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# Are more countries on their way to having a culture of comic book readers?

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# Are more countries on their way to having a culture of comic book readers?

This week (starting Monday 10 June 2013), CNN is broadcasting stories every day in a series called Comic Book Heroes (<http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/comic-book-heroes/>). The series will 'take a look at the writers, artists, films and characters in this global industry.' The first video in the series is called 'The Booming World of Comic Books,' and it is a rather wide-ranging look at the relationship between superhero comic books and the movies that are based on them.

Several men\*\* are interviewed for this piece. Stan Lee describes superhero stories as 'fairy tales for grown-ups. [Fairy tales] were stories about monsters and witches and giants and magicians. But superhero stories have that same flavor, but they're done for adults as well as children.'

Others talk about the integral link between comic books and movies. Sharad Devarajan (CEO of Graphic India) defines comic books this way: 'A comic book is essentially a movie with an unlimited budget [...] where a creator just with a pencil and pen can kind of create worlds unimaginable.' And Bryan Cooney (MCM Expo Group) describes a change in the reading/viewing habits regarding superheroes: 'Everything goes beyond just the comic book now because it's not just a book. It's a comic book that's tied in with a video game, that's tied in with a movie. [...] Thousands of people, they are exposed to comic books through movies as opposed to through comic books to the movie.'

The series presenter, Neil Curry, says that 'Comic book sales in North America alone were close to half a billion dollars last year. So far this year, they're up almost 20%.' In general, the report implies that because of the record-breaking success of recent comic-inspired movies and the probable success of the forthcoming 'Man of Steel,' the comic book industry itself will continue to grow rapidly and achieve record financial success.

What kinds of comic books are being sold? A quick internet search shows websites devoted to tracking comic book sales, with Comic Book Resources (<http://www.comicbookresources.com/>) and ComiChron (<http://www.comichron.com/>) being just two of them. According to John Mayo at Comic Book Resources, here are the Top 5 comic books for March 2013 as reported by Diamond:

Quant.Rank	Publisher	Title	No.	Est. Sales
1	Marvel	Guardians of the Galaxy (2013)	1	211,312

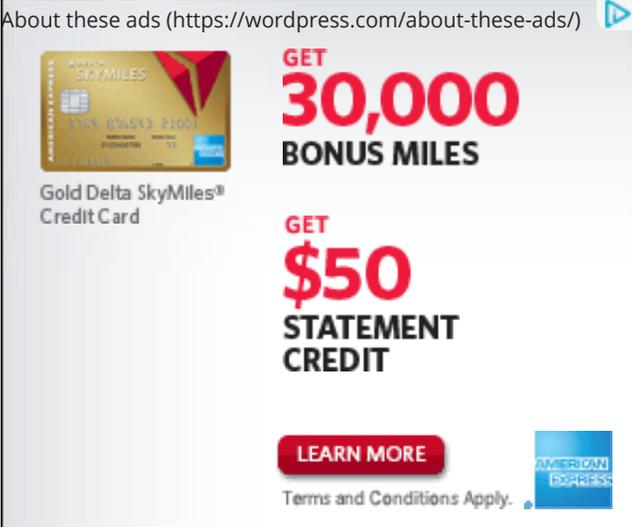
2	Marvel	Age of Ultron (2013)	1	174,952
3	DC	Batman (2011)	18	137,893
4	Marvel	Wolverine (2012)	1	117,669
5	Marvel	Age of Ultron (2013)	2	109,383

Clearly, superhero comics constitute the vast majority of monthly sales in at least some parts of the world.

One oft-quoted bit of wisdom in comics scholarship is that in countries like Belgium and France, there is a strong comic book culture, where children and adults alike spend significant time and money on comics. This observation is frequently paired with the lament that there is too little of this kind of culture in most other European countries as well as North America. But is this changing? Is there a widespread and sustainable growth of comic book culture? And will it include all comics, not just the superhero stories?

\*\*No women were interviewed on camera in Curry's video report, and no female superhero was mentioned either. That's probably a subject for a future blog post on Pencil Panel Page.

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## About Frank Bramlett

Until June 2014, I am a visiting lecturer in the English Department at Stockholm University, where I offer seminars in Sociolinguistics; Language and Gender; and Language and Comics; among

others. For Fall 2014, I will return to the English Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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