


# Between plumbers and mushrooms. The cinema adaptation of the classic video game *Super Mario Bros*

## *Entre fontaneros y champiñones. La adaptación cinematográfica del clásico videojuego Super Mario Bros*




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### Abstract:

In this article, cinema and video games converge with the aim of analyzing the audiovisual treatment of the characters who acquire an important role in the film *Super Mario Bros: The Movie* (Horvarth and Jelenic, 2023) and the transformations raised with respect to the video game that is taken as a reference. For this purpose, a qualitative content

### Resumen:

*En este artículo convergen cine y videojuegos con el objetivo de analizar el tratamiento audiovisual de los personajes que adquieren un papel importante en el filme Super Mario Bros: La película (Horvarth y Jelenic, 2023) y las transformaciones planteadas respecto al videojuego que se toma como referencia. Para ello, se desarrolla un análisis de contenido*

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analysis of descriptive-interpretative cut is developed and attention will be given to those aspects that are more significant in their physical, psychological and social dimensions. The results indicate that all the film characters play a primary role in that they all have to achieve the main objective, for which reason they all interdependently pursue that common goal. Additionally, the film narrative allows for a deeper and more nuanced study of the characters and their relationships. By the same token, so as to flesh out this narrative there is a series of references to characters, costumes, elements and spaces not only appearing in *Super Mario Bros. 1* but also in other interactive fiction games released by Nintendo.

**Keywords:**

Cinema; character; cultural industry; Super Mario; video games.

*cuantitativo de corte descriptivo-interpretativo atendiendo aquellos aspectos más significativos relacionados con la dimensión física, psicológica y de acción de los personajes. Los resultados apuntan que en la película el protagonismo recae en la función de todos para lograr el objetivo, motivo por el cual trabajan de forma interdependiente por un propósito común. Además, la narrativa cinematográfica permite una exploración más profunda y matizada de los personajes y sus relaciones. Asimismo, para dar vida a la narrativa de esta película, encontramos una serie de referencias a personajes, vestuarios, elementos o espacios no solo del videojuego que se toma como referencia, sino también de otras ficciones interactivas desarrolladas por Nintendo.*

**Palabras clave:**

*Cine; industria audiovisual; personaje; Super Mario; videojuegos.*

## 1. Introduction

It was Levis (1997) who predicted that video games would become an authentic mass phenomenon. His prophesy came true insofar as it is now one “that overcomes social barriers [...] being present in the daily lives of most of the population” (Calderón Gómez and Gómez Miguel, 2023, p. 2) and which “has a huge market penetration among children and teenagers” (Urbina et al., 2002, p. 1). Moreover, it is regarded as the sector of the culture industry that has grown most over the past years (Williams, 2022), aimed especially at teenage audiences interested in technology (Calderón Gómez and Gómez Miguel, 2023).

As economic performance is one of the main drivers of the video game industry, it is impossible to ignore that “this industry is a firmly established and hugely diversified entertainment sector that generates huge profits” (Calderón Gómez and Gómez Miguel, 2023, p. 2). But, unlike the social debate on the normalisation of rape culture or structural male chauvinism in the classic narratives of this medium (Calderón Gómez and Gómez Miguel, 2023), there are also figures like Shigeru Miyamoto (the creator of different versions of *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros.*, among others, for the company Nintendo), who is internationally recognised as the principal architect of modern educational video games, with a special interest in dispensing with violence.

Having said that, mention should go to the study performed by Downs and Smith (2009) who highlighted that, in this medium, aspects like nakedness, disproportionate body parts and inappropriate clothing were the most commonplace in female characters. This is borne out by the conclusions of Rodríguez-Prieto (2016), asserting that women tend to be represented as passive and fairly hypersexualised characters. However, the author explains that male characters are usually defined by the representation of their physical strength and their leading and dominant role. In this connection, it is worthwhile noting that Miyamoto has not distanced himself much from this conventional characterisation, for the role played by Princess Peach in his *Super Mario* saga is more or less that of a damsel in distress (Curiel, 2018), with a completely passive role, and the principal objective of the main character in his journey through all the levels. However, her physical characterisation differs from the aforementioned feminine prototype, for she is very demurely dressed.

Against this backdrop, the object of study is both the video game *Super Mario Bros. 1* and the animated film *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* (Horvath and Jelenic, 2023). The focus is placed here on the main characters in the film and their differences with respect to the original video game. In other words, this study involves a detailed visual analysis, employing qualitative research methods, of how the different dimensions –physiological, psychological and that of action– of the main characters are fleshed out in the story. Additionally, the second research objective is to determine whether gender roles or stereotypes are perpetuated.

