

Everyone at a comic book convention knows multiverses are a big business. When Disney purchased the remaining Marvel film rights in late 2009, many casual fans saw this as Disney buying a comic book multiverse. It is less widely known that Disney was crossing over its characters in a comic book multiverse at about the same time Marvel began having its heroes interact in stories. The long-running comic book series *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories* included characters from Walt Disney's *Silly Symphonies* short films as well as the Mickey Mouse shorts starting in 1940. Initially *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories* featured characters from different films appearing in individual stories, in a very similar way to how DC's *World's Finest Comics* of the same era had Batman and Superman stories, but none where Batman and Superman interact.

As *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories* progressed, the same narrative innovations that were taking place in superhero comics were near simultaneously happening in Disney comics. Captain America was famously seen punching Hitler on the cover of the first issue of his eponymous comic in 1941. Minnie Mouse has a gossip column about real-world Hollywood celebrities in 1941. By 1944 *Walt Disney's* movie characters began to interact in comics. Supporting characters from Disney's *Bambi* appear in a story with characters from Disney's *Snow White* in the April 1944 issue.

The way Disney's comic books crossed over characters in the 1940s set standards for how they handled their characters for decades. Characters from virtually every single Disney animated film of the 1940s and 1950s can be seen interacting with characters from other films in the comics of the era. The comic books were Disney's original crossover petri dish, and this research will quantify how they formed their early comic book multiverse. Attendees will see visualizations designed to clarify how narrative innovations in superhero comic books were also reflected in Disney Comic books of the same era.

The research created visualizations of how Disney crossed over its library of characters in the comics. It is based on a systematic analysis of both story and promotional content found in the *Disney Comics* of the 1940s, 1950's, and 1960s. A count of which characters interact, and the frequency of interaction plotted a clear pattern of management applied to fictional characters. For example, among the dozens of character crossovers, linking virtually every Disney movie of the era to every other movie, no two princesses are shown interacting.

This quantitative analysis of Disney comics from the 1940s revealed patterns that are reflected in Disney licensing 50 years later. This research created visualizations by plotting character interaction from a sample of over 500 *Disney Comic* books of the era. This analysis created a portrait of their strategy for using comics to promote new film characters and get the most out of old intellectual property. This research's first goal is to make attendees appreciate how comic

books have long been a place for innovative use of intellectual property. The second goal is to make attendees appreciate that while comic books might not be the most high profile part of Disney's portfolio, they are a historically important part of the company's development.