video game franchise. In 2001, the Tomb Raider video game series was put on the big screen as the film Lara Croft: Tomb Raider grossed $131.2 million domestically and had enough success to garner the sequel Tomb Raider: Cradle of Life, which took in $65.7 million. The year 2005 is scheduled to see the release of movies based on the game BloodRayne, which will star Kristanna Loken from Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines. The video game spy hunter Spy Hunter has also been optioned, and Paramount Pictures has acquired film rights to the games Psi-Ops and Area 51.

Although the domestic draw pale in comparison to most of Marvel's comic book releases, Bowles (2004) said studios are confident that video game films have just as much potential to be profitable as ones based on comic books, especially since surveys indicate that 60 percent of America played some sort of a video game in the year 2004. In addition to being large in number, video game fans are loyal. The game Resident Evil has sold more than 24 million units worldwide. Much like comic books, video games naturally lend themselves to movies because they have stories, characters and even soundtracks. In fact, the games themselves are heavily influenced by movies.
Movie Marketing

The origins of modern movie marketing can be traced to 1948 and the Supreme Court decision in the case of United States v. Paramount Pictures. According to the book *Anti-Trust in the Motion Picture Industry* (Conant, 1960), Paramount Pictures, the defendant in the case, was accused of monopolistic practices, which violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Along with Paramount Pictures, the other major defendants in the case were Warner Bros., Loew’s Inc., Twentieth Century-Fox and RKO. In addition, Columbia, United Artist and Universal were named as minor defendants.

According to Conant (1960), prior to the Supreme Court decision the major defendants were all engaged in the three aspects of the movie industry: production, distribution and exhibition. It is primarily the last two that will affect movie marketing since the courts actually found them not guilty of controlling movie production. However, these studios controlled almost 50 percent of the theater houses in America. Also, most of these theaters were located in downtown major cities and were first or second run theaters, meaning that they were the first to show the newest features. Generally, the major defendants made agreements among each other, which allowed them to display each other’s films and control prices among the independently owned theaters. Adding to these studios’ comfortable status was that the weekly habit of movie going was already ingrained in American culture as television had not yet become mainstream enough to be a viable alternative (Gonzinger, 2005).

Two specific practices that were abolished by the Supreme Court mark a particularly important turning point in movie marketing. The first was the practice of block booking. Conant (1960) said this was the practice of forcing a theater house to buy a group of films
produced by a certain studio. This was especially impressed upon independent theaters, which in order to get the popular movie they wanted had to also accept a block of often mediocre films. The studios would often sell these blocks before the pictures were even complete, making it impossible for theater managers to view the features in a practice known as blind selling. In some cases, a studio could sell a theater a whole year's worth of films using block booking.

When this practice was struck down in 1948, the implications were quite significant. First, studios could no longer afford to produce a mass amount of mediocre films with unknown actors (Conant, 1960). These films, which would not have turned profit if not for the block booking practice, would now almost certainly not have broke even. Independent theaters now had a choice in the features they wanted to exhibit from a variety of studios because their schedule was no longer booked with second-string pictures. This would increase the competition among studios and force them to market differently.

Conant (1960) states that another action the Supreme Court took was forcing the studios to divorce themselves from the exhibition arm of the movie industry although no specific time frame was given. This pushed the five major defendants to either sell off their theaters to independent owners or set up subsidiary companies for the purpose of exhibition. Studios could no longer guarantee exhibition of a film since they no longer owned the theaters. Since these studios all had to set up similar operations, many of the agreements they had with each other before the Supreme Court decision fell apart.

As a result of these actions, in less than 20 years, the amount of movies some of the defendant studios released fell sharply, further increasing the competition in the
marketplace. In 1940, Paramount had released 48 feature films and RKO released 53. By 1957, that amount dropped to 20 for Paramount and one for RKO (Conant, 1960).

Robert G. Friedman (2001) writes that during the 1960s, movies enjoyed a longer life in a marketplace, as compared to today's standards, mainly due to the fact that it was not yet common for movies to open nationally. Advertising dollars were limited to newspaper and radio ads, both of which are local media. It wasn't until 1971 and the movie *Billy Jack* did studios see the potential for national advertising. Warner Bros., who spent unprecedented amounts of national television advertising dollars to generate impressions for their film, distributed *Billy Jack*. When the movie was a success, studios were quick to notice that national television advertising was the future. Nation-wide releases of films quickly replaced limited engagements in cities, as it was more cost effective to advertise a movie nationally rather than locally.

Today marketing is vitally important, as competition is so great. On any given weekend, there can be two or three new movies opening, which all need to compete with the two or three new films that were just released the previous week. R.G. Friedman (2004) breaks motion picture marketing down into the following categories: creative advertising, publicity and promotion, market research, media and international. For the purpose of this study, the author will only review the first four.

According to R.G. Friedman (2004), creative advertising starts as soon as the picture is approved for production by a studio. Based on the screenplay and the actors, the marketing department tries to predict which films are going to be breakout successes and which ones will rely on support from the critics. Using these factors, marketing teams can then plan advertising accordingly. After principle photography wraps up, a couple of
trailers are usually produced: a 90 second one called a teaser, followed by a full two-minute trailer. These are usually the first impressions that audiences have for the film.

With so much of the modern film market centered around the opening weekend, A. O. Scott (2003) of the New York Times said that trailers are becoming ever more crucial, especially for films looking to become blockbusters. "The blockbuster audience must thus be teased into a state of, if not enthusiasm, then at least curiosity, or at least susceptibility to peer pressure, sufficient to get them to the theaters on the first weekend," Scott said. "And trailers, a form of advertising actively sought out by its targets, are a crucial form of bait." (2003)

R.G. Friedman (2004) describes the role that promotion and publicity play by saying that at the beginning of each production, a unit publicist is selected to head all publicity matters during filming. This includes putting together behind-the-scenes featurettes, getting publicity stills, answering media inquiries and putting together both electronic and print media kits. The ultimate goal is to try and land free publicity for that film.

Market research, according to R.G. Friedman (2004), is involved in gauging audiences' reactions to a film's marketing campaign. People are recruited demographically through intercept, usually in a public setting, and asked to view various types of ads (trailers and television commercials). The interviewers then ask a series of questions that usually ask the viewer how interested they would be to see that film. Based on responses, marketers are then able to better tailor their commercials.

Another aspect of market research is previewing. R.G. Friedman (2004) notes that audiences are recruited demographically to watch a cut of a film before it is released to the public. The preview is held at a movie theater and treated like an actual showing.
Audience members may purchase snacks and are free to use the restroom during the screening. After the film has finished, audience opinions are obtained through preview cards, which ask viewers a series of questions relating to all aspects of the film. In some cases, the focus group method is used, where a question and answer session is held after the preview while filmmakers listen to the feedback.

The preview can generate some useful information. It can tell marketers if there is a connection between the campaign strategy they have prepared and the feedback from the audience at the previews. It can also give further information into how to market a movie. R.G. Friedman (2004) writes that the film Lethal Weapon was originally going to be marketed to men as an action film; however, Mel Gibson, who co-stars in the film, appealed strongly to women, and the marketing campaign began pushing the feature as a date movie. Previews can also have an impact on other aspects of the film including its release date. For example, films that test poor, but are visually appealing, might be worth releasing nationally so that studios can "steal a couple of weeks" (R.G. Friedman, 2004) before bad critical reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations spread. Author Edward Jay Epstein said movie studios have little desire to look beyond a film's opening weekend so long as it can recoup its cost during that period (Gonzlinger, 2005). Feedback from the previews also enables filmmakers to go back to the film and re-edit the picture based on audiences' opinions.

Once feedback has been assessed from the previews, the media campaign can begin. R.G. Friedman (2004) said it becomes increasing important to know who your potential audience is because the cost of television advertising is constantly increasing, and popular network shows that appeal to a wide variety of people can range from $400,000
to $275,000 for a national 30-second spot. In New York alone, the price for local advertising is between $40,000 to $25,000. Studios do have an advantage in that most commercial spots for popular network shows are sold well in advance. Therefore, studios pick and choose which films they think will benefit the most from that time slot. However, studios have no control over what actually gets run in that time slot. For example, if a studio bought time for what they thought was a new episode of a popular TV series and the show turned out to be a repeat that night, then the studio gets less impressions than it originally thought. The objective is to reach as many people in your target audience for as little money as possible. Cable television has become a big help in this because its narrow casting is perfect for reaching specific demographics, and the cost of advertising is cheaper. This type of targeted cable advertising is also a way that studios cut advertising cost.

As the film moves closer to its release date, tie-ins with local sponsors are announced and the merchandising campaign begins (R.G. Friednan, 2004). Merchandising or consumer products can generate big dollars for a studio (Ovadia, 2004). The Star Wars franchise generated more than $1 billion in its first few years of merchandising, and consumer products and the in-store tie-ins can go a long way in generating awareness and providing publicity for a film (Ovadia, 2004). Epstein suggests that merchandising revenues have actually eclipsed box office revenue as the principal concern of studios. If this is true, he said, then theatrical releases of films simply begin to take on the aspects of extended advertising campaigns for DVDs, video games, toys, etc. (Gonzinger, 2005).
So how much does all of this marketing finally add up to? According to a Wall Street Journal article published in 2002 (Lippman), the average cost of marketing a movie from 2001 through 2002 rose 14 percent to $31 million. Meanwhile, the actual cost of producing a movie during that same time frame fell 13 percent to $47.7 million. This marked the lowest production cost had been since 1996. The study was conducted by the Motion Picture Association of America, which said rising cost was largely due to the increased spending for network television advertising. This cost presents a real threat to marketing departments, according to John Lippman (2002), because the cost of advertising is out of a studio's control. In 2002, the MPAA reported that around 25 percent of advertising cost went to national network television with another 17 percent going for local television. Cable television, radio and billboard ads were 20 percent of all costs with only 1.3 percent going to online resources (Lippman, 2002).

In a study from Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Gianfranco Walsh and Oliver Wruuck (2001), factors that lead to the economic success of a movie were investigated. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) divided the determinants into two basic groups: movie traits and motion picture-related communication (advertising). Movie traits described those attributes that "are relevant for the decision of consumers to watch this specific movie." (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). Movie traits were further broken down depending on how it influences the behavior of the consumer. They can be subcategorized as: factors that moviegoers can comprehend before watching a movie and factors moviegoers can only comprehend after watching a movie (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). This represents what Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) referred to as quasi-search characteristics, which is when consumers try to evaluate traits they actually cannot without having seen the movie. The
factors investigated under movie traits that are most important for this research are genre, symbolism, attractiveness of personnel, budget and quality of movie. The study also broke down motion picture-related communication into the following groups: movie reviews, awards and viewer’s word-of-mouth activities.

The study (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001) said that consistency within a genre allows the audience to make assumptions about the films in regards to content and structure before they even see the film. For example, in a superhero comic book film audiences can expect to see such things as a hero with super powers, an equally powerful super villain and lots of special effects action. In addition, genre allows audiences to better distinguish which type of movies they want to see based on personal preferences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001).

Key elements that the study (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001) noted about symbolism, which are particularly important in this research, is a relationship to prior works and the possibility of independently merchandising and promoting certain elements of the movie. Concerning prior works, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) said, “A ‘fit’ must exist between the original work and its transfer into film. The effectiveness of this fit depends less on the topic of the original work but on the degree of ‘cinematicality.’” Independent merchandising can increase public awareness of the film and promote the film’s logo (like the green ‘S’ for Shrek). Often, they claimed, the marketing value is more important than the monetary value that the merchandise brings in (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001).

