

# Streaming Platforms, Animation Films & Cinematic Universes' Effects on Transmedia Storytelling after Covid-19

## Streaming Platformlarının, Animasyon Sinemasının ve Sinematik Evrenlerin Covid-19 sonrası Transmedya Hikâye Anlatımına Etkileri

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### ABSTRACT

It can be thought that a major paradigm shift has occurred with the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to education, health, transportation and cultural activities, which have been affected by this situation, radical changes have also occurred in the media area. When it comes to the digital media field, the biggest of these changes is seen in people's relationship with cinema. The findings show that many films and animations consumed in cinemas that have been closed for a long time have changed dynamics in which they are now delivered to the audience through another experience. The findings show that there has been a significant increase in the use of "Streaming platforms" as an existing technology. Production companies, who want to turn this situation to their advantage, have transferred their cinematic universes that creates a sense of belonging in the audience to streaming platforms, both as series, feature films and animations. The main problem of the article is to reveal this paradigm shift. As a method, graphics produced within statistical data will be used and thus a quantitative study will be achieved. The universe of the article will be established with the box office revenue rates of the last eight years obtained from the "Box Office Mojo" website, which is the most reliable source. The top 10 grossing films of each year are divided into three categories: conventional films, films with transmedia storytelling and animated films. Finally, the trends of the media in the 2020s will be explained.

**Keywords:** Cinema, Animation, Transmedia, Streaming, Covid

### Öz

Covid 19 salgını ile beraber büyük bir paradigma değişiminin ortaya çıktığı düşünülebilir. Bu durumdan etkilenen, eğitim, sağlık, ulaşım ve kültürel aktivitelerin dışında medya alanında da köklü değişiklikler ortaya çıkmıştır. Dijital medya alanı söz konusu olduğunda bu değişikliklerin en büyüğü, insanların sinema ile olan ilişkisinde görülmektedir. Elde edilen bulgularda uzun süre kapalı olan sinema salonlarında tüketilen bir çok film ve animasyon eserinin artık izleyiciye başka bir deneyim üzerinden ulaştırılma dinamiğinde değişiklikler meydana geldiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bulgular, hali hazırda mevcut olan bir teknoloji olarak "Streaming Platformları"nın kullanımında ciddi bir artışa sebep olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu durumu kendi lehine çevirmek isteyen prodüksiyon şirketleri ise, uzun zamandır sinema salonlarındaki seyircilerde bir aidiyet yarattıkları sinematik evrenlerini gerek seriler gerekse uzun metraj film ve animasyon eserleri olarak streaming platformlarına taşımışlardır. Makalenin ana sorunsalı bu paradigma değişimini gözler önüne sermektir. Yöntem olarak, istatistiksel veriler dahilinde üretilen grafikler kullanılacak ve böylece nicel bir çalışmaya ulaşılabilecektir. Makalenin evreni, gişe hasılatları söz konusu olduğunda en güvenilir kaynak olan "Box Office Mojo" internet sitesinden elde edilen son on yılın gişe hasılat oranlarıyla kurulacaktır. Her yılın en çok hasılat yapan ilk on filmi üç kategoriye halinde ele alınmıştır. Bu kategoriler; konvansiyonel filmler, transmedya hikaye anlatımıyla üretilen filmler ve animasyon filmleridir. Sonuç olarak, iki bin yirmili yıllara gelindiğinde medyanın yönelimleri gözler önüne serilmeye çalışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sinema, Animasyon, Transmedya, Platform, Covid

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## Introduction

As a media habit, since the beginning of the 19th century, when it comes to the works of conventional cinema, the audience's experience was limited to a single film. However, even though there were certain attempts in the period approaching the millennium, there was a big change in the early 2000s, and cinema works were no longer told alone, but together with many different works that followed. The father of the concept, Henry Jenkins, called this method "Transmedia". A film was no longer limited to a single story, and the story universe was expanded. The idea of presenting a work from many platforms, which was previously used in the concept of multimedia, was added to the idea that these works complement each other. A Transmedia story told on different platforms like pieces of a puzzle creates a huge universe with the addition of feature films, television series, animation series, cartoons, comics, books and computer games. With the use of these universes, the cinema industry has transformed audience into participants who feel a sense of belonging to the work, connect with the characters and interact with this story universe from different platforms for years. The area where this transformation was most intensely determined was the cinemas where feature films were experienced before the Covid-19 outbreak. With the closing of cinemas, the audience's orientation turned to streaming platforms and series produced with transmedia storytelling were also affected by this. The main goal of the study, which will examine this effect through the mentioned cinematic universes, animated films and streaming platforms, is to show how the media journey continues within the changing conjuncture.

## Methods

The main method in the study will be the graphs produced by using statistical data analysis. To better understand these graphs, the concepts will be clarified with the expanded literature review. The research will be expanded within international and national sources. The data analysis of the research will be "Box Office Mojo" platform in this regard which is most commonly used website. This website collects box office revenue data from all over the world on an international scale and lists the films that make the highest box offices each year. The data obtained from this list is categorized and calculated, and the results are graphed and shown in the results section of the study. The top ten highest grossing films of each year were divided into three categories: Conventional films, films produced with transmedia storytelling, and animated films. The top ten highest grossing films of each year were also divided into two categories: 4 years before and after the covid outbreak, and data was obtained from all these categorizations. Thus, it is aimed to make both a qualitative and quantitative contribution to the field.

