

WALT DISNEY PICTURES

## INTRODUCTION

The Disney Corporation: a name synonymous with wholesome family fun and man-made magic since well before the turn of the century. The plethora of Disney products ranging from animated movies to the front page of their website suggests they have something for everyone in the family.

Disney rhetoric is designed to draw children, like the one on the right, in and to subsequently make life-long Disney consumers of them. Forget Hooked on Phonics, Disney is a multi-generational disease similar to alcoholism. You can kick the habit for a while, maybe find some solace in people who don't have the problem, but Disney is smart about keeping you addicted. Just when you thought your daughter (and your wallet) recovered from the last Disney princess movie, out comes another and the cycle repeats. You, your child, their grandparents, aunts uncles, et cetera are forced into the vicious cycle of purchasing, brought on during the Christmas season and before birthdays.

So what does it all reduce to, then? Is it just about keeping kids happy, keeping the magic alive? Or is it all about that big cash money wad? What with the extensive merchandising from the hit new movie Frozen, I'm inclined to believe it might just be all about the Benjamins. After all, they make over 18 billion dollars a year.



## THE DISNEY CORPORATION

A BRIEF HISTORY (see History source)

- Created in **1923** by Walt Disney (top picture) and his brother in Los Angeles.
- Created ALICE COMEDIES.
- Mickey Mouse born in **1928**.
- **1937** first feature-length animated film: *Snow White*!
- Moved to Burbank with new profits.
- Late **1950**'s meant live-action films such as *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*
- **1960s** to **1970s** was era of experimentation with visual effects as well as live-action: *Mary Poppins*
- In **1966** Walt Disney dies
- **1971** was the opening year of Disney World!
- **70s** to present day began a new era filled with theme parks, film merchandising, and *profits*.

## DISNEY FORMULA

PART OF THE APPEAL

- Get to the parents through the children.
- Character usually white to appeal to demographic with money. Most are young adults or teenagers whose nationalities are majorly of some sort of European descent. (AKA – white) French/British? Aurora, Alice, Cinderella, and Belle. German? Snow white and Rapunzel. Et cetera.
- Romance
- Action
- Music allows for earning money across the music mode. Rather than quotes, lyrics stick with people better (Do you want to build a snowman?)
- Retain audiences, no matter the age.
- Plenty of merchandising.

# ARTIFACTS

## LIST OF ARTIFACTS:

1. FROZEN
2. ALICE IN WONDERLAND
3. THE MAGIC KINGDOM
4. DISNEY HOMEPAGE
5. MICKEY MOUSE

How do we gauge, then, the extensive arm of the Disney Corporation? How did it get to be the phenomenon it is now? Just what in the h-e-double hockey sticks is so appealing about Disney that we can't tear our youth, or ourselves, away from the sweet, sweet taste of it?

Let's look at five of the artifacts of the corporation's rise to power. We'll start with bigger artifacts to understand the broad rhetorical choices Disney makes (the formula, if you will) in order to sustain mass audiences. Eventually, we'll funnel down to a singular, mouse-eared, iconic character from Disney's roots. From our analysis we'll see the rhetorical choices used in order to obtain audiences and, more importantly, as much of your hard-earned money as possible.

## FROZEN

The most well-known artifact of the Disney Empire is the long archive of films stringing from 1937 to present day. Disney has the business of entertaining the world down to a fine art. The target? Parents' wallets. Take your child to see Frozen once and watch as the aftermath takes its toll. You'll be purchasing Frozen merchandise for years and all because Disney is so very good at appealing to their primary audience.

Frozen (main characters Anna and Elsa on right) is full of traditional Disney rhetoric. The plot is simple: two sisters, a problem, and a solution. Simplicity is an immediate appeal to younger target audiences who cannot sit through a car ride without squirming, let alone an hour-and-a-half long movie. Specifically, little girls will enjoy the strong females as well as the merchandise (dresses, toys, accessories) which allows them to look like their favorite characters. The usual Disney style of having non-human sidekick characters such as Sven, Olaf, and the trolls will appeal to any child regardless of nationality, gender, or age.

