Abstract

An online survey was conducted to examine how nostalgias associated with Hayao Miyazaki's animations motivate tourists to visit a theme park inspired by the director's works. A structural equation modeling of the collected data revealed that the survey respondents who felt nostalgic about the characters, narratives, aesthetics, cultures, and traditions depicted in the animations showed a strong motivation to visit the theme park, which then positively influenced their attitude and behavioral intention to visit the park in the future. The study findings provided empirical evidence for validating nostalgia as a multidimensional concept and its vital role in promoting film tourism.

Keywords: film nostalgia, Hayao Miyazaki, travel motivation, tourist attitude, visit intention

How Nostalgic Animations Bring Tourists to Theme Parks:

The Case of Hayao Miyazaki's Works

1. Introduction

Nostalgia has been widely manifested in various forms of media, ranging from movies, animations, and TV dramas to music, as a strong stimulus that evokes sentimental feelings, immersive experiences, and emotional connectedness (Batcho, 1998; Swale, 2015; Kim, Kim, & Petrick, 2019). For the tourism industry, such characteristics of nostalgia and its use in media have strategic implications for providing tourists with more memorable experiences (Christou, Farmaki, & Evangelou, 2018), motivating them to participate in tourism activities (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Hsu, Cai & Wong, 2007), and marketing certain destinations (Hunt & Johns, 2013; Leong, Yeh, & Chang, 2015). Nostalgia is also effective in promoting theme parks associated with animations and animated characters as it draws the tourists' attention to the places where they can experience remedies of both positive and negative memories of the animation content as well as their own past (Leong, Yeh, & Chang, 2015; Oh & Ma, 2018).

Various elements of animations, including storylines, narratives, locations, characters, color tones, lighting, and music, can elicit both historical and personal nostalgia from the audience. Through hand-drawn or computer-generated images, animations can easily capture and recreate past moments and accumulate them into a story (Walden, 2018). Such hyper-realistic nature of animations allows the medium to be ideal raw materials for theme parks—the world of hyper-reality and simulation where reality depicted in media is recreated and the difference between reality and its representation becomes blurred (Eco, 1990; Baudrillard, 1994). Despite the promising role of nostalgia in promoting animation theme parks as an attractive tourist destination, no empirical research has examined whether/how nostalgia leads to the success of

the theme parks, which is typically assessed by the degree to which tourists intend to visit the

destination (e.g., Leong, Yeh, & Chang, 2015; Kim, Kim, & Petrick, 2019; Lee, Jeong, & Qu,

2020). The current study aims to fill this gap by identifying multidimensional nostalgias present

in Hayao Miyazaki's animations and examining how they contribute to shaping the audience's

motivations, attitude, and intention to visit a yet-to-be-opened animation theme park inspired by

Miyazaki's works.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Animation theme parks

Disneyland, the first animation theme park, was opened in 1955 in Anaheim, California,

and designed primarily by Disney animators to provide tourists with cinematic experiences

(Clavé, 2007). Following the success of Disneyland, numerous animation attractions, such as the

Turtle Talk with Crush interactive show and the Minion Mayhem ride adopted from *Finding*

Nemo and *Despicable Me*, respectively, were opened in theme parks to invite tourists to the

surreal fantasy world and provide them with immersive, interactive experiences by establishing

strong emotional bonds between popular animations and the tourists (Christou, Farmaki, &

Evangelou, 2018; Oh & Ma, 2018). Themes, characters, and places depicted in the animations

are the fundamental essence of the parks that allows tourists to immerse into the fantasy world

(Clavé, 2007; Oh & Ma, 2018). These theme parks are "a social artwork designed as a four-

dimensional symbolic landscape to evoke impressions of places and times, real or imaginary"

(King, 2001, p. 837). In 2022, a theme park comprising the diegetic worlds of Miyazaki's

animations is scheduled to open in Nagakute, Japan, which will be the first theme park in Asia

based purely on the theme of a single animation studio, Studio Ghibli (Wenger, 2019). Utilizing

the nostalgic feelings and romantic universes in Miyazaki's animation, the theme park is anticipated to attract his global fans and invite them to his fantasy worlds.

