

# **Why Was Disney's 'Frozen' So Successful?**

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*Unit 1: Research*

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# FROZEN

Disney's 'Frozen' has broken box office records for an animated feature film and made over 1.276 billion USD in box office alone. The franchise has made 3.99 billion through merchandising, and won multiple academy awards for Best Animated Feature and Best Original Song. The film has a sequel scheduled for 2019, two animated shorts and a Broadway show. However, 'Frozen' is not as critically acclaimed as its sister films 'Tangled' and 'Moana'.

'Frozen' has been described to "raise an ambitious, perhaps fool-hardy comparison. Does Disney dare herald a subzero Lion King? It does, and 'Frozen' seldom disappoints" (Kyle Smith, New York Post) But "is not fundamentally revolutionary. Its animated characters are the same familiar, blank-faced, big-eyed storybook figures. But they are a little more psychologically complex than their Disney forerunners. Its princesses may gaze at a glass ceiling, but most are not ready to shatter it." (Stephen Holden, New York Times). In contrast, 'Moana' "does break the princess mold with some help from Dwayne Johnson." (Jana Monji) While 'Moana' 'breaking the mold' may appease critics, it does not sit well with the film's target audience. By breaking the pattern of having traditional ball gowns and long dresses for Disney princesses, the

sales of 'Moana' toys have fallen drastically. "The trouble for "Moana" is her outfit isn't as iconic," stated Jim Silver, CEO of TTPM, an online toy review site. "Kids love the [Disney princess] dresses. The dresses all play a significant part in the movie, it's not just that it's a dress you look at...." The metascore (critic rating) of the film is 71 and the audience score is 7.1, compared to the 81 metascore and 7.6 audience score of 'Moana'. The general consensus is that 'Moana' is more critically acclaimed, while 'Frozen' appealed to their target audience more, thus allowing 'Frozen' to become more successful in terms of money earned.

# TARGET AUDIENCE & THEMES



fig 1, 'Frozen' billboard

Through analysing 'Frozen's' billboards and advertisements, I have come to the conclusion that the main target audience of the film 'Frozen' is older children and tweens, while the film also has mature themes.

The bright colours of the billboard are eye catching and distinctly childlike. The cool palette is commonly associated with winter and the cold. Each female character is shown by a male character, implying that there is romance in this film. (A convention of Disney princess films). The male on the left is looking at the female character and not making direct address. Further developing the thought of romance being present in this film. The snowman is a reference to the popular children's Christmas carol "Frosty the snowman". In which a snowman gains sentience and plays with the children before melting away.

The themes explored in the film - familial love, platonic love, anxiety, grief, LGBTQ+ and betrayal target the more mature audience. Allowing them to identify with the characters and the scenarios of the film.

Throughout the film, Elsa has been shown to be in frosty isolation - trying to control and hide her powers from her sister and the outside world. Evidence of these emotions are weaved into the lyrics of "Let it Go". She sings "The wind is howling, like this swirling storm inside, Couldn't keep it in, Heaven knows I tried." This reference to the earlier events of her losing control over her powers sounds extremely similar to depression and anxiety patients losing control over their mental state. Another lyric "Don't let them in, don't let them see, be the good girl you always have to be! Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know..." describes the common practice of concealing their mental health problems. This lyric also resonates with members of the LGBTQ+ community that are still 'closeted.'

It has been rumoured that Elsa will be the first LGBTQ+ Disney princess. Allowing 'Frozen' to appeal to more than just a typical audience of young children.

# QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire was sent to four students of year groups 7-11. 2 male and 2 female. The respondents consisted of 10 students, 2 males and 2 females from year 11, one male and female from year 10, one male from year 9, two year 8 males and one year 7 girl. I recognise that my sample is skewed, and that I did not collect enough responses to make accurate assumptions concerning a wider population.

