

#### **4) Goal, Objective & Tactics**

The goal of the IMC for this movie is one that is pretty easy to see but has levels to its broadness. The goal for the IMC was to make a profit for Universal Pictures. That's the cut and clear answer to that question. But why? Well, for that, we got to go into the nitty gritty the movie making industry. Movies are made to hopefully make a profit. Yes, directors aim to bring in their own artistic flavor to the picture but at the end of the day, it's the numbers that matter to the studio. Because Mario is a well-known IP from a game studio, this movie would not only aim to make a profit for just Universal Pictures but also Nintendo. Not to mention that Universal had a theme park land of Mario in Japan open in early 2021 with one in Hollywood, California called "Super Nintendo Land" planned to open in February 2023 (Parker, 2022).

Universal would hope for some IP synergy with Mario as the movie could bring a profit to their movie department as well as their theme parks and resorts. As of writing this, there are two iterations of Super Nintendo Land being built, one of them being in the Florida resort (Tapp, 2023). The other is currently being built in Universal Studios Singapore, hopefully, by the end of 2025 (Yeo, 2020). So in long story short, the goal is to make a profit and future profits from other forms of Mario media like merch, game sales, theme park tickets and so on.

The IMC objective is a little harder to read so to answer that, I'm going to explain how it's more than just the box office numbers of the movie. Let's look at Universal's box office track record. Box office numbers are always tricky to understand because they mainly account for theaters and the profits, they got from the movies distributed to them. With that said, Universal Pictures did not do so poorly in the previous year of Mario's release. In 2022, Universal Pictures distributed 32 pictures both domestically to the U.S. and internationally. According to Deadline,

the studio made \$1.64 billion in the year 2022, excluding the money it made that year from 2021 releases (D'Alessandro, 2022). While this is a mighty number for the year that was not entirely affected by COVID-19, it is considered that the 32 pictures could've dragged this number to a lower amount.

Another reason why the numbers were dragged is because movie studios only make around 60% of theater proceeds in America and 20-40% overseas (Johnson, 2023). You also must consider that advertising and marketing for a movie usually costs as much or a little than the budget of the production itself. Looking at Universal's most profitable movie of 2022, Jurassic World: Dominion, it made a tiny bit over \$1 billion while it had an estimated budget was \$328.6 million (Reid, 2023). Looking at the numbers closely, this movie in the Jurassic World franchise made \$376 million in the U.S. showing that most of the box office is from overseas. When you think about what we just shared, Universal did not really make as much as the numbers show that it did.

The following year for Universal was not entirely the same in terms of film distributed though. Universal by the end of 2023, distributed around 21 films including The Super Mario Bros. Movie. Consider that four of these films were distributed onto the NBCUniversal streaming service, Peacock. The profit off those four films are not really as easily attainable to research as normal box office numbers. So, while the goal is for The Mario Movie to make a profit for Universal, it could also be accounted that the animation studio behind the picture has made some of Universal's financial lucrative movies. Illumination, the animation studio behind The Mario Movie, has animated most Universal Pictures hits in the 2010s.

Their previous film, Minions: The Rise of Gru, was estimated to have cost around \$80-100 million after the pandemic drove the film to higher costs (D'Alessandro, 2023). That doesn't

count the cost of the marketing since the film was originally slated to release in 2020 and was pushed back for COVID-19. Regardless, Illuminations own IP of the minions itself is worth \$6 billion in revenue plus retail sales (D'Alessandro, 2023). So with that, Universal was hoping for another revenue hit with the partnership with Nintendo for this film. We're going to say that with just one movie, Universal's IMC objective was to reach \$1.7 billion in revenue with retail sales by the end of 2023.

To achieve both the goal and objective, the movie made it's public awareness early on. The Mario movie was announced in early 2018 and that Universal would distribute the picture worldwide with Illumination working on it (Blair, 2018). From insider workers, it has been said merchandise like toys or clothing is usually developed over a year before the movie comes out. The merch developers and manufactures would have to talk to Illumination to get as many, or little, details about the film as they could in order to make the right toys. Then they would hope to release the merch months before the film's release. "Typically, 40 percent of movie merchandise is sold before a film is released, (Film Reference, n.d.).

Marketing of the movie roughly began in September 2021 by Nintendo themselves. On September 23, 2021, Nintendo streamed a "Direct" stream where they usually announce or show off upcoming games for their consoles. In this stream, Shigeru Miyamoto announced the first official release date for the movie as well as its marketing (Nintendo, 2021). It was announced that Chris Pratt would be voicing Mario, Charlie Day as Luigi, Anya Taylor-Joy as Princess Peach and Jack Black as Bowser. This casting announcement was met with very mixed responses from fans. One response from a twitter user @pamrenteria said "CATS 2019 ENERGY. I'M NOT WATCHING THIS SOBER. (okay, okay, I'm done)," (Twitter, 2021). Another user by the name of @rosedommu reacted to the casting with "Can't wait for House of Gucci," (Twitter,

2021). Whether there were auditions for the roles or if the studio just casted off of star power, they very clearly got attention and discussion of the movie a whole year before its release.

