



***Game of Thrones* and its Epitexts. The Journey of Audiences from the Screen to Film Tourist Attractions**

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The aim of this study is to analyze how the process of searching for information about tourist destinations and attractions depicted in *Game of Thrones* can improve/worsen the perceived image of these places, increase/decrease the intention to visit, and even transform these intentions into actual visits.

Methodology: Twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with viewers who had watched

the series and visited one of its locations. **Results:** Consuming epitexts related to Game of Thrones enhances the image of attractions and destinations generated by the series, links real-world locations to those of fantasy, and increases visit intentions and expectations. **Discussion:** Given the above, it is necessary for managers and the tourism industry to understand the processes and information channels through which a viewer goes from the screen to visiting an audiovisual tourism attraction. This will contribute to the production of epitexts that link the settings of audiovisual fiction to tourist attractions. **Conclusions:** Ultimately, we found that the search for information about the locations depicted in the series is its first and essential behavioral effect, which underscores the need to generate epitexts that connect the settings to audiovisual tourist attractions.

Keywords: audiovisual tourism; *Game of Thrones*; epitexts; projected image; perceived image; visit motivation; audiovisual tourist attractions

1. INTRODUCTION

Research on tourism induced by audiovisual fiction has confirmed the effect of films and television series on tourism, particularly in four areas: a) the perceived images of destinations (Hahm & Wang, 2011; Josiam et al., 2014; Shani et al., 2009); b) visit motivations (Kim & Kim, 2018; Michael et al., 2020); c) visit intentions and actual visits (Tkalec et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014); and d) tourists' experiences in locations and settings (St-James et al., 2018; Kim, 2012a; Kim & Wang, 2012; Rittichainuwat et al., 2018). Research has also highlighted the mediating and moderating role of sociodemographic variables, the cultural proximity of audiences to audiovisual productions and/or the destinations represented, and the degree of narrative involvement in these (Kim et al., 2019; Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2023, 2024; Wen et al., 2018).

However, after watching an audiovisual production, viewers/potential tourists can take actions that significantly influence these effects. These actions are aimed at obtaining more information about the tourist destinations and attractions depicted that have captured their attention, whether through social media, the internet, news articles and reports, advertising by tourism operators, or word of mouth. This behavioral effect of audiovisual fiction (the search for information) can improve or worsen the perceived image of an attraction generated by films and series, increase or decrease the intention to visit, and even transform those intentions into actual visits.

The texts available to viewers/potential tourists are of a very diverse nature. They range from epitexts —texts linked to a previous text (a film or series) that circulate publicly: reviews, critiques, various types of information, etc. (Genette, 2001)—that connect audiovisual fictions with the tourist attractions they depict, to texts with practical information about the destination, its attractions, and services. There are also relevant aspects like the informative texts about the destination that have nothing to do with audiovisual productions or tourism.

These initial behavioral effects of audiovisual fiction related to tourism have received scant attention from research. However, their importance is crucial. As Nieto-Ferrando (2025) points out, most of the recommendations researchers make to the tourism industry and managers focus on creating persuasive epitexts that strengthen the link between audiovisual fiction and destinations. They also propose various initiatives to make the experience of film and television tourism memorable. Satisfaction, and the fulfillment or exceeding of expectations during a visit, can turn tourists into generators of epitexts, both on social media and through word of mouth. These, in turn, can improve the perceived image of an attraction or increase the intentions of other viewers/potential tourists to visit.

1.1. Prior Research

1.1.1. The Perceived Image of Destinations

The perceived image of a destination is the set of impressions that audiences have of it based on the sum of beliefs, ideas, and feelings it evokes (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002). The perceived image can be studied by differentiating its cognitive and affective attributes (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Research has demonstrated the relationship between the representation of the destination in audiovisual fiction—the projected image—and changes in the attributes of that destination as perceived by viewers (Hahm & Wang, 2011; Josiam et al., 2014).

