

MARVEL

**STAR
WARS**

hulu

ESPN

Table of Contents



INTRODUCTION

From the Castle to the Cloud3



BRAND CHALLENGES

Franchise Fatigue.....5

Past the Pixie Dust5

The Most Magical Platform Online5



BRAND STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Strategy 1: Lean into Disney IP.....8

Strategy 2: Disney+Hulu Merger9

Strategy 3: Invest in Original Programming 10

Strategy 4: Attract New Fandoms..... 12



CONCLUSION

Challenge Flow Chart 16

From the Castle to the Cloud : Disney+'s Strategic Turning Point

The Walt Disney Company has been a household name for decades through its physical media and cable television success. Disney has brought its magic into our homes by tapping into shared childhood memories and decades of built-up brand trust, creating a powerful and lasting experience for families and fans alike. The launch of Disney+ in 2019 laid the foundation for Disney's transition to direct-to-consumer digital content distribution.

Our team of brand consultants have used a combination of customer interviews and survey research to develop and study three brand challenges facing Disney+ and integrated strategies to solve for each of them.





CHALLENGES

Franchise Fatigue
Past the Pixie Dust
The Most Magical Platform Online

BRAND CHALLENGES

1 Franchise Fatigue: Stuck Under the Disney Umbrella

Disney+ operates within the larger Walt Disney Company, a structure that provides access to one of the most valuable entertainment portfolios in the world. However, this position within a broader corporate framework introduces constraints. Strategic decisions made by Disney+ must align with the company's overarching financial and brand priorities, which may limit the platform's ability to quickly pivot, form new partnerships, or explore experimental content directions.

In an increasingly saturated streaming landscape, where agility and timely content expansion are critical to growth, Disney+ may find itself at a disadvantage compared to more nimble competitors like Netflix and HBO Max, which are free to act independently and take bigger creative risks. Furthermore, Disney's corporate emphasis on franchise development can lead to an overreliance on familiar properties, limiting the platform's capacity to surprise audiences with fresh, unexpected offerings.

2 Past the Pixie Dust: Engaging Audiences Beyond Families

Disney+ has built a strong reputation as a trusted platform for families, anchored by franchises like Pixar and classic Disney animation. Its focus on safe and wholesome entertainment has made it a top choice for parents, but this success has also limited its broader appeal. The brand's deep association with family-friendly content has made it challenging to attract new audiences outside its core demographic.

Compared to competitors like Netflix and HBO Max, Disney+ offers fewer bold or culturally resonant originals that spark ongoing engagement among adult viewers. While it has introduced some more mature titles through Marvel and Star Wars spinoffs, these tend to

serve existing fan bases rather than bringing in fresh audiences. They often feel like extensions of familiar stories rather than new reasons to subscribe.

This leaves a significant gap in content for older viewers who are not already attached to Disney's legacy properties. In a competitive streaming market, Disney+ risks falling behind as platforms like Prime Video and Max continue to expand their offerings with genre-spanning originals that reflect a wider range of interests and life stages. Without content that appeals beyond the family space, Disney+ struggles to win over the broader adult market.

3 The Most Magical Place Online: Standing out in the Saturated Streaming Market

The streaming market is fiercely competitive, with Disney+ and Hulu falling behind Netflix and Prime Video in market share. Our team's survey results aligned

closely with US market share data.

57 respondents had access to Netflix and 52 had Prime Video, while only 47 respondents had access to Disney+. There is also a risk

BRAND CHALLENGES

that market maturity and negative economic outlook can lead to customers reducing their subscription counts. Prime Video's inclusion in the Amazon Prime bundle makes it more resilient to economic downturns, while Disney and Netflix could be more exposed. (Figure 0.1)

When comparing Disney+ to its competitors, its purchase process is more

complicated and certain features like games and music are not currently included in the app. Disney+ has more bundles and price points than any of its streaming competitors, which leaves customers unsure of which option is right for them. Maximizing the perceived value of the Disney+ subscription is the best protection from losing subscribers and winning market share from competitors.

