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THE RISE OF LIVE-ACTION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL NOSTALGIA AND PERSONALIZED CONTENT

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ABSTRACT

The rise of live-action *adaptations of animated films and comics is embedded in a visual ecosystem shaped by digital platforms, algorithmic dynamics, and artificial intelligence technologies. This article examines how these productions combine data-driven aesthetic and narrative decisions with techno-creative processes involving animation, visual effects, and photorealistic realism to enhance audience engagement. Through the analysis of* The Lion King *(2019),* The Little Mermaid *(2023), and* One Piece *(2023), the study explores nostalgia as an emotional strategy and its influence on franchise selection, the early circulation of images, and audience reception in contemporary platform-based media environments.*

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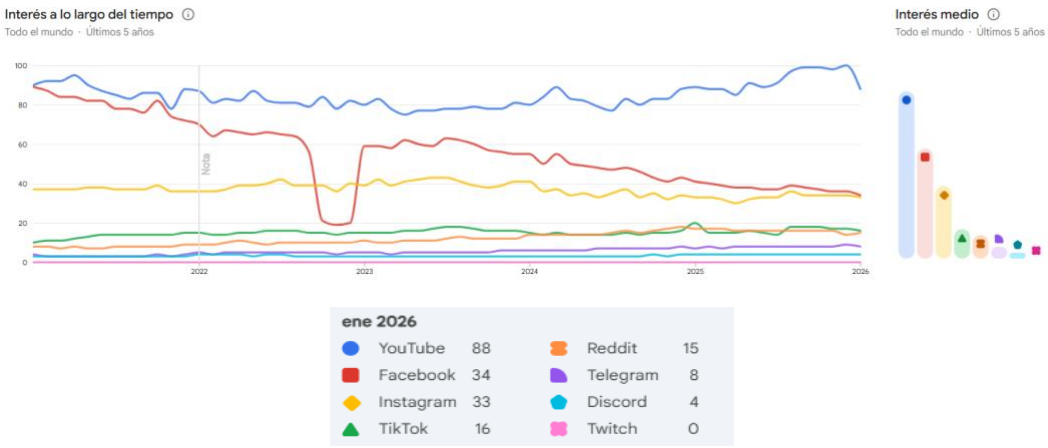
1. Introduction

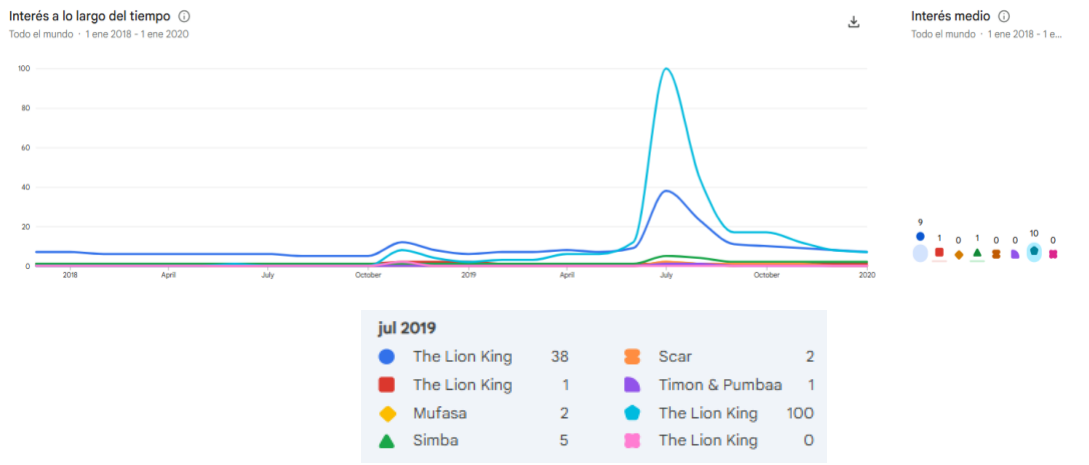
Over the last decade, live-action adaptations have become one of the key drivers of the global entertainment industry. In this article, the term *live action* is used in a broad sense, closer to an industrial and paratextual label than to a strictly technical description (Gray, 2010). Although it evokes the presence of human performers and the promise of a "realistic" register, in the contemporary context it designates a set of strategies for reactivating animated properties through a photorealistic aesthetic regime supported by digital technologies (simulation, computer-generated environments, compositing, and visual effects) (Rodowick, 2007). This breadth helps explain why productions heavily constructed through CGI can circulate and be received as *live action*, insofar as they mobilize the expectation of "real action" as a novelty claim rather than as a technical criterion of the medium. These productions are built, to a large extent, upon an explicit relation of resemblance to the original works, both narratively and visually, reproducing plot structures, recognizable images, and visual codes that are already consolidated within the collective imaginary (Kennedy-Karpat, 2020). This surge cannot be understood merely as an aesthetic fashion, nor as the straightforward application of new photorealistic imaging techniques to audiovisual creation. Rather, it represents a comprehensive rethinking of the cultural value chain, conceived as a format of production, circulation, and reception that extends from the selection of stories to be reactivated to the configuration, distribution, and public discussion of images within transmedia digital environments. The most widespread of these are streaming and video platforms (Netflix/Disney+, YouTube), social networks (TikTok, X, Instagram), and digital communities (Reddit, Discord), where content is distributed and reinterpreted across multiple formats (Fig. 1). There, promotional materials and excerpts from the work are transformed into clips, threads, reactions, memes, or "shot-by-shot" comparisons, generating circuits of discussion that accompany the release and shape its reception (Fig. 2A, 2B, and 2C).

