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The Disneyfication of America: A Critical Analysis of Disney's Cultural Impact on American Society

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Dedication

To those who believed in us all along the way.

Our beloved families whose unconditional love, unwavering support and constant encouragement were the cornerstone of our journey. Your firm belief has strengthened our determination to achieve the most rewarding achievements in our lives at such young age.

And our friends; to whom we extend our warmest thanks for their constant encouragement and motivation.

Thank you all.

As if it were not for your presence and companionship completing our Master dissertation would not have been possible.

Aya & Imane

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Above all, all praise to Allah for the strength, patience and perseverance He has bestowed upon us to complete this dissertation.

As Dr. M. HEZBRI aptly noted, every journey comes with price but ours comes with prize. As we look back down the road, we are reminded of all the organizational, intellectual, emotional and motivational challenges that threatened to detain us. However, as resilient as we are, our strong resolves and faith against these challenges have become opportunities, for intellectual and personal growth, self-development, self-reliance and self-discipline, by overcoming every obstacle and downfall along the way.

With all appreciation, we would like to extend our sincere and profound gratitude to our supervisor, Dr. Mouna HEZBRI, for her insightful guidance, continuous support and constructive feedback that played an essential role in accomplishing this dissertation.

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Last but not least, we hereby affirm this dissertation is plagiarism-free and a self-independent original research study. And thereof any inadvertent errors, mistakes or inconsistencies are our own responsibility.

Abstract

This thesis explores the Disneyfication process through a critical analysis of Disney's cultural impact on American society. The study aims to analyze how Disney portrays cultural norms in its films and their impact on American culture. The research adopted a qualitative research methodology to examine the case study of the Disney film, *Moana*, using textual analysis, visual analysis and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis methods. Accordingly, the film's two-part script, songs and scenes were systematically evaluated in relation to the presentation of American identity in its themes. The results of this study underscore the dual nature of Disneyfication as a mirror and model of American culture. Disney reflects and shapes American culture by popularizing diverse stories, integrating traditional values with individuality and inclusion, while simplifying cultural complexities for global appeal.

Keywords: America, Culture, Disney, Disneyfication, Impact, Moana

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABC	American Broadcasting Corporation
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CGI	Computer-Generated Imagery
ESPN	Entertainment and Sports Programming Network
MCU	Marvel Cinematic Universe
MNC	Multibillion-dollar Multinational Corporation
USA	United States of America

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

American civilization has been heavily influenced by mass media which has served as both a mirror and a forging force of identity, belonging and Americanness. These, despite the US vast ethnic groups and cultural diversity, have been largely assimilated and adapted to shared set of American values and lifestyles. A cultural unity that is by no means an accidental social structure but rather a transmissional strategic top-down plan to reinforce the essence of being American via different content platforms. Characteristically, this is associated with the institutionalization of the common societal convention and norms, such as: the belief in individual freedom, the pursuit of happiness, family values, democracy and civic responsibility and progress and innovation (Storey, 2018). And among these widely influential institutions, the Walt Disney Company has also played a prominent role in reinforcing this sense of Americanness with its ongoing agenda of its Disneyfication of the American Society.

Aside from its widely recognition role as a family-oriented entertainment platform, the Disney company has additionally been advocating for American values reflecting an embodied executive vision of Americanness deeply informed by the process of Disneyfication. Unequivocally, this guiding ethos was articulated by the Walt Disney company in an exclusive statement to the Spay Magazine (1994:63) excerpt, stating:

We have a single vision—a new order based on the promise of democracy. Our resources for building this nation are a rich mixture of land, family and beliefs—which we apply with our own fiery brand of spirit and innovation.... Disney's America celebrates the qualities that have always been the source of our strength and the beacon of hope to people everywhere.

Ultimately, in line with its ambitious vision, Disney has positioned itself as a prominent defining influential force to promote the country's social norms and conventions, and help maintain the

ideological constructs of the U.S. society via the subtle diffusion of its ideals in its animated contents. These thereby lay the foundation for what has eventually been recognized in Academia as: Disneyfication .

As phenomenon, Disneyfication was initially introduced as a broadly defined concept encompassing multiple cultural and commercial phenomena. Respectively, as a term it refers to “the act or instance of assuming, through the process of assimilation the traits and characteristics more familiarly associated with theme park than with real life” (spy magazine, 1994, p. 58). Controversially, its socio-cultural scope was once challenged in 2004 by Bryman under the claim of its inclusion in his term of “Disneyization” and the confinement of the “Disneyfication” to the literature and urban planning, instead (Bryman, 2004). Nonetheless, these two-terms distinction rendered irrelevant after redefining them interchangeably by the Oxford dictionary of social work as: “using the processes that characterize Disney theme parks as metaphors for wide-ranging social changes and processes” (Harris & White, 2018, p175). Similarly, the term was described as a “pejorative term for the metaphorical resemblance of some cultural phenomenon to a theme park. The connotations typically include cultural homogenization, McDonaldization, sanitization, ‘family values’, dumbing down and artificiality.” (Chandler & Munday, 2011, p.107). Grounding on these premises as well as the Disney Universe’s writings of Real (1977) and Wasko’s (1996) (Bryman, 1999), this dissertation adopts the term Disneyfication to refer specifically to the process of altering aspects of real life through representations shaped by the ideological, aesthetic and commercial framework of Disney.

In light of this, one could hypothesize that the Disneyfication process is not just a secondary result of American culture, but a significant source of it. The cultural characteristics associated with the United States like optimism, individualism, consumerism and a belief in moral clarity are consistently reinforced and sometimes even originated through Disney’s media output. As such, Disneyfication has become both a preserver and enforcer of American cultural identity, ensuring its dominance not only within the United States but also on a global scale. (Watts, 1997)

2. Statement of the Problem

Disney has established itself as a dominant presence in American culture. Its vast media wealth and distinctive identity have enabled it to clearly and significantly influence various aspects of popular culture, including entertainment, tourism and consumer behavior. This phenomenon, often referred to as Disneyfication, has greatly influenced cultural consumption and redefined society, making it a critical topic of academic analysis. Despite the company's deep cultural influence, its broad influence raises serious questions about cultural uniformity, institutional excesses and the implicit promotion of certain viewpoints. For example, its portrayal of gender roles, racial stereotypes and family values has been criticized for perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Moreover, its marketing of cultural narratives has sparked controversy over issues of authenticity and the commodification of art and heritage. Despite Disney's efforts to promote cultural diversity in its productions, *Moana* caused a widespread media sensation. Questions have been raised about Western companies benefiting from the original stories, especially after *Moana* appropriated and simplified Polynesian mythology. Although its strong heroine has been praised, critics have claimed that Disney's marketing approach may undermine the authenticity and traditions of the Pacific Islands. In light of these concerns, this study critically analyzes Disney's cultural influence in *Moana*, examining the narrative strategies used and their broader impacts on media and culture in American society.

3. Research Questions

Based on the research question and gap mentioned earlier, this study arises the questions regarding the extent into which the Disneyfication of America contributes to the American culture, in the first place, within the trio of the next sub-questions

1. Is there a cultural agenda implied in Disney ?
2. What specific cultural conventions and norms are attributed to Disney ?

3. In what ways is the cultural agenda of Disney conveyed to the viewers?

4. Aims of the Study

This study seeks to uncover the Disneyfication of American society and its prominent impact on the common US culture. Subsequently, it aims at revealing the key role of the media—particularly The Walt Disney Company—in melding cultural values, social norms and national identity. Additionally, it attempts to examine its cultural agenda to establish a profound understanding to the subtle function of this entertainment industry in creating and endorsing an idealized and commercialized representation of American life. And given to the limit scope of this dissertation, it marginally endeavours to draw attention the implication of its findings beyond the US borders, recognizing the potential cross-cultural effects of Disney’s global reach on diverse societies. Overall, these goals are another effort to new effort to illuminate the cultural and ideological influence of media enterprises, thereby enhancing comprehension of media-induced cultural formation and underscoring the significance of media literacy in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

5. Significance of the Study

This research examines how Disney movies shape American identity through cultural and narrative analysis. It highlights the significance of this research for civilizational studies and its multifaceted impact— both positive and negative—on American society. Moreover, the study contributes to aware Arab Muslim teachers, cultural critics and parents on how storytelling influences personalities. Namely, this research is a vital educational tool designed to enhance cultural awareness and intellectual immunity among young people. It aims to empower them to deconstruct the media messages they encounter, thereby fostering a more conscious generation. Furthermore, the analysis provides a deep understanding of how Disney represents culture in its movies and how this representation affects American society. The field of civilizational studies will also benefit from this study by considering media culture as a means of teaching civilization, which

can be used in the long term in teaching culture, literature and even English to learners of English as a foreign language.

6. Research Methodology

Methodologically, this dissertation adapts a practical empirical case study approach to substantiate its main argument. With this respect, the two parts of Disney's *Moana* are selected as its case study to be critically analysed within the IMRAD framework. With this respect, audio-visual medium is designated as the primary tool for collecting the data. Whereas, the data analysis tools are combined after a hybrid approach which reflects the analytical premises of the textual analysis method, the visual analysis method and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These along with critical thinking showcase the cultural influence through examining sample extracts to assess the proposition regarding the Disneyfication of American society, eventually.

7. Structure of the Study

In terms of structure, this dissertation is organized into four main sections: A general introduction, a theoretical first chapter, a practical second chapter and a general conclusion. With respect to the contents, its first section serves as an academic formal entry to this research paper through reestablishing the local institutionalized academic research framework beginning by establishing the research territory and ending with the organizational development of this research paper. Accordingly, the next section represents a literature review chapter about the relevant aspects of the Disneyfication of America. Specifically, it provides an overview of Disney industry, including: its company, its history, its founder, movies, media and theme parks, as well as the American society, in its first part. Whereas, in its second part, it covers the previous research about Disney cultural impact on the American Society. Subsequently, an empirical case study prevails in a second chapter which critically puts the preceding contents into an analytical test simulating roughly the IMRAD structure. Finally, the dissertation is concluded by a general conclusion which summarizes and concludes the findings of this dissertation and provides new insights to future research reflecting on the limitations and delimitations of the current research scope.

CHAPTER ONE

The Disneyfication of America

Chapter One: The Disneyfication of America

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Introduction

The current chapter retraces the Walt Disney Company's journey, from its beginning as children entertainment local enterprise until its current position as all age's prominent global platform. Through its historical context of evolution, including its visionary founders, its pioneering animation, as well as the birth of its media empire. Accordingly, the focus is on American society, especially in the aspect of media and communication and its cultural dynamics. The result of these paves the way for an analysis of Disneyfication logic and the societal Conventions, as well as the relationship between the company and American society.

