

Transmedia storytelling during the COVID-19 pandemic: Marvel's *WandaVision* and Zack Snyder's *Justice League*

by Luke Webster, Tama Leaver,
and Eleanor Sandry

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the importance of streaming within the context of commercial transmedia strategies. While cinemas have remained closed, studios have used streaming to extend audience engagement, and experiment with transmedia strategies attached to large intellectual properties. This paper seeks to determine how the pandemic affected transmedia and a shift to streaming. Drawing from key scholarly transmedia theory, and industry insights into transmedia best practice, this paper analyses the release of Marvel's *WandaVision* and Zack Snyder's *Justice League* and maps them against the larger transmedia strategies being used by Disney and Warner Bros. to create the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and DC Extended Universe (DCEU), respectively. This research demonstrates that streaming has become the critical component of commercial transmedia. Marvel are using streaming to enhance the integrity of one consistent storyworld. DC are placing greater priority on character than storyworld and using streaming to create a multiverse experience with divergent authorial voices. These varied styles of transmedia storytelling can be attributed to the organisational structures of each parent company, as well as the comic book source material. The pandemic created an opportunity to observe the amplified audience reactions to each approach. As streaming platforms occupy a greater role in transmedia scholarship, these findings will assist in the development of longitudinal research that explores the transformative impact of streaming on commercial transmedia entertainment.

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Background](#)

[Transmedia storytelling methodology](#)

[Corporate structure and creative management foundations](#)

[The MCU](#)

[The DCEU](#)

[#ReleaseTheSnyderCut](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocably altered the commercial media landscape. The Hollywood studios behind large-scale commercial transmedia properties, such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and DC Extended Universe (DCEU), have historically prioritised cinema as the primary mode of content development and distribution, placing narrative content of lesser importance on other platforms (Jenkins, 2013; Flanagan, *et al.*, 2016). However, when the pandemic forced the closure of cinemas, studios had to prioritise streaming as the most viable mode of content distribution and

profitability. Overnight, streaming also became the default choice of entertainment for millions of global citizens forced to isolate and remain at home.

It is too early to comprehend the full impact of the pandemic on commercial entertainment. However, we can start to analyse the prominent role of streaming in the pandemic era in order to understand how this evolving medium may influence the construction of major commercial entertainment transmedia strategies in the future. What effect has the pandemic had on streaming and transmedia? Using two different case studies, Marvel's *WandaVision* and Zack Snyder's *Justice League*, which were both released during the pandemic, we observe how streaming has been utilised in different ways to extend transmedia plans for the MCU and DCEU. Drawing from key scholarly transmedia theory and industry insights, we establish that Marvel are using transmedia to build one coherent storyworld, whilst Warner Bros. are using elements of transmedia and franchising to build several transmedia systems. Through an analysis of *WandaVision*, we observe how the streaming medium gained primary importance for the MCU during the pandemic. Firstly, we investigate how the flexible media conventions of streaming allowed *WandaVision* to broaden the MCU transmedia experience and sustain audience engagement. We then explore how the inter-textual narrative of *WandaVision*, and its location within the library of MCU content on Disney+, allows the show to deepen the meta-narrative experience of the MCU and drive increased consumption of other MCU texts. We then consider how essential streaming will be for Marvel as they continue to consolidate their content into one coherent and continuous transmedia experience. Through the analysis of Zack Snyder's *Justice League*, we observe how the pandemic, and the absence of cinema, afforded streaming a greater cultural cachet. We investigate how the release of this film on streaming allowed Warner Bros. to experiment with transmedia by showcasing a different authorial vision, and exploring alternative facets, of their established DC Extended Universe. We then consider the passionate audience response to Zack Snyder's *Justice League* and identify opportunities for Warner Bros. to leverage this kind of audience engagement to advance their evolving DC Multiverse transmedia strategy. The pandemic placed a spotlight on the unique attributes of streaming and in doing so, cemented the critical importance of streaming to the commercial entertainment industry. Furthermore, the versatility of the platform will allow studios to continue experimenting with different models of transmedia storytelling.



Background

Cinema is commonly a central component of major commercial entertainment franchises (Jenkins, 2013). The global box office is frequently cited to demonstrate the financial success of a film studio and the performance of their intellectual property. However, in recent years, studio-owned streaming platforms have proliferated. Streaming allows studios to curate content libraries, oversee the direct delivery of content to consumers, and receive the full percentage of profits without sharing with distributors or cinema houses. The pandemic accelerated the strategic importance of streaming within the matrix of commercial entertainment platforms.

Disney has been able to embrace, and take advantage of, the sudden shift to streaming, through their Disney+ streaming platform. The stable of studios owned by Disney — including Pixar, Lucasfilm, and Marvel — have been part of a company-wide experiment in pandemic media release strategies designed to find new ways to monetise the release of feature films in the absence of cinemas. Disney's release of *Artemis Fowl*, *Hamilton*, and Pixar's *Soul* direct to streaming was a way to boost subscriptions for Disney+ and generate ongoing revenue for the company (D'Alessandro and Hipes, 2020). Disney also experimented with an exclusive streaming release window, charging Disney+ subscribers an additional fee to watch the feature film *Mulan*. These initiatives did not recoup the revenues anticipated for each film if they were released theatrically (Hughes, 2020). However, it is evident that the pandemic inspired Disney to explore strategies for gaining additional revenue through streaming.

Under Disney's stewardship, Marvel has been developing increasingly coordinated transmedia plans for the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). Kevin Feige, the architect of the MCU, has overseen the deliberate expansion of the MCU storyworld across media platforms (Flanagan, *et al.*, 2016). This allowed the company to temporarily focus exclusively on releasing MCU content designed for streaming. Disney's episodic release of Lucasfilm's *The Mandalorian* was a boon for Disney+ and proved to be an effective way to keep fans engaged with *Star Wars*. During the pandemic, it made sense for Marvel to delay the release of the film *Black Widow* in the hope that cinemas would reopen, and

instead stream weekly instalments of their new streaming show *WandaVision*. The show offered Marvel a precious opportunity to reconnect audiences with the MCU during a global downturn in content.

In comparison, Warner Bros. made a company-wide decision to release all feature films and new content on their new streaming platform, HBO Max, throughout 2021 (WarnerMedia, 2020). The move drew furious criticism from high profile directors and sparked legal inquiries into financial models of content creation and distribution with no box office revenues to share (Ziffren, 2020). It also complicated Warner Brothers' plans for their interconnected DC Extended Universe (DCEU), which was already undergoing a substantial shift in tone and direction.

Zack Snyder had once been the key visionary for the DCEU, but a personal tragedy forced him to leave this role during the production of *Justice League* (Kit, 2017). Warner Bros. appointed Joss Whedon to finalise the film, however the resulting version, dubbed 'Josstice League' by a subsection of fans, presented a vastly different vision for the DCEU from the one Snyder had established, which suggested to fans that the studio may have meddled with Snyder's artistic choices. In 2019, after a strong social media campaign for Warner Bros. to release the 'Snyder Cut' of the film, WarnerMedia, the parent company of Warner Bros., approved the production of *Zack Snyder's Justice League*, hoping the project would attract new subscribers to HBO Max (Couch, 2021). At that time, releasing the film on streaming would have been similar to releasing a film directly to DVD in years past, marking it as less valued than a cinematic release. However, Warner Brothers' prioritisation of streaming during the pandemic meant the film premiered alongside new DCEU projects once intended for cinemas, offering audiences multiple versions of the same storyworld.

At the 2020 DC online fan event, DC Fandome, Warner Bros. told fans that the DCEU should be considered part of a broader DC Multiverse, including content that exists concurrently across media platforms (DC Fandome, 2020; Lang, 2021). Studio executives had already publicly referred to *Zack Snyder's Justice League* as a "storytelling cul-de-sac" (Barnes, 2020) suggesting Snyder's vein of the DC Multiverse would not be given priority moving forward. However, following the release of the film, fan demand to see more of Snyder's vision for the DCEU has been greatly amplified, demonstrating the increased cultural cachet streaming garnered during the pandemic. This situation has created a unique complexity for Warner Bros. as the studio continues their traditional franchised approach to media production, while also navigating their desire to explore large-scale interconnected storytelling.



Transmedia storytelling methodology

The MCU and DCEU are both examples of evolving Hollywood transmedia storytelling practices. Transmedia storytelling is a communication strategy that allows the coordinated and connected distribution of information across a range of media platforms to create deeply immersive experiences that compel audiences to become passionately invested. Transmedia storytelling is not a new phenomenon and well-crafted narratives with compelling characters, told at the right time, have traversed media platforms throughout the ages (Scolari, *et al.*, 2014). Take for example stories from the *Bible*, or the legends of Robin Hood and King Arthur. Likewise, Marvel and DC characters and storylines have travelled beyond their comic book origins and into the global pop-culture psyche.

The convergence of media technologies affords storytellers the tools to create these kinds of immersive entertainment experiences far more easily than was historically possible (Jenkins 2006a; Scolari, *et al.*, 2014). As a result, different transmedia formations are taking shape within popular culture. A deeper understanding of emergent transmedia structures can be forged through reference to transmedia scholarship, as well as industry-based insights into production methodologies.

Henry Jenkins' (2006a) observations of media convergence, and articulation of the possibilities for transmedia storytelling to flourish in this environment, have provided the cornerstone for academic and industrial considerations of transmedia. While definitions of the practice have continued to evolve, Jenkins' (2006a) original core tenets for transmedia storytelling still form a good baseline for measuring best practice. Firstly, texts should unfold "across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinct and valuable contribution to the whole" [1]. Secondly, each new text should use the strengths of its respective platform, ensuring "each medium does what it does best" [2]. Finally, the process of consuming these texts should offer audiences a meta-narrative experience greater than the sum of its parts, which is the ultimate defining trait of transmedia (Jenkins, 2006a).