A film’s personnel referred to those visible and invisible individuals that have worked on a particular film. According to the study (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001) “it is reasonable to expect potential customers to partly base their movie-related expectations
on the names of the individuals involved in the making of the movie.” They break a movie’s personnel into three groups: stars, directors and producers.

In terms of budget, the study (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001) showed two possible effects. First, the audience perceives a bigger budget implies the producer has the resources to tell a convincing story in the way of acting, artistry and technology. Second, a larger budget assumes that producers think they will be able to get an appropriate return on investment. Bringing all of these parts together helps define the overall quality of a film; however, just because a film has the right components (attractive personnel, budget, etc.) it does not guarantee success. These parts still need to fit together in a synergistic relationship, and this relationship is referred to as the quality of movie (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001).

For movie communication, this study (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001) first focused on critics’ reviews. The actual effects that movie reviews have revealed some interesting trends. A study from Jehoshua Eliashberg and Steven Shugan (1997) showed that there was almost no evidence linking the review of a movie and the first four weeks of performance, giving a blow to the influencer perspective, which states that the greatest influence of a film review will be immediately following its publication.

Their study (Eliashberg & Shugan, 1997) did find some correlation between a movie review and the total cumulative box office result, as well as the “staying power” of a film or how long the film runs in theaters. This suggests that reviews fit more into the role of predictors, predicting which films will have long-term success.

In terms of influences on an audience, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) also turned to awards as a factor. It focused on the Academy Awards issued by the Academy of Motion
Picture Arts and Sciences because these receive the greatest publicity and have the greatest potential to influence consumer behavior. For example, the best-movie award generates a demand worth an average of $35 million.

Finally, there is the word-of-mouth factor. This is intensely important because, according to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001), consumers tend to have much higher regard, in terms of credibility, for a film recommendation by a friend, family member or acquaintance than by a commercial source.

To summarize their findings, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) put forth a series of propositions. The following have been selected based on relevance to the author’s research.

1. The movie’s genre influences the movie’s success by impacting on both box office gross and production credits.

2. A movie’s symbolicity (i.e., the existence of prior works, the potential for independent commercialization of key movie elements) positively influences box-office grosses. When a critical level of symbolicity is exceeded, then the positive impact becomes weakened by the lack of surprise and innovativeness.

3. The popularity of stars, directors and producers positively influences a movie’s box-office gross.

4. The aesthetic quality of the movie positively influences the box office gross and profitability.
Specific Movie Campaign

Using the Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) propositions one can look at films that were potential blockbusters, but ultimately went bust. In 2001, 20th Century Fox released what was supposed to be its big summer flick in *Planet of the Apes*. According to David Finnigan (2001), Fox shorted itself by not pursuing an aggressive marketing strategy. The studio never garnered any beverage, fast food, auto or airline partners. In addition, Hasbro, who split the master toy license with Applause, offered only a modest toy line. The film’s star, Mark Wahlberg, did not appear in any of the ads for Reebok, which ran tie-in promotions in their print ads. Finally, many promoters detached themselves from the project because the film was considered too dark. Here’s an example of symbolicity, personnel and aesthetics not being maximized. In the end, *Planet of the Apes* finished as only the 10th highest grossing film of the year (All-Time Box Office, 2004).

One the other hand, examining a Disney film from the same year titled *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* unveils some surprising data. As part of a promotion with Kellogg Co., Disney gave away 13 million free interactive CD games, allowing consumers to play a prequel adventure to the film (W. Friedman, 2001). Disney later released another video game for the Sony Playstation, PlayStation 2, PC, GameBoy and GameBoy Color consoles (W. Friedman, 2001). In addition, the studio had tie-ins with Kellogg, Kodak, PepsiCo’s Frito-Lay and McDonald’s Corp., totaling paid advertising worth $45 million (W. Friedman, 2001). This symbolicity was not enough to propel the film to success as it failed to make over $100 million while production cost were estimated between $80 million and $100 million (W. Friedman, 2001).
The amount a corporate sponsor is willing to spend can vary. A company like Burger King can spend up to $25 million in paid media toward a summer movie (W. Friedman, J. Halliday & K. MacArthur, 2001). In 2001, corporate sponsors flooded to Spider-Man as the film saw an extra $40 million in paid media (W. Friedman et al, 2001). Among some of the companies on board were Cadbury Schweppes’ Dr. Pepper, Kellogg Co. and Tricon Global Restaurants’ Taco Bell, which departed that year from its previous agreement with Lucasfilm’s Star Wars franchise (W. Friedman et al, 2001). Lucasfilm that year came up with around $16 million in corporate sponsorship from General Mills and PepsiCo’s Frito Lay for its film Star Wars: Episode II: Attack of the Clones (W. Friedman et al, 2001). There might be some truth to the Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) propositions as more sponsorship and better reviews lead Spider-Man to gross almost $100 million more than Star Wars: Episode II.

According to the Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) proposition on symbolicity, marketing a film is only effective until the point where the movie starts to lose it innovativeness. Such could have almost been the case in 2004 when Sony attempt to market Spider-Man 2 by having web logos on the bases of all Major League Baseball stadiums during actual games in a promotion that MLB said was aimed at kids and the next generation of fans (Thomaselli, 2004). Soon after the announcement, enraged fans voiced their complaints and baseball reversed the decision. “Brands are continually being challenged to come up with new ways to sell the product,” David Schwab, director of media and marketing for Octagon, said. “They’re just going to have to test the waters to see if the public is going to push back. This time, the public pushed back.” (Thomaselli, 2004) A poll of 45,000 respondents to an ESPN.com poll showed 79.4 percent were against the marketing idea
This one instance may only be the first in a line of what’s to come. Already, sponsors have attached their names to college football bowl games, have posted temporary tattoos on the backs of professional boxers and virtual advertising (which is advertising inserted digitally for the television audience) is commonplace during baseball games (Thomaselli, 2004).

So how much is too much for marketing a film? The answer to that might solely depend on how the movie performs at the box office. According to John Cywinski, a former Burger King executive and president of Disney’s Buena Vista Pictures Marketing (as of time article was written) said, “When you meet expectations (at the box office), your marketing is creative. When you don’t, it’s ‘hype.’” (Jensen, 1998) An example of that is the 1998 film Godzilla, which debuted a trailer before the film ever finished production and proceeded from there with a huge marketing campaign. The movie finished with a less than expected opening weekend and in total garnered $136 million at the box office. Arthur Cohen, a former Revlon VP said, “The success and failure of a movie functions on how much you make the last week come together and make it feel fresh.” (Jenson, 1998) Sometimes, it’s subtle marketing that draws in the crowd. Saving Private Ryan was able to draw $80 million more than Godzilla that same year on the shoulders of strong reviews and famous personnel (Jenson, 1998).

A marketing strategy that seems predominate for movies that have strong source material, like comic books or Lord of the Rings, is to satisfy that material’s fan base first in hopes of building a good buzz for the movie. One such place where that happens is over the Internet. In 2001, there was a re-launch of the Lord of the Rings Web site to coincide with the release of the first part of that work’s movie trilogy. The site included
video and audio clips, an interactive Middle Earth map, chat rooms, screen savers, interviews and links to other Tolkien sites (Lyman, 2001). New Line maintained close relationships with about 40 other Lord of the Rings Web sites, feeding them a daily diet of exclusive behind-the-scenes news, sound clips and images (Lyman, 2001). By forming these relationships, New Line was able to stop false rumors from hitting the Internet; thus, saving the integrity of their film (Lyman, 2001). Movies with sorcery or movies with superheroes both have a predominately Web-savvy male audience, which is often the same crowd that makes up the opening weekend box office. Once you start clicking with this demographic, they become evangelist for a movie (Lyman, 2001).

While one does not want to alienate the core group of fans, studios are aware that this is just a small fraction of their potential audience so ideally you need to have a broader appeal (Lyman, 2001). Marketers for the film X-Men had a great challenge ahead of them as they attempted to promote that movie. While a giant in the world of comic books, many doubted if a broader audience would embrace Marvel’s mutant superheroes. A Newsweek article by Devin Gordon (2000) stated that the diehard fans of the comic would show up opening day no matter what. The trick was how to satisfy them and attract millions of other “normal movie-going fans.” The studio decided to play up the film’s “outcast” theme of the movie, and ran a series of television ads called Mutant Watch that featured Senator Kelly (a character from the movie) running for election on the anti-mutant platform. This marketing idea evidently worked as the film went on to gross $157 million dollars, which was more than twice its budget.

Another place where predominantly males gather, and studios can get free publicity and early buzz for motion pictures, is the San Diego Comic-Con International. Drawing
over 75,000 fans in 2004, the convention previewed 18 films, which included much more than just comic book related films (Holsoa, 2004). The benefit of previewing a film at the Con is similar to the Internet strategy. Appealing to hardcore fans is a way of building early buzz for a film, and it also provides a way for lesser-known comic book characters to be successful. Once you have the hardcore fans of that title on board, you can then move on to appealing to the larger audience (Holson, 2004).
Chapter III

Survey

The means of gathering research for this project was a quantitative survey ( Appendix A). The survey attempted to gather information on a variety of movie-going behaviors. Once all the completed surveys were reviewed, the results were broken down by question and tallied on a spreadsheet. The following list breaks down the survey into its six sections.

1. Section One asked people to check off any of the following movies they have seen in the theater: Spider-Man, Spider-Man 2, X-Men, X2: X-Men United, Hulk and Daredevil. It is important that they only marked the ones seen in the theater since only theater attendance is what this research is measuring.

2. Section Two offered respondents 12 factors that, based on feedback and research, were believed to have most affected a person’s decision to see the study films. The factors included: TV Commercials for the film, Billboards and Print Ads for the film, Critics’ Reviews of the film, Movie Previews (Trailers) for the film, Video Games based on characters in the film, Merchandise based on characters in the film, Took Child to see the film, TV Shows starring characters from the film, Comic Books starring characters from the film, Actor/Actress in the film, Friend/Family/Peer recommendation of the film, and Other. Respondents were asked to choose three factors that most influenced their decision to see one of the films from Section One. If people had seen none of the study films, then they were asked to skip this section.
3. Section Three had respondents use a Likert scale to rate the effectiveness of five factors (TV Commercials, Print Ads, Critics’ Reviews, Movie Previews, Peer Recommendations) that affect people’s decision to see a film. The scale ranged from one to five, with one being No Influence, two being Little Influence, three being Some Influence, four being Much Influence and five being Extreme Influence. The higher the number the respondent chose, the more that factor influenced their overall movie-going behavior. The factors asked people to base their answers on general movie going behavior, not behavior based on comic book films. The hope was to find out, in general, what drove people’s decisions to see a film, and compare it to what drove people’s decisions to see a comic book film. Factors selected were chosen based on review of previous published material, which can be found in Appendix A.