2016						
(T) 1	<a href="#">Captain America: Civil War</a>	\$1,153,296,293	\$408,084,349	35.4%	\$745,211,944	64.6%
(T) 2	<a href="#">Rogue One: A Star Wars Story</a>	\$1,056,057,273	\$532,177,324	50.4%	\$523,879,949	49.6%
(A) 3	<a href="#">Finding Dory</a>	\$1,028,570,889	\$486,295,561	47.3%	\$542,275,328	52.7%
(A) 4	<a href="#">Zootopia</a>	\$1,023,784,195	\$341,268,248	33.3%	\$682,515,947	66.7%
(A) 5	<a href="#">The Jungle Book</a>	\$966,550,600	\$364,001,123	37.7%	\$602,549,477	62.3%
(A) 6	<a href="#">The Secret Life of Pets</a>	\$875,697,467	\$368,623,860	42.1%	\$507,073,607	57.9%
(T) 7	<a href="#">Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice</a>	\$874,360,194	\$330,360,194	37.8%	\$544,000,000	62.2%
(T) 8	<a href="#">Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them</a>	\$816,037,575	\$234,037,575	28.7%	\$582,000,000	71.3%
(T) 9	<a href="#">Deadpool</a>	\$782,612,155	\$363,070,709	46.4%	\$419,541,446	53.6%
(T) 10	<a href="#">Suicide Squad</a>	\$749,200,054	\$325,100,054	43.4%	\$424,100,000	56.6%
6 Transmedia 5,431,563,544\$ - 4 Animation 3,894,603,151\$						

**Figure 1.** The Top Ten Highest Grossing Films of 2016 which Divided into Three Categories: Conventional Films, Transmedia Films and Animated Films (Box Office Mojo, n.d.a)

2023						
(C) 1	<a href="#">Barbie</a>	\$1,445,638,421	\$636,238,421	44%	\$809,400,000	56%
(A) 2	<a href="#">The Super Mario Bros. Movie</a>	\$1,361,949,854	\$574,934,330	42.2%	\$787,015,524	57.8%
(C) 3	<a href="#">Oppenheimer</a>	\$955,706,395	\$328,084,395	34.3%	\$627,622,000	65.7%
(T) 4	<a href="#">Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3</a>	\$845,555,777	\$358,995,815	42.5%	\$486,559,962	57.5%
(C) 5	<a href="#">Fast X</a>	\$704,875,015	\$146,126,015	20.7%	\$558,749,000	79.3%
(T) 6	<a href="#">Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse</a>	\$690,615,475	\$381,311,319	55.2%	\$309,304,156	44.8%
(C) 7	<a href="#">The Little Mermaid</a>	\$569,626,289	\$298,172,056	52.3%	\$271,454,233	47.7%
(C) 8	<a href="#">Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One</a>	\$567,535,383	\$172,135,383	30.3%	\$395,400,000	69.7%
(C) 9	<a href="#">Wonka</a>	\$552,225,218	\$194,925,218	35.3%	\$357,300,000	64.7%
(A) 10	<a href="#">Elemental</a>	\$496,444,308	\$154,426,697	31.1%	\$342,017,611	68.9%
2 Transmedia 1,536,171,252\$ - 6 Conventional 4,793,841,108\$ - 2 Animation 1,858,394,162\$						

**Figure 2.** The Top Ten Highest Grossing Films of 2023 which Divided into Three Categories: Conventional Films, Transmedia Films and Animated Films (Box Office Mojo, n.d.b)

## Findings

### Transmedia Storytelling & Streaming Platforms

Transmedia storytelling coincides with a period in which film production technologies and the internet are rapidly developing and becoming widespread. The viewer has now moved from a passive state to an active orientation. Consuming a conventional movie or a series alone has become ordinary and uninteresting for them. However, following processes such as offline and online games, classic video streaming platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo, and peer-to-peer file sharing, consumers' tendencies have also changed. At this point, it can be thought that transmedia storytelling has emerged as a new alternative that will meet the needs of humanity. "A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best-so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs

to be self-contained, so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 95-96). Although attempts at transmedia storytelling can be traced back to earlier times, Jenkins places the 1999 film "The Matrix" at the core of all these processes. Although the "Star Wars Saga" or "Lord of the Rings" film series, set the process back decades which were quickly adapted after the millennium because they contained an infrastructure that was very suitable for this storytelling method, but the people who consciously designed and managed this process are the Wachowski brothers with their old names and the Wachowskis with their new names and sexual identities. The Wachowskis divided a huge story universe into pieces, told the main themes with a trilogy of films, and brought the remaining themes to consumers with an anime series, a few computer games, and a series of comics. "The Matrix is entertainment for the age of media convergence, integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium. The Wachowski brothers played the transmedia game very well, putting out the original film first to stimulate interest, offering up a few Web comics to sustain the hardcore fan's hunger for more information, launching the anime in anticipation of the second film, releasing the computer game alongside it to surf the publicity, bringing the whole cycle to a conclusion with The Matrix Revolutions, and then turning the whole mythology over to the players of the massively multiplayer online game" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 95). However, this audience has now turned from consumers into participants, because transmedia storytelling demands a high level of interaction. The computer games played, the forums and social media platforms where ideas are shared as the process progresses, and the fan made content produced create an experience in which the audience is included in the storytelling process. People who progress with this experience now feel more belonged to the created universe and consider themselves as a part of the process. "By contrast, the strength and weakness of a collective intelligence is that it is disorderly, undisciplined, and unruly. Just as knowledge gets called upon on an ad hoc basis, there are no fixed procedures for what you do with knowledge. Each participant applies their own rules, works the data through their own processes, some of which will be more convincing than others, but none of which are wrong at face value. Debates about the rules are part of the process" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 53). Thus, the relationship between the media and the individual has made it possible to move from passivity to an active role. The audience, who are no longer a mob directed by a group of financial giants in line with their capitalist goals, can direct the process in the direction they want as participants. It is not known whether the point where transmedia storytelling directs culture is going somewhere good today, but it can be considered to have a much more democratic structure than

before the 2000s. A paradigm shift as big as transmedia storytelling has also occurred with the evolution of the hardware and platform used in content production and consumption.

After the 2010s, international streaming platforms that operate as a channel have emerged, following classic video streaming platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. Streaming platforms have made a difference in terms of offering continuous and always available content together, unlike the old conventional media broadcasts. In the past, television channels had broadcasts with a predetermined program transmitted from local cable broadcasts or satellites. These broadcasts included a structure where the channel sensed the content determined by the channel administrators at certain hours and managed the content as desired. Although this broadcasting method is still used intensively in many parts of the world, it is being abandoned by circles that have faster internet access and are more integrated into a globalized culture, and streaming platforms are becoming the reason for preference. "Any media and entertainment company operating today is looking to augment their existing distribution channels with the Internet. Some are even trying to circumvent their current distribution channels entirely. Movie and television production currently relies on local affiliates and cable television operators to get their content out to the public" (Rayburn, 2007, p. 7). Way of experiencing television is evolving, especially in North America, from cable broadcast into companies that stream their series and films internationally over the internet and produce local productions aimed at globalization in different parts of the world. Channels such as Disney+, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Max and Hulu, which are also the basis of this study, can be given as examples of these companies. These companies were already dominating the series that attracted attention in the sector with the many royalties they had purchased. "...HBO's brand slogan 'It's not TV. It's HBO.' The slogan suggests that HBO is offering something more than television, more than mass culture, while providing it paradoxically through television, as television. (...) HBO produces high-quality dramas that demonstrate quite how good television can be as a dramatic form, but in its brand strategy it implicitly devalues television as a medium. HBO's slogan suggests that its programmes are good despite being television, rather than because of it. This brand strategy does not emerge because HBO executives do not like television, but because HBO in developing its brand strategy is appealing to values that it imagines its audience will share and hence playing on the bourgeois devaluation of television as a cultural form" (Johnson, 2007, p. 10-11). Although a similar approach was used in HBO's transformation into the Max platform, streaming platforms have developed an approach where bourgeois tendencies and the general

tendency of the public can find a common ground. After all these tendencies have somehow become even stronger with the introduction of streaming platforms. "In line with the conceptual definitions and explanations regarding the uninterrupted broadcast environment, uninterrupted broadcast environments are evaluated under two headings as uninterrupted video environment and uninterrupted live broadcast environment in order to shed light on this thesis study. Uninterrupted video platforms refer to platforms that provide professional video streaming services such as series, movies and documentaries in media content, including video on demand (VOD) and subscription on demand (SVOD) systems (such as Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime Video, Blu TV, Puhu TV)" (Üstünbaş-Erdoğan, 2023, p. 145). In the rest of this chapter, views from different perspectives will be discussed more thoroughly in order to expand the discussion and the chapter will continue with views that will improve the research. "It is important for broadcasters to have audience participation and a wider audience reach. Broadcasters produce content in attractive popular genres and move away from public service ideals. As a result of the change, the ideals of public service broadcasting, such as responsibility towards the public and democratisation, which should be protected, are being questioned" (Kısaoğlu, 2023, p. 54). In this case, the rate of consumption of a content stands out as a more important feature than its nature or quality. "This meant they were only available for a premium rental or purchase price that was higher than the price of an average cinema ticket in the UK and Germany. These films subsequently remained available in the PVOD window for several weeks before the online release opened up to a wider range of pay-per-view TVOD platforms, and eventually to other platforms such as SVOD or advertising VOD, and other ancillary markets. That online release pattern was developed before the pandemic as part of conventional, staggered release strategies, and remained in place in the first waves of the pandemic" (Smits, 2024, p. 94). This situation continued to be used by streaming service providers as a great advantage during the pandemic period when the audience was left without options. But at the same time some streaming service providers have created an array of different options when it comes to cinematic possibilities. "From one perspective, SVODs have diversified the modes of storytelling found in the global film industry by investing in new films that are not subject to industrial logics that dominate Hollywood and existing power structures in other parts of the world. By both centering on experienced auteur directors and emerging directors, these services have enhanced the availability of films that were unlikely to have been otherwise produced and made them more accessible than a theatrical release afforded" (Meir, 2023, p. 292). This situation has democratized the process to a certain extent by presenting both the artistic and the classical in different ways