1.1 A Historical Context of Disney's Evolution

Disney shaped childhoods for generations. In the summer of 1923, Walt Disney arrived in California with high hopes. He had created a cartoon in Kansas City called *Alice in Wonderland*, about a little girl in a strange, animated world. He decided to use it as a pilot to sell his *Alice Comedies* series to a distributor. Upon his arrival in California, he secured a deal with distributor M.J. Winkler to distribute *Alice in Wonderland* on October 16, 1923. The date marked the beginning of the Disney Company, led by Walt Disney and his brother Roy O. Disney in Los Angeles. At the Hyperion Studios, Walt created the famous character *Mickey Mouse*, the famous mouse. Two *Mickey Mouse* movies were produced, but Walt failed to sell them, as they were silent, and sound was revolutionizing the movie industry. Subsequently, a third *Mickey Mouse* was later produced, synchronized with sound, and they gained huge popularity with the opening of *Steamboat Willie* on November 18, 1928. The character gained widespread popularity and was followed by a successful series of *Mickey Mouse* cartoons. Despite the difficult circumstances that Disney went through, it proved itself; for example, during World War II (1939), Disney released movies that achieved wide popularity such as *Fantasia* 1940 and *Der Fuehrer's Face* 1943. Moreover, Disney opened theme parks all over the world, which helped it gain fame. Like any enduring company, Disney experienced periods of full successes and times of significant challenges, such as the death

of Walt Disney, which had a negative impact on the company. However, the company proved its ability to recover and became stronger, as seen in its success today. (Walt Disney Studios, n.d.)

1.1.1 The Visionary Founders

In the early 1920s, on October 16, 1923, Walt Disney and his brother Roy founded the Disney Brothers Animation Studio in Hollywood, California. Walt Disney handled the creative side, while his brother Roy managed the finances. (Biography.com Editors, 2022)

Roy Disney, the older brother of Walt Disney was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1893. He and his younger brother worked as a newsboy for their father. In 1912, he graduated from Manual Training High School in Kansas City. He left the newspaper business and eventually took a job at the First National Bank of Kansas City with his brother Raymond. Around this time, Roy met Edna Frances and considered marrying her, but was drafted into the U.S. Navy in World War I from 1917 to 1919. Tuberculosis caused his discharge. After recovering, in 1923, he joined Walt and helped him establish the Disney Brothers Studio. Roy married Edna Frances in April 1925. Roy took care of the company's finances. After Walt Disney's death, Roy changed the name of the company to Walt Disney World in memory of his brother, ensuring Walt's legacy endured. (The Disney Wiki, n.d.)

Walter Elias Disney was born on December 5, 1901 in Chicago, Illinois. As child, he developed an interest in drawing and often sold some of his sketches. Later, his family moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where he developed a love for storytelling and entertainment. In 1923, Disney moved to Hollywood, California, and he started the Disney Brothers Studio with his brother Roy now it is the Walt Disney Company. During World War 2, Walt Disney Studios has an important role in supporting USA war efforts. The company produced propaganda movies under the request of the US government and over 1200 military insignia and training movies. During the war, Disney's work served as a moral booster for troops and those who are at home. However, years earlier. In late 1919, Walt Disney returned from his voluntary Red Cross service in post-World War

I France. As an independent eighteen-year-old, he attempted to establish a career in illustration, graphic design and cartooning. However, a different art form caught his attention. Walt met Ub Lwerks, and they became friends. Together, they started a business, but it struggled. Walt eventually left, and Lwerks soon followed him. (The Walt Disney Family Museum, 2019)

Over the years Walt learned about motion pictures and how to create movement in illustrations. To achieve this, they made paper dolls with arms and legs in different positions. He began experimenting with cartoon animation. “I started, actually, to make my first animated cartoon in 1920,” Walt later explained. “Of course, they were very crude things then, and I used sort of little puppet things.” (The Walt Disney Family Museum, 2019, para 1)

1.1.2 The Birth of Media Empire

Walt Disney was known for his passion for drawing and painting from an early age, even selling his artwork to friends and neighbours. He practiced illustration and drawing in Kansas City around 1919, and his brother Roy helped him get a job. Over the years, Walt establishes his own animation company, and in 1923, Walt, his brother Roy and their friend, the animator Ub Lwerks, decided to head to Hollywood. This trio successfully released several animated movies, resulting in the Academy Award-winning *Flowers and Trees* in 1932, which was the first animated movie produced in colour. In addition, Disney created famous characters, and the first that comes to mind is *Mickey Mouse*. However, he was not actually the first character created by Disney. Instead, *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* was the first. However, it was the iconic mouse that enjoyed great popularity. Despite *Mickey Mouse's* first appearance, it was not a major success due to his appearance in a silent movie. But things changed with the advent of sound. In 1928, *Steamboat Willie* premiered in New York, featuring Mickey Mouse voiced by Walt Disney. The movie was a huge success, inspiring the creation of new characters such as Minnie Mouse, Goofy and Donald Duck. Walt's ambition revolutionized the entertainment industry, making animation more realistic by adding sound and colour and combining animated characters with real-life stars, as seen in *Mary Poppins*. Moreover, Disney's theme parks, which began with Disneyland California in 1955, further

cemented his legacy. Although Walt Disney died in 1966, his influence continues to this day. His art school, has produced some of the world's most prominent movie directors, including Tim Burton. Today, the Disney brand remains one of the largest major media companies in the world, valued at approximately \$130 billion. (Headspace Group, n.d.)

1.1.3 Pioneering Animation: The Advent of Iconic Productions

Over the years, people have been inspired by myths, fairy tales, fantasies and other forms of storytelling to create movies and books. It is known as folk literature. Folk literature uses a simple and engaging style that appeals to young audiences. Nearly a century, Walt Disney began his career by producing movies based on this kind of literature because people were enjoying the action, colourful characters and humor that are typical of folk tales. (O'Daly, 2013)

Disney Studios has produced many movies. And in the same time these movies were inspired by the elements of folk literature like fairy tales and other. Fairies appear in two main kinds of stories: legends, which are set in the real world and often based on true events or beliefs, which take place in imaginary lands and feature magical beings. While fairytales are told as fiction with imaginary beings with magical powers. (Universidad de Cuenca, 2013)

Disney productions were also based on myths, imaginative storytelling and stories are field with fantastic adventures in the same time they provide insight into other cultures. Disney's projects have always stood out in the animation world, achieving global fame and success while creating treasured childhood memories. From *Mickey Mouse* to enduring classics like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Fantasia*, *Cinderella* and *Peter Pan*, Disney has fought to get where it is now. Mickey Mouse, a comedic animal cartoon figure, became the most popular character and the iconic symbol of the Walt Disney Company. On November 18, 1928, Mickey Mouse celebrates his birthday as star animated cartoons. There are several stories about the reasons or inspirations for Walt to choosing a mouse as a character. One of them traces back to his time in Kansas City when Walt trained a real mouse. At first, Walt had in mind *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit*, but later Walt

imagined a mouse as the central character. Walt once said, “A mouse is a sympathetic character, in spite of the fact that everybody’s frightened of a mouse, including myself.” according to this Walt create Mickey Mouse who become global icon. (Universidad de Cuenca, 2013)

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was inspired by the classic fairy tale originally gathered by the Brothers Grimm, Jakob and Wilhelm in 1812. Grimm's Fairy Tales is a famous collection of German folk tales, and most famous tales written by them, which includes well-known tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel* and many others. (Deahl, 2013)

1.1.4 Navigating Adversity: Overcoming Challenges and Competition

Walt Disney is considered the winner of the largest number of Oscars, having received 59 nominations and 26 awards. From 1932 to 1969, most of his awards were for Best Animated Feature. He won Academy Awards eight years in a row from 1931 to 1939. But when viewed from another angle, Walt Disney suffered greatly from problems, including financial ones. But the company has proven itself more than before. (The Walt Disney Company's Challenge, 2024)

In the early 1940s, Disney faced a severe financial crisis, using reinvested funds from *Snow White*. The company established a new studio in Burbank, which led to the company exhausting all its money. The following year, *Pinocchio's Box* was produced, but contrary to expectations, World War II caused a huge loss to the movie. Given that it was produced on a budget of 45 million euros, it is considered the most expensive Italian movie ever. But his profits reached only 26 million euros. The European Walt Disney Market dried up mainly due to World War II, and movies also required high power to operate. (Huff, 2023)

The Walt Disney Company has movies that have gained wide fame, such as *Snow White*, but any success is followed by problems in the movie industry. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in 1991, The Walt Disney Company signed a cooperation with Pixar Animation

Studio, a company specializing in the production of computer animation. The two companies cooperated in producing movies that met with great success, such as *Toy Story*, but in 2004 the co-production agreement between the two companies was stopped due to a personal dispute between Steve Jobs and Eisner. Later, Walt's ratings declined, unlike Pixar, where movie viewership peaked. After that, Walt's CEO realized that the success of movies depended primarily on Pixar. (The Impact of Mergers and Acquisitions, 2016).

In the twenty-first century, the world has witnessed significant development in digital media and the Internet in general. Entertainment and competing platforms such as TikTok and Sanrio have emerged. The development of the Internet also encouraged people to stay at home, and with the spread of the phenomenon of take-out food orders and express delivery, people's interest in watching movies on platforms and applications such as Netflix increased after their launch from the cinema. This does Disney a disservice by not keeping up with the Internet age. (The Walt Disney Company's Challenge, 2024)

1.1.5 From Humble Beginnings to Global Dominance: The Disney Success Story

The Walt Disney Company is one of the most iconic entertainment brands worldwide. It started in the 1920s as a modest animation studio and evolved into a multibillion-dollar multinational corporation (MNC). Its growth from a small family business to a global media and entertainment powerhouse reflects visionary leadership, creative innovation and a steadfast dedication to storytelling. Disney has expanded its reach from animated movies to theme parks and media networks, continuously diversifying its offerings and adapting to market changes, securing its position as a leader in the global entertainment industry. (Barman, 2024)

Walt and Roy Disney founded the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio in 1923, initially focusing on producing short animated movies. Walt was the creative force behind the studio, while Roy managed the business operations. The studio's breakthrough came in 1928 with the creation of *Mickey Mouse*, who rapidly became a global icon. In 1937, Disney released its first full-length

animated feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which was both a critical and commercial success, establishing the company as a pioneer in the animation industry and demonstrating the profitability of feature-length animated movies. (Barman, 2024)

During the 1950s and 1960s, Disney continued to produce popular animated classics such as *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and *The Jungle Book* (1967). In addition to animation, the company broadened its scope by venturing into live-action movies, television programming and merchandise, transforming itself into a multifaceted entertainment enterprise. (British Film Institution, 2021)

