Tradition, Tourism and Cultural Representation: The Resonance of *Coco* Among A British Audience

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
Cinema is a powerful cultural medium, offering audiences a way to engage with global traditions and identities. Animated films, with their blend of realism and artistry, play a crucial role in cultural representation. Pixar's *Coco* (2017) exemplifies this by introducing global audiences to Mexico's Day of the Dead through its emotionally resonant narrative and vibrant depiction of Mexican traditions. This study explores how a British audience interprets *Coco's* portrayal of Mexican culture and its influence on cultural curiosity and tourism interest. Using a qualitative approach with data collected by means of semi-structured interviews, the research investigates perceptions of the film's cultural authenticity, emotional engagement, and its impact on interest in Mexican heritage. Findings reveal that *Coco* resonates significantly with the participants by merging universal themes of family and remembrance with culturally specific elements. While participants praised its authenticity, some noted concerns about simplification and commodification. The study highlights *Coco's* role in inspiring cultural curiosity and film-induced tourism, with many participants expressing interest in visiting Mexico during Day of the Dead celebrations. These insights contribute to broader discussions on cultural representation, the intersection of media and tourism, and cinema's potential to foster cross-cultural understanding. **KEYWORDS:** Cultural representation, audience reception. film-induced tourism, Day of the Dead, Coco, Mexico	

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is widely recognised as a powerful cultural medium, capable of transcending geographical and cultural boundaries to shape audience perceptions and foster global understanding. Animated films have emerged as a significant tool for cultural representation, combining creative storytelling with depictions of real-world traditions and heritage. Pixar's *Coco* (2017) exemplifies this potential, captivating global audiences through its emotionally resonant narrative and vibrant portrayal of Mexican traditions. The film not only highlights the cultural symbolism of the Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*) but also fosters interest in Mexican heritage and tourism, a phenomenon referred to as the "Coco effect" (Gomez, 2017).

Set against the backdrop of the Day of the Dead, *Coco* immerses viewers in the intricate traditions of this celebration, including the use of marigolds, altars (*ofrendas*), and rituals honouring deceased loved ones. To ensure authenticity, Pixar collaborated extensively with cultural consultants, resulting in a portrayal that has been widely praised for its respectful and accurate representation of Mexican culture (Avila, 2020). As Wells (2015) emphasises, animation's ability to blend artistic interpretation with realism makes it uniquely suited to capturing complex cultural practices, a strength that is evident in *Coco*'s ability to create both a visually compelling and culturally meaningful narrative.

This study examines the cultural and emotional impact of *Coco* on audiences in the United Kingdom, focusing on its role in portraying Mexican traditions and fostering cross-cultural curiosity. The research explores how cinema serves as a medium for cultural exchange, introducing audiences to traditions that may be unfamiliar while encouraging engagement with diverse cultural practices. Such analysis contributes to broader discussions on cultural representation, authenticity, and the potential of media to bridge cultural gaps (Lara Ortiz, 2019).

In addition to its cultural resonance, *Coco* has sparked interest in film-induced tourism. The vibrant imagery and rich cultural context of the film serve as 'tourist imaginaries' (Reijnders, 2011), motivating audiences to explore real-world settings and traditions depicted in the narrative. The increased interest in visiting Mexico during Day of the Dead celebrations exemplifies the tangible economic and social impacts of cinema, positioning *Coco* as a prime example of film-induced tourism (Beeton, 2016; Alvarado Sizzo, Sánchez Aguirre & Aldaz Galicia, 2019). This intersection of media, culture, and tourism represents a vital area for scholarly exploration, particularly as animated films continue to shape global perceptions and inspire cross-cultural engagement (Florido Benitez, 2023).

The study is guided by the central question: How do audiences in the United Kingdom interpret *Coco*'s portrayal of Mexican culture, and to what extent does the film foster cultural curiosity and inspire interest in visiting Mexico? The research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore how audiences in England interpret *Coco*'s depiction of Mexican culture and traditions.
2. To assess the extent to which *Coco* fosters cultural curiosity and stimulates tourism interest among audiences in England.

