

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ACCOUNTING

THE SUPERHERO FILM: DAWN OF BLOCKBUSTER SUSTAINABILITY

MICHAEL MAGAGNA
SPRING 2016

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Accounting
with honors in Accounting

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Suzanne Wright
Senior Instructor in Accounting
Thesis Supervisor

Henock Louis
Professor of Accounting
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

When audiences enter cinemas today, they witness a plethora of advertisements showcasing the latest superhero films. Furthermore, 2016 will see the release of six new superhero films – the most a single calendar year has experienced yet. The superhero film is currently the apex of the entertainment industry, with frequent motion picture releases being prioritized by studios and audiences alike. But is this sustainable? Over the course of this composition, the history of the superhero film is analyzed to fully understand its ascension to the top of the motion picture industry and its potential sustainability. Considering 1978's *Superman* as the beginning of the genre, the history analysis encompasses all major franchise films up to 2016's *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*. The key metric that is analyzed for each film is reception, both critical and financial. Critical figures are derived from the Internet Movie Database and Rotten Tomatoes while film grosses represent financial reception. In order to umbrella financial figures from different decades, average ticket price is used to create the number of tickets sold per film. Implementing these various figures, the superhero film analysis covers four distinct periods – the industry's rise (Chapter 2), its new millennium (Chapter 3), the Marvel Cinematic Universe and its impact (Chapter 4), and its role as the industry driver (Chapter 5). Chapter 2 witnesses the superhero film transform itself to a mockery. Chapter 3 sees the rebirth of the superhero film and its gradual ascension in the industry. Chapter 4 changes the motion picture industry as a whole with Marvel's shared-universe format. Consequently, Chapter 5 presents the industry attempting to emulate Marvel. That is the point where there industry sits today. As a result of this analysis, certain factors are determined that promote future sustainability for the superhero film industry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	iv
LIST OF TABLES	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Measures of Success	3
Accounting for Inflation.....	5
Chapter 2 An Industry Rises	8
<i>Superman</i>	8
<i>Batman</i>	12
An Industry Rises: Conclusions	16
Chapter 3 A New Millennium.....	19
<i>X-Men</i>	19
<i>Spider-Man</i>	22
<i>The Dark Knight</i>	24
A New Millennium: Conclusions.....	26
Chapter 4 The Marvel Initiative.....	29
Phase 1	29
Phase 2	32
Phase 3	36
Chapter 5 The Industry Driver	39
Sony	39
20 th Century Fox.....	40
Warner Bros.	44
Chapter 6 Results & Conclusion.....	45
Film Quality	45
Passionate Filmmaking	49
Innovative Offerings	50
Appendix A Chapter 2 – Franchise Details	52
Appendix B Chapter 3 – Franchise Details.....	53

Appendix C Chapter 4 – Franchise Details..... 54

Appendix D Chapter 5 – Franchise Details 55

Appendix E Film Rankings According to Tickets Sold..... 56

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 57

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Upcoming Studio Releases.....	1
Figure 2. Average Film Ticket Price per Year.....	6
Figure 3. <i>Superman</i> – US Tickets Sold vs. Average Review.....	16
Figure 4. <i>Batman</i> Franchise – US Tickets Sold vs. Average Review.....	17
Figure 5. <i>Superman & Batman</i> – US Tickets Sold vs. Average Review.....	17
Figure 6. <i>X-Men, Spider-Man, & The Dark Knight</i> – US Tickets Sold vs. Average Review..	27
Figure 7. Marvel Cinematic Universe – Phase 3 Diagram.....	37
Figure 8. <i>Superman</i> Franchise. Correlation = 0.9294.....	46
Figure 9. <i>Batman</i> Franchise. Correlation = 0.6653.....	47
Figure 10. <i>X-Men</i> Franchise. Correlation = 0.0582.....	47
Figure 11. <i>Spider-Man</i> Franchise. Correlation = 0.7750.....	48
Figure 12. Marvel Cinematic Universe. Correlation = 0.5703.....	48

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Average Ticket Price per Year.....	6
Table 2. 6-10 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Superman</i>	9
Table 3. 16-20 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Superman II</i>	10
Table 4. 30-35 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Superman III</i>	11
Table 5. 36-40 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Superman IV</i>	11
Table 6. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Batman</i>	12
Table 7. 11-15 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Batman Returns</i>	14
Table 8. 11-15 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Batman Forever</i>	15
Table 9. 26-30 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Batman & Robin</i>	15
Table 10. 16-20 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>X2: X-Men United</i>	21
Table 11. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Spider-Man</i>	22
Table 12. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Spider-Man 2</i>	23
Table 13. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>The Dark Knight</i>	26
Table 14. 11-15 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Iron Man</i>	30
Table 15. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>The Avengers</i>	32
Table 16. 6-10 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Iron Man 3</i>	33
Table 17. 11-15 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. <i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	34
Table 18. 1-6 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold.	49

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to personally thank Suzanne Wright for all of her assistance throughout this entire process. Her enthusiasm towards my topic from the very beginning greatly encouraged and enhanced this final product presented in the subsequent pages. Not often does an accounting major get to thoroughly delve into a topic that represents his true passion. Let this thesis serve as the exception.

Chapter 1

Introduction

"You know what I am? I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it! You know, I just... do."¹ Spoken by the Joker in *The Dark Knight*, this line symbolizes the current state of the superhero film industry. With 2016 representing a significant turning point for an exponentially growing industry, studios are anxious for a share of the wealth involved. To illustrate this notion, **Figure 1**² displays how many films the four major production studios plan to release in the near future:

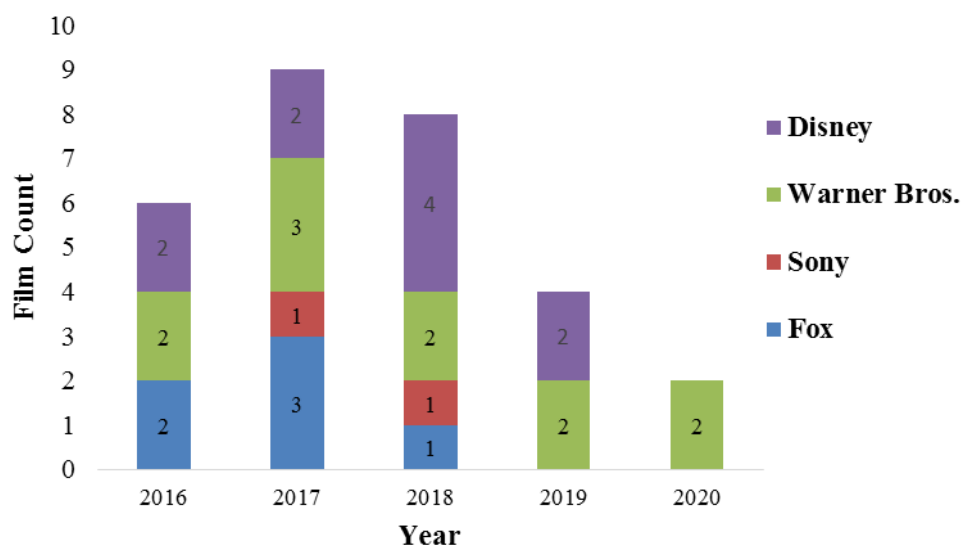


Figure 1. Upcoming Studio Releases.

With 29 films to be released over the next five years, this unparalleled growth (and wealth potential) is what studios are desperately chasing.

¹ Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight*, Performed by Christian Bale, Michael Caine, and Heath Ledger (2008; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008), Blu-ray.

² Adam Chitwood, "Upcoming Superhero Movie Release Dates: From 2016 to 2020," Collider, January 23, 2016, <http://collider.com/upcoming-new-superhero-movies-2016-2020-release>.

To say that superhero films are popular would be a gross understatement. From popularizing a talking raccoon to rival studios forming an unprecedented partnership, superhero films currently dominate the entertainment industry. But it was not always this way. There was a time when superhero films were considered risky propositions.

From 1978 to 1999, only two substantial superhero properties managed to develop into their own film franchises – Superman and Batman. Even those adaptations managed to sputter after subsequent sequels produced diminished returns and poor critical reception. However, the new millennium marked a renaissance for the superhero film and the dawn of a true industry. From this spawned individual franchises such as *X-Men*, *Spiderman*, and *The Dark Knight*. The industry exponentially grew until the point it is found today – churning out crossover films within connected universes and full catalogs of heroes appearing side by side. Tangible proof illustrating this growth can be derived from the financial reception of crossover films like *The Avengers* franchise. These two films, 2012's *The Avengers* and 2015's *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, are two of the highest grossing films of all time, both domestically and globally.³ The success of *The Avengers* franchise represents the current success of the superhero film industry. At this point, it is the most popular film industry with multiple studios producing numerous films annually. But is this sustainable?

“They need you right now. But when they don't, they'll cast you out.... They're only as good as the world allows them to be.”⁴ Additional insight provided by the Joker, this line applies to the type of film that contains all superhero films – blockbusters. A blockbuster is a film with an optimal budget and release date aiming to be a great commercial success. Blockbusters are what people want and what studios prioritize. However, they are fluid in nature. Whether they be Western, science-fiction, crime-thriller, or action-adventure, blockbusters have evolved over time similar to audiences. When asked for

³ Adam Chitwood, "Upcoming Superhero Movie Release Dates: From 2016 to 2020," Collider, January 23, 2016, <http://collider.com/upcoming-new-superhero-movies-2016-2020-release-dates>.

⁴ Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (2008), Blu-ray.

his comments regarding the sustainability of superhero films, director Steven Spielberg, father of the blockbuster, said the following:⁵

We were around when the Western died and there will be a time when the superhero movie goes the way of the Western. It doesn't mean there won't be another occasion where the Western comes back and the superhero movie someday returns. Of course, right now the superhero movie is alive and thriving. I'm only saying that these cycles have a finite time in popular culture.

His words sparked this composition. Contrary to Mr. Spielberg's comments, superhero films represent the opportunity to act as the exception to the blockbuster rule.

While superhero films certainly qualify as a cyclical film genre, they have the potential for atypical, long-term sustainability. This is predicated on continued offerings combining quality filmmaking with innovative ideas and viewer payoff. However, these are all just words without applying the appropriate context. This composition will aim to examine the history behind the superhero film, determine what factors led to successes (or failures), and derive each film's ultimate impact and legacy. As a result of this thorough analysis, it will be easy to understand why the superhero film is here to stay. To quote *The Dark Knight* one last time, "here...we... go!"⁶

Measures of Success

Before proceeding with analyzing superhero film history, this notion of success achieved by superhero films must be defined via specific parameters. Reception to any category of film is two-fold – financial and critical. Over the decades of films that will be analyzed, critical and financial reception will be crucial to understanding a film's legacy and determining superhero sustainability.

⁵ Jack Coyle, "Fall Movie Preview: Spielberg Plunges into the Cold War," Associated Press, September 2, 2015, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/7b4d35d049ff4dc0b6ffe94c4a3fa7ed/fall-movie-preview-spielberg-plunges-cold-war>.

⁶ Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (2008), Blu-ray.

Critical reception is comprised of two groups' opinions – film critics and the general public. With these groups containing two distinct types of people, two separate measures will be considered. These measures will be derived from Rotten Tomatoes and the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDb). Rotten Tomatoes is a website that uses a rating system called the Tomatometer, which is based on the published opinions of hundreds of film and television critics. A trusted measurement of movie quality for millions of moviegoers, it represents the percentage of professional critic reviews that are positive for a given film.⁷ Consequently, Rotten Tomatoes will be the primary source for critical opinion. Conversely, IMDb will represent the general public. Offering a searchable database (with user reviews) of over 3 million movies, IMDb has over 250 million monthly visitors.⁸ Using a one to ten scale (with decimals), IMDb will act as the opinion of the general public.

An important factor applicable to both of these measurements is time and its effect. Rotten Tomatoes considers critical reviews of all types, both from the original release and subsequent re-releases. Similarly, IMDb allows for all types of users (and age-groups) to provide his/her opinion in regard to films at any point. Having time accounted for allows Rotten Tomatoes and IMDb to accurately provide insight into a film's aged perception and legacy.

While IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes do an excellent job of producing aggregate review figures, qualitative commentary is necessary to enhance the quantitative figure. In addition to providing the Rotten Tomatoes percentage and IMDb score, reviews from notable, credible sources will be presented as well in order to provide a more meaningful context in regard to these superhero films. One such notable critic is Roger Ebert, who was a film critic at the Chicago Sun-Times until his death in 2013. Named an honorary life member of the Directors' Guild of America, Ebert is the most influential film critic of all time.⁹ Not only will his film reviews provide additional commentary, they will also greatly assist in the

⁷ "What Is the Tomatometer?" Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com>.

⁸ "What Is IMDb?" Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.imdb.com/help/show_leaf?about&ref_=hlp_brws.

⁹ "Roger Ebert," RogertEbert.com, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.rogerebert.com/contributors/roger-ebert>.

analysis of films released before the dawn of the Internet. Another credible source that will provide more recent commentary on the superhero film genre is Collider. The ultimate source for impactful entertainment news, Collider is dedicated to delivering content that is thoughtful, analytical, and all-encompassing, with a tinge of personality for good measure.¹⁰ Comprised of a group of committed industry observers, Collider is an online blog that offers an honest, appreciated outlook at the superhero industry and its current state.

As opposed to critical reception, financial reception is a straight-forward measurement. It will be accounted for using three relevant statistics: opening weekend domestic gross, total domestic gross, and total global gross. These financial figures will be referenced when necessary. All box office information will be provided by the Internet Movie Database as well. However, inflation is a pertinent variable that must be taken into consideration.

Accounting for Inflation

Because the first established superhero franchise began in 1978, film gross amounts will have significantly different impacts when aligned to their respective years as opposed to a straight comparison. Inflation must be carefully accounted for in order to properly examine these superhero film grosses. A way of circumventing this mitigating variable is to consider the average ticket price per year. **Table 1**¹¹ displays average U.S. film-ticket prices dating back to 1978, when *Superman* was first released:

¹⁰ "About Us," Collider. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://collider.com/about>.

¹¹ "Adjusting for Ticket Price Inflation." Box Office Mojo, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/about/adjuster.htm>.

Table 1. Average Ticket Price per Year.

1978	\$2.34	1985	\$3.55	1992	\$4.15	1998	\$4.69	2004	\$6.21	2010	\$7.89
1979	\$2.51	1986	\$3.71	1993	\$4.14	1999	\$5.08	2005	\$6.41	2011	\$7.93
1980	\$2.69	1987	\$3.91	1994	\$4.18	2000	\$5.39	2006	\$6.55	2012	\$7.96
1981	\$2.78	1988	\$4.11	1995	\$4.35	2001	\$5.66	2007	\$6.88	2013	\$8.13
1982	\$2.94	1989	\$3.97	1996	\$4.42	2002	\$5.81	2008	\$7.18	2014	\$8.17
1983	\$3.15	1990	\$4.23	1997	\$4.59	2003	\$6.03	2009	\$7.50	2015	\$8.34
1984	\$3.36	1991	\$4.21								

A quick glimpse at the data shows a gradual increase in the price per year, with few exceptions. Drawn from **Table 1**, **Figure 2** displays the linear relationship between year and average ticket price:

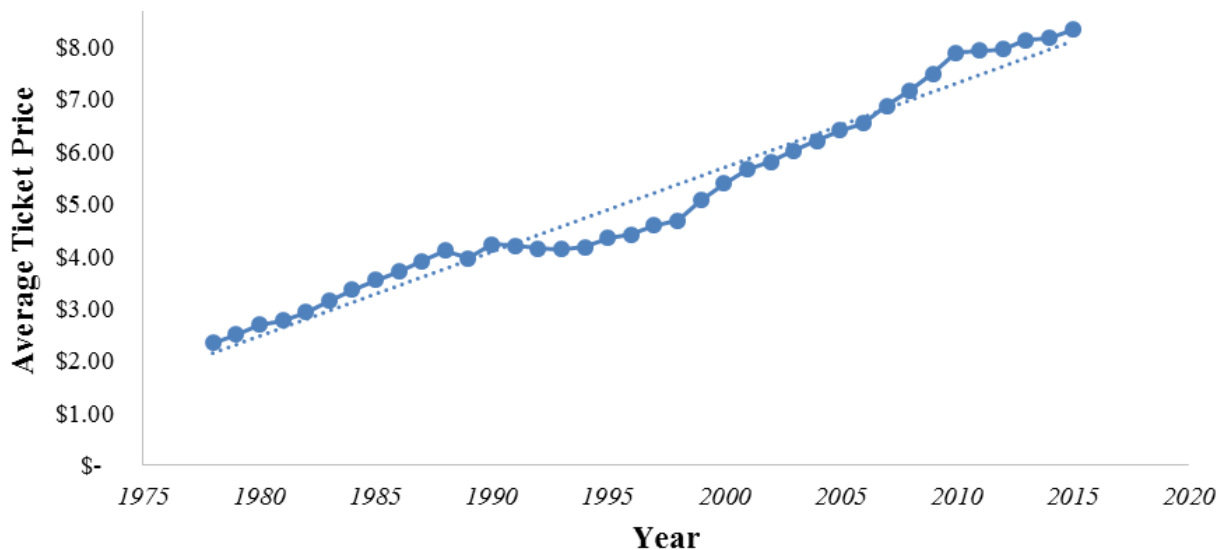


Figure 2. Average Film Ticket Price per Year.