4. Section Four once again used a Likert scale but this time asked respondents to rate how effective commercial products are in raising awareness of a film. The scale ranged from one to five, with one being No Influence, two being Little Influence, three being Some Influence, four being Much Influence and five being Extreme Influence. The higher the number the respondent chose, the more that commercial items raised a respondents’ awareness for a film. The hope was to gather data that would show if the millions of dollars poured into commercial tie-ins, especially in comic book films, generated any substantial awareness among movie-goers.
5. The first question under Section Five asked the respondent to check off when the last time they saw a television show based on the characters featured in the study films. The range of answers were as follows: Several Days Ago, Several Weeks Ago, Several Years Ago, 10+ Years Ago and Never. The hope was to see if there is any correlation between the frequency of viewing television source material and the viewing of comic book movies. Similarly, the second question in Section Five asked respondents to check off when the last time they read a comic book featuring the characters from the study films. The respondent had the same options to choose from as in the first question, and the hope was to find out if there is any correlation between the frequency of viewing printed source material and the viewing comic book movies.

6. Section Six was set up to obtain two pieces of demographic information. The first is age, which was broken down into three choices: 18-34, 35-44 and 45+. Essentially, it was separated into comic books target demographic, 10 years post target age and plus 10 years past target age, although admittedly the line overlaps between the last two categories. Contrary to tradition, comic books are no longer marketed to middle and high schoolers anymore, but rather to adults between 18-34 (Greh, 2000). The last question broke respondents down by gender. Since comics and action movies are predominantly a male interest, it was interesting to see if the data is radically different between the two genders.
Sample

The survey was administered in paper form in classrooms, which generated 111 respondents all from the 18-34 age range. The selected institution was a university from New Jersey with the surveys distributed to students in various Communication courses; however, the author does not feel that this skewed the results. For the respondents in the last two age groups, where it was more difficult to use students, the author attempted to recruit respondents from his place of internship. However, the time frame for review from the location's Institutional Review Board did not permit the study to be carried out there, thus, those groups were omitted.
Chapter IV

Results

The survey results showed 80.2 percent of those surveyed or 89 respondents (of 111) saw at least one of the study films. These were not surprising results because, as stated earlier, all of the study films grossed over $100 million domestically. The amount of money that these films took in superceded what comic book readers were capable of generating. This means that non-comic fans would have to have seen these films as well.

Breaking the data down by gender yielded no surprises either. Of the 63 male respondents to the survey, 54 or 85.7 percent saw at least one of the study films, and of the 48 women that completed the survey, 31 or 64.6 percent answered that they had seen at least one of the study films. In the larger picture, 61 percent of all the respondents, who had seen at least one of the study films, were male while 35 percent of all respondents, who had seen at least one of the study films, were female. There were also four respondents who did not identify gender but had seen one of the study films, giving this group a total of 3.6 percent of respondents who had seen at least one of the study films. As expected, the percentages for the males were higher. Comic books, action cartoons and action movies traditionally appeal more to males so it is not unexpected that
the majority of respondents who had seen at least one of the study films were males.

Looking at each study film individually, it was the movie *Spider-Man* that the majority of respondents answered as having seen in the theater. Sixty-two people or 55.9 percent of all survey respondents answered that they had seen this film. Of those 62 respondents, 66.1 percent were males while 33.8 percent were females. *Spider-Man* stands out for a few reasons. First, it was the only film that the majority of people who answered the survey said they had seen. Next, it was the only film where a majority of people in one demographic, males, said they had seen the film. Finally, it was the film with some of the most well-established source material behind it. Besides the original
comic book, which has been published since 1963, the Spider-Man character has appeared in numerous spin-off magazines and the most television shows and cartoons, including a popular show that ran on the Fox network from 1994-1998.

Due to the amount of people that saw this film, it was not surprising that the film with the second highest number of respondents, who answered that they saw the film, was Spider-Man 2. In total, 48 people or 43.2 percent of all respondents said that they had seen this film. Of those 48 people, 62.5 percent were males and 37.5 percent were females. These results were also as expected. While the original film Spider-Man did very well at the box office and was well received by critics, sequels in general do not typically attract more viewers to the box office. Of all the blockbuster films in U.S. history, only 23 times did a sequel out gross its predecessor, compared to the 48 times an original out grossed its sequel (All-Time Box Office, 2004). In fact, being a sequel might very well have been the reason many people decided to see this film. Of all those who answered that they attended Spider-Man 2 in the theater, only 20.8 percent hadn’t viewed the first Spider-Man movie in the theater. Still, this was difficult to determine since that population could have viewed the original Spider-Man movie on video.

The third highest viewed film was X-Men with 34 respondents or 30.6 percent of respondents saying that they saw this movie. The male demographic carried the bulk of this film’s viewership with 73.5 percent while females comprised 26.5 percent. The sequel to this film, much like with the Spider-Man franchise, saw less respondents answering that they had seen the movie; however, the drop off was not as great. For X2: X-Men United, 32 respondents or 28.8 percent of the total surveyed population said that they had seen this film. The male demographic that comprised viewership to this
The final two study films saw very low viewership among respondents. Only 17 respondents, making up 15.3 percent of all those surveyed, saw *Hulk*. Seventy and one-half percent of these respondents were male while females made up 29.4 percent. The amount of respondents who saw *Daredevil* was 14 or 12.6 percent of all respondents. From those 14, 85.7 percent of those who had seen the film were males and 14.3 percent were females. Not surprisingly, the films with the highest respondent rates were also the ones that grossed the most at the box office. The only exception was with the film *X2: X-Men United*, which significantly out-grossed its predecessor *X-Men*, but also rode the waves of much better critical accolades.
When asked to choose a maximum of three factors from a list of 12 that most influenced their decision to see at least one of the study films, 56.2 percent of respondents who has seen at least one study film indicated that Television Commercials for the film had the most impact on them. The second highest factor was Movie Previews for the film with 52.8 percent of respondents. Next came Peer Recommendations, which garnered 46.1 percent of respondents, and the fourth highest factor that influenced people’s decision to see a film and tallied 25.8 percent of respondents was the Actor or Actress in the film.
The fifth highest factor influencing respondents' decisions to see at least one of the study films was the Comic Book starring characters from the movie with 21.3 percent. The next two factors that influenced respondents' decisions to see at least one of the study films was Television Shows starring the characters from the films and Critics' Reviews of the film, which both received 14.5 percent.

The numbers that were posted for the influence of source material on films, including Comic Books and Television Shows, are almost in line with what the author hypothesized. They are both rank in the top half of respondents' reasons for going to see at least one of the study films; however, their influence falls well short of other factors such as Television Commercials, Movie Previews and Peer Recommendations. Clearly, these materials influenced some people, but the main influence still seems to be traditional marketing techniques. Yet, if you combined the results from the factors of Comic Books and Television Shows, one found that the percentage jumped to 36 percent, which placed all source material as the fourth highest-ranking factor, well ahead of the factor Actor or Actress in the film.

Response rates for the bottom half of the factors were as follows: "Other" with 13.5 percent, Video Games based on the characters in the films with 7.9 percent, Print Ads for the film with 5.7 percent, Took Child to see the film with 3.4 percent and Merchandise based on characters from the film with 1.1 percent.

Looking at factors influencing people's decisions to see at least one of the study films from exclusively the male demographic, Movie Previews topped the list with 47.6 percent of men listing this as a factor, while 46 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor and 31.7 percent listed Peer Recommendations as a factor. The factors of Comic
Books and Television Shows did each move up one spot as 17.1 percent of males listed Comic Books as a factor and 15.9 percent listed Television Shows featuring the characters as a factor. Once again, if one combined these two factors into one source material heading, the percentage jumped to 33 percent, which made it third among factors for males. Rounding out the top half of factors was Critic's Reviews and Actor or Actress in the film; both of which 14.3 percent of males listed as a contributing factor.

The results of the bottom half of factors that influenced males to see at least one of the study films was as follows: Video Games based on characters from the film and "Other" with 9.5 percent, Print Ads for the film with 6.3 percent, and Merchandise based on characters from the film and Took Child to see the film with 1.6 percent.

For the female demographic of the influences that affected their decision to see at least one of the study films, the top three factors were Television Commercials, Movie Previews and Peer Recommendations. Television Commercials and Peer Recommendation were listed as the top two factors with 43.8 percent each, and Movie Previews saw 35.4 percent of females listing that as a factor. Rounding out the top half of influences for females was Actor or Actress in a film, which 29.2 percent listed as a factor, "Other," which 12.5 percent listed as a factor and Critics' Reviews of the film, which 8.3 percent listed as a factor.

Making up the bottom half of factors in the female demographic was as follows: Televisions Shows featuring the characters in the films with 6.3 percent, Print Ads for the film, Took Child to see the film and Comic Book based featuring the characters from the film with 4.2 percent each, and Video Games based on characters in the films with 2.1
percent. If we combined the results from the female demographic for Comic Books and Television Shows, it yielded 10.5 percent, which ranked as only the sixth highest factor.

Not unexpectedly, the influence of Comic Books and Television Shows featuring these superheroes was much more of an influence for males to see the study films than females. As comic books and action cartoons are marketed more toward males, these results are natural. One other factor that greatly differed between the genders was Actor or Actress in the film. Whereas that factor was only chosen by 14.3 percent of males and ranked in the bottom half of factors, 29.2 percent of females chose that as a factor, ranking it fourth among females.

Bar Chart
It is no surprise that Television Commercials, Movie Previews and Peer
Recommendations finished in the top three of factors that most influenced audiences’
decisions to see at least one of the study films. An examination of general movie going
behavior from this survey confirms much of the previous findings. Of all those surveyed,
49.5 percent said that Movie Previews had Much Influence on their decision to see a film.
Over a quarter of those surveyed, or 25.2 percent, said that Previews have an Extreme
Influence over their decision to see a movie. In addition, 18.9 percent said that Previews
had Some Influence.

The numbers did not change much in the male demographic. Among males, 42.9
percent of males said that Previews had Much Influence on their movie-going behaviors,
25.4 percent said that Previews had an Extreme Influence on their decision and 22.2
percent said that Previews had Some Influence on their decision. Among females, 58.3
percent that Previews had Much Influence on them, 25.4 percent said Previews had an
Extreme Influence and 14.6 percent said it had Some Influence.
Looking at the overall respondents to the survey, one saw that 47.7 percent of those surveyed said that Peer Recommendations had Much Influence on their decision to see a film, 30.3 percent said that Peer Recommendations had Some Influence on their decision to see a film and 19.3 percent said that Peer Recommendations had an Extreme Influence on their decision to see a film. Clearly, respondents find the recommendations of peers very influential; however, they do not find it as influential as movie previews.

Breaking these results down among males, the statistics once again mirrored those of the overall respondents. Among males, 46.8 percent said that Peer Recommendations had Much Influence on their decision to see a movie, 29 percent said that Peer Recommendations had Some Influence and 19.4 percent said that Peer Recommendations had an Extreme Influence.

The female demographic results were also very close to the overall results with 48.9 percent saying that Peer Recommendations had Much Influence on their decision to see a movie, 31.5 percent said that Peer Recommendations had Some Influence and 19.1
percent said that Peer Recommendations had an Extreme Influence.

![Bar Chart]

Although the overall influence of Television Commercials was not as great as Movie Previews and Peer Recommendations, the influence was still very apparent as over one-third or 36.9 percent of overall respondents said that TV Commercials have Much Influence on their decision to see a movie. In addition, 36 percent said that TV Commercials had Some influence and 14.4 percent said that TV Commercials had an Extreme Influence.