After achieving great success with animated movies, Walt Disney aimed to broaden his entertainment vision beyond movies. In 1955, he opened Disneyland in Anaheim, California, the world's first large-scale theme park. Disneyland transformed the theme park industry by offering immersive storytelling through rides, attractions and entertainment, bringing Disney's animated worlds to life for both children and adults. Its success laid the foundation for Disney's further expansion into the theme park sector (Designing Disney, n.d.). In 1971, Disney World opened in Orlando, Florida, providing a larger entertainment complex with resorts, hotels and multiple theme parks. This move into theme parks created a new revenue stream and allowed the company to engage directly with its audience in a physical, interactive space. (Weinberg, 2024)

In the 1980s, Disney began a period of aggressive expansion and acquisition. It acquired companies like ABC, ESPN and Miramax Films, which helped the company diversify beyond animation into sports, news and live-action movies and that helped the company grow into a media powerhouse. In the 1980s, Disney embarked on a strategy of rapid growth through acquisitions, purchasing companies like ABC, ESPN and Miramax Films. These acquisitions enabled Disney to expand beyond its traditional animation roots into areas such as sports broadcasting, news and live-action movies, helping the company transform into a major media conglomerate. This diversification significantly contributed to Disney's rise as a dominant force in the entertainment industry. (History Oasis, 2024)

In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Disney experienced a creative revival known as the Disney Renaissance, marked by the release of critically acclaimed and commercially successful animated movies. Iconic movies like *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Lion King* (1994) redefined animated cinema and became cultural landmarks. These movies blended traditional hand-drawn animation with contemporary storytelling, music and technology, captivating audiences worldwide. (British Film Institution, 2021)

In the 2000s and 2010s, Disney made several major acquisitions that solidified its status as a global entertainment leader. The 2006 purchase of Pixar for 7.4\$ billion reinvigorated Disney's animation division by combining Pixar's cutting-edge computer animation with Disney's storytelling expertise, resulting in blockbuster hits like *Toy Story*, *Finding Nemo* and *The Incredibles* (New York Times, 2006). In 2009, Disney acquired Marvel Entertainment, gaining access to a vast array of superhero characters and launching the highly successful Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), with movies such as *The Avengers*, *Black Panther* and *Avengers: Endgame* becoming worldwide box office successes. Then, in 2012, Disney purchased Lucasfilm, obtaining control over the Star Wars franchise, which allowed the company to produce new movies, TV series and merchandise, revitalizing the iconic brand and expanding Disney's global reach further. (Barman, 2024)

Disney's international expansion significantly contributed to its growth as a multinational company. The company opened Tokyo Disney Resort in 1983, followed by Disneyland Paris in 1992 and Shanghai Disney Resort in 2016. These overseas theme parks introduced Disney's unique entertainment experience to new global audiences and became major tourist attractions, further establishing Disney's presence worldwide. (Oriental Land Co., Ltd., n.d.)

In 2019, Disney launched its own streaming service Disney+ as a direct competitor to Netflix and other streaming platforms. It quickly became a major player in the streaming market,

offering a vast library of Disney's movies and TV shows, as well as original content from its franchises like Marvel, Star Wars and Pixar. The streaming service was a strategic move to ensure its relevance in the rapidly changing media landscape and to capture a new generation of digital consumers. In 2019, Disney launched its own streaming platform, Disney+, positioning it as a direct competitor to Netflix and other streaming services. The platform quickly established itself as a key player in the streaming market by offering an extensive library of Disney's movies and TV shows, along with original content from popular franchises such as Marvel, Star Wars and Pixar. This strategic launch was designed to maintain Disney's relevance in the evolving media landscape and to attract a new generation of digital viewers. (The Walt Disney Company, 2019)

Disney's evolution from a small animation studio into a multibillion-dollar global enterprise is driven by its continuous innovation, diversification and strategic growth. Currently, the company generates nearly 94\$ billion in annual revenue, with operations spanning movie, television, theme parks, merchandise and streaming services. By consistently expanding its content portfolio, leveraging its iconic brands, and adopting new technologies, it has established itself as a dominant force in the worldwide entertainment industry. As it adapts to the digital era, its strong legacy of storytelling and innovation positions it for ongoing success in the future. (Barman, 2024)

1.1.6 Disney's Mission and Objectives: From entertaining agenda to cultural propaganda

Disney has a Mission statement which is "To entertain, inform and inspire people around the globe through the power of unparalleled storytelling, reflecting the iconic characters, world-class movie and television, music, live entertainment, sports and brand licensing of The Walt Disney Company". (The Walt Disney Company, n.d, para 1) This mission highlights its commitment not only to entertainment but also to informing and inspiring audiences, positioning itself as a global leader in storytelling that shapes emotions, values and imagination.

Disney originally centred its content on family-friendly, universally appealing stories, often rooted in Christian values and American ideals, aiming to provide wholesome entertainment

for all ages. Over time and as societal values have shifted, so too has its storytelling. The company's narratives have increasingly reflected dominant cultural norms and debates, adapting to changing expectations around gender, race and identity.(Dahle, 2023)

In its beginning princess movies portrayed women as passive, with their worth often tied to beauty and marriage, reinforcing traditional gender roles. But nowadays its movies have introduced more assertive, independent female protagonists, challenging earlier stereotypes and offering more diverse role models. This evolution mirrors broader societal changes and growing demands for representation and empowerment in media. (Fanolla, 2024)

Also, Disney movies often present clear binaries of good versus evil, using characters to embody and transmit moral lessons. While this can foster empathy and moral reasoning, critics argue that it also subtly indoctrinates audiences into specific value systems, including consumerism, traditional family structures and Americanness. It has been criticized for defaulting to Euro-American cultural references, even when adapting stories from non-Western settings. Movies like *Aladdin* and *Mulan* have faced scrutiny for cultural inaccuracies and perpetuating stereotypes, despite more recent efforts to improve authenticity and representation. (Schneider, 2024)

Worldwide, Disney has played a pivotal role in exporting American culture around the world through its movies, theme parks, merchandise and media empire. Also, during World War II, it produced propaganda movies and patriotic cartoons that promoted the American Way both domestically and abroad. Characters like Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse were used to foster allegiance and good citizenship, further cementing their status as American cultural ambassadors. While Disney's global reach has popularized American culture and values, it has also sparked debate about cultural imperialism and the potential overshadowing of local traditions. Some scholars argue that Disney's content can reinforce American social structures and consumerism, though the company has also adapted its offerings to resonate with diverse audiences and sometimes encourages local cultural expression. (Edwards, 2024)

As expressed, The Walt Disney Company has a distinguished history, led by brothers Walt Disney and Roy O. Disney. In addition, how Disney's media empire was built after the success of a series of animated movies. Despite this, at first Walt suffered from competitions and problems, which then led to remarkable successes. As Disney grew, its influence on cultures and societies increased, such as American society, which in turn was shaped by media, communication and Disney theme parks.(Dahle, 2023)

1.2 American Society

American society has long been characterized by its dynamic cultural landscape, technological advancements and ideological diversity. From the Industrial Revolution to the Digital Age, shifts in media, politics and social norms have continuously redefined national identity. Two key aspects media and communication and culture have played pivotal roles in shaping American values and global perceptions. This section examines how these forces interact, with media acting as both a reflection and a driver of cultural change, ultimately influencing societal conventions.

1.2.1 Media and Communication

The evolution of American media from newspapers and radio to television and the internet has radically transformed how information is produced, shared and consumed. Today, digital platforms and social media are central to American life, providing instant access to news, entertainment and public discourse. This shift has democratized information, allowing a broader range of voices to participate in shaping public opinion and cultural trends. (Salzburg Global Seminar, 2019)

However, the proliferation of media sources, including 24-hour news channels and social media, has also contributed to increased polarization. Americans can now curate their news consumption, often reinforcing existing beliefs and narrowing perspectives. Media conglomerates like Disney play a significant role in constructing narratives that influence public opinion and

cultural identity, both domestically and globally. The rise of social media has further accelerated the spread of information, enabled rapid dissemination of news and ideas but also amplified misinformation and divisive content. (Northern Kentucky University Online Degree, 2018)

1.2.2 Culture

American culture is a complex tapestry woven from indigenous traditions, waves of immigration, and the pervasive influence of commercial media. Hollywood movies, popular music and consumer brands have exported American ideals such as individualism, freedom and consumerism worldwide. (Cultural Atlas, 2021) Companies like Disney have been especially influential, using storytelling, theme parks and merchandise to reinforce and sometimes challenge cultural norms.

Social media has intensified cultural exchange, allowing Americans to interact with global communities and adopt new practices. This has led to both the enrichment and dilution of traditional American values, particularly among younger generations who are more exposed to diverse perspectives online. (Lumen Learning, n.d.)

1.2.3 Media and Culture

Media and culture in America are deeply intertwined. Media acts as both a mirror and a catalyst for cultural change, shaping and reflecting societal values, beliefs and behaviours. The phenomenon of Disneyfication exemplifies how entertainment companies can reshape cultural narratives simplifying, commercializing and globalizing American ideals for mass consumption.

At the same time, the diversification of media platforms has made American society more dynamic but also more fragmented. The media's role in shaping and challenging conventions is evident in debates over representation, identity and social norms. As media continues to evolve, it

will remain a powerful force in defining what it means to be American and how the nation is perceived around the world. (Zaman et al., 2023)

The ongoing interaction between media and culture is central to the American experience. Media not only disseminates information but also actively constructs and negotiates cultural meaning. (StudyCorgi, 2022) Entities like Disney exemplify the power of media to both perpetuate and transform societal conventions, illustrating the complex process of Disneyfication, the reshaping of culture through entertainment and commerce. As technology and communication continue to advance, the relationship between media and culture will remain a defining feature of American society.

1.3 The Disneyfication Logic and the Societal Conventions

Disneyfication is a term that describes the process of transforming environments, narratives or cultural products into simplified, sanitized versions that align with the ideals of the Disney brand. Here are definitions and explanations from various sources:

According to Dario Bonifacio in his sociological analysis of the Disney phenomenon said: "Disneyfication is a term used to describe the cultural and social impact of the Disney company and its philosophy". Generally, Disneyfication refers to the process of adapting and transforming places, cultures and traditions in order to make them more appealing and commercially attractive, often at the expense of their authenticity and original characteristics. Additionally, Disneyfication can also refer to the influence of the values and ideal image represented by Disney products and characters on the collective imagination and society as a whole. In his analysis Bonifacio discusses Disneyfication as an aesthetic and structural model linked to urban development globally. This transformation is tied to deeper economic dynamics and reflects broader trends in mass culture and neoliberalism.

Collins Dictionary describes Disneyfication as "the process of transforming historical places, local customs or other entities into trivial entertainment for tourists". This highlights the

reduction of cultural elements into simplified elements directed to tourists in the first place. The concept of Disneyfication developed and became a model for cultural development in the world. With the beginning of the new millennium, it is clear that it is increasingly evolving at the intersections between different dimensions such as mass culture, economics and communication. As the company expanded further into new markets, the greatest focus became on Asia and Europe. (Massimiliano Livi, n.d.)