Culturally rich films like *Coco* play a critical role in an era of globalisation, acting as bridges between cultures through accessible and engaging narratives. By merging universal themes of family, remembrance, and identity into the traditions of the Day of the Dead, *Coco* creates a story that is both culturally specific and universally relatable. Moreover, the film's ability to inspire tourism highlights its broader implications, demonstrating the economic and cultural power of animated cinema. This paper draws on Audience Reception Theory (Hall, 1997; Marsh, 2009) and Film-Induced Tourism Frameworks (Beeton, 2016) to analyse how *Coco* functions as both a cultural artifact and a driver of engagement with Mexican heritage.

The following sections build on these foundational questions and objectives. The literature review examines existing studies on cultural representation in cinema, audience reception, and the influence of media on tourism. The methodology outlines a qualitative approach, focusing on semi-structured interviews with English audiences. Findings are presented thematically, addressing emotional engagement, cultural perceptions, and tourism inspiration. Finally, the discussion connects these findings to theoretical insights, offering broader conclusions on *Coco*'s role as a cultural and social bridge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of cinema as a cultural artifact and medium for storytelling has been a focal point of extensive academic research. Films, particularly animated ones, serve as powerful tools to represent cultural traditions, identities, and narratives on a global stage (Mirzaei, Mohammadzadeh & Safoora, 2024). Pixar's *Coco* (2017) demonstrates how cinema can act as a bridge between cultures, introducing audiences to Mexico's Day of the Dead while promoting cross-cultural understanding. The following sections examine key academic debates on cultural representation, audience reception, emotional engagement, and film-induced tourism, contextualizing *Coco*'s impact on audiences in the UK.

Cultural Representation in Cinema

Cinema serves as a vital platform for cultural representation, acting as what Hall (1997, p. 4) describes as a "site of struggle," where meaning is continuously negotiated between creators and audiences. Films offer viewers glimpses into traditions and practices they might otherwise find unfamiliar, acting as cultural translators (Shohat & Stam, 2014). However, Higbee & Lim (2010) warn that simplifying complex traditions for broader accessibility may dilute cultural authenticity, risking misrepresentation or stereotyping. Animated films occupy a unique space in the representation of culture. Wells (2015) suggests that the stylised nature of animation enables filmmakers to creatively reimagine cultural elements, accentuating traditions in ways that might be more pronounced than in live-action portrayals. This flexibility allows filmmakers to highlight symbolic and visually rich aspects of a culture, creating a compelling medium for global audiences. Nonetheless, this can also complicate the faithful representation of specific cultural practices (Abdullah & Abdullah, 2020). Authenticity, therefore, requires collaboration with cultural consultants (Hornskov, 2007) to ensure respectful and accurate portrayals.

The global nature of animated films necessitates navigating the line between authenticity and universal appeal. Cultural elements are often adapted, streamlined, or reinterpreted to resonate with diverse audiences, thus sparking debates about what constitutes an "authentic" portrayal. This is particularly relevant in *Coco*, where the integration of vibrant visuals and emotionally resonant themes allows the film to transcend cultural boundaries while retaining its specificity to Mexican heritage. Ultimately, audience reception and their interpretation are critical in determining the success of such films as a means for cultural exchange.

Audience Reception

The study of audience reception focuses on how viewers engage with media, recognising that audiences are active participants in constructing meaning. Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding model provides a valuable framework for understanding how audiences decode the meanings encoded by filmmakers. Audiences adopt one of three interpretive positions:

1. Dominant-Hegemonic Position: Audiences fully align with the filmmaker's intended meaning.
2. Negotiated Position: Audiences partially accept the encoded message, reinterpreting some aspects based on their own cultural perspectives.
3. Oppositional Position: Audiences reject the filmmaker's intended meaning, critiquing or challenging it.

This framework is particularly useful for analysing *Coco*, as it reveals how audiences in the UK, who likely have limited exposure to the Day of the Dead, engage with the film. For instance, viewers might adopt a negotiated position, appreciating the universal themes of family and remembrance while interpreting cultural elements through their own personal lenses. Conversely, some may critique *Coco* as a commodified version of Mexican culture, designed for global consumption.