The rate of ticket price increases is effectively a straight line, with a correlation of .9828. This calculation is paramount in producing a measure that can be applied to all superhero films spanning the scope of this work. Dividing a film's domestic gross by the average ticket price for its year will produce the amount of tickets sold per film.

The amount of tickets sold is universally encompassing, regardless of year, due to the average ticket price assumption. However, this assumption is not to dismiss film grosses as irrelevant. Film grosses are still a vital statistic in terms of evaluating a film's success, impact, and legacy. Rather, tickets sold is a necessary component in order to accurately quantify a film's financial reception compared to

others. Having defined the parameters of success and avoided any problems posed by inflation, the superhero film history analysis may commence.

Chapter 2

An Industry Rises

“You’re gonna need a bigger boat.”¹² While not exactly a line from a superhero film, this line rose to fame via *Jaws* – the groundbreaking 1975 film. *Jaws* is significant to the superhero film genre because it established the concept of a blockbuster. Directed by Steven Spielberg, *Jaws* ushered in half a decade of classic films including *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Alien*, and *Superman*. *Superman*, the first superhero film established in the era of blockbusters, is where the genre originates. The original *Superman* franchise consists of four films released over the course of 10 years. Following the original *Superman* franchise was the *Batman* franchise, which released four films within nine years. Both produced by Warner Bros. (WB), these superhero franchises endured similar paths in regard to critical and commercial success.

Superman

“You’ll believe a man can fly.”¹³ Serving as a tagline for *Superman*, 1978 marked the first time a superhero appeared in a big-budget blockbuster. “One of the central icons of American popular culture,”¹⁴ *Superman* was the quintessential choice for the industry to take off. Hitting theaters in December of that year, *Superman* was an instant hit, with critics and audiences alike. Rotten Tomatoes gives it a 93%¹⁵ with a consensus saying “*Superman* deftly blends humor and gravitas, taking advantage of the perfectly cast

¹² Steven Spielberg, *Jaws*, Performed by Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, and Richard Dreyfus (1975; United States: Universal Pictures, 2005), DVD.

¹³ Richard Donner, *Superman*, Performed by Marlon Brandon, and Gene Hackman and Christopher Reeve (1978; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2012), Blu-ray.

¹⁴ Roger Ebert, “*Superman*,” *Chicago Sun-Times* (Chicago), December 15, 1978.

¹⁵ *Superman*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_the_movie.

Christopher Reeve to craft a loving, nostalgic tribute to an American pop culture icon.”¹⁶ Additionally, IMDb awards it with a 7.3.¹⁷ In terms of commercial reception, *Superman* grossed over \$134 million domestically and over \$300 million globally.¹⁸ Regarding ticket reception, *Superman* sold over 57 million – an impressive number representing the 6th most tickets sold in the superhero genre. **Table 2** displays this feat:

Table 2. 6-10 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Superman*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
6	Superman	1978	57,358,127
7	The Dark Knight Rises	2012	56,298,882
8	Avengers: Age of Ultron	2015	55,026,891
9	Iron Man 3	2013	50,306,553
10	Spider-Man 3	2007	48,914,288

Clearly, *Superman* succeeded in 1978. As Roger Ebert opined, “*Superman* is a pure delight, a wondrous combination of all the old-fashioned things we never really get tired of: adventure and romance, heroes and villains, earthshaking special effects and wit.”¹⁹ The factors that led to these glowing remarks and *Superman*’s success must be examined. The casting must be mentioned first and foremost. As mentioned by Rotten Tomatoes, Christopher Reeve perfectly encapsulated Superman. Superman “is Reeve,” who “sells the role; wrong casting here would have sunk everything.”²⁰ Additionally, Margot Kidder, Gene Hackman, and Marlon Brando added distinction to the cast. Directed by the talented Richard Donner, *Superman* was a hard film to pass on in 1978. A special-effect often overlooked in today’s technology, the ability to make a man fly in 1978 proved to be transcendental. Seeing a man fly for the first time, not to mention a superhero fly, must have been extremely enticing to moviegoers. This movie works so well due to its special effects and its ability to have fun with them. “Special effects on this vast scale (falling airliners, derailling passenger trains, subterranean dungeons, cracks in the earth,

¹⁶ *Superman*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

¹⁷ “*Superman*,” Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078346Movie>.

¹⁸ *Superman*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

¹⁹ Roger Ebert, “*Superman*,” 1978.

²⁰ Roger Ebert, “*Superman*,” 1978.

volcanic eruptions, dams bursting) are so expensive and difficult that it takes a special kind of courage to kid them a little.”²¹ In summation, *Superman* succeeded due to the combination of perfect casting, breathtaking special effects, and the right amount of wit. *Superman* set the standard for later superhero films to emulate.

Having hoped for (and anticipated) a successful launch, WB opted to film *Superman* and its sequel simultaneously. Due to several production issues during *Superman II*'s filming, director Richard Donner was ultimately replaced. However, with much of its base still in tack (and a bulk of the filming completed), *Superman II* managed to be nearly as successful as its predecessor. “The humor occasionally stumbles into slapstick territory, and the special effects are dated, but *Superman II* meets, if not exceeds, the standard set by its predecessor.”²² Unable to gross as much as *Superman*, *Superman II* still managed to clear \$100 million domestically²³. It sold over 36 million tickets, placing it 16th on the all-time ticket list (Table 3):

Table 3. 16-20 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Superman II*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
16	Superman II	1981	36,455,982
17	Man of Steel	2013	35,798,957
18	X-Men: The Last Stand	2006	35,780,529
19	X2: X-Men United	2003	35,646,715
20	The Amazing Spider-Man	2012	32,918,425

Due to the massive success of both *Superman* films (all production issues aside), WB was eager for more of the Man of Steel. However, the productions of *Superman III* and *IV* proved that Superman could be defeated by more than just kryptonite.

Released in 1983, *Superman III*, “resorts to plot points rehashed from the previous *Superman* flicks.”²⁴ Losing focus of its own main character while replicating entire plot points, *Superman III* was

²¹ Roger Ebert, “*Superman*,” 1978.

²² *Superman II*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_ii.

²³ *Superman II*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081573>.

²⁴ *Superman III*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_iii.

derailed by critics and audiences alike. Sporting a 38% on Rotten Tomatoes²⁵ and a 4.9 on IMDb²⁶, *Superman III* grossed a mere \$59 million domestically.²⁷ That gross is translated to a mere 19 million tickets sold, placing it 35th out of the 40 qualified films (**Table 4**):

Table 4. 30-35 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Superman III*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
30	Batman and Robin	1997	23,382,395
31	Thor	2011	22,828,578
32	Captain America: The First Avenger	2011	22,276,735
33	Ant-Man	2015	21,374,438
34	Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer	2007	19,174,671
35	Superman III	1983	19,031,944

When production began on *Superman IV*, it was believed that *Superman* films could not sink any lower than *Superman III*. However, *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* rose to the challenge. “The *Superman* series bottoms out here: the action is boring, the special effects look cheaper, and none of the actors appear interested in where the plot's going.” The culprit of a 12% Tomatometer²⁸ and 3.7 on IMDb²⁹, *Superman IV* grossed only \$11 million domestically,³⁰ which resulted in a substantial loss for WB. Holding the 40th and final spot, *Superman IV* sold under 3 million tickets (**Table 5**):

Table 5. 36-40 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Superman IV*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
36	The Incredible Hulk	2008	18,737,310
37	X-Men: First Class	2011	18,462,586
38	The Wolverine	2013	16,304,656
39	Fantastic 4	2015	6,705,736
40	Superman IV: The Quest for Peace	1987	2,871,566

²⁵ *Superman III*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

²⁶ *Superman III*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086393>.

²⁷ *Superman III*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

²⁸ *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016.

http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_iv_the_quest_for_peace.

²⁹ *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094074>.

³⁰ *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

Batman

With the *Superman* franchise lying dormant as a result of 1987's *Superman IV*, WB decided to upstart another superhero film franchise in the form of 1989's *Batman*. Whereas Superman is a light-hearted character with a sense of humor, Batman represents the antithesis. Consequently, Tim Burton, known for darker visuals and gothic undertones (i.e. *Beetlejuice*), was hired to helm *Batman*. Crafting a "distinctive and atmospheric"³¹ Gotham City, Burton brought the Dark Knight to life. Michael Keaton donned the cowl as Batman, while the legendary Jack Nicholson presented audiences with his interpretation of the Joker.

Ultimately, the finished product delivered on what was promised. Critic and audience reception to the film was generally positive. Recipient of a 7.6 on IMDb³² and a 72%³³ on Rotten Tomatoes, *Batman* "is a triumph."³⁴ "An eerie, haunting spectacle, *Batman* succeeds as dark entertainment, even if Jack Nicholson's Joker too often overshadows the title character."³⁵ Commercial reception followed, with *Batman* earning nearly \$250 million domestically and over \$400 million globally.³⁶ It was 1989's highest grossing film. In terms of actual tickets sold, *Batman* is currently 4th on the list with over 62 million (Table 6):

Table 6. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Batman*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
1	The Avengers	2012	78,301,451
2	The Dark Knight	2008	74,282,083
3	Spider-Man	2002	69,484,746
4	Batman	1989	62,713,546
5	Spider-Man 2	2004	60,148,870

³¹ Roger Ebert, "Batman," Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), June 23, 1989.

³² *Batman*, Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096895>.

³³ *Batman*, Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1001781-batman>.

³⁴ Roger Ebert, "Batman," 1989.

³⁵ *Batman*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

³⁶ *Batman*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

Two spots ahead of the original *Superman*, *Batman* greatly succeeded. Factors resulting in its success include the proper hiring of a director to match the darker tone associated with Batman as well as appropriate casting. While Michael Keaton certainly did a serviceable job as the titular role, Jack Nicholson really stole the show – at least in terms of impact and screen time.

Similar to *Superman*, WB was eager to create *Batman* sequels to take advantage of the goodwill generated. Enter *Batman Returns* – the 1992 follow-up again directed by Burton and starring Michael Keaton. Replacing Jack Nicholson’s Joker was Danny DeVito’s Penguin as the main villain. Adding Christopher Walken and Michelle Pfeifer to the cast as well, *Batman Returns* was primed for success; and successful it was (for the most part). In terms of critical reception, they praised this one more so than the original. “Director Tim Burton's dark, brooding atmosphere, Michael Keaton's work as the tormented hero, and the flawless casting of Danny DeVito as The Penguin and Christopher Walken as, well, Christopher Walken make the sequel better than the first.” Recipient of an 80% on Rotten Tomatoes³⁷ and a 7.0 on IMDb³⁸, the film itself clearly appeared to be enjoyable. However, the financial reception was not overwhelming considering the positive buzz. While *Batman* was its year’s highest grossing film, *Batman Returns* brought in only \$162 million domestically and \$336 million globally.³⁹ While certainly impressive numbers, WB was certainly disappointed due to the substantial budget increase (\$35 M to \$100 M⁴⁰). Examining the number of tickets sold, *Batman Returns* accounted for 39 million translating to 15th on the list (**Table 7**):

³⁷ *Batman Returns*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/batman_returns.

³⁸ *Batman Returns*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103776>.

³⁹ *Batman Returns*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

⁴⁰ *Batman Returns*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

Table 7. 11-15 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Batman Returns*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
11	Iron Man	2008	44,373,834
12	Batman Forever	1995	42,306,003
13	Guardians of the Galaxy	2014	40,779,940
14	Iron Man 2	2010	39,559,993
15	Batman Returns	1992	39,236,554

While *Batman Returns* was certainly successful, both critically and commercially, it is worth examining what caused the lesser financial return than that of its predecessor. As previously mentioned, director Tim Burton is well-known for his darker visuals and gothic undertones. This often results in films that are more violent and less suitable for children. WB felt this perception and opted to produce a more kid-friendly version of Batman. The reasoning behind this decision was that a lighter Batman would result in more children seeing the film, which leads to more children purchasing toys.

With Burton and Keaton gone from the franchise, WB sought someone to fulfil its vision of a kid-friendly Batman. This is where Joel Schumacher entered the superhero genre and began his rise to infamy. Starting with *Batman Forever* (1995's "sequel" to the previous two films), Val Kilmer replaced Keaton behind the cowl. Additionally, Gotham City transformed from dark and gloomy to bright and vibrant. These wholesale changes to the franchise were poorly received by critics and audiences alike. "Loud, excessively busy, and often boring,"⁴¹ *Batman Forever* garners a 41% on Rotten Tomatoes⁴² and a 5.4 on IMDb. However, WB achieved its desire for increased returns, at least from a US perspective. Generating \$184 million domestically⁴³, this was a \$20 million increase from *Batman Returns*. Consequently, the amount of tickets sold increased as well to 42 million (**Table 8**):

⁴¹ *Batman Forever*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/batman_forever.

⁴² *Batman Forever*. Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

⁴³ *Batman Forever*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112462>.

Table 8. 11-15 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Batman Forever*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
11	Iron Man	2008	44,373,834
12	Batman Forever	1995	42,306,003
13	Guardians of the Galaxy	2014	40,779,940
14	Iron Man 2	2010	39,559,993
15	<i>Batman Returns</i>	1992	39,236,554

While audiences turned out for *Batman Forever*, they clearly did not care for Schumacher's interpretation of the character. Therefore, 1997's *Batman & Robin* will forever draw the ire of comic-fans. Known most for giving the Bat-suit nipples, George Clooney (replacing Kilmer as Batman) has publicly apologized on multiple occasions for what is the disaster known as *Batman & Robin*. "Joel Schumacher's tongue-in-cheek attitude hits an unbearable limit in *Batman & Robin* resulting in a frantic and mindless movie that's too jokey to care much for."⁴⁴ Sporting an 11% on the Tomatometer⁴⁵ and a 3.7 on IMDb,⁴⁶ *Batman & Robin* only made \$107 domestically.⁴⁷ Translated into ticket numbers, *Batman & Robin* only sold 23 million (**Table 9**):

Table 9. 26-30 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Batman & Robin*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
26	Thor: The Dark World	2013	25,382,536
27	The Amazing Spider-Man 2	2014	24,829,123
28	Fantastic 4	2005	24,133,474
29	X-Men Origins: Wolverine	2009	23,984,421
30	Batman & Robin	1997	23,382,395

⁴⁴ *Batman & Robin*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1077027-batman_and_robin.

⁴⁵ *Batman & Robin*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

⁴⁶ *Batman & Robin*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118688>.

⁴⁷ *Batman & Robin*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

An Industry Rises: Conclusions

“You either die a hero or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain.”⁴⁸ Uttered by Harvey Dent in *The Dark Knight*, this line tragically symbolizes the superhero film industry in the 20th century. Two franchises with such promising starts eventually became their own enemies and sent the superhero industry into a slumber until the 21st century. After a thorough examination of what transpired with *Batman* and *Superman*, certain trends are noticed. **Figure 3** and **Figure 4** display the linear relationship between the amount of tickets sold and the average review for each film of the two individual franchises:

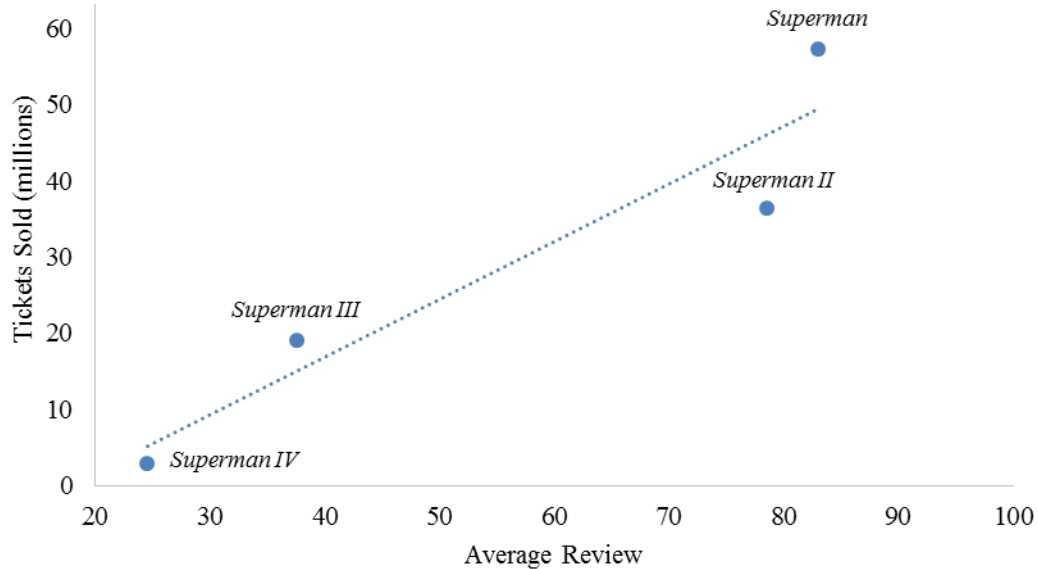


Figure 3. *Superman* – US Tickets Sold vs. Average Review.