when it comes to audience preferences. "All the major video streaming services offer both film and television content, leading to a potential overlap of the two media forms. Nevertheless, movies and television remain distinct industrially, as the media conglomerates that commonly own them continue to differentiate these two media divisionally, and related institutions, such as the Motion Picture Association of America and the Federal Communications Commission, distinguish film from television in a variety of ways. Partly as a consequence of these industrial, institutional definitions, streaming has likewise affected each industry somewhat differently" (Herbert et al., 2019, p. 4-5). The conglomerates in question continue to work on marketing movies and television series in different ways by producing large-scale strategies on an international scale, and they benefit from streaming services to manage these processes. "Regarding age groups, the battle between YouTube, Netflix and traditional TV mainly takes place regarding the younger generations for whom these services represent close alternatives, whereas older generations remain more focused on TV. This also hints at further increasing competitive pressure among the services in the course of time. While these results confirm less detailed but sample wise more representative studies, our result regarding different times of day represent novel insights" (Budzinski et al., 2021, p. 116). The management of age groups can also be used as a specific method for the strategies used in the separation of television and cinema. While the younger generation tends to experience processes through technology, the older generation continues to consume through conventional media. After expanding the discussion with many different perspectives on streaming platforms, it is aimed to continue in the field of transmedia and strengthen the research by expanding the scope of the study. "Another debate worth monitoring here has to do with issues of audience participation in the development of a transmedia property. These debates break down into two sets of issues. The first has to do with the differences I draw in Convergence Culture between interactivity and participation. For me, interactivity has to do with the properties of the technology and participation has to do with the properties of the culture" (Jenkins, 2011). Jenkins thus makes the nature of Transmedia more understandable by revealing the different aspects of interaction and participation. The strategies developed by streaming platforms are implemented through the relationship between the technological structures that control interaction and the cultural structures that control participation. "We need, more specifically, to conceptually distinguish between multiplatform productions and transmedia storytelling. Multiplatform productions typically extend into the web and the mobile phone, but the added textual features are most often not a necessary part of the



narration. Transmedia storytelling as a phenomenon involves several technical platforms, which means that transmediated stories are dependent on multiplatform productions” (Bolin, 2010, p. 82) While these platforms are the main source of income, with the rise of broadcast platforms, television series and animation series have started to become a very important cinema organization. Although computer games also have an important place, they are affected in different ways by the series of large transmedia universes expanding during the pandemic process. “Although studies of convergence culture and trans-media have addressed a set of questions regarding the political economy of contemporary media, their path to these questions remains confined typically to conclusions about the agency of media consumers, rather than about how media institutions and consumption or ‘media citizenship’ matter within a robust, complex and contradictory sense of the current historical conjuncture. To the extent that the most well-known of these media studies venture into discussions about political activism or citizenship...” (Hay & Couldry, 2011, p. 480-481). Political activism or changes in the perception of citizenship have been quite effective in demands for transformation, as audience structures cannot be ignored. And as a result of all these events, new formations have emerged to control the audience's demand, and it can be assumed that streaming platforms are at the forefront of these developments. The relationship of all these processes with the Covid-19 outbreak will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic & Movie Theater Audience Numbers**

“Covid-19”, a virus that emerged suddenly and spread all over the world at the end of 2019, has caused serious changes in human culture. The disease, which quickly became a pandemic, has necessitated serious precautions. This pandemic, which has brought about many situations such as curfews, remote work and education, vaccination and distance rules, and the closure of cultural areas, has made it necessary to look at all events from a different conjuncture. The situation that is most relevant to this study is that movie theaters have been banned from viewing audiences for a certain period. “The negative effects of the pandemic on people and the increase in technological orientation are revealed in many statistical reports. Areas such as social media use, online service and sales platforms, and online venue and environment use have become more prevalent in daily life” (Yüksel, 2023, p. 49). Although the sharing of digital works of art is already available, it can be considered that the pandemic has had a serious impact on the increase in the use of streaming platforms after the outbreak. The indirect effect of these events is also most evident in the number of moviegoers. Because with the pandemic, streaming platforms have established an