Which additional streaming services do you have access to? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice

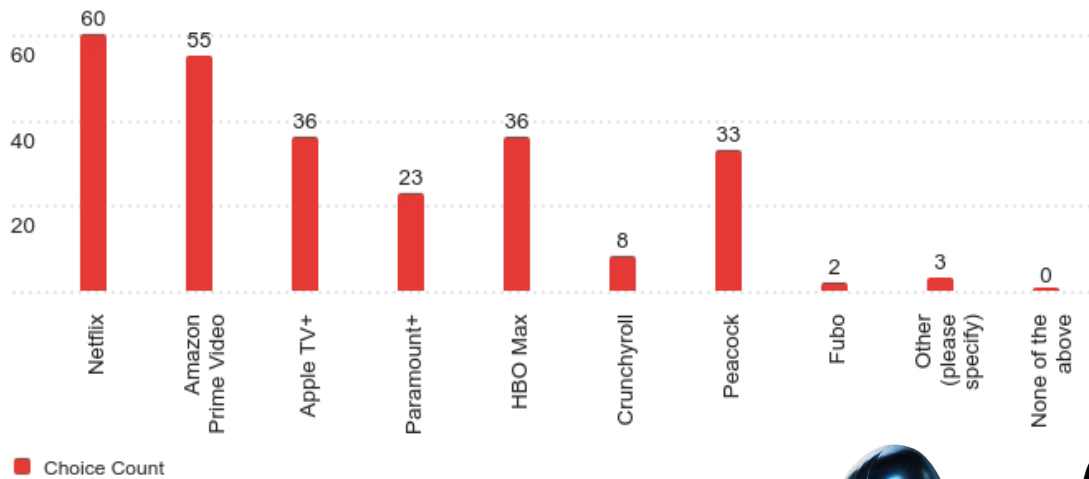


Figure 0.1





STRATEGIES + TACTICS

- Strategy 1: Lean into Disney IP
- Strategy 2: Disney+Hulu Merger
- Strategy 3: Invest in Original Programming
- Strategy 4: Attract New Fandoms

BRAND STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Strategy 1:

Lean into Disney Intellectual Property

Rather than view the Disney corporate structure as a constraint, Disney+ can position it as a strategic asset by fully embracing its most distinctive advantage, its intellectual property. Disney's library spans iconic films, characters, music, games, and television shows with multi-generational cultural resonance. By leaning into this IP, Disney+ can evolve into more than just a passive video streaming platform; it can become a dynamic, interactive home for the entire Disney experience. This strategy allows Disney+ to remain aligned with corporate priorities while fostering innovation within brand-safe boundaries. At the same time, it opens the door to strategic differentiation in a crowded marketplace. Competing platforms like Netflix and Prime Video increasingly resemble one another in their generalist content offerings. Disney+ can stand apart by creating unique, IP-driven features that no other service can replicate.

Tactic 1.1:

Disney+ Music

One way to bring these strategies to life is through the launch of Disney+ Music, a feature that leverages the company's extensive musical heritage. Music has always played a central role in Disney storytelling, from unforgettable film songs like "Hakuna Matata" in *The Lion King*, to catchy Disney Channel hits like "Everything Is Not What It Seems" (the theme song of *Wizards of Waverly Place*), to blockbuster musical numbers in franchises like



"Breaking Free" from *High School Musical*. Beyond content embedded in films and shows, Disney's music divisions, including Walt Disney Records and Disney Music Group, represent globally recognized artists such as Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, and Selena Gomez, and hold distribution rights to acts like Queen. With Disney+ Music, the platform could offer subscribers exclusive musical experiences, including concert specials, behind-the-scenes stories, and original documentaries. This tactic leverages Disney's exclusive IP that no competitor can duplicate and can promote musical content that aligns to adult demographics without young children.

