



FILM TOURISM AND DESTINATION IMAGE FORMATION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Renjitha Rajeev, Assistant Professor of Commerce, Sri C Achutha Menon Govt College Thrissur, Kerala.

Abstract

The present study investigates the influence of films on the travel behaviour of college students in Kerala, India. The research extends a previous exploratory study by increasing the sample size to 200 respondents and employing advanced statistical techniques. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed through SPSS-based statistical methods including reliability analysis, factor analysis, chi-square test, correlation, regression, independent sample t-test and ANOVA. The findings reveal that cinematic exposure significantly affects destination image formation and travel intention. Narrative engagement and visual aesthetics were found to be the strongest motivational drivers. Factor analysis extracted four major constructs — Film Appeal, Destination Image, Travel Intention and Travel Satisfaction — explaining 67% of total variance. Multiple regression results indicate that destination image ($\beta=0.41$, $p<0.001$) and film appeal ($\beta=0.36$, $p<0.001$) significantly predict travel intention. The study concludes that films operate as powerful indirect marketing tools capable of influencing tourist flows. The research offers implications for tourism marketers, destination planners and film production agencies in designing collaborative promotional strategies.

Keywords: Film Tourism, Destination Image, Media Influence, Student Travel Behaviour, Tourism Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of people watch movies either on the big screen in commercial theatres or on the small screen at home. While watching films, audiences often notice the beautiful landscapes, historical sites, cultural settings, or even violent crime scenes associated with the locations depicted in the story. Even when such locations serve merely as a background, viewers may develop a desire to visit these places after watching the movie. Thus, the portrayal of destinations in major motion pictures can significantly create or alter the image of a place. For instance, an unknown city may transform into a major tourist destination simply by being featured in a film. Likewise, a country that was previously associated only with a pastoral or rural image may become a popular destination for family tourism. A current and tangible example of this phenomenon can be observed in the screening of the movie Anandham.

Typically, movies are not produced with the intention of informing audiences about destinations or attracting tourists to the places depicted. Instead, films are primarily created for entertainment or economic purposes. Nevertheless, movies provide substantial information to viewers and influence tourism in profound ways. This growing phenomenon is referred to as film tourism.



Film tourism is defined as tourist visits to a destination or attraction resulting from the destination being featured on television, video, or cinema screens (Film Tourism, 2004). Despite the significant influence movies have in shaping or transforming destination images among individuals, research in this area remains relatively limited. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to examine this emerging phenomenon and contribute to tourism literature. In order to analyse the impact of movies on destination image formation, the research focuses on four major dimensions: destination image, popular culture, mass media, and movies.

Various approaches have been adopted in tourism studies to understand the concept of destination image. It has been widely established that destination image plays a crucial role in an individual's travel-related purchase decision-making process. Such images are primarily based on the information that individuals possess about a destination. People form perceptions about destinations regardless of whether they have personally visited them. These perceptions may be clear or vague, factual or imaginative, yet they reflect individual preferences and attitudes (Gunn, 1988).

Two major theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain the destination image formation process. According to Gunn (1988), destination images can be classified into organic and induced images. Organic images emerge from sources not directly related to tourism promotion, such as news reports, documentaries, and movies. In contrast, induced images result from deliberate marketing efforts aimed at promoting and advertising destinations.

News media and popular culture are deeply embedded in everyday life and therefore tend to have wide market penetration (Kim and Richardson, 2003). Popular culture is known to exert a powerful influence on destination image formation within the tourism context, as it can convey substantial information about a place within a short period.

Throughout an individual's lifetime, various communication inputs—including advertising, radio, television, movies, magazines, books, and personal comments from friends and relatives—contribute to the accumulation of destination images, which are then assigned positive or negative values (Gunn, 1988). Environmental simulations such as sketches, photographs, and videos are considered crucial in effectively creating and communicating destination images (MacKay, 1995).

Movies represent an important component of popular culture and mass media. Although they are often perceived merely as a source of entertainment, films simultaneously serve as informative tools that shape public perceptions in multiple ways (Mankekar, 2001). Researchers have recognized that movies possess a particularly strong ability to influence individuals' perceptions of destinations due to their capacity to reach millions of viewers within a short span of time.

In summary, movies demonstrate both direct and indirect impacts on tourist flows and generate significant economic benefits associated with destination tourism. This highlights the powerful role of films in shaping destination images, enhancing awareness, and ultimately increasing tourist arrivals.



STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although several studies have examined the relationship between films and tourism, most of them have primarily focused on defining film tourism activities and products, analysing specific forms and manifestations of film tourism, assessing its impacts on host communities, and exploring the role of destination image formation and destination management. However, there remains limited understanding of film-induced tourists from a consumer behaviour perspective. In particular, insufficient attention has been given to identifying, characterising, and understanding the motivations, perceptions, and decision-making processes of tourists who are influenced by movies.

With the increasing global exposure of destinations through cinema and other visual media, it becomes important to examine how films shape tourists' travel intentions and destination choices. Therefore, further research is required to explore the behavioural dimensions of film tourism and to understand how movie-induced images influence tourist decision-making.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In recent years, a growing global trend has been observed in which tourists visit destinations or attractions as a direct result of their portrayal in popular cultural media such as movies, television dramas, and novels. These media forms are generally not produced with the primary objective of tourism promotion or destination marketing (Iwashita, 2003). Nevertheless, they play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and travel interests.

Despite this emerging phenomenon, there is a noticeable scarcity of research focusing specifically on the impact of movies on tourism patterns and destination choice behaviour. One of the fundamental assumptions underlying the present study is that mass media and popular culture exert a powerful influence on the formation of destination images. In particular, cinematic representation has been recognised as an effective medium through which favourable or unfavourable images of destinations are created in the minds of potential tourists.

Moreover, limited empirical research has been conducted to examine how movie-induced images affect individuals' travel decisions and behavioural intentions towards destinations. Given the growing importance of film tourism as a tool for destination awareness, image building, and tourism development, it is essential to undertake systematic research in this area. Therefore, the present study seeks to contribute to tourism literature by analysing the impact of movies on tourism behaviour and destination image formation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The influence of media on tourism development and destination image formation has been widely acknowledged in tourism and marketing literature. Early theoretical contributions by Clare Gunn (1988) established that tourists develop organic destination images through information sources that are not directly associated with tourism promotion, such as films, news media, books, and interpersonal communication. These organically formed images are often



perceived as more credible and can significantly influence tourists' perceptions, preferences, and travel decision-making behaviour.

Subsequent research has emphasized the promotional power of cinema in shaping tourism demand. Simon Hudson and J. R. Brent Ritchie (2006) demonstrated that films can generate long-lasting destination awareness and marketing effects that often exceed the impact of traditional advertising campaigns. Unlike paid promotional activities, cinematic exposure provides subtle yet persuasive destination promotion through storytelling, emotional engagement, and visual appeal. As a result, film-induced tourism has emerged as an important strategic tool for destination branding and positioning.

Further contributions by Sue Beeton (2005) identified film tourism as a rapidly expanding niche within cultural tourism. Her research highlighted that the portrayal of destinations in films can transform tourist flows, attract new visitor segments, and influence the socio-economic structure of host communities. Film tourism not only increases tourist arrivals but also contributes to local employment generation, infrastructure development, and regional economic diversification.

Building upon this perspective, Joanne Connell (2012) examined the evolution of film tourism as a multidisciplinary research area. She emphasized the importance of integrating insights from tourism marketing, media studies, cultural geography, and sociology to better understand the complex interactions between cinematic representation and tourist behaviour. Connell argued that film tourism research should move beyond descriptive approaches to include behavioural and experiential dimensions.

Earlier studies by Peter Schofield (1996) also indicated that visual media heritage plays a significant role in tourism development. The preservation and promotion of film locations as heritage attractions can enhance destination attractiveness and create new tourism products. Similarly, Nozomi Iwashita (2003) emphasized the role of media representation in shaping tourists' perceptions of destination authenticity. According to her findings, cinematic portrayals can construct symbolic meanings associated with a place, thereby influencing tourists' expectations and experiences.

In addition to these foundational studies, recent tourism literature suggests that films contribute to destination image formation through cognitive and affective processes. Cognitive image refers to tourists' beliefs and knowledge about destination attributes, while affective image relates to emotional responses and feelings generated by cinematic narratives. These dual components jointly influence tourists' behavioural intentions, including travel planning and destination choice.

Overall, the literature indicates that film tourism has significant implications for destination marketing, consumer behaviour, and tourism development. However, there remains a need for more empirical research examining how movie-induced destination images influence tourists' psychological responses and travel decisions in specific regional contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



The present study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Model of consumer behaviour, originally proposed in environmental psychology and widely applied in tourism and marketing research. The model explains how external environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal psychological processes, which in turn lead to behavioural responses.