It warrants noting that little research on Super Mario as the main object of study has been conducted to date. Those studies that have indeed done so (Suárez and Pareja, 2018; Planells, 2015) have served as a basis for elaborating the theoretical framework. The film adaptation of the video game (Horvath and Jelenic, 2023) has broadened the range of objects of study including the evolution of the social context, the convergence between video games and cinema and the change in roles of characters, underscoring the empowerment of female characters in broadcast media.

## 2. Contextual framework

### 2.1. Characters and their dimensions

Before their appearance in the world of fiction, characters were approached as objects of study from the perspective of narratology (Aumont and Marie, 1991) owing to the close relationship between them. Traditionally, Aristotle (1974) employed dialectic to study the link between characters/subjects and their actions in stories, a premise that was subsequently taken up by more contemporary theories such as the actantial model developed by Greimas and Courtés (1982). For his part, Chatman (1990) claimed that this relationship between characters and action derived from the temporality of stories. Whereas for structuralist-formalist literary analyses (Propp, 1981; Greimas, 1987) characters were one of the structural elements of the storyline, their actions in the narrative justifying their existence. From a psychological point of view, literary authors and critics did not share their idea of characters, asserting that the story did not depend on the events unfolding in it (Chatman, 1990).

Irrespective of the story setting, both visions, that of action and that of psychology, are included in character studies (Pavis, 1983; Ezquerro, 1990) in which they are understood as narrative categories. It is a conception that unites the distinctive aspects of each perspective in a film script. In this respect, mention should go to the narrative analytical study performed by Casetti and Di Chio (1998) addressing characters through the identification of their physiological, psychological and sociological characteristics to determine their construction and functioning as elements of the story. Lastly, as one of the objects of study here is a video game, it includes the study of virtual characters as central elements of gameplay from the three perspectives from which they are constructed and represented:

- Characterisation in which the characters are studied as elements of a fictional world: outward appearance, acting, verbal information and the role assumed.
- Function in which characters are addressed as elements of gameplay: identification, status, attributes and actions/movements.
- Representation, which refers to the actor or user for whom each character is a sort of mask: unrepresented, indicative or fragmentary representation and full representation (individual, collective or multiple).

In light of the foregoing and the results of different studies of characters as a narrative category of film (Bordwell, 2009; Galán Fajardo, 2007; Caminos, 2007; Pérez Rufi, 2008; Sánchez Noriega, 2000) plots (Chatman 1990; Greimas, 1987), three different dimensions for analysing them have been established here, namely, physiological, psychological and that of action.

The first dimension includes the physiology and identity of characters (Casetti and Di Chio, 1998). Attributes such as age, sex and outward appearance (Propp, 1981) give each character in a story certain particularities (Johnson, 1995; Moritz, 2001). Physical appearance comprises elements that characterise (Parker, 1998) and symbolise the features of a character (Field, 1995), a physiological dimension that also includes physical defects and deformities (Egri, 1960). They are features that refer to narrative adjectives that represent the personal qualities of a character that are visible and identifiable in the story (Garrido Domínguez, 1996). This study draws from the proposal put forward by Dyer (2001) which divides the physiological dimension into physiognomy (sex, age, skin colour, weight and height), image (apparel, hairstyle and other aspects) and gestures (formal or social and informal or involuntary codes).

As to the psychological dimension of characters, its construction is based on the classification proposed by Foster (1983) which differentiates between flat and round ones. Its more recent reinterpretation in narrative terms (Chatman 1990; Casetti and Di Chio, 1998) qualifies the differences between these two categories. Whereas flat characters are simple and one-dimensional, round ones are complex and multidimensional with their own psychology and personality (García Jiménez, 1993). The latter is naturally related to the rest of the characters (Onaindia, 1996), but at the same time is unstable and rife with doubt (Alonso De Santos, 1998). Another aspect that should be included in the psychological dimension is temperament as a conditioning factor of personality (Sánchez Escalonilla, 2001). Following Hippocrates' humourism, it is possible to establish four temperaments in behavioural terms:

- Sanguine. Cheerful, outgoing and passionate individuals who cope with adversity calmly and self-confidently.
- Choleric. Persevering, extroverted and individualistic individuals who are self-demanding and impulsive.
- Phlegmatic. Reflective, introverted, obsequious and uncommitted individuals.
- Melancholic. Restless, introverted, shy and solitary individuals who are prone to derealisation.

In sum, the psychological dimension is determined by the personality or disposition of characters, a principal factor for fleshing them out which can be seen in the story through their decisions (Aristotle, 1974), actions (Vale, 1989), individualism (Tomashevski, 1982), relationships with others (Alonso De Santos, 1998) and self-concept (Bentley, 1982).