Figure 1. Temporal evolution of global search interest for platforms and digital communities on Google (Google Trends; normalized index 0–100), worldwide (2021–2026).



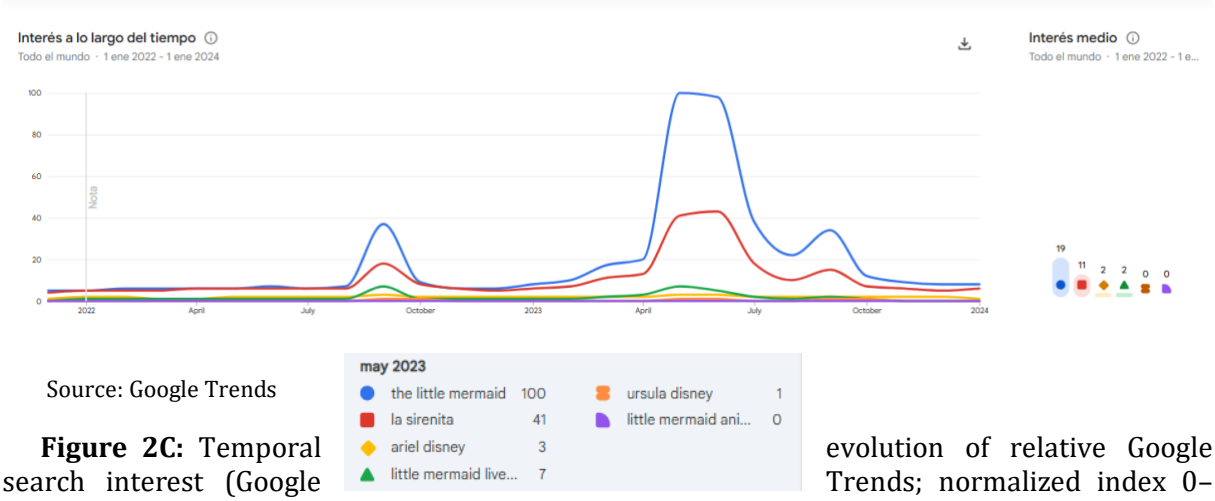
Source: Google Trends

Figure 2A. Temporal evolution of relative Google search interest (Google Trends; normalized index 0–100) for the term "The Lion King" worldwide (Jan 1, 2018–Jan 1, 2020).



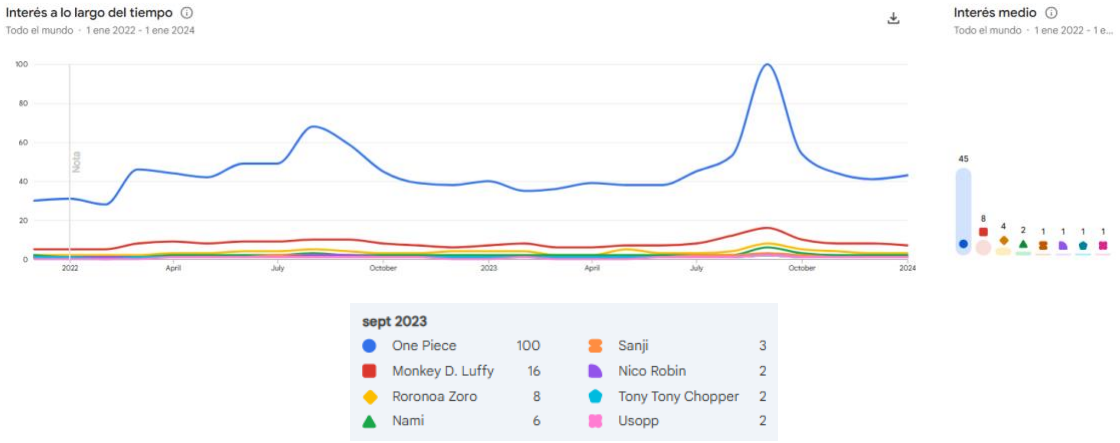
Source: Google Trends

Figura 2B: Evolución temporal del interés de búsqueda relativo en Google (Google Trends; índice normalizado 0–100) para el término "The Little Mermaid" a nivel mundial (1 enero 2022–1 enero 2024).