The movie would eventually get pushed back to Spring 2023 so audiences wouldn't see the first teaser of it until October 2022. As of writing this, the teaser has reached over 19 million views on Illuminations YouTube channel (YouTube, 2022). As months followed, more trailers were shown on the internet, theaters and even a small little spot for Super Bowl LVII. This teaser gained notoriety from fans as it is a in-universe commercial for Mario and Luigi's plumbing company. This trailer gave older fans some nostalgia as it included a remake/cover of the Super Mario Rap from the television show in the 1990s (Serrels, 2023).

Around the release of the first teaser, a reddit user noticed something while watching the teaser in a theater. User VariationArtistic posted a picture of the end of the trailer showing that it was confirmed to be released in IMAX format (Reddit, 2022). This would mean that these large theaters across the United States would have the movie play in them, making the distribution probably cost more with the hope that IMAX could garner more profit. There were also some promotions with theaters at the time of release. AMC Theaters would release a popcorn tin in the shape of a Question Block that Mario would punch in both the movie and in his games (Quence, 2023). Many fans, including reddit user Volbohel, were shocked to see how quickly the tin sold out in theaters (Reddit, 2023).

There were many companies outside of the movie studio that would help promote it to all audiences. One of those companies is a bath product company from the U.K. called Lush. Lush would collaborate with Universal to create products inspired by the property to help promote the movie. One of the products was a Question Block bath bomb, a bath bomb that could be the shape of one of six powerups from the games inside of the yellow Question Block (Lueng,

2023). The Question Block would be almost like a shell for the bath bomb. Other products include a coin shaped soap bar aimed for children, Mario or Luigi shower gel, Princess Peach Body Spray, and shower jelly based on Princess Peach and Bowser (Lush, n.d.).

Another promotion was a Shake Shack in Brooklyn, New York that was rethemed for the Mario movie (Quence, 2023). They gave outdoor seating a red and black retheme to match the colors of the franchise's aesthetic. They also added some more fancier cheeses to a Mario themed burger to give more of an Italian feel for it. There was also a Gold Star Shake which had a strawberry flavor in vein of Princess Peaches' aesthetic. With these promotions, Toy distribution, and even a version of the board game Monopoly based off of the movie, Universal was trying their hardest for a financial hit.

## **11) Evaluation**

Entering the actual theaters, Universal and other movie studios were both excited and anxious about the release of the Mario movie. If it is successful, not only do theater chains continue to thrive with love for family and animated movies, but animated adaptations of video games can be a new wave of a genre for the film industry. That is to say, if people prefer to see their favorite video game characters made for all ages in computer animated forms like Sonic in the "Sonic The Hedgehog" movies. If it is a failure, it not only could prevent other studios from adapting video games in animated forms, but it could also prevent Nintendo from letting Universal touch any of its other properties. After the failure of the Super Mario movie from 1993, Nintendo withheld anyone else from touching their properties in film adaptations for a long time. The same could happen if the 2023 movie was deemed a failure both financially and box office wise.

As of writing this, we believe that Universal Pictures did find its marketing campaign successful. In the terms of attracting its two target audiences, it did succeed in many different aspects of the movie as a product. Before other summer releases of 2023, it was the biggest movie of the year as it had a large opening weekend. Even outside of ticket sales, many theater chains found themselves to have sold out on extra products for the movie. As stated in the Goal, Objective, and Tactics section, AMC quickly sold out of the mystery block popcorn tins in association with the movies release. It wasn't until Cinemacon 2023, where we got a confirmation by Universal that the movie was in fact a success to them.

Donna Langley, chair of Universal Filmed Entertainment Group, presented the Universal showcase at Cinemacon in late April 2023 (McClintock, 2023). The showcase started off with a round of applause from her arrival and she begun the showcase talking about the Mario Movie. "Super Mario has done next-level business since opening over the Easter holiday...", " (McClintock, 2023). Audiences of all ages flocked to the theater during the release of the Mario movie hoping to escape from their daily lives into the world of the Mushroom Kingdom. Jakks, the toy company that produced the toys for the movie saw a spike in sales because of the Mario products while struggling to make a profit from other non-Mario products (Zahn, 2023). To really see the success of the Mario movie, let's look at the actual numbers for the picture.

As stated before, Donna Langley described the movie doing "next-level" business for Universal. With numerical context, The Super Mario Movie earned about \$146 million domestically in its opening weekend (Rubin, 2023). This is excluding the money it made in early fan screenings the Wednesday and Thursday night before its release. Globally, the movie made about \$377 million in its opening weekend. These numbers only represent the opening weekend for

the film. Donna Langley at the showcase shared that the movie was only days away from hitting the \$1 billion mark which is a huge achievement for the studio.