As to the dimension of action, this is determined by the character arc (Seeger, 1991; 2000) which, in turn, depends on the goal that the character should reach in the plot (Chion, 1988). The idea is to understand the actions of characters through a logical

inevitability (Blacker, 1993) that prompts and drives them to achieve their objectives (Vale, 1989), which can change their initial personality or *modus operandi* (Brenes, 2012). These arcs are therefore a useful tool for constructing characters from a more intimate perspective. Sánchez Escalonilla (2001; 2013) has proposed the following classification:

- Flat character arcs. The personality of characters does not change during the plot.
- Moderate character arcs. The personality of characters undergoes a very distinctive transformation during the plot, resulting from a metamorphosis in their temperament.
- Traumatic character arcs. The personality of characters undergoes far-reaching and radical changes converting them into different people as a result.
- Circular character arcs. The personality of characters undergoes a profound change in the middle of the plot but, at the end of the story, they recover their original personality while having been positively transformed by the experience.

## 2.2. *Background of game studies*

It is important to recall the developments that gave rise to game studies. Although experiments were carried out with the first gaming devices at the end of the 1940s and at the beginning of the 1950s, it is generally held that OXO (AS Douglas), created for the EDSAC computer in 1952, was the first ever video game. Be that as it may, it was not until the 1990s and the 2000s that the first research was conducted in this regard, with pioneering researchers like Janet Murray and Marie-Laure Ryan, whose studies served as inspiration for literature and cinema and whose approaches contributed to perform in-depth analyses on phenomena relating to digital narratives and video games (Pérez-Latorre et al., 2017; Parra Bravo, 2023). This research subsequently served as a basis for future enquiries which gave rise to analytical models for video games based on different epistemological approaches, such as the narratology of video games, addressed by Murray (1999), for whom it was destined to be a narrative medium, and Tosca (2009), the discursive analysis of video games, analysed by Frasca (2007) and Sicart (2013), and cultural studies, with Jenkins (2009) at the forefront. At present, the theoretical contributions to game studies of Navarrete Cardero (2014; 2020) and the critical approaches of Paredes Otero (2020; 2022) are the most noteworthy.

## 2.3. *The relationship between cinema and video games: Super Mario Bros. as a case study*

Video games influence other cultural industries, as is the case with cinema, for they “have inherited the language and forms of cinema in a new medium based on both visual and interactive aspects” (Tato, 2017, p. 105). Accordingly, the intention here is to draw comparisons between the video game *Super Mario Bros. 1* and its film adaptation *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*. Needless to say, one of the main difficulties in doing so is Super Mario, the main character in both. For this reason, in cinema “the character becomes an essential vehicle for allowing us to delve freely into that sequence of moving images [...] it makes us feel the same desires and understand the strategies that main characters adopt to achieve their ends” (Tato, 2017, p. 106). Whereas in video games the narrative needs “touching up so as to give it that new dimension that represents interactivity [...] and mechanics that enable us to interact with that universe” (Tato, 2017, p. 106).

Having said that, this should be qualified because cinema is contextualised in the broadcast medium that pursues different aims, as well as having diverse and formally differentiated languages and structures (documentaries, shorts, etc.). In Tato's (2017, pp. 106-107) view, however, there are different ways of managing the system of languages that video games construct, such as "games with puzzles, graphic adventures, mobile games, strategy games and so forth", as different forms of expression. Some of these do not result in a direct narrative that defines the structure of the story, as occurs with *Tetris* and *Candy Crush*, which dispense with characters and, it could be claimed, do not apparently tell us anything.

So, technological development and progress serve as connecting links between both cultural vehicles, for it has allowed the video game industry to use film language to adapt or shape film productions by, for example, transforming film sequences that serve as transitions between the playable sections of video games. To this should be added the intensity and tone of voice, the acting and the body language of the characters, among other aspects, enhanced by planning, camera work or digital devices, for scaling, camera angles and framing contribute to the narrative for the purpose of engaging audiences, while the languages of both disciplines are hybridised.

In the case at hand, the film adaptation derives from the video game saga, as with others like, for instance, *Wreck-it Ralph* and *Mad Max*. Nevertheless, the opposite is also usually true, for many video games employ film techniques and narratives to give their gameplay a hybrid aspect between both cultural vehicles. This can be found in films like *Until Dawn* (Will Byles, 2015), which was made into a narrative horror video game, falling into the survival horror subgenre, and *Heavy Rain* (David Cage, 2010), a psychological thriller that was made into an interactive drama, plus miniseries such as *The Wolf Among Us* (Herman, Latino and Lenart, 2010), which was made into a graphic adventure video game.