Initially, the representation of cultures in Disney movies was not intended to provide a true perspective on them. Instead, the studio frequently drew its inspiration from myths and tales from cultures other than American culture. For example, in *Hercules* 1996 the ideas were simplified, and in this way the duality of love between good and evil was represented. This is not at all compatible with Christianity and the mentality of ancient Greece. Also, in *Mulan* 1998, many liberties were taken to suit the movie with Western audiences. For example, in its most famous scenes, the scene of the heroine cutting her hair, pretending to be a man and wearing her father's Armor. While men in China at the time kept their hair long, many Chinese made fun of the scene. Furthermore, in the 2020 remake, the scene was deleted to make it more realistic and authentic to China. This version is considered more respectful of Chinese culture. (Lafontant, July 2nd, 2021)

Subsequently, Disney worked to develop its journey of reaching new cultures at different times, taking advantage of its myths and adding a fantasy touch to its movies while respecting cultures and customs. Also, when he was inspired by the culture of the Americas, he often took from pre-Columbian cultures and beyond the current era. But it retained the contemporary American touch, values and worldview of the United States of America and presented it in a very authentic way. The company's ultimate goal is to reach the Americas because they are the target audience. (Lafontant, July 2nd, 2021).

1.4 Disney's Cultural Footprint: Insights from Prior Studies

Chris Rojek (1993) critically examines the pervasive influence of Disney as a global cultural and ideological force. Rojek argues that Disney culture embodies consumer-fetishism, with its characters and narratives reinforcing capitalist ideologies. Disney movies and products promote consumption as a central aspect of modern life, often embedding hidden messages that reflect the values of economic society. The researcher highlights how Disney commodifies culture, reshapes historical memory and constructs children's identities within a consumerist framework. For example, movies like *The Little Mermaid* are interpreted as metaphors for consumer behaviour, where characters adopt capitalist values to achieve their desires. He argues that Disney plays a central role in embedding consumerist values into society, particularly targeting children. Through its media, products and marketing strategies, Disney trains children to adopt consumerist habits and identities, effectively commodifying childhood itself.

Peter Trifonas (2001) examines Disney's significant impact on American popular culture, focusing on how the company shapes cultural narratives, values and perceptions. The article explores themes such as: Disneyfication; which is the process of simplifying and sanitizing cultural elements to align with Disney's family-friendly ideals. Cultural Influence; which means how Disney changed myths, fairy tales and historical narratives to reach American cultural expectations and values. Globalization and Homogenization; the spread of Disney's cultural products like movies, theme parks around the world and it represents American culture and values. The article highlights Disney's role in creating a public pedagogy that educates audiences through its media products. This involves crafting narratives that simplify and sanitize complex cultural and historical realities, presenting them in a way that aligns with Western ideals of morality and entertainment. It critiques Disney's tendency to appropriate cultural elements from marginalized groups, often reducing them to stereotypes or decontextualized versions that fit into its commercial framework. Trifonas mentioned in his article that by exporting its products globally, Disney plays a key role in cultural

globalization, often leading to the homogenization of diverse traditions into a singular, marketable narrative that reflects American ideals.

Julie C Garlen and Jennifer A Sandlin (2016) explores the significant role Disney plays as a pedagogical force within popular culture. It examines how Disney's media, products and experiences influence identity formation, cultural norms and values in both formal and informal educational settings. The chapter critiques how Disney's narratives contribute to identity formation by promoting stereotypical representations of gender roles racial identities and class hierarchies. these portrayals often reinforce dominant ideologies rather than challenging them. Also, it considers that Disney is identified as a powerful cultural educator that influences how individuals, particularly children, understand concepts like race, gender, class and sexuality. It operates beyond traditional education systems to instil societal norms through its pervasive media and products.

Amanda Rutherford and Sarah Baker (2021) critically examine the cultural impact of Disney's portrayal of princesses. The article introduces the concept of the princess bubble, which refers to the narrow, idealized portrayal of Disney princesses that emphasizes physical beauty as the primary determinant of their worth and success. It employs critical cultural analysis as its methodology. This approach is used to examine the cultural and ideological implications of Disney princess narratives and their influence on societal perceptions of gender, beauty and identity. The article argues that Disney princesses perpetuate the idea that physical beauty is directly tied to a woman's value and success. This reinforces the stereotype that attractiveness is essential for achieving happiness and happily-ever-after outcomes. Disney's global influence shapes how young audience perceive gender roles and relationships. The article critiques how these portrayals engrain flawed stereotypes into popular culture, potentially affecting children's understanding of gender and self-worth.

conclusion

This chapter examines Disney's logic and societal norms, along with the challenges it faced that helped it move from a humble beginning to a global cultural empire. Hence its strong

cultural influence on the American society in particular. In summary, a review of the relevant literature of Disney, the media and the American culture reveal their intertwined nature, with each influencing the other in complex ways. Disney, as a pervasive media force, promoting its characters and narratives to shape and reinforce the American identities and culture (Trifonas and Rojek). At the same time, the American cultural expectations and values influence how Disney adapts its stories and characters and presents them to a wide audience. Furthermore, Disney media has contributed to the spread of the American culture globally, leading to cultural homogeneity (Trifonas). However, this relationship remains largely theoretical, underscoring the necessity of empirical evidence to prove the influential relationship. For the following study, two parts from Disney's *Moana* were selected as a case study for a critical analysis of Disney's cultural impact on American society.

CHAPTER TWO

A Critical Analysis of Disney's Cultural Impact on American Society

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Introduction

This chapter examines Disney's cultural influence in shaping societal norms, particularly in American culture. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study utilizes textual and visual analysis as primary methods to explore the ways in which cultural representations are constructed and communicated through media. To enhance analytical depth, these methods are complemented by the application of the three-dimensional model, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the interplay of text, audience and production contexts. The analysis centres on Disney's *Moana* (2016) and its sequel *Moana 2* (2024), investigating how these movies reflect and contribute to cultural narratives and values. Also, it aims to uncover the dynamics of cultural negotiation and adaptation present in Disney's storytelling, shedding light on the ways popular media shapes and disseminates cultural meanings within contemporary society.

2.1 Methods and Methodology

Methodologically, the framework of this practical investigative study was founded on the theoretical chapters' arguments regarding the cultural aspect of the Disneyfication process of the American society, in particular, as well as the specification of the research field of civilization studies, in general. Accordingly, an emphasis on the Disney Movies industry and an adaptation of qualitative approach of the critical analytical study were represented in the following paradigms:

2.1.1 Methods

In tandem with the qualitative research approach's requirements and this research paper's cultural orientation, both textual and visual analytical methods were mainly employed to conduct the critical analysis assigned into the supplement of the research topic under investigation. Fundamentally, the former was selected due to its direct and explicit association to the culture and media studies; while, the latter was chosen because of its equitability with the audio-visual's aspects of media. Additionally, the critical discourse analysis'(CDA) Noreman Fairclough's three-

dimensional model was adapted to the first analytical method as complementary analytical method. Altogether these are subsequently further explored in detailed in their next review.

2.1.1.1 The Textual Analysis' Method

Textual analysis refers to the systematic examination and interpretation of texts to uncover meanings, patterns and relationships within them. According to Fairclough (1995), it is "a method for exploring the ways in which language reflects and shapes social reality."(Fairclough,1995, p 132). That is to say, textual analysis involves closely studying the language used in a text to understand not just what it says, but how it conveys ideas, influences readers and relates to broader social or cultural contexts. In practice, this process begins by extracting relevant linguistic elements such as words, phrases or sentences from the text _in this case, movies_ under examination. These elements are then analysed for their connotations, frequency, structure and context to reveal underlying themes, biases or intentions. This method helps to deepen the understanding of texts beyond their surface meaning by considering the subtle ways language operates.

2.1.1.2 The Visual Analysis' Method

In parallel to the previous method, the visual analysis method was additionally implemented in examining the presumably cultural agenda of the Disneyfication process. By definition, this method refers to the systematic observation, processing and understanding of the visual choices made in creating an artwork or visual object. It focuses on examining formal elements such as colour, line, texture, size, composition and spatial arrangement to interpret how these aspects contribute to the overall meaning or effect of the work. Visual analysis goes beyond mere description by making claims about the artist's intent and the cultural or historical context in which the work was created (Sayre, 2005). In simpler terms, it means carefully looking at an image or artwork, noticing how its visual parts are arranged and interact and explaining how this influences what the viewer understands or feels about it. By focusing on the aesthetic and cinematic elements of the movie that contribute to the construction of meaning. This includes studying

aspects of cinematography such as camera angles, shot composition, movement, as well as the scales, arrangement of settings, props, costumes, and lighting within each frame. The use of colour palettes and lighting techniques was analyzed to understand how they evoke mood and highlight themes related to diversity and inclusion. Additionally, visual symbolism, such as recurring images or spatial arrangements, has been explored to reveal how visual narrative enhances or complicates textual narrative. (Van Leeuwen & Jewett, 2001).

2.1.1.3 Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

As a complementary analytical method, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis was implemented with the previously identified methods given to its sociolinguistics perspectives that compensate on the lack of context in textual and visual analyses. Nonetheless, owing to the limited scope of this dissertation, the three dimensions of his approach-namely The Three-Dimensional Model- were holistically employed emphasizing largely the second discursive practice and the third social practice dimensions. And this is due the association of the former with the processes of production and consumption of the discourse, the latter with the perspectives of its context and situation, and the first, text dimension, with the properties of its language usage the textual analysis. Namely, this model analyses language at three interconnected levels: the text itself, the discursive practices surrounding its production and consumption, and the broader social practices in which it is embedded. The first dimension focuses on the linguistic features of the text, such as vocabulary and grammar. The second explores how texts are created, shared and interpreted within social interactions. The third considers how discourse relates to social structures, power relations and ideologies. This model is employed as a complementary approach to textual and visual analysis, enhancing the understanding of the processes involved in Disneyfication by revealing how language and discourse contribute to shaping social and cultural meanings. (Fairclough, 2015)

In action, these methods were eclectically combined drawing selectively on the paradigms of each and thereby amplifying the critical cultural-perspective examination of the Disney movies' Disneyfication agenda. Justifyingly, the adherence to this pluralistic

methodological stance enables the empirical research to adapt dynamically to the evolving complexities of the topic under investigation by exhibiting a deeper context-sensitivity and henceforth meeting the aims of this dissertation more effectively. Ultimately, this eclecticism positions the study to yield a richer, more nuanced understanding of the subject—laying a robust foundation for the interpretive and evaluative stages that follow.

