

Film-induced tourism – the impact the of animation, cartoon, superhero and fantasy movies

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Received 1 November 2022
Revised 25 December 2022
26 January 2023
28 January 2023
Accepted 29 January 2023

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The author wishes to extend his thanks to four anonymous reviewers and the editor-in-chief, Professor Dimitrios Buhalis, for providing helpful remarks and suggestions on prior versions of this work. In addition, the author would also like to thank Mrs Chenxi Ma for the Chinese abstract of this paper, she is very professional and reliable.

Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to analyze the interrelationship between film-induced tourism and visits to theme parks by tourists and examine the most viewed movies worldwide (2010–2022) which are related with theme parks and their attractions.

Design/methodology/approach – The methodology used in this study is a set of qualitative and quantitative indicators for measuring the most visited theme parks worldwide and the most viewed movies that have allowed to answer the research questions.

Findings – This research provides a new contribution to tourism and entertainment industries. Results have shown that film-induced tourism can be the perfect marketing tool to attract more tourists to theme parks through movies and their real or fictional characters represented in films such as Marvel, Minions, Avatar, Harry Potter and Disney, amongst many others. These famous characters are part of theme park's rides to attract tourists to visit film theme parks. These rides allow users to travel in a fantasy experience and interact with film characters of cartoons or fictions. There is a high correlation between film-induced tourism and theme parks' attractions. Film-induced tourism provides great benefits to the society, theme parks, cinemas and tourist destinations. Indeed, movies help to increase the number of visitors to theme parks. In 2019, 215 million people visited the top 20 theme parks worldwide analyzed in this study, this figure is quite lucrative to entertainment and tourism sectors, local and regional economies where these theme parks are localized.

Originality/value – This study presents the importance of theme parks at tourist destinations because theme parks are an extension of movies, thus is, the end of the physical perfect experience at theme parks which began in a movie seat or on your TV/videogame/PC screens.

Keywords Animation tourism, Theme parks, Tourists, Visitors, Film-induced tourism, Attractions

Paper type Research paper

电影引发的旅游业：动画电影、卡通片、超级英雄和幻想的影响

目的：本文的主要目的是分析电影引起的旅游和游客参观主题公园之间的相互关系，并研究与主题公园及其景点有关的全球最受欢迎的电影（2010-2022年）。

设计/方法/途径：本研究使用的方法是一套定性和定量的指标来衡量全球访问量最大的主题公园和观看次数最多的电影，使我们能够回答本研究中提出的问题。

结果：这项研究为旅游和娱乐业提供了新的贡献，结果表明，电影引起的旅游可以成为完美的营销工具，通过电影及其影片吸引更多的游客到主题公园。通过电影和他们在电影中所代表的真实或虚构的人物，如漫威、小人、阿凡达、哈利波特、迪斯尼等，主题公园。这些著名人物是主题公园景点的一部分，以吸引游客参观与电影有关的景点。这些景点让游客有一个幻想的体验，并与卡通人物互动。电影引起的旅游和主题公园景点之间存在着高度的相关性。我们必须认识到，电影引发的旅游为社会、主题公园、电影院和旅游目的地提供了巨大的利益。事实上，电影有助于增加主题公园的游客数量。2019年，有2.15亿人参观了本研究中分析的世界前20大主题公园，这个数字对于娱乐和旅游部门、这些主题公园所在的地方和区域经济来说是相当有利可图的。

原创性/价值：本研究揭示了主题公园在旅游目的地的重要性，因为这些旅游景点是电影的延伸，也就是说，主题公园及其基于电影和动画的景点是游客在主题公园生活体验的最后一部分，而这种体验是从电影院的座位上、电视、视频游戏或电脑屏幕前开始的。

关键词 电影旅游；主题公园；游客；参观者；电影胶片引起的旅游；主题和旅游景点
文章类型 研究型论文

Turismo inducido por el cine: el impacto de las películas de animación, dibujos animados, superhéroes y fantasía

Objetivo: El principal desafío de este artículo es analizar la interrelación entre el turismo inducido por las películas y las visitas a los parques temáticos por parte de los visitantes, y examinar las películas más vistas en todo el mundo (2010-2022) relacionadas con los parques temáticos y sus atracciones.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque: La metodología utilizada en este estudio es un conjunto de indicadores cualitativos y cuantitativos para medir los parques temáticos más visitados a nivel mundial y las películas más vistas que nos han permitido responder a las preguntas planteadas en esta investigación.

Resultados: Esta investigación proporciona una nueva contribución a las industrias del turismo y el entretenimiento. Los resultados han demostrado que el turismo inducido por el cine puede ser la herramienta de marketing perfecta para atraer más visitantes a los parques temáticos a través de películas y sus personajes reales o ficticios representados en películas como Marvel, Minions, Avatar, Harry Potter, Disney, entre muchos otros. Estos personajes famosos son parte de las atracciones de los parques temáticos para atraer a los visitantes a visitar las atracciones relacionadas con las películas. Estas atracciones permiten a los visitantes tener una experiencia de fantasía e interactuar con personajes de películas de dibujos animados o ficción. Existe una alta correlación entre el turismo inducido por el cine y las atracciones de los parques temáticos. Debemos reconocer que el turismo inducido por el cine ofrece grandes beneficios a la sociedad, parques temáticos, cines y destinos turísticos. De hecho, las películas ayudan a aumentar el número de visitantes a los parques temáticos. En 2019, 215 millones de personas visitaron los 20 parques temáticos más importantes del mundo analizados en este estudio, esta cifra es bastante lucrativa para los sectores de entretenimiento y turismo, y la economía local y regional donde se encuentran estos parques temáticos.

