

Research Horizons

Highlights of Recent Research by the SHTM

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Movies Generate Tourism Demand

Movies can be important determinants of tourists' destination choices and behaviour, according to a recent research study by the SHTM's Dean, Chair Professor Kaye Chon, newly joined Assistant Professor Markus Schuckert, former Visiting Professor Mike Peters and a coauthor. The researchers surveyed tourists in Vienna, Austria, to examine whether their decisions to visit the city were influenced by the Austro-German *Sissi* trilogy of the 1950s. The movies indeed affected the tourists' choice of destination, which suggests that "a continuous penetration of the audience creates a strong pull factor to visit movie sites".

Movie-Induced Tourism

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to how destinations that have served as sets for popular movies and television shows become a focus for tourism. Of particular interest has been the role of films such as the *Lord of the Rings*, *Captain Correlli's Mandolin* and *The Sound of Music* in influencing tourists' perceptions of the associated destinations, their motivation to visit and their behaviour while visiting them.

According to the researchers, this new form of 'cultural tourism' can have positive benefits in terms of increased visitor numbers, which in turn create additional jobs and business opportunities. However, there is "also evidence of a range of negative impacts associated with film-induced tourism", such as price increases, invasion of the locals' privacy, and overcrowding and physical changes to the site. It is thus vital "to adopt well-considered tourism marketing initiatives" that allow local communities to profit rather than suffer from movie-induced tourism.

A crucial point to understand is that movies can alter viewers' knowledge of and emotional responses to a destination and help them to retain or maintain their interest in a country or region. Because pictorial representations are easier to recall than non-visual forms of information, people are more likely to remember the information embedded in movies. The portrayal of a destination in a movie can also be perceived as more credible than marketing information, and so may be more effective in altering people's perceptions.

From this perspective, a viewer can experience both 'push' and 'pull' factors in wanting to visit a movie location. 'Pull' factors can include attributes of the location, such as the scenery and landscapes, the personal attributes of the cast and stars, and performance attributes such as the plot and theme. In contrast, note the researchers, push factors "stem from internal drivers that lie within each individual" such as ego enhancement, status, fantasy, vicarious experience or the search for self-identity.

The *Sissi* Movies and Tourism in Vienna

The researchers set out to examine the specific effects of the *Sissi* movies – *Sissi* (1955), *Sissi: The Young Empress* (1956) and *Sissi: The Fateful Years of an Empress* (1957) – on visitors' travel behaviour and destination selection. The trilogy portrayed the life of Elisabeth of Bavaria, daughter of Duke Max of Bavaria, who married Emperor Franz Joseph I in 1854. It enjoyed wide popularity and created an image of Vienna as "a classical, elegant and imperial city".

Building on Professor Chon's previous study of the influence of *The Sound of Music* on visitors to Salzburg, the researchers surveyed tourists at various Sissi-related

heritage sites in Vienna. The 229 tourists who completed the questionnaire were predominantly European (85.6%), female (73.4%) and aged between 20 and 40 (64.6%). The largest group were professional, executives or self-employed (21.8%) and most were university educated (60.3%). Around two-thirds of the sample was visiting Vienna for the first time.

Movie-Related Travel Decisions

A great majority of the tourists (90%) had seen the movies at least once, and 3.9% of them “stated that the primary purpose of their Vienna visit was to witness the historic sites where *Sissi* was produced”. The researchers admit that this figure is not high, but do point out that 45.5% of the tourists “agreed that the movie(s) triggered their decision to visit Vienna”. Thus, the *Sissi* trilogy can be considered a major source of tourist information.

The researchers back this up by noting that the more often a viewer had watched the movies, the more likely that person was to decide to actually visit Vienna and the film locations. Those who had watched the movies more often were also more likely to want to revisit Vienna in the future.

Demographics also played a role in how the movies induced tourism. The female tourists surveyed tended to have watched them more often than the male tourists, and were more likely to have wanted to visit the sites after watching them. The older tourists were also more likely to have watched the movies and have been motivated to visit Vienna as a result.

Movie Sites and Tourist Experiences

When asked how they felt about visiting the *Sissi* sites, the tourists most often indicated that the experience was “rather exciting”. Overall, observe the researchers, the visits were considered as being “interesting, appealing, fascinating and authentic”. Although they were less likely to associate their visits with adjectives such as ‘meaning’, ‘relevance’, ‘importance’ and ‘need’, the tourists “as a whole felt rather involved than uninvolved in their visit to the locations”.

When the tourists were asked about the features they most associated with Vienna and whether those associations had changed since their visit, the city’s sights and landmarks remained significant. Music-related associations were less important after the visit, but ambience and cultural associations were more important. This suggests an evolving

appreciation of the city after actually visiting, which is borne out by shopping and museums ranking higher once the tourists had visited Vienna.

Movies as Destination Marketing

The researchers conclude that the *Sissi* trilogy, and by extension other movies featuring locations that can be visited, can influence both the intention to visit a destination and how that visit is experienced. This is by no means an exclusive influence, but it does lead to another interesting observation: movies “can in fact create a destination”, at least in part.

The researchers point to the proliferation over the last 50 years of *Sissi*-related attractions throughout Vienna, a long established tourist destination in its own right. This, they suggest, has implications for destination marketing well beyond the Austrian capital. Movies could yet be used “as specific marketing tools and channels for destination marketing”.

Points to Note

- Exposure to movies and television shows can generate tourism demand.
- The *Sissi* trilogy of movies has a demonstrable influence on the destination choice and behaviour of visitors to Vienna.
- Those tourists who have watched the movies most are more likely to revisit the city.
- Movies could thus be an effective form of destination marketing.

Peters, Mike, Schuckert, Markus, Chon, Kaye and Schatzmann, Clarissa. (2011) “Empire and Romance: Movie-induced Tourism and the Case of the *Sissi* Movies”. *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 169-180.