Source: Google Trends

Figure 2C: Temporal evolution of relative Google search interest (Google Trends; normalized index 0–100) for the term "One Piece" worldwide (Jan 1, 2022–Jan 1, 2024).



Source: Google Trends

This scenario can be explained through three interrelated axes that structure the contemporary audiovisual environment. First, the nostalgia economy, through which major studios recuperate iconic titles capable of activating shared memories and securing a pre-existing audience base, thereby turning the past into a form of emotional capital that can be strategically

exploited in a highly competitive market (Brown et al., 2024). Second, the algorithmic logic of platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, or Amazon Prime, which do not merely exhibit content but continuously process consumption and behavioral data to generate predictive models that shape industrial decision-making (from investment and script development to release planning and personalized promotion) (Wayne, 2022). Finally, there is the permanent conversation on social media, where each teaser, poster, or leak (often even at pre-release stages) helps to shape public perceptions of these works and functions simultaneously as a feedback mechanism and an informal measurement system for the industry (Oh et al., 2017; Kampani & Nicolaides, 2023).

In this context, live-action adaptations take shape as a techno-emotional product embedded in what can be defined as an architecture of anticipation. This architecture rests on largely invisible infrastructures (such as big data, recommendation engines, and emotional-segmentation systems), with the aim of modulating anticipation and continuously integrating it into the creative process itself.

1.1. Research Objectives

This article poses the following central research question: How do data technologies and mass personalization reconfigure the life cycle (production, distribution, and reception) of live-action adaptations?

To address this question, the study pursues three specific objectives::

1. Describe the technical and narrative strategies through which studios capitalize on nostalgia and brand recognition.
2. Analyze the role of artificial intelligence and recommendation algorithms in creative and promotional decision-making.
3. Explore the interaction between audiences and social platforms in the pre-reception phase..

2. Metodología

This article adopts a qualitative methodological approach complemented by statistical foundations, with an exploratory and analytical orientation, aimed at understanding the rise of live-action adaptations as a complex cultural phenomenon embedded within the contemporary audiovisual system.

The methodology combines a critical literature review with the analysis of representative case studies, thereby articulating the theoretical framework with the examination of specific audiovisual products and their media reception.

2.1. Interdisciplinary Theoretical Review

First, an interdisciplinary literature review was conducted focusing on the three axes outlined above: theories of nostalgia and cultural memory, scholarship on algorithms and digital platforms, and transmedia approaches to audiovisual storytelling. This review made it possible to construct a solid conceptual framework supporting the article's central hypothesis: that contemporary live-action adaptations are a symptom of the convergence between emotion, automation, and digital culture.

To this end, academic sources from cultural studies, audiovisual communication, the sociology of platforms, and media theory were considered, prioritizing authors such as Svetlana Boym, Fredric Jameson, Henry Jenkins, Shoshana Zuboff, and Tarleton Gillespie, among others.

2.2. Case Selection

For the empirical analysis, three case studies were selected that exemplify different live-action adaptation strategies within the global entertainment industry:

> ***- The Lion King (2019),*** directed by Jon Favreau and produced by Disney, represents a clear example of digital hyperrealism applied to a classic narrative with a strong nostalgic charge.

- ***The Little Mermaid (2023),*** directed by Rob Marshall, also produced by Disney, was selected due to the intensity of the social debate it generated, especially across digital networks, around ethnic representation and fidelity to the original work.

- ***One Piece (2023*)**, a Netflix series based on Eiichirō Oda's manga, makes it possible to analyze how live-action adaptations expand into the realm of Japanese anime and are reconfigured according to transmedia logics, with a high degree of interaction with fan communities.

These cases were selected on the basis of their media impact, their aesthetic and cultural diversity, and their wide circulation across digital platforms and social networks, which makes them particularly suitable objects for analyzing the interplay between image, algorithms, and reception.

2.3. Discursive and Media Analysis

A content analysis was conducted for each case, considering:

- The narrative and visual strategy adopted in the adaptation (aesthetics, screenplay, character design).
- The institutional promotional discourse (official campaigns, trailers, interviews, press releases).
- The product's reception and digital circulation, focusing on reactions across platforms such as Twitter/X, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, as well as specialized criticism.

At this final level, the analysis focused on identifying dynamics of pre-reception understood as a specific analytical phase: the set of visual, discursive, and emotional interactions that occur prior to release and that actively shape meaning-making, audience expectations, and the work's subsequent reception.

Particular attention was paid to the role of emotions (such as nostalgia, awe, identification, or disappointment) and to the ways in which recommendation and virality algorithms condition the visibility, amplification, or rejection of certain visual content.