To better understand the relationship between the image projected by audiovisual fiction and the perceived image, research has included the analysis of audiovisual texts, specifically how attractions are represented in films and series (Gómez-Morales et al., 2022; Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2021, 2024). It is also considered that the effect on the perceived image of destinations depends on the degree of engagement with the audiovisual fiction (Wen et al., 2018), the pleasure derived by viewers (Yang et al., 2017), or the evaluation of its attributes (story, locations, and characters) (Wong et al., 2021). Similarly, the effect on the image may differ depending on the cultural proximity of the audiences to the audiovisual productions and destinations, the familiarity with the latter (Hudson et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2008) or sociodemographic variables (Hahm et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2019).

The link between representation and perception raises the issue of the effects on the image of destinations of negative (Hudson et al., 2011; Itoo and Nagar, 2017; Shani et al., 2009), stereotypical, or misrepresented portrayals (Justus et al., 2018; Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2022). Furthermore, audiovisual fictions as a source of image interact with other sources of image, whether mediated or not (resulting from a visit or knowledge of the destination), and whether persuasive and produced by tourism managers or independent. In this regard, Ozretic-Dosen et al. (2018) demonstrate that viewers of Turkish television series have a more positive image of Turkey than those who also consume other media texts that depict the country's political problems.

Epitexts and texts related to attractions/destinations can improve/worsen the image generated in audiences by audiovisual fiction.

1.1.2. Reasons for Visiting a Place

Motivation is the driving force behind behavior, the engine of tourism consumption. Research distinguishes between push motivations, inherent to tourists, and pull motivations, inherent to destinations. Among the former, tourists' internal motivations, are ego enhancement, fantasy, escape from daily life, relaxation, social interaction, learning, novelty, and status (Pearce & Lee, 2005). External motivations, or pull factors, are inherent to the attributes of destinations.

Most studies on the effects of audiovisual fiction on travel motivations pursue two objectives. First, they analyze the weight of different attraction factors. Macionis (2004) suggests that audiovisual fiction enhances the attractiveness of destinations by showcasing landscapes, presented with spectacular staging, plots/themes, and the characters who populate them, often portrayed by celebrities. Kim (2012b) argues that, rather than the depiction of landscapes, plot, and characters—to which they add technique and music—it is the perception and evaluation of these attributes in audiovisual fictions that can be considered a motivational factor. Riley et al. (1998) add the symbolic value that viewers attribute to attractions due to their role in audiovisual representation and narrative as a motivational factor.

A second objective is to identify internal motivating factors based on the type of film tourist: whether it is specific—their objective is to visit destinations or attractions seen in audiovisual fiction—, general—they enjoy

a cinematic attraction, although their visit is not the main objective— or fortuitous/accidental (Chang, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2018; Macionis, 2004; Michael et al., 2020). The type of film tourist and their motivations are conditioned by the degree of involvement in audiovisual fictions (Liu & Pratt, 2019), sociocultural variables and the cultural proximity of audiences to destinations and productions (Kim et al, 2019; Meng & Tung, 2016; Michael et al., 2020; Ng & Chan, 2020; Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015).

On the one hand, epitexts would enhance the link between the attractive factors of destinations and their representation in audiovisual fiction; on the other hand, the type of audiovisual tourist would condition the quantity and type of epitexts and texts related to the destination.

1.1.3. The Intention to Visit and the Actual Visit

Intention can be considered the antecedent of behavior. Tourism research links intention and decision to the perceived image and to internal and external motivational factors. Intention and decision can lead to visits to destinations and attractions.

Beyond these pioneering texts (Riley et al., 1998), research focused on the increase in visitor numbers has been infrequent due to at least three problems: the difficulty of distinguishing the effect of audiovisual fiction from that of other events or marketing actions promoted by destinations; the difficulty of obtaining rigorous information, given that many attractions lack access control data or, if they do have it, do not make it available; and finally, the danger of assuming that all visitors to a place featured in audiovisual fiction are audiovisual tourists. Research on the effect on visit intentions and destination loyalty is much more abundant, as it complements studies on the perceived image of destinations, motivations, and experiences (Irimiás et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2018; Teng & Chen, 2020; Wong & Lai, 2015).