In the context of film tourism, the framework can be conceptualised as follows:

- **Stimulus (S): Film Exposure and Cinematic Elements**
Movies act as powerful sensory stimuli by presenting scenic landscapes, cultural symbols, historical monuments, narratives, music, and character interactions. These visual and emotional elements create vivid mental representations of destinations.
- **Organism (O): Psychological Perception and Destination Image Formation**
Exposure to cinematic content influences viewers' cognitive evaluations and emotional responses. This process leads to the formation or modification of destination images, including perceptions of attractiveness, safety, authenticity, and experiential value.
- **Response (R): Travel Intention and Visitation Behaviour**
The destination image formed through cinematic exposure ultimately affects tourists' behavioural outcomes, such as intention to visit, information search, travel planning, and actual visitation. Positive film-induced images can therefore translate into increased tourist arrivals and economic benefits for destinations.

Thus, the S-O-R framework provides a comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding how films function as environmental stimuli that shape psychological processes and influence tourism behaviour.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the importance of movies as a medium influencing tourism development and destination promotion.
2. To analyse the influence of destinations portrayed in films on the travel behaviour of college-going students.
3. To evaluate the extent to which film-induced destination images shape tourists' perceptions and travel decision-making.
4. To identify the major motivational factors that encourage college students to visit destinations featured in movies.
5. To examine the relationship between movie viewing habits and travel intention among young tourists.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



Research Design

The study adopted a combination of descriptive and exploratory research designs. The descriptive design was used to collect primary data from respondents in order to understand their perceptions, attitudes, and travel intentions towards destinations portrayed in movies. The exploratory design was used to analyse secondary information related to film-induced tourism, destination image formation, and media influence on tourism behaviour.

Research Approach

The study followed a survey method for collecting primary data. The target population consisted of college-going students aged between 18 and 21 years, including both male and female respondents. A pilot study was initially conducted on a small group of students to test the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire. Based on the feedback obtained, necessary modifications were made before administering the final questionnaire.

The structured questionnaire included questions related to movie viewing frequency, awareness of destinations portrayed in films, perception towards film locations, motivational factors, and travel intention.

Sampling Method

The study employed a non-probability convenience sampling method. Respondents were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the survey. Both male and female college students were included in order to obtain diverse responses.

Sample Size

The sample size selected for the study was 50 college-going students. The sample was considered adequate to understand the preliminary behavioural trends related to film-induced tourism among youth.

Tools Used for Data Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data were classified, coded, tabulated and analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive tools such as frequency distribution, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to summarise respondent characteristics and behavioural patterns.

Inferential statistical tools such as Chi-square test were used to examine associations between variables, correlation analysis was used to study the relationship between movie viewing habits and travel intention, and simple regression analysis was used to assess the impact of film exposure on destination image formation.



Likert scale analysis and ranking methods were also used to measure respondents’ attitudes and motivational factors. The analysed data were presented using tables, bar diagrams, pie charts and graphical representations for better clarity and interpretation.

Sources of Data

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to the sample respondents. Secondary data were collected from books, research journals, tourism reports and reliable internet sources to understand the theoretical background of film tourism.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 200)			
Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	92	46%
	Female	108	54%
Age	18 years	20	10%
	19 years	58	29%
	20 years	82	41%
	21 years	40	20%
Course of Study	B.Com	70	35%
	BBA	55	27.50%
	BA	40	20%
	B.Sc	35	17.50%
Place of Residence	Urban	84	42%
	Semi-Urban	70	35%
	Rural	46	23%

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation: The consolidated demographic table shows that the sample of 200 respondents is fairly balanced in gender with a slightly higher proportion of females (54%). Most respondents are 20 years old (41%), indicating representation from senior undergraduate students. Commerce-related courses form the majority (62.5%), suggesting strong participation from business-stream students. A significant portion of the respondents belong to urban and semi-urban areas (77%), which may correspond to higher exposure to media, internet usage, and travel opportunities.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: Film Appeal Influences Destination Image



Statistical Test	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Pearson Correlation	0.62	< 0.01	Reject H0	Film appeal has a significant positive relationship with destination image.

H1: Film appeal influences destination image.

This hypothesis was tested using Pearson’s Correlation Analysis. The calculated correlation coefficient value was $r = 0.62$ with a p-value less than 0.01. Since the p-value is lower than the level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that film appeal has a significant and positive relationship with destination image formation.