3. Theoretical Framework

Live-action adaptations do not emerge in a vacuum; rather, they arise at the intersection of three converging dynamics in recent years: the exploitation of collective memory (nostalgia), the automation of cultural consumption (algorithms), and the expansion of narrative universes beyond the screen (transmedia). Added to this is a recent phenomenon, pre-reception, which refers to the anticipatory discussion of a product prior to its release and whose impact is decisive in shaping the final form of the audiovisual work. This section reviews these four axes, which help to explain (in part) the current rise of live-action adaptations.

3.1. Nostalgia and the Culture of Repetition

Nostalgia (in its etymological sense as pain associated with return) has been repurposed as a key resource in today's cultural economy, where major media conglomerates exploit it as an emotional anchor and a lever of differentiation in an oversaturated market (Sedikides, Wildschut & Baden, 2004). Large platforms identify works that shaped the childhood imaginaries of different generations and relaunch them in updated versions, offering an experience that combines the familiar with new audiovisual technologies. This emotional mobilization enables marketing strategies based on direct appeals to memory, but it also supports programming decisions within ever-expanding catalogs, where prior recognition translates into lower financial risk and a higher likelihood of an immediate click (Brown et al., 2024; Bucher, 2018).

As Boym (2001) argues, one can distinguish between restorative nostalgia, oriented toward reconstructing an idealized past with as few alterations as possible, and reflective nostalgia, which allows itself to ironize and interrogate that same past. Live-action productions bring both

modalities into play: the former manifests in the near-literal reproduction of iconic scenes, while the latter introduces clear plot modifications, accompanied by metanarrative nods and adjustments in character construction aligned with contemporary sensibilities. The result is a product that fulfills a dual function: it operates as an emotional relic for adult audiences and as a gateway for new publics, all of it calibrated through audience testing and preference metrics that minimize the likelihood of rejection.

Paul Grainge (2002) conceptualizes this phenomenon as stylized memory: a process that recodes the past through the visual codes of the digital era. In live-action adaptations, this translates into the reconstruction of animated worlds through photorealistic imagery, highly detailed textures, and immersive sound, giving the original a more "spectacular" appearance aligned with current standards. These resources reinforce the promise of novelty while simultaneously helping to legitimize investment by showcasing the studio's capacity to compete in an increasingly demanding visual-effects landscape. In addition, online promotional materials such as behind-the-scenes featurettes, trailers, and short-form social media assets invite audiences to comment on the new version and facilitate the title's viral circulation even before its release.

However, photorealistic translation entails aesthetic tensions: when an animated classic is reinterpreted through hyperrealistic digital animation (realistic texturing and more restrained gesture), a form of emotional estrangement can emerge, close to what the literature terms the uncanny valley (Mori, 1970/2012). In the case of virtual animals, several studies show that increasing realism and certain mismatches between style and expressivity can reduce affinity and heighten feelings of unease (Schwind et al., 2018; Sierra Rativa, Postma & van Zaanen, 2022). This friction between technical verisimilitude and stylized expressivity forces viewers to negotiate new forms of empathy (Rodowick, 2009), something that was particularly visible in the critical reception of The Lion King (2019), where it was noted that the naturalism pursued by the remake limits the anthropomorphic expressivity of the original (Brody, 2019). It is also worth уточifying that the film was constructed entirely with computer-generated images and without motion capture (Desta, 2019).

Ultimately, nostalgia in live-action adaptations operates as a programmable affective element: studios track which titles generate the strongest resonance in interaction metrics (search queries, nostalgic playlists, commemorative hashtags) and use these signals to feed predictive models of profitability.

3.2. Algorithms, Personalization, and the Attention Economy

Live-action adaptations are embedded in an ecosystem in which recommendation algorithms have ceased to be mere ordering tools and have become decisive infrastructures of cultural mediation (Gillespie, 2014). Platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, or Amazon Prime process vast volumes of data to anticipate behaviors and maximize user time-on-platform (Gomez-Uribe & Hunt, 2015). These recommendation systems operate by learning from past behavior to predict preferences and suggest tailored content, increasingly powered by advanced artificial intelligence techniques such as neural networks and deep learning (Zhang, Lu & Jin, 2021). This predictive and adaptive capacity reinforces consumption patterns by reducing exposure to proposals that entail greater aesthetic or narrative risk (Pajkovic, 2022).

Studies such as that of Günevi Uslu (2025) show that recommendation systems do not merely rank the visibility of titles; they actively shape users' subjective experience by reinforcing consumption patterns grounded in familiarity, repetition, and low cognitive friction. Algorithmic personalization therefore tends to privilege content perceived as safe or recognizable, reducing exposure to aesthetic or narrative proposals deemed riskier. This logic is particularly relevant to live-action adaptations, whose appeal to already familiar universes aligns optimally with environments that reward predictability and emotional affinity.