Originalidad/valor: Este estudio revela la importancia de los parques temáticos en los destinos turísticos, dado que estas atracciones turísticas son una extensión de las películas, es decir, los parques temáticos y sus atracciones basadas en películas y animaciones son la parte final de una experiencia vivida por los visitantes en dichos parques y que comenzó en un asiento de cine, frente a su TV, un videojuego, o pantalla de ordenador.

Palabras clave Turismo de cine, parques temáticos, visitantes, turistas, turismo inducido por películas de cines, atracciones temáticas y turísticas

Tipo de papel Trabajo de investigación

1. Introduction

Every person has within his/her mind his/her own character or superhero such as Pinocchio, Cinderella, Mickey Mouse, Harry Potter or even Peppa Pig. Most tourists have a common denominator, the desire to travel where they have always dreamt under an adventurous spirit or calmed, a time of leisure and enjoyment, where they can rest and disconnect from daily routine, that is, a dream come true. For this purpose, theme parks were created and encouraged by animation, cartoon, superhero and fantasy movies. [Stewart \(2022\)](#) indicates that animation provides all recreational possibilities for tourists to enjoy a cheerful, active and interesting vacation. Movies induce tourists to travel to the locations where these were filmed ([Kolasińska, 2020](#)). The Themed Entertainment Association (TEA/AECOM) reported that in 2021 theme parks increased attendance globally by an impressive 72% compared to the previous years ([TEA/AECOM, 2021](#)). Some Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) promote their tourist attractions to attract more tourists, the famous Dracula's Castle in Transylvania, Romania, is a living example of this. Film tourism is a marketing tool for promoting and selling tourist destinations, and an important differentiating factor in the marketing strategies of cities.

Film-induced tourism is defined by [Hudson and Ritchie \(2006\)](#) as a tourist visit to a destination or attraction due to the destination being featured on television, video, digital video disc or the cinema screen ([Marafa et al., 2022](#)). The concept of movie-induced tourism has received popular support ([Mori, 2022](#); [Zhou et al., 2023](#)), the influence of movies in countries ([Liu et al., 2020](#)), how influences movie-induced tourism between different cultures to attract more tourists and visitors ([Michael et al., 2020](#)), the influence of cartoon movies on children's gender ([Gökçearslan, 2010](#)), how film-induced tourism can improve tourist's satisfaction and experience, because movies are one of the most important factors that motivate people to travel to a destination ([Oshriyeh and Capriello, 2022](#)), or even as a marketing tool and brand image for tourist destinations ([Nakayama,](#)

2022). Nostalgia is also effective in promoting theme parks associated with animations and animated characters to increase the number of visitors (Oh and Kim, 2020).

Kim *et al.* (2019) found that film tourists are motivated to experience historical reality of movies at destinations and tourist attractions where these were filmed. The subject of film-induced tourism and theme parks is underresearched, authors like Fu *et al.* (2022) and Florian (2017) investigated this topic, but not in-depth, especially in the interrelationship between film-induced tourism and theme parks by tourists. A study carried out by Milman (2001) solicited opinions from 122 general managers representing North American theme parks and attractions regarding the future of the industry, and the most managers answered that visitors seek interactive adventure, fantasy, mystery, science fiction and futuristic themes of movies. Animation is a prime way to promote tourism destination marketing (Chen *et al.*, 2021), but how movies, animations and cartoons content affect theme park's attractions has not been fully discussed.

To fill this gap, the main challenge of this paper is to analyze interrelationship between film-induced tourism and visits to theme parks by tourists, and to examine the most viewed movies worldwide (2010–2021) which are related with theme parks and their attractions. In other words, how movies and cartoons influence the number of tourists at theme parks. Moreover, to achieve this objective, this research examines the most viewed movies worldwide, due to the narrative of movies and their characters are related to the main attractions of theme parks and number of visitors. Shvartman (2022) claims that Disney's movies continue breaking the box office, and its animated drawing people worldwide to its theme parks' rides.

2. Literature review

2.1 Movies a marketing tool of cities and theme parks

Film-induced tourism can revitalize the economies of cities, their tourist attractions and increase tourism demand (Zhang *et al.*, 2022), and popular movies stimulate tourism demand to filmed destinations and theme parks (Kumar, 2022). In this study, film-induced tourism is conceptualized as those tourists or visitors who visiting a tourist attraction, theme park, specific location or city influenced/induced/attracted by a movie, series, documental, cartoon on digital platforms, cinema, TV or videogames. Indeed, the characters from videogames are a distinguishing element of theme parks like Mario Bros, Transformers or Marvel characters.

Film-induced tourism profits from attracting tourists inspired by movies, through merchandising of tourist packages. Brown (2007) defines the interrelation between movies and attractions of theme parks as “the cinema of attractions.” Movies means of conveying stories and influencing humans and one of the most important factors that motivate people to travel to cities and their tourist attractions (Oshriyeh and Capriello, 2022). Most develop characters like Mickey Mouse, Snow Beauty and Beast and Spiderman are part of theme park's rides to attract visitors to visit film theme parks. These rides allow visitors to travel in a fantasy experience and interact with film characters of cartoons or fictions (Abd Rahman *et al.*, 2019).

