

# The romance film at the box office in five European countries, 2006 to 2010

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## **Abstract**

We analyze the box office performance of romance films in five European countries – France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom – from 2006 to 2010, inclusive, based on the top 50 grossing films in each country in each year. The results show that romance films account for only a small proportion of the films to reach the top 50 highest grossing films, and that there is no statistically significant variation in the proportion of romance films among the highest grossing films in each country. However, few romance films achieve a high box office ranking in more than one of these countries, indicating a lack of commonality across different markets with different audiences watching different romance films. Romance films achieving top 50 rankings in Germany, Spain, and the UK originate almost exclusively from outside these countries, whereas domestically produced films account for a larger proportion of romance films in France and Italy. Romance films perform consistently at the box office in three of the five countries, albeit lacking the very high grosses achieved by action/adventure, family, and fantasy/science fictions films; while this genre performs particularly poorly in Italy and Spain. Romance films emerge as a fixed part of the exhibition market in all five countries, but the variation in the films viewed, source of productions, and box office grosses indicates some important national differences.

**Keywords:** European cinema, genre, romance films, box office gross

## 1. Introduction

We analyze the box office performance of romance films in five European countries– France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom – from 2006 to 2010, inclusive, based on the top 50 grossing films in each country in each year. Using real-world data, our aim is to understand the box office performance of romance films in major European markets and we focus on three areas: the proportion of romance films in each country and the commonality of those films across all five countries; the production source of romance films achieving high rankings in each country; and the distribution of box office grosses of romance films in each country.

## 2. Data

We collected data on the top 50 grossing films in each year from 2006 to 2010 for the five countries from Box Office Mojo (<http://boxofficemojo.com/>) and the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/>). The data set contains the name, and country for each film and total gross for each film.

We sorted these films into eight genres so that each film is a member of one – and one only – category. The genres used are action/adventure, comedy, crime/thriller, drama, family, fantasy/science fiction, romance, and other. Films were also classified by production source as *domestic*, in which the home country is the only listed production source; a *co-production*, in which the home country is listed as a producer along with any other country(ies) and includes both minority and majority co-productions; or an *international* film, in which the host market is not listed under country.

For ease of comparison, we present box office grosses in US dollars adjusted for inflation to 2010 values based on the US Department of Labour’s Bureau of Labour Statistics consumer price index (<http://www.bls.gov/cpi/>).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Frequency and uniqueness

Romance films account for between 7 and 11 per cent of films to achieve top 50 ranking in these countries between 2006 and 2010, and the proportion of romance films is homogenous across the five countries (see Table 1):  $\chi^2(4) = 4.93$ ,  $p = 0.29$ .

**Table 1** Frequency and percentage of romance films in five European countries, 2006 to 2010

	Frequency	%	Unique	%
<b>France</b>	17	7	9	53
<b>Germany</b>	23	9	6	26
<b>Italy</b>	28	11	14	50
<b>Spain</b>	17	7	4	24
<b>UK</b>	18	7	1	6

However, this does not mean that audiences are watching the same films. There are clear differences between different countries in the commonality of romance films with other countries. Of the 17 romance films to make the top 50 in France, nine appear in the rankings of this country only. Similarly, half of romance films to reach the top 50 in Italy do not appear in the

rankings of any other country. For Germany and Spain the corresponding figures are 26 and 24 per cent, respectively. In stark contrast, a single film (*Just Friends*) appears in the top 50 of the UK only.

Few romance films achieve a high box office ranking in more than one country: of the 53 different romance films in the sample, 34 (64%) reached the top 50 in only one country. A total of seven films (13%) feature in all five lists, including three *Twilight* movies and the two *Sex and the City* films, along with *Slumdog Millionaire* and *The Holiday*.

These results indicate that although romance films comprise a similar proportion of high ranking film in each market, audiences in continental European countries are watching different romance films to varying degrees while audiences in the UK are watching films that are also successful elsewhere.

### 3.2 Production source

To explain the patterns described above it is necessary to look at the source of production for each film relative to the host market. Table 2 presents the breakdown of the romance films in each country by production source. Domestic films and co-productions account for a significant proportion of romance films achieving top 50 rankings in France and Italy; while in Germany, Spain, and the UK such films originate almost exclusively from outside these countries. International films are overwhelmingly Hollywood films in every country.