Within this framework, decisions about which classics to relaunch and with what aesthetic tone are grounded in consumption and segmentation data, which make it possible to estimate affinities across generational cohorts and demographic niches within a risk-management logic

(Wayne, 2022). Algorithms function as invisible mediators between supply and demand, indirectly influencing production strategies by privileging content with greater potential for retention and sustained circulation within the platform (Bucher, 2018; Gomez-Uribe & Hunt, 2015).

This model fits within what Zuboff (2019) terms surveillance capitalism: the digital traces left by each viewing are transformed into "raw material" for algorithms that assign an anticipated value to future titles. In this way, big data describes past preferences in order to configure the cultural menu of the future, determining which audiovisual products receive the green light and what technological investment accompanies them.

The development phase is also shaped by creative analytics tools. Hallinan and Striphas (2016) document how studios test multiple trailer versions through automated A/B testing, adjusting music, editing pace, and even color palette in response to segmented micro-audiences. Recent research on recommendation systems suggests that these decisions are embedded within two-stage algorithmic architectures, where an initial selection identifies content with high attraction potential and a second stage optimizes its presentation to maximize retention (Jaiswal, 2024). These processes confirm that personalization is not confined to distribution; it begins at the point of conception of the product, giving rise to what Manovich (2020) describes as human–machine co-authorship.

In business terms, platforms treat audiences as differentiated groups that can be targeted in an almost automated way (Bergaz Portolés, Perlado Lamo de Espinosa, & Pérez Penas, 2022). This segmentation is materialized through recommendations, notifications, and (as noted) variations in artwork designed to increase the likelihood of clicks and viewing continuity (Eklund, 2022). In this way, the "attention economy" operates as a sustained cycle of capture, measurement, and readjustment whose goal is to optimize the performance of each title within the platform environment (Heitmayer, 2025).

This algorithmic mechanism operates after content is added to the catalog and also in the pre-release phase, extending its effects to promotion and the management of expectations. The same systems that optimize visibility and retention after launch are used to monitor early signals of interest (interactions, searches, comments), identify potential points of controversy, and adjust the promotional framing. In this sense, algorithmic personalization helps to prepare the symbolic terrain on which reception will take place, turning the period prior to release into a strategic instance of calibration (Kampani & Nicolaides, 2023; Schreiner et al., 2025).

As Günevi Uslu (2025) suggests, the user experience begins before the first actual viewing: preventive recommendations, personalized previews, and segmented promotional content help to preconfigure the interpretive frame through which the work will be evaluated. Consequently, attention is captured not only through consumption of the audiovisual text but also through the algorithmic management of expectations and of the paratexts that surround it (Gray, 2010).

From this perspective, so-called pre-reception can be understood as an extension of the attention economy, in which early interaction metrics (likes, dislikes, comments, sentiment scores) function as predictive indicators that inform marketing strategies and, in some cases, subsequent creative decisions, contributing to the anticipation of performance (Kampani & Nicolaides, 2023; Oh et al., 2017; Schreiner et al., 2025). In this way, anticipatory conversation ceases to be a peripheral phenomenon and becomes fully integrated into the algorithmic architecture that governs the production and circulation of live-action adaptations.

Recent research on cultural diversity on digital platforms shows that, in the absence of explicit corrective mechanisms, algorithms reproduce pre-existing symbolic hierarchies within catalogs and reinforce dynamics of cultural homogenization (Moradi et al., 2025). In this context, live-action adaptations align optimally with an environment that rewards familiarity, repetition, and emotional affinity (Pajkovic, 2022), but that can also amplify tensions when such rereadings alter established identity reference points (Gammon & Phan, 2024).

3.3. Transmedia Narratives, Narrative Reconfiguration, and Algorithmic Pre-Reception

Building on this articulation of personalization, prediction, and the management of expectations, live-action adaptations should be understood as nodes within a transmedia network whose construction begins before the official release. Beyond translating an animated text into a photorealistic register, live-action adaptations activate a network of discourses, platforms, and participatory practices that preconfigure the work's meaning prior to its release (Jenkins, 2006; Gray, 2010). Each additional support (such as spin-offs, video games, or even social media content) contributes specific information and encourages viewers to move across platforms, activating an assemblage in which the boundaries between production, distribution, and reception become blurred (Scolari, 2019).

From an industry perspective, this expansion enables the diversification of revenue streams (Evans, 2011). A live-action adaptation can revalorize the original work within streaming catalogs while also boosting merchandising sales, theme-park licensing, and product placement deals (Santo, 2019). Narrative thus becomes an asset that extends its commercial life cycle by unfolding simultaneously across formats with different modes of consumption and by synchronizing release and launch calendars.