A range of prominent industry professionals involved in the creation of high profile commercial transmedia projects, have also offered practical and pragmatic insights into transmedia development. Jeff Gomez, for example, has continued to be a prominent voice in transmedia storytelling production, advocating for storytelling groups to establish a unified aspirational and creative vision, and develop “architectures for dialogue” (Gomez in Bernstein, 2013) with the audience, to maximize opportunities for immersion and participation. Likewise, Andrea Phillips’ (2012) *A creator’s guide to transmedia storytelling* offers practical advice for implementing expansive, multi-platform experiences, emphasizing the need for careful planning and effective fan engagement.

For both academics and practitioners, the capacity for transmedia storytelling to create a meta-narrative is profound because of its ability to drive audiences to become deeply invested in a story world, over long periods of time (Mittell, 2013; Phillips, 2012; Gomez in Van Gool, 2010; Jenkins, 2006a). Dedicated audiences become fandoms that can be motivated by the desire to solve puzzles and search for information, opportunities to categorise knowledge and understand storyworld logic, as well as the chance to use entertainment to express elements of self and earn cultural capital (Jenkins, 2006b).

However, the commercial transmedia strategies employed by major Hollywood studios do not always match the idealised versions discussed in academia and among key practitioners. The siloed production of media content brought about by franchising continues to influence modern entertainment practices, making the simultaneous production of inter-connected content across multiple media a difficult task (Johnson, 2013). Jenkins extended his initial theories, observing the prevalence of the more common “mothership” [3] model of Hollywood transmedia, whereby the texts on one media platform occupy a greater importance than the other media elements within the transmedia system. Other elements on other platforms often exist in service of the central texts. The commercial ownership of entertainment means there is also a constant tension between supporting fan engagement and worrying fan activity may at some points be at odds with the plans of the corporate copyright holders, which may discourage content owners from encouraging fan dialogue (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013). Practitioners and academics now generally agree that commercial transmedia storytelling is often not a highly coordinated practice, instead being a more fluid cultural practice (Fast and Örnebring, 2017). In this context, we can observe a variety of different transmedia models emerging.



Corporate structure and creative management foundations

To understand the differences between the transmedia structure of the MCU and DCEU, we must consider the style of each respective comic book company, including their storytelling strategies, as well as the corporate practices and preferences of their respective parent companies.

DC Comics was established in 1934 and, with the notable exception of Batman, is renowned for its stable of super-human characters with God-like abilities, such as Superman, Wonder Woman, and Green Lantern. DC adventures predominately take place in fictional locations, such as Gotham, Metropolis and Themyscira. Many DC characters have become so iconic and well suited to a mythological storytelling approach that they have made an easy transition across platforms, such as the 1940s Superman radio serials and Fleischer cartoons (Freeman, 2014). The characters have continued to be reinvented throughout the years, take, for example, the Batman TV show (1966–1968). The DC Comics storyworld is a multiverse, meaning different versions of characters can exist on separate worlds with different continuities, at the same time. DC have used company-wide story events, such as *Infinite Crisis* and *New 52* that provide readers with a compelling reason for resetting storyworld continuity, when multiverse storylines have become too unwieldy and convoluted.

In 1969, Warner Bros. was acquired by the same parent company that owned DC Comics (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2021). DC characters could now be expanded across a multitude of Warner Brothers’ media platforms, including animation, TV shows, film adaptations, toys, video games, and theme parks. Warner Brothers’ siloed and departmentalised structure allowed storytellers of all kinds to leverage the iconography of the characters and apply them to different media. Take for instance, Richard Donner’s *Superman* (1978), Tim Burton’s *Batman* (1989), Bruce Timm’s *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992–1995) and Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight* trilogy (2005–2012). These projects allowed directors to re-envision the comic book characters with different styles and storylines, that were nevertheless recognisably DC, and often commercially successful.

In 2013, with the release of *Man of Steel* (2013), Warner Bros. began experimenting with a serialised cinematic storytelling style. The transmedia content that comprised this project formed the DC Extended Universe (DCEU). However, Warner Bros. continued to produce a range of successful DC properties across other platforms, such as the interconnected Arrowverse TV shows, as well as more experimental standalone shows including *Gotham*, *Krypton*, and *Pennyworth*.

Marvel Comics, founded in 1939 as Timely Comics, is renowned for its stable of super-human characters with relatable human problems, such as Spider-Man, The Hulk, and Iron Man, whose adventures predominately take place in real-world locations, such as New York and California. Marvel characters and storylines contain a heroic quality, but there is also a focus on character fallibility, human conflict, and representing characters as if they existed in the ‘world outside your window’. There is a stricter attention paid to canon and continuity in the Marvel Comics storyworld. While some stories do take place in alternative worlds, most stories occur on the main Earth of the Marvel Universe, designated Earth-616. Through the work of Stan Lee and his collaborators, Marvel developed a consistent house style and a distinctive manner of engaging directly with fans, which is still used by the company today (Wetzel and Wetzel, 2020).

Unlike DC, Marvel was not part of a larger media conglomerate, until Disney acquired the company in 2009. Prior to that, Marvel had to work hard to generate licensing deals and partnerships with external groups to expand their characters across media platforms, and they eventually sold most of the cinematic rights to their characters to a variety of studios (Wetzel and Wetzel, 2020). After filing for bankruptcy in the mid-nineties, Marvel re-emerged under new ownership and refocused on films in a bid to make the company more profitable (Wetzel and Wetzel, 2020). While financially unrewarding for Marvel, New Line’s Blade trilogy, Twentieth Century Fox’s X-Men series and Sony’s Spider-Man films all helped generate audience interest in cinematic super heroics. In a bid to maximise profitability and creative control, Marvel leveraged their remaining cinematic rights to obtain a substantial loan and rolled the dice on producing movies of their own through Marvel Studios (Wetzel and Wetzel, 2020).

Under the leadership of Kevin Feige, Marvel Studios started releasing the interconnected films of the MCU, beginning with *Iron Man* (2008). The MCU became so successful that it prompted a company-wide transformation whereby the films, not the comics, have become the main gateway into the Marvel brand, containing the defining representation of each character (Flanagan, *et al.*, 2016). Since the inception of the MCU, the feature films have therefore formed the mothership content, with short films, comics, and other media extending the experience. Content produced by other departments, such as the TV shows produced by Marvel Television, would expand upon the films but occupy lower tiers of canon and importance. *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and Netflix’s *Defenders* shows became increasingly distanced from the MCU, Freeform’s *Cloak and Dagger* and Hulu’s *Runaways* barely connected and Hulu’s *Helstrom* was not part of the MCU at all.



The MCU

In 2019, Disney allowed Feige greater control over the transmedia development of the MCU (Fleming, Jr., 2019). Marvel Television was disbanded, and Marvel Studios were assigned TV production, allowing Feige to oversee narrative interconnectivity between films and TV shows and intentionally expand the MCU storyworld across media platforms (Tassi, 2019). This move would allow the MCU to deliver a coordinated style of transmedia closer to the models proposed by Jenkins (2006a), Phillips (2012) and Gomez (Gomez in Van Gool, 2010). That same year, Feige announced the MCU Phase Four line-up, which included feature films and streaming shows to be distributed through Disney+. Moving forward, streaming would be just as integral to the MCU as the films had always been.



Figure 1: The Marvel Phase Four Timeline, revealed at San Diego Comic Con, 2019 (Winter in Alexander and Liptak, 2019).

The pandemic forced Marvel to rely solely on their streaming plans, for a period. Luckily, the pandemic hit during a natural narrative gap within the MCU, after the conclusion of the Infinity Saga and just prior to the launch of Phase Four. Keen to delay the release of *Black Widow*, Marvel were able to reorganise the Phase Four timeline to shift focus towards the release of their new streaming shows (Vary, 2021). *WandaVision*, a show focusing on two lesser-known Avengers Wanda Maximoff and Vision, was originally set to be Marvel's second Disney+ show (after *Falcon and the Winter Soldier*). However, since *WandaVision* was being filmed primarily on closed sets, it could be completed comparatively quickly during the pandemic (Fleming, Jr., 2020). Marvel had promoted the show as a creative risk for the MCU and this was in part because, within the fixed events of the MCU storyworld, Vision was deceased at the time. However, after 18 months of releasing no new content, *WandaVision* became Marvel's best opportunity to reengage audiences starved for content.

WandaVision is an ideal transmedia text because it allows audiences easy entry into the heavily inter-textual MCU environment. The show begins with the two lead characters trapped in the world of a TV sitcom and, for established fans of the Marvel films, no explanation for Vision's miraculous resurrection. This mysterious premise temporarily disconnects the show from the heavy intertextuality of the MCU built up over the course of 23 prior films, allowing *WandaVision* to offer audiences a new point of entry into the storyworld, which is ideally what each new transmedia text should allow (Jenkins, 2006a; Phillips, 2012).

Designing the show for a streaming platform allowed Marvel to incorporate televisual tropes into the MCU experience and draw from the strengths of the platform, which Jenkins (2006a) identifies as good transmedia practice. *WandaVision* is structured like a classic TV sitcom, told in episodic format, with each episode showing the characters set in different eras of American television. The show begins in black and white, in the style of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, before moving into technicolour environments reminiscent of *Bewitched*, *The Brady Bunch*, and *Modern Family*, among many other examples. Era-specific theme songs and adverts are spliced into the episodes and the Marvel Studios fanfare is also transformed to match each different era. As Kevin Feige stated, "[a]n experience like 'WandaVision' is something you can't get in a movie" (Reinstein, 2020). Marvel have used streaming in a way that allows the MCU to evoke a media style and experience intrinsic to TV.