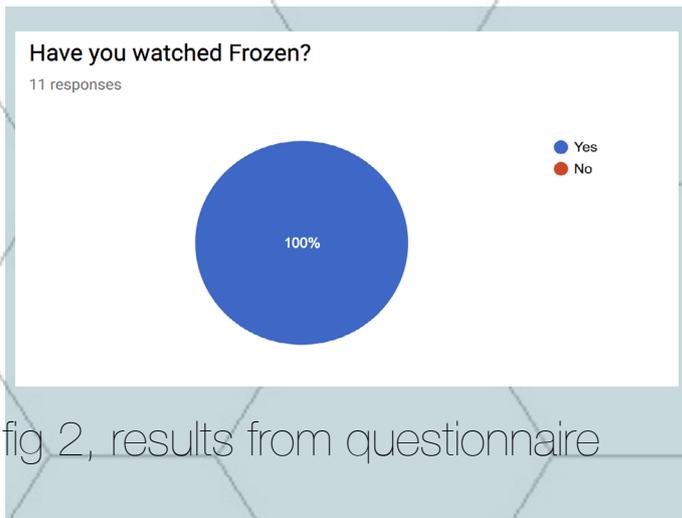


fig 2, results from questionnaire

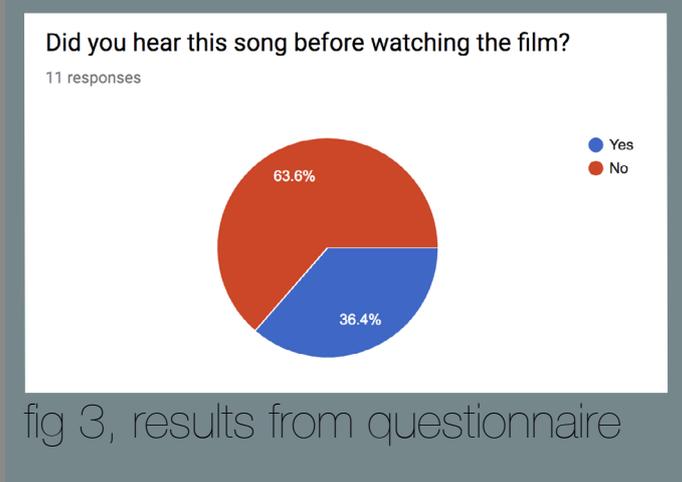


fig 3, results from questionnaire

Of the 10 respondents, all have watched 'Frozen'. As the film was first released in 2014, the current year 11 respondents would have been year 7 students when they watched it. (Assuming they watched it when the film first came out.) This proves that 'Frozen' was successful in targeting children ages ranging from 7 to 12.

There is evidence that the song 'Let it Go' is responsible for some of the success of the 'Frozen' franchise. The song alone has won an academy award for "the best original song" in the 86th Oscars. The fact that 36.4% of the respondents had listened to the song before watching the film suggests that the song garnered more success than the film in the beginning, and had led people to watch the film.