This expansion also responds to hypertextual and participatory modes of consumption: users create fan art, cosplay, podcasts, or wikis that add layers of meaning not anticipated in the corporate plan (Jenkins, 2006; Gray, 2010). These contributions feed an affective archive that circulates freely and, in turn, informs creative and marketing decisions; a viral comment on Twitter can lead to the inclusion of a particular scene in a sequel or alter the prominence of a secondary character. In this way, live-action becomes a laboratory in which audience response determines which narrative branches merit additional investment, integrating engagement data into the very architecture of the fictional universe (Wayne, 2022).

Added to this expansive dynamic is pre-reception, an anticipatory phase in which teasers, casting announcements, and leaks further shape a work prior to release (Elmogahzy, 2018; Gray, 2010). The volume and tone of social media mentions during this period have been linked to box-office performance (Pham, 2019), such that pre-release conversation functions as an algorithmic barometer for adjusting campaigns and, at times, content.

Pre-reception also reconfigures power relations between studios and audiences. Organized fandoms can exert pressure for changes in design or casting, as in the paradigmatic case of the redesign of Sonic the Hedgehog (2020). Departments within major production companies monitor hashtags, memes, and sentiment scores in real time to calibrate releases or introduce modifications, evidencing a form of distributed co-authorship among algorithm, studio, and public (Johnson, 2013). In this way, the data generated by anticipatory debate are integrated into dashboards that guide both creative and financial teams, making pre-reception an indispensable vector in the cultural construction of live-action adaptations.

4. Case Analysis

4.1. The Lion King (2019): Nostalgic Hyperrealism and Digital Simulacrum

The live-action version of The Lion King, directed by Jon Favreau, is one of the most representative cases of the use of digital hyperrealism as a filmmaking strategy. Although it was marketed as live action, in technical terms it is more accurately described as a fully computer-generated animation with a high degree of visual realism.

Moreover, this version was conceived as a near shot-by-shot reiteration (Fig. 3) of the 1994 animated classic, a strategy through which Disney brings back to the screen a cult object in the form of the original film. In doing so, it follows the line of restorative nostalgia described by Boym (2001), which is common in the live-action field. The screenplay introduces hardly any variations, and Hans Zimmer's iconic score is retained, reinforcing the sense of familiarity that this adaptation seeks to generate (Grainge, 2002). The novelty lies in the staging: Disney invested in a production workflow based on render farms and virtual-reality environment capture, to the point of promoting the film as "shot inside a video game" (Favreau, 2019).

Figure 3. The Lion King (1994/2019) comparison



Source: Fotogramas

From an algorithmic logic (understood here as the optimization of content circulation and reception through platform metrics), Disney articulated a staggered release strategy. First, a 1-minute-and-32-second trailer was released on the night of Thanksgiving 2018; subsequently, clips of around 45 seconds were launched, tailored to different markets and platforms. The official trailer reached 224.6 million views in 24 hours, the company's highest figure for views up to that date (Variety, 23 Nov 2018).

However, part of the specialized criticism argued that digital hyperrealism, rather than intensifying the emotional experience, produced an estrangement effect linked to the loss of expressivity and charisma in the characters. Peter Bradshaw emphasizes that this new version "gains in visual impact, but loses in character and wit," describing the animal protagonists as "more real than reality itself," with facial and speech patterns that are unsettlingly lifelike yet lacking the expressive plasticity that defined the original animated film. This reading aligns with what (Rodowick, 2009) identifies as a paradox of technical realism, whereby increased visual fidelity does not guarantee greater expressive intensity and may, on the contrary, weaken the viewer's mechanisms of emotional identification. In the case of The Lion King (2019), this tension is reflected in the divergence between critical reception and that of the general public: Rotten Tomatoes lists a 52% critic score versus an 88% audience approval rating. This contrast suggests that the effectiveness of the nostalgic promise (amplified through algorithmic personalization strategies and segmented campaigns on Disney+) prevailed over aesthetic evaluation criteria in the majority viewer's experience.

At the transmedia level, the adaptation extended the narrative across multiple supports: it drove a merchandising line, included RealD 3D and 4DX screenings, and developed virtual-reality experiences, as well as re-editions on Disney+ featuring a Sing-Along function. Each of these supports extended the title's commercial life and generated engagement data (scene-level performance and average viewing time), which feed back into recommendation algorithms and inform creative decisions for future productions (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014).

From an industrial perspective, the film grossed more than $1.6 billion worldwide, making it the company's highest-grossing remake up to that point (Box Office Mojo, 2020). After its addition to the Disney+ catalog, the film exceeded one billion minutes viewed in its first week (Nielsen, 2021). These figures underscore how a "second life" in streaming extends commercial longevity and generates a large volume of interactions that become integrated into platform recommendation systems, thereby increasing the value of these productions beyond theatrical release (Günevi Uslu, 2025).