With an increasing number of movies and series on digital platforms (Netflix, Disney+, HBO, Amazon Prime or Tencent), many tourists are attracted to visit theme parks worldwide. Sometimes, the stories, narrative and imaginary phenomenon of movies are designed to connect the film with a specific theme park, location or city. Marafa *et al.* (2022) found that Disneyland and Universal Studios Hollywood lead the market both in film production and film-induced tourism through theme park development. Tourist destinations and theme parks should extend their efforts to discover the needs and follow necessary promotional strategies to raise interest among the potential tourists (Florida-Benítez, 2022a; Buhalis *et al.*, 2019). An important strategy in the promotion of on-screen tourism destinations is to

create an iconic concept ([Florida-Benitez, 2022b](#)), or even an iconic image or character to identify a theme park, city or country such as French characters Asterix, or Tintin and his dog Snowy; Captain America and Mickey Mouse in USA; Harry Potter, and Peppa Pig in UK; Dracula vampire in Rumania; or Legoland park and its characters in Denmark. Although sometimes the iconic image of characters of movies to attract tourists at cities can encapsulate the brand image of a tourist destination as in the case of Rumania with Dracula character.

Most visited theme parks worldwide have thematic and narrative characteristics based on characters of movies and cartoons which provide appeal to visitors ([Baker, 2023](#)). Disneyland was built on 30 years of film heritage, and their parks are an extension of the movies. Star Wars is the best example of that. At Disney's new theme park, they have an audience that knows everything about Star Wars. In prototyping rides, products or games, one is testing expectations ([Rüger, 2021](#)).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

This research is focused on the most important theme parks worldwide, and we also examined the interrelationship between the top 20 movies related to these theme parks and their attractions to link movies with specific tourist attractions of theme parks, particularly Disney and Universal companies which promote their tourist attractions in their official websites and marketing campaigns. [Oh and Ma \(2018\)](#) found that the animation characters took key roles that led the narrative in theme park attractions to increase the numbers of visitors. To address the research objectives, a qualitative study was performed ([Kirova and Thanh, 2019](#)) to stage the interrelationship between film-induced tourism and visits to theme parks by tourists. Moreover, we need to identify the most popular movies, cartoons and their characters which are linked to the rides of theme parks. Most theme parks have the largest number of rides related to movies. These factors entail the essential requirements that need to be considered for a theme park ride to be a tourist magnet. [Bu et al. \(2022\)](#) revealed that movies characters (e.g. Mickey Mouse, Shrek, Hello Kitty, among many others) are necessary elements of theme park designs to meet visitors' needs. Immersive rides based on storytelling of movies' characters help to improve visitor's experience and share positive content on social media ([Langhof and Guldenberg, 2019](#)).

This study used data and information (qualitative data) from The Numbers Nash Information Services LLC., which is the premier provider of movie industry data and research services. Data shows the top 20 movies at the Worldwide Box Office from 2010 to 2022 (see [Table 1](#)). Moreover, [Table A1](#) (Appendix) shows all movies related to theme parks and their attractions according to the top 100 of the most viewed movies worldwide in the period under study. These two tables present all films and cartoons released (2010–2022) which are represented in attractions, characters, live musical performances and main street music at theme parks. We selected this timeline due to the global economy began to recover in 2010 from financial crisis of 2008, and movie and entertainment industries had an exponential growth until 2019. Movie theaters and theme parks are not essential products and services in times of crisis, they depend on people's spending capacity, and a growing economy that improve the lives of citizens.

Regarding theme parks and number of visitors data, these were collected from Themed Entertainment Association (TEA/AECOM). Visitor arrivals is the most used metric to identify factors that play a role in consumers' selection of theme parks, visitors' emotions and which attractions are most visited ([Park et al., 2020](#); [Zhang et al., 2022](#)), or develop marketing strategies to attract and retain future customers ([Luo et al., 2020](#)), but this indicator remains challenging to acquire at the tourist attraction level, as theme parks do not disclose their data ([Zhang et al., 2022](#)). For this reason, this research also uses quantitative data.

Table 1 Top 20 movies at the worldwide box office (2010–2022)