**Table 2** Production source of romance films in five European countries, 2006 to 2010

	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	UK
<b>Domestic</b>	6	3	8	1	1
<b>Co-production</b>	3	0	3	1	1
<b>International</b>	8	20	17	15	16
<b>Total</b>	17	23	28	17	18

The information in Table 2 enables us to interpret the commonality of romance films across these markets. In France there is a clear distinction between international productions that feature not only in the top 50 rankings of this country but also in other countries, and the nine domestic films and co-productions that feature only in this country's rankings. Similarly, the fourteen romance films unique to Italy include all eight of the domestic productions and the three co-productions. Both these countries have significant numbers of domestic productions across all genres but romance films make up only a small part of these films. Romance films account for just nine per cent of the French domestic films to make it into the top 50, making it the third most frequently occurring associated with domestic productions but still a long way behind comedy (47%) and drama (27%). In Italy the romance genre accounts for 17 per cent of the high grossing domestic productions, making it a distant second to the comedy genre (77%). There is a clear divide between continental romance films which are successful only in their country of origin and Hollywood films that are internationally successful. One of the reasons audiences are watching different romance films in these countries is because they are watching films produced within those countries.

This does not apply in the other three countries. All three German domestic productions reached the top 50 in their home country only, along with three international films. The sole domestic Spanish romance film (*Fuga de Cerebros*) is also unique to this country, though the co-production

*You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* also made the top 50 in Italy. Both these countries have fewer domestic productions than France or Italy and so the small number of such films in the romance genre reflects this general tendency, though it is interesting to note that romance was the only genre for which there was no co-production in Germany.

The solitary domestic romance film in the UK is *Slumdog Millionaire*, which was the one of the highest grossing films in every country, and the lone co-production is *Atonement*, which also reached the top 50 in Spain. The limited number of UK productions in this genre reflects the lack of domestic productions in the top 50. The UK has a large number of co-productions in the action/adventure, fantasy/science fiction, and family genres reflecting its status as a destination for Hollywood productions requiring visual effects, but there are only a handful of romance films in this category.

So far we have noted that the proportions of romance films in the sample for each country are homogenous but that audiences are watching different films. This raises the possibility that when romance films in one production category reach the top 50 in a country they do so at the expense of romance films from another production category rather than films from another genre. Thus, in France domestic romance films succeed at the expense of non-domestic romance films and in the UK international romance films succeed at the expense of domestic romance films. This effect also appears to be evident in other genres.

### 3.3 Box office gross

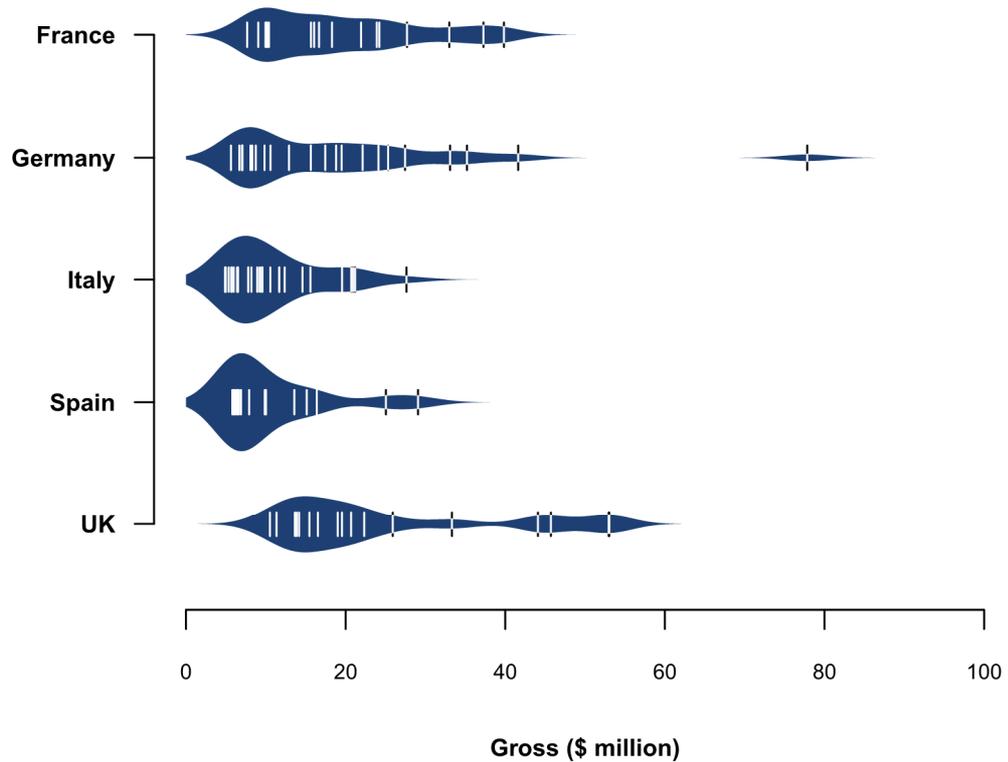
Table 3 sets out the total and median grosses of romance films in each country along with the number of films to reach the top 10 and top 25 in each country, and the beanplots in Figure 1 display the distribution of the grosses. Generally, romance films are among the lowest grossing films for the total set of films in each market, with the best performing genres being action/adventure, family, and fantasy/science fiction.