Epitexts and texts that contain practical information about the destination and its attractions can be essential to increase the intention to visit, even to transform the intention to visit into an actual visit.

1.1.4. Audiovisual Tourism Experiences

The effect of audiovisual fictions on the perceived image of destinations and on motivations, as well as epitexts and texts related to the destination, generates expectations in tourists who visit these destinations. These expectations interact with the reality of the tourist experience. Satisfaction is the result of meeting or exceeding these expectations (Carl et al., 2007).

Audiovisual fiction helps to give meaning to the tourist experience (St-James et al., 2018; Justus et al., 2018; Reijnders, 2011). It also influences the wide range of tourist behaviors in the places they visit. These behaviors, experiences, and satisfaction vary depending on the type of film and television tourist, the degree of audience engagement with the audiovisual fiction (Kim, 2012b, 2012c), and their cultural characteristics (Kim, 2012a; Kim & Wang, 2012). Loyalty, the desire to return, and recommendations to other tourists are all related to satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2014). Mansson (2011) analyzes the generation of content on social media following tourist experiences. It observes how users become promoters of cinematic tourism through their ratings, recommendations, and descriptions. Publishing these texts can influence the impact of audiovisual fiction on the perceived image, motivations for visiting, and tourist experiences.

Tourists satisfied/dissatisfied with the audiovisual tourism experience can generate epitexts, and these could influence the image of attractions and destinations, the motivations for visiting, and the intentions of visiting.

1.2. Epitexts to Stimulate Film Tourism

As Hahm and Wang (2011) point out, a film or series can increase viewers' awareness of a destination (cognitive effect) and their search for information about it (behavioral effect). It can also influence their motivations for visiting, their intention to visit, and their experience. However, in most cases, these effects are incidental (Hahm et al., 2008), since the primary objective of audiovisual fiction is to entertain and achieve high audience ratings. The representation of destinations and attractions is secondary to this. Therefore, given that the effects of audiovisual fiction on tourism are largely uncontrollable, tourism managers must develop initiatives to redirect and align them with their interests.

Many of the researchers' proposals to stakeholders in audiovisual tourism point in this direction. Specifically, they propose the creation of epitexts that strengthen the relationship between audiovisual production and appeal, with three objectives:

- 1) To link the characters and plot of a film or series to the location (Chang, 2016; Kim, 2012c, 2012d) is fundamental in advertising the audiovisual production itself (Quintal & Phau, 2015). Kim and Kim (2018) suggest that using actors/celebrities is more effective than using locations or plots/stories to promote an attraction. Therefore, destination advertisements should include photographs of celebrities and characters from films and series. Celebrities, as demonstrated by Lee et al. (2008), are an effective promotional tool that facilitates the sequential process of awareness, familiarization, and persuasion.
- 2) To link the scenarios of audiovisual fiction to the attractions of the destination. This can be done through documentaries or reports (Hahm & Wang, 2011), videos for social media (Mitev et al., 2017), or the *advertisements* for the films or series themselves (Oviedo-García et al., 2016). Given the emotional involvement of viewers in audiovisual fiction, tourism companies and managers must also activate, stimulate, and promote persuasive messages that appeal to the emotions generated by audiovisual fiction (Kim, 2012a; Kim & Wang, 2012).
- 3) To help to identify and interpret attractions through guides, location itineraries, and maps (Di Cesare et al., 2009; Chen, 2023; Gómez-Morales et al., 2022; Hahm & Wang, 2011; Oviedo-García et al., 2016), which must be continuously updated (Kim & Kim, 2018). This is even more necessary when there are large differences between the places depicted and the actual locations (Bolan et al., 2011).