Emotional engagement plays a pivotal role in audience reception. Plantinga (2018) and Staiger (2020) argue that emotionally resonant narratives provide universal points of connection, enabling audiences to relate to unfamiliar cultural contexts. *Coco's* exploration of family, remembrance, and identity thus resonates with global audiences. That is, the film's vibrant visuals, traditional Mexican music, and symbolic imagery enhance emotional engagement, immersing the viewers in a narrative that encourages appreciation and curiosity for Mexican traditions.

Film-Induced Tourism

Film-induced tourism examines how cinematic portrayals inspire audiences to visit the locations depicted on screen (Beeton, 2016). While much research has focused on live-action films, animated films like *Coco* are increasingly recognised for their impact on destination perception and tourism. Connell (2019) suggests that animated films, despite their fictionalised or stylised settings, can evoke strong associations with real-world places, fostering curiosity about the traditions and landscapes they depict. Through visually immersive storytelling, animated films like *Coco* create powerful connections between audiences and the cultures they represent.

The 'tourist imaginaries' of Reijnders (2011) explain how cinematic depictions construct mental images of destinations that audiences aspire to experience in reality. These imaginaries are often tied to cultural symbolism, rituals, and landscapes, which, in the case of *Coco*, have brought Day of the Dead into global focus. The "Coco effect" exemplifies this phenomenon, sparking interest in the occasion and its associated cultural heritage (Rühse, 2021). As a result, visitors are drawn to Mexican towns and regions known for their Day of the Dead celebrations, such as Michoacán and Oaxaca, seeking the vibrant colours, traditions, and communal spirit portrayed in the film (Brandes, 1997).

However, scholars have raised concerns about the commodification of cultural traditions through film-induced tourism. Hudson & Ritchie (2021) caution that increased tourism interest driven by films like *Coco* may lead to the commercialisation of deeply rooted practices, potentially undermining their cultural integrity. For example, events traditionally tied to family and local community rituals may be adapted or altered to accommodate tourist expectations. This tension underscores the importance of sustainable tourism practices that balance cultural preservation with the economic benefits of increased tourism.

Emotional Resonance and Broader Implications

The emotional impact of *Coco* is integral to its success as a cultural bridge. By turning universal themes into culturally specific narratives, the film creates a space for audiences to reflect on their own traditions while appreciating those of others. For British audiences, who may have limited exposure to Day of the Dead, this emotional resonance serves as a gateway to curiosity and deeper cultural engagement. Barker (2019) suggests that this dual function—emotionally connecting with audiences while introducing them to new traditions—is what makes cinema such an effective medium for cultural exchange.

Moreover, the global popularity of *Coco* highlights the broader potential of animated films to shape cultural understanding. As Florido Benitez (2023) notes, the intersection of media, culture, and tourism is becoming increasingly significant in a globalised world, where storytelling not only entertains but also educates and inspires. The ability of *Coco* to spark interest in Mexican traditions and contribute to tourism underscores its role as both a cultural artifact and a driver of tangible social and economic impacts.

Table 1: Summary of Literature Review

Section	Key Themes	Key References	Implications
Cultural Representation in Cinema	- Cinema as a "site of struggle" for meaning negotiation (Hall, 1997). - Films as cultural translators (Shohat & Stam, 2014). - Challenges in balancing authenticity and global appeal (Higbee & Lim, 2010). - Animation's flexibility in representing traditions (Wells, 2019). - Role of cultural consultants in ensuring respectful portrayals (Lopez & Telles, 2020).	Hall (1997); Shohat & Stam (2014); Higbee & Lim (2010); Wells (2019); Abdullah & Abdullah (2020); (Hornskov, (2007).	- Animated films like *Coco* highlight the tension between cultural authenticity and global accessibility. - Audience reception plays a key role in determining success as a cultural bridge.
Audience Reception	- Audiences as active participants in meaning-making (Hall, 1997). - Three interpretive positions: dominant, negotiated, oppositional. - *Coco* as a cultural bridge, sparking varied responses among English audiences. - Universal themes of family and remembrance enhance	Hall (1997); Plantinga (2018); Staiger (2020).	- *Coco* illustrates how audiences interpret cultural texts differently, influenced by personal and cultural contexts. - Emotional