2.2 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is defined as a symptom of melancholia (McCann, 1941), a longing for the past and mourning for the lost time (Davis, 1979; Walden, 2018). The term "nostalgia" is derived from the Greek words "notos" meaning a return to home and "Algos" meaning pain, i.e., a pain caused by a longing to return home (Sedikides et al., 2006; Walden, 2018). Between the 17th and 19th centuries, nostalgia had been understood as a neurological condition—induced by the endless longing of returning to the place where one's home is—that causes anxiety, insomnia, smothering sensations, and homesickness (McCann, 1941; Walden, 2018). However, nostalgia is no longer considered as a kind of illness; rather, it is now held in a positive light (Batcho, 2013) and is associated with greater social connectedness (Zhou et al., 2008) and higher self-regard (Vess et al., 2012).

Nostalgia is an essential component in films. The audience experiences strong feelings of nostalgia when they are emotionally engaged with the media contents (Caton & Santos, 2007; Kim, 2012). The nostalgic memories and feelings evoked from watching a film establish a sentimental bond between the audience and the places, products, services, and aesthetics shown in the film (Holbrook, 1999). Such a nostalgic linkage plays an integral role when people choose tourist destinations (Christou, Farmaki, & Evangelou, 2018), as they are typically attracted to locations associated with their distinct, nostalgic experiences. In a similar vein, animation theme parks are a nostalgic destination that enables tourists to experience contextualized cinematic worlds by reanimating personal memories and nostalgic values associated with a certain animation.

Nostalgia is also conceptualized as a multidimensional concept (Natterer, 2015), e.g., historical and personal nostalgia. The former refers to the time, culture, and history in the past that do not include a person's own experiences. On the other hand, personal nostalgia is about one's past experiences from childhood, school days, or any memorable, emotional events (Natterer, 2015). In the film tourism context, Kim, Kim, and Petrick (2019) identified four domains of nostalgias associated with Hong Kong films, and demonstrated that individuals who feel nostalgic about 1) characters and places, 2) storylines and artistic scenes, 3) Hong Kong history and culture, and 4) Hong Kong society depicted in the films exhibited a strong tendency to visit the city. By extension, the current study adopts this multidimensional approach and predicts that these four domains of nostalgia are also likely to be present in Miyazaki's animations, which would ultimately motivate the audience to visit the theme park.

2.3 Nostalgia in Miyazaki's animations

2.3.1 Characters

Miyazaki has been one of the most influential, well-known animation directors in the world over the last three decades, with his masterful storytelling, and the themes of environmentalism, pacifism, feminism, love, family, traditional values, religion, and personal transformation frequently recur in his work (Schellhase, 2014). He has an extensive filmography, which includes *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, *The Wind Rises*, and many others. Especially known for well-developed characters, most of Miyazaki's animation works feature the main characters' adventurous journey to a specific place as a key narrative component and emphasize how the characters mature and explore through the places they inhabit. This process mirrors the tradition of Japanese animations featuring a close linkage between the characters and their spaces (Chow, 2013). Given such characteristics of

Miyazaki's works, the characters in his works are likely to be long remembered and cherished by

his fans, and serve as a key nostalgic element that can motivate tourists to visit the theme park

based on his creations. This possibility is tested with the following hypothesis.

  H1. Individuals who feel nostalgic about the characters appearing in Hayao Miyazaki's

  animations will have greater motivation for visiting the theme park.

2.3.2 Narratives and aesthetics

  As a creative traditionalist, Miyazaki distances himself from commercialism and

industrialism, and believes that modern technology and culture are "thin and shallow and fake"

(Cappello, 2005). His narratives typically convey idyllic, ecological, and hopeful messages for a

new beginning (Mes, 2002), and take place in the lost time or pre-modernization era as a way to

explore the past to engage with the present (Moist & Bartholow, 2007). Accordingly, the scenes

and aesthetics in Miyazaki's animations predominantly portray the past and nature, thereby

creating a nostalgic universe that enables the audience to recall the things they have lost and left

behind as they grew old (Mes, 2002). Such narratives and aesthetics are the key components of

his animations that provide the adult audience with strong nostalgic feelings, in spite of the fact

that most of the main characters in his works are children. By extension, those of the audience

who remembers these feelings are also likely to be motivated to visit the animation theme park to

re-experience Miyazaki's exquisite storylines and scenes, as the park may serve as "a film that

could be walked in" (Hine, 1986, p 151). This rationale leads to the following hypothesis.

  H2. Individuals who feel nostalgic about storylines and artistic scenes of Hayao

  Miyazaki's animations will have greater motivation for visiting the theme park.