4.2. The Little Mermaid (2023): Representation, Controversy, and Emotional Virality

The adaptation of The Little Mermaid, directed by Rob Marshall, became embroiled in intense controversy from the moment Disney announced that Halle Bailey would play Ariel, thereby reconfiguring the ethnic representation of an iconic character and triggering a public debate on

representation and racialization in contemporary remakes (Fig. 4). That announcement activated a pre-reception phase (Elmogahzy, 2018): within 72 hours, the official teaser had accumulated 1.5 million "dislikes," and the hashtag #NotMyAriel became a global trend. Depending on one's position, the change in the ethnic identity of an iconic character was read either as an inclusive gesture or as a "betrayal" of the canon. In this context, the X (Twitter/X) algorithm amplified the most polarized reaction videos (Tufekci, 2015), while Disney responded by circulating videos of girls of color moved by the new Ariel, generating a countervailing positive wave.

Figure 4. The Little Mermaid (1989/2023) comparison.



Source: Cinemanía

The new The Little Mermaid oscillates between visual fidelity (recreating emblematic shots from the 1989 classic) (Fig. 3) and screenplay adjustments that shift the romantic focus toward Ariel's exploratory curiosity, reinforcing a form of reflective nostalgia (Svetlana Boym, 2001): the myth remains recognizable, yet the heroine questions the geopolitical boundaries of her world and, by extension, the limits faced by today's young viewers. This narrative rewriting sparked a debate about identity, racism, and canon, turning the film into a site of cultural contestation even before its release.

At the industrial level, Disney segmented the campaign through three mini-trailers guided by viewing-history data: one emphasized romance, another maritime spectacle, and a third the musical dimension (an example of human–algorithm co-authorship in promotion) (Lev Manovich, 2020). In parallel, the studio deployed a transmedia system featuring TikTok challenges, augmented-reality filters, and a pop-remix EP, capturing data on musical tastes and patterns of youth participation. Global box office surpassed $560 million (an intermediate figure for the brand), which analysts interpreted as the result of a "double curve" of demand: initial controversy followed by affirming support (Pham, 2019).

Beyond the product itself, what became central was its digital reception; from a communication perspective, this mass reaction can be understood as part of an algorithmic model that privileges emotionally polarized content (Zeynep Tufekci, 2015). The case of The Little Mermaid illustrates how live-action adaptations update narratives, catalyze social tensions, and generate a parallel story on digital platforms, often more influential than the film text itself.

4.3. One Piece (2023): Transmedia Convergence and Fan-Based Legitimation

The live-action adaptation of One Piece (Netflix, 2023) illustrates how a global platform can reach both local and worldwide audiences without alienating the original fandom. Released simultaneously in 190 countries and dubbed into more than 30 languages, the series was developed through an "algorithmic sampling of fandom" (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016): Netflix analyzed millions of messages across forums and subreddits to identify fears (loss of humor or shifts in tone) and desires (chromatic fidelity and respect for the canon). On the basis of these data, first looks and character posters were designed and tested with micro-communities, a process that Mitchell (2022) terms predictive content calibration.

The manga's creator, Eiichirō Oda, publicly intervened as a guarantor of the project by signing letters to fans and appearing in featurettes, which added legitimacy and eased skepticism. The result was unusual for an anime adaptation: Rotten Tomatoes reports 85% critical approval and 95% audience approval; Brandwatch measured fewer than 5% negative mentions on X/Twitter during the first week, compared with the 18% typically observed for equivalent titles.La estrategia transmedia reforzó el vínculo con la comunidad: filtros de Instagram que recreaban los poderes de los Sombrero de Paja o una línea de ropa Uniqlo activaron lo que Pedrero et al. (2022) llaman ecosistema de retroalimentación afectiva. Estas extensiones generaron picos simultáneos en métricas de venta: Viz Media informó de un +880 % en los tomos 1-3 del manga en EE. UU. la semana posterior al estreno (Publisher's Weekly, 2023).

In terms of consumption, One Piece accumulated 140 million viewing hours and reached 18.5 million accounts in its first four days; by the end of the fourth month, it totaled 71.6 million views (Netflix Top 10, 2023). These figures support the claim that the combination of emotional mining, fan participation, and algorithmic personalization can translate into tangible success metrics within the attention economy.

5. Discussion

The analysis of The Lion King (2019), The Little Mermaid (2023), and One Piece (2023) shows that live-action adaptations now operate as hybrid cultural artifacts in which strategies for activating nostalgia, algorithmic infrastructures, and transmedia expansion converge. Each title activates a different form of nostalgia: restorative in the shot-by-shot replication of The Lion King; reflective in the identity-focused rereading of The Little Mermaid; and mixed in One Piece, where fidelity to the original series material is balanced with an orientation toward new audiences. This plasticity confirms the coexistence of divergent nostalgias identified by Boym (2001) and suggests that the choice of one modality or another is made during the algorithmic phase of audience segmentation.