2.1.2 Case Study and Data Collection

In accordance to the evidence and justifications stated above, one of the movie productions of Disney studio—namely *Moana*—was selected to represent the case study of this dissertation, and, subsequently, relevant media-related instruments were identified and utilized for data collection as elaborated following the case study’s overview below:

2.1.2.1 Case Study’s Overview

Moana is a two-part American animated musical adventure movie produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios in the years: 2016 and 2024. Directed by J. Musker and R. Clements, its first part introduces the story of the protagonist, princess Moana, as a rebellious advantageous Polynesian girl who challenges the tribal laws and orders of her island by volunteering to restore the decaying natural resources of her homeland on her own. By contrast she has been reintroduced as more mature and grown-up chief of the tribe who bends to her tribal conventions by responding to the call of her ancestors in seeking new routes toward and building new connections with the outside world in the second part of the movie, directed by D. Derrick Jr., J. Hand and D. Ledoux Miller. In pursuit of these goals, the movie plot unfolds through a perilous oceanic voyage across the mysterious Pacific where the protagonist, her guardian spirit and teammates attempt to overcome natural, mystical and emotional obstacles with determination, strength, unity, intelligence and sometimes, humor. These culminate ultimately in powerful life lessons and morals about the significance of compassion, courage, respect, nature, heritage, innovation, tradition and culture to humankind.

2.1.3 Data Collecting Tools

Accordingly, the data collection process for this study involved a multi-faceted approach to gather textual, visual and discourse data from the selected movie sample. Subsequently, to collect textual data more precisely, the movie transcript of *Moana* was obtained from Scribd. Additionally, the VideoToText.io tool was utilized to extract text from YouTube videos, allowing for the analysis of the songs performed in both movies. To collect visual data, screenshots were taken at key moments during the movie, capturing important scenes and imagery. However, primarily data were pin pointed directly interacting with the movies on the Apollo 05 Flex IPTV app on Start Digital Giant digital receiver. Combined these tools and instrument were embedded for more redundancy, verification, accuracy and reliability of the anticipated results as well as allowing for a rich and detailed analysis of the textual, visual and discourse data.

2.1.4 Data Analysis

Disney involved a dedicated Oceanic Story Trust—composed of scholars, anthropologists, cultural practitioners and artists from across Polynesia—to advise on script, design, music and themes. This was intended to lend authenticity and respect in the portrayal of indigenous traditions, stories and visual motifs. The production process also reflected corporate interests: decisions about narrative structure, character design and dialogue were tailored for global audiences. This sometimes resulted in blending and simplifying distinct Polynesian practices to ensure wide appeal and marketability, balancing authenticity with commercial viability. Even with consultation, there was negotiation between honoring Polynesian voices and meeting Disney’s storytelling conventions. The hero’s journey, for instance, was fused with indigenous motifs, resulting in a hybrid narrative that satisfied both cultural respect and blockbuster requirements. The Marketing process presented *Moana* as a celebration of Polynesian culture and female empowerment, highlighting landscapes, traditional music and the titular heroine. Campaigns emphasized themes like self-discovery and environmental stewardship to resonate internationally.

The movie's launch was accompanied by a vast line of merchandise—dolls, costumes, books—embedding its imagery into everyday life and further amplifying Disney's brand reach.

2.1.4.1 Analyzing the Movie Scenario

Traditions and customs serve as the foundational cultural mechanisms through which communities transmit identity, values and social order across generations. In *Moana*, Polynesian traditions are depicted not as static relics, but as dynamic practices that continuously shape and sustain the island community's way of life. The movie foregrounds customs such as leadership succession, voyaging and the honoring of elders, which collectively reflect key Polynesian cultural values like cooperation, discipline, respect and tolerance. For instance, leadership succession is portrayed through the ceremony that marks the transfer of chiefly authority, as Moana's father, Chief Tui, prepares Moana to one day assume his role. This process underscores the cultural importance placed on lineage, duty to one's people and the collective well-being over individual desires. However, *Moana* also dramatizes the internal community tension between adherence to established tradition and the need to adapt or rediscover lost knowledge. This is evident in the contrast between Chief Tui—who favors maintaining the status quo by restricting exploration beyond the reef for the community's safety—and Grandma Tala—who encourages Moana to embrace her adventurous spirit and revive their voyaging heritage. This narrative tension foregrounds a nuanced representation of cultural heritage as living and evolving rather than fossilized. It acknowledges that while customs provide stability, they also must incorporate flexibility to respond to changing circumstances and individual calling. Through Moana's journey, it emphasizes that true respect for tradition includes honoring its origins while allowing for renewal and reinvention—a concept deeply rooted in Polynesian customs that value both ancestral wisdom and the guidance of future generations.

Subsequently, art and entertainment function as essential cultural expressions that communicate a community's values, history and collective identity. In Polynesian societies, these creative forms —encompassing dance, music, storytelling, tattoos and craftsmanship— are deeply

embedded within everyday life and spiritual practices. They are not simply for amusement but serve as key means for preserving ancestral knowledge, reinforcing social cohesion and celebrating the community's relationship with the natural world. In *Moana*, traditional dance and music play a crucial role in illustrating cultural identity and continuity. The villagers actively engage in singing ancient songs that pass down important lessons and cultural memories, showcasing that performance art is a living tradition linking past and present. For example, the lyrics emphasizing the uses of coconuts highlight the artistic integration of natural resources within Polynesian life, art is often inspired by and intertwined with the environment, reflecting the community's deep respect and practical relationship with nature. Tattoos are another vital art form depicted in the movie, they are portrayed not simply as decoration but as visual narratives expressing genealogy, social status and personal achievements. In Polynesian culture, Tatau is a sacred rite and a form of visual storytelling, encoding ancestral histories and spiritual connections into the body itself. Through this lens, tattoos in *Moana* symbolize more than individual identity; they represent the interwoven stories of families and communities.

Moreover, religion and spirituality in cultural contexts explore the beliefs, values and transcendental meanings that shape how individuals understand their existence and their relationship with the world. In *Moana*, spiritual themes are deeply rooted in Polynesian cosmology, which emphasizes a profound and reciprocal relationship between humans, ancestors and the natural environment. Central to the movie's spirituality is the idea that nature is alive with spiritual power—or mana—and that the ancestors continue to guide the living through natural forces and symbols. The heart of Te Fiti, depicted as a luminous greenstone, symbolizes this sacred connection. It embodies life, creation and ancestral spirit, reflecting indigenous beliefs where spiritual power is intertwined with the land and sea. This greenstone is not merely a magical artifact, but a sacred embodiment of the source of life and balance in the world. Moana's relationship with Te Kā, the lava entity, introduces a nuanced spiritual perspective common to Polynesian and broader indigenous worldviews: natural forces have agency and must be respected

rather than controlled. Te Kā represents disrupted nature, a force of destruction born from loss and imbalance, reminding viewers of the consequences of disrespecting the environment. Moana's journey to restore Te Fiti's heart and heal Te Kā highlights themes of reconciliation and harmony, stressing that healing the world requires understanding and cooperation with natural powers rather than domination. Additionally, ancestors hold a revered place in shaping identity and guiding actions. Moana's ancestors are portrayed as expert way finders whose knowledge and spirit inspire her to rekindle the voyaging tradition. This highlights an enduring spiritual tie between people and the ocean—a living, guiding presence rather than just a physical expanse—. Through this lens, Moana emphasizes that spirituality is inseparable from cultural survival and environmental stewardship.

Additionally, family and social structure encompass the complex web of relationships, roles, expectations and power dynamics that bind individuals within communities. In many Polynesian cultures, social organization is deeply hierarchical yet communal, with clearly defined roles that contribute to collective harmony and cultural continuity. Moana vividly portrays this hierarchical social framework centered around chiefly leadership embodied by Moana's father, Chief Tui. As the village chief, his authority is not only political but also familial and spiritual, reflecting the traditional Polynesian concept of chiefly power that carries both privilege and responsibility to maintain social order and ensure the welfare of the whole community. This mirrors the Fa'amatai system prevalent in Samoa and other Polynesian islands, where chiefly titles and authority (matai titles) are inherited and involve governance over family units (aiga) as well as village affairs. The movie also underscores the centrality of family lineage in legitimizing leadership and social status. The passing of leadership titles is ceremonially significant, symbolizing continuity of tradition and ancestral connections. Moana's journey dramatizes a vital tension within this system: the challenge of balancing respect and obedience to family authority—especially to her father—with the courage to follow her own calling and redefine her role within the social structure. This personal conflict resonates with broader themes in Polynesian societies, where communal

expectations sometimes confront individual aspirations, especially in younger generations who seek to innovate while honoring heritage. Also, it highlights the supportive role of elders, especially female figures like Moana's grandmother Tala, whose guidance provides spiritual and cultural anchorage. This layered social structure integrates multiple generations in a living dialogue, illustrating how family and community interconnect to sustain identity and social cohesion.

Also, History and heritage encompass the collective memory, ancestral legacies and cultural foundations that shape the identities of individuals and communities. In *Moana*, these themes are central to the narrative, as the protagonist's journey is also a metaphorical and literal rediscovery of her people's past and communal legacy. Moana learns that her ancestors were extraordinary voyagers who navigated vast ocean distances with sophisticated knowledge of stars, currents and natural signs. This revival echoes the real historical Long Pause—a period during which Polynesian oceanic navigation reportedly declined or ceased, resulting in limited voyaging across the Pacific for several centuries—. The movie positions Moana's voyage as a symbolic renewal of ancestral traditions and an act of cultural reclamation. This highlights the deep pride in Polynesian maritime heritage, which evidences one of humanity's greatest feats of exploration and cultural interconnectedness. The story also alludes to archaeological heritage through the depiction of ancient pottery found on a remote island. Such artifacts visually and contextually reference the Lapita culture, which is considered the archaeological ancestor of modern Polynesian peoples. The Lapita are known for their distinctive decorated pottery and vast oceanic expansion throughout Oceania. By including this element, *Moana* grounds its narrative in real historical and anthropological foundations, linking myth and legend with material heritage.

Meanwhile, Technology and innovation within cultural frameworks refer not only to mechanical inventions but also to the body of knowledge and practices developed to adapt to and thrive within one's environment. In *Moana*, the movie foregrounds indigenous Polynesian scientific ingenuity, illustrating how centuries of accumulated empirical knowledge enabled expert navigation, resource management and sustainable living without reliance on modern industrial

technology. A central theme is the traditional Polynesian navigation system; a sophisticated body of ecological and astronomical knowledge passed down through generations. Unlike modern mechanized navigation, these skills rely heavily on observing natural patterns—such as the movement of stars, the behavior of ocean swells, bird flight paths and cloud formations—to traverse vast stretches of open ocean safely. Moana’s ability to pilot the canoe reflects this ecological synchronization, displaying an intimate, respectful understanding of her environment, rather than an instrumental or conquering approach to nature. This highlights Polynesian innovation as a knowledge system rooted in harmony with nature and community continuity. It also emphasizes practical indigenous ingenuity through representations of multipurpose uses of natural resources like coconuts. From food and drink to fibers for weaving nets or roofing materials, these examples illustrate a holistic technological approach where sustainability and resourcefulness are integrated cultural values.