Tactic 1.2:

Disney+ Games

Building on the same strategic foundations, Disney+ Games would further expand the platform into interactive, IP-based entertainment. Unlike Netflix's current gaming offerings, which are largely disconnected from its content library, Disney already has a strong foundation of branded games that hold deep nostalgic value. Titles such as *Kim Possible: A Stitch in Time*, *Tipton Trouble* from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, and interactive DVD experiences like

BRAND STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Aladdin’s Magic Carpet Ride and Lilo & Stitch: Island of Adventures are fondly remembered by many viewers. Our survey results confirm this potential, with 78% of respondents reporting a sense of nostalgia for Disney games. Disney+ Games would modernize and reintroduce these titles directly through the Disney+ platform, offering interactive content such as multiplayer family challenges, choose-your-own-adventure missions based on popular franchises, and trivia or quizzes tied to Disney+ series and films. This tactic extends the life and reach of Disney’s existing creative assets in a new and engaging format.

Strategy 2:

Disney+Hulu Merger

Tactic 2.1:

One Unified App

Our research revealed significant consumer confusion between Disney+ and Hulu, with many users unsure which content belongs to which platform. Price was a primary factor in choosing one service over the other, which we address in Tactic 2.2. Disney+ currently promotes bundle subscriptions by offering one- to two-episode previews of select Hulu shows, but this overlap contributes to a broader frustration around content discovery and platform boundaries. Over half of survey respondents expressed interest in a Disney+ and Hulu merger, and we do not anticipate a unified platform to negatively impact subscriptions. (Figure 2.1)

Consolidating the platforms into a single, personalized experience would streamline content access, reduce user frustration, and better highlight the full value of Disney’s portfolio. Profiles could prioritize content based on demographics, with children’s accounts focused on age-appropriate Disney titles and general profiles offering access to Hulu and Disney+ content. A successful merger would require a thoughtful rebrand, supported by consumer research, but the new identity does not need to be a direct combination of the two names. Instead, it can serve as an umbrella brand that signals variety and ease. In the short term, using “Disney+Hulu” in taglines and SEO will help guide users through the transition and reinforce the value of the merger.

If Disney+ and Hulu were combined into one app/platform, how appealing would that be — whether you're already subscribed or thinking about it?

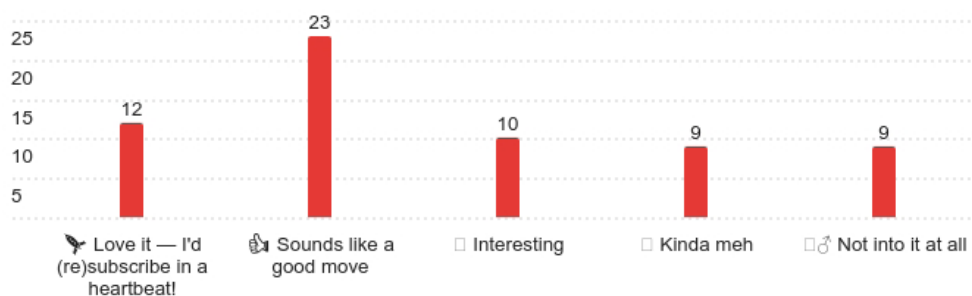


Figure 2.1

BRAND STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Tactic 2.2:

Simplify Bundles and Price Points

Depending on how you count it, Disney+ currently has between 10 and 16 different bundled pricing options. This is significantly more complicated than Prime Video with 1 pricing option and Netflix with 3 options. While Disney+ has tried to compete through diverse bundle options, merging the Hulu and Disney+ offerings into 1 app can significantly simplify pricing options for consumers and reduce friction in the sign-up process.

Our recommendation is to reduce pricing options down to 3 tiers like Netflix. This simplified pricing maintains Disney+ revenue potential while matching Netflix's simplicity. Viewers will get easier purchase experiences, more content on one app, and lose no functionality. It is a win-win for Disney and its subscribers!