Figure 3 demonstrates a .95 correlation (r) between the two variables for the *Superman* franchise.

⁴⁸ Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (2008), Blu-ray.

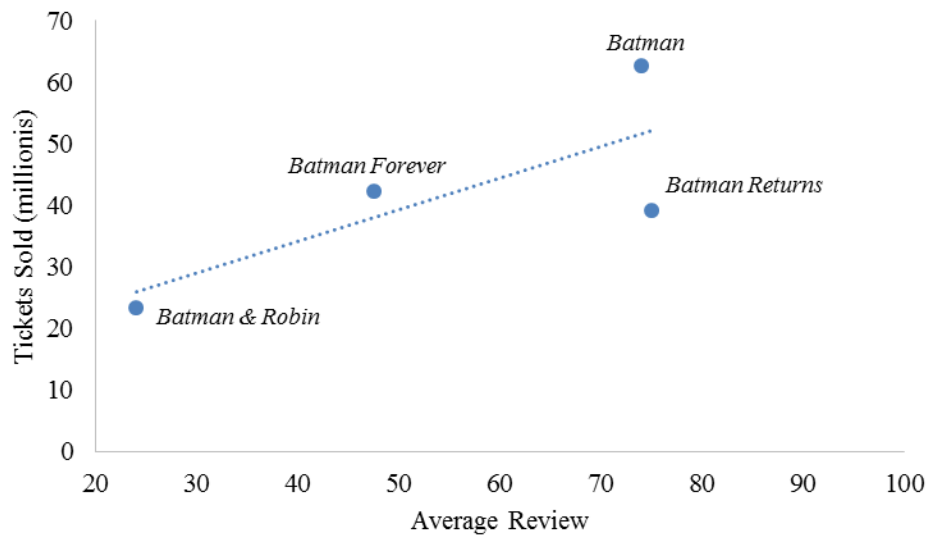


Figure 4. *Batman* Franchise – US Tickets Sold vs. Average Review.

Figure 4 demonstrates a .77 correlation for the *Batman* franchise. Both of these correlation numbers strongly indicate a distinct linear relationship between the average review for a film and the amount of tickets sold per franchise.

In addition to examining each franchise individually, lumping *Batman* and *Superman* together present a figure (**Figure 5**) representative of both WB and the superhero industry during the 20th Century:

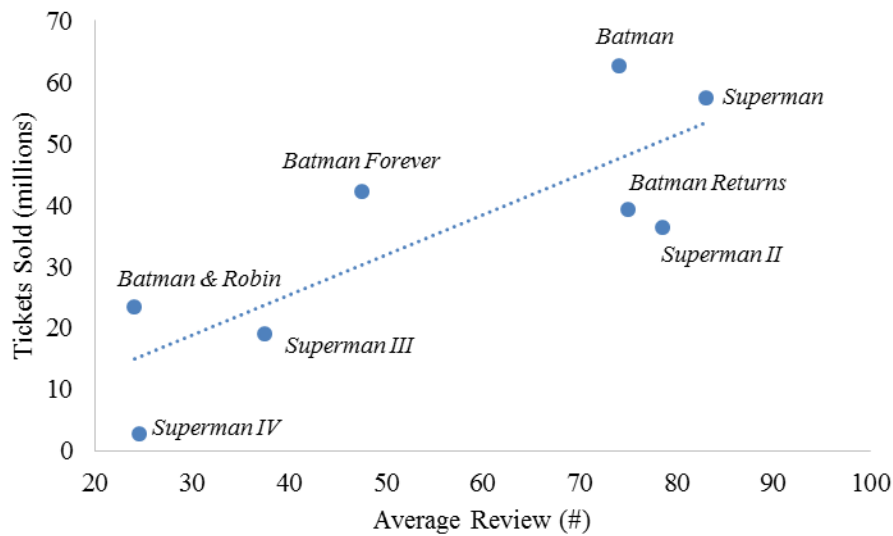


Figure 5. *Superman & Batman* – US Tickets Sold vs. Average Review.

Figure 5 encapsulates Harvey Dent's quote from earlier. Both franchises have the earlier, stronger entries to the far right while the later, poorer entries fill out the left. Certainly, it is clear there is a relevant linear relationship between the two variables.

What led to these poorly received films? Firstly, the notion of studio involvement and oversight played a part in the quality of the films produced. With *Superman*, disagreements between the studio and director Richard Donner led to his departure from the franchise. Similarly with *Batman*, the difference in vision between the studio and director Tim Burton led to his ultimate departure. This studio involvement leads to a second trend, in that brand alone does not sell films to audiences. Batman and Superman, two easily distinguishable characters to all age groups, could not guarantee success based off name alone. A certain quality and standard is expected of a film if it aims to be successful. This concept will carry forward to subsequent periods. As WB learned the hard way, the lesser quality of the film produced, the lesser the returns will be on the investment. *Batman & Robin* marked the conclusion of the superhero film industry in the 20th century.

Chapter 3

A New Millennium

After experiencing a temporary death due to the failures of Superman and Batman, the superhero industry experienced a rebirth in the form of 2000's *X-Men*. *X-Men* served as the launching pad for an industry that later will burst at the seams with new and varied franchises. While the *Batman* and *Superman* franchises aimed to pull the audience into their fantastical worlds, the 21st century marks a drastic shift – films aiming to place superheroes into the modern world. This notion all started with *X-Men*, which was directed by Bryan Singer. Singer, serving as the godfather of the current superhero movie genre, made a statement with *X-Men*. Superhero movies were no longer just for “colorful suits and predictable plots. They were stories that transcended the silly costumes and sci-fi powers to relate to us as human beings, and the struggles we face day to day.”⁴⁹

X-Men

“There was no concept. There was no template for it. Comic book movies had died, there was no concept of one as anything but camp.”⁵⁰ Spoken by Bryan Singer, these words described the climate of the superhero industry at the turn of the millennium. Fox wanted to make an *X-Men* film, but was unsure of what the approach should be. Enter Bryan Singer and the superhero industry is never the same.

“I can make it like a film that happens to be based on a comic book, that happens to have action sequences in it, but it's still to me a film. It's not just genre. It's a film.”⁵¹ A paramount principal in his

⁴⁹Adam Chitwood, “Bryan Singer Reflects on Making *X-Men* 1, Talks Evolution of the Superhero Genre,” Collider, February 2, 2016, <http://collider.com/bryan-singer-x-men-superhero-movies>.

⁵⁰ Adam Chitwood, “Bryan Singer Reflects on Making *X-Men* 1, Talks Evolution of the Superhero Genre,” 2016.

⁵¹ Adam Chitwood, “Bryan Singer Reflects on Making *X-Men* 1, Talks Evolution of the Superhero Genre,” 2016.

approach, Singer needed a clever hook to incorporate these fantastical characters into just a film. This resulted in Singer using the character of Wolverine as the audience's surrogate⁵² to assist in the gradual acceptance of these characters. "For me I was very cynical about it, like 'They call themselves Cyclops, Storm, Sabertooth,' but with Wolverine, I said 'I can be Logan and by the end of the movie I can embrace this universe,' so I can tell this story. Through him I can make this movie."⁵³ When Singer started researching the X-Men and the various mutations that came along with the characters, he saw very real-life parallels. "I saw Xavier and Magneto as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X characters. I'm gay... so that probably factored into it a bit because mutancy is discovered at that age in puberty when you're different from your whole neighborhood and your family and you feel very isolated."⁵⁴ Applying real-life people and principals to the superhero genre allowed the industry to be reborn with this new approach.

Reception to *X-Men* was primarily positive with it receiving a 7.4⁵⁵ on IMDb and an 81%⁵⁶ from Rotten Tomatoes. They describe the film as being "faithful to the comics and filled with action. *X-Men* brings a crowded slate of classic Marvel characters to the screen with a talented ensemble cast and surprisingly sharp narrative focus."⁵⁷ While its financial reception ranks right in the middle of the pack in terms of qualified films (24th in tickets sold), the impact of *X-Men* is far beyond measurable.

With *X2: X-Men United*, Singer upped the ante with his follow-up. Building upon storylines and character arcs established in *X-Men*, *X2* demonstrated that sequels were no longer entirely different stories. Released in 2003, *X2* bettered *X-Men* in nearly every aspect, especially critical and financial reception. Recipient of a 7.5⁵⁸ on IMDb and an 86%,⁵⁹ *X2* "is bigger and better than its predecessor." "Tightly scripted, solidly acted, and impressively ambitious,"⁶⁰ *X2* is a benchmark for comic sequels.

⁵² Adam Chitwood, "X-Men: Apocalypse: Over 75 Things to Know about the Epic Superhero Sequel," Collider, January 21, 2016, <http://collider.com/x-men-apocalypse-news-things-to-know>.

⁵³ Adam Chitwood, "Bryan Singer Reflects on Making X-Men 1, Talks Evolution of the Superhero Genre," 2016.

⁵⁴ Adam Chitwood, "Bryan Singer Reflects on Making X-Men 1, Talks Evolution of the Superhero Genre," 2016.

⁵⁵ *X-Men*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120903>.

⁵⁶ *X-Men*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/xmen>.

⁵⁷ *X-Men*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

⁵⁸ *X2: X-Men United*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0290334>.

⁵⁹ *X2: X-Men United*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016,

http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/x2_xmen_united.

⁶⁰ *X2: X-Men United*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

Grossing over \$200 million domestically and \$400 million globally,⁶¹ X2 is ranked 19th in tickets sold

(Table 10):

Table 10. 16-20 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. X2: X-Men United.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
16	Superman II	1981	36,455,982
17	Man of Steel	2013	35,798,957
18	X-Men: The Last Stand	2006	35,780,529
19	X2: X-Men United	2003	35,646,715
20	The Amazing Spider-Man	2012	32,918,425

Not only did X2 work on its own, it set up plotlines that were to be explored in its sequel. However, they were never fully realized.

Awarded the opportunity to bring the next iteration of Superman to the big screen, Bryan Singer jumped ship from Fox's *X-Men* franchise to resurrect WB's *Superman*. Fox, not wanting to wait for Singer to complete *Superman Returns*, hired essentially a yes-man to replace Singer. Brett Ratner, now a punch-line for many superhero jokes, gave the world *X-Men: The Last Stand*. This third entry "provides plenty of mutant action for fans of the franchise," but does "so at the expense of its predecessors' deeper character moments."⁶² *The Last Stand* raises a lot of questions regarding segregation and discrimination, but fails to answer them due to its action-movie mandate. Recipient of a 6.8⁶³ from IMDb and a 58%⁶⁴ from Rotten Tomatoes, *The Last Stand* is essentially forgotten by moviegoers and Fox alike.

⁶¹ X2: X-Men United, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

⁶² X-Men: The Last Stand, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/x-men_3_the_last_stand.

⁶³ X-Men: The Last Stand, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0376994>.

⁶⁴ X-Men: The Last Stand, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

Spider-Man

“With great power comes great responsibility.”⁶⁵ A line instilled in a generation of superhero fans, these words were first muttered in 2002’s *Spider-Man*. In addition to *X-Men*, *Spider-Man* was also integral to introducing superheroes to the modern world. Along with Singer, Sam Raimi is considered the other godfather of the modern superhero movie. Whereas *X-Men* related to real-life via segregation issues applicable to groups of people, *Spider-Man* chose a more intimate venue. *Spider-Man* connected with audiences through Peter Parker. Peter Parker, eventually transforming to Spider-Man, possesses recognizable human traits. “He is a nerd, a loner, socially inept, insecure, a poor kid being raised by relatives.”⁶⁶ This relatability allowed the audience to transform into Spider-Man along with Parker. Combine a well-told origin story with a complex villain and the result is a tremendous hit. *Spider-Man* became the first film ever to make over \$100 million in its opening weekend.⁶⁷ This led to over \$400 million domestically and over \$800 million globally.⁶⁸ With **Table 11** indicating over 69 million tickets sold, *Spider-Man* is the 3rd biggest superhero film of all-time:

Table 11. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Spider-Man*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
1	The Avengers	2012	78,301,451
2	The Dark Knight	2008	74,282,083
3	Spider-Man	2002	69,484,746
4	<i>Batman</i>	1989	62,713,546
5	Spider-Man 2	2004	60,148,870

Similar to *X-Men*’s substantial impact on the superhero industry, *Spider-Man*’s subsequent sequels mirrored the trajectory of its mutant counterpart. Consequently, this meant a strong second

⁶⁵ Sam Raimi, *Spider-Man*, Performed by Toby Maguire, Willem Dafoe, and Kirsten Dunst (2002; United States: Columbia Pictures, 2012), Blu-ray.

⁶⁶ Roger Ebert, "Spider-Man," Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), May 3, 2002.

⁶⁷ *Spider-Man*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0145487>.

⁶⁸ *Spider-Man*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

installment. If *Spider-Man* helped established what a superhero film could be, *Spider-Man 2* greatly raised the bar. Simply put by Roger Ebert, *Spider-Man 2* “is what a superhero movie should be.”⁶⁹

Having established storylines and character arcs from the previous film, *Spider-Man 2* provides great viewer payoff. However, the most important aspect to the film is the human element. At the expense of the previous *Superman* and *Batman* films, Ebert admired *Spider-Man 2* for finally not short-changing the person behind the hero. Calling it “the best superhero movie since the modern genre was launched with *Superman*,”⁷⁰ Ebert and many other critics praised Raimi’s sequel. Rotten Tomatoes succinctly describes *Spider-Man 2* as “boasting an entertaining villain and deeper emotional focus. This is a nimble sequel that improves upon the original.”⁷¹ Recipient of a 93%⁷² and a 7.3⁷³ on IMDb, *Spider-Man 2* displayed everything that a superhero film could be. The commercial reception was just as strong, with *Spider-Man 2* grossing over \$783 million globally.⁷⁴ In terms of domestic ticket sales, **Table 12** shows *Spider-Man 2*’s presence in the top five of all-time:

Table 12. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Spider-Man 2*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
1	The Avengers	2012	78,301,451
2	The Dark Knight	2008	74,282,083
3	<i>Spider-Man</i>	2002	69,484,746
4	<i>Batman</i>	1989	62,713,546
5	<i>Spider-Man 2</i>	2004	60,148,870

If *Spider-Man 2* represented everything that a superhero film could be, 2007’s *Spider-Man 3* is an effective example of what not to do in a superhero film. While Sam Raimi was still the creative force behind the film, there was a semblance of studio interference. Specifically, one producer wanted Raimi to include a fan-favorite villain into the film. Ultimately, this resulted in a messy, convoluted film that left a

⁶⁹ Roger Ebert, “*Spider-Man 2*,” Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), June 29, 2004.

⁷⁰ Roger Ebert, “*Spider-Man 2*,” 2004.

⁷¹ *Spider-Man 2*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spiderman_2.

⁷² *Spider-Man 2*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

⁷³ *Spider-Man 2*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0316654>.

⁷⁴ *Spider-Man 2*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

sour taste in most fans' mouths. Recipient of a 6.2⁷⁵ on IMDb and a 63%⁷⁶ on Rotten Tomatoes, *Spider-Man 3* is just not "quite as refined as the first two."⁷⁷ Due to the goodwill established from its predecessors, audiences turned out to produce an impressive financial reception. However, its legacy is left in the form of the question – "how could Sam Raimi, having gone so right with *Spider-Man 2*, have gone so wrong with *Spider-Man 3*?"⁷⁸

The Dark Knight

"It's not who I am underneath... but what I do... that defines me."⁷⁹ Derived from 2005's *Batman Begins*, this line allegorizes the initiative taken by Christopher Nolan with his *Dark Knight* trilogy. If Singer and Raimi were responsible for placing superheroes in the modern world, then Nolan is responsible for the first superhero created by the modern world. This is accomplished via the embodiment of Batman as seen throughout his *Dark Knight* trilogy – the most gritty, grounded superhero films the superhero industry has ever seen.

"People need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy and I can't do that as Bruce Wayne. As a man, I'm flesh and blood, I can be ignored, I can be destroyed; but as a symbol... as a symbol I can be incorruptible, I can be everlasting."⁸⁰ Spoken by Bruce Wayne in *Batman Begins*, this quote represents what Nolan sought to accomplish with his film. Rather than just present the audience with Batman, Nolan takes viewers through a journey that "explores the path that led Bruce Wayne from a parentless childhood to a friendless adult existence."⁸¹ Nolan managed to craft a "plausible, persuasive"⁸² film that adds substantial weight to the cape and cowl donned by Batman. More so, Nolan neglected the "gloss of

⁷⁵ *Spider-Man 3*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0413300>.

⁷⁶ *Spider-Man 3*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spiderman_3.

⁷⁷ *Spider-Man 3*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

⁷⁸ Roger Ebert, "Spider-Man 3," Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), November 15, 2007.