While the romance we've come to expect from Disney princess movies is still present, Disney has made a clever appeal to the modern feminist critiques of the Disney formula. Elsa did not need a man to help her, but instead the strength of another woman. Anna was tricked by a dastardly male character and found her own strength to help her sister, whether it cost her life or not. Sure, she still falls in love with Kristoff, but while the feminist approach may appeal to some the overarching Disney audience has come to expect romance. When comparing a non-romance Disney princess movie, such as Brave, with Frozen, Brave made around 500 million worldwide while Frozen made more than double that with 1.2 billion in box office revenue. (See *Box Office Mojo* sources)



WHITE PROTAGONISTS  
APPEALS TO CHILDREN  
EXTENSIVE MERCHANDISING

ACTION  
MUSICAL  
ROMANCE

TEENAGE  
CHARACTERS

FORMULA ELEMENTS

## ALICE IN WONDERLAND

Disney has made quite a few live-action films as well as animated ones. A few of the live-action ones, such as *Alice in Wonderland* (see right), began as 2D animated classics and were turned into live-action films to appeal to modernized generations. Doing so makes the stories more accessible to jaded adults and newly jaded teenagers. The live-action *Alice* gave my nieces nightmares for days, but I found it hilarious. Because it still appeals to me, even though I am no longer a kid, we can see that Disney is trying to retain its former audience as they grow out of Disney. Even if you get older you can still invest in the magic. If you can't market the same thing to a different audience, offer them something new to replace the old. Teenagers and adults, rather than kids, are the audience here.



The white washed cast may alienate viewers of other ethnicities. However, the logic may be that the majority of white people are better-off and more willing to spend their money on frivolities like movie tickets. A hint of romance for the older ladies, plenty of action for teenagers, and a steampunk/Victorian style for the growing nerd/geek demographic. Johnny Depp appeals to the Johnny Depp fandom as well as people who just enjoy seeing him.

We're capitalizing on people's fantasies here. But unlike animated movies, it's easier to insert yourself into a story where there are real people. The ethos of the situation makes some hopeful part of you think that maybe this could happen to you. However, while it is real, *Alice in Wonderland* uses ample CGI animation, rhetorically saying that the real and fantastical worlds can still collide. You don't have to lose the magic even when, as an adult, you have to go out into the "real world". No dream is too impossible when you see a Disney movie. Even when we're old, Disney will still sell us our dreams on the big screen.



## DISNEY WORLD'S MAGIC KINGDOM

Attached is a top view of the Magic Kingdom Park in Disneyworld. At the very epicenter lies the main attraction, the one place every family comes to Disneyworld to see: Cinderella's castle. By having the castle as the focal point, when families are done there their attention is immediately drawn to the pathways around it leading off into Fantasyland, Liberty

Square, and other sections of the park.

This layout makes the park extremely accessible to guests. Your first look of the park (seen left) is very warm and open, as if saying "here is the magic at the end of this road!"



## MAGIC KINGDOM CONTINUED...

Of course, all of this lies past Main Street USA, filled with a plethora of enticing shops. Main Street works as a funnel to direct crowd flow. You literally cannot get to other parts of the park without going through Main Street USA. Restaurants, rides, games, arcades, gift shops, hotels, anything you can imagine you can spend money on here. It traps you into buying something before even getting to the actual park.

While the appeal lies in garnering the interest of children, parents are ultimately the ones paying for the experience. Therefore, children (who enjoy the park more) are only secondary audiences. Families as a whole are the main target and packaged products such as park passes and hotel stays offer an affordable Disney experience, which is usually one of your kidneys and a leg.

If you have a hard time getting around, a theme park may not be for you. While places in the park are most often wheelchair accessible, the sheer amount of walking required makes Magic Kingdom a taxing experience. To get near the rest of the park you must go down Main Street USA and trek around the castle. Also, recently Disney has tightened their guidelines on accommodating families with mentally disabled children. The fallout from this rhetorical choice has already made some families feel as if imperfect children are discouraged from being a part of the Disney ideal, alienating a formerly avid consumer group who feel “Disney willingly abandoned them” (Diamant, 2014).