However, *Moana* centers on the protagonist’s journey to discover and assert her personal identity and destiny. Raised as the daughter of the village chief, Moana’s identity is initially shaped by collective expectations—continuing her family’s leadership, abiding by tradition and protecting the island community. Nevertheless, her heart pulls her beyond these boundaries toward the ocean, symbolizing her internal drive for self-realization. This tension between communal obligation and personal desire embodies a core American cultural narrative of individual empowerment and self-realization. Unlike traditional Polynesian cultures where identity is deeply embedded in collective roles and ancestry, *Moana*’s story foregrounds the importance of personal choice and inner calling. She is not content with simply fulfilling inherited roles but seeks to chart her own path, reflecting the Western ideal that one’s destiny is not fixed but can be shaped by individual courage and self-knowledge. Importantly, *Moana* frames this journey of self-discovery not as rebellion but as integration. Her grandmother Tala’s spiritual guidance teaches Moana to listen to her inner voice "the call" from within rather than solely external expectations. Tala’s words, “The voice inside is calling,” emphasize that true identity emerges from self-acceptance and

reconciling tradition with personal authenticity. This framing shifts the narrative from individualism as disengagement from community to individualism as a vital source of renewal for the community itself. It's lyrical emphasis in songs like "Know Who You Are" reinforces this message of inner certainty and empowerment: Moana declares she is not defined by external loss or limitation but by her own spirit and choices. This reflects a broader American cultural motif of finding strength through self-awareness and embracing one's unique path as essential to heroism.

Furthermore, in *Moana*, Maui is portrayed as a confident, humorous and somewhat self-centered figure that strongly resembles the archetype of the "American dominant hero." From his very first appearance, Maui exudes a bold charisma, boasting loudly about his many feats and expecting recognition and praise from the mortals around him. His personality is larger than life, combining a playful sense of humor with a swaggering confidence that borders on arrogance. This is very much in line with American pop cultural heroes, who often embody individualism, self-assuredness and an irrepressible witty charm. Maui's humor is frequent and deliberate, designed to engage audiences with his bravado and fallibility — for example, his interactions with his living tattoos serve as comic relief and highlight his playful but egotistical nature—. Throughout the movie, his motivations initially seem self-focused; he desires adoration and fame, and his heroic deeds are framed as performances to win admiration rather than acts of humble service. However, as the story progresses, Maui undergoes a redemption arc typical of American hero narratives: he learns the value of teamwork and selflessness, becoming more aligned with Moana's mission and recognizing the importance of community. This characterization stands in sharp contrast to the traditional portrayal of Maui in Polynesian mythology. In indigenous stories, Maui is more complex and balanced, often depicted as a demigod and trickster whose deeds are fundamentally in service to humanity. His mythic feats — pulling islands from the sea, slowing the sun and capturing fire — are not performed for personal glory but to aid his people and improve their life conditions. While he may display trickster traits and occasional arrogance, Maui is usually humbled by his limitations and the consequences of his actions. This humility is an integral part of his characterization,

reminding listeners of the need for respect, balance and community harmony. Unlike Disney's Maui, whose self-promotion dominates his personality at first, the mythological Maui thrives within a network of familial relationships and collective interactions, emphasizing the communal values central to Polynesian culture. His heroism is less about individual status and more about cultural identity, ingenuity and responsibility.

Moreover, *Moana* powerfully embodies values of empowerment and courage, weaving these themes through both its textual storytelling and visual aesthetics in ways that resonate strongly with modern, universal ideals—particularly those celebrated in American culture—. Textually, Moana's character arc is defined by her strength and bravery, but also by a proud connection to her heritage that she simultaneously honors and reinterprets. From the outset, Moana is portrayed not as a typical passive princess but as an assertive young woman who actively chooses to take charge of her destiny. Instead of waiting for rescue or simply fulfilling prescribed roles, she embarks on a perilous journey motivated by a deep sense of responsibility to her people and the environment. Her quest is sparked by a collective threat but driven by individual agency—an emphasis on self-determination and self-actualization consistent with American storytelling values—. Moana's courage unfolds on multiple levels: she defies her protective father and the traditional expectations that seek to confine her, challenging patriarchal authority by embracing a role historically held by men in her village. This rebellion against oppressive structures aligns with contemporary feminist ideas of empowerment, where strength is not only physical but deeply connected to identity, autonomy and the reclamation of voice. The movie highlights Moana's inner struggle and growth as she learns to trust her intuition, listen to the ocean's call and reconcile her love for tradition with the need for renewal. Her journey symbolizes a universal coming-of-age story—one where empowerment comes from answering the question “Who am I?” through embracing both heritage and personal purpose—. Furthermore, her leadership style breaks from combative or aggressive tropes common in male-dominated hero narratives, showcasing empathy, gentleness and connection as strengths rather than weaknesses.

2.1.4.2 Analyzing the Movie's Scenes

Moana visually communicates Polynesian traditions and customs with attention to authentic cultural detail, embedding symbolic and practical elements that reinforce the narrative's cultural grounding. The architecture of the village's communal space, the Fale, is a key visual motif embodying traditional Polynesian values of community and leadership. The Fale is an open structure made with natural materials such as wooden beams and thatched roofing, designed to foster connection and storytelling. In the movie, the Fale serves as the locus of decision-making where the chief holds court and where the community gathers for important announcements. This spatial openness symbolizes transparency, collective responsibility and the oral transmission of knowledge they are all vital aspects of Polynesian social systems.

Figure2.1 Moana's Village Life, Communal Work and the Traditional Customs (Screenshot from YouTube)



Subsequently, the movie depicts scenes where villagers, especially women and children, practice traditional dances characterized by fluid arm movements, hip sways and rhythmic footwork. These sequences visually draw inspiration from authentic Polynesian dances such as the Samoan Tauluga—a graceful and sacred dance traditionally performed at important occasions—and the Tahitian Tamure, known for its energetic hip movements and vibrant skirts. Costumes are crafted with natural materials like tapa cloth and woven leaves, adorned with shells and flowers, reflecting cultural aesthetics and ties to the environment. The layering of skirts and use of earthy yet

vivid colors recreate the textures and patterns found in Polynesian ceremonial attire, expressing identity and respect for ancestral art forms. Also, Maui's tattoos are among the movie's most dynamic visual features. They move independently, interacting with him and narrating his heroic stories, thereby bringing Polynesian tattoo art to life as a storytelling medium. The complexity of Maui's tattoo patterns—featuring geometric shapes, spirals and anthropomorphic designs—reflects traditional Polynesian motifs. Other characters like Moana and Tala bear tattoos with subtler designs, signaling their status and spiritual connections. Its animation emphasizes the cultural significance of tattoos as living marks of identity rather than mere ornamentation. The artistry extends to the detailed depiction of the double-hulled voyaging canoe—a marvel of indigenous Polynesian craftsmanship—. The boat's intricate wood carvings, woven sails and painted motifs reveal a sophisticated visual language of symbols and artisanal skill passed down through generations. Navigation charts made of sticks and shells (though spoken of rather than shown explicitly) are referenced through star maps and ocean patterns visually rendered in the movie, underscoring the innovative and artistic approaches to wayfinding.

Visually, the glowing green heart stands out as a potent and sacred symbol. Its radiant light pulsates with life, emitting warmth and vitality, directly linking spiritual energy to the physical environment. The heart is often framed against lush island landscapes or vast ocean vistas, reinforcing its role as the source of creation and balance. The greenstone's glow also conveys a sense of mana—a divine force present in all things—making the spiritual tangible for viewers. Also, Tala's character serves as Moana's spiritual mentor and her deep connection with the natural world is consistently emphasized through visual cues. She interacts seamlessly with animals such as the glowing manta ray or the ocean itself, suggesting a harmonious relationship. It portrays Tala often bathed in soft, warm light or shadowed in ethereal glow, signifying wisdom and a transcendent connection to the ancestral realm. Her cave home adorned with carved wooden idols and natural artifacts reflects indigenous practices of honoring spirits through sacred objects. Throughout the movie, the ocean is personified and animated as an active, sentient force with agency—it plays with

Moana by lifting her and guiding her path—. Visually, it is depicted with shimmering, fluid movements and glowing lights, emphasizing its spiritual vitality and responsiveness. This dynamic conveys the Polynesian worldview that the ocean is a living ancestor and protector, a constant presence in the interplay between humanity and nature. Also, the climactic visual transformation from the fiery Te Kā back into the verdant Te Fiti powerfully symbolizes spiritual reconciliation and restoration of balance. The shift from angry, destructive lava flows to blossoming greenery and vibrant life visually articulates healing. The change is accompanied by a soothing color palette and flowing animation that radiate calm and fertility, reinforcing the theme of forgiveness and ecological harmony. This metamorphosis illustrates the spiritual concept that forces of destruction are often born from imbalance and can be restored through respect and unity.

Moreover, Chief Tui is visually distinguished by symbols of rank and authority, most notably his elaborate headband crafted from natural fibers and adorned with shells or feathers. His upright, broad-shouldered posture, calm demeanor and commanding presence visually convey his role as the patriarch and leader. These elements mirror traditional imagery of Polynesian chiefs — figures who are simultaneously approachable leaders and revered figures vested with responsibility—. Intimate familial moments between Moana, her father and her grandmother Tala depict the emotional fabric underpinning social roles. Visually, Moana’s tender exchanges with Tala take place in warm, softly lit settings, emphasizing trust, wisdom and nurturing. In contrast, her interactions with Chief Tui often occur in more formal or communal settings, underscoring duty, hierarchy and the weight of leadership expectations. These contrasts in lighting, framing and camera proximity communicate the different facets of family relationships—love, respect, expectation and generational dialogue—. Large scenes showing the entire community assembled in the open Fale reinforce the collective nature of Polynesian social life. The Fale's architectural openness symbolizes transparency and communal governance, with villagers seated in circles or arranged spaces around the chief, visually representing social order and inclusion. Community members engage in discussions, support social rituals and participate in decision-making,

highlighting how family extends beyond the nuclear unit to encompass the village's interconnected extended families.

Additionally, one of the most vivid representations is the sequence in which Moana uncovers a hidden cave filled with ancient voyaging canoes. These vessels are intricately designed with traditional Polynesian carvings and craftsmanship, highlighting the cultural importance of canoe building and seafaring. The canoes lie dormant yet majestic, visually embodying a sleeping heritage waiting to be awakened. The reverent lighting and Moana's awestruck reactions reinforce a sense of sacred connection to her history. The ocean is portrayed not just as a physical environment but as a living, sentient entity carrying stories and memories of the people. The animation gives the ocean playful personality and luminescent qualities, underscoring Polynesian belief systems wherein nature is imbued with life and mana (spiritual power). This visual metaphor reflects how history and heritage are not static but flow continuously, carried forward by the ocean that binds island communities together. The shifting colors and motions of the ocean echo ancestral pathways and cultural transmission—not just natural phenomena but vital cultural archives—.