Tier	Price
Basic: Disney+Hulu with Ads	\$10.99/month
Bundle: Disney+Hulu and ESPN+	\$16.99/month
Premium Bundle: Disney+Hulu (No Ads) and ESPN+	\$23.99/month

Strategy 3:

Invest in Developing New Original Programming

To succeed in reaching new audiences and staying competitive in a crowded streaming market, Disney+ must prioritize original programming that moves beyond its current franchise heavy model. While the platform has earned strong loyalty from families, it lacks the culturally relevant content that attracts adult viewers and keeps them engaged over time. Creating fresh, standalone stories in areas like drama, thrillers, or grounded comedy allows Disney+ to reshape its brand and appeal to a wider subscriber base.

Original programming also helps increase the perceived value of the Disney+ subscription. With many consumers looking to reduce their number of paid services, the platform must offer content that feels exclusive and essential. Investing in original stories not only helps update the platform's image beyond family focused entertainment, but it also creates long lasting assets that can support Disney's wider business through merchandise, licensing, and experiences.

Tactic 3.1:

Develop Shows Based on Books and Video Games

Adapting popular books and video games is a proven way to attract highly engaged audiences, and Disney+ has a major opportunity to tap into this trend. Streaming platforms like Netflix, Prime Video and HBO have seen huge success with titles like The Witcher (based on the book and game series), Fallout (based on the video game) and The Last of Us (based on the video game), both of which drew massive fan interest and critical acclaim. These adaptations not

BRAND STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

only brought in new viewers but also helped redefine the platforms as homes for bold, genre-spanning content. By exploring similar opportunities, Disney+ can break out of its franchise bubble and build original programming that resonates with niche but passionate communities. This tactic directly supports the broader strategy of expanding into new audience segments, offering content that's fresh, and built on stories with pre-existing fan loyalty.



On our survey, responders mentioned these books and video games that they'd like to see adapted to the TV - Red Rising, The Stormlight Archive, Halo, Throne of Glasses, Rangers Appreciate, Son of Neptune, The Breadwinner, Americanah, Assassin's Creed, Cherub, Among the Hidden, Mulan, Dog Man, Pilgrim's progress, Box Car Children, Faraway Tree, Animorphs.

Tactic 3.2:

Reduce Content Seasonality

Disney+ relies heavily on the holiday season and summer months to launch the bulk of its content, which reinforces its family-first image and leaves long gaps in programming the rest of the year. To attract and retain a broader audience, Disney+ should shift to a staggered release model, dropping fresh, original content every few weeks throughout the year. This approach keeps subscribers consistently engaged and reduces churn, especially among non-family viewers who expect a steady stream of new entertainment. It also plays a critical role in attracting new audiences: when a show gains buzz, curious viewers often subscribe to check it out, but if there's nothing else to watch afterward, they're less likely to stick around. A consistent flow of new titles ensures there's always something compelling to keep these newer audiences subscribed in a saturated streaming market, while also supporting the broader

Have you ever subscribed to a streaming service just to watch one specific show or movie?

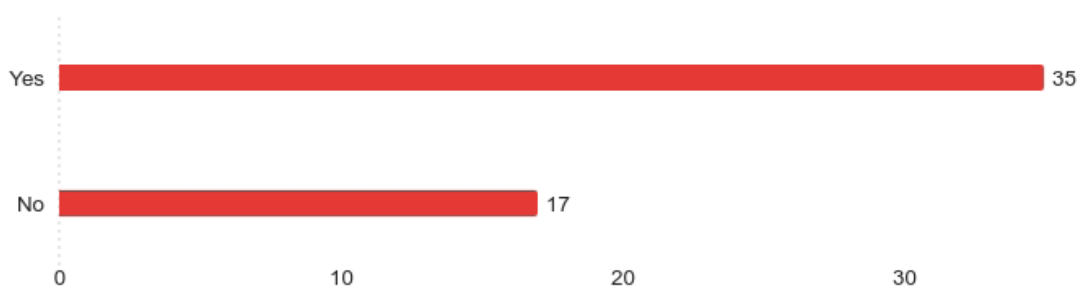


Figure 3.1

BRAND STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

strategy of expanding Disney+'s original programming slate.