Rank	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1	Toy Story 3	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part II	The Avengers	Frozen	Transformer: Age of Extinction	Star Wars Ep. VII: The Force Awakens	Captain America: Civil War	Star Wars Ep. VIII: The Last Jedi	Avengers: Infinity War	Avengers: Endgame	Kinetsu no Yaiba: Mugen Ressha-Hen	Spider-Man: No way Home	Top Gun: Maverick
2	Alice in Wonderland	Transformers: Dark of the Moon	Skyfall	Iron Man 3	The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies	Jurassic World	Rogue One: A star Wars Story	Beauty and the Beast	Black Panther	The Lion King	Ba bai	Chang jin hu	Jurassic World: Dominion
3	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I	Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides	The Dark Knight Rises	Despicable Me 2	Guardians of the Galaxy	Furious 7	Finding Dory	The Fate of the Furious	Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom	Frozen II	Wo He Wo De Jia Xiang	Ni Hao, Li Huan Ying	Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness
4	Shrek Forever After	Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol	The Hobbit: Unexpected Journey	The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug	The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1	Avengers: Age of Ultron	Zootopia	Despicable Me 3	Incredibles 2	Spider-Man: Far From Home	Bad Boys for Life	No Time to Die	Minions: The Rise of Gru
5	Inception	The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Part I	Ice Age: Continental Drift	The Hunger Games: Catching Fire	Maleficent	Minions	The Jungle Book	Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle	Aquaman	Captain Marvel	Tenet	F9: The Fast Saga	The Batman
6	The Twilight Saga: Eclipse	Kung Fu Panda 2	The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Part 2	Fast and Furious 6	X-Men: Days of Future Past	Spectre	The Secret Life of Pets	Spider-Man: Homecoming	Bohemian Rhapsody	Toy Story 4	Sonic the Hedgehog	Tang Ren Jie Tan An 3	Thor: Love and Thunder
7	Iron Man 2	Fast Five	The Amazing Spider-Man	Monsters University	Captain America: The Winter Soldier	Inside Out	Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice	Guardian of the Galaxy Vol 2	Venom	Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker	Dolittle	Venom: Let There be Carnage	Chang Jin Hu Zhi Shui Men Qiao
8	Tangled	The Hangover Part II	Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted	Gravity	Planet of the Apes	Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation	Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them	Thor: Ragnarok	Mission: Impossible – Fallout	Joker	Jiang Ziya	Godzilla vs Kong	Du Xing Yue Qiu
9	Despicable Me	The Smurfs	The Hunger Games	Man of Steel	The Amazing Spider-Man 2	The Martian	Deadpool	Zhan Lang 2	Deadpool 2	Aladdin	Song Ni Yi Duo Xiao Hong Hua	Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings	Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore
10	How to Train your Dragon	Cars 2	Men in Black 3	Thor: The Dark World	Interstellar	The hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2	Suicide Squad	Wonder Woman	Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald	Jumanji: The Next Level	The Croods: A new Age	Sing 2	Sonic the Hedgehog 2
11	Clash of the Titans	Puss in Boots	Life of Pi	The Croods	Big Hero 6	Fifty Shades of Grey	Doctor Strange	Coco	Ant-Man and the Wasp	Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw	Chai Dan Zhuan Jia Er	Eternals	Uncharted
12	The King's Speech	Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows	Ted	World War Z	How to Train Your Dragon 2	Cinderella	Moana	Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men	Ready Player One	Ne Zha Zhi Mo Tong Jiang Shi	Birds of Prey	Dune	Ji Su Shi Ke
13	The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader	Brave	Oz the Great and Powerful	Brave	American Sniper	The Revenant	Sing	It	Tang Ren Jie Tan An 2	Liu Lang Di Qiu	Jin gang chuan	Black Widow	Elvis

(continued)

Table 1

Rank	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
14	Tron: Legacy	Rise of the Planet of the Apes	Wreck-It Ralph	Star Trek Into Darkness	Godzilla	Ant-Man	X-Men: Apocalypse	Justice League	Hong Hai Xing Dong	How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World	Wonder Woman 1984	Free Guy	Rénshēng dàshì
15	The Karated Kid	Thor	Les Intouchables	The Wolverine	Rio 2	Hotel Transylvania 2	Mel Ren Yu	Logan	Ralph Breaks The Internet	Maleficent: Mistress of Evil	The Invisible Man	A Quiet Place: Part II	The Bad Guys
16	Prince of Persia: Sands of Time	The adventures of Tintin	Django Unchained	Pacific Rim	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Kung Fu Panda 3	Kung Fu Panda 3	Transformer: The Last Knight	Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation	It: Chapter Two	Onward	Encanto	Bullet Train
17	Black Swan	Captain America: The First Avenger	Les Misérables	The Wolf of Wall Street	The Lego Movie	Terminator: Genisys	Warcraft	Kong: Skull Island	The Meg	Wo he wo de zu guo	When Nuan De Bao Bao	Cruella	Lightyear
18	Robin Hood	X-Men: First Class	Prometheus	G.I. Joe: Retaliation	Lucy	Kingsman: The Secret Service	La La Land	The Boss Baby	Dr. Seuss' The Grinch	The Secret Life of Pets 2	Zhong Guo Nu Pai	Wo He Wo De Fu Be	Qi Ji Nian Dai
19	Megamind	Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked	Snow White and the Huntsman	The Hangover 3	Gone Girl	Home	Jason Bourne	Dunkirk	Bumblebee	Zhoungguo jizhang	Soul	Nou lo	DC League of Super Pets
20	The last Airbender	Bridesmaids	Hotel Transylvania	The Great Gat Gatsby	Edge of Tomorrow	Mad Max: Fury Road	Ice Age: Collision Course	War for the Planet of the Apes	Wo Bi Shi Yao Shen	Pokémon: Detective Pikachu	The Call of the Wild	Jungle Cruise	The Lost City

Note: *Bold* words are all films and cartoons which are represented in attractions, characters, live musical performances and main street music at theme parks

Source: Own elaboration from [The Numbers \(2022\)](#)

Secondary data shows us the most important theme parks worldwide by number of visitors from 2010 to 2021 period (see [Figure 2](#)), that is, the top 20 theme parks and their locations (see [Figure 1](#)), and other theme parks which are related to movies, animation, and cartoons like Legoland, Peppa Pig, Harry Potter or even Asterix. [Mori \(2022\)](#) claims that many fans have visited locations that have appeared in anime as film-induced tourists.