The influence of TV Commercials dipped among males as 38.1 percent said that this factor has only Some Influence, 34.9 percent said that this factor has Much Influence
and 12.7 percent said this factor had an Extreme Influence. However, 12.7 percent of males also said that TV Commercials had Little Influence on their decision to see a film. The female demographic was more in line with the overall results. Among females, 39.6 percent said that TV Commercials had Much Influence in their decision to see a film, 33.3 percent said the factor had Some influence and 16.7 percent said that this factor had an Extreme Influence.

Influence started to wane with the rest of the factors. Critics' Reviews ranked in the middle of factors that influenced respondents' decisions to see a study film. Those results are also mirrored in the overall movie-going influences. Of those surveyed, 30.6
percent of respondents said that Critics' Reviews had Some Influence on their decision to see a film, 27.9 percent said that this factor had Little Influence and 20.7 percent said that this factor had Much Influence.

Among males, Critics' Reviews had slightly more influence on their decision to see a film as 31.7 percent of males said this factor had Some Influence on their movie-going habits, 25.4 percent said that this factor had Much Influence and 22.2 percent said that this factor had Little Influence. The influence of Critics' Reviews among females dips as 35.4 percent of this demographic said that this factor had Little Influence over their decision to see a film, 29.2 percent said that this factor had Some Influence and 14.6 percent said that this factor had Much Influence.

The lowest influence on respondents was Print Ads. Among overall respondents, 45.9 percent said that Print Ads had Little Influence on their decision to see a film, 25.2 percent said that this factor had Some Influence on their decision to see a film and 21.6 percent said that this factor had No Influence. Among males, 42.9 percent said that Print Ads had Little Influence on their decision to see a film, 30.2 percent that this factor had No Influence while 19 percent said that this factor had Some Influence. The female demographic continued to rank Print Ads low as 50 percent said this factor had Little Influence over their decision to see a film, 33.3 percent said that this factor had Some
Influence and 10.4 percent said that this factor had No Influence.

Film merchandise has become a large component of movie marketing. In addition to raising money, the merchandise also helps to raise awareness for a movie by generating symbols that instantly become identifiable with a film. When this age demographic was asked if movie merchandise had any influence in raising awareness for a film, 38.7 percent of overall respondents said it had Little Influence, 34.2 percent said it had Some Influence and 13.5 percent said it had No Influence.

In the male demographic, the statistics were similar as 33.3 percent of males said that Merchandise had Little Influence in raising awareness for a film, 33.3 percent said it
had Some Influence and 17.5 percent said it had No Influence. Statistics changed slightly among females as 45.8 percent of surveyed females said Merchandise had Little Influence in raising awareness for a film, 35.4 percent said that it had Some Influence and 10.4 percent said that Merchandise had Much Influence.

Looking further into respondents' familiarity with source material, results from 110 people revealed that the majority did in fact either watch shows featuring the study film superheroes or read those characters' comic books in their lifetime. Overall, 33.6 percent of respondents or 31 students said that they had seen a show featuring the characters from the study films at least one time Several Years Ago. Thirty-one respondents or 28.2 percent said they had Never seen a show featuring those characters. Twenty-one respondents or 19.1 percent said they last saw these characters in a show 10+ Years Ago with 16 respondents or 14.5 percent answering that Several Weeks Ago was the last time they saw a show featuring these characters. Finally, five respondents or 4.5 percent overall said the last time they watched one of these shows was Several Days Ago.

Males comprised the majority of the category Several Years Ago with 27 of the 37 respondents. Nineteen percent of males said the last time they had contact with shows featuring the characters was 10+ Years Ago and 17.5 percent said the last time they watched the shows were Several Weeks Ago. The percentage of males who said they Never watched the shows featuring these characters was 55.9 percent while 4.8 percent said the last time they viewed these shows was Several Days Ago.

Of the 31 respondents who said they Never viewed shows featuring the characters from the source material, 21 were females. In addition, 21.3 percent of females said the
last time they viewed these shows was Several Years Ago while 19.1 percent said 10+ Years Ago was the last time they watched the shows. Only 10.6 percent of total females said they had contact with the shows Several Weeks Ago with 4.3 percent saying they viewed a show Several Days Ago.

In terms of reading comic books featuring these characters, 57.2 percent of all respondents said they Never read them, and 23.4 percent said the last time they read them was 10+ Years Ago. These results were somewhat shocking. Comic books have been progressively marketed to this age demographic for well over 10 years, yet these results showed that the majority of respondents never read any comic books featuring these characters. Meanwhile, 18.9 percent of respondents said Several Years Ago was the last time they read a comic featuring these characters. Also, 3.6 percent of respondents said Several Weeks Ago was the last time they read these books and 9 percent said Several Days Ago was the last time they read these books.

Surprisingly, 34.9 percent of males said that they Never read a comic book featuring the characters from the study films. This was unexpected since comic books are typically a male dominated media and this age demographic is the prime marketing audience. In addition, it seemed quite odd that over one-third of the males who took this survey Never read a comic featuring these characters, especially since these characters were at the height of their popularity even when this demographic were youths. The next most common response among males for this question was Several Years Ago, of which 30.2 percent of males answered. In addition, 28.6 percent of males said 10+ Years Ago was the last time they read a comic book featuring these characters, 4.8 percent of male respondents said they last time they read these comic books was Several Weeks Ago and
1.6 percent of male respondents said Several Days Ago was the last time they read one of these comic books.

In the female demographic, it was 77.1 percent of respondents who said that they Never read a comic book featuring a character from one of the study films. It was 16.7 percent of female respondents who said that it has been 10+ Years Ago since they last read one of these books, 4.2 percent who listed Several Years Ago, and 2.1 percent who listed Several Weeks Ago since they last read one of these books.

These results are considered somewhat of a surprise. The most recent categories, Several Days Ago and Several Weeks Ago, had the lowest response rates overall, yet this age demographic is the target audience for this source material. As expected, though, the rate of women who Never had contact with any of the source material greatly outnumbered those males in that category.

Spider-Man was the most viewed film among those who responded to the survey. Spider-Man is also the character that has had the most consistently popular source material. Did more people see this film based on its source material than any of the other films? Indeed, among those who saw Spider-Man a greater percentage of people listed Comic Books and Television Shows featuring the character as a factor that influenced their decision to see this film than those who saw at least one of the other study films. Among viewers of Spider-Man, 22.6 percent listed Comic Books as a factor, which was up from 17.1 percent among overall viewers of the study films. In addition, 21 percent of Spider-Man viewers listed Television Shows based on the character as a factor that influenced their decision to see a film over 11.7 percent that listed Television Shows as a factor among overall viewers of study films.
Not surprisingly, Television Commercials and Movie Previews had the most influence over people's decisions to see the film. Among viewers of *Spider-Man*, 67.7 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor for seeing the film, with 62.9 percent listing Movie Previews, indicating that it was the traditional marketing techniques that had the most impact on the financial success of *Spider-Man* among this demographic. This film was also well received by the critics. This would account for the 50 percent of viewers of this film that listed Peer Recommendations as a factor. Generating a word-of-mouth buzz is a marketing technique that movie studios use to increase box office gross for a movie that the critics agree is worth seeing. Using the starlet power of Kirsten Dunst in a starring role in *Spider-Man* could account for the increase in the percentage of viewers who listed Actor/Actress as a factor (30.6 percent) for seeing this movie.

Since Comic Books and Television Shows were clearly not a top factor in seeing movies, were the people who watched *Spider-Man* just not reading comic books or watching cartoons with superheroes? The data showed that this was partially true when it comes to comic books. In total, 45.2 percent of viewers who watched *Spider-Man* said that they Never read a comic book featuring the study film characters. Twenty-nine percent of viewers said they read comic books Several Years Ago, 22.6 percent said they read comic books 10+ Years Ago, 4.8 percent said they read comic books Several Weeks Ago and 1.6 percent read comic books Several Days Ago.
The data for Television Shows for when the last time viewers of Spider-Man watched a show featuring one of the characters from the study films showed different results. Forty-three and one half percent of viewers said they watched a Television Show with one of the characters Several Years Ago, 22.6 percent said they Never watched a Television Show, 21 percent said they watched a Television Show 10+ Years Ago, 10 percent said they watched a Television Show Several Weeks Ago and 6.4 percent watched a Television Show Several Days Ago.

Spider-Man 2 made great use of marketing techniques, and the public seemingly responded. Sixty percent of viewers of this film listed either Television Commercials or
Movie Previews as a factor that influenced their decision to see this film. Strong reviews helped this movie as 48 percent listed Peer Recommendations as a factor and 28 percent listed Actor or Actress as a factor. In terms of source material, 24 percent listed Comic Books as a factor and 20 percent listed Television Shows as a factor.

The comic books featuring the X-Men have had great success since the 1980s. Whereas the series struggled for popularity during its first 20 years of publication, the book quickly became the most successful comic book of all time in the last two decades, which would account for the timeframe that this demographic would have been reading comic books. This was reflected when 30.6 percent of the viewers of X-Men listed Comic Books as a factor for seeing that movie, which accounts for the highest percent of any of the study films. Surprisingly, Television Shows based on the characters only accounted for 19.4 percent of the viewers. This came after the popular 1990s cartoon show, which also should have attracted this demographic. Among viewers of the X-Men, 66.7 percent listed Movie Previews as a factor, 52.8 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor, 47.1 percent listed Peer Recommendations as a factor and 33.3 percent listed Actor or Actress as a factor.

The sequel of the X-Men movie, X2: X-Men United, had similar results. Among viewers of this film, 57.6 percent listed Movie Previews as a factor that influenced their decision to see a film, 51.6 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor, 33.3 percent listed Peer Recommendations as a factor, 27.3 percent listed either Actor or Actress or Comic Books as a factor and 24.2 percent listed Television Shows as a factor.

Apparently the re-runs of the 1978-1982 live-action show starring the Hulk were not a strong enough influence on Hulk viewers to see that film, as only 11.1 percent listed
The amount a corporate sponsor is willing to spend can vary. A company like Burger King can spend up to $25 million in paid media toward a summer movie (W. Friedman, J. Halfay & K. MacArthur, 2001). In 2001, corporate sponsors flooded to Spider-Man as the film saw an extra $40 million in paid media (W. Friedman et al., 2001). Among some of the companies on board were Cadbury Schweppes’ Dr. Pepper, Kellogg Co. and Tricon Global Restaurants’ Taco Bell, which departed that year from its previous agreement with Lucasfilm’s Star Wars franchise (W. Friedman et al., 2001). Lucasfilm that year came up with around $16 million in corporate sponsorship from General Mills and PepsiCo’s Frito Lay for its film Star Wars: Episode II: Attack of the Clones (W. Friedman et al., 2001). There might be some truth to the Hennig-Thura et al. (2001) propositions as more sponsorship and better reviews lead Spider-Man to gross almost $100 million more than Star Wars: Episode II.

According to the Hennig-Thura et al. (2001) proposition on symbolicity, marketing a film is only effective until the point where the movie starts to lose its innovativeness. Such could have almost been the case in 2004 when Sony attempt to market Spider-Man 2 by having web logos on the bases of all Major League Baseball stadiums during actual games in a promotion that MLB said was aimed at kids and the next generation of fans (Thomaselli, 2004). Soon after the announcement, enraged fans voiced their complaints and baseball reversed the decision. “Brands are continually being challenged to come up with new ways to sell the product,” David Schwab, director of media and marketing for Octagon, said. “They’re just going to have to test the waters to see if the public is going to push back. This time, the public pushed back.” (Thomaselli, 2004) A poll of 45,000 respondents to an ESPN.com poll showed 79.4 percent were against the marketing idea
(Thomaselli, 2004). This one instance may only be the first in a line of what’s to come. Already, sponsors have attached their names to college football bowl games, have posted temporary tattoos on the backs of professional boxers and virtual advertising (which is advertising inserted digitally for the television audience) is commonplace during baseball games (Thomaselli, 2004).