These epitexts must also link cinematic attractions with other non-cinematic attractions (Gómez-Morales et al., 2023; Oviedo-García et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021). The interest generated on screen by the former can radiate to the latter (Ertz et al., 2021).

Researchers consider knowing the right moment to deploy these destination marketing initiatives to be crucial. Some studies suggest that such strategies should accompany the entire production process: before, during, and after filming (Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2018; Oviedo-García et al., 2016; Wen et al., 2018). As Contu and Pau (2022) state, published information about the potential filming of a successful audiovisual production in a location can be enough to prompt a visit. Mitev et al. (2017) point out that between the premiere of a series season and the search for information about its locations, three to five weeks elapse. This is the ideal time to disseminate epitexts that promote the location's cinematic appeal.

It is also suggested that marketing initiatives cater to the diversity of film tourism audiences/potential tourists. Three types of segmentation are proposed: based on sociodemographic and cultural aspects (Hahm et al., 2008; Kim, 2012a; Kim et al., 2019; Michael et al., 2020; Su et al., 2011), based on the audience, and on the type of film tourist. The production's target audience can also help predict the potential film tourist (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Yang et al., 2017). Epitexts and any promotional strategy for the appeal shown in an

audiovisual production have a different impact depending on the type of film tourist. In general, the research that makes these proposals follows Macionis's (2004) differentiation between specific, general, and incidental tourists. This typology is linked to the different motivations for visiting. Aguilar-Rivero et al. (2023) and Ng and Chan (2020) consider that managers should develop marketing campaigns that can satisfy tourists who are driven by different motivations.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research is to study the way viewers consume epitexts and texts containing information about the attractions and destinations depicted in audiovisual fiction, and how these epitexts can enhance the impact of films and series on tourism. To this end, the *Game of Thrones* (GoT) case study is analyzed as well as its viewers/tourists. The reason for choosing this series is that research has corroborated its impact on tourism (Gómez-Morales et al., 2022, 2023; Mellinas, 2019). The study is based on the premise that consuming these texts can modify the effects of audiovisual fiction on perceptions of attractions, travel intentions, and actual visits.

3. METHODOLOGY

To study the route taken by viewers from watching *Game of Thrones* to taking a tourist trip, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used. This method has been used to analyze the effect of audiovisual fiction on different areas of tourism by Buchmann et al. (2010), Dung and Reijnders (2013), Reijnders (2016), and Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018), among others. The method is also justified by the exploratory nature of the research, given that, to the authors' knowledge, little research has been conducted on the consumption of epitexts and informational texts about tourist attractions following the viewing of an audiovisual fiction, despite this being the primary effect such works can generate.

The questions were divided into four areas based on the information that was to be collected, although the interviewees were given ample freedom to link one topic to another: 1) the appreciation of the attributes of *GoT* and the effects of the tourist attractions shown in the series and their epitexts; 2) the types of epitexts and informational texts related to attractions and destinations, as well as the moment in which they are consumed; 3) the sources and the reliability attributed to them; and 4) the creation of new epitexts by tourists following their experience at the attraction and the destination.

To select the testimonials, a call was made on social media and fan forums for the series, accompanied by a survey to gather basic sociodemographic information and details of visits to the attractions featured in the show. Fifty-one people responded. Of these, 20 were deemed eligible and agreed to the interview, half women and half men. The testimonials cover a wide age range, from 22 to 65 years: four interviewees are between 20 and 29 years old, six between 30 and 39, six between 40 and 49, and four over 50. The sample was also divided into two groups of ten testimonials each, based on their place of residence at the time of their visit to the *Game of Thrones* filming locations: the first group consisted of residents of Spain and was anonymized with the letter "N" and a number; the second group consisted of residents outside of Spain and was anonymized with the letter "I" and a number. The difference between the two groups stems from the fact that many of the series' locations are in Spain. The degree of familiarity/unfamiliarity with these locations can influence the search for information about them.