⁷⁹ Christopher Nolan, *Batman Begins*, Performed by Christian Bale, Michael Caine, and Liam Neeson (2005; United States: Warner Bros Pictures, 2008), Blu-ray.

⁸⁰ Christopher Nolan, *Batman Begins*, (2005), Blu-ray.

⁸¹ Roger Ebert, "Batman Begins," 2005.

⁸² Roger Ebert, "Batman Begins," 2005.

previous films. The Batman costume is an early design. The Bat Cave is an actual cave beneath Wayne Manor. The Bat Signal is crude and out of focus.”⁸³ Not only do these changes ground Batman in reality, it allows the viewer to believe that Batman could exist somewhere, somehow.

Audiences responded well to this fresh take on the material. *Batman Begins* is universally praised with an 8.3⁸⁴ on IMDb and an 83%⁸⁵ on Rotten Tomatoes. “Brooding and dark, but also exciting and smart, *Batman Begins* is a film that understands the essence of one of the definitive superheroes.”⁸⁶ Batman, a definitive superhero adored by many, was back in form. With the film grossing over \$350 million⁸⁷ and selling over 32 million tickets domestically, *Batman Begins* ended up being an appetizer to its sequel, *The Dark Knight*.

“He's the hero Gotham deserves, but not the one it needs right now. So we'll hunt him. Because he can take it. Because he's not our hero. He's a silent guardian. A watchful protector. A Dark Knight.”⁸⁸ Serving as the epilogue to the 2008 masterpiece, *The Dark Knight* is a transcendental piece of cinema. As Roger Ebert puts it, “Batman isn't a comic book anymore. This film redefines the possibilities of the comic-book movie.”⁸⁹ *The Dark Knight* resulted from the ultimate optimization of all aspects that go into creating a film. The performances, directing, writing, and technical aspects all converge to create one of the most memorable movies of this century. As Rotten Tomatoes puts it, “dark, complex and unforgettable, *The Dark Knight* succeeds not just as an entertaining comic book film, but as a richly thrilling crime saga.”⁹⁰ The measurables certainly back up this universal praise. Recipient of a 94%⁹¹ and

⁸³ Roger Ebert, “*Batman Begins*,” 2005.

⁸⁴ *Batman Begins*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0372784>.

⁸⁵ *Batman Begins*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/batman_begins.

⁸⁶ *Batman Begins*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

⁸⁷ *Batman Begins*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

⁸⁸ Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (2008), Blu-ray.

⁸⁹ Roger Ebert, “*The Dark Knight*,” Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), July 16, 2008.

⁹⁰ *The Dark Knight*, Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_dark_knight.

⁹¹ *The Dark Knight*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

a 9.0⁹² from IMDb, *The Dark Knight* grossed over \$1 billion globally⁹³. In terms of US tickets sold, *The Dark Knight 2nd* on the list at nearly 75 million (**Table 13**):

Table 13. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *The Dark Knight*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
1	The Avengers	2012	78,301,451
2	The Dark Knight	2008	74,282,083
3	<i>Spider-Man</i>	2002	69,484,746
4	<i>Batman</i>	1989	62,713,546
5	<i>Spider-Man 2</i>	2004	60,148,870

The Dark Knight's legacy cannot be understated. As a film crafted in the post-9/11 era⁹⁴, making the villain a terrorist and contemplating how to deal with it exudes an element far beyond the pages of a comic-book. As evident from quotes referred to earlier in this work, Heath Ledger's Joker outshone Batman in his own film. Not only did Heath Ledger posthumously win an Oscar for Best Supporting Oscar, *The Dark Knight* forced the category of Best Picture to contain ten nominees – a direct result of its omission from the ballot. Countless critics have declared it the greatest superhero film of all time. All of these accolades are a direct testimony to the potential weight that a great superhero film can hold.

A New Millennium: Conclusions

The first decade of the new millennium saw the ascendancy of the superhero film to the top of the entertainment industry via three franchises – *X-Men*, *Spider-Man*, and *The Dark Knight*. Implementing ways to relate to the audience, the superhero film reflected the modern world. While there were other superhero films released during this period, these three franchises represent the most significant impact on the industry as whole. Not only did these three vault superheroes into the upper echelon of the

⁹² *The Dark Knight*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0468569>.

⁹³ *The Dark Knight*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

⁹⁴ Matt Goldberg, "Iron Man Revisited: 'I'm Just Not the Hero Type. Clearly'," Collider, April 20, 2015, <http://collider.com/iron-man-marvel-series-retrospective-mcu>.

entertainment industry, they served as a substantial precursor as to what will come. Before proceeding with the next phase of the superhero industry, conclusions must be drawn in regard to these “millennial” superheroes. **Figure 6** displays the linear relationship between average review and tickets sold for all relevant films for these three franchises:

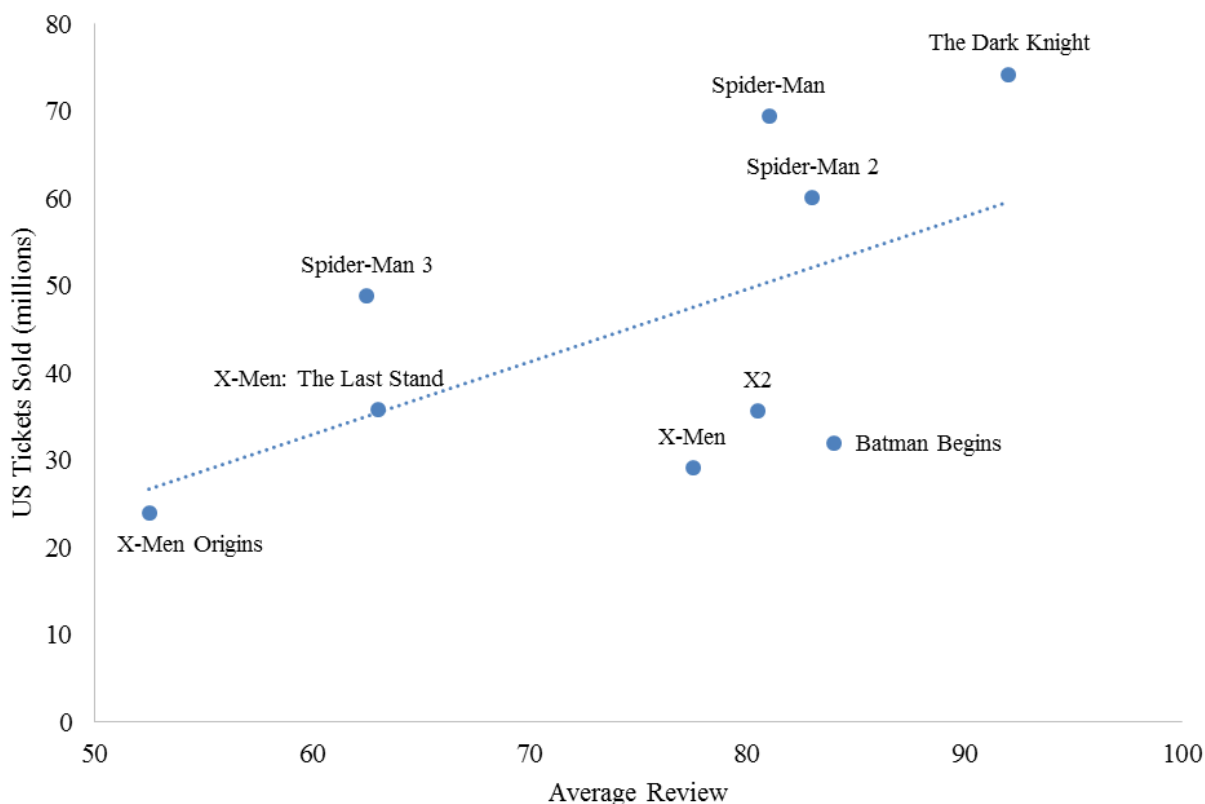


Figure 6. *X-Men, Spider-Man, & The Dark Knight – US Tickets Sold vs. Average Review.*

With a correlation of .57, the linear relationship is not as conclusive as displayed earlier from *Batman* and *Superman* franchises. However, certain qualitative trends reasonably explain this weaker figure.

To reiterate Bryan Singer’s words, the superhero industry did not exist by the year 2000. Therefore, there was no template from which to work. As a result, the notion of placing these heroes in the real world was born. One commonality between *X-Men*, *Spider-Man*, and *The Dark Knight* is the human element behind them. Whether it is the segregation of the X-Men, social ineptitude of Peter Parker, or the personal tragedy of Bruce Wayne, these films had characters that could connect with

audiences. This concept elevated superhero films to where they could just be considered films – a transcendental notion for the industry.

Additionally, these three franchises implemented the concept of ‘viewer payoff.’ Simply put, these films introduced elements and plotlines that could persist beyond just one film. No longer did film plots have to be individual. Not only did this allow characters to evolve and grow in front of the audiences, but it felt more rewarding considering the human connection previously established. Therefore, it is not surprising to see all three franchises having second installments stronger than the first entries.

While the average review-ticket price relationship is not a perfect gauge, it provides a reasonable explanation for what occurred throughout the past decade. *X2* exceeded *X-Men*, *Spider-Man 2* kept pace with *Spider-Man*, and *The Dark Knight* more than doubled *Batman Begins*. While the weaker third installments still sold a large amount of tickets, that was more predicated on the goodwill established from the previous two entries than the quality of the film being presented.

While it may seem that superhero franchises were very prevalent by the time *The Dark Knight* was released in 2008, audiences and the industry alike had no idea about the exponential growth about to occur. It all started with an obscure titular character known as Iron Man.

Chapter 4

The Marvel Initiative

“‘I am Iron Man.’ You think you're the only superhero in the world? Mr. Stark, you've become part of a bigger universe. You just don't know it yet.”⁹⁵ In 2008, the talk of the superhero industry was *The Dark Knight*. Considered the greatest superhero film of all time, it was thought that going forward studios would look to emulate this film. However, another film came out in 2008 that had audiences’ attention and that was *Iron Man*.

Produced by the new Marvel Studios (before they were bought by Disney), *Iron Man* was Marvel’s first foray into the motion picture industry. While certainly less established than Fox, Sony, and WB, Marvel possessed something that the other studios did not – a full catalog of characters. This was a studio that did not have to acquire the rights to characters because it already owned them. This represented the possibility of crossover films – films in the same universe allowing characters to interact with one another. This concept forever changed the superhero industry.

Phase 1

“There was an idea called the Avengers Initiative. The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people to see if they could become something more. To see if they could work together when we needed them to, to fight the battles that we never could.”⁹⁶ Spoken by Nick Fury, assembler of the Avengers, this quote is applicable to the film universe these heroes encompassed. Marvel’s plan was to introduce heroes via individual films, which would converge into the first-ever crossover film. *Iron Man*,

⁹⁵ Jon Favreau, *Iron Man*, Performed by Robert Downey Jr., Terrence Howard, and Jeff Bridges (2008; United States: Paramount Pictures, 2008), DVD.

⁹⁶ Joss Whedon, *The Avengers*, Performed by Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, and Mark Ruffalo (2012; United States: Paramount Pictures, 2012), Blu-ray.

essentially Marvel’s trial run, represented the first film of Phase 1. However, *Iron Man* was seen as a risky endeavor. How would people respond to the first non-mainstream superhero?

Released to audiences in May of 2008, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Seeming as if the character was written for him, Robert Downey Jr. is perfectly casted as Tony Stark (aka Iron Man). “So comfortable is Downy with Tony Stark’s dialogue, so familiar does it sound coming from him, that the screenplay seems almost to have been dictated by Downey’s persona.”⁹⁷ Recipient of a 7.9⁹⁸ on IMDb and a 94%⁹⁹ on Rotten Tomatoes, “star Robert Downey Jr. make this smart, high impact superhero movie one that even non-comics fans can enjoy.”¹⁰⁰ Grossing over \$500 million domestically and \$1 billion globally,¹⁰¹ *Iron Man* sold over 44 million tickets (ranking 11th as per **Table 14**):

Table 14. 11-15 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Iron Man*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
11	Iron Man	2008	44,373,834
12	<i>Batman Forever</i>	1995	42,306,003
13	Guardians of the Galaxy	2014	40,779,940
14	Iron Man 2	2010	39,559,993
15	<i>Batman Returns</i>	1992	39,236,554

Iron Man’s impact goes beyond commercial and critical reception. It “set the template for a Marvel Studios movie: fun and light-hearted but also thrilling and unique, and then carried by absolutely perfect casting.”¹⁰² Led by head architect Kevin Feige, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) was born. After *Iron Man*, Marvel introduced the world to *Captain America* (2011), *Thor* (2011), and various others. While these films individually did not shatter any box office records or win universal acclaim, they accomplished what they sought out to do – introduce audiences to these characters, develop character arcs, and build towards something larger. Furthermore, Marvel introduced the Easter egg

⁹⁷ Roger Ebert, “*Iron Man*,” Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), June 1, 2008.

⁹⁸ *Iron Man*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0371746/?ref_=nv_sr_2.

⁹⁹ *Iron Man*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/iron_man/?search=iron%20man.

¹⁰⁰ *Iron Man*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

¹⁰¹ *Iron Man*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

¹⁰² Matt Goldberg, “Iron Man Revisited: ‘I’m Just Not the Hero Type. Clearly,’” 2015.

(references to other characters and/or films) and end credit tags (scenes appearing after the credits teasing another film). After comprehensive universe building, these five separate films culminated in 2012 with the event film known as *The Avengers*.

“If we can't protect the Earth, you can be damned well sure we'll avenge it!”¹⁰³ Spoken by Tony Stark preceding the film's finale, *The Avengers* forever changed the entertainment industry. “If Iron Man showed a new path for superhero movies, *The Avengers* showed a new path for blockbuster franchises.”¹⁰⁴ Following *The Avengers*, studios were eager to transform their blockbuster properties into shared-universes. As of 2016, official shared-universe franchises include *Star Wars*, *Universal Monsters*, *Transformers*, and *King Kong-Godzilla*. This list does not include various other shared-universes in initial development stages. Studios are no longer content to have one profitable blockbuster franchise.

In addition to showing a new path for blockbuster franchises in general, *The Avengers* laid a new path for the MCU as well. It all started with director Joss Whedon. Forced to unite characters established by different writers and directors in various films, Whedon was the perfect singular voice to lead such a film. As a result, Whedon “was the unlikely hero of the superhero film.”¹⁰⁵ Marvel's first writer-director, Whedon “understood the intricacies of storytelling, ensemble casts, superhero mythology, and above all, humor.”¹⁰⁶ He understood that this was a Marvel movie.

A culmination of everything that came beforehand, *The Avengers* is a “case where the studio laid it all out and made their mission statement.”¹⁰⁷ Reception to the film exceeded even that of *The Dark Knight*. Recipient of an 8.1¹⁰⁸ on IMDb and a 92%¹⁰⁹ on Rotten Tomatoes, “*The Avengers* lives up to its

¹⁰³ Joss Whedon, *The Avengers* (2012), Blu-ray.

¹⁰⁴ Matt Goldberg, “The Avengers Revisited: ‘I Was Playing Something Even Riskier,’” Collider, April 25, 2015, <http://collider.com/the-avengers-marvel-series-retrospective-mcu>.

¹⁰⁵ Matt Goldberg, “The Avengers Revisited: ‘I Was Playing Something Even Riskier,’” 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Matt Goldberg, “The Avengers Revisited: ‘I Was Playing Something Even Riskier,’” 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Matt Goldberg, “The Avengers Revisited: ‘I Was Playing Something Even Riskier,’” 2015.

¹⁰⁸ *The Avengers*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0848228/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

¹⁰⁹ *The Avengers*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/marvels_the_avengers/?search=the%20avengers.

hype and raises the bar for Marvel at the movies.”¹¹⁰ In terms of tickets sold, *The Avengers* sits atop the list at over 78 million (**Table 15**):

Table 15. 1-5 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *The Avengers*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
1	The Avengers	2012	78,301,451
2	<i>The Dark Knight</i>	2008	74,282,083
3	<i>Spider-Man</i>	2002	69,484,746
4	<i>Batman</i>	1989	62,713,546
5	<i>Spider-Man 2</i>	2004	60,148,870

The Avengers represents Marvel’s ascension to the top of the entertainment industry. Not only did the film become the 3rd highest grossing film of all time (until 2015), the film was universally praised along with Marvel’s methods. The ability of a studio to layout a foundation and to exercise patience was unprecedented. As previously mentioned, other studios and franchises began to emulate Marvel. The phrase “shared-universe” is now frequently referred to because of Marvel. The rival studios producing superhero films are still desperately trying to catch up to them. Following *The Avengers*, the question to ask was – what does Marvel do now to stay on top? The answer – Phase 2.

Phase 2

As a result of *The Avengers* (and acquisition by Disney), Marvel went from an obscure studio to an industry leader. Having already established characters and a powerful brand, Marvel decided to expand their universe even further. Phase 2 acted as Marvel’s own test of sustainability in the industry. Would audiences keep turning out for multiple films on an annual basis? The answer to that question is two-fold, with mixed results occurring.

