

Parker Dickson

ENC 2135

25 January 2016

The orchestra begins and the logo follows in its classic yellow, retro styled font reading “Star Wars”. The iconic slow crawl follows which explains the background that lead up to the movie the viewer is about to see. This is one aspect of the Star Wars brand that separates it from other movies or even movie sagas. This and many more icons build this brand, from their eye-catching lightsabers or infamous characters like Darth Vader. Even those who have not seen a single movie recognize these symbols. Due to its long running series, Star Wars has been made a household name and exists in the bedrock of pop culture. A resurgence in trilogies in two different generations, endless merchandise, and a theme park in the works Star Wars has a juggernaut level brand that extends through the memories of old veteran to the series to the continuous flow of new fans.

The Star Wars story, and spin off stories, have been told throughout many different media. The story has spanned movies, books, videogames, and television shows. This phenomenon began with the release of “Star Wars: From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker” on November 12, 1976. This book was based on the original screenplay, written by George Lucas, released before being spawned into the first movie simply titled “Star Wars” released the following year. Due to its popularity, and being the top grossing movie of 1977, George Lucas decided to continue writing and filming to create a trilogy. Little did he know how big this project would become. After the original trilogy, A New Hope, Empire Strikes Back, and Return of the Jedi, Star Wars appeared to be over. This trilogy of movies had been released between

1977 to 1983. Much of their fan base grew up, so to rebuild this galactic empire the “prequels” were released. Ranging from 1999 to 2005 the next trilogy had a new target audience. It intended to bring back the fans of the originals while also grabbing the attention of the children of the time. Old fans who were now parents could bring their families to see the movies they loved, which built Star Wars back up to its famous status. This pattern, to release a new trilogy approximately 10 years after the previous had been released, began again in 2015. Yet again three more movies will carry those yellow letters titled “Star Wars”. A whole new generation of kids will be in awe over the raging battle between the light and dark sides of the force. Star Wars as a brand extends through three generations of fans, bringing in new ones every day with new availability to watch the movies. Lucasarts as well as Disney knew what they were doing when they signed deal to turn one Star Wars movie into a nine movie series with spin offs also being written. They intended to grab the media’s attention and spread themselves throughout decades and claim the love of children as they grew into adults that, just out of love for the movies, would spread Star Wars like a plague. After doing this again and again, its safe to say Star Wars is safely secure in their spot of pop culture classics, with more and more of their movies gracing the public even now. New technologies have helped spread the science fiction fire throughout the world allowing everyone of any age to hear a classic space adventure.

The massive fan following of a series as big as Star Wars has a massive window for merchandise. Fans gladly buy up a shirt or maybe a mug, but others buy anything they can that could be considered relevant to that galaxy far far away. The merchandise was intelligently crafted to target all different age groups. The first audiences targeted were children and avid collectors. In 1978 a toy company called Kenner, which later became Hasbro, released their first action figures. These 3.75-inch action figures where smaller than the standard figurine of their

time making this a risky business venture. It was decided to cut down the size to increase the number of figures that could be produced. This paid off when they flew off shelves alongside all other merchandise including clothing, lunchboxes, and posters. As the movies became more popular and more began to release more and more goods with “Star Wars” labels came out. Under Disney’s expertise Star Wars brand goods can be found in nearly every store as the new trilogy is approaching. After Force Awakens was released in 2015 \$2.07 billion dollars was made in the box office but this is dwarfed by the merchandise sales claimed in a Variety article written in 2016, “\$251.7 billion last year, according to the Licensing Industry Merchandisers Assn.” (Variety). This billion-dollar business is much more than lunchboxes and poster now; it has grown to be aimed towards the public creating styled goods for each age and gender of potential fan. These new goods range from extensive different clothing options, bedroom accessories, coffee mugs, and even remote controlled droids. This expansion in markets showed the inclusiveness of Lucas Arts and Disney which has crushed the stereotype of “nerds” being the only fans of sci-fi and has built up the Star Wars brand to all people. In 1978 the previously mentioned toy company Kenner released a toy version of the light saber. This is arguably the most sought after toy by young fans. Throughout the years the technology has advanced and the product has improved. This where the high-end market opened, allowing collectors the opportunity to buy a product more similar to a replica rather than a plastic toy sword. Another large part of bringing Star Wars into the lives of different kinds of people is through Disney’s cooperation with Electronic Arts to create exclusive Star Wars videogames. Star Wars videogames began in 1979 with Kenner’s “Star Wars Electronic Battle Command” and continue to this day with Electronic Arts release of “Star Wars Battlefront” in 2015, with a sequel to be released in the future. The love for Star Wars merchandise is so great that it

spawned its own day called Force Friday. Force Friday is on September 4<sup>th</sup> every year and is a day known for buying up new merchandise for the year, which in 2015 was the day for the midnight release for Star Wars: Force Awakens. The Disney store, Target, Toys “R” Us, Walmart, and Amazon all conserve this nerd holiday in order to sell as much Star Wars gear as they can. With merchandise reaching across multiple platforms the logo reading “Star Wars” in its traditional font is easily recognized and brings nostalgia and excitement to fans. This is the intention of casting such a wide net. The more recognizable a label or icon and the more exposure to it, fans and nonfans want to be a part of this “in-group” created by the vast amount of product. Just by having a rack of shirts at Target it could make fans want to rewatch their favorite movie in the series and help encourage a new comer into joining in. The merchandise doesn’t only make money being sold for what it is, but also is used for marketing new and even previous movies.

After Disney purchased the Star Wars property from George Lucas’s company Lucasfilm in 2012 they began to go to work on how to improve the Star Wars brand. In 2015 Disney released a statement that they would be creating a whole Star Wars theme park for fans to explore. This will not only be a new avenue for merchandise sales, but it will be an entire destination for all hardcore fans. Not only will Disney and Star Wars be building their brand with exclusive activities and goods with the park but they are selling an experience that can be marketed in itself. This will bring in families who already love the Disney parks and Star Wars lovers, combining two worlds. Such an in depth experience into a world that some have loved for decades may bring up emotions, but this is what Disney does best. They focus on the capacity for positive memories to be made and attempt to make every park goer’s experience unique and special. Disney putting their brand on this park gives it creditability because it is such a trusted

company. Appealing to the younger and older audiences Disney focuses on bringing all force users and blaster carriers into their park to spread the word about their new creation of a living fantasy world as well as to continue to expand their new property. As more fans pour in to see this new world and see their favorite characters the Star Wars brand grows, the brand is strong with this one.

Sources to cite:

<http://io9.gizmodo.com/the-groundbreaking-history-of-star-wars-toys-1706298670> (history of SW)

IMDB (movie release dates)

<http://variety.com/2016/film/news/star-wars-licensed-merchandise-sales-1201799640/> (sales #)

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/natalierobehmed/2015/12/16/how-disneys-star-wars-merchandise-is-set-to-make-billions/#544421c541a4> (other sales #)

<http://www.starwars.com/news/playing-jedi-the-history-of-toy-lightsabers> (lightsaber facts)

<http://www.starwars.com/news/force-friday-event-guide> (Force Friday)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star\\_Wars\\_video\\_games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Wars_video_games) (SW 1st videogame)

<http://starwars.ea.com/starwars/battlefront> (EA Battlefront)

<https://www.wired.com/2015/12/disney-star-wars-return-on-investment/> (Disney buying SW)

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/17/travel/disney-star-wars-parks/> (Announcement of themepark)