Table 1. *Gender and Age of the Interviewees*

	GENDER	AGE
N 1	Woman	44
N 2	Woman	49
N 3	Woman	52
N 4	Woman	46
N 5	Man	52
N 6	Man	28
N 7	Man	35
N 8	Man	28
N 9	Man	29
N 10	Man	36
I 1	Women	31
I 2	Woman	40
I 3	Woman	22
I 4	Woman	30
I 5	Woman	31
I 6	Woman	49
I 7	Man	45
I 8	Man	65
I 9	Man	46
I 10	Man	31

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

All participants were informed of the purpose of the research and consented to the recording of the interview. The interviews were conducted via videoconference, in English or Spanish, according to the interviewee's preference. They lasted an average of 30 minutes. The interviewees' testimonies were treated anonymously.

The interviews were transcribed so that all researchers could review them and develop a general understanding of the information gathered. Using the interview script as a basic guide, coding was inductive, given the very limited prior research on the topic. Each researcher coded all the interviews, and the codes were then shared. The initial level of agreement was 83%, which increased to 94% after discussion of certain points.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The Effects of *GoT*, Epitexts and Texts With Practical Information

Nineteen testimonials highlight the beauty of the scenery and/or the medieval aesthetic of the series as one of its most outstanding attributes, always in relation to other attributes such as the characters, plots, and music. The locations shown are described as “impressive” (N6), “truly beautiful” (I7), “spectacular” (N2, I8), or “breathtaking” (I4). N4 states that “it is a series that, apart from the impact of the characters' storylines, is very attractive in terms of its landscapes.” All of the interviewees believe that the presence of an attraction or tourist destination in the series generates awareness about it and adds value to it. According to I4, those responsible for the production

They did an incredible job. There are so many places I didn't know existed or would never have thought of visiting. I think they found places with a very medieval feel that allowed for total immersion in that world without it feeling like you were in the present day.

The beauty and spectacular nature of the series' visuals increased the desire to visit in almost all the testimonials. I8 explains that “Dubrovnik is a beautiful city, and I've always wanted to go; long before *Game of Thrones*. But the series made me want to visit even more. Seeing it on television made me appreciate its beauty.”

Some testimonies are recognized as “tourist-specific,” as defined by Chang (2016), Macionis (2004), or Michael et al. (2020), since the presence of the attraction in the series gives them an excuse to visit the places for the first time. I4, who lives in the United States and considers herself a big *Game of Thrones* fan, points out the following:

What happened was that my husband and I wanted to sneak away and get married, and it occurred to me that it would be really fun to do it on a *Game of Thrones* set. So that's what really inspired the trip we took [...] I don't think I would have thought of traveling to Northern Ireland if it weren't for the show. Where I live, in the United States, there are a lot of people of Irish descent, and there are still those who consider traveling to Northern Ireland taboo because of the conflict.

I4 acknowledges that audiovisual fiction allows her to discriminate among the wide range of tourist possibilities: “There are so many places I want to visit, it overwhelms me. So I think that being inspired by the series to choose certain places helps me decide.” But above all, she points to an important aspect for our research: viewers/potential tourists are not exclusively under the influence of audiovisual fiction, given that word-of-mouth and other informative texts about the place, even those produced in the past, interact with the effects of *Game of Thrones* on the perceived image and intentions to visit. I4 recognizes that the series and its epitexts improved her image of Northern Ireland, which was negative due to the country's conflictive past.

However, tourists specifically interested in the series are a minority. The majority of testimonials are from “general” tourists; that is, they enjoy the attractions featured in the series, but visiting it is not the main reason for their trip. Eight testimonials took advantage of being on vacation in the area, and four residents of Spain live near the attractions.

However, it is also possible for a tourist to be specific to one destination and general to another; even that within a destination, certain attractions are visited specifically because of the series, while in others it is just one more incentive (N1, N5, N7, I8). N1 visited Girona as a specific tourist and Dubrovnik as a general tourist. I8 visited several places in Ireland as a specific tourist, but Spain and Croatia as a general tourist.