Following the successful choices Whedon made with *The Avengers*, Phase 2 consisted of three films (four initially) with writer-directors attached. Phase 2’s first film was *Iron Man 3*, Tony Stark’s

¹¹⁰ *The Avengers*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

(supposedly) last solo adventure donning the armor. After *Iron Man 2* fizzled at the box office, *Iron Man 3* featured writer-director Shane Black. Known for “trademark quips, comedy, and subversions,”¹¹¹ Black’s film was a commercial and critical success. Grossing over \$1.2 billion at the box office¹¹², *Iron Man 3* scored a 7.3¹¹³ on IMDb and a 79%¹¹⁴ Tomatometer rating. More impressively, it is the 3rd highest Marvel film in terms of tickets sold with over 50 million (**Table 16**):

Table 16. 6-10 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Iron Man 3*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
6	<i>Superman</i>	1978	57,358,127
7	<i>The Dark Knight Rises</i>	2012	56,298,882
8	<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	2015	55,026,891
9	Iron Man 3	2013	50,306,553
10	<i>Spider-Man 3</i>	2007	48,914,288

While *Iron Man 3* certainly benefitted from a distinct voice, *Iron Man* was already an established franchise at this point. Marvel’s biggest risk to date came in the form of a movie starring, “a thief, two thugs, an assassin and a maniac.”¹¹⁵ *Guardians of the Galaxy* represented Marvel’s first foray into science-fiction, prominently featuring a talking-raccoon and a personified tree. “The power of Marvel Studios brand was enough to get people to buy a ticket to a film where a kid’s mom dies of cancer, he’s abducted by aliens, and 25 years later he’s walking around on an alien planet listening” to 1980’s hits.¹¹⁶ Benefiting from a truly unique vision by writer-director James Gunn, *Guardians* became a hit. Placing the Marvel brand on a film essentially guarantees a positive box office; however, the quality and reception of the film dictates how positive of a performance. *Guardians’* success was not just a byproduct of Marvel’s

¹¹¹ Matt Goldberg, “Iron Man 3 Revisited: “Some People Say Progress Is a Bad Thing.”” Collider, April 26, 2015, <http://collider.com/iron-man-3-marvel-series-retrospective-mcu>.

¹¹² *Iron Man 3*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1300854/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

¹¹³ *Iron Man 3*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016.

¹¹⁴ *Iron Man 3*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/iron_man_3/?search=iron%20man%203.

¹¹⁵ James Gunn, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Performed by Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, and Bradley Cooper (2014; United States: Marvel Studios, 2014), Blu-ray.

¹¹⁶ Matt Goldberg, “Guardians of the Galaxy Revisited: “Bunch of Jackasses Standing in a Circle.”” Collider, April 29, 2015, <http://collider.com/guardians-of-the-galaxy-marvel-series-retrospective-on-the-mcu>.

success. *Guardians* succeeded because of Gunn’s unique personality gleaming throughout the film. The characters are heroic yet flawed, the visuals are eye-popping, and the music gives the film a distinct attitude. “*Guardians of the Galaxy* is just as irreverent as fans of the frequently zany Marvel comic would expect – as well as funny, thrilling, full of heart, and packed with visual splendor.”¹¹⁷ Recipient of a 91%¹¹⁸ on Rotten Tomatoes and 8.1¹¹⁹ from IMDb, *Guardians* grossed over \$750 million globally.¹²⁰ In terms of tickets sold, *Guardians* is ranked 13th with over 40 million sold (**Table 17**):

Table 17. 11-15 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold. *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold
11	<i>Iron Man</i>	2008	44,373,834
12	<i>Batman Forever</i>	1995	42,306,003
13	Guardians of the Galaxy	2014	40,779,940
14	<i>Iron Man 2</i>	2010	39,559,993
15	<i>Batman Returns</i>	1992	39,236,554

The fact that *Guardians* was considered a very risky film makes this feat all the more impressive. This innovative film upped the ante from Marvel and opened the MCU to a new realm of possibilities.

Switching gears from the power of a distinct writer-director, Marvel’s Phase 2 is also known for incorporating different styles of films into its finished products. *Guardians* is considered a space opera while *Ant-Man* is a heist film. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is lauded as a political thriller. “Suspenseful and politically astute, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is a superior entry in the Avengers canon and is sure to thrill Marvel diehards.”¹²¹ Marvel’s ability to produce a variety of films in different categories is particularly noteworthy. Their films are not bound to the superhero film label. Marvel shifted the genre of superhero film to consist of subgenres of its own. No longer are superhero films considered along the same lines of westerns or science-fiction. Superhero films are now able to be

¹¹⁷ *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/guardians_of_the_galaxy/?search=guardians%20of%20the.

¹¹⁸ *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

¹¹⁹ *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2015381>.

¹²⁰ *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

¹²¹ *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/captain_america_the_winter_soldier_2014/?search=captain%20america.

westerns or science fiction. This revelation is crucial in regard to the superhero industry's sustainability. What started with *X-Men* striving to be just a film has evolved to where superheroes can be any type of film.

With Marvel being such a premium player in the entertainment industry, its shared-universe requires massive caregiving. Consequently, having so many films interconnected with one another allows for the quality of the individual film to become secondary to the ultimate crossover event. Marvel, ever aware of its required synergy between films, is not afraid to flex its muscle in regard to individual films. Various former Marvel filmmakers have made public comments regarding this interference. Alan Taylor, director of *Thor: The Dark World* did not have positive things to say about his time in the MCU. "The Marvel experience was particularly wrenching because I was sort of given absolute freedom while we were shooting, and then in post it turned into a different movie. So, that is something I hope never to repeat and don't wish upon anybody else."¹²² Always keeping their eye on future films, Marvel even forced Joss Whedon into certain decisions for *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. In regard to two specific sequences in the film, Whedon said "with the cave, it really turned into: they pointed a gun at the farm's head and said, 'Give us the cave, or we'll take out the farm,' — in a civilized way. I respect these guys, they're artists, but that's when it got really, really unpleasant."¹²³

The most noticeable difference the studio had with one of their directors was during the production of *Ant-Man*. Not feeling comfortable with the mandates the studio imposed upon him, director Edgar Wright left the film in the middle of production. Whedon spoke sadly of Wright's departure, "I don't know where things went wrong... I was very sad. Because I thought, 'This is a no-brainer. This is Marvel getting it exactly right.' Whatever dissonance that came, whatever it was, I don't understand why it

¹²² Joe McGovern, "Thor: The Dark World director Alan Taylor calls working for Marvel 'particularly wrenching,'" Entertainment Weekly, June 30, 2015, <http://www.ew.com/article/2015/06/30/terminator-genisys-alan-taylor-marvel-complaint>.

¹²³ Ryan Gajewski, "Joss Whedon on Fighting with Marvel over *Avengers: Age of Ultron*: 'It Got Really, Really Unpleasant,'" The Hollywood Reporter, May 5, 2015, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/joss-whedon-avengers-age-ultron-793502>.

was bigger than a marriage that seemed so right.”¹²⁴ While Phase 2 consisted of many successful films stemming from its formula, Marvel learned of its potential flaws via *Ant-Man*. While certainly not a critical or commercial failure by any means, *Ant-Man* was “too minor to matter.”¹²⁵ Peyton Reed replaced Edgar Wright as director after he and Marvel could no longer agree on the direction of the film. “In Reed and Marvel’s hands, that direction seems to have landed in the most inoffensive, dry place imaginable. If last summer’s *Guardians of the Galaxy* is Marvel at its most daring, then *Ant-Man* is the studio at its safest.”¹²⁶

Phase 2 represented Marvel enduring all the aspects apparent to an industry leader. *Iron Man 3*, *Guardians*, and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* all enhanced its brand while taking Marvel in new directions. *Thor: The Dark World*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and *Ant-Man*, while still commercially successful, hinted at issues behind the scenes. Due to Marvel’s films having strict MCU requirements, filmmakers involved with these films felt their artistic integrity being compromised. Going forward, Marvel must maintain a fine line between its individual film and its shared-universe. Its industry’s history demonstrates that audiences will move on if individual film quality is not prioritized.

Phase 3

From installing writer-directors, promoting different styles of films, and “aligning” film-makers with the needs of the MCU, Phase 2 clearly demonstrated Marvel’s growth as a company. But as with many companies, continued product differentiation and innovation is required to sustain success. **Figure 7**¹²⁷ displays the nine films that Marvel will release over the next four years:

¹²⁴ Marianne Zumberge, “Joss Whedon: Edgar Wright’s *Ant-Man* Script the Best Marvel Ever Had,” *Variety*, April 22, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/ant-man-edgar-wright-joss-whedon-1201477447>.

¹²⁵ Matt Goldberg, “*Ant-Man* Review: Marvel’s Latest Is Too Minor to Matter,” *Collider*, July 16, 2015, <http://collider.com/ant-man-review-paul-rudd>.

¹²⁶ Matt Goldberg, “*Ant-Man* Review: Marvel’s Latest Is Too Minor to Matter,” 2015.

¹²⁷ Andrew Steinbeiser, “Marvel Released Official Marvel Cinematic Universe Phase 3 Timeline Chart,” *Comicbook.com*, November 17, 2014, <http://comicbook.com/2014/11/17/marvel-released-official-marvel-cinematic-universe-phase-3-timel>.



Figure 7. Marvel Cinematic Universe – Phase 3 Diagram

As the figure demonstrates, Marvel will average three releases a year as compared with two annual releases during Phase 2. However, there are more factors at play in regard to Marvel's continued growth as a company.

Further examination of the types of films being released show product differentiation. Phase 1 and Phase 2 followed similar trajectories in that individual films per hero would lead to the culmination in the form of an *Avengers* film. While the two-part *Avengers: Infinity War* will conclude Phase 3, the films building up to that part are quite different. The first film of Phase 3, *Captain America: Civil War* sees its titular hero fighting against Iron Man and other fellow Avengers. That is followed by the introduction of a new mystic hero, Dr. Strange. Furthermore, the characters of Black Panther and Captain Marvel will receive their introductions as well in Phase 3. The significance of the latter two films is the concept of diversification. Black Panther will be the first black superhero to lead his own film while Captain Marvel will be the first Marvel-woman to lead hers. In addition to the significance of what will be on camera, the directors behind the screen are just as important. Ryan Coogler, Marvel's first black director, fresh off the successful *Creed*, will direct *Black Panther*. Additionally, Marvel is actively seeking a woman director to

lead *Captain Marvel*. Not only is Marvel changing the formula in terms of its plots and heroes, it is also striving to be an industry leader in terms of diversity.

Continued product differentiation and accounting for diversity are two strategies implemented by companies striving for long-term sustainability. Regardless of its efforts on these fronts, Marvel will always put the MCU's interests first and foremost. As referenced earlier, this has (and will) be an issue when it comes to courting filmmakers. Marvel attempted to hire Ava DuVernay, a black, female director famous for her film *Glory*. However, she opted to decline working with Marvel stating, "for me, it was a process of trying to figure out, are these people I want to go to bed with? This is my art. This is what will live on after I'm gone," she said. "So it's important to me that that be true to who I was in this moment. And if there's too much compromise, it really wasn't going to be an Ava DuVernay film."¹²⁸ This notion of compromising to a standard set of guidelines may prove to be a double-edged sword for Marvel. While the inter-connectedness of its films is what allow Marvel to be unique, the cost of subduing filmmakers' creative voices may prove to be too great.

¹²⁸ Andrea Towers, "Ava DuVernay opens up about why she passed on directing *Black Panther*," Entertainment Weekly, July 21, 2015, <http://www.ew.com/2015/07/21/ava-duvernay-black-panther-blogger>.

Chapter 5

The Industry Driver

"You know what I am? I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it! You know, I just... do."¹²⁹ Reiterating the Joker from the beginning, these words can now be interpreted with a new meaning. In this case, Marvel is the car that all the other studios are attempting to chase. With Marvel dominating the superhero industry via its shared-universe, rival studios were bound to notice and attempt to replicate their success. Sony, Fox, and WB all have developed plans in order to take full advantage of their catalog of superheroes in order to established shared-universes within their confines.

Sony

The superhero under Sony's possession is Spider-Man, whose original trilogy proved to be quite profitable. However, Sony was not content to possess Spider-Man's rights without further film productions. Therefore, the *Spider-Man* franchise was rebooted, merely five years after *Spider-Man 3*, in 2012 via *The Amazing Spider-Man*. While proving to be moderately successful in terms of critical and commercial reception, *The Amazing Spider-Man* ultimately suffered from "revisiting many of the same plot points from 2002's Spider-Man."¹³⁰ That same year *The Avengers* took the world by storm and Sony needed a counter-argument. Consequently, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* was produced in order to expand this version of Spider-Man's universe and begin building Sony's own shared-universe. However, Sony attempted to do what Marvel did in five films via one individual film. Shifting plotlines and a greater concern for building a shared-universe, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* "suffers from an unfocused narrative

¹²⁹ Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (2008), Blu-ray.

¹³⁰ *The Amazing Spider-Man*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_amazing_spider_man.

and an overabundance of characters.”¹³¹ Awarded a 53%¹³² by Rotten Tomatoes, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* grossed only \$202 million domestically (nearly \$60 million less than its predecessor).¹³³ Receiving the lowest critical and commercial reception of all Spidey entries to this point, Sony was at a crossroads with what to do with the character. Spider-Man’s ultimate fate is the result of something never done before.

“Sony Pictures Entertainment Brings Marvel Studios into the Amazing World of Spider-Man.”¹³⁴ Aptly described as hell freezing over,¹³⁵ never before have two major studios partnered in this capacity. Spider-Man is now able to fight alongside Iron Man, Captain America, and the other Avengers. Since Sony’s attempt to establish their own Spider-Man universe ultimately fizzled, they opted instead to jump aboard the unstoppable force that is Marvel. Spider-Man will make his debut in the upcoming film *Captain America: Civil War*. From there, he will have his own feature in 2017. Produced jointly by Marvel and Sony. Sony’s superhero franchise moving forward is directly tied to Marvel and its capabilities.

20th Century Fox

“What’s the last thing you remember?”¹³⁶ Spoken by Professor Xavier to Wolverine, this line symbolizes the reset button hit by Fox with 2014’s *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. *X-Men* is a franchise that successfully built a shared-universe without any concrete plan. With *Deadpool*’s recent release, Fox is

¹³¹ *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016.

http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_amazing_spider_man_2/?search=the%20amazing%20spider-man%202.

¹³² *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016.

¹³³ *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1872181>.

¹³⁴ Adam Chitwood, "Details of the Sony/Marvel Spider-Man Deal Revealed; Looking to Cast Younger Actor," Collider, February 10, 2015, <http://collider.com/spider-man-marvel-sony-details-casting>.

¹³⁵ Adam Chitwood, "Details of the Sony/Marvel Spider-Man Deal Revealed; Looking to Cast Younger Actor," 2015.

¹³⁶ Bryan Singer, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. Performed by Hugh Jackman, Patrick Stewart, and Ian McKellen (2014; United States: Twentieth Century Fox, 2014), Blu-ray.

three films deep into its *X-Men* universe. While following the typical franchise format during the 2000's, *X-Men* developed into a shared-universe over night with the help of its original creator, Bryan Singer.

Following the less-favorable receptions of *X-Men: The Last Stand* and *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, Fox was at a crossroads with what to do with the X-Men property. In a producer capacity, Bryan Singer helped champion the release the of 2011's *X-Men: First Class*. Rather than rebooting the earlier entries of the franchise, *First Class* went back into time to explore the earlier lives of Professor Xavier and Magneto (two stalwarts of the previous trilogy). Released with little fanfare, *First Class* was well received due to its "strong script, stylish direction, and powerful performances from its well-rounded cast."¹³⁷ While its financial reception is nothing too noteworthy, the critical reception rivaled that of X2 (the franchise's previous high mark). Recipient of a 7.9¹³⁸ on IMDb and an 87%¹³⁹ Tomatometer rating, *First Class* "is a welcome return to form for the franchise."¹⁴⁰ The style of the film proved to be quite popular as it was a period piece set during the 1960's. Providing clips of JFK and placing the climax at the heart of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *First Class* placed superheroes into America's history for the first time.

Again, *The Avengers* hit the world one year later and Fox decided it was time to expand its *X-Men* universe. Aiming to capitalize on the positive performance of *First Class*, Fox dubbed Bryan Singer to direct its sequel, *Days of Future Past*. Back in the directorial chair, Singer developed a method to connect his previous X-Men films with this new film that would take place in the 1970's. This method, of course, is time-travel. Using the cast from his earlier entries, Singer set *Days of Future Past* in both the distant future and 1970's past. Familiarly placing Wolverine as the audiences' surrogate between the two time eras, Singer found a way to unite all of the *X-Men* films under one umbrella. And successful he was

¹³⁷ *X-Men: First Class*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/x-men_first_class/?search=x-men%20first%20class.