infrastructure where they can deliver a movie with a (PVOD) premium video on demand option to the platform's members on the same day of the release day. “With COVID-19's upheaval of the industry, this disruptive period has accelerated PVOD's claim to the market. And, given the unprecedented nature of the PVOD business model, the flexibility offered to consumers who might want to stay home to see their top films is mirrored by the many ways that studios can still shape the offering, not least in terms of price. Therefore, it is also important to understand to what extent U.S. audiences are experimenting with PVOD, how those consumers are feeling about this type of viewing consumption and how they rate the value proposition versus their traditional theatrical experience” (Whip Media, n.d.). Thus, as a method that will change the media consumption habits of the audience that movie theaters need, a movie can be released by meeting the audience in their homes. This situation has been revealed with very strong results in the research conducted by “Whip Media Group” with the American public. Nowadays, many people have started to prefer not to return to movie theaters while there are movies that they can access from the comfort of their homes. “U.S. Audiences are dipping their toes into the PVOD space, with 20% of Total Respondents claiming they had purchased one of these titles during the stay-at-home measures. Avid and Frequent theatergoers were more likely to have purchased one of these titles: 24% and 23% respectively. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as at-home shelter group size increased, the percentage of those reporting a PVOD purchase also increased: solo individuals (12%), 2 people in shelter group (19%), 3-4 people in shelter group (20%) and 5 or more people in shelter group (25%). Clearly, the economic value is more tangible the larger the group size” (Whip Media, n.d.). As can be seen from the mentioned data, the viewing dynamics of the audience vary. This variability has led to an easier and less expensive version of reaching the audience with the strategies that major studios and production companies have changed. While the pandemic has played a major role in these developments, there may be serious changes in the habits of the audience after the pandemic is over. “Theaters have been influenced by the idea of variable pricing for years, while studios have been opposed. With COVID-19, studios may have inherited the very challenge-meets-opportunity of variable pricing that they were chagrined to potentially see in the exhibition space” (Whip Media, n.d.). With the Covid-19 pandemic, streaming platforms have experienced a serious rise. “Cinema closures also had devastating consequences for Hollywood studio films that played in cinemas in the period immediately before March 2020, since their theatrical release windows were broken. That meant in most cases that these films were released much earlier than usual online. Amongst the first such films were Universal's *The Invisible Man* (Leigh

Whannell, 2020), Sony's *Bloodshot* (Dave Wilson, 2020), Warner's *Birds of Prey* (Cathy Yan, 2020) and Paramount's *Sonic the Hedgehog* (Jeff Fowler, 2020)" (Smits, 2024, p. 93) The box office revenues of feature-length films, which are shown for much shorter periods in movie theaters, have also decreased proportionally. But "Nostalgia is a prevalent undercurrent that tends to bind cinephilia to cinemas, perhaps in reverence to the rarefied conditions of theatrical viewing but likely more as a nod to the sociality of taste in cultural consumption" (Burgess & Stevens, 2021, p. 70) That is one of the main reasons that still movie theaters are on demand from the film enthusiasts. To make all these different perspectives more understandable and how this situation has affected transmedia storytelling; movie theater audience numbers will be clarified by the statistical analysis conducted in the "Results" section. However, before that, it is necessary to talk about animation cinema and cinematic universes in order to expand on the subject a little more.

### Animation Films & Cinematic Universes

Animation can be considered as a production method of the art of cinema. Although the main art form is cinema, animation, visual effects and live action were born together and developed by helping on each other. Among all the techniques used to produce a movie, animation has continued to produce works that humanity has followed with interest since the very beginning. Animation can be produced both in 2-dimensional environments such as celluloid or paper, and in 3-dimensional environments such as stop motion sets or 3D programs. The illusion created by poses placed in a 24th of a second that constantly changing can be called animation. With the infrastructure established by the important names that will be mentioned in the history of animation, works were produced on celluloid, paper or stop motion until the 90s. In the beginning there were very important figures and characters in animation world. "...previously animated cinema heroes such as Winsor McCay's *Gertie The Dinosaur*, William C. Nolan's *Krazy Kat*, Otto Mesmer's *Felix The Cat*, Bud Fisher's *Mutt* and Jeff were created..." (Teksoy, 2005, p. 259) These characters mentioned are the first important characters of the animation world. After this characters, Walt Disney, who today dominates the entire world in the field of media, gradually started to meet the American society with the company he opened under his own name and the characters and cartoons he produced in this company. "Mickey Mouse, who symbolized the American on the street, was initially named Mortimer. In a short time, his name changed to Mickey and he started to reflect the emotions and suppressed passions of the man on the street with his behaviors specific to people and became famous on a world scale. Mickey Mouse first appeared in the movie in *Plane Crazy* (1928) which inspired by Lindbergh's crossing of the

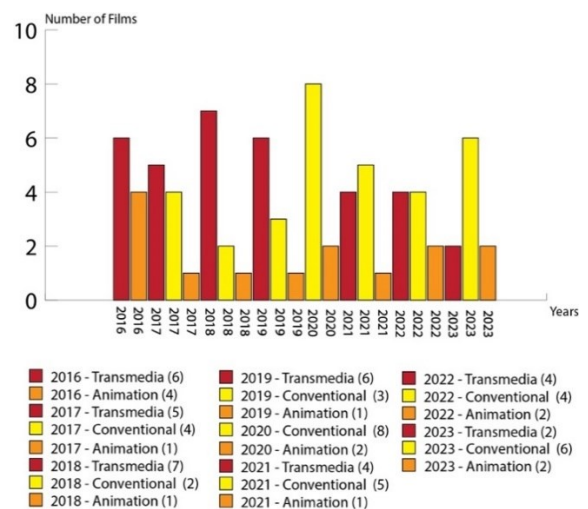
Atlantic Ocean and featuring Mickey connecting animals to make a plane. Mickey's third film *Steamboat Willie* (1928) was also his first film with sound" (Teksoy, 2005, p. 259) Mickey Mouse has the distinction of being a great symbol among cartoon characters all over the world. If we think of Walt Disney as the father of today's media habits of the capitalist world, the character he left as a legacy to humanity can be considered Mickey Mouse. Although Walt Disney is the most important figure in animation cinema, he was not the only powerful figure in the early periods. "The Fleischer Brothers, who did not adopt Disney's star system, made short films starting with the clown Koko emerging from an inkwell in the early 1920s. In this series called *Out of The Inkwell*, the director Max Fleischer, who was a cartoonist, criticized the values of American society with a subtle sense of humor, especially the widespread belief that hard-working individuals who do not give up on obstacles will definitely be successful (Teksoy, 2005, p. 261). After Disney, The Fleischer brothers are the most talked by the people. The Fleischer brothers produced very important characters such as *Betty Boop* and *Popeye the Sailor*, and they created works that had a serious impact on the industry. After the Fleischer brothers, the most important names that should be mentioned are William Hanna (1910-2001) and Joe (Joseph) Barbera (b. 1911). The artists mentioned above created important works such as "*Tom & Jerry*", "*Flintstones*" and "*The Jetsons*" that left their mark on the history of animation. This kind of cell animation continued to be produced heavily until the 90s. But in the 90s, Pixar Studios, which would cause a great change, was established and with the film "*Toy Story* (1995)" produced by the founder John Lasseter, 3D animation films began to thrive, which would put an "Industrial" end to the use of cell animation technique all over the world.