WandaVision offers a meta-textual commentary on the importance of television, in a way that MCU films could not do. The show is a nostalgic and warm meditation on many people's love for television,

and its strong association with childhood and family bonding. The show eventually reveals that Wanda has created a fake television-inspired reality to manage her immense grief at the loss of Vision, as well as her brother and parents. Wanda's progression through family sitcoms from different TV eras therefore operates as a narrative device used to describe her journey through the stages of grief. Wanda is fixated on television because she cherishes the time she spent as a child watching American sitcoms with her brother and parents, and as an immigrant to America, heavily associates television with family. According to the show's director, *WandaVision* attracted an intergenerational audience intrigued by the traditional TV tropes and allowed families to bond watching television during the pandemic as they have in the past (Bernardin and Smith, 2021).

WandaVision pushes the boundaries of the streaming platform medium, and this is a by-product of transmedia storytelling (Evans, 2008). The show starts in a television-centric format, leveraging these tropes when convenient for narrative reasons. However, by the end of the season, the show has completely transitioned into more recognisable MCU cinematic fare. This move is, in part, enabled by the way Marvel's MCU films already incorporate a variety of conventions often associated with TV, such as a serial and episodic storytelling approach. Marvel is therefore using a deep understanding of media conventions to redefine the boundaries, and audience expectations, of different platforms, within their transmedia strategy. Evans (2011) argues this is an inevitable result of content flowing across media forms as production processes influence multiple media platforms. As audiences traverse platforms, they bring their media literacies from other platforms to the process, and the experience of transmedia content becomes more layered and complex (Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b). *WandaVision* is a production that intermingles televisual and cinematic content and style, a combination readily acceptable to audiences familiar with streaming.

Streaming allowed Marvel to stagger the release of content, building anticipation, and focus audience engagement. While the episodic delivery of content was a clever way for Marvel to offer audiences a nostalgic, broadcast TV experience, more importantly it allowed Marvel to maximise interest in the show, and keep viewers subscribed to Disney+. Anticipation has long been woven into the fabric of the MCU, from the fan-centric announcements of each new phase of content, through to the consistently clever use of Easter eggs, the "distant mountains" (Gomez in Van Gool, 2010) in films that signpost where future stories could possibly lead, and post-credit tags that serve as "migratory cues" (Long, 2007) to other texts. Each *WandaVision* episode ends with a "PLEASE STAND BY" placard, which would historically appear when a television signal was interrupted. Here Marvel is using this as a literal instruction, teasing the delayed delivery of new content in a way that has become rare in the age of bingeing. Even Darcy Lewis and Agent Jimmy Woo get to binge watch the 'live stream' of Wanda's false TV reality, yet the audience is forced to watch the show in weekly instalments and ruminate on end-of-episode revelations and cliff-hangers.



Figure 2: *WandaVision*'s PLEASE STAND BY placard, screenshot by author (Disney, 2021c).

This streaming strategy sustained fan interaction for the two months that the show was screening. Fans formed communities to participate in the kind of fan practices Jenkins (2006b) identifies, namely unpacking episodes, unravelling the mysteries of the show, and anticipating narrative events. Why were Wanda and Vision in a sitcom? Was Vision alive? Who was the real villain of the show? Why was Quicksilver being played by Evan Peters, who played the character in Fox's X-Men films, instead of Aaron Taylor-Johnson who portrayed the character previously? Through this process of searching for information, exercising agency, and seeming control over texts, *WandaVision* offered fans narrative pleasures unique to well-crafted transmedia storytelling (Evans, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a).

WandaVision demonstrated the capacity for a transmedia text to promote consumption of other related texts (Jenkins, 2006a; Phillips, 2012). The mysteries of the show invited fans to search the back catalogue of MCU films, as well as other core transmedia materials, including the comic books, for clues. The show was so effective in driving the consumption of related materials that Marvel were forced to reprint collective editions of key Scarlet Witch and Vision comic book stories, due to the rise in sales (Holub, 2021). The fact that fans could forensically search such a deep collection of materials, demonstrates the immense "drillability" (Mittell, 2013) of the Marvel storyworld, which worked in the company's favour during the global downturn in content.

In the content vacuum of the pandemic, the show's innate "spreadability" (Jenkins, *et al.*, 2013) could be seen in amplified fashion. *WandaVision* aired against little other competition and theories and discussions rippled across social media platforms (Mayberry, 2021). Phillips (2012) outlines different levels of engagement that transmedia producers can expect from fans, suggesting 80 percent of fans will be passive, 15 percent will be engaged, and five percent superfans. However, it is reasonable to speculate that the pandemic gave a greater percentage of the audience time to become more active fans. Online fan content produced about the show became unavoidable. Key character moments became instant memes, such as Agatha's infamous wink. In fact, Agatha became such a talking point that the song featured in the show announcing her villainous revelation rocketed up the iTunes charts (Zellner, 2021). The villain Mephisto was rumoured to appear (given his presence in key comic book storylines) and fans took pleasure in concocting ludicrous theories as to when and how the character could be unveiled.



Figure 3: Agatha Harkness winking, screenshot by author (Disney, 2021a).

This social media activity made the show essential viewing for fans wanting to avoid spoilers and be part of “water-cooler” conversations. *WandaVision* became the top viewed show in the world for a time, and Disney+ servers crashed regularly as fans clamoured to watch newly released episodes (Mayberry, 2021). The spreadable nature of the show created new points of entry into the storyworld (Jenkins, *et al.*, 2013; Phillips, 2012), inspiring the curious uninitiated to be drawn into the MCU and impatient fans who left the show early, to return.

The fan engagement was such that Marvel ultimately had the problem of subduing audience expectations. The comic book storylines the show was taking inspiration from, such as *House of M*, *The Visions*, and *Avengers Disassembled* had ‘world changing’ effects. The appearance of Evan Peters as Quicksilver suggested that an incorporation of Fox’s X-Men, and the long-rumoured start of an MCU multiverse might have arrived. Fans speculated that an unnamed aerospace engineer who was mentioned might be Reed Richards, heralding the arrival of the Fantastic Four in the MCU. Vision actor Paul Bettany also suggested that the season would end with a massive guest star. When there was no multiverse revelation, Evan Peters’ appearance was just a metatextual gag at the replacement of actors in sitcoms (Bernardin and Smith, 2021), Reed Richards did not appear and Paul Bettany’s guest star turned out to be himself playing another version of Vision, fans expressed a little disappointment, and the final episode of the show achieved the lowest Rotten Tomatoes rating for the series (Rotten Tomatoes, 2021b). However, these minor drawbacks emerged only because the show was incredibly effective at enhancing the MCU metanarrative.

WandaVision demonstrates how the transmedia strategy of the MCU creates and deepens a metanarrative, which is key to effective transmedia (Jenkins, 2006a; Phillips, 2012; Gomez in Van Gool, 2010). For instance, the core cast of the show are all ensemble players from other MCU films. Wanda and Vision received less screen time than most Avengers, and the team that comes together to solve the mystery of Wanda’s hex reality includes astrophysicist Darcy Lewis from the first two *Thor* films, FBI Agent Jimmy Woo from *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, and the now adult Monica Rambeau, who was last seen as a child in *Captain Marvel*. Each character brings their MCU history and affiliations into the fabric of *WandaVision*. Subtle gestures, like Woo’s magic card trick, which he learned from Ant-Man, mean a great deal for the keen MCU observer. These elements are examples of “additive comprehension” or the Origami unicorn effect (Jenkins, 2006a) whereby new narrative elements can cause audiences to see existing narrative elements through a different light. Audiences can develop a deeper appreciation and affection for characters, and this carries through to previous texts.

Similarly, *WandaVision* serves to consolidate and strengthen interconnected narrative threads. For example, Wanda and Vision’s relationship was mostly built off screen in the moments between their film appearances. This economy in storytelling worked because fans could draw from their knowledge of the couple’s relationships in the comics. However, *WandaVision* offers a deeper exploration of their partnership in the MCU and shows key moments that were only referenced in the films, allowing this narrative thread to be elevated across platforms. Similarly, when Wanda and Pietro were introduced in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, it was implied that Hydra experimentation using the mind stone in Loki’s sceptre had brought on their powers (which was a means to side-step the twins traditionally being Mutants, during an era when Marvel did not have the on-screen rights to Mutants). However, *WandaVision* reiterates the comic book history for the characters. In a flashback provoked by Agatha Harkness, the villain of *WandaVision*, the show suggests that Wanda likely had latent powers that were activated by contact with the mind stone.

Most significantly, *WandaVision* demonstrates the ability for the MCU to improve retrospectively its lesser-regarded works. Despite its significant box office, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* is critically and commercially regarded as the weakest of the four Avengers films. However, *WandaVision*’s continued links to the film, which retrospectively improve the film’s narrative, led to an outpouring of affection and renewed interest for it on social media (Barnhardt, 2021). The Darcy and Woo characters also happen to be taken from some of Marvel’s least commercially successful films. Their pairing in *WandaVision* was a hit with fans, giving audiences another reason to revisit the *Thor* films, and *Ant-Man and the Wasp*. Woo’s popularity among fans even brought about calls for Marvel to green light an X-Files style investigatory show set in the MCU featuring the character (Ford, 2021). This led to a contingent of fans pointing out that *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, with a similar scope, already existed on Disney+ (Steiner, 2021). *WandaVision*’s narrative and the discussions around the show therefore benefitted other transmedia elements of the MCU.