#### Which of these films have you watched?

11 responses

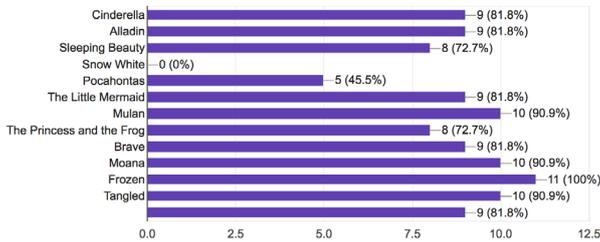


fig 4, results from questionnaire

#### Which of these films did you enjoy the most?

11 responses

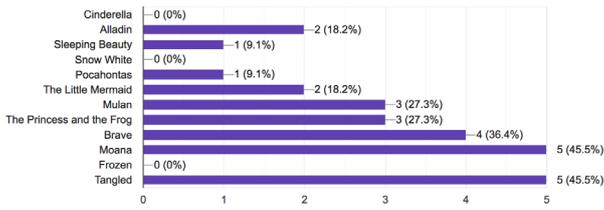


fig 5, results from questionnaire

#### Why do you like Elsa? (don't answer this if you don't like her)

9 responses

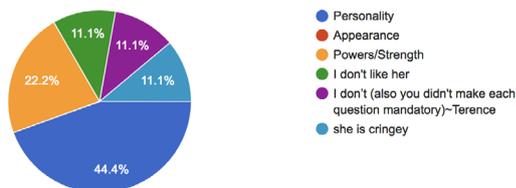


fig 6, results from questionnaire

Of the 12 Disney princess films produced, 'Frozen' was the most watched. Followed closely by 'Tangled', 'Moana' and 'Mulan'. However, 'Frozen' is the least liked film compared to the other 11 princess films. The most liked films are 'Tangled' and 'Moana'. Thus giving evidence that 'Frozen' was less enjoyed by the general public, but more successful in terms of amount of people viewed, money made and awards won.

When asked why the respondents liked Elsa, 2 replied "powers/strength" while 4 replied "personality." As Disney princesses have recently took on post-feminist, empowered-women personas, their popularity seemed to grow as well.

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# INTERVIEWS

In the four interviews I conducted with children ages 9-12, they described Elsa as their favourite Disney princess because she "has cool powers". When questioned on the traditional Disney princesses, more specifically Cinderella, they responded distastefully. Stating that "she's useless" but "is really nice".

In particular, the 9 year old female responded: "I didn't really enjoy it because it's just like princesses and they're useless not like Mulan and those people. I don't like the traditional princesses. They just need someone to save them. Why can't they just be strong like Belle and Mulan and those others?" She also stated that her favourite Disney princess film is 'Beauty and the Beast'. She took her place for her dad and helped the Beast become human. She's really pretty and so brave." Thus proving that the recent strong-willed Disney princesses have gained their popularity for their strength and determination.

**MOANA**

# SECONDARY RESEARCH

'Moana' has been described to allow "you to succumb to an enjoyable experience that splits the difference between mythology and merchandising. Moana is an inspiring heroine, a smart, brave and decent young woman whose individual aspirations align perfectly with a larger, world-saving mission." (A. O. Scott, New York Times) Compared to 'Frozen', 'Moana' has a box office of 643.3 million USD, and has also won an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. However, 'Moana' did not seem to strike a chord with the young audience, as the earnings of the film are almost half of the earnings of 'Frozen'.

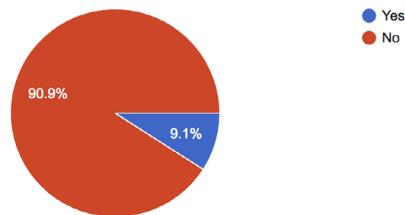
# INTERVIEWS & QUESTIONNAIRE

While 'Moana' was one of the most liked films of the questionnaire respondents,

the interviewees responded differently. In their eyes, the film was "boring" and she was described to be "stupid" and "a copy of Mulan". This suggests that 'Moana' appealed more to older children and teens (questionnaire respondents) rather than younger children. "Older children and teens are generally less attracted to princess stories", as stated by the 12 year old interviewee when asked if he liked 'Frozen'.

## Do you own Frozen merchandise?

11 responses



As shown in fig 8, only 1 out of 11 respondents owned 'Frozen' merchandise. Thus suggesting that older children and teens are less likely to purchase merchandise.

fig 8, results from questionnaire

Marty Brochstein, senior vice president of International Licensing Industry Merchandisers Association stated, "To expect ['Moana'] to reach the heights of 'Frozen,' it would be really unusual to think that it could do that," This suggests another reason as to why 'Moana' did not make as much money through merchandising as 'Frozen'.

In contrast, the film 'Tangled' was well liked by both the questionnaire respondents and the interviewees. Reasons for this consist of a mix of "I liked the characters' personalities", "the film was funny" and "Rapunzel is strong and has good powers". This further proves that the strong-willed and empowered Disney princesses of today are gaining popularity with both children and teens.

# CONCLUSION

The secret to 'Frozen's success lies within the post-feminist personalities of its characters, and its ability to target both a young audience but appeal to a large range of people simultaneously. While 'Frozen' was not as critically acclaimed as 'Moana', it was more popular amongst children. The song 'Let it Go' is responsible for some success of the film, as it had garnered success before the film's premier, thus leading people to watch the film.

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