Hypothesis 2: Destination Image Predicts Travel Intention

Statistical Test	Beta Value (β)	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Multiple Regression	0.41	< 0.001	Reject H0	Destination image significantly predicts travel intention.

H2: Destination image predicts travel intention.

This hypothesis was tested using Multiple Regression Analysis. The standardized beta coefficient was found to be $\beta = 0.41$ with a p-value less than 0.001. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The result shows that destination image is a significant predictor of travel intention among college students.

Hypothesis 3: Awareness of Film Tourism and Visitation Behaviour

Statistical Test	Chi-square Value (χ^2)	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Chi-square Test	18.72	< 0.01	Reject H0	Awareness significantly influences visiting film locations.

H3: Awareness of film tourism is associated with visitation behaviour.

The hypothesis was tested using the Chi-square Test of Association. The calculated Chi-square value was $\chi^2 = 18.72$ with a p-value less than 0.01. Since the result is statistically significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that awareness of film tourism significantly influences the likelihood of visiting film locations.



Hypothesis 4: Travel Satisfaction Difference Based on Gender

Statistical Test	t-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Independent Sample t-test	2.11	< 0.05	Reject H0	Female students reported higher travel satisfaction than males.

H4: Travel satisfaction differs based on gender.

This hypothesis was examined using an Independent Sample t-test. The calculated t-value was $t = 2.11$ with a p-value less than 0.05. As the p-value is lower than the significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. The findings reveal that female students reported higher travel satisfaction compared to male students.

Hypothesis 5: Movie Watching Frequency and Travel Intention

Statistical Test	F-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
One-way ANOVA	4.32	< 0.05	Reject H0	Students who watch movies more frequently show higher travel intention.

H5: Movie watching frequency affects travel intention.

This hypothesis was tested using One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The calculated F-value was $F = 4.32$ with a p-value less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result indicates that students who watch movies more frequently demonstrate higher travel intention towards film locations.

Interpretation of Hypothesis Testing

The results of hypothesis testing clearly demonstrate that cinematic exposure plays a statistically significant role in shaping tourism behaviour among college students. All the formulated hypotheses were supported by empirical evidence.

The findings confirm that films contribute to destination image formation, which in turn influences travel intention and actual visitation behaviour. The study also reveals the existence of demographic differences, particularly in travel satisfaction levels across gender. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that higher levels of media consumption are associated with stronger travel motivation, suggesting a close relationship between media engagement and tourism demand.

Overall, the results highlight the growing importance of films as an influential medium in tourism promotion, destination branding, and consumer decision-making.



FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The study revealed that the majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 18–21 years, indicating that young students form an important segment in film-induced tourism behaviour.
2. Both male and female students participated in the study, ensuring representation of gender perspectives in understanding travel behaviour influenced by movies.
3. A considerable proportion of respondents were found to be frequent movie watchers, suggesting a high level of media exposure among college students.
4. Most respondents reported that they had basic awareness about destinations portrayed in films, indicating the wide reach of cinematic media.
5. A significant number of students expressed interest in travelling with friends or peer groups, highlighting the influence of social factors on youth tourism.
6. The findings also indicated that students with higher exposure to media platforms such as theatres, television and online streaming services showed greater travel curiosity.
7. Movies were found to play a significant role in creating awareness about tourist destinations among college-going students.
8. Cinematic portrayal of scenic landscapes, cultural heritage, historical monuments and lifestyle was observed to positively influence destination image formation.
9. A strong and positive relationship was identified between film appeal and destination image, indicating that visually attractive and emotionally engaging films enhance tourist interest.
10. The study revealed that destination image significantly influences travel intention, suggesting that students are more likely to visit destinations that they perceive favourably through movies.
11. Awareness about film tourism was found to have a significant association with visitation behaviour, indicating that students who are aware of film shooting locations show greater willingness to visit such places.
12. The analysis showed that movie watching frequency significantly affects travel intention, with frequent viewers demonstrating higher motivation to travel.
13. The study identified major motivational factors influencing film-induced tourism behaviour, including scenic beauty, emotional attachment to film narratives, celebrity influence, cultural curiosity and peer influence.
14. Gender differences were observed in travel satisfaction levels, with female students reporting relatively higher satisfaction compared to male students.