The concept of the Cinematic Universe emerged with the concept of transmedia storytelling. The most famous of these universes is of course the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It is perhaps one of the most important steps taken in perfecting transmedia storytelling after the Matrix series. A producer named Kevin Feige, who has been working on productions that adapt Marvel comics to cinema for a time, started to design a new cinematic universe with the 2008 film "*Iron Man*" and produced a series of films for the most important characters of Marvel comics, first as standalones and then all together. The structure that supports these film series with cartoons and television series has turned into a huge cinematic universe in which transmedia storytelling is getting stronger with that. "The MCU exists within a web of other franchises which originated during the same period. Having analyzed the Hollywood landscape prior to the release of *Iron Man* and by analyzing the trends in the highest grossing movies, helped place the MCU on the map of blockbusters, and set it up in an entertainment world that exists within the social and political discussions of its time"

(Roederer, 2019, p. 21). MCU is the short form of Marvel Cinematic Universe and this Universe made everything possible for streaming media. With the turn of the millennium “The Matrix (1999)” showed everyone that a transmedia storytelling is possible. However, it was not exactly expected that this situation would create cinematic universes and dominate the entire industry with the pandemic. Just like the heroes in these series, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has found a place for itself on streaming platforms like a hero who saved the industry. “We are not so subtly told that if we challenge the hegemonic class, the state will push back through the police and military. However, more subtly, the films we identify with the heroes who return the world back as it was, with all its injustices and inequalities, rather than with the villains who tried to change it” (Manicastro, 2022, p. 3). The capitalist system has always found a way out. In this case, the producers of the Marvel Cinematic Universe have moved the movies and film series made for the movie theaters to streaming platforms, disregarding the habit of watching film in the movie theaters. This has led to events that will radically change the sociocultural structure. Apart from this universe, the DCEU “DC Extended Universe” was born from DC comics. Also many other cinematic universes has found a place in the world of cinema such as the Star Wars universe, the Lord of the Rings universe and the Harry Potter universe. In the rest of this section, views from different perspectives will be added in order to expand the discussion and the section will continue with views that will improve the research. “The cinema release window has shrunk smaller than ever before, partly because cinema exhibitors are not always able to impose strict rules on theatrical windows. That has resulted in concerns about the continuing value of the theatrical cinema market, and the role of Hollywood studio films therein, not least because such films account for the majority of cinema revenues in most European markets and elsewhere. The direct-to-streaming strategy in particular is widely perceived as a threat to cinema exhibition. Some industry observers, for instance, are worried that other Hollywood studios could follow the straight-to-SVOD strategy developed by Walt Disney” (Smits, 2024, p. 96) Strategies of media giants like Disney that are capable of shaping the entire industry could result in the process being affected at serious levels. “In the era of new media, the development of the animation industry is facing certain opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the development of Internet technology has greatly expanded the communication and audience of animation works. Some well-produced animations can gain more market share and economic benefits and gain a lot in terms of box office and commercial value” (Ya’nan, 2021, p. 404-405) Shortly after being shown in cinemas, animated films are shown to the audience on the internet via broadcast platforms, and

immediately afterwards, transmedia universes are expanded with television series. In addition to this situation, streaming platforms benefit from the situation of being an international formation with a global structure in terms of production as well as consumption. “Each episode of the sci-fi animation series Love, Death and Robot is 5-15 minutes long. The first season has 18 episodes. It is divided into 18 creation teams and has gathered top animation production teams from the United States, France, Canada, Hungary and South Korea. The creators are free of any restrictions and create according to their own preferences and styles. In addition to the diversification of types and themes, the animation series also alternates between 2D, 3D and 2D + live action shooting, so that audiences with different preferences can enjoy watching movies. Animation works themselves have their inherent freedom and reasonable exaggeration range” (Chai, 2022, p. 1827) And this global sensation of an animation series made a great impact on streaming processes. Lastly Netflix had series of strategies when it comes to animation production through global market. “Moreover, the anime industry is using Netflix to address one of the most significant challenges to their continued economic development, which is the necessity to serve an increasingly globalized audience in earnest. Despite being touted as a media globalization success story, until recently, the anime industry considered their domestic market to be their priority, and the desires and consumption practices of the global audience to be largely peripheral” (Noh, 2024, p. 245) Their strategies on anime series productions have affected the artform and audience expectations both. But in the end like everything else the media consumption methods changed because of the technological and cultural changes in the present situation. In the next section, these situations will be analyzed through a series of graphs obtained from the statistical data.