Although it is true that when addressing the convergence between cinema and video games, it is essential to take into account some of the aspects deriving from this. As observed by Lorenzo Otero (2017), the terms "transmediality" and "intermediality" proposed by Jenkins are a constant in any narrative, while also being closely linked to the new mass society resulting from contemporality. The author recalls, however, that when broaching the subject of transmediality, attention should also be paid to the concept of transtextuality, defined by Genette in 1982, in which "intertextual relationships would be restricted to the explicit and/or literal reference to a text with respect to a previous one. For which reason, according to Genette, intertextuality is considered to be a mode or type of transtextuality" (Lorenzo Otero, 2017: 258).

Furthermore, different narrative forms often intercommunicate, thus enhancing fictional immersion by means of the formula in which "it is important that they should contain a radical intertextuality" (Jenkins in Scolari, 2013: 34). The presence of this intertextuality in different narrative techniques, formats and languages allows to broaden reality, thus enhancing the experiences of spectators (Lorenzo Otero, 2017). Intermediality is therefore a mode of interaction between different communication channels or tools and implies integrating one or more media in another mode or channel of communication (Lorenzo Otero, 2017).

As also noted by Lorenzo Otero (2017), "mass sociology" has given rise to concerns about the transformations that the so-called "electronic media" have brought about in society and its culture. Communication channels can therefore be understood as ways of exteriorising a specific idea or message, leveraging its appeal to increase its influence.

As to the context at hand, it is also essential to mention intertextuality, which opens a dialogue between a particular communication format and other arts and/or forms of expression (Martínez Fabre, 2013). This dialogue and the broadening of meanings both facilitate the construction of multiplatform narratives. From this derives the aforementioned concept of transmediality (a term coined by Kristeva in 1969 and subsequently developed by Jenkins), which refers to the fact that a narrative can be presented in different media in such a way that they supplement and/or elaborate on the information or content available. In sum, the idea is to create a more intense and enriching entertainment experience for spectators.

The transmedia narrative universe also draws from and coexists with other concepts like *transmedia storytelling* (Jenkins, 2006; Freire, 2017; Freire-Sánchez, et al., 2023), namely, “fictional content that is developed and evolves in multiple formats and platforms” (Lorenzo Otero, 2017: 258). As observed by Freire (2023), this universe is also surrounded by other concepts deriving from the multiverse, such as the gameverse (Villani, 2020), the narrative galaxy (Selva-Ruiz, 2021) and other lesser known ones like the narrative multiverse (Freire, 2022), to name but a few. In their interesting contribution, Freire et al., (2023) have recently reviewed all these concepts with the aim of enquiring into how they make scientific research more complex and confusing, while also defining their different dimensions.

In order to provide some background information, Mario was the result of the franchise that started in arcades with the launching of *Donkey Kong* (1981) and, at a later date, *Super Mario Bros.* (1985), when the character assumed his leading role in the following saga. It was Shigeru Miyamoto who created this humble plumber, residing in the fictional Mushroom Kingdom, where he has to overcome a series of obstacles to rescue a princess. In the video game, Mario’s objective is to progress through different levels defeating a series of enemies, to collect objects and to make headway towards his goal –without being killed– which is none other than to rescue Princess Peach. In other words, he is driven by love and loyalty towards the princess and his desire to protect the inhabitants of the Mushroom Kingdom. On his way, he encounters other important characters like his brother Luigi and the villain Bowser, also known as King Koopa, who is holding the damsel in distress prisoner.

In the fictional Mushroom Kingdom, the brothers have to overcome a series of obstacles to rescue the princess from the abominable Bowser, who is Mario’s archenemy. In order to overcome these obstacles and to defeat his enemies (escaping from carnivorous plants, murderous turtles, etc.), Mario consumes several elements (mushrooms) to become physically stronger, while also having extra lives in the form of stars. The video game, which is for audiences of all ages for it contains no explicit violence, is set in eight universes, each with four levels, meaning that there are 32 levels in all. The universes differ in some aesthetic and structural respects, while the fourth level is set in a fort located inside a castle, ending with a showdown with Bowser.

### 3. Research objectives and methodology

The main research objective is to determine how the virtual characters of the video game featuring Super Mario (*Super Mario Bros. 1*, 1985) have been adapted in the film (*The Super Mario Bros. Movie*, Horvarth and Jelenic) released in 2023. The specific research objective is to establish, with an analysis of the characters appearing in both the video game and the film, whether the characteristics of each dimension are reflected in the same way when constructing them.