**Table 3** Box office grosses for romance films in five European countries, 2006 to 2100

	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	UK
<b>Films</b>	17	23	28	17	18
<b>Per cent</b>	7	9	11	7	7
<b>Total Gross (\$m)</b>	331.98	450.12	304.50	184.03	457.49
<b>Per cent</b>	7	10	10	6	7
<b>Minimum (\$m)</b>	7.66	5.64	4.89	5.81	10.52
<b>Lower Quartile (\$m)</b>	10.16	8.08	6.09	6.34	14.09
<b>Median (\$m)</b>	16.68	15.64	9.07	6.90	20.12
<b>Upper Quartile (\$m)</b>	25.96	25.32	14.04	14.36	36.03
<b>Maximum (\$m)</b>	39.84	77.85	27.63	29.08	53.05
<b>Top 10/Top 25</b>	5/9	6/13	4/14	4/6	5/11

\*All grosses are inflation adjusted to 2010 values

The romance film accounts for a small proportion of the total gross of all the films in the sample, although this is approximately equal to the proportion of romance films in the sample for each country.



**Figure 1** Distribution of total grosses for romance films in five European countries, 2006 to 2010

The median gross of romance films in France, Germany, and the UK is greater than the overall median gross for the full sample of 250 films in each country; but is less than the overall median in both Italy and Spain. The romance film has the highest median gross of any genre in Germany and the lowest median gross of any genre in Spain. In France and the UK the median gross of the romance film lags behind the action/adventure, family, and fantasy/science fiction genres; and in Italy also lags behind the comedy film.

Few romance films make it into the top 10 grossing films in any year in any country even when the median gross is relatively high. This is because the grosses of the romance films exhibit less variation in grosses than technology-friendly genres such as action/adventure, family, and fantasy/science fiction. These genres tend to achieve the very highest rankings consistently across the time period covered, while romance films struggle to make it into the top 10. Approximately 1 in 10 of the top 10 grossing films in each country are romance films compared to between 1 in 3 and 1 in 4 accounted for by family films and approximately 1 in 5 that are fantasy/science fiction films. No more than two romance films made the top 10 in the same year in any country, and only *Keinohrhasen* achieved a number one ranking in its year of release and is the highest grossing romance film in the sample.

There does not appear to be any difference in the box performance of romance films from different production sources in those countries with a significant proportion of domestic productions. In France, the nine domestic films and co-productions to reach the top 50 in this country only account for 50% of the accumulated gross. There is no tendency for films with a

French producer to gross more or less than those without a French producer (Mann-Whitney  $U = 32$ ,  $p = 0.74$ ); and the nine films are distributed randomly throughout the beanplot in Figure 1. The highest grossing romance films in Italy were also domestic productions (*Manuale d'amore 2*, *Scusa ma ti chiamo amore*) and films with an Italian producer are randomly distributed and perform no better or worse overall than international productions without an Italian producer (Mann-Whitney  $U = 62$ ,  $p = 0.15$ ). The gross accounted for by the eight domestic and three co-productions in Italy is 48% of the total for this genre in this country.

In Germany the two highest grossing films substantially outperformed other romance films, accounting for 26% of the accumulated gross for this genre. *Keinohrhasen* (2007) grossed \$77.85 million, making it the third highest grossing film in Germany in the sample (behind *Avatar* and *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*); while its sequel *Zweiohrküken* (2009) grossed \$41.61 million. The beanplot of the UK grosses in Figure 1 shows romance films can be divided into two groups. Four films (*Slumdog Millionaire*, *Sex and the City*, *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, and *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*) grossed more than \$44 million each, accounting for 43% of the total gross for this genre. The remainder of the films gross are much less successful between \$10 and \$26 million. Unusually, *Twilight* performed relatively poorly grossing only \$16.52 million. *Sex and the City 2* (\$33.34 million) is marooned between these two groups outperforming romance films in general but lagging behind the highest earners. The romance film in Spain is rooted firmly in the lower reaches of the box office charts, and has only six films in the top 25 from 2006 to 2010. The three highest grossing romance films in Spain all belong to the *Twilight* franchise, and this reflects the general tendency for the box office rankings in this country to be dominated by Hollywood franchise films.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, we analysed the performance of romance films at the box office in five European countries. The results show the romance genre accounts for approximately equal proportions of the films to reach the top 50 rankings between 2006 and 2010 in these countries, but audiences in different countries tend to be watching different romance films. In Germany, Spain, and the UK audiences are watching different Hollywood films; but in France and Italy the films unique to these countries tend to involve a production partner from the host market. In general, the box office gross of romance films in these countries tend to be low to mid-range with few of the very highest grossing films belonging to this genre. The romance film is a fixed part of the exhibition market in all five countries but lags behind other genres in terms of the share of the number of films and the proportion of gross accumulated.