



Influence of movies and television on Chinese Tourists perception toward international tourism destinations

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of movies and TV dramas on Chinese tourists' choice of international travel destinations. An online survey instrument was developed and distributed to Chinese consumers through an online survey panel company. Findings indicated many Chinese are highly involved with international travel and were ardent about movies and/or TV dramas. There was a high level of agreement that these media outlets have a significant impact on travel motivations. Foods, fashion, and other elements featured in movies and TV dramas were motivators for the Chinese market. Thailand and Korea were the two top favorite destinations based upon movie and TV drama consumption. Implications for the tourism industry and the movie and TV drama industries are discussed.

1. Introduction

Since the late 1800s, motion pictures have caught audiences' attentions when the Lumiere brothers first mesmerized the world through film (Bolan, Boy, & Bell, 2011; Josiam et al., 2015). Even though inducing viewers to visit the screened locations as tourists was not the primary purpose of most movie producers, beautiful sceneries, landscapes, lifestyles and cultural experiences featured in movies had enhanced the viewers' awareness of the screened destinations and impacted viewers' travel intentions (Bolan et al., 2011; Hudson, Wang, & Gil, 2011). Films, therefore, have served as marketing tools for destination management/marketing organizations (DMOs) across different countries (Beeton, 2005; Ji & Beeton, 2011; Josiam, Spears, Dutta, Pookulangara, & Kinley, 2014; Reijnders, Bolderman, Van Es, & Waysdorf, 2015).

The gross box office in China, the world's second-largest movie-going market, was over \$6.78 billion in 2015, with foreign films having a share of 38.4% (Brzeski, 2015). It is also estimated that the movie industry in China will surpass North America and become the top market in the world by the end of 2017 (Brzeski, 2015). In addition, China is the number one country producing TV dramas in the world (Entgroup, 2015). According to a report of a popular social media site in China (i.e., Weibo.com), Chinese viewers watched an average of 52 min of television (TV) dramas per day. Specifically, Korean dramas have increased in popularity in China since the late 1990s (Li, 2014). Even though many Chinese viewers are in favor of TV dramas from western

countries, the government has tightly controlled the media and only a limited number of western dramas can be shown each year on Chinese TV channels (Li, 2014).

The tourism industry in China has experienced rapid growth in the last decade (2017; China National Tourism Administration [CNTA], 2008). In 2006, there were 34,523,600 Chinese citizens traveling outbound to other countries or districts; among these travelers, 5,724,400 traveled outbound for public duty and 28,799,100 went outbound for private purposes; the top five countries that Chinese citizens traveled to were Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Russia, and the United States (CNTA, 2008). In 2016, 1.22 billion Chinese citizens traveled outbound and spent 1098 billion US dollars in other countries or districts (CNTA, 2017). According to these statistics, the number of international travelers from China has increased > 300% during the decade between 2006 and 2016. Outbound travelers in China have created numerous opportunities for the tourism industry in both China and other countries. From an international tourism perspective, the growth of China's outbound tourism market has attracted a great deal of attention and has emerged as a very important export market for many countries worldwide (Byron & Anton, 2008).

Previous research has investigated the impact of movies and TV dramas on international tourism. In India, United States, Korea, and Taiwan research found that movies and TV dramas had motivated viewers to travel abroad (Cho & Agrusa, 2007; Josiam et al., 2014; Josiam et al., 2015; Kim & Wang, 2012; Spears, Josiam, Kinley, & Pookulangara, 2013). Researchers have also discovered that locations

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shown in movies or TV dramas had impacted the viewers' decision-making process when selecting travel destinations (Busby & Klug, 2001; Hudson et al., 2011; Josiam et al., 2014, 2015; Spears et al., 2013; Young & Young, 2008). By investigating the impact of Bollywood movies on the activities and behaviors of Indian tourists, researchers identified that Bollywood movies had significantly impacted Indian tourists' perceptions toward European destinations (Josiam et al., 2014, 2015). Movies can be used as an efficient, effective and impactful tool in destination marketing, perhaps more so than traditional marketing approaches (Rajaguru, 2014).

However, no research has been conducted to date that comprehensively explored the impact of movies and TV dramas on Chinese tourists' perceptions of international travel destinations. Results of this research may benefit the tourism industry and the movie and TV drama industry in China and other countries as it investigated the relationships between these two (Movies/TV and Tourism) large segments of the Chinese economy. Therefore, the main purpose of this research was to fill the gap in literature by investigating the impact of movies and TV dramas on Chinese viewers' choice of international travel destinations. The specific objectives of the study were to (1) determine Chinese viewers' movie and TV watching preferences and engagement; (2) identify the impact of movie and TV on Chinese viewers' motivation to travel to international destinations; (3) explore the linkage between movie/TV and the perceived images of international travel destinations among Chinese viewers; and (4) provide recommendations and suggestions to marketing professionals in the tourism, movie, and TV industries.