In our survey, over 65% of respondents said they had subscribed to a streaming platform just to watch one show or movie. A staggered release model helps Disney+ turn that curiosity into lasting engagement by keeping content momentum going year-round. It also creates ongoing opportunities for buzz, improves retention, and smooths revenue beyond seasonal peaks—ultimately building stronger loyalty across a broader audience. (Figure 3.1)

Strategy 4:

Attracting New Fandoms

As the streaming landscape becomes increasingly commoditized, consumers are faced with an abundance of platforms offering similar formats, pricing tiers, and content strategies. In this crowded environment, differentiation is no longer just about having strong titles, it's about creating a distinctive user experience that offers added value and reflects a unique brand identity. Disney+ has the rare advantage of being tied to one of the most powerful entertainment brands in the world.

To stand out, Disney+ must go beyond traditional streaming by developing features and experiences that are deeply tied to the Disney brand and that competitors cannot easily replicate. This means offering more than just shows and movies, but building an ecosystem that blends storytelling, interactivity, and nostalgia into something uniquely Disney. Differentiation, in this context, is not about quantity of content, but about deepening engagement and making the platform feel truly irreplaceable in the eyes of consumers.

Tactic 4.1:

Disney+ Sports and diversified sports content

Aligning itself with peers, Disney+ could benefit greatly from adding more diversified sports content. In our research, 21% of subscribers did not know that Disney+ offered extended sports stories outside of live content from ESPN. 40% of viewers use ESPN+ and other apps to stream sports regularly. As an industry leader and tried and true name balancing live content between ESPN+ and Disney+ bridges the gap between owned enterprises.

In the same way Peacock was home to the Olympics and Max launched the exclusive NASCAR drive cam, Disney+ can create a pocket of content that attracts first time subscribers. Developing content via documentaries, behind the scenes content, talk shows and athlete profiles could call in folks who have a developed trust with the Walt Disney Brand as reliable narrative storytellers. Disney+ needs to set an expectation that their ownership with ESPN+ affords all subscribers more benefits not just bundlers.

Tactic 4.2:

Disney+ Music

Disney's dense, historical music catalog and partnership with many now well-known artists is another way we believe they can bring new viewers but long-time fans of Disney on to Disney+ for the first time. This content differentiates Disney+ from competitors, none of which currently offer music-integrated experiences tied directly to their streaming content. Our

BRAND STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

survey data further supports this initiative, with 61.9% of respondents expressing interest in a Disney+ Music feature. While this would require modest investment in platform updates and content curation, it presents a high-reward opportunity to drive engagement, deepen viewer connection, and make Disney+ stand out as more than just another streaming app.

Tactic 4.3:

Disney+ Games

As mentioned, inviting Disney's previous IP onto the platform in new ways could capture new audiences. Using well known, nostalgic Disney Games specifically serves as a key differentiator in a streaming market where passive content consumption is the norm. By integrating play into the platform, Disney+ can create

a hybrid entertainment experience that no other service offers, enhancing its appeal among families, nostalgic millennials, and younger audiences alike. Though the development of games and integration into the platform would require upfront investment, the potential returns in retention, engagement, and subscriber growth make this a compelling long-term opportunity.