Ultimately, content such as *WandaVision*, which might once have been secondary to films with cinematic release, became essential during the pandemic. It encouraged audiences to become and then remain subscribed to Disney+, while also driving them to revisit prior MCU instalments with renewed interest (Barnhardt, 2021). At the end of each new *WandaVision* episode, Disney+ would recommend the viewer watch *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, the first appearance of Wanda and Vision, signalling it would be a good text to examine while trying to make sense of the show. Such a specific pairing of content speaks to the ability for transmedia storytelling to keep a back catalogue of content topical and fresh, which has been vital for Disney as it worked to populate a sparse streaming platform. It also highlights the efficacy of streaming as a home for transmedia content. Disney+ is used in this example as a space where Marvel can sequence texts and provide audiences with navigation frameworks to explore the MCU.



Figure 4: *WandaVision* credits directing viewers to watch *Avengers: Age of Ultron* on Disney+, screenshot by author (Disney, 2021b).

WandaVision is as much a piece of entertainment as it is a promotion for the forthcoming *Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness*, *The Marvels*, *Secret Invasion*, and the entire MCU. Marvel used behind-the-scenes footage to construct a ninth episode for the series, similar to a DVD extra. ‘Disassembled’ makes explicit connections between the show and past and future MCU texts, officially mapping its transmedia connections (Leon and Baruh, 2021).

WandaVision continues the Marvel tradition of exciting audiences for the future of the MCU. The show sets up future adventures for characters and the storyworld. The extended exploration of Wanda, her transition into the Scarlet Witch, and the codification of how magic operates in the MCU will allow *Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness* to move swiftly into deploying the Scarlet Witch character and the theme of magic. Similarly, seeing Monica Rambeau’s experience of the five-year period when half the population were snapped out of existence by the villain Thanos (known in the MCU as ‘the blip’), the loss of her mother, attainment of superpowers, and learning of her fall out with Captain Marvel, enriches the character’s story and foreshadows Rambeau’s appearance in *The Marvels*. The exploration of Wanda and Vision’s relationship adds an ethereal quality to the characters and the storyworld, with the resolution that Wanda’s grief is merely love enduring. The show also reanimates and reintroduces Vision, preparing the character for future appearances in the storyworld. For Marvel, the move to streaming was a significant evolution of the MCU transmedia strategy.

The DCEU

Warner Bros. and DC's success in adapting superhero stories across media pre-dates Marvel's accomplishments. The character of Superman, for example, expanded from the comic books across other media in a transmedia fashion as early as the 1930s (Freeman, 2014) and has continued to be adapted into popular and profitable texts, such as *Superman: The Movie* (1978). Likewise, Batman has been featured prominently in a range of media adaptations including the 1960s Batman TV show, Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992), and Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy (2005–2012). Following the commercial and critical success of Nolan's Batman films, Warner Bros. selected a pitch from Nolan and David S. Goyer to reboot Superman on screen (Finke and Fleming, Jr., 2010). Zack Snyder was selected to direct *Man of Steel* (2013), which maintained the grounded and realistic style Nolan used in his Batman films and leaned into the immigrant outsider aspect of the character. In contrast to the gentle and nostalgic *Superman Returns* (2006), *Man of Steel* earned double the box office takings of its predecessor (Nash Information Services, 2021). The film launched the DC Extended Universe (DCEU), Warner Brothers' transmedia project that would bring DC characters to cinema through interconnected stories.

Initially, the DCEU was to have one shared continuity, similar to the MCU. In 2014, Kevin Tsujihara, CEO of Warner Bros. Entertainment, announced a slate of 10 interconnected films that would expand the DCEU (WarnerMedia, 2014). Snyder was listed as the director of key team-up films that would form the narrative foundation of the storyworld and introduce characters such as Wonder Woman, Flash, Aquaman, Cyborg, and Batman. This meant Snyder was positioned as the architect of the DCEU. The characters being introduced by Snyder would spin out into solo films. David Ayer's *Suicide Squad*, for instance, was set to be the first of many films building on Snyder's DC storyworld (Beedle, 2014). Snyder and his wife Deborah would later serve as producers on several of the projects too. Through these announcements and actions, Warner Bros. was indicating that the DCEU would function in a similar manner to the MCU.

However, Snyder's authorial vision for the DCEU proved to be a problematic foundation for a transmedia storyworld. Gomez argues that transmedia storyworlds require an aspirational quality to encourage audiences to travel across platforms (Gomez in Bernstein, 2013). Snyder presented a violent and deconstructionist vision of DC superheroes, who struggled to connect with humanity. While Snyder's approach did allow the DCEU to explore more mature themes than the family friendly MCU, this choice also limited younger audiences from being able to consume DCEU content. Some of Snyder's creative choices that veered away from the comic book source material, such as Superman killing Zod in *Man of Steel*, proved controversial among fans (Holmes, 2015). Snyder's stylised take on the source material was consistent with how Warner Bros. had allowed directors freedom to interpret DC characters in past franchising efforts. However, Snyder's artistic approach complicated Warner Brothers' plans to develop an ongoing transmedia storyworld.

By *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, it became clear that Snyder was drawing inspiration from comics set outside of DC's main continuity such as *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Injustice*, and *Kingdom Come*. This allowed the DCEU to catapult forward into storytelling terrain that Marvel had not yet reached, such as the death of a major character (Superman) or a conflict between traditional allies (Batman and Superman). However, a comparison between the theatrical versions of *Batman v. Superman* and *Justice League*, with their extended director's cut counterparts, demonstrates Snyder was struggling to fit this fast-track approach to storyworld building into the relatively short films that Warner Bros. was mandating (Fritz, 2017). It may be for this reason that *Batman v Superman* translated into a confusing experience for audiences, attracting an underwhelming box office for a film of this size and budget (Fleming, Jr., 2017).

Warner Bros. executives began to lose faith in Snyder's approach and started placing immense pressure on him to shift the tone of *Justice League* and the DCEU (O'Connell, 2021a; Ryan, 2021). Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* had been a commercial hit, earning the title of the thirty-first highest grossing film of all time (Box Office Mojo, 2021). Comparatively, *Batman v Superman* had reached seventy-one on that list. The first combined on-screen appearance of DC's flagship characters was also dwarfed by Marvel's *Captain America: Civil War*, which was released in the same year and would become the twenty-second highest box office of all time (Box Office Mojo, 2021). Joss Whedon, director of *Avengers*, was brought into the studio to assist in the development of the DCEU. The studio also radically re-edited Ayer's *Suicide Squad* (2016) resulting in a commercially successful, but tonally dissonant and critically underwhelming film (Masters, 2016). When Snyder had to deal with the sudden death of his daughter, Whedon took over the final stages of the production of *Justice League*.

Warner Bros. publicly assured fans that Whedon would make minimal changes to Snyder's film (Kit, 2017), however the finished version was clearly shifting their transmedia property in a new direction. Rushed special effects, mismatched colour palettes, and Whedon's trademark humour signalled that Snyder's film had been significantly retooled. The film earned less than *Batman v Superman* and attracted a divisive critical response (Box Office Mojo, 2021; Rotten Tomatoes, 2021a). However, it did successfully bring Snyder's vision for the DCEU to a close and started to move the storyworld in a more family friendly direction. DC's next projects *Aquaman* and *Shazam!* were colourful, vibrant, and only loosely connected to Snyder's films. Many of the DCEU projects Tsujihara announced in 2014, tied to Snyder's storyworld, did not eventuate.



#ReleaseTheSnyderCut

Warner Brothers' decision to alter *Justice League* led to the rise of the #ReleaseTheSnyderCut fan campaign on social media (O'Connell, 2021a). After *Justice League*, a segment of fans united by their passion for Snyder's DCEU work bonded over their disappointment and came together to search for answers. Trailers for Snyder's *Justice League* had shown snippets of content not found in the theatrical version, and fans became convinced that an alternative version of the film, the 'Snyder Cut', existed. The group was motivated by the participatory fandom desires Jenkins (2006b) identifies, but in this case, were working to overturn the official text the studio had distributed in favour of a preferred alternative. Warner Bros. became the focus of the campaign. From the fans' perspective, Warner Bros. delivered a substandard film because they cared more about money than the integrity of DC characters (O'Connell, 2021a). Preventing the fans from accessing what they were sure would be a superior Snyder version meant that the studio was now in direct opposition to a volatile and loud section of their audience.

The #ReleaseTheSnyderCut campaign demonstrates the intense loyalty transmedia storytelling can yield (Jenkins, 2006a; Phillips, 2012; Gomez in Van Gool, 2010). However, in this instance, this fan community worked against the interests of the studio. The #ReleaseTheSnyderCut campaign gained notoriety for its sheer persistence. Collectively, fans collaborated to petition Warner Bros. in creative and public ways. The group used campaign Web sites and raised funds to promote their message on prominent billboards as well as a banner towed behind a plane, which was flown over Warner Bros. offices (O'Connell, 2021a). Snyder Cut fans continued to maintain a strong online presence, regularly paralysing Warner Bros. social media channels with demands for the Snyder Cut to be released. A Warner Bros. executive noted the studio found this practice alarming when the studio could not even post about *Sesame Street* without attracting the same response (O'Connell, 2021a). United in their passion for Snyder's work, the members also helped raise over half a million dollars for American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in memory of Snyder's daughter (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2021). The campaign promoted Snyder's vision for DC's characters, at the expense of Warner Brothers' plans.

