

## From Film to Franchise: The Rise of Cinematic Universes and Their Impact on Global Cinema

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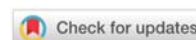
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### Abstract

The proliferation of film franchises, looking at how the evolution of single-feature productions into multi-part epics has altered the face of film around the world. The rise of cinematic universes, spearheaded by the massively popular Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), has changed the face of filmmaking, distribution, and audience participation around the world. Studios have created immersive universes that encourage long-term audience devotion and produce unprecedented commercial success by establishing interconnected narratives spanning numerous films. how cinematic universes have influenced independent filmmaking, how they have influenced traditional filmmaking methods, and how they have contributed to the globalization of film culture. Also covered are how this tendency could affect creative storytelling, the state of the market, and what audiences demand from content. In the end, the impact of cinematic universes on the film industry and the global cinema landscape is a direct result of the shift toward franchise-building rather than standalone films.

**Keywords:** Cinematic universes, film franchises, global cinema, Marvel Cinematic Universe

### Introduction

There have been many shifts in cinematic history, but the emergence of cinematic universes ranks among the most significant. There has been a change in the film business away from standalone features and toward the production of vast, interconnected universes that encompass numerous films and even television series. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) was an early adopter and populariser of this concept, which has since altered filmmaking, distribution, and audience participation. Hollywood heavyweights like Warner Bros. (with their DC



Extended Universe) and Universal Pictures are trying to follow the success model of cinematic worlds. Audiences are able to immerse themselves in a continuous, vast story for a lengthy period of time thanks to the interconnected stories, recurring characters, and world-building in these universes. Because of this, franchises have become extremely popular and profitable, amassing billions of dollars in sales and box office receipts. This change has affected film all across the world and changed viewer expectations even beyond Hollywood. Cinematic universes have made record profits, but they have also made people wonder what the future holds for indie and traditional filmmaking. There are new worries about creative narrative, market saturation, and the exclusion of independent films that don't belong in a bigger cinematic world as studios focus on establishing franchises. cinematic universes, with an emphasis on how they have influenced film around the world. The impact of these interrelated franchises on independent filmmaking, their impact on the globalization of cinema culture, and the ways in which they have altered filmmaking techniques will be explored. The article will go even farther by discussing the broader ramifications for cinema's future and how the cinematic universe concept has rethought audience participation. The study will shed light on the lasting consequences of this trend on the world of international cinema through its investigation of this topic.

### **The Commercial Success of Cinematic Universes**

The worldwide film industry's financial environment has been reshaped by the commercial success of cinematic universes, especially in the last twenty years. Studios have reaped enormous box office profits, expanded merchandise opportunities, and a more dedicated fan base by capitalizing on prolonged audience involvement through the creation of interconnected stories that span numerous films. Pioneers in this paradigm, like Marvel's Cinematic Universe (MCU), have shown how lucrative these kinds of franchises can be, and many studios have followed suit.

- **Box Office Performance and Revenue Generation**

Outperforming the conventional expectations for standalone films, cinematic universes have time and time again produced box office smash hits. One example is the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), which has become the highest-grossing film franchise in history with over \$29 billion worldwide as of 2024. The unprecedented demand for interconnected stories and



recognized characters is evident from the record-breaking box office success of films such as Spider-Man: No Way Home and Avengers: Endgame.

Audiences are encouraged to watch numerous entries in the series to properly grasp and enjoy the overall narrative, which is a key component of this financial model. High viewer retention and interest for future releases are ensured by each film fitting into a greater jigsaw. Consequently, studios enjoy ongoing prosperity thanks to long-term revenue streams that go far beyond the release of a single film, thanks to spin-offs, sequels, and prequels.

- **Merchandising, Licensing, and Spin-Off Opportunities**

Merchandising and licensing agreements contribute significantly to the financial success of cinematic worlds, in addition to ticket sales. The goal of these franchises is to broaden their influence in popular culture by incorporating them into several mediums, such as clothing, video games, and theme parks. Capitalizing on their worldwide popularity, brands like the MCU and Star Wars have built entire product ecosystems.

A major factor in the financial success of film universes is licensing deals. Fast food tie-ins and unique retail merchandise are only two examples of the many products that these franchises promote in partnership with brands and enterprises from other industries. Further potential to generate cash and increase the universe's reach across media channels arise when one can create spin-off content, such as TV programs, animated films, and comics.

- **Long-Term Viewer Engagement and Brand Loyalty**

Cinematic universes' capacity to cultivate long-term spectator involvement is a critical component of their commercial success. These series keep viewers committed in the characters and universe through serialized storytelling, which creates narratives that span across numerous films and years. Strong opening weekends and repeat viewings are the results of cinematic universes, which create anticipation for future films through interwoven plotlines and constant character development. Intense brand loyalty is also fostered by this kind of sustained involvement. When viewers develop strong emotional attachments to characters and plot points in a film's universe, they may seek out related media like comic books, novels, and TV spin-offs to fully immerse themselves in the world. The consistent success of each film in the theaters and the increased demand for related items are both results of this devoted fan base. Studio communication with audiences is enhanced by fan communities built through online forums, social media, and fan conventions; this, in turn, increases the efficacy of marketing campaigns and guarantees that every new film release is well-received.