The only reason we went to some places is because we discovered—either by watching the TV series or doing some research—that they were filming locations for *GoT*. We might not have gone otherwise. [...] We did that quite a bit in Ireland. We'd go to a castle not because we had any particular interest in visiting it, but because we knew the series had been filmed there. [...] We went to Spain and then said, "Well, let's look for some *GoT* locations." We knew there were some there. The same thing happened in Croatia [...]. We said, "Since we're in Croatia, let's look for *GoT* locations in Split and Dubrovnik."

With the exception of I4, the rest of the testimonies state that they would not travel to a distant country motivated solely by the series, although it is an added incentive to visit. However, if the trip to the destination does not involve a considerable investment of time and money, they would visit or have visited a place exclusively because of *Game of Thrones*. In some cases, when the destination is already familiar from previous visits, the series motivates the revisit, but attributing to it a different meaning related to the link between the place and the series (N2, I7).

The vast majority of testimonies acknowledge the impact of *Game of Thrones* on the perceived image of the attractions depicted in the series and on travel intentions. This is already a common finding in the research. However, regarding the effect on travel motivations, tourists vary from general to specific to a destination (or to certain attractions within a destination) depending on its proximity or whether it is a first visit or a return visit.

The vast majority of respondents believe that consuming epitexts and texts with practical information improved the positive image of the attractions and destinations generated by the series. They note that these texts "enriched or complemented her experience" (N2), that "the more she knew, the more the experience improved" (N3) because "you go from knowing nothing to putting it into context" (N7) and "it makes the locations more interesting" (I6). I2 states the following:

When you start searching, researching, reading, and looking at pictures, you get more information about the site, its history, and its legends. This sparks more interest, and you also see more images of the site from different angles and think, "Yes, yes, this place is interesting." Then you become more curious and more eager to go visit it.

The consumption of epitexts reinforced the connection between the location and the series' setting, increased the intention to visit, and generated positive expectations. However, it doesn't appear that epitexts influenced the choice of one location over another. This choice is primarily due to opportunity, economic considerations, and distance. Nevertheless, it's also true that to understand economic considerations and appreciate proximity/distance, one should consume texts with practical information about the destinations.

4.2. The Typology of Information

A distinction must be made between the search for information to identify settings and locations (mostly in epitexts) and practical information related to the destination, its services, and its infrastructure. Furthermore, the different types of information are consumed at different times.

Nineteen participants were aware that the locations they saw on screen existed in reality, although modified by digital effects. Regarding how they knew where they were, only three residents of Spain actively searched for epitexts to determine their location, compared to eight non-residents. Four residents outside of Spain and one resident, with a very high level of engagement with the series, looked for exact shots from the filming of some scenes. In some cases, the locations were identified during the tourist experience or after the visit (N5).

Sometimes information emerges while searching for other topics related to *Game of Thrones* (N2, N3, among

others) or, even without specifically searching for it, in everyday conversations with friends and family. N2 says she came across related content linking the series to specific locations while searching for information about a new season, “for example, when it was going to premiere. From there, you start seeing related information: that they’re filming at such-and-such a location or wrapping up production here or there.”

It is also worth noting that three of the witnesses learned of the locations through other people (N6, I10, I6), and three others were unaware of being in the locations until they visited them (N1, N4, and N5), all of whom reside in Spain. Finally, two other witnesses, also Spanish, do not recall how they identified the locations (N3, N7).

Compared to foreigners, residents of Spain have searched the least online for information about locations within the country, even though many of them consider themselves fans of the series. The difference between residents and non-residents can be explained by geographical proximity to some of the locations. This allows for easier identification, given the potential for a broader understanding of the iconic imagery associated with the place. N1, for example, easily identified Girona, but required more effort to research Dubrovnik. No differences were observed based on gender or age.