However, Warner Bros. failed to harness the passion of this fan movement and the toxic actions of some members have come to define it. When *Batman v. Superman* began to attract divisive critical reviews, Snyder and the film's cast used interviews to explain that the film was made for fans, not critics (Yahoo! News, 2016). Weaponising this narrative, some of Snyder's fans became hostile towards anyone who was critical of the film, positioning themselves as 'real' fans, and anyone who felt otherwise as other. After *Justice League*, this tactic was applied to Warner Bros. executives and anyone suspected of interfering with Snyder's storyworld was targeted (Robinson, 2020). Former DC Film chief Geoff Johns and former DC Entertainment president Diane Nelson both left Twitter after relentless online attacks (Robinson, 2020; Arvedon, 2018). Gomez advocates for open dialogue with fans to ensure the success of a transmedia storyworld (Gomez in Bernstein, 2013). If Warner Bros. had made a greater effort to engage with these fans, it is possible they may have been able to direct such passionate fan behaviour for their intellectual property in a more constructive manner.

Snyder proved more adept at directing the fan movement for his own personal gain. Using the niche social media platform Vero, Snyder showed his support from afar. Initially afraid of reprisals from the studio, Snyder became increasingly brazen, releasing cryptic responses and snippets of unseen materials, fuelling the speculation that an alternative cut existed (Dean, 2021). Over time, more of Snyder's DCEU collaborators spoke publicly in support of the campaign, adding to the allure of the Snyder Cut. Jason Momoa and Gal Gadot, who both continued to occupy prominent roles in the DCEU as *Aquaman* and

Wonder Woman, used social media to join the movement (Gadot, 2019; Mamoa, 2019). At Snyder's request, Ben Affleck, who had since departed the role of Batman, used Twitter to lend his support (Affleck, 2019; O'Connell, 2021a). Harnessing this wave of growing momentum, shortly after the second anniversary of *Justice League*, Snyder took to Vero to confirm officially that there was indeed a version of his now mythical film.

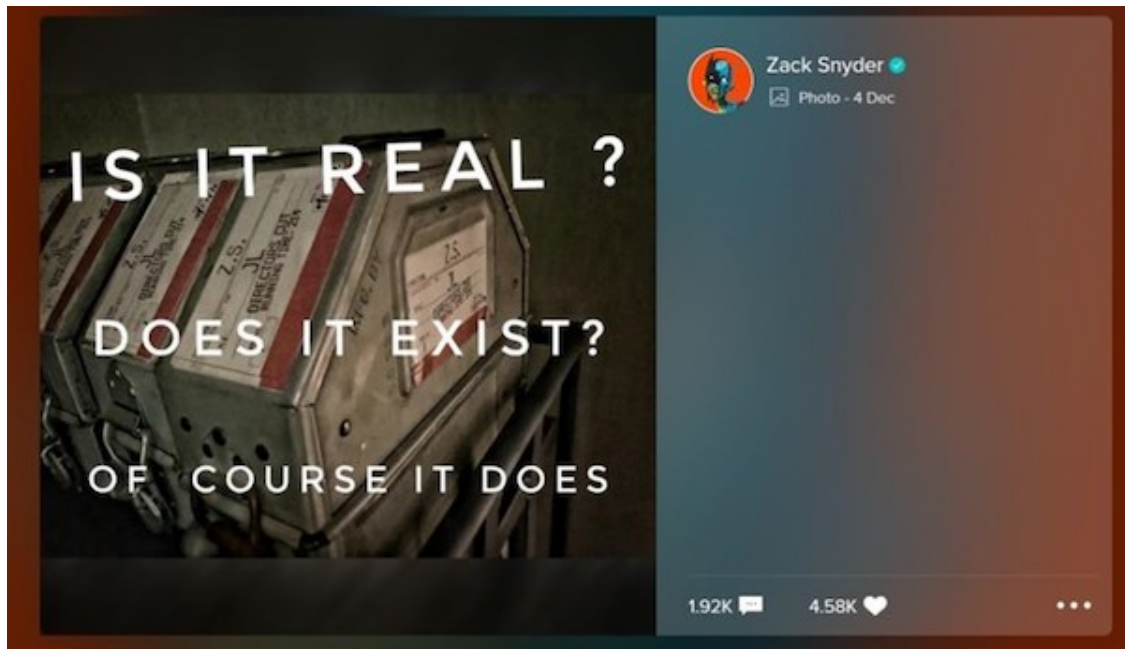


Figure 5: Zack Snyder confirms the existence of the Snyder Cut on Vero (Snyder, 2019).

The campaign reached a scale so substantial that WarnerMedia asked if Snyder would consider releasing his film, in its incomplete state, on HBO Max (Kit, 2020). Instead, Snyder and his wife Deborah used social media analytics to demonstrate the unprecedented scale of the movement, comparing the Snyder Cut social media footprint to the top shows on Netflix (Couch, 2021). They pitched that if they were allowed a budget to complete the film and insert new special effects, it would draw a substantial audience to the brand-new streaming platform HBO Max. As Snyder noted, the Snyder Cut social media footprint outsized that of any film Warner Bros. had ever released, so it made commercial sense to release his film (O'Connell, 2021a). WarnerMedia agreed to the deal on the condition that Snyder shot no new footage.

Zack Snyder's Justice League, as the Snyder Cut would officially be named, turned out to be an ideal project for completion during COVID-19 lockdowns. Soon after WarnerMedia agreed to the film, the world was plunged into the global pandemic. However, Snyder had already completed filming and the editing, so scoring and visual effects could be completed remotely. Amid the pandemic, during a virtual screening of *Man of Steel* with fans, Snyder, along with Superman actor Henry Cavill, officially announced the film would be coming to HBO Max (Vero True Social, 2021).

Zack Snyder's Justice League also provided the DCEU with a fortuitous new piece of content that would divert focus away from Joss Whedon's increasingly problematic reputation. Concurrent with Snyder's cut being completed, Whedon found himself at the centre of a personal and professional scandal. Ray Fisher, the actor who plays Cyborg, took to social media to accuse Whedon of abuse and racial mistreatment during the reshoots for *Justice League* (Fisher, 2020). Warner Bros. launched an inquiry and Whedon quietly exited his HBO production *The Nevers* (O'Connell, 2020). A variety of Whedon's collaborators and employees spoke out in support of Fisher, corroborating a historical pattern of Whedon being abusive (Carpenter, 2021; Trachtenberg, 2021). Fisher continued to allege that there was a systemic problem with racism at the studio and that numerous executives had enabled Whedon's behaviour. Fisher revealed Whedon had significantly reduced his character's role in *Justice League*. His character was also no longer scheduled to appear in *The Flash* film as planned (Fisher, 2021). Playing

Cyborg was Fisher's first on-screen role and his willingness to openly critique the entrenched Hollywood system was brave and largely unprecedented. Fisher's continued allegiance to Snyder and his vision for Cyborg super-charged Snyder's fans and amplified their argument that Snyder was more in tune with the characters than the studio. In contrast with the predominantly white and male Avengers cast, Snyder's Justice League was comprised of actors from more diverse backgrounds, some of whom were playing traditionally white characters in the comics. Warner Bros. was not always happy with Snyder's casting decisions (Ryan, 2021), but Snyder's fans celebrated, and found meaning, in Snyder's commitment to diversity.



Figure 6: Ray Fisher calls out Joss Whedon on Twitter (Fisher, 2020).

WarnerMedia's choice to bring Snyder back to complete his film created confusion around the ongoing transmedia strategy of the DCEU. Snyder was invited to speak at DC Fandome, a global online fan event held during the pandemic, and his inclusion in the event could be read as both an apology to Snyder and his fans, and a tacit admission that the studio should never have interfered with *Justice League* (DC Fandome, 2020). Reinstating an auteur to realise their vision was not without precedent for Warner Bros. Richard Donner was allowed to release *Superman II: The Richard Donner Cut* on DVD almost 30 years after being ousted from the project. However, inviting Snyder to return to his project so soon held far greater implications. The original DCEU architect would be launching his film alongside newer DCEU projects, with the potential for him to expand his storyworld vision and have it compared with the current direction of the DCEU in real time.

During the pandemic, the release of streaming to launch the film gave the project far greater credence, than releasing the content straight to home release would have in the past. Instead of being clearly framed as secondary to cinematic releases, Snyder's film was being released directly alongside other content. Warner Bros. attempted to pre-emptively address this issue by categorising *Zack Snyder's Justice League* as a non-canon entry into the DCEU, signalling they had no desire to continue Snyder's vision (Lang, 2021; D'Alessandro, 2021b). The film would be like an 'Elseworlds' comic book, set outside of the larger narrative continuity of the DCEU.

Warner Bros. also began to articulate an alternative transmedia strategy for DC content that would differentiate it from other Hollywood properties. During DC Fandome, Walter Hamada, President of DC Films, appeared in a panel alongside Jim Lee, Chief Creative Officer of DC Comics, and Greg Berlanti, architect of the Arrowverse, and explained that the DCEU would now constitute part of a wider DC Multiverse (DC Fandome, 2020). The DCEU would continue to be comprised of a line of central films

that would share continuity. A range of non-canon and experimental DC projects, such as Todd Phillips' *Joker*, would exist outside of this continuity. However, numerous other DC storyworlds, such as the Arrowverse TV shows, could separately exist and also be part of this new sprawling and partially connected multiverse (Swann, 2020). The upcoming *Flash* film is expected to articulate and enshrine this multiple storyworld structure at a narrative level (Couch and Kit, 2021). Hamada later announced plans to start producing DC films at a far higher rate, with some being released in cinemas, some being released on streaming, and new TV shows being developed on streaming to expand the world of some of these films too (Barnes, 2020). This would allow Warner Bros. to manage a range of different transmedia projects, loosely connected under one umbrella.