**Impact on Traditional Filmmaking and Independent Cinema**

Both mainstream and independent filmmaking have seen significant shifts as a result of the proliferation of cinematic universes. Although these massive franchises have changed the way major studios earn money, they have also made it harder for smaller films and independent filmmakers to break through. There have been changes in viewer attention, the types of storylines that get greenlit, and the allocation of resources due to the importance of interconnected, franchise-driven material, which has created opportunities and challenges for both independent and traditional cinema.

**The Shift from Stand-Alone Films to Franchise-Building**

The production of standalone films, particularly blockbuster blockbusters, has decreased significantly in the era of cinematic universes. Interconnected franchises that offer long-term profitability through spin-offs, prequels, and sequels are becoming more and more popular among studios. The focus has shifted from standalone stories to those with the potential to launch a franchise as a result of this trend.

This transformation has altered the storytelling mechanics of conventional filmmaking. Rather than focusing on complex, character-driven stories, studios frequently favor spectacular, world-building, and interwoven tales. The creative freedom that filmmakers used to have is being eroded as more and more films that were originally greenlit as standalone productions are being pressured to either fit into larger universes or create sequels. The business is becoming more focused on blockbuster franchises, making it harder for traditional standalone films to get distribution and financing, especially those that target older or specialized audiences.

**Challenges Faced by Independent Filmmakers**

In this franchise-dominated market, independent filmmakers encounter distinct obstacles as they work outside of the main studio structure. Studio funding for smaller, independent films has been declining as big-budget franchise films have taken up most of the cash. Independent filmmakers face a number of challenges in launching their projects due to a lack of funding, particularly when pitted against the enormous marketing budgets of franchise films.

Furthermore, independent films have a harder time getting screening slots due to the popularity of franchise pictures in theaters. Smaller, independent films that target specialized audiences



are sometimes overlooked in favor of blockbuster releases, especially in multiplex chains. Thus, indie films have a hard time breaking into theaters and end up on streaming services, where they face stiff competition from both Hollywood blockbusters and an excess of similarly ambitious indie films.

Many indie filmmakers have relied on streaming services, however these platforms also provide difficulties for their work in terms of exposure. Independent films may struggle to compete in the saturated online marketplace for viewers' attention without the advertising budgets of big studios.

### **The Marginalization of Non-Franchise Films**

Additionally, non-franchise films have been marginalized in mainstream cinema due to the reliance on cinematic worlds. Many films fail to succeed commercially because they fail to incorporate the interrelated world into their narrative. Films that are more experimental or stand-alone are losing popularity as a result of the cultural shift brought about by the success of cinematic universes. Now, audiences want sequels, shared narratives, and continuity.

Genres like historical films, romantic comedies, and dramas have been hit the hardest by this trend of eroding popularity. Superhero flicks, fantasy epics, and other franchise-friendly genres have supplanted these once-thriving classical cinematic genres. The mainstream cinema has drastically reduced the prominence of these non-franchise films, yet they still do well in independent circuits and film festivals.

### **Opportunities for Independent Cinema in the Franchise Era**

Independent film has taken advantage of some chances in the current climate, despite the threats presented by cinematic universes. In contrast to major studios' obsession with franchise development, indie filmmakers are allowed to experiment with narrative styles, social issues, and viewpoints that may not mesh with the commercial blockbuster paradigm.

Actually, independent filmmakers now have more ways than ever to reach viewers all over the world because to the proliferation of streaming platforms. Independent films have a larger audience now than they would have had they been released in theaters because to streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu. Despite the dominance of franchise films, independent films are able to thrive because to these platforms, which connect them with niche audiences looking for content outside of the blockbuster mainstream.



Also, with the advent of more affordable production technology and new distribution platforms, the digital age has made filmmaking accessible to a wider audience. Online platforms, social media, and crowdfunding campaigns have made it possible for independent filmmakers to create high-quality films with less costs, which they can then share with viewers across the world. Despite the dominance of franchises, independent cinema has managed to stay innovative and durable because to this transition.

### Conclusion

The proliferation of film franchises has undeniably affected both studio-based and indie filmmaking. Franchise films have changed the industry and consumer expectations, but they have also made it harder for independent and stand-alone films to break through. More and more, studios are putting their money and brainpower into creating franchises, which means both independent and traditional filmmakers are finding it harder to develop stories that are varied and not part of a series. Combining strong box office performance, substantial merchandise, and persistent viewer engagement is the key to cinematic universes' commercial success. Studio business models have expanded far beyond the realm of conventional filmmaking thanks to the rise of long-term narratives that engage consumers over numerous films. Studios throughout the world are rethinking their strategies for brand development and audience engagement in light of the new profit standard that cinematic universes, like Marvel's, have established. The continued popularity of cinematic universes will undoubtedly shape box office techniques and the entertainment industry as a whole, as this trend continues to influence cinema's future. In spite of this, indie film has embraced new distribution channels and creative methods to keep up with the times. Despite the continued success of cinematic universes, independent films provide an important platform for innovative storytelling, social critique, and artistic expression. What happens next in international filmmaking will be heavily influenced by the dynamic between franchise-driven and independent films.

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