hulu

CONCLUSION





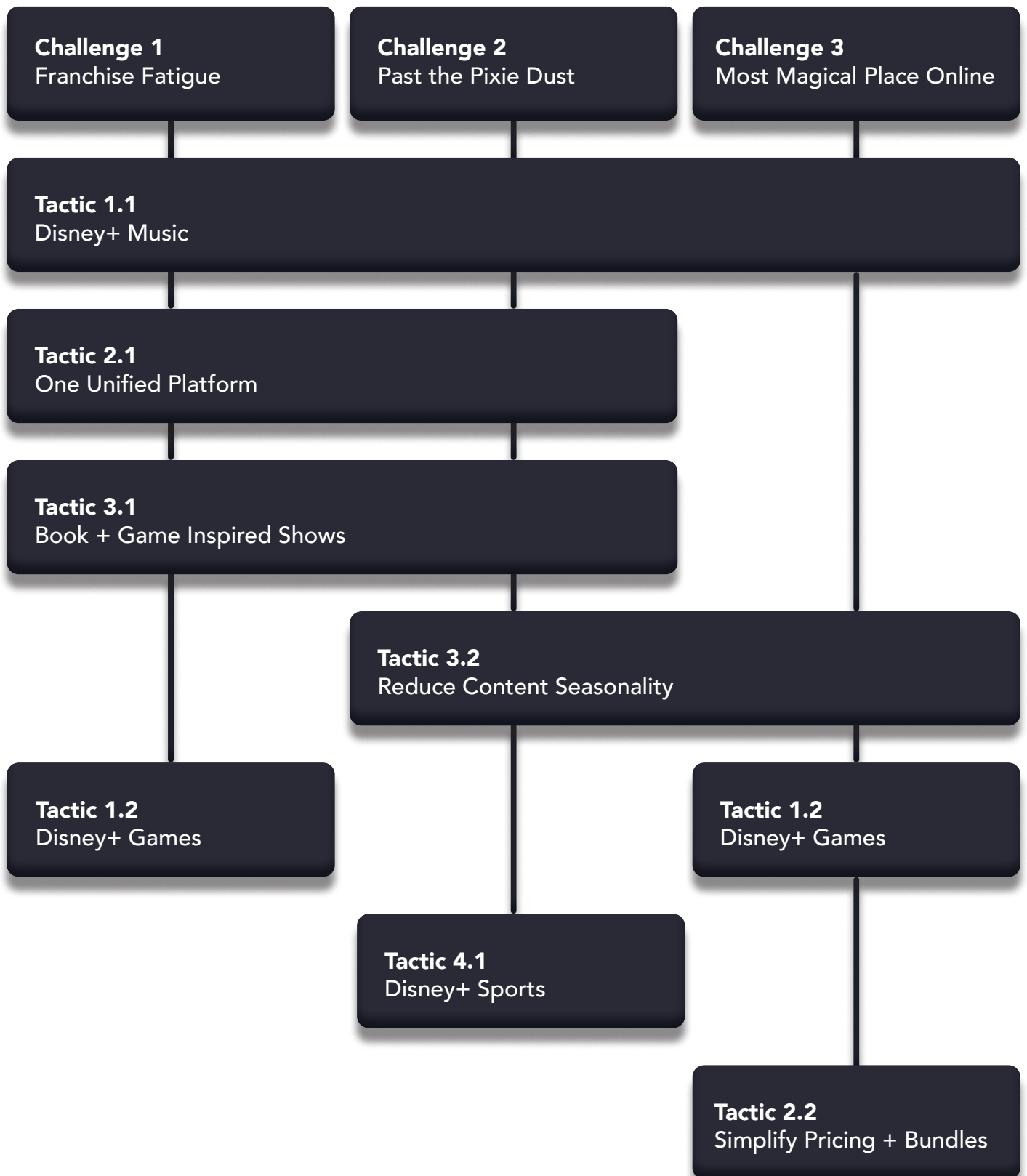
Conclusion

By directly addressing internal constraints, shifting demographic perceptions, and navigating an increasingly saturated streaming landscape, each tactic plays a distinct role in unlocking growth. These initiatives don't operate in isolation—they reinforce one another to create a more cohesive, future-ready platform experience. Together, they form an integrated roadmap to enhance relevance, differentiation, and long-term brand resilience.

This following visual highlights the deliberate alignment between Disney+'s most pressing brand challenges and the targeted tactics designed to overcome them

CONCLUSION

Challenge Flow Chart



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