Cover Image

Key & Terms

Bold writing indicates an importance to the information,
italics represents information that will likely gain you further marks but isn't necessarily important information.
Superscript indicates a recap of a theory or extra/specific information on something specific.
BP - Black Panther
MCU - Marvel Cinematic Universe

Lexus x Black Panther

"Welcome to Wakanda"

NYFW Catwalk

Product Context

Black Panther is the *17th film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe* (MCU), the **highest-grossing film franchise in history.**
It was **directed by Ryan Coogler** (Creed) and **released in February 2018.**
The film shows us the *fictional African kingdom of Wakanda*, which has *avoided European colonisation and achieved a technological superiority through the use of a mineral called Vibranium.*
T'Challa (*Chadwick Boseman) must fight a number of foes who oppose him becoming king after the death of his father.*
Black Panther (T'Challa) first appeared in Fantastic Four #62, released July 1966.
The film was **produced by Marvel Studios, a famous comic book brand that is also a subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company.**
Black Panther was **extremely successful, broke the records for the highest opening weekend in the USA, and also performed well globally.**
The film grossed well over **$1billion worldwide, with 48% in non-US countries.**
It was also **one of the only superhero films to be nominated for a "Best Picture" Academy Award. It won three Oscars for Costume, Production Design, and Original Soundtrack.**

Media Industries

-- HISTORICAL CONTEXT --
From 15th-20th century, **European powers colonised African countries and exploited the continent for both resources and slave labour.**
Africans were branded 'savages' by the European invaders, their cultures dismissed as 'primitive'.
During the **early 20th century, African Americans attempted to establish a new black cultural identity with movements such as the Harlem Renaissance.**
The **Black Panther Party (October 1966-82) was a political activist group established initially to provide armed monitoring of police behaviour and prevent police brutality in the US.**
It was controversial, with many Panthers being arrested or killed in confrontations with police.
-- CULTURAL CONTEXT --
The **science fiction blockbuster and superhero genres have traditionally been dominated by white, male characters.** In the *1990s, actors like Will Smith and Wesley Snipes did break ground playing black characters*, but **recent action films and especially superhero films have rarely featured African-American actors in lead roles.**
For the **last 15 years, Marvel films have topped the box office**. Though these **regularly featured non-white characters, they were often sidekicks (e.g. The Falcon in the Captain America films).**
There have also been *very few superhero films with a female lead (Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel being exceptions).*

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Media Industries (cont)

Black cinema has traditionally consisted of issues-based social realism (e.g. the films of Spike Lee) or have been 'arthouse'/'pre-stige' pictures (e.g. Moonlight, 2016). **Blade (1998) is one of the few superhero films to have a black main character.**

In **2016, the #oscarssowhite meme drew attention to the lack of diversity in the films nominated.**

US/European news media tends to portray Africa as an under-privileged, developing country, focusing on civil wars, famine and terrorism.

The **Victorian branding of Africa as 'the Dark Continent' has not evolved very far**. Very few feature films from Africa reach the Western mainstream, and films like Blood Diamond (2006) and Captain Phillips (2013), **though featuring sympathetic African characters, still portray Africa as a dangerous and barbaric place.**

-- ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT --

Barack Obama (2009-2017), America's first African-American president, created many initiatives that aided minority and women's groups: from universal healthcare, to college and entrepreneurship access funds for the under-privileged.

Donald Trump, the current president, has vowed to reverse many of these, winning support from mostly white, right wing Americans who consider such initiatives unfair. *In addition, Trump has insulted other countries (including many in Africa), and refused to condemn violent racist attacks in American cities.*

Worrying statistics about the amount of unarmed 'people of colour' (POC) shot by US police led to the #blacklivesmatter campaign, which has utilised social media to raise awareness of an issue that has often been ignored by mainstream media.

Media Industries (cont)

-- THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PATTERNS OF OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL, INCLUDING CONGLOMERATE OWNERSHIP, VERTICAL INTEGRATION AND DIVERSIFICATION --

Black Panther was **produced by Marvel Studios**, who became a **subsidiary of Disney in 2008.**

They are also the **film's distributor, which makes this a good example of vertical integration.**

Marvel has historically sold options on individual characters or comic book titles e.g. Spiderman to TV and then to Paramount (and who is still partly owned by Sony).

Black Panther was one of those owned fully by Marvel; in 2009 a new team began developing T'Challa and lesser known characters.

In early 2000s, Marvel Studios began to produce films, starting with Blade (1998) and the X-Men films (2000).

When Disney bought Marvel, they agreed to minimal creative influence over Marvel products.