Figure 2.2 Moana Discovers the Ancient Voyaging Canoes in the Cave, with Ancestral Chanting (Screenshot from YouTube)



Also, the double-hulled voyaging canoe is a focal technological artifact, meticulously animated to showcase indigenous craftsmanship. Its design balances stability, speed and agility, suitable for navigating the vast and sometimes treacherous Pacific Ocean. The animated textures

reveal wooden frames, bark fiber lashings and woven sails, recalling traditional canoe building techniques. The canoe's prominence throughout the movie visually underscores its central role as a technological marvel of the Polynesian world, representing not only transportation but cultural identity and survival. *Moana's* navigation scenes are visually captivating, employing celestial charts and luminous star maps to illustrate how she charts her course by the night sky. The stars and constellations are portrayed in rich detail, animated to help viewers understand their role as navigational tools. Waves and currents ripple dynamically under the canoe, animated with glowing lines and symbols indicating environmental cues—such as ocean swells and bird flight—highlighting Moana's skillful interpretation rather than mere chance or mechanical aid. This depiction emphasizes indigenous navigation as a learned art grounded in observation and environmental attunement.

Meanwhile, the ocean represents both the limit of her world and the path to self-actualization. Early scenes show Moana gazing longingly at the sea's horizon, framed so that the vast, open water suggests possibility and the unknown. The ocean's personification—as a playful, guiding entity that lifts and directs Moana—embodies the idea that her individual destiny is intertwined with larger natural and spiritual forces. This visual interplay emphasizes both her unique relationship with the world and the call toward personal growth. Also, Moana's relationship with Maui visually reflects her assertion of agency. Early scenes show Maui's arrogance contrasted with Moana's calm resolve. She takes the lead, physically pulling Maui along or standing firmly when he belittles her, visually asserting her autonomy and equal heroism. Their teamwork scenes are framed to emphasize cooperation, but the camera often centers Moana, visually reinforcing her narrative primacy and individual growth. During the pivotal musical moment in the song *Know Who You Are*, Moana is often framed against glowing blue light, ocean waves, and stars—elements that symbolize her connection to her inner self and her voyaging ancestors—. The lighting and composition highlight her awakening and empowerment, visually underscoring the lyric's message about embracing one's true identity beyond external definitions.

However, Maui underscores his heroic characterization through a deliberately exaggerated and dynamic physical design. His immense size and muscular build conform to Western superhero ideals, symbolizing power and dominance. His tattoos cover nearly his entire body, animated to tell stories and interact with him, reinforcing his larger-than-life persona and his pride in past deeds. These tattoos act almost like a personal performance — they animate his ego as much as his mythic history—. Maui’s facial expressions and body language further emphasize his cocky, playful attitude, marked by confident grins, raised eyebrows and expansive gestures that assert his presence in every scene. While this renders Maui visually striking and entertaining to global audiences, it somewhat amplifies traits of dominance and individualism that differ from traditional cultural depictions.

Figure2.3 Moana Confronts TeKa and Restores the Heart, Fully Embracing her Role as a Leader (Screenshot from YouTube)



Furthermore, *Moana* reinforces these themes of empowerment and pride through deliberate artistic choices. Moana is animated with expressive features that portray her determination, curiosity and compassion, often framed in shots that isolate her against the vastness of the ocean or the imposing threats she faces. This visual emphasis on individual scale and presence at key moments—such as when she confronts Te Kā alone—celebrates the heroism of personal courage and resilience. The natural environment is also rendered with vivid, luminous

colors that reflect her close bond to nature, echoing ecofeminist interpretations that link female empowerment with harmony and respect for the earth. Lighting contrasts, such as the bright warmth of her island home against the dark chaos beyond the reef, visually dramatize her internal and external challenges. Motion and fluid animation reflect her growing confidence: early scenes show tentative gestures, while later sequences highlight swift, assured movements that parallel her growing leadership and control.

2.1.4.3 Analyzing the Movie Songs

Comparatively, the songs introduced in *Moana* and *Moana 2* serve not only as representations of Polynesian music culture but also as significant channels of communication embedding implicit messages to audiences and reviewers. This cultural agenda is reflected in the diverse music genres that each of the songs exemplifies—from traditional Polynesian chants and spiritual motifs to Broadway-style ballads and contemporary pop rhythms, showcasing a rich tapestry of musical influence. These musical forms act as ways of preserving the artistic heritage of Polynesian culture, including spiritual elements that often carry religious messages, underscoring the deep connection between music, identity and ancestral reverence. At the same time, these songs function as entertainment, blending indigenous sounds with styles recognizable and appealing to American and global audiences. This fusion reflects the process of Disneyfication, whereby authentic cultural expressions are adapted within the conventions of American musical theater and pop culture, giving them universal appeal. In terms of titles and lyrics, songs like “How Far I’ll Go” and “Beyond” emphasize themes of personal freedom, self-discovery and courage—concepts central to American cultural narratives of individualism and empowerment. Meanwhile, songs such as “We Know the Way” and “Finding the Way” highlight collective memory, community and navigation, anchoring the narrative in Polynesian cultural identity. The humor and self-promotion in “You’re Welcome” reflect American-style showmanship, while celebratory anthems like “Can I Get a Chee Hoo?” translate local traditions into accessible, joyful expressions of unity and resilience. Together, these songs mirror a dynamic blend of cultural preservation and adaptation, offering

listeners both a window into Polynesian heritage and a reflection of American cultural values and entertainment practices.

The visual elements accompanying the songs in *Moana* and *Moana 2* further emphasize the interplay between Polynesian culture and American Disneyfication, reflecting a carefully crafted visual narrative designed to resonate with global audiences. In “How Far I’ll Go”, the sweeping shots of Moana standing on vast, open shores and distant horizons visually symbolize the American ideal of boundless opportunity and individual exploration, mirroring the song’s themes of self-discovery and personal ambition. The use of vibrant, saturated colours, dynamic camera movements and dramatic lighting are hallmarks of Disney’s signature animation style, designed to captivate and inspire emotionally, showcasing a blend of authentic island landscapes with a fantasy-like grandeur typical of American animated musicals. In “You’re Welcome,” Maui’s animated tattoos come alive with exaggerated expressions and humorous movements, embodying American pop culture’s love of witty, charismatic characters while also simplifying complex Polynesian mythology into an accessible, entertaining spectacle. The song “We Know the Way” features fluid, choreographed visuals of voyaging canoes cutting through sparkling waters, layered with glowing bioluminescent effects that add a magical realism common in Disney movies, highlighting the fusion of indigenous knowledge with cinematic spectacle. “Where You Are” uses tightly framed shots of village life focused on communal activities, underscoring Disney’s emphasis on family and belonging, concepts deeply ingrained in American cultural narratives. Similarly, in *Moana 2*, songs like “Can I Get a Chee Hoo?” transform traditional celebratory gestures into stylized, high-energy group performances with synchronized dance and bright, festive colours, echoing American sports cheers and pop concert atmospheres, making cultural expressions visually approachable and commercially appealing. In “Beyond” and “Finding the Way,” the visuals shift between intimate character close-ups and vast ocean vistas, reflecting American storytelling tropes where individual courage is framed within epic natural settings. The vibrant character animations, expressive facial features and seamless integration of traditional Polynesian motifs with modern

animation technology exemplify Disney's broader visual strategy: to preserve cultural elements while enhancing them through American cinematic conventions that prioritize spectacle, emotional engagement and global marketability. Collectively, these visual choices reinforce Disneyfication by simultaneously celebrating Polynesian heritage and melding it into a visually stunning narrative aligned with dominant American entertainment values.

Many Pacific Islanders and global audiences expressed pride at seeing aspects of their culture represented in a major Disney movie. *Moana* topped box office charts, with particular acclaim for its visuals, music and depiction of navigation traditions. Moana was embraced as a strong role model, especially for young girls, and praised for challenging stereotypes typically associated with Disney princesses. But some Polynesian viewers and scholars raised concerns about oversimplification, cultural blending and the homogenization of diverse Pacific cultures into a single narrative. The Americanization of characters—especially Maui's personality—and the risk of commodification of cultural stories were points of criticism. Discussions also centered on the extent to which community voices were truly heard versus simply consulted. Its critics generally lauded Moana for its animation, original songs and uplifting story. Professional reviews frequently cited its sensitivity and progress compared to previous Disney attempts at depicting non-Western cultures. Meanwhile, Scholars in cultural and media studies discussed its blend of authenticity and commercial adaptation, highlighting ongoing tensions between cultural representation and corporate interests. Some emphasized its progressiveness and educational value, while others critiqued it for perpetuating soft forms of cultural imperialism and universalizing messages.

2.2 Results

The analysis of the case study through the lens of Textual and Visual Analysis with the Fairclough three-dimensional model of CDA, reveals a complex evolution in the company's cultural impact within the American society. The following two tables summarized the results of analyzing the two movies, *Moana* and *Moana 2*:

Table2.1: The Case Study Critical Analytical Study's Results

Major Themes	American Core values and Ideals
<p>Choosing one's own path</p> <p>Breaking familial constrains</p>	Individualism
<p>Disregarding communal expectations</p> <p>Embracing personal freedom and self-determination.</p> <p>Freeing oneself from psychological and societal chains.</p>	Freedom and Liberty
<p>Assuming leadership.</p> <p>Assuming adventurous role.</p>	Feminism and Gender Role Challenge
<p>Earning status through courage and hard work.</p> <p>Believing in hope, progress and innovation.</p>	Meritocracy and the American Dream. Social mobility.
<p>Defying expectations</p> <p>Pursuing personal calling</p> <p>Staying true to oneself</p>	Self-reliance
<p>Showing an adventurous spirit</p> <p>Taking initiatives, learning new skills autonomously, overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities.</p>	Entrepreneurial Spirit
<p>Supportive relationship with grandmother</p> <p>Showing familial kindness, unconditional love and support.</p>	Family structure and values
<p>Shifting focus to the extended family and community roles.</p>	Reflects evolving American family norms

Balancing respect for heritage with needs to break from restrictions.	Meritocracy Ideal
Taking life-risks and willingness for making sacrifices for the sake of others.	Volunteerism and Philanthropy
Using practical problem-solving skills and learning by experience.	Pragmatism
Celebrating Polynesian culture, mythology, language and customs.	Diversity and multiculturalism
Featuring a spiritual worldview with gods, spirits, and nature-based beliefs.	Religious pluralism
Adapting to new challenges	Youth culture and innovation
Implementing creative and inclusive strategies to the leading tradition.	
Maintaining communal ties.	Community bonds.
Having a common sense of a duty to participate in and preserve the community.	Democracy and civic Responsibility
Emphasizing shared responsibility.	
Working within a team.	Charismatic and transformational leadership
Building relationships between teammates.	
Promoting positivity and motivation.	
Highlighting the importance of nature for mankind.	Environmental awareness and stewardship
Respecting marine and land-dwelling life.	Ethical living and sustainability
Promoting the significance of harmonious living with nature.	Spiritual and emotional well-being
Embedding music and dances scene.	Diversity and multiculturalism

	Self-Expression and creativity
	Social connection and community
	Entertainment and popular culture
	Historical and political expression
Incorporating humor lines.	Individuality and creativity
	Resilience and optimism
	Social and post critique
	Communal connection
	Inclusiveness and diversity

2.3 Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the dual nature of Disneyfication as both a mirror and a molder of American culture. This discussion unpacks the implications of these findings through the lens of textual and visual analysis with the three-dimensional model of CDA as a complementary, considering the depth of cultural transformation, the boundaries of corporate inclusion and the broader societal impact of Disney’s global reach.