	relatability. - Emotional engagement fosters connections to unfamiliar cultures.		narratives enhance cultural resonance.
Film-Induced Tourism	- Films inspire interest in depicted locations (Beeton, 2016). - *Coco* sparks curiosity about Mexican traditions and Día de los Muertos. – 'Tourist imaginaries' link cinematic depictions to real-world destinations (Reijnders, 2019). - Risks of commodification of cultural traditions through tourism (Hudson & Ritchie, 2021).	Beeton (2016); Connell (2019); Reijnders (2019); Brandes (1997); Hudson & Ritchie (2021).	- *Coco* exemplifies the dual role of films in promoting cultural curiosity and driving tourism. - Sustainable tourism is essential to preserving cultural integrity.
Emotional Resonance and Broader Implications	- *Coco* balances universal themes with cultural specificity, fostering cross-cultural understanding. - Animation blends emotional storytelling with cultural richness (Barker, 2019). - Broader role of animated films in shaping global cultural understanding and inspiring tourism (Florido Benitez, 2023).	Barker (2019); Florido Benitez (2023).	- Emotional narratives allow audiences to connect deeply while appreciating unfamiliar traditions. - Films like *Coco* highlight the growing impact of media on culture and tourism.

METHODOLOGY

This methodology section outlines the research design, data collection, and analysis process adopted for this study, ensuring alignment with the research question and objectives.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is well-suited for exploring subjective experiences, interpretations, and cultural perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection, allowing for in-depth insights into individual interpretations of *Coco*. This approach ensures flexibility to probe participants' thoughts while maintaining consistency across key themes related to the research objectives.

Context of Coco

Released in 2017 by Pixar Animation Studios, *Coco* is an animated film that has received widespread critical acclaim for its cultural authenticity and emotionally resonant narrative. Set against the backdrop of Day of the Dead, the film offers a detailed depiction of practices such as *ofrendas* (altars adorned with offerings), marigolds symbolising remembrance, and cemetery vigils honouring deceased loved ones. As mentioned above, to ensure the accuracy and cultural specificity of its portrayal, Pixar collaborated extensively with cultural consultants, resulting in a depiction that balances authenticity with accessibility for global audiences (Puig, 2018).

At the heart of *Coco* is the story of Miguel, a young boy who dreams of becoming a musician despite his family's longstanding prohibition on music. His journey takes him to the Land of the Dead, a vividly imagined afterlife where he must reconcile with his family while uncovering hidden truths about his ancestry. The film combines universal themes of family, memory, and identity with culturally specific traditions.

For viewers unfamiliar with Day of the Dead, *Coco* serves as an important cultural artifact, offering a lens through which they can engage with Mexican heritage. This makes *Coco* a particularly significant case study for examining how animated films can bridge cultural gaps and introduce global audiences to unfamiliar practices and traditions.

Data Collection

-Participants

The study involved 15 participants who were aged between 35 and 81, all from the United Kingdom. Participants were selected based on their familiarity with *Coco* and their willingness to discuss cultural and emotional engagement with the film. Purposive sampling ensured diversity in age, gender, and background to capture a range of perspectives.

-Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to balance structure with flexibility, allowing participants to share detailed insights while addressing specific themes. The interviews took place in December, 2024, lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were conducted via video call (Zoom). Each interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

-Interview Sections

The interview guide was divided into four thematic sections, as shown in the table below:

Table 2: Focus Areas and Example Questions for Exploring Audience Perceptions of *Coc*

Section	Focus	Example Questions
1. General Impressions	Participants' overall thoughts on *Coco*.	*What were your first impressions of the film?*

2. Cultural Representation	Perceptions of how Mexican culture and traditions were portrayed.	*How do you feel Coco represented the Day of the Dead?*
3. Emotional Engagement	Emotional impact of the narrative, visuals, and themes.	*Did you find the film's themes of family and remembrance relatable?*
4. Tourism and Curiosity	Interest in Mexican culture and travel inspired by the film.	*Has watching Coco sparked your interest in visiting Mexico or experiencing the Day of the Dead firsthand?*

Data Analysis
-Thematic Analysis
The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The process followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step framework:
1. Familiarisation: Transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data.
2. Initial Coding: Segments of data were coded based on recurring themes (e.g., cultural understanding, emotional resonance, tourism curiosity).
3. Theme Development: Codes were grouped into broader themes aligned with the research objectives.
4. Theme Review: Themes were refined to ensure relevance and clarity.
5. Defining Themes: Final themes were defined and organized to reflect the research question and objectives.
6. Report Production: Themes were used to structure the findings and connect with theoretical insights.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical approval was obtained prior to conducting the study. Participants provided informed consent, and their anonymity was ensured by assigning pseudonyms. Data was securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

FINDINGS
The findings are organised thematically based on the research objectives: interpretations of *Coco's* portrayal of Mexican culture, emotional engagement with the film, and the extent to which *Coco* fosters cultural curiosity and tourism interest.

Interpretations of Coco's Portrayal of Mexican Culture
Participants shared diverse interpretations of *Coco's* representation of Mexican culture, particularly its depiction of the Day of the Dead. Responses highlighted themes of authenticity, visual richness, and cultural learning.

(i)   *Authenticity   and   Respect   for   Tradition*
        Most participants perceived *Coco* as an authentic and respectful representation of Mexican traditions. They appreciated the detailed portrayal of rituals, even if they lacked prior knowledge of the customs associated with the Day of the Dead.

"It felt like they really cared about getting it right. You could see it in the way they showed the altars and the way the family talked about remembering loved ones" (Participant 5, December 16, 2024).
"I didn't know much about the Day of the Dead before watching, but the film made it feel really meaningful, not just a festival but something deep and personal" (Participant 9, December 20, 2024).

(ii)   *Simplification and Commercialisation* A minority of participants critiqued the film for simplifying or romanticising cultural elements to appeal to a global audience.
        "It's beautiful, but it felt a bit like they had to make everything shiny and perfect for a Disney audience" (Participant 3, December 15, 2024).
        "I wonder if this is how people in Mexico would actually see the Day of the Dead, or if it's more of a polished version" (Participant 14, December 21, 2024).

(iii)   *Cultural Learning and Curiosity* Many participants insisted that *Coco* introduced them to aspects of Mexican culture they were previously unaware of.
        "I had no idea about the traditions, like leaving food or personal items on the altars. It was fascinating to learn about" (Participant 13, December 21, 2024).

        Emotional Engagement with the Film
        Participants highlighted *Coco's* ability to evoke emotional responses through its narrative, themes, and visuals. Many identified strongly with the film's themes of family, remembrance, and identity.

(i)   *Relatability of Themes* Participants noted that the universal themes of family and remembrance resonated with them, even if they were unfamiliar with Mexican culture.
        "It made me think about my grandparents and how we remember them. The message about keeping loved ones alive in memory was really powerful" (Participant 8, December 20, 2024).
        "I connected with the idea of family traditions and passing stories down. It felt like something everyone could relate to" (Participant 1, December 14, 2024).

(ii)   *Emotional Impact of the Narrative* Several participants described feeling moved by the story's emotional depth, particularly the reunion scene between Miguel and his great-grandmother, Coco.

"The scene with the grandmother singing made me cry—it was just so full of love and memory" (Participant 8, December 20, 2024).

"It was one of those films where you leave thinking about it for days. It really stayed with me" (Participant 7, December 19, 2024).

(iii) *Visual and Musical Immersion* The vibrant visuals and traditional Mexican music were cited as key factors enhancing emotional engagement.

"The colours and the music made it feel so alive, even though it was about the dead. It's a strange but beautiful contrast" (Participant 4, December 15, 2024).