## Results

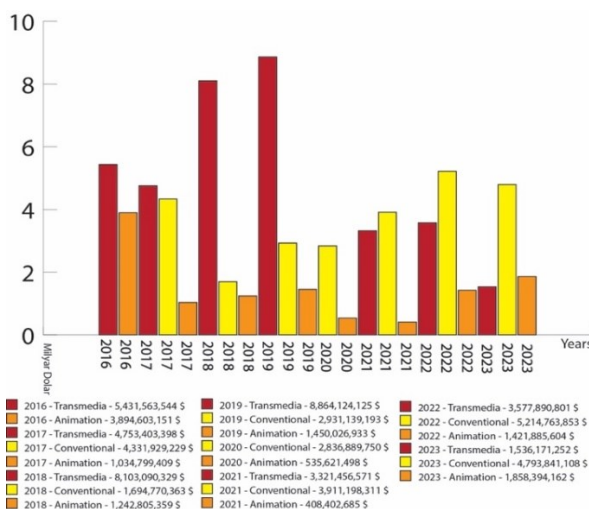


**Graph 1.** Number of 10 Highest Grossing Films in the Years between 2016 to 2023



As a result of all these concepts, a series of data was obtained based on the four years between 2020 and 2023, when the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were seen. In order to see the change in this process, the four years before the pandemic were also taken into account. Thus, the processes from 2016 to 2020 and from there to 2023 were compared.

In the graph above, the top ten highest grossing films of each year are evaluated in three different categories. Normal films are evaluated as conventional films. Films made with animation techniques are evaluated as animation films. Films made with transmedia storytelling within a story universe are also evaluated as transmedia films. Until 2019, films made with transmedia storytelling are predominant. Seven of the ten highest grossing films in 2018 and six of the ten in 2019 are part of a series made with transmedia storytelling. In 2020, no transmedia films were produced, which could be thought to be due to the pandemic. At least 50% of the films in the four years before 2020 were films containing transmedia storytelling. However, it did not reach the 50% level again in the 4 years after 2020. One of the most interesting situations in this graph is that no conventional films made it into the top 10 in 2016. In 2016, 4 films were animated and 6 were transmedia. In 2020, when the pandemic became serious, there were no transmedia films, while eight conventional films made it into the top ten. Although transmedia and animation films made it into the rankings in the following three years, conventional films were the most numerous. Animated films did not make it onto the list with more than 4 films in any year except 2016.



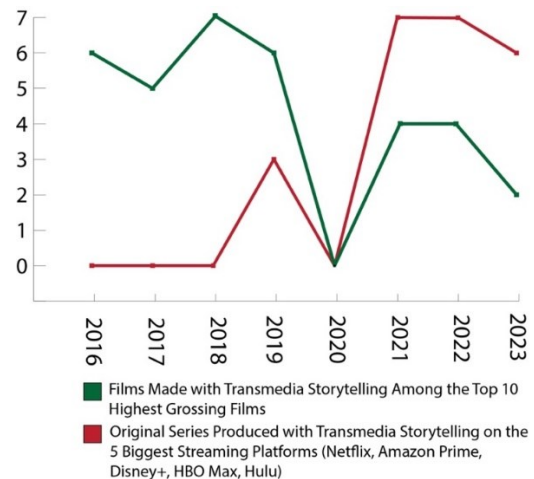
**Graph 2. Revenues of 10 Highest Grossing Films in the Years between 2016 to 2023**

The most obvious indicator on the graph is that the total revenue of the top ten films were significantly higher in the years before 2020 compared to the years after 2020. The box office revenues of transmedia films reached very high levels in 2018 and 2019. In 2019, the box office revenues of transmedia films alone were almost 3 times higher than all

the other films in the top ten in 2020. In the years before 2020, transmedia always ranked above other genres. However, the difference increased significantly in 2018 and 2019. When it comes to the total revenues of the films in the top 10 in box office revenues, a gradual increase is seen until 2020.

The total revenues in 2016 were \$9,326,166,695, and the total revenues in 2017 are \$10,120,132,036. Total revenues in 2018 are \$11,039,666,051. Total revenues in 2019 are \$13,245,290,251.

Total revenues in 2020 are \$3,372,511,248. Total revenues in 2021 are \$7,641,057,567. Total revenues in 2022 are \$10,214,540,258. Total revenues in 2023 are \$8,188,406,522. As can be seen from these data, although the level of 2016 was only reached in 2022, this number was still below 2016 in 2023. The box office revenues of animated films have gradually decreased, while the box office revenues of conventional films have increased.