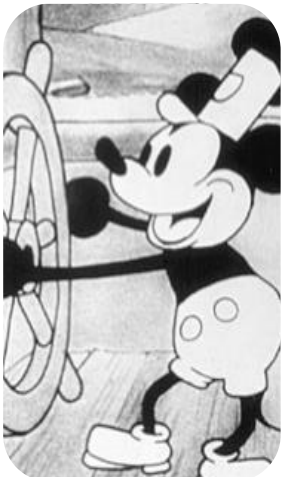
## DISNEY WEB PAGE

<http://disney.com/>

SIMPLE, EASY TO USE, NICE TO LOOK AT,  
LOADS QUICKLY, MANY OPTIONS

Here we have the main hub for easy navigation between all Disney products. The convenient bar at the top allows you to get information on music, movies, games, Disney theme parks, and more. If you're wondering where to spend your money, this is Disney's way of saying “Hey! Here's what you can buy with that!”

The rhetoric of the site lies in the ease of navigation. Even a child can do it, as they seem to assume by offering playable games on the front page. Shows from Disney channel appeal to the teenage demographic and there are even some children's shows featured as well. Games and quizzes encourage children to come back, perhaps with their parents' permission and attention. Ads shown on the page, unlike places such as Facebook, are very consistent. Everything you see is a Disney product. But this artifact only appeals to those with the technology to access it. You can find it through social media sites which, again, need certain technologies to be accessed.



## MICKY MOUSE

And finally we have the face of Disney himself! There is not any one age target because of his notoriety from his creation to the present day which has spanned close to a hundred years. While not Disney's main selling point, he is a symbol of the quality of family entertainment Disney has come to represent. By simply putting his silhouette on a product it becomes part of the Disney brand which can make that product more valued and therefore more expensive.

### MICKEY MOUSE CONTINUED...

Those of all ages, within the United States at least, have grown up with Mickey, whether they were a part of the Mickey Mouse club in the 50s or are just now seeing the mouse's new cartoons in all of their horrifically dumb splendor. The progressive transformation of Mickey makes it more available/familiar to modern generations (who may or may not even know who Steamboat Willy, the picture above, is) and keeps the symbol alive and useful. After all, kids these days still know about him.

The use of a mouse, which is often seen as a pest, may not have been ideal. However, his creators increased his appeal by making him cartoonish and cute. Animals as mascots are useful because while they may have a gender, they don't normally have a nationality/skin color. The name Mickey Mouse rolls off of the tongue because of its alliteration and the entire thing, name and mouse, translates well across cultures and languages. Minnie and Mickey are not only popular in America but also Japan as well.



### ... CONCLUSION OF ANALYSIS

Disney, through these artifacts, projects an image of flexible family-friendly fun. Their organization is what it is because of an extensive line of cohesive products building off of one another and adding to or using elements of the Disney formula. The artifacts keep a consistent façade of “entertainment for entertainment's sake”, but the constant push for merchandising (and the yearly figures a single Disney movie makes) contradicts that. Animated movies like *Frozen* follow a general template while the live action ones such as *Alice in Wonderland* follow a more complicated template, but still retain the Disney elements. Disney rhetoric is simple, repetitive, but it works. Most people consume and don't see anything wrong with the process, not even the fact that there are only five non-white princesses and never a hint at any gay relationships anywhere. Disney rhetoric keeps us conformed, happy, and constantly purchasing to placate our children into following the same pattern.

#### AN ORGANIZATION'S RHETORIC

- Can gain a consumer's support or lose the consumer as a source of income. This does not always mean a financial income.
- Rhetoric can persuade important people to support the organization with words, common man to donate time and service.
- Artifacts = skeleton of support for the image of the company. People who hold fond memories of Mickey Mouse, for example, are more likely to buy Disney products. Parents whose children love *Frozen* will look fondly upon Disney for the happiness it brings them and will therefore be more likely to consume their products.

#### PROFESSIONAL WRITERS

- Our job to take all of this into account.
- What artifacts is the organization putting out and how will they affect their image?
- Find intentional and unintentional effects of artifacts and tweak them until they efficiently further the goals of the business.
- A professional writer is a smart investment towards the long term health of an organization.
- We are molders and shapers, critical thinkers and problem solvers.

## Works Cited

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\*Magic kingdom top view