4. Results of research

4.1 The movie industry and its main films in the past 13 years

Since the beginning of 2000s, several new characters and themes have emerged within movie industry, and the specter of film tourism research activity. Following data of [Table 1](#) displays the top 20 movies at the Worldwide Box Office in 13 years (460 movies), and we selected representative movies that are staged and promoted in attractions, characters, live musical performances and main street music at theme parks, and these were 163 movies, that is, these represents 35.4% of total over the period considered. Although, if we add movies from [Table A1](#) (67 movies), the total movies selected are 230 movies. Disney, Universal, Warner Bros and Marvel movies have been the most presentative in theme parks in the past 13 years, and these have traditionally dominated cinemas and theme parks, thanks to these famous characters of animation. In 2019, 24 movies related to theme parks were screened in cinemas around the world, and 27 movies more in 2016 (see [Table 1](#) and [Table A1](#)), and the top 20 theme parks worldwide reached a new milestone with 215 million visitors in 2019, and 205 million visitors in 2016. Results shows that the theme park industry was booming until the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. However, Disney and Universal's movies have a high representation in the Worldwide Box Office, and this favors the interest of knowing the new characters of movies by viewers in theme parks and their attractions.

These data demonstrate that movies can improve the number of visitors at theme parks through animation, cartoon, superhero and fantasy films as an incentive to visit theme parks. A general overview of [Table 1](#) shows film-induced selection criteria and the importance of these in movies, theme parks and tourism industries. Movies that have dominated the first 20 places in cinemas' worldwide box office ranking are represented in

Figure 1 Localization of the top 20 theme parks worldwide and other theme parks

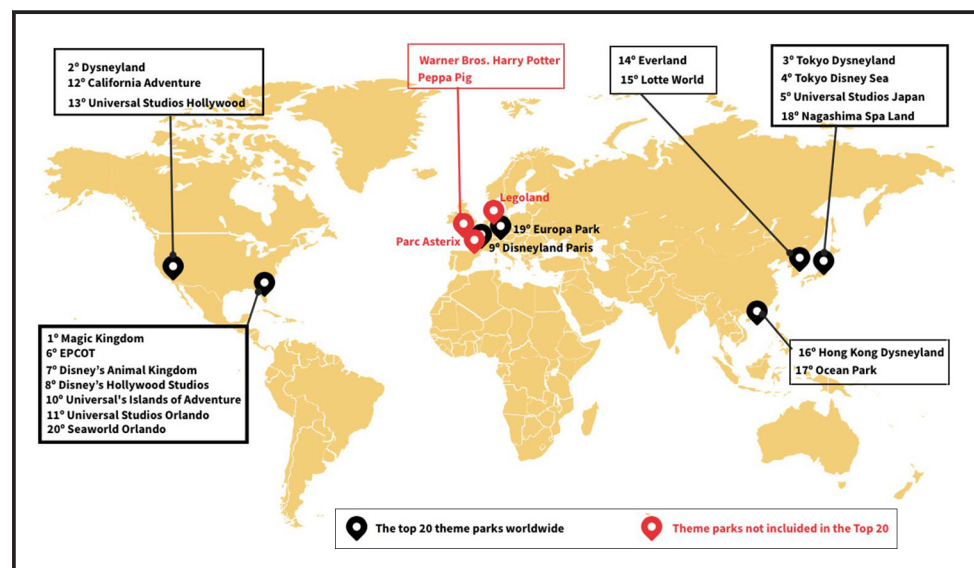


Table 1. Movies selected in this research have a dual purpose for Disney, Universal and Warner Bros, among many others. First, companies want to obtain the greatest benefit from cinemas, and second, promote these movies and their characters worldwide through marketing campaigns to attract a maximum influx of tourists to theme parks.

Movies and cartoons like The Lego Batman, The Lego Ninjago, Asterix or Peppa Pig television series are good examples of best practices in educational and creativity in theme parks, mainly focused on children and teenagers. Asterix, Legoland and Peppa Pig theme parks are known around the world. Likewise, we have also seen that there is a lack of information, marketing strategies and promotion of theme park's rides through digital channels and social media by some theme park operators such as Europa Park, Ocean Park, Everland, Lotte World, Nagashima Spa Land, Parc Asterix, Peppa Pig and Legoland, among many others in comparison with Disney and Universal theme parks, the latter are pioneers on marketing, promotion and communication campaigns of their theme park's attractions and movies through digital media. Disney and Universal Studios operators are examples to follow in the theme park and entertainments sectors. For this reason, we urge the rest of theme park operators to promote new attractions related to movies as an added value through digital channels and social media to better visualize their leisure and entertainment activities and increase the number of visitors.

Nonetheless, **Table 1** displays how in 2020 during the pandemic crisis, Disney released only two movies, *Soul* and *Mulan* related to theme parks, and Universal Studios did not present films which were linked to its attractions. Given this scenario, it is no coincidence that the problem of cinemas and theme parks were closed, both have not been excepting from global pandemic, and the effects of pandemic crisis caused a drastic slowdown in visitors and viewers worldwide, in fact, viewers were forced to stay home for their video entertainment and this situation favored the emergence of new streaming video services from such prominent studios as Disney+, Universal and Warner Bros joining and competing with Netflix, Hulu and Amazon platforms. Although in 2022, the film industry is picking up thanks to films like *Top Gun: Maverick* and *Jurassic World Dominion*, *Elvis* and *Minions: The Rise of Gru*, but there is a very long way to go until the sector recovers to prepandemic levels of custom (see **Table 1**). Movies are also considered as a marketing tool, and a new window to promote the new attractions in theme parks, the best examples of success are *Minions*, *Marvel* characters, *Star Wars*, *Toy Story* and *The Beauty and the Beast* films.