In 2013, Marvel also signed a deal with streaming service Netflix to develop TV series for six more characters (including Daredevil and Punisher who had already been made into films)

This may have caused conflict with Disney, who has their own streaming channel, and in 2019 Netflix cancelled their Marvel shows.

Media Industries (pt2)

-- HOW MEDIA ORGANISATIONS MAINTAIN, INCLUDING THROUGH MARKETING, VARIETIES OF AUDIENCES NATIONALLY AND GLOBALLY --

Disney, the film's distributor adopted a '360-degree consumer experience' to their marketing (i.e. wherever you look, there's Black Panther!)

Media Industries (pt2) (cont)

The **concept was to make the film into a 'cultural event' across a variety of media and platforms and raising its profile from being 'another superhero' film into something more politically resonant.**

Black Panther's **teaser trailers were shown between NBA games and a special collab-oration with Lexus called 'Long Live The King' was shown during the Superbowl.**

What kind of audiences normally watch these programmes? How are they different to the usual Marvel fanbase?

The film's release also **harnessed a political element to add gravitas. Crowd-funding projects to buy under-privileged children a ticket won support from celebrities; the film was released during Black History Month; plus Coogler, the stars and the costume, hair/make-up , production designers all gave detailed interviews about how the film celebrates African culture**

There was also a **'Welcome to Wakanda' catwalk show at New York Fashion Week and features in numerous fashion magazines. (On opening weekend 44% of ticket buyers were female)**

Disney are adept at identifying nuanced demographic groups and strategies for targeting them. Many of their products are 'intercultural' i.e. **they strongly represent one cultural tradition but in a way that resonates with audiences from other cultural / national / ethnic backgrounds.**

Disney has *used recent Nielsen research to challenge conventional ideas about the ethnic diversity in mainstream America. 53% of Americans live in a multicultural or 'blended' household. 67% indicated they were enthusiastic about encountering and experimenting with 'diverse cultures'.*

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Media Industries (pt2) (cont)

-- REGULATORY FRAMEWORK OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA IN THE UK AND THE ROLE OF REGULATION IN GLOBAL PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CIRCULATION --

The **BBFC (an independent, non-governmental body) classifies film and video releases in the UK.** However, **local councils have the power to overrule BBFC decisions and rate films differently** (e.g. This is England was rated 18 by the BBFC but several counties rated it at 15).

The **theatrical release of Black Panther gained a 12a certificate.**

The film, like many recent Marvel films, features **very little romantic drama and no sex or nudity. It is fairly violent, but the combat is fantastical (hard to imitate) and there is a strong moral code to most of the conflict.**

The film was classified as **PG-13 in USA, and similarly in other territories.**

-- PROCESSES OF PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTED AND CIRCULATION AND THE IMPACT OF DIGITALLY CONVERGENT PLATFORMS --

The **teaser trailer was released in June 2017 by Disney's sister channel ABC, during NBA Finals. Within 24 hours it had been viewed 89 millions times on YT.**

Just **before release, Black Panther was the most-tweeted about film of 2018 with more than 5 million tweet globally.** In mid-**March 2018, it became the most-tweeted about film ever with 35 million tweets.**

-- APPLYING THEORY --

Hesmondhalgh - Cultural Industries

^(1) the idea that cultural industry companies try to minimise risk and maximise audiences through vertical and horizontal integration, and by formatting their cultural products (e.g.

Media Industries (pt2) (cont)

through use of stars, genres and serials). (2) the idea that the largest companies or conglomerates now operate across a number of different cultural industries. (3) the idea that the radical potential of the internet has been contained to some extent by its partial incorporation into a large, profit-orientated set of cultural industries.^.

The concept of profit in relation to the film industry and in this case specifically to the film franchises. **Often films within a series can become formulaic and lack risk.**

The film released as part of a **synergy- with fashion, music, videogames, sports tie-ins, and even a car, releasing with the film.**

Curran & Seaton - Media and Power

Theory recap: (1) the idea that the media is controlled by a small number of companies primarily driven by the logic of profit and power. (2) the idea that media concentration generally limits or inhibits variety, creativity and quality. (3) the idea that more socially diverse patterns of ownership help to create the conditions for more varied and adventurous media productions.

The film's **celebrated diversity challenges Curran & Seaton's idea that a small number of media institutions limits creativity & variety.**

The **conglomerate model (Marvel as a separate brand to Disney) offers a more complex pattern of ownership than Curran and Seaton describe.**

The **dominance of Marvel in the sci-fi/superhero genre limits the opportunities for alternative, riskier independent films in this genre.**

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