2. Literature review

2.1. Film-induced tourism

Film-induced tourism can be described as the purposeful visitation of destinations depicted in films and television shows, including visits to film production studios and related theme parks (Beeton, 2005; Hahm & Wang, 2011; St-James, Darveau, & Fortin, 2018). As a form of cultural tourism, film-induced tourism has become a growing phenomenon worldwide, driven by the development of the entertainment and global travel industries (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). In the global context, a number of film tourism initiatives has been undertaken by destination marketing organizations or local economic development organizations to increase the reputation of filming destination, visitor awareness, and number of visitors (Connell, 2012). Such initiatives were found to be effective as researchers found that these films had changed or enhanced the image of featured destinations in tourists' minds and further increased tourists' engagement toward film-related activities (Volo & Irimiás, 2016). The scope of filming destinations could be very broad, according to Beeton (2005), the destinations include "on-location" – the screened locations and "off-location" – the theme parks, filming studios, or even the filming festivals. Connell (2012) expanded the scope of "off-locations" and added the themed attractions with film themes (e.g., Disneyworld), film celebrity homes (e.g., Beverly Hills), and film premieres into the context. As seen above, film-induced tourism is a complex issue with many facets and perspectives. The literature has evolved by scholars building on older concepts and exploring the phenomena from new angles and through different lenses.

As O'Connor, Flanagan, and Gilbert (2008, p. 434) note, "Film-induced tourism is partially based on tourism demands to escape reality to a better world represented in films." From consumers' perspectives, some researchers used push factors (e.g., need for socialization and escape) and pull factors (e.g., landscapes, scenery) as a framework to understand tourists motivations (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Macionis, 2004). Some other researchers identified that escaping from routine lives and seeking rewarding personal or interpersonal experience were two motivational forces that stimulate tourists' behaviors to visit

screened places featured in movies (Iso-Ahola, 1983; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987). A study in the United Kingdom found that consumers considered visiting locations filmed in their favorite movies when planning for trips (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). Singh and Best's (2004) study examined the wave of film-induced tourism to New Zealand after the release of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and found that viewers' primary motivation to visit the screening location was to see the scenery as portrayed in the film.

As a result, filming destinations usually experience increased number of visitors after the movie was released (Singh & Best, 2004). Many films have unintentionally, yet substantially influenced tourism trends, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, and *Cidade de Deus* (City of God). These movies have been responsible for increased tourist traffic to their respective filming destinations in different parts of the world. In New Zealand, the filming locations of *The Lord of the Rings* have experienced a marked increase in tourist interest (Suní & Komppula, 2012). In the UK, it is estimated that approximately 20% of international visitors were motivated by the images they had seen in movies or on television (VisitBritain, 2006). The promotion of the Harry Potter series is expected to both increase the number of visits to the UK as well as contribute significantly to the 74-billion-pound visitor economy (VisitBritain, 2006). In India, the release of *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2008 drew unprecedented international attention to the slums of Mumbai, giving rise to "slum tourism" there. After the success of the film, "Indian slums began to appeal more visibly to consumers as new exotic tourist destinations, away from the well-trodden road of so-called conventional tourism" (Mendes, 2016, p. 478). The 2003 release of *Cidade de Deus* (City of God) had a similar effect on Rio de Janeiro, with tours popping up across the city allowing voyeuristic visitors to explore the favelas they had seen on the screen (Freire-Medeiros, 2011).

Though movies increasingly have the power to shape the future of tourism, few studies have explicitly considered its effects on specific markets. The bulk of the film-induced tourism literature has emphasized the importance of this sector on economic growth (O'Connor et al., 2008). In their study of film-induced tourist perceptions of Spain, Mestre, Del Rey, and Stanishevski (2008) found that realistic images presented in films often attract the attention of tourists, subsequently resulting in the creation of a tourist destination. Additionally, Mestre et al. (2008) found that the majority of film viewers accepted the fictional storyline as reality. In a 2004 survey in the United Kingdom, 80% of respondents remarked that their ideas for their vacation destinations had come from movies, while 20% of respondents were planning trips to the filming locations of their favorite films (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). The financial value of film-induced tourism to the United Kingdom was estimated to be approximately 1.6 billion Pounds annually (Suní & Komppula, 2012). At present, no established methods exist to accurately measure film-induced tourism. However, the influence certain films have on the popularity of the destinations in which they were filmed is readily apparent through increasing visitor numbers.

2.2. Film-induced tourism in China

The history of film-induced tourism in China can be traced back to 1896 when the first imported film show occurred in Shanghai (Liu & Liu, 2004; Zhang & Ryan, 2018b). Rapid growth of film-induced tourism appeared from early 2000s with the development of new media and consumers' growing exposure to different types of online resources (Liu & Liu, 2004; Zhang & Ryan, 2018a). Previous studies have investigated the development stages of film-induced tourism in China, the relationship between films/TV dramas and viewer's tourism motivations, and the impact of film on screened destination's image (Hao & Ryan, 2013; Kim & Kim, 2018; Liu & Liu, 2004; Meng & Yuan, 2006; Pan, 2005; Pan & Ryan, 2013; Wu & Hou, 2006; Jing, 1999). By surveying tourists visiting *Longquan Villa of Tieling*, researchers found that the majority of the tourists visited the destination after seeing it in the

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