However, this interpretation has an initial limitation: the opacity of recommendation systems and the various analytics tools prevents the establishment of direct causal relationships between predictive models and specific creative decisions. As Günevi Uslu (2025) notes, although it is possible to infer patterns from the observable behavior of platforms, the internal criteria that guide the prioritization of certain content remain largely inaccessible to academic analysis. In this respect, the present study necessarily relies on indirect indicators (consumption data, promotional strategies, and corporate discourse) that allow trends to be identified, but not an exhaustive reconstruction of decision-making processes.

Despite this limitation, the cases analyzed indicate that recommendation systems influence content visibility after release; they also indirectly shape production strategies by privileging formats, tones, and narrative universes with higher retention potential.

Platforms such as Netflix (and, more broadly, major streaming services) use machine learning to personalize recommendations and title presentation, while also testing promotional variants designed to maximize click-through and retention (Netflix Research, n.d.; Netflix TechBlog, 2016). In Netflix's case, this logic extends to experiments with personalized trailers (Moses, 2025; Netflix, Inc., 2024). However, the gap between critics and audiences (52% vs. 88% for The Lion King) shows that attention metrics do not necessarily translate into aesthetic evaluation, opening a debate about a potential overemphasis on spectacle and about the limits of algorithmic optimization (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.).

Precisely, one of the drivers of this hypertrophy of spectacle is the discursive value of the "live action" label. In digital environments, the term functions as a paratext of authenticity and realistic updating that orients expectations before viewing (Gray, 2010). However, that promise is often sustained by images constructed through a high degree of simulation and digital effects, so that the distinction between "the filmed" and "the animated" becomes less evident. In practice, viewers interpret as "real action" an outcome that, to a large extent, derives from techniques specific to digital animation (modeling, lighting, and compositing), and "realism" ends up operating as an argument that legitimizes the project's expenditure and technical deployment (Rodowick, 2009;

Manovich, 2020). In *The Lion King* (2019), this rhetoric is articulated around a photorealism that, by privileging naturalism, can strain the expressivity inherited from the original animated film and reactivate frictions in reception (Brody, 2019; Desta, 2019).

The transmedia dimension reinforces the franchise through additional experiences that extend the narrative's useful life and generate feedback for future iterations (Jenkins, 2006). In the case of One Piece, the series' release coincided with an 880% increase in sales of the first three manga volumes (Publisher's Weekly, 2023), exemplifying an affective feedback network in which narrating, measuring, and reconfiguring the product form part of the same process.

Finally, pre-reception emerges as a central space of symbolic contestation. The flood of "dislikes" and strongly negative reactions surrounding The Little Mermaid shows that hyperconnected publics attempt to shape a work's discourse before its release; moreover, Disney's corporate response illustrates the capacity of major studios to reframe controversy and convert it into positive visibility within the very circuit of recommendation algorithms, thus confirming that controversy can also function as a strategic resource. This reading, however, must be qualified: the analysis is based primarily on highly visible platforms such as X (Twitter/X) and YouTube, which leaves out other, less quantifiable and potentially less polarized forms of conversation, such as private forums or closed communities.

6. Conclusions

Live-action adaptations function as platforms of convergence between emotion, data, and participation. Their success depends on how effectively nostalgia is mobilized as cultural capital, predictive analytics are integrated into production and promotion, and transmedia networks are activated to transform each text into a measurable, remixable asset. This logic can optimize attention, but it can also homogenize cultural supply and turn controversy into a market tactic.

These conclusions entail three main implications. At the economic-industrial level, the future profitability of live action will depend on articulating recommendation algorithms with transmedia strategies capable of sustaining long-term interest. In the cultural sphere, the tendency to exploit nostalgia highlights the need to promote editorial policies that foster narrative innovation and ensure greater diversity of representations. Finally, on the regulatory front, the opacity of recommendation systems and the intensive management of expectation in the pre-release period (hype) make it essential to adopt algorithmic transparency frameworks that protect audience autonomy.

This study is limited to three high-budget titles and publicly available reception metrics; it lacks internal minute-by-minute data and examples from non-Western markets. Future research should compare independent adaptations, conduct longitudinal audience tracking, and examine the ethical implications of generative AI in production and marketing.

In sum, live-action adaptations are confirmed as a privileged laboratory for studying the hybridization of cultural memory, data mining, and narrative design in the era of mass personalization. Understanding their dynamics is key to anticipating the challenges (and opportunities) of an audiovisual industry increasingly governed by algorithms that do not merely distribute content, but actively contribute to shaping cultural experience.

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