So how much is too much for marketing a film? The answer to that might solely depend on how the movie performs at the box office. According to John Cywinski, a former Burger King executive and president of Disney’s Buena Vista Pictures Marketing (as of time article was written) said, “When you meet expectations (at the box office), your marketing is creative. When you don’t, it’s ‘hype.’” (Jensen, 1998) An example of that is the 1998 film Godzilla, which debuted a trailer before the film ever finished production and proceeded from there with a huge marketing campaign. The movie finished with a less than expected opening weekend and in total garnered $136 million at the box office. Arthur Cohen, a former Revlon VP said, “The success and failure of a movie functions on how much you make the last week come together and make it feel fresh.” (Jenson, 1998) Sometimes, it’s subtle marketing that draws in the crowd. Saving Private Ryan was able to draw $80 million more than Godzilla that same year on the shoulders of strong reviews and famous personnel (Jenson, 1998).

A marketing strategy that seems predominate for movies that have strong source material, like comic books or Lord of the Rings, is to satisfy that material’s fan base first in hopes of building a good buzz for the movie. One such place where that happens is over the Internet. In 2001, there was a re-launch of the Lord of the Rings Web site to coincide with the release of the first part of that work’s movie trilogy. The site included
video and audio clips, an interactive Middle Earth map, chat rooms, screen savers, interviews and links to other Tolkien sites (Lyman, 2001). New Line maintained close relationships with about 40 other Lord of the Rings Web sites, feeding them a daily diet of exclusive behind-the-scenes news, sound clips and images (Lyman, 2001). By forming these relationships, New Line was able to stop false rumors from hitting the Internet; thus, saving the integrity of their film (Lyman, 2001). Movies with sorcery or movies with superheroes both have a predominately Web-savvy male audience, which is often the same crowd that makes up the opening weekend box office. Once you start clicking with this demographic, they become evangelists for a movie (Lyman, 2001).

While one does not want to alienate the core group of fans, studios are aware that this is just a small fraction of their potential audience so ideally you need to have a broader appeal (Lyman, 2001). Marketers for the film X-Men had a great challenge ahead of them as they attempted to promote that movie. While a giant in the world of comic books, many doubted if a broader audience would embrace Marvel’s mutant superheroes. A Newsweek article by Devin Gordon (2000) stated that the diehard fans of the comic would show up opening day no matter what. The trick was how to satisfy them and attract millions of other “normal movie-going fans.” The studio decided to play up the film’s “outcast” theme of the movie, and ran a series of television ads called Mutant Watch that featured Senator Kelly (a character from the movie) running for election on the anti-mutant platform. This marketing idea evidently worked as the film went on to gross $157 million dollars, which was more than twice its budget.

Another place where predominantly males gather, and studios can get free publicity and early buzz for motion pictures, is the San Diego Comic-Con International. Drawing
over 75,000 fans in 2004, the convention previewed 18 films, which included much more than just comic book related films (Holson, 2004). The benefit of previewing a film at the Con is similar to the Internet strategy. Appealing to hardcore fans is a way of building early buzz for a film, and it also provides a way for lesser-known comic book characters to be successful. Once you have the hardcore fans of that title on board, you can then move on to appealing to the larger audience (Holson, 2004).
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Chapter III

Survey

The means of gathering research for this project was a quantitative survey (Appendix A). The survey attempted to gather information on a variety of movie-going behaviors. Once all the completed surveys were reviewed, the results were broken down by question and tallied on a spreadsheet. The following list breaks down the survey into its six sections.

1. Section One asked people to check off any of the following movies they have seen in the theater: Spider-Man, Spider-Man 2, X-Men, X2: X-Men United, Hulk and Daredevil. It is important that they only marked the ones seen in the theater since only theater attendance is what this research is measuring.

2. Section Two offered respondents 12 factors that, based on feedback and research, were believed to have most affected a person’s decision to see the study film. The factors included: TV Commercials for the film, Billboards and Print Ads for the film, Critics’ Reviews of the film, Movie Previews (Trailers) for the film, Video Games based on characters in the film, Merchandise based on characters in the film, Took Child to see the film, TV Shows starring characters from the film, Comic Books starring characters from the film, Actor/Actress in the film, Friend/Family/Peer recommendation of the film, and Other. Respondents were asked to choose three factors that most influenced their decision to see one of the films from Section One. If people had seen none of the study films, then they were asked to skip this section.
3. Section Three had respondents use a Likert scale to rate the effectiveness of five factors (TV Commercials, Print Ads, Critics’ Reviews, Movie Previews, Peer Recommendations) that affect people’s decision to see a film. The scale ranged from one to five with one being No Influence, two being Little Influence, three being Some Influence, four being Much Influence and five being Extreme Influence. The higher the number the respondent chose, the more that factor influenced their overall movie-going behavior. The factors asked people to base their answers on general movie-going behavior, not behavior based on comic book films. The hope was to find out, in general, what drove people’s decisions to see a film, and compare it to what drove people’s decisions to see a comic book film. Factors selected were chosen based on review of previous published material, which can be found in Appendix A.

4. Section Four once again used a Likert scale but this time asked respondents to rate how effective commercial products are in raising awareness of a film. The scale ranged from one to five with one being No Influence, two being Little Influence, three being Some Influence, four being Much Influence and five being Extreme Influence. The higher the number the respondent chose, the more that commercial items raised a respondents’ awareness for a film. The hope was to gather data that would show if the millions of dollars poured into commercial tie-ins, especially in comic book films, generated any substantial awareness among movie-goers.
5. The first question under Section Five asked the respondent to check off when the last time they saw a television show based on the characters featured in the study films. The range of answers were as follows: Several Days Ago, Several Weeks Ago, Several Years Ago, 10+ Years Ago and Never. The hope was to see if there is any correlation between the frequency of viewing television source material and the viewing of comic book movies. Similarly, the second question in Section Five asked respondents to check off when the last time they read a comic book featuring the characters from the study films. The respondent had the same options to choose from as in the first question, and the hope was to find out if there is any correlation between the frequency of viewing printed source material and the viewing of comic book movies.

6. Section Six was set up to obtain two pieces of demographic information. The first is age, which was broken down into three choices: 18-34, 35-44 and 45+. Essentially, it was separated into comic books target demographic, 10 years past target age and plus 10 years past target age, although admittedly the line overlaps between the last two categories. Contrary to tradition, comic books are no longer marketed to middle and high schoolers anymore, but rather to adults between 18-34 (Groh, 2000). The last question broke respondents down by gender. Since comics and action movies are predominately a male interest, it was interesting to see if the data is radically different between the two genders.
Sample

The survey was administered in paper form in classrooms, which generated 11 respondents all from the 18-34 age range. The selected institution was a university from New Jersey with the surveys distributed to students in various Communication courses; however, the author does not feel that this slanted the results. For the respondents in the last two age groups, where it was more difficult to use students, the author attempted to recruit respondents from his place of internship. However, the time frame for review from the location's Institutional Review Board did not permit the study to be carried out there; thus, those groups were omitted.
Chapter IV
Results

The survey results showed 80.2 percent of those surveyed or 89 respondents (of 111) saw at least one of the study films. These were not surprising results because, as stated earlier, all of the study films grossed over $100 million domestically. The amount of money that these films took in superceded what comic book readers were capable of generating. This means that non-comic fans would have to have seen these films as well.

Breaking the data down by gender yielded no surprises either. Of the 63 male respondents to the survey, 54 or 85.7 percent saw at least one of the study films, and of the 48 women that completed the survey, 31 or 64.6 percent answered that they had seen at least one of the study films. In the larger picture, 61 percent of all the respondents, who had seen at least one of the study films, were male while 35 percent of all respondents, who had seen at least one of the study films, were female. There were also four respondents who did not identify gender but had seen one of the study films, giving this group a total of 3.6 percent of respondents who had seen at least one of the study films. As expected, the percentages for the males were higher. Comic books, action cartoons and action movies traditionally appeal more to males so it is not unexpected that
the majority of respondents who had seen at least one of the study films were males.

Bar Chart

Looking at each study film individually, it was the movie Spider-Man that the majority of respondents answered as having seen in the theater. Sixty-two people or 55.9 percent of all survey respondents answered that they had seen this film. Of those 62 respondents, 66.1 percent were males while 33.8 percent were females. Spider-Man stands out for a few reasons. First, it was the only film that the majority of people who answered the survey said they had seen. Next, it was the only film where a majority of people in one demographic, males, said they had seen the film. Finally, it was the film with some of the most well-established source material behind it. Besides the original
comic book, which has been published since 1963, the Spider-Man character has appeared in numerous spin-off magazines and the most television shows and cartoons, including a popular show that ran on the Fox network from 1994-1998.

Due to the amount of people that saw this film, it was not surprising that the film with the second highest number of respondents, who answered that they saw the film, was Spider-Man 2. In total, 48 people or 43.2 percent of all respondents said that they had seen this film. Of those 48 people, 62.5 percent were males and 37.5 percent were females. These results were also as expected. While the original film Spider-Man did very well at the box office and was well received by critics, sequels in general do not typically attract more viewers to the box office. Of all the blockbuster films in U.S. history, only 23 times did a sequel out gross its predecessor, compared to the 48 times an original out grossed its sequel (All-Time Box Office, 2004). In fact, being a sequel might very well have been the reason many people decided to see this film. Of all those who answered that they attended Spider-Man 2 in the theater, only 20.8 percent hadn’t viewed the first Spider-Man movie in the theater. Still, this was difficult to determine since that population could have viewed the original Spider-Man movie on video.

The third highest viewed film was X-Men with 34 respondents or 30.6 percent of respondents saying that they saw this movie. The male demographic carried the bulk of this film’s viewership with 73.5 percent while females comprised 26.5 percent. The sequel to this film, much like with the Spider-Man franchise, saw less respondents answering that they had seen the movie, however, the drop off was not as great. For X2: X-Men United, 32 respondents or 28.8 percent of the total surveyed population said that they had seen this film. The male demographic that comprised viewership to this
film rose slightly to 75 percent with female viewership dipping slightly to 25 percent. If a comic book fan from 1979 was transported to today, they might find these results interesting. When the comic book *Uncanny X-Men* first came out, it was not considered a very popular book. The characters never enjoyed much cartoon success or a live action show. However, the 1980s changed all that. During that decade the *X-Men* comic book flourished, becoming the most successful comic book of all time. In addition, a popular Saturday morning cartoon featuring the characters ran from 1992-1997 with another one airing from 2000-2003. It could have been this later onslaught of popularity that led to over a quarter of the respondents to see each *X-Men* film respectively.