¹³⁸ *X-Men: First Class*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1270798/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

¹³⁹ *X-Men: First Class*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

¹⁴⁰ *X-Men: First Class*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

as *Days of Future Past* became the best-received *X-Men* film ever. Recipient of an 8.1¹⁴¹ on IMDb and a 91%¹⁴² on Rotten Tomatoes, *Days of Future Past* “combines the best elements of the series to produce a satisfyingly fast-paced outing that ranks among the franchise's finest installments.”¹⁴³ Grossing nearly \$750 million at the box office¹⁴⁴, *Days of Future Past* provided Fox with limitless directions to move forward with the *X-Men* franchise.

Unlike Spider-Man, *X-Men* is comprised of many heroes capable of leading films and crossing over with one another. Additionally, *Days of Future Past* reset the *X-Men* franchise to where the cast of the previous films could be retained for additional sequels. Accordingly, Fox greatly expanded its franchise with a tentative layout of what films were to come. The first of those films to be released was *Deadpool*, a.k.a. The mercenary with a mouth.

“You're probably thinking ‘This is a superhero movie, but that guy in the suit just turned that other guy into a (expletive) kebab.’ Surprise, this is a different kind of superhero story.”¹⁴⁵ As spoken by *Deadpool* to the audience, *Deadpool* is a very much a different kind of superhero film – one that fought for a very long time for its own existence. Known for his foul mouth and penchant to speak to the audience directly, *Deadpool* was considered the hardest superhero to adapt to the screen. Never before had a studio green-lit a superhero project that would be rated R for “strong violence and language throughout, sexual content and graphic nudity.”¹⁴⁶ But *Deadpool* received approval and the industry anxiously awaited. If *Deadpool* were to be a success, how would that transform the industry? Even James

¹⁴¹ *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1877832/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

¹⁴² *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/x-men_days_of_future_past/?search=x-men%20days.

¹⁴³ *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Rotten Tomatoes, 2016.

¹⁴⁴ *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

¹⁴⁵ Tim Miller, *Deadpool*. Performed by Ryan Reynolds, Morena Baccarin, and Ed Skrein (2016; United States: Twentieth Century Fox, 2016.), in theaters.

¹⁴⁶ *Deadpool*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1431045/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

Gunn prayed “every night that *Deadpool* is awesome and does well – to encourage more varied types of comic book movies.”¹⁴⁷

Released to the public on February 12, 2016, *Deadpool* received universal praise. Currently sporting an 8.8¹⁴⁸ on IMDb and 83%¹⁴⁹ on Rotten Tomatoes, *Deadpool* absolutely demolished the box office. Grossing over \$135 million domestically in its opening weekend,¹⁵⁰ this R-rated film broke the previous *X-Men* weekend record of \$90 million.¹⁵¹ In addition to having the highest opening weekend of any *X-Men* film, *Deadpool* has the highest opening weekend of any R-rated film ever. “Fast, funny, and gleefully profane, the fourth-wall-busting *Deadpool* subverts superhero film formula with wildly entertaining -- and decidedly non-family-friendly – results.”¹⁵² The key phrase in that consensus is that *Deadpool* ‘subverts superhero film formula.’ As with many previous successes before it, *Deadpool* represents the concept of innovation within the industry. Introducing audiences to fresh ideas and perspectives, but set within familiar confines, allows this industry to continue to grow. The aftermath of *Deadpool* included rumors swirling of further R-rated superhero films including *Wolverine 3* and *X-Force*. While nothing definitive yet, these rumblings indicate the type of widespread impact that *Deadpool*’s strong showing inspired.

After *Deadpool*, Fox will release *X-Men: Apocalypse*. Concluding the trilogy started with *First Class*, *Apocalypse* is set in the 1980’s and will introduce younger versions of characters introduced in Singer’s original trilogy. With the *X-Men* franchise, Fox is emulating Marvel with a different formula. Individual spinoffs combined with ensemble pieces set in different periods provide Fox with many directions to take the franchise. Along with Marvel, Fox is well-positioned to sustain its *X-Men* franchise in the long-run.

¹⁴⁷ James Gunn, “I pray every night that *Deadpool* is awesome & does well, to encourage more varied types of comic book movies,” Twitter, February 7, 2016, <https://twitter.com/JamesGunn/status/696347167183794176>.

¹⁴⁸ *Deadpool*, Internet Movie Database, Accessed February 28, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ *Deadpool*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/deadpool/?search=deadpool>.

¹⁵⁰ *Deadpool*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

¹⁵¹ *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Internet Movie Database, 2016.

¹⁵² *Deadpool*, Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed February 28, 2016.

Warner Bros.

“The world has been so caught up with what he could do, that no one has asked what he SHOULD do!”¹⁵³ A line pertaining to Superman, this is spoken in the recent film *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*. This quote represents WB approach to the superhero properties that it owns and the rapidly produced universe it plans on promoting. Following its failed reboot of Superman in 2006, WB approved another reboot in the form of 2013’s *Man of Steel*. Aware of the success of Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight* trilogy, WB hired Nolan as a producer. Attempting to emulate Nolan’s work, director Zack Snyder grounded his Superman film with a serious, somber tone. Released with a great deal of anticipation, *Man of Steel* garnered mixed reviews and pedestrian box-office numbers. While certainly not a universal success like *The Dark Knight* trilogy, *Man of Steel*’s legacy is that it represents the first film of the DC Comics Extended Universe (DCEU).

Following the success of 2012’s *The Avengers*, WB needed to answer the powerhouse known as the MCU. Having many popular characters and impatient to allow for individual solo films, WB opted for a quick conception of a shared-universe. After declaring *Man of Steel* as the official start of the DCEU, WB was eager to introduce more characters into its universe. Hence, *Man of Steel*’s sequel evolved into *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*. Not only do two of the most famous superheroes share the same screen for the first time, they do so in conflict. In addition to the conflict between the two leads, other members of the Justice League are introduced. Essentially the Avengers of DC Comics, Justice League films are WB’s ultimate goal. Distributing at least two films a year, WB needs favorable audience reaction. Spanning the course of four years and five films, Marvel slowly generated a positive reputation and goodwill from audiences and critics. WB attempted to do the same with this one film whose legacy is to be determined.

¹⁵³ Zack Snyder, *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*. Performed by Ben Affleck, Henry Cavil, and Amy Adams (2016; United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016.), in theaters.

Chapter 6

Results & Conclusion

“The end of the Batman story... is that Batman is a symbol...He can be anybody... The only way that I could find to make a credible characterization of a guy transforming himself into Batman is if it was as a necessary symbol, and he saw himself as a catalyst for change... Batman was not important as a man, he’s more than that. He’s a symbol, and the symbol lives on.”¹⁵⁴ Spoken by Christopher Nolan referencing his conclusion to his *Dark Knight* trilogy, this quote is representative of the superhero film industry. The superhero film is symbolic of who we are as an audience and as a people. These films have greatly evolved over time just as we have as people. Their credibility stems from the real-world ideas, devices, and beliefs implanted in their fantastical settings.

Having analyzed the history of the superhero film since its inception, it is clearly apparent that the superhero film controls its own destiny. In terms of sustainability, this industry will continue to grow because it is never content with where it is. Having gone extinct once due to complacency combined with campiness, the superhero film is alive and showing no signs of losing its powers. Film quality, passionate filmmaking and innovative offerings will be essential for the superhero film to continue its reign as the pinnacle of the entertainment industry.

Film Quality

“What’s the difference between you and me? I’m not wearing hockey pads!”¹⁵⁵ As Batman responds to one of his imitators in *The Dark Knight*, this line is applicable to superhero film quality.

¹⁵⁴ Scott Foundas, “Cinematic Faith,” *Film Comment - The Dark Knight Rises* Issue, November 28, 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (2008), Blu-ray.

Throughout this composition, film review statistics and tickets sold for each film have been implemented to apply an appropriate context in regard to film quality. Specifically highlighting the notable successes and failures, film quality was always a relevant factor in determining the number of US tickets sold. The following figures (**Figures 8 – 12**) represent the various superhero franchises' film quality:

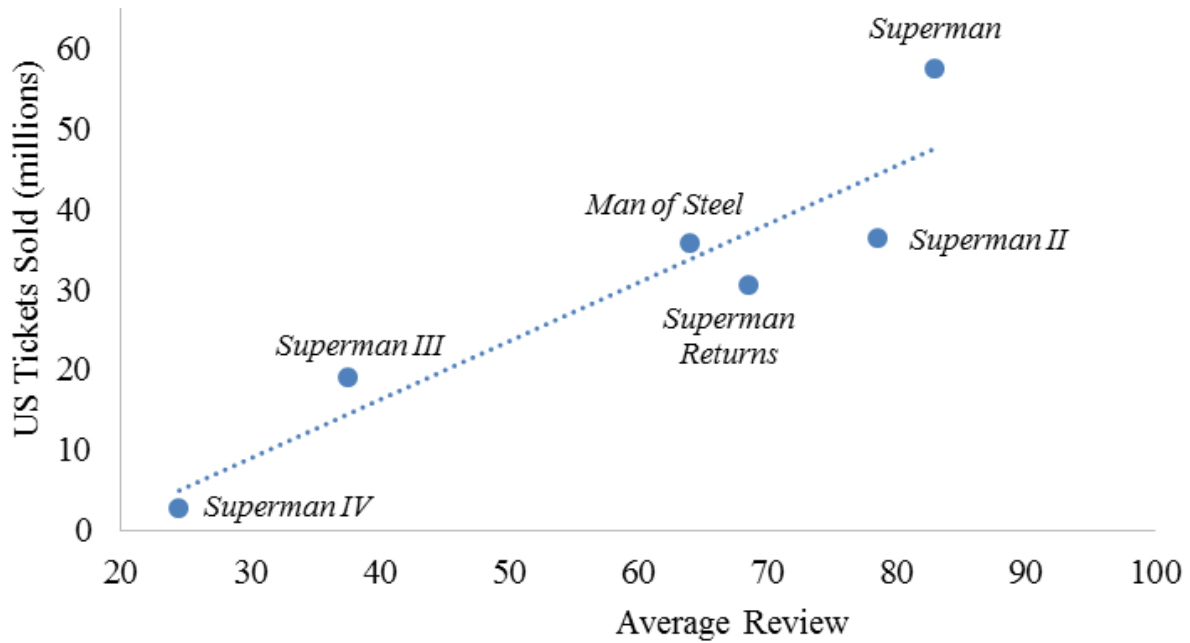


Figure 8. *Superman* Franchise. Correlation = 0.9294

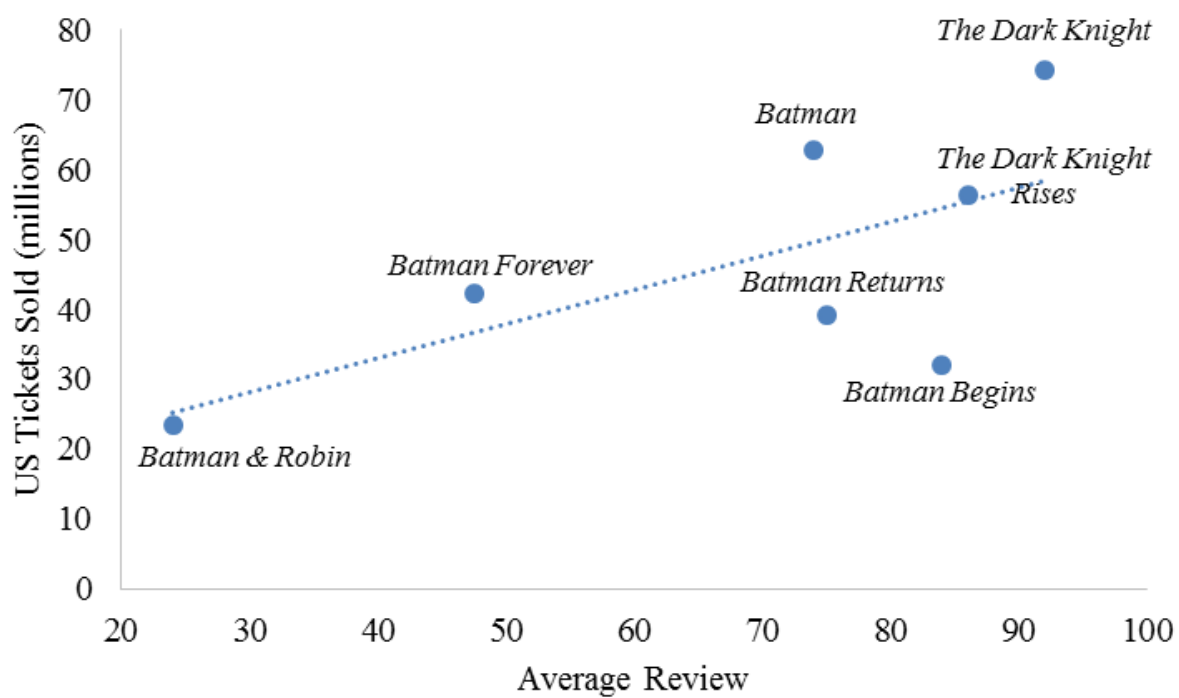


Figure 9. *Batman* Franchise. Correlation = 0.6653

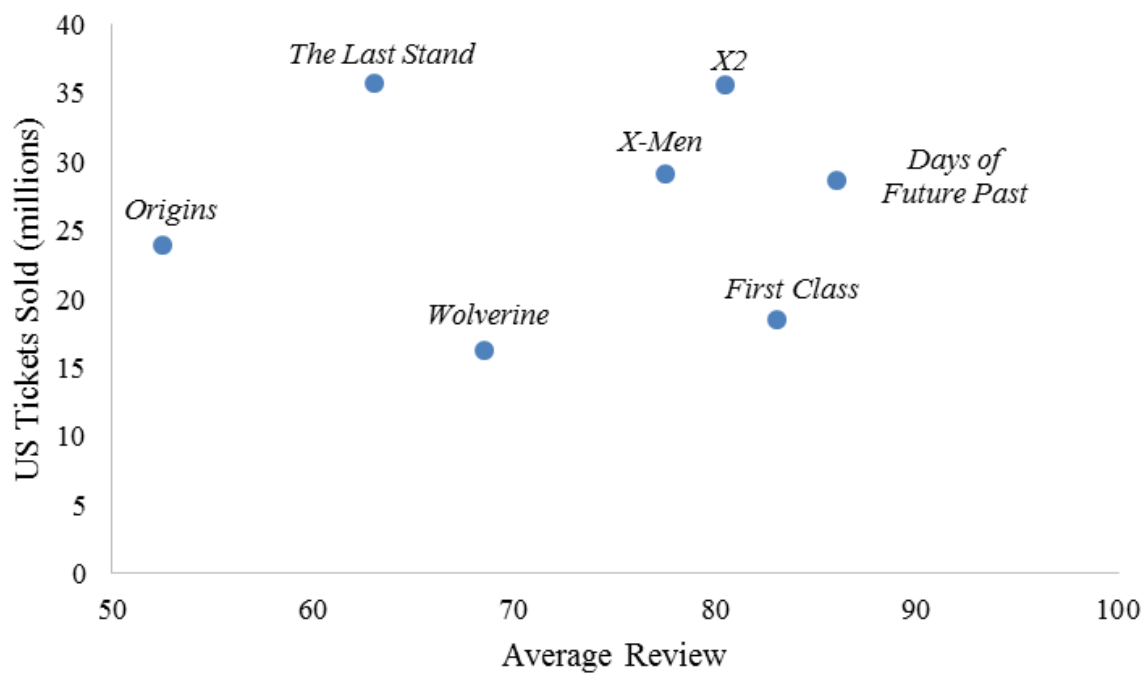


Figure 10. *X-Men* Franchise. Correlation = 0.0582

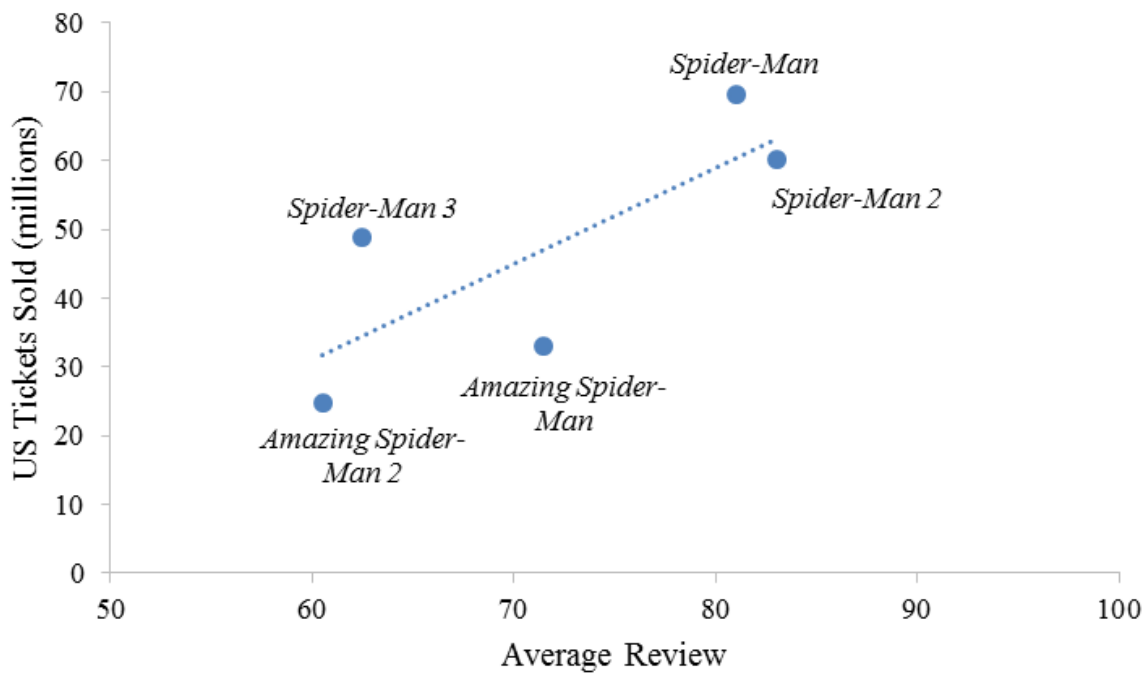


Figure 11. Spider-Man Franchise. Correlation = 0.7750



Figure 12. Marvel Cinematic Universe. Correlation = 0.5703

With the exception of the *X-Men* franchise (as explained in Chapter 3), every other notable film franchise has fairly strong linear relationship between average review received and the number of US tickets sold. The *Superman* franchise, spanning from 1978 to 2013, has the strongest relationship with a correlation of 0.9294. Even Marvel, essentially containing all quality films, has a disparity between its average and exceptional films. The lesson to learn from these figures is that film quality counts. Over the decades of superhero film history, quality films undeniably rose to the top. An ultimate glance at the top six films in terms of US tickets sold and their average film review (**Table 18**) demonstrates this consistent film quality:

Table 18. 1-6 Film Ranking According to Tickets Sold.