In order to meet the research objectives, a qualitative methodology was employed, specifically, an analysis of the characters appearing in the film under study. To this end, a content analysis (Krippendorff, 1990), based on a worksheet drawing from the literature on character studies from the perspective of narrative (Chatman, 1990; Greimas 1987; Propp, 1981), cinema (Casetti and Di Chio, 2007; Sánchez Escalonilla, 2001) and video games (Cuadrado Alvarado and Planells, 2020), was performed. Despite the fact that there are many characters in the film, the analysis was limited to those appearing in the video game and the film (150 mins), namely, Mario, Princess Peach and Bowser. The reason behind selecting these three characters is down to the fact that, in a way, they have an interdependent relationship in the events unfolding in both the video game and the film.

Taking into account these objectives, it is important to highlight that no similar studies have been performed to date, given the fact that, although the video game was launched some 30 years ago, the film was only released last year. It also warrants noting that, as it is a saga with a large variety of video games of different genres on the market, it was decided to select the first version of the franchise as the object of study, viz. *Super Mario Bros. 1*, launched by Nintendo Entertainment System in Japan in 1985 and in North America and Europe in 1987.

This analysis worksheet is novel in that it includes the characteristics and roles not only of the characters of a narrative but also of those virtual characters typical of video game discourses, signifying that it is a tool that can also be employed in other similar studies. It includes the three main dimensions of characters when studying them in a story (see Table 1): the physiological dimension which encompasses their outward appearance (age, sex, skin colour, weight and height), image (apparel, hairstyle and other aspects), gestures (formal or social and informal or involuntary codes) and attributes (elements or objects with which they interact); the psychological dimension which covers their behaviour (flat or round characters), temperament (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic or melancholic), verbal information (dialogues, personality and nature of the characters) and the role played (their principal function); and the dimension of action in which an actor or user assumes the mask of each character (represented, indicative or unrepresented), the way of acting or *modus operandi* of the characters and their arcs (flat, moderate, radical, traumatic or circular). The combination of these three dimensions allows to determine the differences between these three characters in the video game and the film.

**Table 1. Analysis worksheet**

Character analysis (name of the character)		
	Film	Video game
Physiological dimension		
Outward appearance: age, sex, skin colour, weight and height		
Image: apparel, hairstyle and other aspects		

Gestures: formal or social and informal or involuntary codes		
Attributes: items or objects with which they interact		
Psychological dimension		
Behaviour: flat/round		
Temperament: sanguine/choleric/phlegmatic/melancholic		
Verbal information: dialogues, character and nature		
Role played: main function		
Dimension of action		
Representation: unrepresented, indicative representation, full representation.		
Acting: modus operandi or characteristic actions		
Character arc: flat/moderate/radical/traumatic/circular		

Source: own elaboration

## 4. Results

The results of the analysis of the three characters selected as a sample of both the video game and its film adaptation, namely, Mario, Princess Peach and Bowser, are discussed below. They were selected mainly because they are the most important in the gameplay and narrative of both productions.

### 4.1. *Mario Bros*

In reference to his physiological dimension, Mario's outward appearance is practically identical in both the video game and the film. The most notable difference has to do with his eyes because in the film they are blue, whereas in the video game this is not so clear. Regarding his apparel, although this is basically the same, his dungarees are red in the video game and blue in the film (as with his shirt and shoes). Likewise, it should be noted that the colour of his clothing differs somewhat depending on the narrative context. In the video game, he wears the same clothes whose colour varies slightly only in terms of the items and

objects with which he interacts, as well as the different settings in which he finds himself. For its part, in the film his apparel changes completely when he collects an item or object. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that, despite these variations, he still maintains other hallmarks like his white gloves and his moustache (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Physiological dimension of Mario in the video game and the film**



**Source: own elaboration based on frames from both<sup>1</sup>**

Continuing with Mario's personal image, his hair is always brown and curly, with his moustache standing out as one of his most distinctive physical attributes. Similarly, his moustache is one of his distinctive physical attributes (it glistens when he gains a star). In his fight with Donkey Kong, when he gains a gold block, he dons a yellow cat costume, whereas when he catches a leaf, his costume turns brown like the fur of a raccoon (in both cases, he retains his moustache and gloves). As to his gestures, the character is more reflective in the film than in the video game in which he is invariably seen running with his arms in the air and fists clenched. In the film, in contrast, his formal or social codes are expressed in the friendly, natural and familiar way in which he interacts with the rest of the characters, whereas his informal codes are reflected above all by his facial gestures and the way in which he moves his arms. Referring to the elements with which he interacts in the story, in both the video game and the film he collects different items and objects (these being more varied in the film). One of the differences is that in the video game the character can throw fireballs at will, an attribute that he does not possess in the film.

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<sup>1</sup> The frames used to illustrate the matters addressed in this study belong to the copyright holders of the aforementioned productions and have been included here under the right to quote established in Article 32 of the Spanish Intellectual Property Rights Act. In this case, the rights of the images belong to Nintendo (video game) and Illumination, Nintendo, Universal Pictures and Sky Studios (film).