"The Land of the Dead was so stunning—it felt like stepping into another world" (Participant 9, December 20, 2024).

Cultural Curiosity and Tourism Interest

Participants discussed how *Coco* influenced their curiosity about Mexican culture and traditions, with some expressing a desire to visit Mexico or experience the Day of the Dead firsthand.

(i) *Increased Interest in Mexican Culture* Many participants stated that *Coco* piqued their curiosity about Mexican traditions and increased their desire to learn more.

"It definitely made me want to look up more about the Day of the Dead and what it means for people in Mexico" (Participant 2, December 14, 2024).

"I didn't know much about Mexican culture before, but after watching the film, I started reading about it online" (Participant 13, December 21, 2024).

(ii) *Tourism Interest* Some participants mentioned that the film inspired them to consider visiting Mexico, particularly during the Day of the Dead celebrations.

"I'd love to see how it's celebrated in real life. The film made it look so magical, but I'd like to see the real thing" (Participant 6, December 18, 2024).

"It's made me think about planning a trip to Mexico one day. It's a culture I didn't know much about, but now I'm really curious" (Participant 5, December 16, 2024).

(iii) *Scepticism About Tourism*m A few participants expressed concern about the impact of increased tourism on cultural traditions.

"It's great that people are interested, but I wonder if it changes the way people celebrate, especially if it becomes a big tourist attraction" (Participant 14, December 21, 2024).

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives and theoretical frameworks, connecting the insights gathered from the participants to broader academic debates on cultural representation, audience reception, and film-induced tourism. The discussion is organised thematically, addressing how participants interpreted *Coco's* portrayal of Mexican culture, their emotional engagement with the film, and the extent to which it inspired cultural curiosity and tourism interest.

Interpretation of Mexican Culture in Coco

The findings reveal that the participants largely perceive *Coco* as an authentic and respectful representation of Mexican culture. This aligns with scholarly perspectives that highlight the role of animated films in translating cultural traditions for global audiences (Wells, 2019). Participants praised the detailed portrayal of rituals, indicating their newfound appreciation for traditions associated with Day of the Dead. This supports the argument that cinema can act as a bridge between cultures, offering viewers an accessible entry point into unfamiliar practices (Ballerini, 2016; Shohat & Stam, 2014).

Critiques about the film's simplification and romanticisation demonstrate the fine line between staying true to cultural authenticity and meeting the commercial expectations of global audiences. Some participants raised concerns that the visuals and emotionally charged narrative might present a sanitised version of the Day of the Dead, tailored for broader appeal. These observations reflect the ongoing challenge for filmmakers to strike a balance between cultural depth and universal resonance (During, 1997; Higbee & Lim, 2010).

Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding model provides a useful lens for understanding these varied responses. While most participants aligned with the filmmaker's intended message—interpreting *Coco* as a celebration of Mexican culture—a minority adopted a negotiated or oppositional stance, critiquing the film's commodification of traditions. This demonstrates the active role of audiences in shaping the meaning of cultural texts.

Emotional Engagement

The emotional resonance of *Coco* emerged as a central theme, with participants connecting to its universal themes of family, remembrance, and identity. This finding confirms Plantinga's (2018) position that emotionally engaging narratives provide audiences with a way to relate to unfamiliar cultural contexts. For the participants, who have had limited exposure to Day of the Dead, *Coco's* exploration of familial bonds served as a relatable gateway into Mexican traditions.

The visuals and traditional music further enhanced participants' emotional immersion, aligning with Barker's (2019) assertion that audiovisual elements play a key role in fostering connections between audiences and cultural narratives. The Land of the Dead, with its vibrant colours and intricate design, was frequently cited as a highlight, exemplifying how animation can blend artistic interpretation with cultural symbolism (Wells, 2019).

Participants' emotional responses also reflect the dual nature of *Coco's* storytelling: while the narrative is culturally specific, its themes are universally resonant. This balance enables the film to transcend cultural boundaries, fostering empathy and curiosity among global audiences.