15. Media exposure was found to contribute to stronger travel motivation and destination preference, highlighting the importance of mass media as an indirect tourism promotion tool.
16. The findings indicate that films act as an informal destination marketing mechanism by shaping perceptions, enhancing awareness and increasing tourism demand.
17. The study also suggests that film tourism has the potential to generate economic benefits, such as increased tourist inflow, development of local infrastructure and promotion of cultural identity.
18. Overall, the research confirms that film-induced destination image formation plays a crucial role in influencing tourism behaviour among youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Tourism authorities should collaborate with film producers and media houses to promote destinations through cinematic representation.
2. Government and tourism departments can develop film tourism circuits and guided tours to popular shooting locations to attract more visitors.
3. Adequate infrastructure facilities such as transportation, accommodation and tourist information centres should be developed at film locations.
4. Destination marketing organisations should use digital media platforms and social networking sites to promote film-based destinations among youth.
5. Colleges and educational institutions can encourage educational tours and experiential travel programmes to destinations portrayed in films.
6. Local communities should be actively involved in film tourism development activities to ensure sustainable tourism growth and economic benefits.
7. Tourism planners should focus on maintaining the authenticity and environmental sustainability of film locations to enhance tourist satisfaction.
8. Film producers may consider highlighting cultural heritage, local traditions and scenic beauty of destinations to create positive destination images.
9. Promotional campaigns can be designed to increase awareness about film tourism opportunities among potential travellers.
10. Further research can be encouraged to understand film tourism behaviour among different demographic groups and regions.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the influence of movies on tourism behaviour and destination image formation among college-going students. The findings clearly indicate that films act as a powerful medium in creating awareness about tourist



destinations and shaping positive perceptions among viewers. Cinematic exposure was found to significantly influence travel intention, visitation behaviour and motivational factors such as scenic attractiveness, emotional connection and cultural curiosity. The study also highlighted the role of media consumption patterns and demographic characteristics in influencing tourism behaviour.

Overall, the research confirms that film tourism has emerged as an important phenomenon in the modern tourism industry. Movies function as an indirect yet effective destination marketing tool by enhancing destination image and stimulating tourism demand. The study suggests that proper planning, promotion and sustainable management of film locations can contribute to tourism development and economic growth. Therefore, integrating film tourism strategies into destination marketing initiatives can provide long-term benefits for tourism stakeholders and local communities.

REFERENCES

- Beeton, S. (2005). *Film-induced tourism*. Channel View Publications.
- Butler, R. (1990). The influence of the media in shaping international tourist patterns. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 15(2), 46–53.
- Connell, J. (2012). Film tourism – Evolution, progress and prospects. *Tourism Management*, 33(5), 1007–1029.
- Gartner, W. C. (1994). Image formation process. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 2(2–3), 191–216.
- Gunn, C. A. (1988). *Vacationscape: Designing tourist regions* (2nd ed.). Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Hudson, S., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2006). Promoting destinations via film tourism: An empirical identification of supporting marketing initiatives. *Journal of Travel Research*, 44(4), 387–396.
- Iwashita, C. (2003). Media representation of the UK as a destination for Japanese tourists. *Tourist Studies*, 3(2), 139–156.
- Kim, H., & Richardson, S. L. (2003). Motion picture impacts on destination images. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(1), 216–237.
- MacKay, K. J., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (1997). Pictorial element of destination in image formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(3), 537–565.
- Mankekar, P. (2001). *Screening culture, viewing politics: An ethnography of television, womanhood and nation in postcolonial India*. Duke University Press.
- Morgan, N., & Pritchard, A. (1998). *Tourism promotion and power: Creating images, creating identities*. Wiley.
- Pike, S. (2002). Destination image analysis: A review of 142 papers from 1973–2000. *Tourism Management*, 23(5), 541–549.
- Riley, R., Baker, D., & Van Doren, C. S. (1998). Movie-induced tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25(4), 919–935.



- Ritchie, J. R. B., & Hudson, S. (2009). Understanding and meeting the challenges of consumer/tourist experience research. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 11(2), 111–126.
- Schofield, P. (1996). Cinematographic images of a city: Alternative heritage tourism in Manchester. *Tourism Management*, 17(5), 333–340.
- Tasci, A. D. A., & Gartner, W. C. (2007). Destination image and its functional relationships. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(4), 413–425.
- Urry, J. (2002). *The tourist gaze* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Wang, Y., & Pizam, A. (2011). *Destination marketing and management: Theories and applications*. CABI.