Moving on to Mario's psychological dimension, he behaves differently in the video game and the film owing to the narrative structure of both. In the video game, there is no way of evaluating the evolution of his behaviour, signifying that he is a flat and simple character. In the film, for its part, his behaviour is round, complex and three-dimensional. As to his temperament, this is sanguine in both cultural products, for he is always cheerful and outgoing and, above all, undertakes his missions resolutely and self-confidently. With respect to verbal information, although Mario does not speak in the video game and, therefore, there are no dialogues, the captions offer clues about his character and mission. In the film, by contrast, as well as enriching the story from the outset the dialogues offer deeper insights into his personality and mission. Once he had fulfilled this, he has to meet a second challenge with the help of the rest of the characters appearing in the story. Lastly, in both the video game and the film Mario plays the same role, namely, that of main character and hero.

In conclusion, Mario's *modus operandi* is very similar in both cultural products. He is depicted in full, except that in the video game his representation is rather repetitive for he can only be seen side on when he moves and face on when he stops, whereas in the film he performs a much more varied repertoire of movements and actions. As to specific actions, he only throws fireballs in the video game and can only fly in the film. Lastly, Mario's character arc is moderate in both cultural products because this changes somewhat after he has met his previously established objectives.

#### 4.2. *Princess Peach*

The physiological dimension of the character of Princess Peach is very different in the video game and the film, except for her general appearance. As to this last aspect, the only differences lie in her blue eyes, the colour of which are indiscernible in the video game, in her height, for she is taller and slimmer in the film, and in her hair, which is long and reddish in the video game and long and blond in the film (see Figure 2). In contrast, in the fiction film the character wears a variety of costumes and jewellery (e.g. a long pink dress, a long red and white dress, a pink scuba diver suit with a blue pendent, long white gloves and a round crown decorated with coloured stones). Lastly, as to her costumes and accessories, these are more varied in the film than in the video game in which she only wears a white dress with a red hem and a gold crown.

**Figure 2. Physiological dimension of Princess Peach in the video game and the film**



Source: own elaboration based on frames from both

Moving on to Princess Peach's gestures, these are invariably the same in the video game, in contrast to her informal and formal codes in the film which are more representative in that she is much more dynamic. By and large, her gestures reflect strength, determination, courage and empowerment. Likewise, the items and objects within her reach in the video game are not present because she is static during gameplay. By contrast, in the fiction film Peach uses weapons to confront her enemies, while also interacting with the flower-like elements of the universe and eating mini mushrooms which allow her to acquire special skills.

Similarly, Princess Peach's psychological dimension is very different in both cultural products. This is owing to the fact that as she is static and does not have any particular objective in the video game, she does not develop any specific behaviour or temperament. In the film, by contrast, the character plays a more important role in the story, developing a round and complex behaviour, as well as a choleric temperament resulting from her individualism, self-discipline and impulsivity. With regard to verbal information, she does not speak in the video game, her one and only dialogue being in caption form. In the film, however, her dialogues denote that she is an educated young woman, with a firm but sweet voice, although quick to anger in situations that pose a threat to her or her subjects. She is characterised by her loyalty, self-confidence and decisiveness, while she also learns from her mistakes and copes with her fears with character and courage. As before, the role that she plays in the video game is not the same as that in the film, for the story of the former is rather that of a damsel in distress waiting to be rescued. In the film, she is one of the main characters and assumes the role of an unattainable, empowered, strong and inflexible young woman who does not need any man to reach fulfilment.

Lastly, in the dimension of action Princess Peach is fully depicted in both the video game and the film, although in the former she is only seen side on. As to her actions, practically the same can be said, for in the video game she is shown as a uniform character, without performing anything of note. Unlike in the video game, in the film she moves at will, jumping, leaping and pirouetting to overcome the obstacles in her way, mainly bricks and malign plants which fall from a platform emerging from the water before crossing the sky of the Mushroom Kingdom. Nor does she shy away from fighting with Mario (who arrives at her castle without an invitation) or against Bowser's troops (Koopas and Goombas), in both her kingdom and the real world to which Mario and Luigi belong. All her actions reflect her determination, fighting spirit and readiness to overcome the adversities and enemies in her path. Concerning her character arc, this is non-existent in the video game because she does not appear until the end of the story and does not perform any type of action. In the case of the film, she has a circular arc because she undergoes a profound and radical change to become a person with a different behaviour. The vulnerability and suspicion that she shows at the beginning of the plot ultimately disappear, as evidenced by her more self-confident and determined actions.