Therefore, the entry point to the DCEU, as it always has been for all other DC related media, will be character, not storyworld. The meta-narrative created in the DC Multiverse will not be based on strict continuity, but on broader associations between characters and recurring themes. While this structure does not adhere as closely to transmedia structures outlined by Jenkins (2006a) and Phillips (2012), it is a valid approach. Warner Bros. has a long history of reinterpreting DC characters, to great effect. This structure allows Warner Bros. to embrace its roots in franchising and create large swathes of experimental narratives not constrained by a singular continuity mandate. Without a singular creative voice or vision, it will be difficult for this transmedia strategy to achieve consistent quality and commercial success (Phillips, 2012). However, it does allow a range of teams to work independently to produce new ideas. This approach relies on enduring character appeal and a continual process of reinvention. The DCEU may not be able to take advantage of one consistent metanarrative that encourages audiences to revisit previous texts and drive cumulative commercial growth of its storyworld. Warner Brothers' plan relies on producing consistently high-quality storytelling across discontinuous narratives that will need to attract their own large audiences each time.

The release of *Zack Snyder's Justice League* on HBO Max capitalised on the benefits of streaming in a different way to *WandaVision*. Working without pressure from Warner Bros. executives, Snyder was free to unveil his full, uncompromised version of the film (Ryan, 2021). Had it been released in cinemas, the film would not be the almost four-hour, IMAX ratio version that currently exists. The film retrospectively makes clear the narrative complexity of Snyder's earlier works and showcases an intricate piece of long-form storytelling, elevating his vision for the storyworld. It doesn't matter that the majority of audiences did not complete watching the film, or at least not in one sitting (D'Alessandro, 2021a), *Zack Snyder's Justice League* attracted better reviews than the theatrical version (Rotten Tomatoes, 2021c). For Snyder Cut fans, this outcome may serve to validate their argument that the studio did not clearly understand, agree with, or effectively promote Snyder's vision for the storyworld. More broadly, it also problematizes the studio's decision to use the inferior theatrical version as a canon text for the DCEU.

Despite Warner Brothers' attempts to move the DCEU in a different direction, Snyder used the film to generate more interest in his future plans for the property. Against the studio's wishes, Snyder shot new footage that teases where he would have taken the story in future films (O'Connell, 2021b). The film ends on a cliff-hanger, as scripted, with the Justice League staring through space at the villain Darkseid, who is ready to mount an invasion of Earth. A newly filmed coda showcasing the Knightmare future reality in which Superman turns evil and a band of heroes and villains are working together to stop him, allowed Snyder to signpost where his future films would have gone. In addition, he has since revealed footage featuring the Green Lantern John Stewart, which he claims Warner Bros. forced him to remove from the film (Snyder, 2021; O'Connell, 2021b). In interviews, Snyder has spoken openly about the plot points for these remaining films (D'Alessandro, 2021b), intentionally whetting the appetites of his fans. While this gives fans more insight and reason to revisit Snyder's earlier work, which will benefit the studio, it also serves to undermine Warner Brothers' larger plans for the DCEU.

Immediately following the release of *Zack Snyder's Justice League*, #RestoreTheSnyderVerse began trending on Twitter (Twitter, 2021d). Emboldened by the success of petitioning the studio for Snyder's film, fans are now eager to see Snyder's entire vision restored, including Snyder's cancelled films, the cancelled spin off films, and Ayer's original version of *Suicide Squad*. #ReleaseTheAyerCut, #MakeTheBatfleckMovie, and #DeathstrokeHBOMax have all been trending on Twitter (Twitter, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Ayer, Deathstroke actor Joe Manganiello, and Fisher are all interacting with these campaigns to generate support for their projects to be restored or reinstated (Ayer, 2021; Manganiello, 2021; Justice Con, 2021). Snyder's fans have once again been persistent in their campaigning, bombing the ratings and reviews for Warner Brothers' most recent film, *Godzilla vs. Kong* (Clarke, 2021) and downvoting the new trailer for the 4K release of *Justice League* (Outlaw, 2021). It seems that vocal fan

support for Snyder's vision may undermine the studio's plans for the future of the DCEU, which have essentially been paused during the pandemic.

Zack Snyder's Justice League demonstrated that content created for streaming will be a powerful tool for Warner Bros. as they develop their new DC Multiverse transmedia strategy. Warner Bros. founded the DCEU after the MCU, outlining similar plans that gave audiences the impression that it would follow the same transmedia conventions (WarnerMedia, 2014). However, the passionate response to *Zack Snyder's Justice League* has demonstrated that streaming could allow Warner Bros. to explore different authorial visions within their expanding DC Multiverse, in different ways from their current TV and feature film productions. To set audience expectations correctly, Warner Bros. may need to consider nominating a multiverse architect and spokesperson, or equivalent team. Given their DC Fandome presentation, Hamada, Berlanti, and Lee may already be emerging as this team. Either way, the studio will need to be clear about how audiences can expect to engage with the multiverse, particularly in comparison with the MCU.

In doing so, Warner Bros. will also be acknowledging the multiple fandoms that cherish different elements of the DC Multiverse, all of which may not exist in harmony. Snyder's vocal fan base has demonstrated how disruptive an unhappy segment of fandom can be to the health and planning of an intellectual property. Given Warner Bros. wants to develop multiple DC transmedia properties, fan management and dialogue may need to become a major priority for the studio to maximise audience interest in new commercial projects. Warner Bros. have an opportunity to leverage the current goodwill surrounding Snyder to reinstate some version of the SnyderVerse. Placating Snyder's fans might well be a savvy way for the studio to garner extra support for their multiverse strategy. Streaming will be the ideal platform for Warner Bros. to continue experimenting with new and varied transmedia DC content.




Conclusion

The pandemic fast-tracked the process of streaming becoming the mothership of commercial transmedia strategy. In the absence of cinemas, the episodic release of *WandaVision* became the main event for MCU fans, establishing streaming content as vital to the property moving forward. The show sustained global audience participation over a period of months, which in turn inspired audiences to continue traversing the network of MCU texts and experiencing deeper narrative pleasures. The pandemic foregrounded Disney+ as the natural home of MCU content. Marvel's ability to direct audiences to navigate MCU texts within the platform will only continue to make streaming the most essential component of the MCU transmedia ecosystem.

During the pandemic, *Zack Snyder's Justice League* was afforded the same cultural clout as a cinematic release, exploring an alternative pathway in the DCEU storyworld and inspiring passionate debate around the future of the project. Warner Bros. arguably underestimated the response the film would attract, as well as Snyder's ability to direct fan goodwill for his own personal gain. However, the studio could certainly incorporate these same tactics into the development of the DC Multiverse to garner similar responses to future projects. The release of this film demonstrates the capacity for Warner Bros. to use both streaming and cinema to explore a range of authorial voices and character interpretations as they seek to advance a new transmedia strategy.

Streaming allows studios to release more content than ever, with a direct link to consumers and an undiluted revenue stream. For these reasons, this medium is likely to become exponentially prominent in commercial media. The pandemic has accelerated a commercial focus on streaming, amplified the cultural importance of the platform and allowed streaming to supplant cinema as the most important medium within a commercial transmedia framework. The shift to streaming afforded by the pandemic, and the versatility of the platform compared to cinema, will allow studios to further experiment with, and refine, different transmedia strategies attached to major intellectual properties.

Further research will be required to observe the evolution of commercial transmedia, and the role of streaming, as we begin to transition into a post-pandemic world. It is suggested that both quantitative and qualitative research conducted in a longitudinal manner will offer greater insight into shifting commercial priorities, transmedia strategies and consumer habits as media production and consumption continues to accelerate. 

About the authors

Luke Webster is a doctoral research candidate in Internet Studies at Curtin University.
Direct comments to: L [dot] Webster [at] curtin [dot] edu [dot] au

Tama Leaver is a Professor of Internet Studies at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia. He is president of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) and a chief investigator on the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child.
E-mail: T [dot] Leaver [at] curtin [dot] edu [dot] au

Eleanor Sandry is a senior lecturer in Internet Studies at Curtin University.
E-mail: E [dot] Sandry [at] curtin [dot] edu [dot] au

Notes

1. Jenkins, 2006a, pp. 95–96.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Jenkins, 2013, p. 244.

References

- Ben Affleck (@BenAffleck), 2019. “#ReleaseTheSnyderCut,” at <https://twitter.com/BenAffleck/status/1196200825766453248>, accessed 18 March 2021.
- Julia Alexander and Andrew Liptak, 2019. “Marvel reveals massive Phase Four film and television plan,” *The Verge* (20 July), at <https://www.theverge.com/2019/7/20/20702328/marvel-disney-plus-thor-eternals-doctor-strange-wandavision-hawkeye-black-widow-san-diego-comic-con>, accessed 29 June 2022.
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2021. “Thank you to the #ReleasetheSnyderCut movement for raising \$500k for suicide prevention” (2 February), at <https://afsp.org/story/thank-you-to-the-releasethesnydercut-movement-for-raising-500k-for-suicide-prevention>, accessed 26 May 2021.
- Jon Arvedon, 2018. “Former DC President harassed off Twitter by angry Zack Snyder fans,” *Comic Book Resources* (23 September), at <https://www.cbr.com/former-dc-president-harassed-off-twitter-by-angry-zack-snyder-fans/>, accessed 18 May 2021.
- David Ayer (@DavidAyerMovies), 2021. “My turn ...” at <https://twitter.com/DavidAyerMovies/status/1420826069939023882/photo/1>, accessed 30 July 2021.
- Brooks Barnes, 2020. “Managing movie superheroes is about to get a lot more complicated,” *New York Times* (27 December), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/27/business/media/dc-superheroes-movies.html>, accessed 18 May 2021.
- Adam Barnhardt, 2021. “WandaVision fans are falling in love with *Avengers: Age of Ultron* all over again,” *Comicbook.com* (27 February), at <https://comicbook.com/movies/news/wandavision-fans-love-age-of-ultron-twitter-trend/#10>, accessed 6 May 2021.
- Tim Beedle, 2014. “A full slate of DC entertainment movies are on their way,” *dccomics.com* (15 October), at <https://www.dccomics.com/blog/2014/10/15/a-full-slate-of-dc-entertainment-movies-are-on-their-way> accessed 26 May 2021.
- Marc Bernardin and Kevin Smith, 2021. “*SPOILERS* WandaVision finale & special guest MATT SHAKMAN!! FMB 3/7/21” *Fatman Beyond*, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFxn1q-KqW8>, accessed 21 May 2021.

