

Cultural impact of batman and harry potter



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The film industry has continued to evolve in many facets from genre to effects to even the very narrative that inspires films today. While not an entirely new occurrence, films today are more and more inspired by existing material ranging from text, video games, or even previous adaptations, leading to the phrase “reboot”. This new form of narrative has become immensely popular due to the wide reaching media that now accompanies these films releases, creating hype and leading to the cinema becoming more of an event. This new form of film lends itself to the discussion of three key terms; cross media, transmedia and intertextuality.

In exploring these terms, key discussions of the films releases, accompanying merchandise, sequels and of course source media will be cited. While numerous films display these characteristics, the concepts of series seem to create a much larger spectacle, particularly the Batman films of the 1980's/90's and also the highly successful Harry Potter series pioneering this example. Both of these franchises adhere to the contemporary classical narrative form whilst also displaying the evolution of cinema as an event, highlighting the growth of the film industry today.

Preceding the release of the highly successful Batman and Harry Potter franchises, the film that pioneered cinema as an event and began to utilise merchandise was Steven Spielberg's Jaws. Jaws received a large amount of build up prior to its release in 1975, with large adverts in newspapers, posters around the world, and pre-release success with Peter Benchley's 1974 novel. Jaws went against a “platforming” release (opening in big cities then across the country to smaller markets), with a nationwide release on the 20th of June 1975.

Also accompanying the eye-catching posters and adverts advertising Jaws as “ the most terrifying motion picture ever”, was a range of merchandise. From shark toys, clothing items, action figures to John Williams’ soundtrack, the release of Jaws encompassed a wide range of audiences and forms of media, ensuring that it truly was a “ summer blockbuster”. The release of Jaws started a new form of film releases, one that proved most successful in the box office, and inspired many films today including the Batman and Harry Potter franchises.

Just as important as the media that precedes and accompanies these films releases, is the source media that inspired these blockbuster interpretations in the cinema. Prior to Batman’s release in 1989, the character had already enjoyed a healthy following and presence in pop-culture, dating back to Bob Kane’s creation of the character over 70 years ago in May 1939, appearing in Detective Comics #27. Since then Batman has appeared in numerous media from the original comics to TV serials in the 40s to the famous Batman TV series which ran from 1966-1968.

Known for its overly camp and a consistently predictable plot structure, the show became extremely popular, with even high profile celebrities making cameos on the show. People such as Jerry Lewis and Sammy Davis Jr. appeared during “ Batclimb” cameos, in which Batman and Robin scaled buildings only to bump into famous celebrities in the buildings, and stop to have a short conversation with them. During its prime the Batman series was the most popular show on television, being the only program screened twice in a week.

After the show's cancellation in 1968, the popularity of Batman severely waned, as film adaptations were turned down due to a lack of interest. Despite initial disinterest, two key comic book series shaped the course of the Batman release, with the original source media again proving most useful. With Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* released in 1986 and *The Killing Joke* in 1988, rekindled interest was generated into the story of Batman, influencing Tim Burton to helm *Batman* for the first blockbuster release of the famous hero.

The comics continue to act as blueprints for the films, relying on the numerous tales, versions and perceptions of Batman, his supporting cast, and his infamous rogues gallery. Also integral to the continuation of Batman's popularity is the development of new stories in a wide range of media formats and the role of transmedia. Transmedia storytelling refers to integral elements of a story being systematically dispersed across a range of media sources.

Following the release of *Batman* in 1989, the critically acclaimed *Batman: The Animated Series* or BTAS was released in 1992, which became known as arguably the most faithful adaptation of Batman and the characters in his universe. Highly complex and dark for an animated series, BTAS ran until 1996 and is regarded as one of the finest animated TV series ever created, winning 4 Emmy Awards. The series also introduced characters created in the show, into the main Batman universe, notably Harley Quinn who served as the Joker's love interest and accomplice, along with Detective Renee Montoya.

Aside from TV series like BTAS, Batman's stories were released in numerous video games, none more acclaimed than the recent productions by Rocksteady, Batman Arkham Asylum (2009) and Batman Arkham City (2011). Both games were critically and widely praised for their ability to make the player feel like they are Batman, solving crimes, fighting criminals and defeating high-profile villains, whilst also developing new storylines with existing characters from the Batman canon.

The popularity of Nolan's films coincided with the smash-hit success of these two games, much like Burton's 1989 Batman coincided with the success of BTAS, proving a further example of the influence of cross and trans media on the film world, and also vice-versa. Much like the Batman franchise, the Harry Potter franchise grew from the success of its source material, the novels by J. K. Rowling. Selling over 400 million copies, Rowling's series forms the basis of the high-concept Harry Potter films, with Rowling herself having creative control over the first and last instalments in the film series.

With differing opinions on the films, Rowling herself said, " It is simply impossible to incorporate every one of my storylines into a film that has to be kept under four hours long. Obviously films have restrictions novels do not have, constraints of time and budget; I can create dazzling effects relying on nothing but the interaction of my own and my readers' imaginations". Rowling's influence on the series was evident in the characters, setting and overall tone of every film, signifying the importance of source media in today's contemporary cinema.