### 4.3. *Bowser*

In the physiological dimension, Bowser is a huge creature characterised by his leathery green and yellow skin. His body is also enveloped by a spikey carapace like that of a turtle, while some of his body parts resemble those of a dragon, all of which points to a male creature (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Physiological dimension of Bowser in the video game and the film**

Source: own elaboration based on frames from both

As regards Bowser's outward appearance, in the video game he is simply depicted as a reptile, without any accessories. In the film, his most noteworthy physical features include his sticking up hair, which is red like his bushy eyebrows, and the fact that he wears metal bands with spikes on several parts of his body. He gesticulates more in the film, expressing coldness, callousness and inflexibility, clenches his fists to express rage in specific situations and his mere presence and stare are enough to strike fear into the hearts of his adversaries. Additionally, he breathes fire at his enemies at will. He also carries sharp elements and objects with which to attack them. In the video game, the character involuntarily jumps backwards and forwards throwing metal hammers extracted from his carapace and breathing fire.

In the psychological dimension, Bowser displays the same flat and choleric behaviour and temperament in both cultural products. As he plays the role of the villain and antagonist in the video game and the film, he has a similar personality and goal. In the video game, he has no identifiable voice, whereas in the feature film this is firm and deep, thus reflecting his defiant character. Only when he interacts with Peach does his voice change, which now has a sweet and calm tone with the aim of winning her heart. Furthermore, in the film he possesses a cold, cruel and calculating personality, being pitiless and devoid of moral values and emotion with respect to the other characters (except for Peach). In short, he is evil and arrogant and has an unquenchable thirst for power.

Lastly, in the dimension of action Bowser's behaviour is influenced by his objective. He is fully represented in the video game and the film, although in the former he is only seen side on. In the video game, his movements boil down to jumping backwards and forwards and breathing fire automatically. In contrast, in the film he mainly attacks using hard blows, confrontation, blackmail and fire. Regarding his character arc, this is non-existent in the video game because he appears at the end of the story in the final showdown with Mario. In the film, he has a flat arc for his personality does not develop during the plot. When he is defeated, he shows a certain degree of repentance, but this is not seen in his attitude but only in the words that he pronounces as a strategy of surrender.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

After analysing the three dimensions –physiological, psychological and that of action– of the characters of Mario, Princess Peach and Bowser in their representation in the video game and the film, we have arrived at some interesting conclusions. In relation to our general research objective, there is a certain physical coherence in that the outward appearance of the characters is respected in the video game and the film, alike. Having said that, there are indeed some minor variations in the shape of additional physical details aimed at giving the characters greater visual depth, such as Bowser's red hair and Princess Peach's more varied attire, which do not appear in the video game. However, their most recognisable physical attributes, like Mario's moustache and Princess Peach's long hair, are maintained.

In the film there is evidently more verbal and physical interaction between the characters, thus offering the opportunity to explore the interpersonal relationships and to develop dialogues between them in much more depth than in the video game. In turn, this allows to develop the personality and impulses of the characters in greater detail as the plot progresses. Similarly, the psychological dimension of the characters is enriched in the film owing to its more complex narrative structure. Whereas in the video game the characters tend to be flatter and simpler, in the film they are more complex and rounder, with more discernible arcs. As to the dimension of action, albeit present in both the video game and the film, in the latter the capabilities and actions of the characters are more varied and detailed. Whereas in the video game their movements are simpler and more repetitive owing to technological constraints.

With respect to the role represented in the discourse and in relation to the secondary research objective, in the video game the characters maintain their principal roles with Mario as the hero, Princess Peach as the damsel in distress and Bowser as the villain. In the film, these archetypes are attenuated by representing the characters in a more complex manner. Special mention should go to Princess Peach for her representation changes drastically from the video game to the film, the way she is characterised now being closer to the conception of *turris eburnea*. Albeit subject to Bowser's physical and verbal abuse, she is a young woman who is far removed from the traditional stereotypes. The helping hand that Mario, as the main character of the story, lends her is important but not essential because at the beginning of the film it is clear that the princess has the strength to overcome the obstacles on her own. From a narrative perspective, Princess Peach and Bowser are the two characters that are most fleshed out in the film, including costume details and psychological and physical nuances that help to construct special and symbolic characters.

Mario's objective is to save Luigi, after his brother has been sucked into a pipe when attempting to fix the city's waterworks while pursuing their trade as plumbers. However, his secondary mission is to deliver the Mushroom Kingdom and the real world from the evil clutches of Bowser, with the help of his sidekicks (Peach, Luigi and their mushroom friends). Nevertheless, at the beginning of the diegesis neither does Peach need Mario nor vice versa because in order to save his brother he has to take up Donkey Kong's challenge to win over his army. However, it can be concluded that all the characters play a similar role in achieving the objective, for which reason they proceed interdependently in pursuit of a common goal.