**Graph 3. Numbers of Films with Transmedia Storytelling from 10 Highest Grossing Films and Original Shows from Streaming Platforms which Have Transmedia Storytelling in the Years between 2016 to 2023**

The last graph shows the change in the number of transmedia films that entered the top 10 in box office revenue over an eight-year period. In addition, the changes in the number of original television series produced on streaming platforms with a transmedia storytelling universe are also given. Thus, the correlation between the two situations is shown. Until 2020, films in the transmedia genre covered 6 to 7 out of 10 films. After 2020, these numbers remained at 3 to 4. However, while the number of television series was zero until 2018, it suddenly increased to 6 to 7 after 2020. Thus, the relationship between these two situations is shown. After 2020, the annual revenues of the 5 major streaming platforms (Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime, HBO Max and Hulu) have drastically increased. It can also be thought that there is a relationship in this situation with the decrease in box office revenues in movie theaters in the



previous graph. The total revenues of the 5 major platforms in 2020; \$66,202,000,000, total revenue in 2021; \$83,963,000,000, total revenue in 2022; \$92,263,000,000, total revenue in 2023 (Amazon Prime and HBO Max Q4 data missing); \$90,697,000,000. Thus, the inverse relationship between box office revenues in movie theaters and the earnings of streaming platforms has been revealed.



**Image 1.** *Disney Production Company Owned Cinematic Universes (The Direct, n.d.)*

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Considering all these data and concepts, it can be considered that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a serious change when it comes to developing media habits and technologies. The paradigm shift that took place in the media field after the 2000s shows that the passive audience has turned into an interactive participant with transmedia storytelling. This audience has now become integrated into the process both on the internet and with their own fan made productions. Films are no longer stand-alone works but are placed at the center of a very large story universe. Thus, a process has been initiated that has radically changed the experience of watching films. About this tendency to show the cross-examination of the argument, findings obtained in similar studies will be shared; "There is also opportunity for studios with the younger Gen Z crowd. This generation has more eagerness and enthusiasm toward returning to the theaters than their older counterparts, specifically compared to Gen X. One-fifth (20%) of Gen Z would be at theaters today if open, the highest among any age group, compared to just 12% each for Millennials and Gen X. Another 30% of Gen Z plan to return once social distancing is relaxed, versus 20% of Millennials and 16% for Gen X. The older generations, who perhaps feel more susceptible to the virus, are holding out for more secure conditions, such as commonplace testing. And the older generations express a greater likelihood of never returning: 10% of Gen X might never return versus only 4% of Gen Z" (Whip Media, n.d.). This indicates the fact that Generation Z's tendency to watch films and series from movie theaters have stayed quite stable but Millennials and Gen X are not that steady. "When asked if they would go to the theater more often, less often or about the same as before COVID-19, the vast majority (80%) of respondents

who will eventually return to the theater intend to go the same amount as before. Some will go less (12%) while fewer (8%) will actually go more often" (Whip Media, n.d.). Even though 4 out of 5 people remain the same when it comes to their preference on going to films in movie theaters, there is a 10 percent that created negative tendencies over the situation and there is another 10 percent created more positive tendencies about going to the movie theaters. "When asked if there is a movie, they are on the fence about seeing, Total respondents were nearly split on whether they would be more likely to purchase it in-home than they would have been paying to see it in a theater. A slim majority (55%) agreed that they are more willing to give a title a try in a home-purchase setting. While this is not an overwhelming majority, it should be noted that studios are still hesitant to press their luck with major tentpoles, such as any Marvel title, which would potentially have enticed many more individuals trying to avoid packed theaters. That said, there are clearly both obstacles and opportunities for studios in the PVID space as they strategize for future releases" (Whip Media, n.d.). Afterall, the data has been shared by the Whip Media may suggest that there won't be any major differences on movie theater experience but this research data has been clearly shown that the situation is not that equal to prior to the pandemic. Live action and animation series both conventional and transmedia has been consumed more and more on Streaming platforms. The data that has been shared in the results chapter indicate that transmedia and animation films are less experienced on movie theaters than the times before the pandemic. Animated series have also become one of the important actors of this process. At the same time, feature animation films that create their own transmedia universes have been produced. The domination of transmedia universes by streaming platforms occurred with the Covid-19 pandemic. In this case, it can be considered that Disney owns the rights to the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and the Star Wars universe. Because the highest grossing films in movie theaters had long been among the feature films of these universes. However, with the emergence of the pandemic, Disney+, which stopped these productions in the field of cinema films, has enabled the story universe to reach the audience with many new television series. Thus, the audience who feels connected to any transmedia universe has started to get used to accessing these contents in the comfort of their homes rather than in movie theaters. In addition, when it comes to Premium Video on Demand (PVID) broadcasts, giants such as Disney+ and Amazon Prime have increased the revenues of their platforms by sharing the films with the audience on the date they are released. All these events have caused a change in the process of consumption on an international scale. After the pandemic is over, the audience's preference for movie

theaters has decreased and it has become difficult to return to its previous levels. Both feature films produced with Transmedia storytelling and films produced with animation techniques have been seriously affected by this situation. While streaming platforms are now considered the basic media tool in the new reality, the number of audiences in movie theaters, where the art of cinema was born and grew, is decreasing. It won't be known whether mainstream broadcast channels and movie theaters will be closed one day, all over the world, but it is quite clear that they will never be the same again.

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**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

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