![Bar Chart](image-url)
The final two study films saw very low viewership among respondents. Only 17 respondents, making up 15.3 percent of all those surveyed, saw *Hulk*. Seventy and one half percent of these respondents were male while females made up 29.4 percent. The amount of respondents who saw *Daredevil* was 14 or 12.6 percent of all respondents. From those 14, 85.7 percent of those who had seen the film were males and 14.3 percent were females. Not surprisingly, the films with the highest respondent rates were also the ones that grossed the most at the box office. The only exception was with the film *X2: X-Men United*, which significantly out-grossed its predecessor *X-Men*, but also rode the waves of much better critical accolades.

Bar Chart

![Bar Chart Image]
When asked to choose a maximum of three factors from a list of 12 that most influenced their decision to see at least one of the study films, 56.2 percent of respondents who has seen at least one study film indicated that Television Commercials for the film had the most impact on them. The second highest factor was Movie Previews for the film with 52.8 percent of respondents. Next came Peer Recommendations, which garnered 46.1 percent of respondents, and the fourth highest factor that influenced people's decision to see a film and tallied 25.8 percent of respondents was the Actor or Actress in the film.

Bar Chart
The fifth highest factor influencing respondents' decisions to see at least one of the study films was the Comic Book starring characters from the movie with 21.3 percent. The next two factors that influenced respondents' decisions to see at least one of the study films was Television Shows starring the characters from the films and Critics' Reviews of the film, which both received 14.6 percent.

The numbers that were posted for the influence of source material on films, including Comic Books and Television Shows, are almost in line with what the author hypothesized. They are both rank in the top half of respondents' reasons for going to see at least one of the study films; however, their influence falls well short of other factors such as Television Commercials, Movie Previews and Peer Recommendations. Clearly, these materials influenced some people, but the main influence still seems to be traditional marketing techniques. Yet, if you combined the results from the factors of Comic Books and Television Shows, one found that the percentage jumped to 36 percent, which placed all source material as the fourth highest-ranking factor, well ahead of the factor Actor or Actress in the film.

Response rates for the bottom half of the factors were as follows: "Other" with 13.5 percent, Video Games based on the characters in the films with 7.9 percent, Print Ads for the film with 6.7 percent, Took Child to see the film with 3.4 percent and Merchandise based on characters from the film with 1.1 percent.

Looking at factors influencing people's decisions to see at least one of the study films from exclusively the male demographic, Movie Previews topped the list with 47.6 percent of men listing this as a factor, while 46 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor and 31.7 percent listed Peer Recommendations as a factor. The factors of Comic
Books and Television Shows did each move up one spot as 17.1 percent of males listed Comic Books as a factor and 15.9 percent listed Television Shows featuring the characters as a factor. Once again, if one combined these two factors into one source material heading, the percentage jumped to 33 percent, which made it third among factors for males. Rounding out the top half of factors was Critic's Reviews and Actor or Actress in the film, both of which 14.3 percent of males listed as a contributing factor.

The results of the bottom half of factors that influenced males to see at least one of the study films was as follows: Video Games based on characters from the film and “Other” with 9.5 percent, Print Ads for the film with 6.3 percent, and Merchandise based on characters from the film and Took Child to see the film with 1.6 percent.

For the female demographic of the influences that affected their decision to see at least one of the study films, the top three factors were Television Commercials, Movie Previews and Peer Recommendations. Television Commercials and Peer Recommendation were listed as the top two factors with 43.8 percent each, and Movie Previews saw 35.4 percent of females listing that as a factor. Rounding out the top half of influences for females was Actor or Actress in a film, which 29.2 percent listed as a factor, “Other,” which 12.5 percent listed as a factor and Critics' Reviews of the film, which 8.3 percent listed as a factor.

Making up the bottom half of factors in the female demographic was as follows: Televisions Shows featuring the characters in the films with 6.3 percent, Print Ads for the film, Took Child to see the film and Comic Book based featuring the characters from the film with 4.2 percent each, and Video Games based on characters in the films with 2.1
percent. If one combined the results from the female demographic for Comic Books and Television Shows, it yielded 10.5 percent, which ranked as only the sixth highest factor.

Not unexpectedly, the influence of Comic Books and Television Shows featuring these superheroes was much more of an influence for males to see the study films than females. As comic books and action cartoons are marketed more toward males, these results are natural. One other factor that greatly differed between the genders was Actor or Actress in the film. Whereas that factor was only chosen by 14.3 percent of males and ranked in the bottom half of factors, 29.2 percent of females chose that as a factor, ranking it fourth among females.

Bar Chart
It is no surprise that Television Commercials, Movie Previews and Peer Recommendations finished in the top three of factors that most influenced audiences' decisions to see at least one of the study films. An examination of general movie going behavior from this survey confirms much of the previous findings. Of all those surveyed, 49.5 percent said that Movie Previews had Much Influence on their decision to see a film. Over a quarter of those surveyed, or 25.2 percent, said that Previews have an Extreme Influence over their decision to see a movie. In addition, 18.9 percent said that Previews had Some Influence.

The numbers did not change much in the male demographic. Among males, 42.9 percent of males said that Previews had Much Influence on their movie-going behaviors, 25.4 percent said that Previews had an Extreme Influence on their decision and 22.2 percent said that Previews had Some Influence on their decision. Among females, 58.3 percent that Previews had Much Influence on them, 25.4 percent said Previews had an Extreme Influence and 14.6 percent said it had Some Influence.
Looking at the overall respondents to the survey, one saw that 47.7 percent of
those surveyed said that Peer Recommendations had Much Influence on their decision to
see a film, 30.3 percent said that Peer Recommendations had Some Influence on their
decision to see a film and 19.3 percent said that Peer Recommendations had an Extreme
Influence on their decision to see a film. Clearly, respondents find the recommendations
of peers very influential; however, they do not find it as influential as movie previews.

Breaking these results down among males, the statistics once again mirrored those
of the overall respondents. Among males, 46.8 percent said that Peer Recommendations
had Much Influence on their decision to see a movie, 29 percent said that Peer
Recommendations had Some Influence and 19.4 percent said that Peer Recommendations
had an Extreme Influence.

The female demographic results were also very close to the overall results with
48.9 percent saying that Peer Recommendations had Much Influence on their decision to
see a movie, 31.5 percent said that Peer Recommendations had Some Influence and 19.1
percent said that Peer Recommendations had an Extreme Influence.

Bar Chart

Although the overall influence of Television Commercials was not as great as Movie Previews and Peer Recommendations, the influence was still very apparent as over one-third or 36.9 percent of overall respondents said that TV Commercials have Much Influence on their decision to see a movie. In addition, 36 percent said that TV Commercials had Some Influence and 14.4 percent said that TV Commercials had an Extreme Influence.

The influence of TV Commercials dipped among males as 38.1 percent said that this factor has only Some Influence, 34.9 percent said that this factor has Much Influence
and 12.7 percent said this factor had an Extreme Influence. However, 12.7 percent of males also said that TV Commercials had Little Influence on their decision to see a film. The female demographic was more in line with the overall results. Among females, 39.6 percent said that TV Commercials had Much Influence in their decision to see a film, 33.3 percent said the factor had Some Influence and 16.7 percent said that this factor had an Extreme Influence.

**Bar Chart**

Influence started to wane with the rest of the factors. Critics’ Reviews ranked in the middle of factors that influenced respondents’ decisions to see a study film. Those results are also mirrored in the overall movie-going influences. Of those surveyed, 30.6
percent of respondents said that Critics' Reviews had Some Influence on their decision to see a film, 27.9 percent said that this factor had Little Influence and 20.7 percent said that this factor had Much Influence.

Among males, Critics' Reviews had slightly more influence on their decision to see a film as 31.7 percent of males said this factor had Some Influence on their movie-going habits, 25.4 percent said that this factor had Much Influence and 22.2 percent said that this factor had Little Influence. The influence of Critics' Reviews among females dips as 35.4 percent of this demographic said that this factor had Little Influence over their decision to see a film, 29.2 percent said that this factor had Some Influence and 14.6 percent said that this factor had Much Influence.

The lowest influence on respondents was Print Ads. Among overall respondents, 45.9 percent said that Print Ads had Little Influence on their decision to see a film, 25.2 percent said that this factor had Some Influence on their decision to see a film and 21.6 percent said that this factor had No Influence. Among males, 42.9 percent said that Print Ads had Little Influence on their decision to see a film, 30.2 percent that this factor had No Influence while 19 percent said that this factor had Some Influence. The female demographic continued to rank Print Ads low as 50 percent said this factor had Little Influence over their decision to see a film, 33.3 percent said that this factor had Some
Influence and 10.4 percent said that this factor had No Influence.

**Bar Chart**

Film merchandise has become a large component of movie marketing. In addition to raising money, the merchandise also helps to raise awareness for a movie by generating symbols that instantly become identifiable with a film. When this age demographic was asked if movie merchandise had any influence in raising awareness for a film, 38.7 percent of overall respondents said it had Little Influence, 34.2 percent said it had Some Influence and 13.5 percent said it had No Influence.

In the male demographic, the statistics were similar as 33.3 percent of males said that Merchandise had Little Influence in raising awareness for a film, 33.3 percent said it
had Some Influence and 17.5 percent said it had No Influence. Statistics changed slightly among females as 45.8 percent of surveyed females said Merchandise had Little Influence in raising awareness for a film, 35.4 percent said that it had Some Influence and 10.4 percent said that Merchandise had Much Influence.

Looking further into respondents' familiarity with source material, results from 110 people revealed that the majority did in fact either watch shows featuring the study film superheroes or read those characters' comic books in their lifetime. Overall, 33.6 percent of respondents or 31 students said that they had seen a show featuring the characters from the study films at least one time Several Years Ago. Thirty-one respondents or 28.2 percent said they had Never seen a show featuring those characters. Twenty-one respondents or 19.1 percent said they last saw these characters in a show 10+ Years Ago with 16 respondents or 14.5 percent answering that Several Weeks Ago was the last time they saw a show featuring these characters. Finally, five respondents or 4.5 percent overall said the last time they watched one of these shows was Several Days Ago.

Males comprised the majority of the category Several Years Ago with 27 of the 37 respondents. Nineteen percent of males said the last time they had contact with shows featuring the characters was 10+ Years Ago and 17.5 percent said the last time they watched the shows were Several Weeks Ago. The percentage of males who said they Never watched the shows featuring these characters was 15.9 percent while 4.8 percent said the last time they viewed these shows was Several Days Ago.

Of the 31 respondents who said they Never viewed shows featuring the characters from the source material, 21 were females. In addition, 21.3 percent of females said the
last time they viewed these shows was Several Years Ago while 19.1 percent said 10+ Years Ago was the last time they watched the shows. Only 10.6 percent of total females said they had contact with the shows Several Weeks Ago with 4.3 percent saying they viewed a show Several Days Ago.

In terms of reading comic books featuring these characters, 53.2 percent of all respondents said they Never read them, and 23.4 percent said the last time they read them was 10+ Years Ago. These results were somewhat shocking. Comic books have been progressively marketed to this age demographic for well over 10 years, yet these results showed that the majority of respondents never read any comic books featuring these characters. Meanwhile, 18.9 percent of respondents said Several Years Ago was the last time they read a comic featuring these characters. Also, 3.6 percent of respondents said Several Weeks Ago was the last time they read these books and 0.9 percent said Several Days Ago was the last time they read these books.