Paula Bernstein, 2013. "The 3 rules of transmedia storytelling from transmedia guru Jeff Gomez," *IndieWire* (3 December), at <https://www.indiewire.com/2013/12/the-3-rules-of-transmedia-storytelling-from-transmedia-guru-jeff-gomez-32325/>, accessed 3 May 2021.

Box Office Mojo, 2021. "Top lifetime grosses" (30 June), at https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top_lifetime_gross/?area=XWW, accessed 26 May 2021.

Charisma Carpenter (@AllCharisma), 2021. "My truth," at <https://twitter.com/AllCharisma/status/1359537746843365381>, accessed 13 February 2021.

Cass Clarke, 2021. "#Restorethesnyderverse fans are review-bombing Godzilla vs King Kong," *Comic Book Resources* (27 March), at <https://www.cbr.com/restorethesnyderverse-fans-are-review-bombing-godzilla-vs-kong/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Aaron Couch, 2021. "'Justice League' producer Deborah Snyder on assembling a-listers during COVID-19 and the power of fans," *Hollywood Reporter* (16 March), at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/justice-league-producer-deborah-snyder-on-assembling-a-listers-during-covid-19-and-the-power-of-fans>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Aaron Couch and Borys Kit, 2021. "Ava DuVernay's 'New Gods,' James Wan's 'The Trench' DC movies not moving forward at Warner Bros. (exclusive)," *Hollywood Reporter* (1 April), at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/ava-duvernays-new-gods-james-wans-the-trench-dc-movies-not-moving-forward-at-warner-bros>, accessed 2 May 2021.

Anthony D'Alessandro, 2021a. "'Zack Snyder's Justice League' ranks behind 'Wonder Woman 1984' in HBO Max households," *Deadline* (23 March), at <https://deadline.com/2021/03/justice-league-snyder-cut-wonder-woman-1984-hbo-max-viewership-1234720662/>, accessed 20 May 2021.

Anthony D'Alessandro, 2021b. "Zack Snyder Q&A on his 'cathartic journey' with 4-hour-plus 'Justice League' cut, his future with DC & original intentions for Ray Fisher 'Cyborg' movie," *Deadline* (18 March), at <https://deadline.com/2021/03/zack-snyder-justice-league-cut-interview-ray-fisher-cyborg-joss-whedon-hbo-max-1234716917/>, accessed 24 May 2021.

Anthony D'Alessandro and Patrick Hipes, 2020. "Disney/Pixar's 'Soul' moving to Christmas Day release on Disney+," *Deadline* (8 October), at <https://deadline.com/2020/10/soul-release-date-disney-plus-christmas-day-1234594147/>, accessed 17 January 2021.

DC Fandome, 2020. "Explore the multiverse," at <https://www.dcfandome.com/>, accessed 22 August 2020.

Jonathan Dean, 2021. "Zack Snyder on losing his daughter: 'It's ironic Justice League was already about grief'," *Times* (2 May), at <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/zack-snyder-interview-daughter-justice-league-extended-cut-8btrztrp2>, accessed 2 May 2021.

Disney, 2021a. "Agatha Harkness winking" (screenshot by author).

Disney, 2021b. "*WandaVision* credits directing viewers to watch *Avengers: Age of Ultron* on Disney+" (screenshot by author).

Disney, 2021c. "*WandaVision*'s PLEASE STAND BY placard" (screenshot by author).

Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021. "Warner Brothers: American film studio," at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Warner-Brothers>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Elizabeth Evans, 2011. *Transmedia television: Audiences, new media, and daily life*. New York: Routledge.

Elizabeth Evans, 2008. "Character, audience agency and transmedia drama," *Media, Culture & Society*, volume 30, number 2, pp. 197–213.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443707086861>, accessed 29 June 2022.

Karin Fast and Henrik Örnebring, 2017. "Transmedia world-building: *The Shadow* (1931–present) and *Transformers* (1984–present)," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, volume 20, number 6, pp.

636–652.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877915605887>, accessed 29 June 2022.

Nikki Finke and Mike Fleming, Jr., 2010. “It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s Chris Nolan! He’ll mentor Superman 3.0 and prep 3rd Batman,” *Deadline* (9 February), at <https://deadline.com/2010/02/its-a-bird-its-a-plane-its-chris-nolan-hell-mentor-superman-3-0-while-preparing-3rd-batman-24783/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Ray Fisher (@ray8fisher), 2021. “Please read” (13 January), at <https://twitter.com/ray8fisher/status/1349500170896084992>, accessed 3 March 2021.

Ray Fisher (@ray8fisher), 2020. “Joss Whedon’s on-set treatment of the cast and crew of *Justice League* was gross, abusive, unprofessional and completely unacceptable” (1 July), at <https://twitter.com/ray8fisher/status/1278362556214755329>, accessed 3 March 2021.

Martin Flanagan, Mike McKenny, and Andrew Livingstone, 2016. *The Marvel Studios phenomenon: Inside a transmedia universe*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501311871>, accessed 29 June 2022.

Mike Fleming, Jr., 2020. “Disney halts ‘The Falcon and the Winter Soldier’ Prague shoot over coronavirus concerns,” *Deadline* (10 March), at <https://deadline.com/2020/03/falcon-and-the-winter-soldier-halted-coronavirus-prague-disney-plus-1202878797/>, accessed 19 May 2021.

Mike Fleming, Jr., 2019. “Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige adds Marvel Chief Creative Officer title; He’ll oversee all creative & story initiatives,” *Deadline* (15 October), at <https://deadline.com/2019/10/kevin-feige-marvel-studios-president-adds-chief-creative-officer-marvel-title-oversees-all-creative-1202760382/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Mike Fleming, Jr., 2017. “No. 13 ‘Batman V. Superman’ box office profits — 2016 most valuable movie blockbuster tournament,” *Deadline* (23 March), at <https://deadline.com/2017/03/batman-v-superman-box-office-profit-2016-1202049201/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Stephen Ford (@StephenSeanFord), 2021. “Hear me out,” at <https://twitter.com/stephenseanford/status/1355616480159617025>, accessed 2 February 2021.

Matthew Freeman, 2014. “Up, up and across: Superman, the second World War and the historical development of transmedia storytelling,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, volume 35, number 2, pp. 215–239.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2014.941564>, accessed 29 June 2022.

Ben Fritz, 2017. “The quest to save ‘Justice League’,” *Wall Street Journal* (6 November), at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/offbeat-super-heroes-take-on-batman-wonder-woman-1509997635>, accessed 2 April 2021.

Gal Gadot (@GalGadot), 2019. “#ReleaseTheSnyderCut,” at <https://twitter.com/GalGadot/status/1196167460501671936>, accessed 18 March 2021.

Adam Holmes, 2015. “Man of Steel ending explained: How Superman’s actions affect the DC Cinematic Universe,” *Cinemablend* (10 April), at <https://www.cinemablend.com/new/Man-Steel-Ending-Explained-How-Superman-Actions-Affect-DC-Cinematic-Universe-70715.html>, accessed 5 May 2021.

Mark Hughes, 2020. “‘Mulan’ small success has big implications for future of VOD at Disney,” *Forbes* (29 October), at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markhughes/2020/10/28/mulan-small-success-has-big-implications-for-future-of-vod-at-disney/?sh=ef081137a91d>, accessed 20 May 2021.

Henry Jenkins, 2013. “The reign of the ‘mothership’: Transmedia’s past, present, and possible futures,” In: Denise Mann (editor). *Wired TV: Laboring over an interactive future*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, pp. 244–268.

Henry Jenkins 2006a. *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Henry Jenkins, 2006b. *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, 2013. *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Derek Johnson, 2013. *Media franchising: Creative license and collaboration in the culture industries*. New York: New York University Press.

Justice Con, 2021. "Spotlight on Ray Fisher," at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDEIEBqIPTg>, accessed 20 April 2021.

Borys Kit, 2020. "'It will be an entirely new thing': Zack Snyder's \$20M-Plus 'Justice League' cut plans revealed," *Hollywood Reporter* (20 May), at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/justice-league-snyder-cut-plans-revealed-it-will-be-an-new-thing-1295102/>, accessed 20 May 2021.

Borys Kit, 2017. "Zack Snyder steps down from 'Justice League' to deal with family tragedy," *Hollywood Reporter* (22 May), at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/zack-snyder-steps-down-justice-league-deal-family-tragedy-1006455/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Brent Lang, 2021. "WarnerMedia's Ann Sarnoff on 'Zack Snyder's Justice League' and DC's future," *Variety* (22 March), at <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/zack-snyder-justice-league-suicide-squad-ray-fisher-warnermedia-1234935580/>, accessed 22 May 2021.