2.3.3 Cultures and traditions

Another characteristic of Miyazaki's animations is that they pursue to send the audience back to the nostalgic past by recapturing the traditional Japanese culture that values family love, nature, peace, religion, myths, and rituals (Grapard, 1982; Napier, 2000; Swale, 2015). Most of the time, his characters interact with spiritual, mythological beings hidden in sacred places, such as a big tree or mountain, that are unexplored and unindustrialized, thereby restoring the vanished time and world when/where people still valued the tradition. Through such interactions, the characters grow into protagonists, develop intimate relationships with the spiritual beings, learn to value the traditional Japanese family life, and experience communion with nature and the community (Boyd & Nishimura, 2004; Cavallaro, 2006; Ellis, 2010). The recreation of the traditional culture evokes both historical and personal nostalgic feelings from the audience, enabling them to fantasize and become sentimental about the past and its core values and motivating them to visit the animation theme park where Miyazaki's diegetic world is recreated. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3. Individuals who feel nostalgic about Japanese history and culture depicted in Hayao Miyazaki's animations will have greater motivation for visiting the theme park.

2.3.4 Utopian societies

Although the notion of "utopia" was introduced to the Japanese society as early as the Meiji Restoration period in the 19th century, the country as a whole had become pessimistic after losing the World War II, and its cultural products, such as visual arts and novels, had also leaned toward the dystopian genre (Moichi, 1999). Contrary to this cultural trend, Miyazaki depicts utopian Japanese societies in his animations by emphasizing the values of unity, support, and compassion among members of society and by tackling critical social and cultural issues that

need immediate attention (McCarthy, 1999). Miyazaki believes that utopia exists only in one's

childhood, and thus, places children in the center of the community, and portrays a sense of

belonging to the community as an integral component of his utopian society (Fujimoto, 2008).

From watching characters grow with the encouragement from their community, the audience

appreciates and longs for the utopian society that does not exist in Japan (Wegner, 2010).

Although his works echo acute alarms of the modern society, Miyazaki still attempts to deliver

the hope and comfort for the future through depictions of utopian society with communal support

and eternal love (McCarthy, 1999; Napier, 2000). Thus, the values of utopian society depicted in

Miyazaki's animations are likely to be further projected onto the theme park based on his works

and thus motivate audiences to visit the park. This rationale leads to the following hypothesis.

H4. Individuals who feel nostalgic about the society depicted in Hayao Miyazaki's

animations will have greater motivation for visiting the theme park.

2.4 Motivation and attitude

Tourism motivation is central to understanding tourist behavior. Motivation in tourism

literature has been discussed in terms of push and pull factors (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). Push

factors are driven by tourists' internal desire to visit out of pure interest in the destination,

whereas pull factors include external features of the destination such as attractions and services

provided (Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995; Park, Reisinger, & Park, 2009; Uysal & Jurowski,

1994; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In addition, tourism motivation generally includes the constructs of

escapism, fantasy, immersion, verisimilitude, and nostalgia (Choi, 2017; Oh & Ma, 2018).

According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Pearce's (1993) leisure ladder, tourists

aim to satisfy their desire for self-esteem, self-actualization, social needs, relaxation, stimulation,

relationship, and fulfilment. All these factors play an integral role in intrinsically and

extrinsically motivating tourists to visit the destination depicted in media.

Given that motivation is a key driving force behind tourist behavior, it is also likely to

significantly influence tourist attitude and intention. Studies have indeed found that highly

motivated tourists tend to form more positive, favorable attitudes toward tourism activities and

destinations (Huang & Hsu, 2009). Tourist attitude is an affective predisposition, shaped by

experience and learning, to respond to tourism destinations or services in a favorable or

unfavorable way (Lam & Hsu, 2006). The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) postulates

that attitude is a significant predictor of human behavioral intention, and studies have shown that

a positive attitude leads to a higher intention to visit a destination (Huang & Hsu, 2009; Lam &

Hsu, 2006). Therefore, this study predicts similar relationships among motivation, attitude, and

intention to visit in the context of the animation theme park.

H5. Motivation for visiting the theme park will positively influence individuals' attitude

toward the theme park.

H6. Motivation for visiting the theme park will increase individual's intention to visit the

theme park.

H7. Positive attitude towards the theme park will increase individual's intention to visit

the theme park.

3. Method

Questionnaire items measuring multidimensional nostalgias associated with Miyazaki's

animations, motivation, attitude, and intention to visit the animation theme park were adapted

from previously validated studies and slightly modified to reflect the specific context of this

study. For example, original items such as "I envied Hong Kong society as shown in the films"

and "I believed the storylines of the Hong Kong films were intriguing" were changed to "I

envied the society shown in Miyazaki's animations" and "The storylines of Miyazaki's

animations were intriguing." All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly

disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Individual questionnaire items, their original sources, and item

reliability and validity are reported in Table 1.