4.2 Theme parks in a globalized context of economic crisis

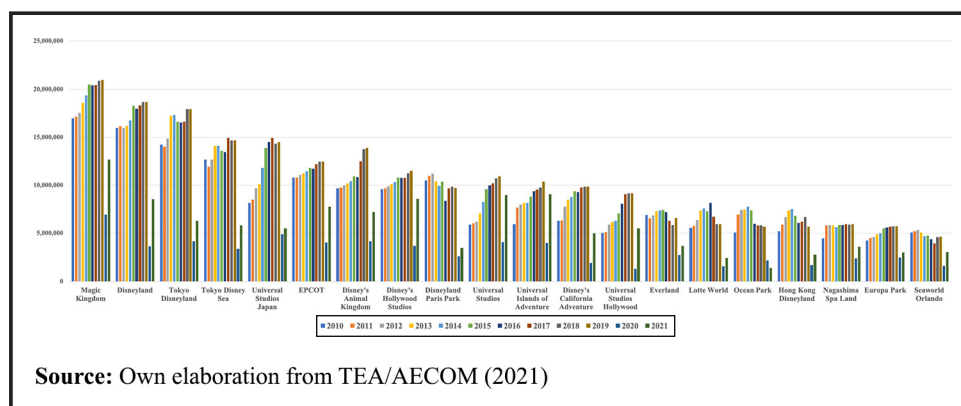
Visits to themed attractions are highly related to film theme viewed by visitors. In addition, the world's most popular visitor attractions and theme parks are directly related to film (TEA/AECOM, 2021). Based on extant data of research, **Table 2** provides an overview of the most important theme parks around the world, being Magic Kingdom in Florida/USA as the most visited theme parks with 212 million visitors in the world from 2012 to 2021, followed by Disneyland in California with 185 million visitors and third, Tokyo Disneyland with 173 million visitors. Results show us that the Disney World Company is the best company worldwide in theme parks, thus is, out of the top 20 theme parks, 10 belong to Disney company. The Universal Studios company ranks second with four theme parks, and the remaining of companies have one park in this study.

In 2019, over 215 million people visited these 20 parks. It is worth noting that this figure is higher than the number of international tourists who visited France, Spain and Thailand combined in 2019 (UNTWO, 2020). **Figure 2** empathizes the positive progress of the numbers of visitors at top 20 parks from 2010 to 2019. Based on these indicators, theme parks are alive and well, and they are continuing growing around the world. But theme parks have not been excepting from COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 the effects of pandemic crisis have caused a drastic slowdown by –69% on average in the number of visitors in the top 20 parks. Indeed, these data were especially devastating in California's theme parks

Table 2 Top 20 theme parks worldwide by numbers of visitors (2010–2021)

Rank	Theme park	Location	Total visitors (2010–21)	Total percentage (2010–2021)
1	Magic Kingdom	Walt Disney World (Lake Buena Vista, Florida state, USA)	212,361,000	9.89
2	Disneyland	Anaheim, California state, USA	185,154,000	8.63
3	Tokyo Disneyland	Tokyo, Japan	173,625,000	8.09
4	Tokyo Disney Sea	Tokyo, Japan	145,929,000	6.80
5	Universal Studios Japan	Osaka, Japan	130,796,000	6.09
6	EPCOT	Walt Disney World (Lake Buena Vista, Florida state, USA)	127,790,000	5.95
7	Disney's Animal Kingdom	Walt Disney World (Lake Buena Vista, Florida state, USA)	123,331,000	5.75
8	Disney's Hollywood Studios	Walt Disney World (Lake Buena Vista, Florida state, USA)	117,017,000	5.45
9	Disneyland Paris Park	Mame-La-Valle, Paris, France	107,188,000	4.99
10	Universal Islands of Adventure	Orlando, Florida state, USA	98,834,000	4.60
11	Universal Studios	Orlando, Florida state, USA	97,983,000	4.56
12	Disney's California Adventure	Anaheim, California state, USA	92,727,999	4.32
13	Universal Studios Hollywood	Universal City, California state, USA	77,862,000	3.63
14	Everland	Gyeonggi-Do, South Korea	74,850,000	3.49
15	Lotte World	Seoul, South Korea	70,827,000	3.30
16	Hong Kong Disneyland	Hong Kong SAR	69,041,000	3.22
17	Ocean Park	Hong Kong SAR	68,695,000	3.20
18	Nagashima Spa Land	Kuwana, Japan	63,125,000	2.94
19	Europa Park	Rust, Germany	57,020,000	2.66
20	Seaworld Orlando	Orlando, Florida state, USA	52,457,000	2.44
	Total visitors		2,146,612,999	100.00

Source: Own elaboration from [TEA/AECOM \(2021\)](#)

Figure 2 Most visited theme parks worldwide from 2010 to 2021

with –80% on average in the number of visitors, this tourist destination is highly dependent on tourism activities. Nevertheless, the pandemic crisis must be an opportunity by theme park operators, to introduce new products and services, tackle new challenges and goals with different responses, design and promote innovative marketing strategies and, finally, and very importantly, to unify movies and theme parks' promotion campaigns through digital channels, TV and digital newspapers as a new entertainment package.