Cultural Curiosity and Tourism Interest

The "Coco effect" was evident in participants' increased curiosity about Mexican culture and traditions. Many expressed a desire to learn more about Day of the Dead, highlighting *Coco's* role as a catalyst for cultural interest. Reijnders' (2019) concept of 'tourist imaginaries' is particularly relevant here, as *Coco* constructs mental images of Mexican traditions and landscapes that inspire audiences to engage with the culture in real life.

The film's impact on tourism interest was significant, with several participants expressing a desire to visit Mexico and experience Day of the Dead firsthand. This can be linked with Beeton's (2016) Film-Induced Tourism Framework, which emphasises how cinematic portrayals can influence destination perception and inspire travel. The findings suggest that *Coco* has contributed to the growing popularity of areas particularly associated with Day of the Dead (Brandes, 1997).

However, concerns about cultural commodification and the impact of tourism on local traditions were also noted. Participants questioned whether increased tourist interest might alter or commercialise the rituals depicted in the film, aligning with Hudson & Ritchie's (2021) warning about the risks of film-induced tourism. This underscores the need for sustainable tourism practices that balance cultural preservation with the economic benefits of increased tourism.

Broader Implications

The findings illuminate the multifaceted impact of *Coco* as both a cultural artifact and a driver of social and economic change. The film's ability to introduce the participants to Mexican traditions while fostering emotional connections demonstrates its role as a powerful medium for cross-cultural understanding. However, the critiques of simplification and commodification reveal the complexities inherent in representing non-Western cultures in global media.

These findings also speak to the broader potential of animated films to shape cultural perceptions and behaviours. As Florido Benitez (2023) notes, the intersection of media, culture, and tourism is becoming increasingly significant in a globalised world. *Coco* exemplifies how storytelling can inspire curiosity, empathy, and tangible actions, such as tourism, while also raising important questions about cultural representation and preservation. Table 2 below provides a summary of the discussion.

Table 3: Summary of the Discussion

Theme	Findings	Theoretical Alignment	Key Implications
Cultural Representation	- Most participants found *Coco's* depiction of Mexican culture authentic and respectful. - Critiques of simplification and romanticisation were noted.	- Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding model: Varied audience interpretations (dominant, negotiated, oppositional). - Higbee & Lim (2010): Challenges of cultural complexity.	- Highlights the tension between authenticity and accessibility in global media. - Suggests cinema as a bridge for introducing unfamiliar traditions to new audiences.
Emotional Engagement	- Participants strongly connected with universal themes of family, remembrance, and identity. - Vivid visuals and music enhanced emotional immersion.	- Plantinga (2018), Barker (2019): Emotionally engaging narratives facilitate connection to unfamiliar cultural contexts.	- Demonstrates how culturally specific narratives can resonate globally when tied to universal themes. - Reinforces animation as an effective medium for emotional storytelling.
Cultural Curiosity	- Many participants expressed a desire to learn more about Day of the Dead. - The film sparked curiosity about Mexican traditions and heritage.	- Reijnders (2019): "Tourist imaginaries" create mental images of destinations that inspire exploration.	- Shows cinema's potential to foster cross-cultural understanding and inspire curiosity about heritage. - Highlights how media can act as a cultural educator.
Tourism Interest	- Some participants expressed interest in visiting Mexico, particularly during Day of the Dead celebrations. - Concerns	- Beeton (2016): Film-induced tourism links cinematic portrayals to audience travel behaviours. - Hudson & Ritchie (2021): Risks of commercialising cultural traditions.	- Demonstrates *Coco's* tangible impact on tourism. - Emphasises the need for sustainable tourism practices to protect cultural

| *Broader Implications* | about cultural commodification arose.
 - *Coco* balances cultural specificity with universal appeal. - Raises tensions between cultural authenticity and commercialization. | - Florido Benitez (2023): Media, culture, and tourism intersect to influence cultural perceptions and behaviours. | integrity while accommodating increased interest.
 - Highlights the dual role of cinema as a cultural bridge and a site of negotiation. - Suggests the potential for animated films to shape global cultural understanding. |

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how representatives of a Uk audience interpret *Coco's* portrayal of Mexican culture and traditions and the extent to which the film fosters cultural curiosity and tourism interest. By examining audience reception through Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding model and situating *Coco* within the framework of film-induced tourism (Beeton, 2016), the findings provide insights into the multifaceted impacts of the film as both a cultural artifact and a driver of engagement with Mexican heritage.