The movie did eventually hit the \$1 billion mark the weekend following CinemaCon and was deemed a hit for Universal Pictures (Rubin, 2023). At the end of its theatrical run, the movie made \$1.36 billion in the worldwide box office (The Numbers, n.d.). Not only was the movie a hit in theaters but made smashing records at home. The movie made \$75 million on Premium Video-On-Demand through services like Amazon Prime video and others by July 2023 (Grober, 2023). Retailers began selling the movie physically in June of 2023 and in just one month, the movie tracked to have sold the most number of units for the month of July 2023 and of the year, as of up to July 2023 (Latchem, 2023). While DVD sales are not what they used to be a decade or two decades ago, this is still a huge achievement for the movie and shows that family films like Mario sell physical copies. The movie made about \$10 million total as of June 2023 in both DVD and Blu-Ray sales for the year (The Numbers, n.d.).

In terms of streaming platforms, the movie joined Peacock first in August of 2023 and became Peacock's biggest movie debut on the platform for its time (Hailu, 2024). It held that spot for a pretty long time, as the streaming service needed a newer, more advertisable family film on the platform. The title for biggest movie debut on Peacock was later dethroned by *Oppenheimer* in January of 2024 (Hailu, 2024). This also could've helped Peacock with its subscriber numbers for the year of 2023. The streaming service saw an increase of 10 million subscribers in the year 2023 with it reaching a total of 31 million by Q4 of 2023 (Stoll, 2024). This also may have helped Universal and Comcast with its profits.

In July of 2023, Peacock increased the price for its streaming service for the first time since 2020 (Diaz, 2023). Its first pricing tier for the service was increased by \$1 per month while its

higher tier was increased by \$2 per month. These pricing increases probably helped with Mario making its debut on the streaming service. It did leave Peacock for its run on another streaming service. Netflix debuted the movie in late November of 2023 and it stood in the top 10 of that week on Netflix (Graham-Lowery, 2023).

In terms of theme parks, 2023 was a huge year for Universal Studios in the U.S. parks (Theme Park Tourist, 2023). While it is hard to determine how much of this revenue is dedicated to the Nintendo Land themed areas, it was reported that the parks made \$2.4 billion in revenue for Q3 of 2023. A lot of this could be assumed towards the Nintendo Land built in the Hollywood Park. The reason for this is that this same article reports huge crowds in the summer for Universal Studios Hollywood while Orlando had milder crowds. Most of the crowds could be dedicated to the Nintendo Land as the summer crowds want to explore the new land. Not to mention the merchandise and add-ons the land gives like the Power-Bands which help you interact with the land like how wands do in The Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

The movie was a commercial hit but what did audiences think of it? With over 10,000+ user reviews, the movie has a 95% audience score. This doesn't mean that they think it's a 95% or A grade movie but that 95% of the users liked it (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). The movie has a 7.0 user score on IMDB with one user, named folk\_egm, claiming that the movie is a "love letter to the fanbase" and more so to Nintendo fans in general (IMDB, 2023). Fans of the franchise like @WendyLeeSzany on Twitter claimed that the movie handled "the storytelling and the game easter eggs really well..." (Twitter, 2023).

While it may have satisfied some fans of the game, what did kids think of the movie? Well, one writer from Vice shared that he got emotional watching his daughter react to the movie (Klepek, 2023). This writer wrote about how lucky his daughter is to get to enjoy games like Mario



without being ridiculed like he was because of the mass volume of fans as Mario travelled to different mediums like the silver screen. One reviewer labelled the movie as a kid's film as he described seeing it as part of a list of "parental duties," (Thomas, 2023). Either way, it made as much money as it did, and we don't think that it did so attracting the same type of audience as Universal's Oppenheimer.

## **12) Evaluation**

Overall, in hindsight, our group believed that the marketing campaign for The Super Mario Bros. Movie was successful. Universal made an overall hit that warranted a sequel, granted the sequel wasn't announced until the writing of this. It also gained more traction for the Nintendo Land in the American park, Universal Studios Hollywood. Some of the strengths for this campaign were clear to see in that one, it was based on a very popular video game IP. Mario, with the launch of the Nintendo Entertainment System, helped save the American video game industry back in the mid 1980s (Cifaldi, 2012). Since then the character and property had been very popular with not just company of Nintendo, but with the gaming industry. As we stated before, Mario is a powerful IP with games, action figures, plush toys, and all sorts of merchandise around it.

It was a joke that anyone of the older generation would react to children playing video games as "Are you playing the Nintendo?" Or "Are you playing Mario?" That's how much of a household name the Mario franchise has been for the past 39 years since his debut. That can also be said about the animation studio that made The Mario Movie. More so with the creation of that studio, the minions. Yes

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