[Table 1. Internal reliability and convergent validity of the measurements.]

The main survey was conducted in South Korea by an online panel survey firm and

collected 342 valid responses (143 males, 199 females). All the respondents were Korean

nationals, and nearly 60% resided in or around the vicinity of Seoul, the nation's capital and

largest city. Their ages ranged from 15 to 61 years, with a mean age of 35.52 years ($SD = 8.785$).

A power analysis using online R software (Preacher & Coffman, 2006) confirmed that the

current sample size was sufficient for testing the hypotheses, with a strong statistical power

(0.999). Although prior familiarity with Miyazaki and his works were not taken into

consideration when recruiting the respondents, they all reported that they knew Miyazaki and

had watched at least one of his animations, indicating the high familiarity of the director in South

Korea.

4. Results

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the collected data to validate the

factor structures of the measurements. Items with significantly low factor loadings were removed

first based on the CFA results. As reported in Tables 1 and 2, the final measurement model had

adequate internal reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The CFA results also

indicated that the overall fit indices of the measurement model were acceptable (Table 3). Next,

structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was conducted using the items confirmed via the

CFA to examine the validity of the proposed research model and its hypothesized paths. As

summarized in Table 3, the SEM results showed that the structural model had adequate fit

indices overall.

[Table 2. Descriptive analysis and discriminant validity of the measurements.]

[Table 3. Fit indices of the measurement and structural models.]

As predicted by H1, H2, and H3, memory of characters (H1: $\beta = 0.575$, $p < 0.001$),

memory of film backdrops and contents (H2: $\beta = 0.152$, $p < 0.01$), and memory of Japanese

history and culture (H3: $\beta = 0.215$, $p < 0.01$) elicited greater motivation to visit the theme park.

However, H4 was not supported; memory of envying an advanced society had no significant

effect on motivation (H4: $\beta = 0.072$, $p > 0.05$). Consistent with H5 and H6, greater motivation

led to more positive attitude towards the theme park (H5: $\beta = 0.878$, $p < 0.001$) and increased

visit intention (H6: $\beta = 0.734$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, H7 was also supported; positive attitude

toward the theme park elicited greater intention to visit the destination (H7: $\beta = 0.158$, $p < 0.01$).

[Figure 1. Proposed research model with standardized path coefficients.]

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that the feelings of nostalgia elicited from Miyazaki's

animations are positively associated with tourism motivation, which is consistent with earlier

studies suggesting that film nostalgia largely influences tourist attitudes and behaviors (Kim

2012; Kim, Kim, & Petrick, 2019; Roesch 2009). Specifically, our findings show that members

of the audience who feel nostalgic about characters (Nostalgia 1) and storylines and artistic

scenes (Nostalgia 2) in Miyazaki's animations are more likely to be motivated to visit the theme

park. This suggests that animation can elicit feelings of nostalgia although it, by nature, is not as

realistic as motion pictures with human actors, implying that the richness in content of the media

is more central to experiencing nostalgia than the *type* of media (e.g., movie vs. animation).

Moreover, nostalgia associated with Japanese history and culture (Nostalgia 3) is found to

enhance tourism motivation. Miyazaki's fans tend to have a strong curiosity and emotional

connection with the traditional Japanese culture, and the director satisfies the fans by providing a

culturally enriched universe with religious, supportive, unindustrialized, and nature-friendly

surroundings (Wegner, 2010). After watching the animations, those who are interested in or

willing to learn about the history and culture portrayed in his works are likely to be motivated to

visit the theme park.

Contrary to our hypothesis, the society depicted in Miyazaki's works (Nostalgia 4) is

found to induce a nonsignificant effect on motivation. This nostalgic dimension is associated

with the degree to which the audience envies the society and perceives it as an advanced one

(Kim, Kim, & Petrick, 2019). Given that Miyazaki's animations typically feature a pre-

modernized time and place, our survey respondents might have perceived the society as not

being utopian and advanced as they would hope for. Another possible interpretation for the

nonsignificant finding may be attributed to the characteristics of the sample. The survey

respondents are all South Koreans who are well aware of the oppressive Japanese rule over

Korea between 1910 and 1945; thus, they might have not been envious of the society depicted in

the animations although they acknowledge the aesthetic value of the Japanese characters, places,

history, and culture.