Surprisingly, 34.9 percent of males said that they Never read a comic book featuring the characters from the study films. This was unexpected since comic books are typically a male dominated media and this age demographic is the prime marketing audience. In addition, it seemed quite odd that over one-third of the males who took this survey Never read a comic featuring these characters, especially since these characters were at the height of their popularity even when this demographic were youths. The next most common response among males for this question was Several Years Ago, of which 30.2 percent of males answered. In addition, 28.6 percent of males said 10+ Years Ago was the last time they read a comic book featuring these characters, 4.8 percent of male respondents said they last time they read these comic books was Several Weeks Ago and
1.6 percent of male respondents said Several Days Ago was the last time they read one of these comic books.

In the female demographic, it was 77.1 percent of respondents who said that they Never read a comic book featuring a character from one of the study films. It was 16.7 percent of female respondents who said that it has been 10+ Years Ago since they last read one of these books, 4.2 percent who listed Several Years Ago, and 2.1 percent who listed Several Weeks Ago since they last read one of these books.

These results are considered somewhat of a surprise. The most recent categories, Several Days Ago and Several Weeks Ago, had the lowest response rates overall, yet this age demographic is the target audience for this source material. As expected, though, the rate of women who Never had contact with any of the source material greatly outnumbered those males in that category.

Spider-Man was the most viewed film among those who responded to the survey. Spider-Man is also the character that has had the most consistently popular source material. Did more people see this film based on its source material than any of the other films? Indeed, among those who saw Spider-Man a greater percentage of people listed Comic Books and Television Shows featuring the character as a factor that influenced their decision to see this film than those who saw at least one of the other study films.

Among viewers of Spider-Man, 22.6 percent listed Comic Books as a factor, which was up from 17.1 percent among overall viewers of the study films. In addition, 21 percent of Spider-Man viewers listed Television Shows based on the character as a factor that influenced their decision to see a film over 11.7 percent that listed Television Shows as a factor among overall viewers of study films.
Not surprisingly, Television Commercials and Movie Previews had the most influence over people's decisions to see the film. Among viewers of Spider-Man, 67.7 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor for seeing the film, with 62.9 percent listing Movie Previews, indicating that it was the traditional marketing techniques that had the most impact on the financial success of Spider-Man among this demographic. This film was also well received by the critics. This would account for the 50 percent of viewers of this film that listed Peer Recommendations as a factor. Generating a word-of-mouth buzz is a marketing technique that movie studios use to increase box office gross for a movie that the critics' agree is worth seeing. Using the starlet power of Kirsten Dunst in a starring role in Spider-Man could account for the increase in the percentage of viewers who listed Actor/Actress as a factor (30.6 percent) for seeing this movie.

Since Comic Books and Television Shows were clearly not a top factor in seeing movies, were the people who watched Spider-Man just not reading comic books or watching cartoons with superheroes? The data showed that this was partially true when it comes to comic books. In total, 45.2 percent of viewers who watched Spider-Man said that they Never read a comic book featuring the study film characters. Twenty-nine percent of viewers said they read comic books Several Years Ago, 22.6 percent said they read comic books 10+ Years Ago, 4.8 percent said they read comic books Several Weeks Ago and 1.6 percent read comic books Several Days Ago.
The data for Television Shows for when the last time viewers of Spider-Man watched a show featuring one of the characters from the study films showed different results. Forty-three and one half percent of viewers said they watched a Television Show with one of the characters Several Years Ago, 22.6 percent said they Never watched a Television Show, 21 percent said they watched a Television Show 10+ Years Ago, 10 percent said they watched a Television Show Several Weeks Ago and 6.4 percent watched a Television Show Several Days Ago.

Spider-Man 2 made great use of marketing techniques, and the public seemingly responded. Sixty percent of viewers of this film listed either Television Commercials or
Movie Previews as a factor that influenced their decision to see this film. Strong reviews helped this movie as 48 percent listed Peer Recommendations as a factor and 28 percent listed Actor or Actress as a factor. In terms of source material, 24 percent listed Comic Books as a factor and 20 percent listed Television Shows as a factor.

The comic books featuring the X-Men have had great success since the 1980s. Whereas the series struggled for popularity during its first 20 years of publication, the book quickly became the most successful comic book of all time in the last two decades, which would account for the timeframe that this demographic would have been reading comic books. This was reflected when 30.6 percent of the viewers of X-Men listed Comic Books as a factor for seeing that movie, which accounts for the highest percent of any of the study films. Surprisingly, Television Shows based on the characters only accounted for 19.4 percent of the viewers. This came after the popular 1990s cartoon show, which also should have attracted this demographic. Among viewers of the X-Men, 66.7 percent listed Movie Previews as a factor, 52.8 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor, 47.1 percent listed Peer Recommendations as a factor and 33.3 percent listed Actor or Actress as a factor.

The sequel of the X-Men movie, X2: X-Men United, had similar results. Among viewers of this film, 57.6 percent listed Movie Previews as a factor that influenced their decision to see a film, 51.6 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor, 33.3 percent listed Peer Recommendations as a factor, 27.3 percent listed either Actor or Actress or Comic Books as a factor and 24.2 percent listed Television Shows as a factor.

Apparently the re-runs of the 1978-1982 live-action show starring the Hulk were not a strong enough influence on Hulk viewers to see that film, as only 11.1 percent listed
Television Shows a factor. Comic Books did not fare much better as only 16.7 percent of viewers listed this as a factor. Marketing once again prevailed as 77.8 percent listed Movie Previews as a factor and 66.7 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor. Poorer reviews for this film would account for the fact that only 22.2 percent of viewers list Peer Recommendations as a factor and 16.7 percent listed Actor or Actress as a factor.

The study film with the lowest attendance and least amount of source material had to rely heavily on marketing. Among viewers of Daredevil, 73.3 percent listed Movie Previews as a factor influencing their decision to see the film and 40 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor. The high star power of this film, which featured Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, Colin Farrell and Michael Clarke Duncan, prompted 40 percent of viewers for this film to list Actor or Actress as a factor. Mixed reviews could be seen as only 26.7 percent of viewers for this film listed Peer Reviews as a factor. Weak source material yielded low percentages among viewers who listed Comic Books and Television Shows as a factor, as the results were 20 percent and 13.3 percent respectively.
Chapter V
Conclusions

The impact of well-established source material has a minimal effect on the financial success of comic book movies. Rather, movie previews, television commercials and word-of-mouth recommendations most affected survey respondents' decisions to see the study films. However, one should not fall into the trap that source material did not rank as a top factor because people simply do not read comic books. In fact, the results showed that around 47 percent of all survey respondents had at one point read a comic book featuring a character from the study films and over 70 percent had at one point watched a television show based on a character from the study films. However, most of the respondents did state that it had been several years since they had any contact with this type of superhero source material. When it came for audiences to decide whether a superhero film was worth their cash, nostalgia clearly was not a factor.

The sub-hypothesis, which stated that television shows featuring the study characters will have a greater influence on people's decision to see at least one of the study films must be refuted. More respondents did say they had at one point watched a television show featuring at least one of the characters from the study films compared to respondents who had read a comic book featuring at least one of the study film characters. However, more people listed comic books featuring the study film characters over television shows featuring the study film characters as a factor for going to see at least one of the study films. This could possibly mean that printed material made a greater lasting impression on respondents.
Breaking the results down by gender did not reveal any surprising results. As expected, a greater percentage of males saw at least one of the study films, had contact with the source material the study films were based on, and listed source material as a factor for seeing the study films.

Movie studios need not worry, although this new comic book film genre is emerging, classic forms of marketing are still their best bet. If they wanted to, studios could make great changes to these beloved characters and still see a pretty decent payday because “satisfying the fans” isn’t necessarily important. Regular readers of comic books do not have the numbers to push these films into blockbuster status. In fact, this author would even go so far as to comic book readers’ total portion of the box office is relatively small. Therefore, studios need only to correctly market a superhero film with a good story, big budget, right personal and synergistic relationship. Survey results show that movie-goers who even are not fans of the source material will at least see the film. This could explain why *Catwoman*, based on a very popular character from DC’s Batman comic books did very poorly at the box office. While certainly most Americans know about the Catwoman character from numerous comic books, television shows and movies, this particular film lacked the good story (universally deplored by critics) and synergistic relationship to make it all financially come together successfully.

The San Diego Comic Con only really provides studios with a captive audience so they can showcase their films and generate word-of-mouth recommendations. Even this has only a minor effect. The movie *Sin City*, based on the unknown and originally low-selling series of graphic novels by Frank Miller, grossed $29.1 million opening weekend
not because the small percentage of fans loyal to the book gave their approval, but because of the aggressive television campaign the studio has engaged in.

So what exactly do movie studios see in comic books anyway? Why is Hollywood supporting the current comic book industry by buying the rights to all these characters? One could give the old answer about Hollywood being lazy. Comic books, especially the ones that go on to become blockbuster movies, have been around for over 40 years. During that time, countless stories have been written that unfold in much the same fashion as a movie. Some might even say that some of these stories were very good (or else why would people continue reading them?). In addition, comic books generally provide all the action and excitement that can translate into a big-budget, special effects-filled, Hollywood summer action movie.

By turning comic books into movies, studios are saved the trouble of having to come up with an original character and testing it on the American, movie-going public. The studios then avoid risking that the character might not be well received. Instead, they can use these 40-year-old characters which have already gone through decades of audience testing. As a bonus, there are also decades worth of stories that can be told. All a screenwriter needs to do is adapt one for film.

The second reason for the appeal to acquire the rights to a comic book is the massive potential for merchandising. The characters naturally lend themselves to action figures, clothing, video games, dolls and other items that appeal to children. The special effects required for making a comic book film, the history of the character and the process of adapting the character to film are all elements that are often included on the DVD bonus features, which can be used to push video sales.
Licensing accounts for so much of comic books publishers' income that they can almost stop publishing stories entirely and just option out the backlog of characters. This would only enable them to survive for so long as eventually they would run out of useable characters or the public's interest in comic book movies would wane. If publishers were to bleed their library of characters dry, they would have to come up with new characters that they could then test on their readers. If successful, this could become a valuable piece of property.

If the audiences' interest in comic book movies declines, publishers are going to find themselves having to rely on their books to drive profits since licensing will drop. Since the readership for monthly comic books remains relatively low, publishers are going to have to find new audiences and outlets for their books as many traditional places that used to carry comics no longer do. It has actually already taken these steps by pushing their graphic novels in bookstores with great success.

The author must admit that the relatively narrow scope of the survey is not enough to solidify this paper's theories into absolute facts. However, the relatively small percentages that source material played in impacting the financial success of comic book movies suggests that even if this survey's population were broadened, source material would still not be a significant influence.

The author does feel, though, that further research can prove useful, especially if other age groups are tested. Today's youth population has virtually no contacts with comic books, but it would still be interesting to see whether the numbers posted by the young adult population declined any among children. Also, America's over-40 population would have been around right when these comic book characters made their
debut and were at the height of their popularity. Among this population that actually saw the films, did nostalgia play a factor in their decision to see the films? Another interesting area of research would be to take a look at these comic book stories that studios claim to use for their films, and find out how faithful the movies are to the printed material. Using critical reviews and box office draws, one can analyze how successful a film is the closer it stays to the source material or how successful it is by taking more liberties with the stories.


Appendix A

Survey
Dear Sir or Madame:

I thank you for taking a moment to fill out this survey on the movie marketing of comic book films. As a Seton Hall University graduate student in the Master of Corporate and Public Communication Program, I am required to present a Thesis consisting of original research on my chosen topic of studying movie marketing tactics for comic book films, and how well-established source materials impacts the financial success of those films.