The term cross media refers to a single story being interpreted in different media. The purpose of cross media is to enhance the story in one medium

can amplify someone's understanding of the story told via another but each of the interpretations is self-sufficient. Coinciding with the release of Tim Burton's *Batman* in 1989, Prince's official soundtrack released to critical acclaim, continuing from Prince's success with *Purple Rain* in 1984. Containing music "inspired" by the film, Prince's album showed a great example of cross-media success, with two of the album's nine songs being featured in the film ("*Partyman*" and "*Batdance*"). The characters and scenes in the film inspired the other songs featured on the album, with songs attributed to "lead vocals by the Joker" or "lead vocals by Vicki Vale", even though Prince sings all the tracks. The album's lyrics operate in parallel sync with the film's narrative, with songs such as "*The Future*" detailing the dark environment of Gotham City, ("*I've seen the future/And boy it's rough*").

Other songs like "*Electric Chair*" and "*Vicki Waiting*" describe the characters of the film such as the Joker and Batman's love interest Vicki Vale, providing Prince's own perspective on the narrative. The purpose of Prince's soundtrack is to give a different view on the film, through Prince's pop character and to focus on the "style and sexuality of the characters", compared to the action during the film. Prince's songs even feature sound clips from the film, such as Joker's catch phrase "Ever dance with the devil in the pale moon-light?" juxtaposed against phrases by Batman and Vicki Vale.

This continued use of references to the film within the soundtrack increases the reference to the film and subsequent success. *Batman*'s release in 1989 was truly a blockbuster, riding months of "Bat-Mania" where over \$750 million in merchandise was sold, the film smashed box office records being

the first film to make \$100 million in its first ten days, and making \$411.35 million overall. Cult filmmaker and comic book writer Kevin Smith described the Batman release as “huge. You couldn't turn around without seeing the Bat-Signal somewhere. It was just the summer of Batman and if you were a comic book fan it was pretty hot. The following sequel Batman Returns released in 1992, adopting an even darker tone to the previous film, still managing to take \$266.83 million worldwide. The film's release coincided with similar cross-media including comic books, action figures and a successful video game. Joel Schumacher's films Batman Forever (1995) and Batman and Robin (1997) built on the success of the previous films and incorporated more cross-media varieties, such as books, video games, costumes and roller coasters at several theme parks in the United States, such as Six Flags.

While Christopher [Nolan's trilogy of Batman Begins (2005), The Dark Knight (2008) and the upcoming The Dark Knight Rises (2012)] adopts a much more realistic and darker tone to the previous films, they still draw on a high amount of cross-media hype and build up, with the use of roller coasters, apparel, soundtrack and action figures. This cross-media release gave way to new film franchises adapting similar techniques and expanding it further.

Much like the Batman franchise, the Harry Potter series incorporated numerous paraphernalia in aid of the film's hype as a key event in the history of cinema and for the years the films were released from 2001 to 2011. Much like Jaws, riding on the success of its novel, Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone incorporated an immense range of trans-media and cross-media products, from brooms to stuffed dolls, wands to cauldrons,

lollies to cloaks, and video games to trading cards. This translated to a staggering \$974. 755 million earned at the box office, the 13th highest grossing film of all time.

In turn the series became the highest grossing film franchise of all time, grossing around \$7. 7 billion, and the consistent hype throughout the series was a key result behind this. As the industry changed, more detailed and immersive experiences were created for fans of the films and the Harry Potter universe, with innovations in video games like Microsoft Kinect for XBOX 360 in 2011, allowing fans to cast spells just like the characters in the movie, becoming one of the last of the games for the series, with one for each film being produced by Electronic Arts, one of the biggest video-game companies in the world.

Following the conclusion of the film series, the creator of the Harry Potter franchise J. K. Rowling introduced a website titled “ Pottermore”, which expanded the universe even further. With a beta version arriving in July 2011 and a completed version in April 2012, the website invites fans of the series to socially interact with other fans and explore new images, stories and games all pertaining to the Harry Potter universe. The site has received immense praise upon its release, showing another example of how cross and trans media extended the popularity of the franchise.

Further increasing the fans ability to interact with the Harry Potter universe was the opening of “ The Wizarding World of Harry Potter” at the Islands of Adventure theme park in Orlando, Florida, in 2010. This experience included realistic environments that people could walk around in, including Hogsmeade, Hogwarts Castle, and Diagon Alley, with rides like The

Forbidden Journey taking the consumer on a 3_D immersive ride through the world of Harry Potter.

The hype created by pre-release media across a wide range of products only increased Harry Potter's impact as a summer blockbuster in contemporary cinema. As the film industry begins to change, we are beginning to see an added emphasis on source materials, franchises, marketing and cross/trans media. The blockbuster film series' of Batman and Harry Potter fully demonstrate how much the cinema is changing in this manner, and how it will continue to change in the future.