Moreover, the princess already has an unattainable, hard and inflexible personality before Mario's arrival in the kingdom, because she has been able to develop autonomously without the need for a male figure. It is when the plot begins to unfold

that Mario asks Peach to help him to save Luigi, which unites both characters in pursuit of the common goal of putting an end to Bowser. Throughout this first part of the plot, the character who needs saving is Luigi, not the princess. Even though Peach is ultimately captured by Bowser, it is really an astute ploy of hers and she is capable of resolving the dilemma on her own. In short, neither does Peach require the help of a male character, nor does Mario require that of a female one, it being their joint collaboration and equal protagonism that drive the plot towards the ultimate goal of resolving the conflict.

In other words, the film narrative allows for a deeper and more nuanced analysis of the characters and their relationships, which enriches the narrative and makes for a more emotional experience for audiences. From the word go, the plot is fast paced with sound effects that recall the video game, which is always used as a reference (*Super Mario Bros. 1*, 1985). This becomes more evident as the film progresses and the main characters overcome obstacles similar to those appearing in the video game. In addition, the virtual universe in which they live is very colourful, an aspect that is particularly eye-catching for audiences for it brings to mind its similarities with the classic video game, while clearly showing the film's emotional and psychological intentions.

In light of the results of the analysis of the psychological dimension and that of action of the characters, it should be noted that the violence is more explicit in the film than in the video game. There are clashes initially between Donkey Kong and Mario and then between them both and the Koopas, in which they trade blows and punches throughout the plot. Nonetheless, it is soft violence exercised chiefly by Bowser and his army in pursuit of his prime objective. In this connection, it should be noted that the violence in this film can be regarded as soft because it does not include whippings, mutilations, broken bones, humiliations, sexual assaults, electrocutions, crucifixions, torture or other such acts.

Although Bowser is a dark, domineering and defiant creature, he displays the more affectionate side of his character when he sings softly to Peach, albeit a song with certain possessive connotations. As in the video game, it is also possible to observe certain Manichaeian tendencies in the main characters, with a number of contradictions in the case of Bowser. Therefore, the intention of Bowser's violence is the submission of the princess archetype, something he fails to achieve.

Finally, in the film's narrative it is possible to encounter a number of references to characters, costumes or settings not only appearing in the video game under study (*Super Mario Bros. 1*, 1985) but also in other interactive fiction products developed by Nintendo, like, for example, the cat costume worn by Mario which is borrowed from *Super Mario 3D Land* (Nintendo 3DS, 2011); the aesthetics of the mushrooms protecting Princess Peach which come from *New Super Mario Bros. U* (Wii U and Nintendo Switch, 2012); and the crystal flask in which Bowser is placed after being shrunk down to a petite version of himself, which is used by this character in the video game *Super Mario 3D World* (Wii U and Nintendo Switch, 2013) to imprison a mini creature. Moreover, the film includes other relevant characters already used by the franchise in other games, such as the penguin appearing in *Super Mario 64* (1996), *Super Mario Galaxy* (2007), *Super Mario Galaxy 2* (2010) and *Super Mario Odyssey* (2017), plus Donkey Kong, which appears in the film fighting Mario and which was created by Miyamoto as the main character of a series of arcade games predating the Super Mario saga, launched in 1981. Although there remains the question of why such a relevant and well-known character like the antihero Wario does not appear in this film, for he does so in numerous video games as the antagonist or main character.

Lastly, it can be claimed that the concept of intermediality is present in the film, for it is a form of interrelationship between different channels, with both the video game, which is used as a reference, and the elements borrowed from the video games mentioned above. The concept of intertextuality is equally evident in that both productions complement one another. For its part, the film provides additional content and nuances with respect to the physical and psychological dimensions of the main characters. Noteworthy aspects include the mobile platform that emerges from the water and which Mario learns to climb, which serves as the basis of the game and a clear reference connecting it with the film. Be that as it may, the fact that Peach lives in a castle together with mushrooms that hold her in high esteem, that Bowser kidnaps Luigi after being sucked into a pipe or that Bowser and his acolytes reach the real universe in which the brothers live are interesting additions in the film. These narrative situations can only be developed in a fiction feature film because of the limited scope of the classic platform video game, as well as the technological limitations at the time.

Future lines of research in this regard, but which are closely linked to the field of advertising, include the analysis of the concept of brand movie, as part of the branded content and storytelling strategy of Nintendo and the adaptation not only of visual aspects but also audio branding (as occurs with the characteristic soundtrack of the film which clearly recalls that of the classic video game), both of which have received scant attention in the scientific literature.

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## 8. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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