Your input will be vital to the fulfillment of this requirement, and I can assure you that all information you provide is for academic purposes. The survey should only take 5-10 minutes, but the time you spend on it will be instrumental to this assignment. As a reward for assistance, I will be happy to share the survey results with you upon request. I thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Joseph Gregov
Graduate Student
Seton Hall University
1. Please mark the following movies you have seen in the theater. If you have seen none, you may skip Section 2:

a. __ Spider-Man
b. __ Spider-Man 2
c. __ X-Men
d. __ X2: X-Men United
e. __ Hulk
f. __ Daredevil

2. Please mark the top 3 factors that most influenced your decision to see any of the above-mentioned movies:

a. __ TV Commercials for the film
b. __ Billboards and other Print Ads for the film
c. __ Critics' Reviews of the film
d. __ Movie Previews (Trailers) for the film
e. __ Video Games based on characters in the film
f. __ Merchandise based on characters from the film
g. __ Took Child to see the film
h. __ TV Shows starring characters from the film
i. __ Comic Books starring characters from the film
j. __ Actor/Actress in the film
k. __ Friend/Family/Peer's recommendation of the film
l. __ Other ________________________________

3. Using the following criteria as a guide, please circle your answer the following questions based on your general movie going behavior:

No influence Little influence Some influence Much influence Extreme influence

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<td>b. How much do billboards and other print ads influence your decision to see a film?</td>
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c. How much do critics’ reviews of a movie influence your decision to see a film?

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d. How much do movie previews influence your decision to see a film?

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e. How much do friends/family recommendations influence your decision to see a film?

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4. Using the following criteria as a guide, please circle your answer to the following the questions:

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How much do commercial items (video games, action figures, clothing, etc.) featuring movie logos raise your awareness for a movie?

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5. Please check the answer that is most appropriate:

a. When was the last time you watched a TV show based on Spider-Man, X-Men or the Hulk (either on television or video)?

   ____ several days ago  ____ several weeks ago  ____ several years ago  ____ 10+ years ago  ____ never

   If you can recall, please list the TV show(s):

b. When was the last time you read a comic book where the characters of Spider-Man, Hulk, the X-Men or Daredevil made an appearance?

   ____ several days ago  ____ several weeks ago  ____ several years ago  ____ 10+ years ago  ____ never

6. Please mark the appropriate demographic information.

   a. Age:  ____ 18-34  ____ 35-44  ____ 45+

   b. Gender:  ____ Female  ____ Male
Television Shows a factor. Comic Books did not fare much better as only 16.7 percent of viewers listed this as a factor. Marketing once again prevailed as 77.8 percent listed Movie Previews as a factor and 66.7 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor. Poorer reviews for this film would account for the fact that only 22.2 percent of viewers list Peer Recommendations as a factor and 16.7 percent listed Actor or Actress as a factor.

The study film with the lowest attendance and least amount of source material had to rely heavily on marketing. Among viewers of Daredevil, 73.3 percent listed Movie Previews as a factor influencing their decision to see the film and 40 percent listed Television Commercials as a factor. The high star power of this film, which featured Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, Colin Farrell and Michael Clarke Duncan, prompted 40 percent of viewers for this film to list Actor or Actress as a factor. Mixed reviews could be seen as only 25.7 percent of viewers for this film listed Peer Reviews as a factor. Weak source material yielded low percentages among viewers who listed Comic Books and Television Shows as a factor, as the results were 20 percent and 13.3 percent respectively.
Chapter V
Conclusions

The impact of well-established source material has a minimal effect on the financial success of comic book movies. Rather, movie previews, television commercials and word-of-mouth recommendations most affected survey respondents' decisions to see the study films. However, one should not fall into the trap that source material did not rank as a top factor because people simply do not read comic books. In fact, the results showed that around 47 percent of all survey respondents had at one point read a comic book featuring a character from the study films and over 70 percent had at one point watched a television show based on a character from the study films. However, most of the respondents did state that it had been several years since they had any contact with this type of superhero source material. When it came for audiences to decide whether a superhero film was worth their cash, nostalgia clearly was not a factor.

The sub-hypothesis, which stated that television shows featuring the study characters will have a greater influence on people's decision to see at least one of the study films must be refuted. More respondents did say they had at one point watched a television show featuring at least one of the characters from the study films compared to respondents who had read a comic book featuring at least one of the study film characters. However, more people listed comic books featuring the study film characters over television shows featuring the study film characters as a factor for going to see at least one of the study films. This could possibly mean that printed material made a greater lasting impression on respondents.
Breaking the results down by gender did not reveal any surprising results. As expected, a greater percentage of males saw at least one of the study films, had contact with the source material the study films were based on, and listed source material as a factor for seeing the study films.

Movie studios need not worry, although this new comic book film genre is emerging, classic forms of marketing are still their best bet. If they wanted to, studios could make great changes to these beloved characters and still see a pretty decent payday because "satisfying the fans" isn't necessarily important. Regular readers of comic books do not have the numbers to push these films into blockbuster status. In fact, this author would even go so far as to comic book readers' total portion of the box office is relatively small. Therefore, studios need only to correctly market a superhero film with a good story, big budget, right personal and synergistic relationship. Survey results show that movie-goers who even are not fans of the source material will at least see the film. This could explain why Catwoman, based on a very popular character from DC's Batman comic books did very poorly at the box office. While certainly most Americans know about the Catwoman character from numerous comic books, television shows and movies, this particular film lacked the good story (universally deplored by critics) and synergistic relationship to make it all financially come together successfully.

The San Diego Comic Con only really provides studios with a captive audience so they can showcase their films and generate word-of-mouth recommendations. Even this has only a minor effect. The movie Sin City, based on the unknown and originally low-selling series of graphic novels by Frank Miller, grossed $29.1 million opening weekend
not because the small percentage of fans loyal to the book gave their approval, but because of the aggressive television campaign the studio has engaged in.

So what exactly do movie studios see in comic books anyway? Why is Hollywood supporting the current comic book industry by buying the rights to all these characters? One could give the old answer about Hollywood being lazy. Comic books, especially the ones that go on to become blockbuster movies, have been around for over 40 years. During that time, countless stories have been written that unfold in much the same fashion as a movie. Some might even say that some of these stories were very good (or else why would people continue reading them?). In addition, comic books generally provide all the action and excitement that can translate into a big-budget, special effects-filled, Hollywood summer action movie.

By turning comic books into movies, studios are saved the trouble of having to come up with an original character and testing it on the American, movie-going public. The studios then avoid risking that the character might not be well received. Instead, they can use these 40-year-old characters which have already gone through decades of audience testing. As a bonus, there are also decades worth of stories that can be told. All a screenwriter needs to do is adapt one for film.

The second reason for the appeal to acquire the rights to a comic book is the massive potential for merchandising. The characters naturally lend themselves to action figures, clothing, video games, dolls and other items that appeal to children. The special effects required for making a comic book film, the history of the character and the process of adapting the character to film are all elements that are often included on the DVD bonus features, which can be used to push video sales.
Licensing accounts for so much of comic books publishers’ income that they can almost stop publishing stories entirely and just option out the backlog of characters. This would only enable them to survive for so long as eventually they would run out of usable characters or the public’s interest in comic book movies would wane. If publishers were to bleed their library of characters dry, they would have to come up with new characters that they could then test on their readers. If successful, this could become a valuable piece of property.

If the audiences’ interest in comic book movies declines, publishers are going to find themselves having to rely on their books to drive profits since licensing will drop. Since the readership for monthly comic books remains relatively low, publishers are going to have to find new audiences and outlets for their books as many traditional places that used to carry comics no longer do. It has actually already taken these steps by pushing their graphic novels in bookstores with great success.

The author must admit that the relatively narrow scope of the survey is not enough to solidify this paper’s theories into absolute facts. However, the relatively small percentages that source material played in impacting the financial success of comic book movies suggests that even if this survey’s population were broadened, source material would still not be a significant influence.

The author does feel, though, that further research can prove useful, especially if other age groups are tested. Today’s youth population has virtually no contacts with comic books, but it would still be interesting to see whether the numbers posted by the young adult population declined any among children. Also, America’s over-40 population would have been around right when these comic book characters made their
debuted and were at the height of their popularity. Among this population that actually saw the films, did nostalgia play a factor in their decision to see the films? Another interesting area of research would be to take a look at these comic book stories that studios claim to use for their films, and find out how faithful the movies are to the printed material. Using critical reviews and box office draws, one can analyze how successful a film is the closer it stays to the source material or how successful it is by taking more liberties with the stories.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Survey
Dear Sir or Madame:

I thank you for taking a moment to fill out this survey on the movie marketing of comic book films. As a Seton Hall University graduate student in the Master of Corporate and Public Communication Program, I am required to present a Thesis consisting of original research on my chosen topic of studying movie marketing tactics for comic book films, and how well-established source material impacts the financial success of those films.

Your input will be vital to the fulfillment of this requirement, and I can assure you that all information you provide is for academic purposes. The survey should only take 5-10 minutes, but the time you spend on it will be instrumental to this assignment. As a reward for assistance, I will be happy to share the survey results with you upon request. I thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Joseph Gregov
Graduate Student
Seton Hall University
1. Please mark the following movies you have seen in the theater. If you have seen none, you may skip Section 2:

a. __ Spider-Man
b. __ Spider-Man 2
c. __ X-Men
d. __ X2: X-Men United
e. __ Hulk
f. __ Daredevil

2. Please mark the top 3 factors that most influenced your decision to see any of the above-mentioned movies:

a. __ TV Commercials for the film
b. __ Billboards and other Print Ads for the film
c. __ Critics’ Reviews of the film
d. __ Movie Previews (Trailers) for the film
e. __ Video Games based on characters in the film
f. __ Merchandise based on characters from the film
g. __ Took Child to see the film
h. __ TV Shows starring characters from the film
i. __ Comic Books starring characters from the film
j. __ Actor/Actress in the film
k. __ Friend/Family/Peer’s recommendation of the film
l. __ Other

3. Using the following criteria as a guide, please circle your answer the following questions based on your general movie going behavior:

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a. How much do TV commercials for movies influence your decision to see a film?

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b. How much do billboards and other print ads influence your decision to see a film?

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c. How much do critics' reviews of a movie influence your decision to see a film?

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d. How much do movie preview influence your decision to see a film?

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e. How much do friend/family recommendations influence your decision to see a film?

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4. Using the following criteria as a guide, please circle your answer to the following the questions:

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How much do commercial items (video games, action figures, clothing, etc.) featuring movie logos raise your awareness for a movie?

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5. Please check the answer that is most appropriate:

a. When was the last time you watched a TV show based on Spider-Man, X-Men or the Hulk (either on television or video)?
   - ___ several days ago
   - ___ several weeks ago
   - ___ several years ago
   - ___ 10+ years ago
   - ___ never

   If you can recall, please list the TV show(s):

b. When was the last time you read a comic book where the characters of Spider-Man, Hulk, the X-Men or Daredevil made an appearance?
   - ___ several days ago
   - ___ several weeks ago
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   - ___ 10+ years ago
   - ___ never

6. Please mark the appropriate demographic information:

a. Age:  
   - ___ 18-34
   - ___ 35-44
   - ___ 45+

b. Gender:  
   - ___ Female
   - ___ Male