Meghan Leon (writer) and Bradford Baruh (director), 2021. "The making of *WandaVision*" (Season 1, Episode 1) [TV series], In: Kevin Feige, Brad Winderbaum, Louis D'Esposito, Victoria Alonso, Jeff Redmond, and Bradford Baruh (executive producers), *Assembled*. Marvel Studios (12 March).

Geoffrey A. Long, 2007. "Transmedia storytelling: Business, aesthetics and production at the Jim Henson Company," S.M. thesis, Department of Comparative Media Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, at <http://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/39152#files-area>, accessed 29 June 2022.

Jason Mamoia (@prideofgypsies), 2019. "Well let's be honest if it wasn't for this man we wouldn't have Aquaman," *Instagram* (18 August), at https://www.instagram.com/tv/B1U1rmigdlY/?utm_source=ig_embed, accessed 18 March 2021.

Joe Manganiello (@JoeManganiello), 2021. "#RestoreTheSnyderVerse #Deathstroke," at <https://twitter.com/joemanganiello/status/1377094986102018051>, accessed 11 April 2021.

Kim Masters, 2016. "'Suicide Squad's' secret drama: Rushed production, competing cuts, high anxiety," *Hollywood Reporter* (3 August), at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/suicide-squads-secret-drama-rushed-916693/>, accessed 5 March 2021.

Carly Mayberry, 2021. "Disney+'s 'WandaVision' cast into top viewing spot worldwide," *Forbes* (11 February), at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carlymayberry/2021/02/11/disneys-wandavision-cast-into-top-viewing-spot-worldwide/?sh=2eb88aa86133>, accessed 7 May 2021.

Jason Mittell, 2013. "Forensic fandom and the drillable text," at <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/mittell/#.VWQymPmqko>, accessed 29 June 2022.

Nash Information Services, 2021. "Box office history for Superman movies," *The Numbers*, at https://www.the-numbers.com/movies/franchise/Superman#tab=summary&franchise_movies_overview=od5, accessed 18 May 2021.

Sean O'Connell, 2021a. *Release the Snyder Cut: The crazy true story behind the fight that saved Zack Snyder's Justice League*. Guildford, Conn.: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books.

Sean O'Connell, 2021b. "Zack Snyder says the studio had 'rules' about what he couldn't put in his Snyder Cut of Justice League," *Cinemablend* (19 March), at <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2564640/zack-snyder-says-the-studio-had-rules-about-what-he-couldnt-put-in-his-snyder-cut-of-justice-league>, accessed 27 March 2021.

Sean O'Connell, 2020. "Joss Whedon is leaving HBO show The Nevers, read his statement," *Cinemablend* (25 November), at <https://www.cinemablend.com/television/2559344/joss-whedon-is-leaving-hbo-show-the-nevers-read-his-statement>, accessed 11 March 2021.

Kofi Outlaw, 2021. "New Justice League 4K trailer sparks major backlash from Zack Snyder fans," *Comicbook.com* (29 April), at <https://comicbook.com/movies/news/justice-league-4k-trailer-zack-snyder-cut-fan-reactions/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Andrea Phillips, 2012. *A creator's guide to transmedia storytelling: How to captivate and engage audiences across multiple platforms*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Mara Reinstein, 2020. "Not your mother's suburbs: The Marvel Cinematic Universe comes to television with *WandaVision* the new Disney+ series that places a super-powered Elizabeth Olsen and Paul Bettany in the suburbs of classic sitcoms," *Emmy* (16 December), at <https://www.emmys.com/news/features/not-your-mothers-suburbs>, accessed 19 May 2021.

Joanna Robinson, 2020. "Is releasing the Snyder Cut of *Justice League* a victory for toxic fandoms?" *Vanity Fair* (22 May), at <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2020/05/is-releasing-the-snyder-cut-a-victory-for-toxic-fandoms>, accessed 19 May 2021.

Rotten Tomatoes, 2021a. "*Justice League*," at https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/justice_league_2017, accessed 18 May 2021.

Rotten Tomatoes, 2021b. "The series finale: *WandaVision* season 1," at <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/wandavision/s01/e09>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Rotten Tomatoes, 2021c. "*Zack Snyder's Justice League*," at https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/zack_snyders_justice_league, accessed 18 May 2021.

Mike Ryan, 2021. "Zack Snyder on getting back to basics with 'Army of the Dead' after what he calls 'torture'," *Uproxx* (14 May), at <https://uproxx.com/movies/zack-snyder-army-of-the-dead-justice-league/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Carlos A. Scolari, Paolo Bertetti, and Matthew Freeman, 2014. *Transmedia archaeology: Storytelling in the borderlines of science fiction, comics and pulp magazines*. London: Palgrave Pivot. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137434371>, accessed 29 June 2022.

Zack Snyder (@zacksnyder), 2021. "Drive way productions," *Vero* (4 May), at <https://vero.co/zacksnyder/B5v-9T6z2GFN6rNVgtxWN8J4>, accessed 16 May 2021.

Chelsea Steiner, 2021. "If you liked this week's *WandaVision*, you'll love *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*," *The Mary Sue* (31 January), at <https://www.themarysue.com/if-you-liked-this-weeks-wandavision-youll-love-agents-of-s-h-i-e-l-d/>, accessed 11 March 2021.

Erik Swann, 2020. "DC Films boss confirms how the multiverse will work in the DCEU," *Cinemablend* (22 August), at <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2553096/dc-films-boss-confirms-how-the-multiverse-will-work-in-the-dceu>, accessed 23 March 2021.

Paul Tassi, 2019. "Kevin Feige confirms you'll need to watch Disney Plus Marvel shows to keep up with the movie MCU," *Forbes* (7 November), at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2019/11/07/kevin-feige-confirms-youll-need-to-watch-disney-plus-marvel-shows-to-keep-up-with-the-movie-mcu/?sh=38ccd8066d08>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Michelle Trachtenberg (@michelletrachtenberg), 2021. "Thank you @sarahmgellar for saying this," at <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLH9ce-ByTV/>, accessed 20 April 2021.

Twitter, 2021a. "#DeathstrokeHBOMax," at https://twitter.com/search?q=%23DeathstrokeHBOMax%20&src=typed_query&f=live, accessed 5 April 2021.

Twitter, 2021b. "#MakeTheBatfleckMovie" at https://twitter.com/search?q=%23MakeTheBatfleckMovie%20&src=typed_query&f=live, accessed 11 April 2021.

Twitter, 2021c. "#ReleaseTheAyerCut" at https://twitter.com/search?q=%23ReleaseTheAyerCut&src=typed_query&f=live, accessed 26 March 2021.

Twitter, 2021d. “#RestoreTheSnyderVerse” at https://twitter.com/search?q=%23RestoreTheSnyderverse&src=typed_query&f=live, accessed 22 March 2021.

Daniël Van Gool, 2010. “Jeff Gomez reveals secrets to transmedia franchise development at CineKid” (1 December), at https://www.argn.com/2010/11/jeff_gomez_reveals_secrets_to_transmedia_franchise_development_at_cinekid/, accessed 20 March 2021.

Adam B. Vary, 2021. “Marvel’s Kevin Feige on ‘WandaVision,’ ‘Star Wars’ and how the pandemic is like Thanos’ blip,” *Variety* (11 January), at <https://variety.com/2021/tv/news/kevin-feige-wandavision-1234882498/>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Vero True Social, 2021. “OFFICIAL Man of Steel Watch Party with Zack Snyder by VERO True Social” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Mj5FZ_FxG8, accessed 22 May 2021.

WarnerMedia, 2020. “Warner Bros. Pictures Group announces innovative, hybrid distribution model for its 2021 theatrical slate” (3 December), at <https://pressroom.warnermedia.com/us/media-release/hbo-max/warner-bros-pictures-group-announces-innovative-hybrid-distribution-model-its-2021>, accessed 5 May 2021.

WarnerMedia, 2014. “Warner Bros. details strategic content plans at Time Warner investor conference” (15 October), at <https://www.warnerbros.com/news/press-releases/warner-bros-details-strategic-content-plans-time-warner-investor-conference>, accessed 5 March 2021.

Charlie Wetzel and Stephanie Wetzel, 2020. *The Marvel Studios story: How a failing comic book publisher became a hollywood superhero*. New York: HarperCollins Leadership.

Yahoo! News, 2016. “Henry Cavill: Fan response to Batman v Superman is more important than the reviews” (24 March), at <https://news.yahoo.com/henry-cavill-fan-response-to-batman-v-superman-is-153603237.html>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Xander Zellner, 2021. “‘WandaVision’ song ‘Agatha All Along’ is now a billboard chart hit,” *Billboard* (3 March), at https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/chart-beat/9534159/agatha-all-along-digital-song-sales-wandavision/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social, accessed 2 May 2021.

Ken Ziffren, 2020. “Ken Ziffren: How talent deals are evolving as studios become streamers (guest column),” *Hollywood Reporter* (6 February), at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/ken-ziffren-how-talent-deals-are-evolving-as-studios-become-streamers-guest-column-1274871/>, accessed 20 May 2021.

Editorial history

Received 7 September 2021; revised 12 January 2022; accepted 29 March 2022.



This paper is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Transmedia storytelling during the COVID-19 pandemic: Marvel’s *WandaVision* and Zack Snyder’s *Justice League*

by Luke Webster, Tama Leaver, and Eleanor Sandry.

First Monday, Volume 27, Number 7 - 4 July 2022

<https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/11784/10684>

doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i7.11784>