In 2021, the number of visitors at theme parks increased by 84% on average with previous year at the top 20 themes. Universal Studios Hollywood (California, USA) experienced the largest growth in number of visitors by percentage terms (324%), followed by Disney's California Adventure with a 159%, Disney's Hollywood Studios (Orlando, USA) by 133.7%,

Disneyland (California, USA) with a 133.3%, and in fifth place Universal Islands of Adventure in Orlando with a 119%. These results are quite surprising, because Florida theme parks reopened in July 2020, while all theme parks in California remain shuttered (Whitten, 2020), it is because of each Disney and Universal Studios parks are dependent on local travel restrictions. Obviously, Disney and Universal Studios companies show that they are the great drivers of demand for theme parks and movies, and that these sectors (movies and theme parks) have an incredible capacity to recover and resilience to face pandemic crisis or times of economic uncertainty. Disney and Universal Studios operability and management are copied by most theme parks worldwide with the aim of attracting more visitors to parks. South Korea has its own theme park Everland, and it is ranked as the 14th theme park in the world having 75 million visitors (see Table 2), and is known for using their own characters and service strategies.

Other relevant information about Disney and Universal Studios theme parks in Japan is also displayed in Table 2 and Figure 2. Tokyo Disneyland, Tokyo Disney Sea and Universal Studios Japan parks are close to reaching in number of visitors to American theme parks. Possibly, Japan theme parks shall exceed the number of visitors to American parks in the forthcoming years, because of its location and proximity to the Asian continent. Indeed, Manga characters are becoming more relevant and popular in theme parks and movies like *Totoro*, *Dragon Ball* or *Doraemon*; these characters are very popular and demanded in movies and theme parks worldwide. For instance, at Universal Studios Japan, the Japanification of attractions (e.g. Tafari, Hello Kitty, Dragon Ball) seems to be the key to arresting the decline in visitors' numbers (Beeton and Seaton, 2018).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The findings of this study revealed new insights and a close marketing and business relationship between the most viewed movies worldwide and theme parks' attractions. Films have become an essential tool to create and develop new fictional characters and scenarios by the big movie companies under the watchful gaze of an enthusiastic public and fans that require new and best experiences of cinema and TV screens. Moviegoers/spectators/viewers/tourists demand a real and physical experience of transition from movies to theme parks or traveling to the locations where films were filmed. A more immersive experience based on movies' knowledge, history and scenarios that viewers watched on cinema or TV screens. If there is one thing movies and entertainment industries can boast is to create a world of fiction where being able to transport people to a happy and fantasy world. Although we must acknowledge that books were the big drivers of this marvelous initiative.

Our study's first question (RQ1) was to analyze whether film-induced tourism can improve the number of visitors at theme parks. The foremost result of research is that film-induced tourism can be the perfect marketing tool to attract more visitors to theme parks through movies and their real or fictional characters represented in films. Moreover, this study confirmed these findings while at the same time revealing that animation, cartoon, superhero and fantasy movies are an incentive for children and families to visit theme parks through real or fictional characters represented on cinema and TV screens, as we can raise in RQ2. This correlation between film-induced tourism and theme parks and their attractions which are represented in Figures 3 and 4, and we can observe as Disney company designs and develops its movies, characters and imaginary scenarios with the aim of attracting more visitors to theme parks through film shown at cinemas. Disney parks are the ones that have the most attractions according to their showed movies. Indeed, Figure 2 showed us that the number of visitors at theme parks has not ceased to grow from 2010 to 2019, excluding 2020 because of the pandemic crisis. In this study, we defend that theme parks are an extension of movies, thus is, the end of the physical perfect experience at theme parks which began in a movie seat or on your TV/videogame/PC screens.

companies. Consequently, the success of theme parks also depends on accommodation facilities like customized and thematized hotels and resorts, restaurants, shops, merchandising products, public and private transport, supporting product and services, safety and hygiene measures, among many others. Disney and Universal Studios parks have the largest number of rides related to movies analyzed in this research; these two theme park operators have successfully developed a differentiated adult and children's literature and narrative focused on movies and theme park's rides to attract a variety of customer segments like children and teenagers, families, students and professors, film lovers and geeks, among others.

These business and marketing strategies by Disney and Universal Studios operators are reflected in theme parks and movies every year, but not in the case of the rest of theme park operators, where they are only focused on increasing the number of visits, and without developing future scenarios, which allow them to prepare relevant business strategies to promote theme park' rides. Figures 3 and 4 present the most important Disney and Universal' rides which are linked to movies analyzed in Table 1 and Table A1; these famous rides are known worldwide, and one of the main purposes of theme park operators is to encourage audience's interests and expectation of movies showed on cinemas, TV, streaming platforms, series and videogames to increase the number of visitors. This study displays the most important Disney and Universal's attractions because these are the most representative attractions in the context of movies analyzed in this research. The rest of theme parks show a limited information and promotion related to rides and attractions, and movies in their official websites and social media.

Our research's third question (*RQ3*) was to explore whether animation, cartoon, superhero and fantasy movies are related to the main attractions of theme parks. This study reveals that the greatest potential of theme parks is that their attractions are associated with the most famous characters of movies. Like with other forms of storytelling like books, TV series, cartoons, documental and videogames, theme park narratives are closely tied to emotion, the idealized image of characters and idyllic environment of attractions.

In such times of economic uncertainty and wars like Russia and Ukraine, we would like to highlight that movies, theme parks, museums, sports and books help people to disconnect from the daily routine and troubles that our modern life causes. This is the perfect time to recognize the educational value of books, movies, theme parks and museums, with the aim of improving the present and future of people. Parents, children, educators, governments and companies have a great opportunity to explore how theme parks contribute to the construction of new ideas, characters, narratives, knowledge and innovative experiences through artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), holograms and, most important of all, that all people really enjoy their learning experience, and they will be happy during their time at theme parks.