Rank	Film	Tickets Sold	Review
1	<i>The Avengers</i>	78,301,451	87
2	<i>The Dark Knight</i>	74,282,083	92
3	<i>Spider-Man</i>	69,484,746	81
4	<i>Batman</i>	62,713,546	74
5	<i>Spider-Man 2</i>	60,148,870	83
6	<i>Superman</i>	57,358,127	83

From *Superman* to *The Avengers*, these top films encompass every section of superhero film history. From key initial installments (*Superman*, *Batman*, and *Spider-Man*), strong sequels (*Spider-Man 2*, *The Dark Knight*) and the ultimate event film (*The Avengers*), film quality is the one constant tying these high performers together.

Passionate Filmmaking

A key contributor to quality filmmaking is what goes on behind the scenes. Those tasked with bringing these iconic heroes to the screen are essential to what is ultimately presented to the public. Names that were foreign before reading this composition should now be instantly recognizable – Tim Burton, Bryan Singer, Sam Raimi, Christopher Nolan, Joss Whedon, James Gunn. The commonalty

between all of these filmmakers is their passion behind their work. All had unique visions and distinct voices to add to these characters to relate them to audiences. There is a reason why we know that flying, “statistically speaking, is still the safest way to travel.”¹⁵⁶ There is a reason why we know that “with great power comes great responsibility.”¹⁵⁷ And there is a reason why “we are Groot.”¹⁵⁸ Over the course of its history, superhero films evolved from fantastical world settings to placing heroes in our world along with other heroes. This evolution is all due to the filmmakers’ desire to be relevant to the world that we all encompass. The most successful superhero films are not only relevant, but have a heart and soul provided by their creators.

Equally important to a filmmaker having a vision is its studio allowing him/her to realize that vision. Especially for blockbusters, positive returns are essential. Therefore, it is not surprising for studios to provide greater oversight for these high-budget superhero films. However, this can occasionally lead to filmmakers comprising their artistic integrity. As already referenced earlier, studio interference has often resulted in poor performance. Individual film quality should come first and foremost.

Innovative Offerings

“Growth via breakthrough innovation.”¹⁵⁹ Articulated by the accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, this quote is perfectly applicable to the superhero film industry. As the superhero film history analysis showed, innovation is a key predictor of success. Critics and audiences alike respond well to films unlike anything they have seen before. *Superman* showed that a man could fly. *X-Men* placed superheroes in the real world. *The Avengers* let superheroes fight alongside one another. *Guardians of the Galaxy* made audiences care about a talking tree. *Deadpool* pushed the boundaries of

¹⁵⁶ Richard Donner, *Superman* (1978), Blu-ray.

¹⁵⁷ Sam Raimi, *Spider-Man* (2002), Blu-ray.

¹⁵⁸ James Gunn, *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), Blu-ray.

¹⁵⁹ "Innovation," *PwC.com*, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, March 16, 2016.

what a superhero filmed encompassed. The key to a successful superhero film is its ability to rewrite the formula that came before it. Not only to rewrite the formula, but to combine a new approach with passionate filmmaking. As a truly satisfying conclusion to this entire work, James Gunn's recent thoughts on *Deadpool* provide instant clarity:

“After every movie smashes records, people here in Hollywood love to throw out the definitive reasons why the movie was a hit. I saw it happen with *Guardians*. It ‘wasn't afraid to be fun’ or it ‘was colorful and funny’... And next thing I know I hear of a hundred film projects being set up ‘like *Guardians*,’ and I start seeing dozens of trailers exactly like the *Guardians* trailer with a big pop song and a bunch of quips... *Deadpool* wasn't that. *Deadpool* was its own thing. THAT'S what people are reacting to. It's original, it's damn good, it was made with love by the filmmakers, and it wasn't afraid to take risks. For the theatrical experience to survive, spectacle films need to expand their definition of what they can be. They need to be unique and true voices of the filmmakers behind them. They can't just be copying what came before them. So, over the next few months, if you pay attention to the trades, you'll see Hollywood misunderstanding the lesson they should be learning with *Deadpool*. They'll be green lighting films ‘like *Deadpool*’ – but, by that, they won't mean ‘good and original’ but ‘a raunchy superhero film’ or ‘it breaks the fourth wall.’ They'll treat you like you're stupid, which is the one thing *Deadpool* didn't do. But hopefully in the midst of all this there will be a studio or two that will take the right lesson from this – like Fox did with *Guardians* by green-lighting *Deadpool* - and say – ‘Boy, maybe we can give them something they don't already have.’ And that's who is going to succeed.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ James Gunn, "Why *Deadpool* Succeeded," Facebook, February 15, 2016.

Appendix A

Chapter 2 – Franchise Details

Franchise Details			Production Details				Commercial Reception (Gross)			
Franchise	Title	Year	Studio	Release Date	Budget	Opening	Domestic	Worldwide		
Superman	Superman	1978	WB	12/15/1978	\$ 55,000,000	\$ 7,465,343	\$134,218,018	\$300,200,000		
Superman	Superman II	1981	WB	6/19/1981	\$ 54,000,000	\$14,100,523	\$101,347,629	\$101,347,629		
Superman	Superman III	1983	WB	6/17/1983	\$ 39,000,000	\$13,352,357	\$ 59,950,623	\$ 59,950,623		
Superman	Superman IV: The Quest for Peace	1987	WB	7/24/1987	\$ 17,000,000	\$ 5,683,122	\$ 11,227,824	\$ 11,227,824		
Batman	Batman	1989	WB	6/23/1989	\$ 35,000,000	\$40,489,746	\$248,972,777	\$409,132,777		
Batman	Batman Returns	1992	WB	6/19/1992	\$100,000,000	\$45,687,711	\$162,831,698	\$336,495,936		
Batman	Batman Forever	1995	WB	6/16/1995	\$ 80,000,000	\$52,784,433	\$184,031,112	\$266,824,291		
Batman	Batman and Robin	1997	WB	6/20/1997	\$125,000,000	\$42,872,605	\$107,325,195	\$238,300,947		
Franchise Details			Ticket Information				Critical Reception			
Franchise	Title	Year	Avg. Price	US # Sold	RT (%)	IMDb	*10	Avg.		
Superman	Superman	1978	\$ 2.34	57,358,127	93	7.3	73	83		
Superman	Superman II	1981	\$ 2.78	36,455,982	89	6.8	68	79		
Superman	Superman III	1983	\$ 3.15	19,031,944	26	4.9	49	38		
Superman	Superman IV: The Quest for Peace	1987	\$ 3.91	2,871,566	12	3.7	37	25		
Batman	Batman	1989	\$ 3.97	62,713,546	72	7.6	76	74		
Batman	Batman Returns	1992	\$ 4.15	39,236,554	80	7.0	70	75		
Batman	Batman Forever	1995	\$ 4.35	42,306,003	41	5.4	54	48		
Batman	Batman and Robin	1997	\$ 4.59	23,382,395	11	3.7	37	24		

Appendix B

Chapter 3 – Franchise Details

Franchise	Franchise Details			Production Details			Commercial Reception (Gross)		
	Title	Year	Studio	Release Date	Budget	Opening	Domestic	Worldwide	
X-Men	X-Men	2000	Fox	7/14/2000	\$ 75,000,000	\$ 54,471,475	\$ 157,299,717	\$ 296,339,717	
X-Men	X2: X-Men United	2003	Fox	5/2/2003	\$ 125,000,000	\$ 85,558,731	\$ 214,949,694	\$ 407,711,549	
X-Men	X-Men: The Last Stand	2006	Fox	5/26/2006	\$ 210,000,000	\$ 102,750,665	\$ 234,362,462	\$ 459,359,555	
X-Men	X-Men Origins: Wolverine	2009	Fox	5/1/2009	\$ 150,000,000	\$ 85,058,003	\$ 179,883,157	\$ 374,825,760	
Spiderman	Spider-Man	2002	Sony	5/3/2002	\$ 139,000,000	\$ 114,844,116	\$ 403,706,375	\$ 821,706,375	
Spiderman	Spider-Man 2	2004	Sony	6/30/2004	\$ 200,000,000	\$ 88,156,227	\$ 373,524,485	\$ 783,705,001	
Spiderman	Spider-Man 3	2007	Sony	6/4/2007	\$ 258,000,000	\$ 151,116,516	\$ 336,530,303	\$ 890,875,303	
Batman	Batman Begins	2005	WB	6/15/2005	\$ 150,000,000	\$ 48,745,440	\$ 205,343,774	\$ 359,142,722	
Batman	The Dark Knight	2008	WB	7/18/2008	\$ 185,000,000	\$ 158,411,483	\$ 533,345,358	\$ 1,002,891,358	
Superman	Superman Returns	2006	WB	6/28/2006	\$ 232,000,000	\$ 52,535,096	\$ 200,120,000	\$ 374,085,065	
Fantastic 4	Fantastic 4	2005	Fox	7/8/2005	\$ 87,500,000	\$ 56,061,504	\$ 154,695,569	\$ 330,716,569	
Fantastic 4	Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer	2007	Fox	6/15/2007	\$ 120,000,000	\$ 58,051,684	\$ 131,921,738	\$ 288,215,319	
Franchise Details				Ticket Information			Critical Reception		
Franchise	Title	Year	Avg. Price	U.S.# Sold	RT (%)	IMDb	*10	Average	
X-Men	X-Men	2000	\$ 5.39	29,183,621	81	7.4	74	78	
X-Men	X2: X-Men United	2003	\$ 6.03	35,646,715	86	7.5	75	81	
X-Men	X-Men: The Last Stand	2006	\$ 6.55	35,780,529	58	6.8	68	63	
X-Men	X-Men Origins: Wolverine	2009	\$ 7.50	23,984,421	38	6.7	67	53	
Spiderman	Spider-Man	2002	\$ 5.81	69,484,746	89	7.3	73	81	
Spiderman	Spider-Man 2	2004	\$ 6.21	60,148,870	93	7.3	73	83	
Spiderman	Spider-Man 3	2007	\$ 6.88	48,914,288	63	6.2	62	63	
Batman	Batman Begins	2005	\$ 6.41	32,034,910	85	8.3	83	84	
Batman	The Dark Knight	2008	\$ 7.18	74,282,083	94	9.0	90	92	
Superman	Superman Returns	2006	\$ 6.55	30,552,672	76	6.1	61	69	
Fantastic 4	Fantastic 4	2005	\$ 6.41	24,133,474	27	5.7	57	42	
Fantastic 4	Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer	2007	\$ 6.88	19,174,671	37	5.6	56	47	

Appendix C

Chapter 4 – Franchise Details

Franchise Details				Production Details			Commercial Reception (Gross)		
Franchise	Title	Year	Studio	Release Date	Budget	Opening	Domestic	Worldwide	
Iron Man	Iron Man	2008	Marvel	5/2/2008	\$186,000,000	\$102,118,668	\$318,604,126	\$ 582,443,126	
Iron Man	Iron Man 2	2010	Marvel	5/7/2010	\$170,000,000	\$128,122,480	\$312,128,345	\$ 623,256,345	
Iron Man	Iron Man 3	2013	Marvel	5/3/2013	\$200,000,000	\$174,144,585	\$408,992,272	\$1,215,392,272	
The Incredible Hulk	The Incredible Hulk	2008	Marvel	6/13/2008	\$137,500,000	\$ 55,414,050	\$134,533,885	\$ 263,144,885	
Thor	Thor	2011	Marvel	5/6/2011	\$150,000,000	\$ 65,723,338	\$181,030,624	\$ 449,326,618	
Thor	Thor: The Dark World	2013	Marvel	11/8/2013	\$150,000,000	\$ 85,737,841	\$206,360,018	\$ 633,360,018	
Captain America	Captain America: The First Avenger	2011	Marvel	7/22/2011	\$140,000,000	\$ 65,058,524	\$176,654,505	\$ 370,569,776	
Captain America	Captain America: The Winter Soldier	2014	Marvel	4/4/2014	\$170,000,000	\$ 95,023,721	\$259,746,958	\$ 713,846,958	
The Avengers	The Avengers	2012	Marvel	5/4/2012	\$225,000,000	\$207,438,708	\$623,279,547	\$1,519,479,547	
The Avengers	Avengers: Age of Ultron	2015	Marvel	5/1/2015	\$250,000,000	\$191,271,109	\$458,924,272	\$1,404,624,272	
Guardians of the Galaxy	Guardians of the Galaxy	2014	Marvel	8/1/2014	\$170,000,000	\$ 94,320,883	\$333,172,112	\$ 771,172,112	
Ant-Man	Ant-Man	2015	Marvel	7/17/2015	\$130,000,000	\$ 57,225,526	\$178,262,810	\$ 406,762,810	
Franchise Details				Ticket Information			Critical Reception		
Franchise	Title	Year	Avg. Price	US # Sold	RT (%)	IMDb	*10	Average	
Iron Man	Iron Man	2008	\$ 7.18	44,373,834	94	7.9	79.0	87	
Iron Man	Iron Man 2	2010	\$ 7.89	39,559,993	72	7.0	70.0	71	
Iron Man	Iron Man 3	2013	\$ 8.13	50,306,553	79	7.3	73.0	76	
The Incredible Hulk	The Incredible Hulk	2008	\$ 7.18	18,737,310	67	6.8	68.0	68	
Thor	Thor	2011	\$ 7.93	22,828,578	77	7.0	70.0	74	
Thor	Thor: The Dark World	2013	\$ 8.13	25,382,536	66	7.1	71.0	69	
Captain America	Captain America: The First Avenger	2011	\$ 7.93	22,276,735	79	6.8	68.0	74	
Captain America	Captain America: The Winter Soldier	2014	\$ 8.17	31,792,773	89	7.8	78.0	84	
The Avengers	The Avengers	2012	\$ 7.96	78,301,451	92	8.1	81.0	87	
The Avengers	Avengers: Age of Ultron	2015	\$ 8.34	55,026,891	74	7.6	76.0	75	
Guardians of the Galaxy	Guardians of the Galaxy	2014	\$ 8.17	40,779,940	91	8.1	81.0	86	
Ant-Man	Ant-Man	2015	\$ 8.34	21,374,438	80	7.4	74.0	77	

