

The Walt Disney Company vs Studio Ghibli: Exploring the possibility to achieve both artistic and commercial successes in the mainstream animation industry

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ABSTRACT

Due to rapid technological development and advancements in the media communication field during the 20th and 21st century, various forms of entertainment contents have been created and widely consumed in today's society. In particular, visual contents such as feature-length films have not only become a major entertainment form for audiences from all ages around the world, but also a significant economic driving force for the media industry, particularly for mainstream productions from Hollywood.

Since the introduction of the blockbuster genre in the 1970s, many mainstream films have been purposely created under a similar format in order to not only effectively keep audience's attention, but also to generate long-term merchandising and franchising projects after the film release. Such methods has become typical in film production during the past decades, because in many cases, related merchandises bring much more revenues to production companies than box office sales of their film. As a result, the creative process tends to be heavily influenced by commercial factors. This limits the freedom of creators to express themselves and compromises the artistic quality that they would originally like to achieve. Contents from animation genre have especially been affected by such a dominant production style. One of the most obvious examples is The Walt Disney Company, the largest transnational multimedia conglomerate in the world.

Meanwhile, there are many production companies around the world that attempt to break such trend. A great study case is Studio Ghibli, an animation studio from Japan. Founded in 1985 by a few animators, including the most famous leading figure Hayao Miyazaki, the studio has maintained remarkable production quality based on their essential company philosophy: protecting artistic freedom from any external commercial pressure. Highly regarded domestically and internationally, their animated films have succeeded both as artistic works and as cinematic entertainments. While winning many prestigious international awards, Studio Ghibli remains the most profitable animation company in the world besides Disney and other Hollywood-based studios.

Comparing The Walt Disney Company and Studio Ghibli as study cases, this ongoing research analyzes their differences and similarities in terms of creative and commercial approaches. Eventually, the research also will explore whether it is possible for production companies to gain artistic and commercial successes simultaneously in the current mainstream animation industry.