2.3.1 Disneyfication as a Cultural Force

The Disneyfication process has profoundly shaped American culture by embedding narratives that promote optimism, individual empowerment, clear moral frameworks and strong family values into mainstream consciousness. Disney movies like *Moana* exemplify this influence by taking culturally rich and diverse traditions and reinterpreting them through an accessible, universal lens, allowing audiences from various backgrounds to connect emotionally with stories that also honor heritage and identity. This approach has helped standardize storytelling conventions—such as the classic hero’s journey, musical storytelling and redemption arcs—that have become deeply ingrained in how Americans understand narrative and character development. These conventions do more than entertain; they provide shared cultural touchstones that influence

collective notions of good and evil, personal responsibility and the importance of community. Furthermore, Disneyfication has shaped social ideals about identity, encouraging viewers to value self-discovery and courage while balancing communal ties. Through this pervasive cultural presence, Disney has contributed to shaping a cultural ethos that blends traditional values with contemporary ideals of inclusivity and empowerment.

2.3.2 Disney's Underlying Cultural Blueprint in Storytelling

Disney's cultural agenda is clearly implied in *Moana* through its representation of Polynesian culture as both a source of inspiration and as a product adapted for global consumption. The studio seeks to celebrate indigenous heritage—highlighting traditions, spiritual beliefs, social structures and ancestral knowledge—while framing these cultural elements within familiar storytelling frameworks that emphasize individual empowerment, self-discovery and familial duty. This agenda reflects the dual goal of honoring authentic culture and making it accessible and appealing to a broad, mostly Western audience. The process of Disneyfication involves balancing reverence for cultural origins with the imperatives of mass entertainment, often blending indigenous specificity with American values such as individualism, optimism and progress. Thus, Disney's agenda promotes cultural preservation but also selectively transforms and universalizes narratives to fit its brand and audience expectations.

2.3.3 Signature Cultural Patterns and Values Woven by Disney

Disney is attributed with several cultural conventions and norms that shape its portrayal of *Moana*. Central is the valorization of individualism and personal agency, where the hero's journey reflects American ideals of self-reliance and empowerment. Disney's narratives typically emphasize optimism, courage and the quest for identity, frequently framed around a young protagonist breaking free from constraints to fulfill a unique destiny. Family values and social harmony also play critical roles, with community and belonging reinforced through inclusive and warm visual storytelling. Disney further adopts conventions of musical theatre and pop culture, integrating diverse musical genres and spectacle-driven visuals. These norms manifest in stylized

animation, dramatic lighting and emotionally expressive characters. The studio's storytelling conventions often privilege spectacle and emotional engagement over cultural complexities, simplifying and universalizing cultural practices to fit hegemonic entertainment paradigms.

2.3.4 The Impact of Disney's Cultural Vision on Critical Reception

Disney's cultural agenda is conveyed to reviewers through multiple channels: the movie's narrative, visual style and soundtrack all communicate its blend of cultural celebration and commodification. Reviewers encounter a rich depiction of Polynesian customs, spiritual symbolism and heritage that resonate with notions of cultural respect. However, the simultaneous presence of familiar Disney storytelling tropes—centered on empowerment, internal conflict and triumphant self-realization—signals a clear alignment with American cultural values. The movie's polished animation and musical numbers, which fuse indigenous and American musical forms, highlight Disney's strategy of cultural adaptation for mass appeal. Critical reception often reflects awareness of this negotiation, praising authenticity and representation while noting the simplification and Disneyfication of complex traditions. Through press releases, interviews with creators and behind-the-scenes attention to cultural consultants, Disney frames the agenda as both respectful collaboration and global entertainment, shaping reviewers' understanding of the movie as a cultural bridge imbued with American storytelling sensibilities.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complex interplay between Disney's storytelling and the representation of Polynesian culture in *Moana*. Disney's cultural agenda reveals a deliberate effort to honor indigenous traditions while simultaneously adapting them to fit Western narrative frameworks and entertainment paradigms. Through the movie's textual and visual elements, a rich tapestry of Polynesian customs, spirituality, social structures and heritage is presented not as a static relic but as a living, evolving culture. Yet, this authentic portrayal is intricately woven with hallmark Disney conventions—individualism, empowerment and spectacle—that reflect broader American cultural values. The process of Disneyfication, evident in the blending of traditional

music genres with contemporary styles and the stylized animation techniques, demonstrates both a preservation and commodification of culture designed to appeal to global audiences. This duality shapes how critics and viewers interpret the movie, recognizing its representation alongside the inevitable simplifications inherent in a commercial blockbuster. Ultimately, *Moana* serves as a powerful cultural bridge, offering insight into Polynesian identity through the lens of Disney's visual and narrative language, underscoring the challenges and opportunities of cultural storytelling in a globalized media landscape.

General Conclusion

The research began by providing a comprehensive background on the history and evolution of The Walt Disney Company, emphasizing the concept of Disneyfication and its significant role in shaping American society. Additionally, the historical development of American society and its foundational components were explored to contextualize Disney's influence within the broader social fabric. This background established a foundation for understanding how its media products interact with and contribute to American cultural identity.

The study's foundation was built upon clearly articulated research questions, which guided the inquiry into Disney's influence on American culture through its narratives, media productions and branding strategies. These research questions framed the investigation of how Disney's movies, specifically *Moana*, portrayal cultural components and the resulting cultural discourse. The research problem identified a critical gap in understanding the extent and nature of Disney's cultural impact, particularly in relation to media representation and societal values.

To address these questions, a qualitative research methodology was employed, grounded in textual and visual Analysis. This approach was selected for its ability to critically examine how language, visuals and narratives within media texts construct and convey social ideologies, power relations and cultural norms. CDA's three-dimensional model-comprising textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice provided a rigorous framework for analyzing the movie's content and its cultural significance.

The primary data collection tools involved detailed textual and visual analysis of *Moana*. This included systematic viewing and coding of relevant scenes, dialogues, character interactions and visual symbolism related to cultural portrayal. Supplementary data were drawn from public statements, interviews and media coverage to contextualize its production and reception. Purposive sampling was used to select this movie due to its representation of Polynesian culture through an American perspective, making it ideal case study for this research.

The data analysis followed the stages of Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA as follow: first, Textual Analysis focused on examining the language choices, character portrayals and visual elements within the movies to identify how cultural values are represented. Second, Discursive Practice explored the production, marketing and reception of it, including public and critical responses, to understand in what way these representations are negotiated within societal and corporate contexts. Third, Social Practice situated the movies within broader American cultural norms and ideologies, analyzing in what form Disney's portrayals reflect, reinforce or challenge dominant social values and power relations.

The analysis revealed that Disney's *Moana* encapsulates the intricate process by which indigenous cultural elements are adapted and reinterpreted within the framework of Disney's storytelling, blending authentic Polynesian traditions with American narrative conventions and commercial imperatives. This synthesis exemplifies critical aspects of Disneyfication, including the simplification and standardization of cultural expressions as well as the production of culturally hybrid narratives aimed at broad, global audiences. Consequently, *Moana* provides a valuable lens through which to examine the negotiation, representation and transformation of cultural identities within dominant media structures, highlighting the dual dynamics of cultural preservation and commodification. Analyzing this movie thus offers significant insights into the broader sociocultural implications of Disneyfication, particularly regarding its impact on American culture and its role in shaping contemporary American cultural discourse.

The Disneyfication of Polynesian culture in *Moana* generated a wave of pride, hope and validation for many Pacific Islanders while also prompting critical reflections on representation, authenticity and cultural ownership. The movie stands as both a milestone in the mainstreaming of indigenous stories and a reminder of the complexities involved when global media giants adapt living cultures for mass entertainment. Ongoing dialogue among audiences, creators, and cultural custodians continues to shape how such stories might be told more inclusively and authentically in the future.

The study has several limitations. Firstly, its focus on only two movies and a relatively narrow scope of public discourse, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The exclusive examination of *Moana* limits the ability to capture the full spectrum of Disney's media output and the diverse range of audience responses. Secondly, the data collection process is limited to a specific timeframe and involves recent release of the movie constrains the assessment of their long-term cultural impact. Lastly, the sample size is limited, with the analysis only two recent movies, which may not adequately represent the overall Disney impact.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to broaden the scope by including a wider range of Disney media productions and a more diverse array of public and critical responses. Expanding the study to incorporate other Disney movies, television series and international perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of Disney's cultural influence. Furthermore, longitudinal studies and audience reception research could offer deeper insights into the evolving impact of Disney's representation on societal attitudes and identity formation.

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ملخص

تستكشف هذه الأطروحة عملية ديزنيفيكيشن من خلال تحليل نقدي للتأثير الثقافي لديزني على المجتمع الأمريكي. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية تصوير ديزني للمعايير الثقافية في افلامها و تأثيرها على الثقافة الأمريكية. اعتمد البحث منهجية بحث نوعية لفحص دراسة حالة فيلم ديزني، موانا، مع استخدام التحليل النصي والتحليل البصري وأساليب تحليل الخطاب النقدي لفيركلاف. وبناءً على ذلك، تم تقييم سيناريو الفيلم المكون من جزأين وأغانيه ومشاهده بشكل منهجي فيما يتعلق بعرض الهوية الأمريكية في موضوعاتها. تؤكد نتائج هذه الدراسة على الطبيعة المزدوجة لـ ديزنيفيكيشن باعتبارها مرآة ونموذجًا للثقافة الأمريكية. تعكس ديزني وتشكل الثقافة الأمريكية من خلال دمج القيم التقليدية مع الفردية و تعميم القصص المتنوعة، في حين تعمل على تبسيط التعقيدات الثقافية من أجل جذب عالمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: امريكا, الثقافة, ديزني, ديزنيفيكيشن, تأثير, موانا.