Appendix D

Chapter 5 – Franchise Details

Franchise	Franchise Details		Production Details				Commercial Reception (Gross)			
	Title	Year	Studio	Release Date	Budget	Opening	Domestic	Worldwide		
X-Men	X-Men: First Class	2011	Fox	6/3/2011	\$160,000,000	\$ 55,101,604	\$146,408,305	\$ 355,408,305		
X-Men	The Wolverine	2013	Fox	7/26/2013	\$115,000,000	\$ 53,113,752	\$132,556,852	\$ 416,456,852		
X-Men	X-Men: Days of Future Past	2014	Fox	5/23/2014	\$200,000,000	\$ 90,823,660	\$233,921,534	\$ 748,121,534		
Spiderman	The Amazing Spider-Man	2012	Sony	7/3/2012	\$220,000,000	\$ 62,004,688	\$262,030,663	\$ 757,890,267		
Spiderman	The Amazing Spider-Man 2	2014	Sony	5/2/2014	\$200,000,000	\$ 91,608,337	\$202,853,933	\$ 708,996,336		
Batman	The Dark Knight Rises	2012	WB	7/20/2012	\$275,000,000	\$160,887,295	\$448,139,099	\$1,084,439,099		
Superman	Man of Steel	2013	WB	6/14/2013	\$225,000,000	\$116,619,362	\$291,045,518	\$ 667,999,518		
Fantastic 4	Fantastic 4	2015	Fox	8/7/2015	\$120,000,000	\$ 25,685,737	\$ 56,117,548	\$ 757,890,267		
Franchise Details			Ticket Information				Critical Reception			
Franchise	Title	Year	Avg. Price	U.S. # Sold	RT (%)	IMDb	*10	Average		
X-Men	X-Men: First Class	2011	\$ 7.93	18,462,586	87	7.9	79	83		
X-Men	The Wolverine	2013	\$ 8.13	16,304,656	70	6.7	67	69		
X-Men	X-Men: Days of Future Past	2014	\$ 8.17	28,631,767	91	8.1	81	86		
Spiderman	The Amazing Spider-Man	2012	\$ 7.96	32,918,425	72	7.1	71	72		
Spiderman	The Amazing Spider-Man 2	2014	\$ 8.17	24,829,123	53	6.8	68	61		
Batman	The Dark Knight Rises	2012	\$ 7.96	56,298,882	87	8.5	85	86		
Superman	Man of Steel	2013	\$ 8.13	35,798,957	56	7.2	72	64		
Fantastic 4	Fantastic 4	2015	\$ 8.34	6,728,723	9	4.1	41	25		

Appendix E

Film Rankings According to Tickets Sold

Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold	Review	Rank	Film	Year	Tickets Sold	Review
1	<i>The Avengers</i>	2012	78,301,451	87	21	<i>Batman Begins</i>	2005	32,034,910	84
2	<i>The Dark Knight</i>	2008	74,282,083	92	22	<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	2014	31,792,773	84
3	<i>Spider-Man</i>	2002	69,484,746	81	23	<i>Superman Returns</i>	2006	30,552,672	69
4	<i>Batman</i>	1989	62,713,546	74	24	<i>X-Men</i>	2000	29,183,621	78
5	<i>Spider-Man 2</i>	2004	60,148,870	83	25	<i>X-Men: Days of Future Past</i>	2014	28,631,767	86
6	<i>Superman</i>	1978	57,358,127	83	26	<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	2013	25,382,536	69
7	<i>The Dark Knight Rises</i>	2012	56,298,882	86	27	<i>The Amazing Spider-Man 2</i>	2014	24,829,123	61
8	<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	2015	55,026,891	76	28	<i>Fantastic 4</i>	2005	24,133,474	42
9	<i>Iron Man 3</i>	2013	50,306,553	76	29	<i>X-Men Origins: Wolverine</i>	2009	23,984,421	53
10	<i>Spider-Man 3</i>	2007	48,914,288	63	30	<i>Batman & Robin</i>	1997	23,382,395	24
11	<i>Iron Man</i>	2008	44,373,834	87	31	<i>Thor</i>	2011	22,828,578	74
12	<i>Batman Forever</i>	1995	42,306,003	48	32	<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	2011	22,276,735	74
13	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	2014	40,779,940	86	33	<i>Ant-Man</i>	2015	21,374,438	79
14	<i>Iron Man 2</i>	2010	39,559,993	71	34	<i>Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer</i>	2007	19,174,671	47
15	<i>Batman Returns</i>	1992	39,236,554	75	35	<i>Superman III</i>	1983	19,031,944	38
16	<i>Superman II</i>	1981	36,455,982	79	36	<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	2008	18,737,310	68
17	<i>Man of Steel</i>	2013	35,798,957	64	37	<i>X-Men: First Class</i>	2011	18,462,586	83
18	<i>X-Men: The Last Stand</i>	2006	35,780,529	63	38	<i>The Wolverine</i>	2013	16,304,656	69
19	<i>X2: X-Men United</i>	2003	35,646,715	81	39	<i>Fantastic 4</i>	2015	6,705,736	25
20	<i>The Amazing Spider-Man</i>	2012	32,918,425	72	40	<i>Superman IV: The Quest for Peace</i>	1987	2,871,566	25

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "About Box Office Mojo." Box Office Mojo. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/about/?ref=ft>.
- "About Us." Collider. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://collider.com/about>.
- "Adjusting for Ticket Price Inflation." Box Office Mojo. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/about/adjuster.htm>.
- Ant-Man*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0478970>.
- Ant-Man*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/antman>.
- Batman & Robin*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118688>.
- Batman & Robin*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1077027-batman_and_robin.
- Batman Begins*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0372784>.
- Batman Begins*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/batman_begins.
- Batman Forever*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112462>.
- Batman Forever*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/batman_forever.
- Batman Returns*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103776>.
- Batman Returns*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/batman_returns.
- Batman*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096895>.
- Batman*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1001781-batman>.
- Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/captain_america_the_winter_soldier_2014/?search=captain%20america.

- Chitwood, Adam. "Bryan Singer Reflects on Making *X-Men* 1, Talks Evolution of the Superhero Genre." Collider. February 2, 2016. <http://collider.com/bryan-singer-x-men-superhero-movies>.
- Chitwood, Adam. "Details of the Sony/Marvel Spider-Man Deal Revealed; Looking to Cast Younger Actor." Collider. February 10, 2015. <http://collider.com/spider-man-marvel-sony-details-casting>.
- Chitwood, Adam. "Upcoming Superhero Movie Release Dates: From 2016 to 2020." Collider. January 23, 2016. <http://collider.com/upcoming-new-superhero-movies-2016-2020-release-dates>.
- Chitwood, Adam. "*X-Men: Apocalypse*: Over 75 Things to Know about the Epic Superhero Sequel." Collider. January 21, 2016. <http://collider.com/x-men-apocalypse-news-things-to-know>.
- Coyle, Jack. "Fall Movie Preview: Spielberg Plunges into the Cold War." Associated Press, September 2, 2015. <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/7b4d35d049ff4dc0b6ffe94c4a3fa7ed/fall-movie-preview-spielberg-plunges-cold-war>.
- Deadpool*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1431045/?ref_=nv_sr_1.
- Deadpool*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/deadpool/?search=deadpool>.
- Donner, Richard. *Superman*. Performed by Marlon Brandon, and Gene Hackman and Christopher Reeve. 1978. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2012. Blu-ray.
- Ebert, Roger. "*Batman Begins*." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), June 13, 2005.
- Ebert, Roger. "*Spider-Man 3*." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), November 15, 2007.
- Ebert, Roger. "*The Dark Knight*." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), July 16, 2008.
- Ebert, Roger. "*Batman*." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), June 23, 1989.
- Ebert, Roger. "*Spider-Man*." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), May 3, 2002.
- Ebert, Roger. "*Spider-Man 2*." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), June 29, 2004.
- Ebert, Roger. "*Superman*." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), December 15, 1978.
- Ebert, Roger. "*Iron Man*." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago), June 1, 2008.
- Favreau, Jon. *Iron Man*. Performed by Robert Downey Jr., Terrence Howard, and Jeff Bridges. 2008. United States: Paramount Pictures, 2008. DVD.
- Foundas, Scott. "Cinematic Faith." Film Comment - The Dark Knight Rises Issue, November 28, 2012.
- Gajewski, Ryan. "Joss Whedon on Fighting With Marvel Over *Avengers: Age of Ultron*: "It Got Really, Really Unpleasant." The Hollywood Reporter. May 5, 2015. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/joss-whedon-avengers-age-ultron-793502>.

- Goldberg, Matt. "Ant-Man Review: Marvel's Latest Is Too Minor to Matter." Collider. July 16, 2015. <http://collider.com/ant-man-review-paul-rudd>.
- Goldberg, Matt. "Christopher Nolan Talks about the Ending of *The Dark Knight Rises* and More." Collider. November 28, 2012. <http://collider.com/dark-knight-rises-ending-christopher-nolan>.
- Goldberg, Matt. "*Guardians of the Galaxy* Revisited: 'Bunch of Jackasses Standing in a Circle'." Collider. April 29, 2015. <http://collider.com/guardians-of-the-galaxy-marvel-series-retrospective-on-the-mcu>.
- Goldberg, Matt. "*Iron Man 3* Revisited: 'Some People Say Progress Is a Bad Thing'." Collider. April 26, 2015. <http://collider.com/iron-man-3-marvel-series-retrospective-mcu>.
- Goldberg, Matt. "*Iron Man* Revisited: 'I'm Just Not the Hero Type. Clearly'." Collider. April 20, 2015. <http://collider.com/iron-man-marvel-series-retrospective-mcu>.
- Goldberg, Matt. "*The Avengers* Revisited: 'I Was Playing Something Even Riskier.'" Collider. April 25, 2015. <http://collider.com/the-avengers-marvel-series-retrospective-mcu>.
- Guardians of the Galaxy*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2015381>.
- Guardians of the Galaxy*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/guardians_of_the_galaxy/?search=guardians%20of%20the.
- Gunn, James. *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Performed by Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, and Bradley Cooper. 2014. United States: Marvel Studios, 2014. Blu-ray.
- Gunn, James. "I pray every night that *Deadpool* is awesome & does well, to encourage more varied types of comic book movies." Twitter. February 7, 2016. <https://twitter.com/JamesGunn/status/696347167183794176>.
- Gunn, James. "Why *Deadpool* Succeeded." Facebook. Facebook, February 15, 2016.
- "Innovation." *PwC.com*. PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP. March 16, 2016.
- Iron Man 3*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1300854/?ref_=nv_sr_1.
- Iron Man 3*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/iron_man_3/?search=iron%20man%203.
- Iron Man*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0371746/?ref_=nv_sr_2.
- Iron Man*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/iron_man/?search=iron%20man.

- Man of Steel*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0770828/?ref_=nv_sr_1.
- Man of Steel*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_man_of_steel/?search=man%20of%20steel.
- McGovern, Joe. "Thor: The Dark World director Alan Taylor calls working for Marvel 'particularly wrenching.'" Entertainment Weekly. June 30, 2015.
<http://www.ew.com/article/2015/06/30/terminator-genisys-alan-taylor-marvel-complaint>.
- Miller, Tim. *Deadpool*. Performed by Ryan Reynolds, Morena Baccarin, and Ed Skrein. 2016. United States: Twentieth Century Fox, 2016. In theaters.
- Nolan, Christopher. *Batman Begins*. Performed by Christian Bale, Michael Caine, and Liam Neeson. 2005. United States: Warner Bros Pictures, 2008. Blu-ray.
- Nolan, Christopher. *The Dark Knight*. Performed by Christian Bale, Michael Caine, and Heath Ledger. 2008. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008. Blu-ray.
- Raimi, Sam. *Spider-Man*. Performed by Toby Maguire, Willem Dafoe, and Kirsten Dunst. 2002. United States: Columbia Pictures, 2012. Blu-ray.
- "Roger Ebert." RogertEbert.com. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.rogerebert.com/contributors>.
- Singer, Bryan. *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. Performed by Hugh Jackman, Patrick Stewart, and Ian McKellen. 2014. United States: Twentieth Century Fox, 2014. Blu-ray.
- Snyder, Zack. *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*. Performed by Ben Affleck, Henry Cavil, and Amy Adams. 2016. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016. In theaters.
- Spider-Man 2*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0316654>.
- Spider-Man 2*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spiderman_2.
- Spider-Man 3*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0413300>.
- Spider-Man 3*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spiderman_3.
- Spider-Man*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0145487>.
- Spider-Man*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spiderman>.
- Spielberg, Steven. *Jaws*. Performed by Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, and Richard Dreyfus. 1975. United States: Universal Pictures, 2005. DVD.

Steinbeiser, Andrew. "Marvel Released Official Marvel Cinematic Universe Phase 3 Timeline Chart." Comicbook.com. November 17, 2014. <http://comicbook.com/2014/11/17/marvel-released-official-marvel-cinematic-universe-phase-3-timel>.

Superman II. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081573>.

Superman II. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_ii.

Superman III. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086393>.

Superman III. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_iii.

Superman IV: The Quest for Peace. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094074>.

Superman IV: The Quest for Peace. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_iv_the_quest_for_peace.

Superman. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078346Movie>.

Superman. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_the_movie.
The Amazing Spider-Man 2. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.

The Amazing Spider-Man 2. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1872181>.

The Amazing Spider-Man 2. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_amazing_spider_man_2/?search=the%20amazing%20spider-man%202.

The Amazing Spider-Man. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_amazing_spider_man.

The Avengers. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0848228/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

The Avengers. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/marvels_the_avengers/?search=the%20avengers.

The Dark Knight. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0468569>.

- The Dark Knight*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_dark_knight.
- Towers, Andrea. "Ava DuVernay opens up about why she passed on directing *Black Panther*." Entertainment Weekly. July 21, 2015. <http://www.ew.com/2015/07/21/ava-duvernay-black-panther-blogger>.
- What Is IMDb?" Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.imdb.com/help/show_leaf?about&ref_=hlp_brws.
- "What Is the Tomatometer?" Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.rottentomatoes.com>.
- Whedon, Joss. *The Avengers*. Performed by Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, and Mark Ruffalo. 2012. United States: Paramount Pictures, 2012. Blu-ray.
- X2: X-Men United*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0290334>.
- X2: X-Men United*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/x2_xmen_united.
- X-Men*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120903>.
- X-Men*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016. <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/xmen>.
- X-Men: Days of Future Past*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1877832/?ref_=nv_sr_1.
- X-Men: Days of Future Past*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/x_men_days_of_future_past/?search=x-men%20days.
- X-Men: First Class*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1270798/?ref_=nv_sr_1.
- X-Men: First Class*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/x_men_first_class/?search=x-men%20first%20class.
- X-Men: The Last Stand*. Internet Movie Database. Accessed February 28, 2016.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0376994>.
- X-Men: The Last Stand*. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed February 28, 2016.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/x_men_3_the_last_stand.
- Zumberge, Marianne. "Joss Whedon: Edgar Wright's *Ant-Man* Script the Best Marvel Ever Had." Variety. April 22, 2015. <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/ant-man-edgar-wright-joss-whedon-1201477447>.

ACADEMIC VITA

Michael Magagna
Magagna6153@gmail.com

Education

The Pennsylvania State University - Schreyer Honors College University Park, PA
Smear College of Business – Integrated Masters of Accounting Program (MAcc) Class of 2016

- Master of *Accounting* and Bachelor of Science in *Accounting*
- Minor in *History* and Two-piece Sequence in *Finance*
- Recipient of – *Robert W. Koehler Academic Excellence in Accounting Scholarship & Marty D'Ambrosio Honors Scholarship*

Temple University

Semester Abroad Rome, Italy
Spring 2015

Work Experience

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP Philadelphia, PA
Tax FS – Asset Management Intern Summer 2015

Received comprehensive tax training in regard to corporations, partnerships, and individuals

- Prepared federal, state, and local tax returns/work-papers for partnerships and corporations
- Shadowed a variety of tax professionals including associates, managers, and partners

The Wolf Group, PC

Tax/Wealth Management Intern Fairfax, VA
Summer 2014

- Prepared individual income tax returns for high net worth taxpayers
- Received training in tax and wealth management areas including international and expatriate tax planning and compliance
- Involved in development of an investment portfolio for a Wolf Group Capital Advisers client

Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP

Financial Services Assistant Philadelphia, PA
Summer 2013

Reviewed data entries regarding tasks performed on behalf of clients

Analyzed data for compliance with client guidelines

Discussed with lawyers in different offices the nature of their work in order to confirm descriptions for billing records

Leadership and Volunteer Experience

Penn State University University Park, PA
Teaching Assistant – Introductory Accounting Fall 2015

- Taught a weekly recitation class preparing students for quiz assessments
- Conducted office hours to accommodate student questions and concerns
- Monitored course exams to ensure and uphold academic integrity

Mamiani Liceo Statale (Roman High School)

English Student Teacher Rome, Italy
Spring 2015

- Furthered Italian high school students' comprehension of English as a second language
- Introduced students to American culture while being exposed to Italian culture concurrently
- Responsible for the preparation and teaching of lesson plans

KPMG International Case Competition

Penn State Finalist University Park, PA
Fall 2014

- Acted as consultants for the planning and preparation of the 2022 FIFA World Cup
- Responsible for developing a comprehensive implementation plan for Qatar in regard to potential logistical and political issues
- Presented the developed plan in front of a board of KPMG partners and associates

Penn State Homecoming

Finance Captain University Park, PA
Spring 2014 to Fall 2014

- Responsible for planning and organization of Homecoming fundraisers
- Handled the management of funds garnered from both fundraisers and university support
- Collaborated with a team of captains in all Homecoming matters pertaining to finance

Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon (THON)

Security Leader and Social Chair University Park, PA
Fall 2012 to Spring 2014

- Served as a committee member for both the Rules & Regulations and Finance committees
- Acted as a second-in-command through facilitating all security information from captains to committee members (R&R)
- Responsible for planning and coordination of all committee social events (Finance)