Key Findings

The research highlights *Coco's* success in introducing British audiences to the Day of the Dead, with most participants perceiving the film as an authentic and respectful portrayal of Mexican culture. Through vibrant visuals, emotionally resonant themes, and its depiction of traditions, *Coco* acts as a cultural bridge, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation for Mexican heritage. However, critiques about simplification and the commercialisation of cultural practices reveal the challenges of balancing authenticity with global accessibility.

The emotional engagement elicited by *Coco* is another significant finding. Participants connected deeply with the film's universal themes of family, remembrance, and identity, which served as a gateway to engaging with unfamiliar traditions. This duality— combining cultural specificity with universal relatability—shows *Coco's* broad appeal and its capacity to resonate with audiences across cultural boundaries.

Finally, the study demonstrates *Coco's* influence on cultural curiosity and tourism. Many participants expressed a desire to learn more about Day of the Dead or visit Mexico to experience the traditions firsthand. While this highlights the potential of cinema to inspire real-world actions, concerns about the commodification of cultural practices through film-induced tourism serves to highlight the importance of balancing cultural preservation with economic benefits.

Implications

The findings contribute to broader discussions on cultural representation in media, audience reception, and the impact of cinema on tourism. *Coco* exemplifies the role of animated films in shaping cultural perceptions and inspiring engagement with diverse traditions. However, the tensions between cultural authenticity, commercial interests, and audience expectations remain central challenges for filmmakers.

For British audiences, *Coco* demonstrates how storytelling can encourage cross-cultural understanding and curiosity, providing an accessible lens through which to explore unfamiliar traditions. At the same time, the film's influence on tourism highlights the tangible impacts of cultural representation in media.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings are based on a small sample of participants from the United Kingdom, which may not fully capture the diversity of audience interpretations. Future research could expand the sample size or explore audience reception in other cultural contexts to provide a comparative perspective. Additionally, quantitative methods could complement qualitative findings, offering a broader understanding of *Coco's* impact on cultural curiosity and tourism behaviours.

Final Thoughts

This study highlights the capacity of animated cinema to act as a powerful medium for cultural exchange, bridging traditions across geographical and cultural divides. *Coco* exemplifies how storytelling, rooted in cultural specificity yet containing universal themes, can resonate with diverse audiences, sparking curiosity and fostering greater appreciation for heritage. For British audiences, the film's portrayal of Day of the Dead serves not only as an introduction to Mexican culture but also as a catalyst for reflection on their own traditions and familial practices.

However, the interplay between cultural authenticity, commercial imperatives, and audience expectations raises critical questions for filmmakers and scholars alike. While *Coco* successfully balances these elements to an extent, the critiques around simplification and commodification highlight the challenges inherent in globalised cultural representation. These dynamics are particularly relevant in the context of film-induced tourism, where the preservation of cultural integrity must be carefully negotiated alongside economic opportunities.

Moreover, the phenomenon of film-induced tourism further exemplifies the tangible impact of cinema on real-world behaviours. *Coco* not only inspires audiences to engage with Mexican traditions but also encourages them to visit the locations and cultural

events depicted in the film. This demonstrates the importance of integrating sustainable tourism practices that respect and preserve cultural heritage while maximizing the economic benefits for local communities.

Ultimately, the findings of this study reaffirm the potential of cinema to create meaningful cross-cultural dialogues. Animated films like *Coco* demonstrate the capacity of entertainment to educate and inspire, offering audiences an accessible lens through which to explore unfamiliar traditions. As such, cinema's impact extends beyond the screen, shaping cultural perceptions and fostering greater intercultural understanding.

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