Although the current study does not propose and validate its own exploratory dimensions

of nostalgia, it still offers meaningful theoretical contributions to the field by successfully

applying and replicating the four dimensions of film nostalgia identified by Kim, Kim, and

Petrick (2019) for the very first time, and by confirming the notion that nostalgia is a

multidimensional concept that has much use in the tourism industry. While studies have

identified numerous tourism motivation factors such as novelty, relaxation, adventure, weather,

and cost, only a few have leveraged nostalgia, and in particular, its multidimensional nature.

However, this study verifies the different types of nostalgic feelings and demonstrates how they

motivate tourists' visit intention, thus offering useful conceptual insights for studying nostalgia

as a key tourism motivation and filling the gap in research.

Moreover, this study extends film tourism literature to include the context of animation

theme parks. Earlier research has frequently examined the role of past experience in choosing

tourism destinations; however, no empirical studies have been conducted to investigate how

nostalgic elements in popular animations can serve as motivating factors for tourists' visit

intention. The context of this study is also unique such that while most film tourism research

focuses on destinations that have appeared in live action films or places where films have

actually been made, our findings show that surreal fantasy worlds created in animations can also

induce positive nostalgic effects for attracting tourists. This extends the existing film tourism

literature to the domain of non-live animated films, which theoretically bridges the fields of

animation and tourism and calls for future research on the intersection of the two.

In addition to these theoretical implications, the findings of this study provide the tourism

industry with practical guidelines for developing strategies related to effectively identifying and

utilizing the nostalgic elements when designing, planning, and marketing an animation theme

park, which may lead to a more sustainable development and success of film tourism. For

example, theme parks are a hybrid of three large components: pre-show or waiting areas where

visitors wait in line to see key attractions, the main shows consisting of rides and movies

associated with media contents (e.g., animation), and post-show or gift shop areas where related

merchandise (e.g., character figurines, key chains, and souvenirs) can be purchased. While the emphasis is primarily on the design and presentation of the main shows, the theme park industry should also recognize the importance of visitors' pre-show experience and aim to design their parks to elicit nostalgic feelings about animation characters, storylines, scenes, and culture even before the visitors enter the main attraction areas.

Nostalgic feelings are critical to strengthening consumer-brand relationships over time and are often contingent on longevity and exposure to the brand and storytelling practice (Kessous, Roux, & Chandon, 2015). The theme park industry would thus benefit from preparing high quality merchandise associated with key nostalgic elements identified in this study and promoting the same in post-show areas, making it convenient for visitors to purchase them. In turn, this would allow sustainable exposure to the animation and ultimately increase the audience's loyalty to Miyazaki's works. In addition, theme parks should encourage visitors to *tell* their stories by sharing nostalgic experiences on the parks' homepages or social media, thereby shaping the sense of belonging to a social circle that appreciates Miyazaki's animation.

Despite these theoretical and practical contributions, our findings should be interpreted with caution. The sample consisting only of Koreans may also restrict the generalizability of the study findings. Theme parks aim to attract not only local but also international tourists with diverse backgrounds and interests. Therefore, the current sample does not fully represent the entire range of potential visitors, and our findings may not be applicable to non-Koreans. Nonetheless, future studies conducted elsewhere on Miyazaki's animation may expect to find a similar role played by nostalgia, given that the director and his works are recognized and enjoyed globally.

Another limitation arises from the absence of investigation into the potential effects of individual differences such as gender and sensation seeking tendency. For example, previous tourism studies have found that men and women have different travel values and purposes (Meng & Uysal, 2008), and individuals who seek high sensation tend to participate in extreme tourism activities, whereas those with low desire for sensation prefer to visit cultural, natural, and heritage attractions (Pizam, Reichel, & Uriely, 2001). Thus, future studies should consider recruiting a more diverse, representative sample and investigating the role of such individual differences to achieve greater generalizability and significance of the study findings.

6. Conclusion

The elements of fantasy, adventure, and surrealism embedded in animations make the medium a suitable ingredient for theme parks where tourists become immersed into the world of hyper-reality. In line with this presumption, the current study demonstrates that the multidimensional nostalgias associated with Miyazaki's animations play a vital role in increasing tourists' intention to visit the theme park inspired by the director's works. Our findings indicate that individuals who feel nostalgic about characters, narratives, aesthetics, cultures, and traditions show a strong motivation to visit the theme park, which positively influences their attitude and behavioral intention to visit the theme park in the future. Although the representativeness of the sample and lack of investigation into the potential moderating effects may limit the generalizability and applicability of our findings, this study provides useful insights on understanding the multidimensional nature of nostalgia and its integral role in promoting film tourism.

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