Finally, we observed in this study that there is a high correlation between the most viewed movies worldwide and theme parks' attractions (*RQ4*). This study found that more than 230 movies were presented at cinemas in the past 13 years, films which are the most representative in attractions of theme parks. Movies encourage viewers to visit theme parks' attractions because people like to identify with movies' characters, enjoy of scenarios and characters of movies at theme parks.

Nevertheless, the situation of pandemic crisis favored the large streaming platforms, and viewers were forced to stay home for their video entertainment, companies Netflix, HBO, Disney+, Amazon Prime and Tencent taken advantage of this favorable situation to increase the numbers of users. These large streaming platforms are seen as the prime deterrent to cinema and movie industry because they provide to users personalized services, better prices than cinemas, comfort and the availability to watch a film at any time

by users. As stated by [Martínez-Sánchez et al. \(2021\)](#), these new audiovisual operators are breaking the hegemony of TV, cinema and movie industries.

Finally, we would like to highlight the contribution made by this research in movie and theme park industries. First, we must recognize that film-induced tourism provides great benefits to the society, theme parks, cinemas and tourist destinations. Second, movies help to increase the number of visitors and tourists to theme parks and tourist destinations. In 2019, 215 million people visited the 20 theme parks analyzed in this study; this figure is quite lucrative to entertainment and tourism sectors, and local and regional economy where are localized these 20 theme parks. And third and last, this paper contributes to improve visitors' satisfaction and experience at theme parks through animation, cartoon, superhero and fantasy movies. This research makes us very happy, because we want that children enjoy with movies through theme parks' attractions and make their dream a reality, as well as parents would recover the kid in all of us, so they enjoy with their children in a fun, participative way.

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

On theoretical grounds, we recommend that the interrelation between film-induced tourism and theme parks should be improved considering the importance of entertainment and tourism literature at these two sectors. The effectiveness of VR, AR and AI technologies enhance consumer's experience, promote his/her positive behavior, improve educational activities, encourage visitors to return or even promote new attractions of theme parks in social media. For instance, the metaverse will opens new possibilities in the theme park, music and videogames industries it provides substantially enhanced user experiences. Videogames are also marketing tools and a new window to promote the new attractions of theme parks. In 2022, Disney company reported that they have been granted a patent for providing metaverse functionality in their theme parks.

Practical implications are considered in this study. New technologies like VR, AR or AI can help park operators to personalize each guest's visit. Theme park operators may also offer exclusive promotions (discount price, gifts, fast track ticket or special prices) to customers who follow your park's social media accounts, or their official websites and apps, and post about their experiences in theme parks and characters of movies and animations. Gamification and interactivity are part of the biggest technology trends in the attractions of theme parks. Another marketing strategy can be to create loyalty programs for customers who like films and videogames which are related to theme park's rides (e.g. Avatar, Harry Potter, Peppa Pig, Mario Bros, among many others) to stimulate visitor demand, especially in this time of economic uncertainty.

5.2 Limitations and future research

This study has limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, theme park operators do not show information related to the number of visitors (e.g. nationality, gender and age) in their official websites. And second and last, there is no data and surveys about why parents are motivated to take their children to visit theme parks; this information is very important to theme park operators and researchers because according to results of this information operators and researcher can analyze better visitors' motivations and emotions.

Future research should shed lights on understanding how a specific kind of movie (action, drama, animation, cartoon, among many others), or videogames could influence the motivations, emotions and experience of visitors at theme parks. For example, movie characteristics perceived by viewers may influence their expectations when they visit theme parks. In addition, future studies need to tackle visitors' motivations, visitors' psychological mechanism and a direct correlation between movies and theme park's rides through surveys in theme parks and cinemas.

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Table A1 The rest of movies related to theme parks and their attractions in the period analyzed (2020–2022)

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Gulliver's Travels Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore	Gnomeo and Juliet The Muppets	The Bourne Legacy Frankenweenie	The Smurfs 2 Disney Planes	Penguins of Madagascar Night at the Museum: Secret of the Lost City Hercules Robocop Dracula Untold	The Good Dinosaur Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip Tomorrowland The Fantastic Four The Grand Budapest Hotel Muppets Most Wanted	The Legend of Tarzan Trolls Star Trek Beyond Alice Through the Looking Glass Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows Assassin's Creed	The Mummy Cars 3 The Lego Batman Movie The Alien Covenant Smurfs: The Lost Village Power Rangers	Solo: A Star Wars Story Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse Tom Raider Halloween Robin Hood The Lego Ninjago Movie	Godzilla: King of the Monsters Shazam! Dumbo Terminator: Dark Fate The Addams Family The LEGO Movie 2: The Second Part Wonder Park Eiga Doraemon: Nobita no Getsuhen Tansaki	Mulan Stand by Me Doraemon 2 Trolls: World Tour Scoobi! Gretel & Hansel	The Suicide Squad The Matrix Resurrections Space Jam: A New Legacy Tom and Jerry The Addams Family 2 Mortal Kombat	Scream Halloween Ends Paws of Fury: The Legend of Hank Hotel Transylvania: Transformania Doraemon the Movie: Nobita's Little Star Wars 2021

Notes: Films and cartoons which are represented in attractions, characters, live musical performances, and main street music at theme parks
Source: Own elaboration from [The Numbers \(2022\)](#)

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