The search for practical information aims to assess the possibility of converting an intention to visit into an actual visit, or, once a visit has been decided upon, to plan the trip. The most sought-after information relates to travel costs, how to get there, where to stay, where to eat, and other tourist attractions: “Location, history, context, area, how to get there, for example. Also, information about the surrounding area to know what's nearby and where to eat, which is very important” (N7). N8 indicates that they have a specific search procedure: “First, flights, then the destination airport, where exactly the place to visit is, if it's far away, and how to get there.” N6 relies on recommendations from friends and consults local tourist offices.

Viewers/tourists most involved with the series search for information about specific *Game of Thrones* tours, exact filming locations, and scene framing. Gender differences are observed here. While information about services is sought equally by men and women, significantly more men specify having researched the exact filming locations and scene framing (I7, I8, I10, for example).

The moment when epitexts are consumed in order to investigate locations is related to the degree of involvement with the series and the type of film tourist.

N8, I7, I8, and I9, with a high degree of involvement, looked for information about the locations right after the episode ended or even while watching it. It's worth noting that all four are men and most of them are not Spanish. N8 explains the following:

I would rewind and recapture the moment when the landscape I liked was visible. Then, I would use two methods: one is to take a photo and search with Google Lens; the other is to also search on Google "Game of Thrones, season 6, episode four, where is the place that appears at that moment."

Similarly, I9 states the following:

I love to know more about the shows I watch. So, usually, even while we're watching a show, I open IMDb on my phone and start reading interesting facts, like where it was filmed and so on. I really enjoy that kind of extra information. I'm a geek. It really enhances the viewing experience to know more details. That's how I found out [where the locations were].

However, with a lower level of involvement in the series, the consumption of epitexts aimed at identifying locations or reinforcing identification increases when it comes to considering the transition from intention to

actual visit. This is also when practical information about the destination is consumed.

During trip planning, those with a high degree of involvement in the series may conduct thorough research, both to refine their identification of locations and to plan their visits as efficiently as possible. This is acknowledged by I8. The consumption of epitexts on-site is also common, especially among general tourists (N1 in Dubrovnik, for example) and those with a lower level of involvement. Sometimes, these epitexts consumed on-site, or through word-of-mouth recommendations, allow for the identification of locations during the tourist experience or after the visit (N5, N6).

4.3. Information Sources and Their Reliability

Regarding the sources of information used to find filming locations, 11 of the testimonies mention Google or the internet in general. I4 paid particular attention to a website that “showed on a map of Northern Ireland where each scene had been filmed. A webpage indicated which scene had been filmed there.” The following sources of information are also cited: Wikipedia entries, specifically the one for *Game of Thrones*, and the official website of *GoT*, fan forums, digital news announcing a new season with information about filming (N2), websites of specialized magazines such as *Fotogramas* (N2), Findthatlocation.com, the Facebook page @Film locations- Then and now, IMDb or Google Maps Street View.

Google Maps Street View is particularly useful for I8, which does thorough research with the aim of replicating scenes in real-world locations:

That means I go to the same place and try to pose in the same pose as the actor. I look for a photograph of a scene from *Game of Thrones*. Then I would search for images on Google and say, “Okay, that’s the scene I want to replicate.” I know it’s in a particular castle. I know I can get there. I know if I have to pay an entrance fee. [...] At the Alcázar of Seville, which is a huge castle, and obviously a tourist attraction in its own right, I spent a lot of time trying to identify where the scenes from *Game of Thrones* might be. There’s one with a fountain. I have to find that particular fountain inside that castle and take a picture in front of it to match what was shown in the series.

Most statements rely on official or well-documented sources. N2 refers to:

Websites or publications dedicated exclusively to film shoots, since they are run by professionals who write with expert knowledge—not just a big fan offering their opinion on a filming location, since they don’t really know much about it either. Fans don’t have access to the press kits that the production companies themselves can distribute.

Pages where visitors narrate their experiences are also considered relevant, especially if they are experts on the subject (N1). Fans also trust epitexts generated by other fans. Thus, N8 considers Wikipedia entries to be relevant.

They're made by a fanbase that genuinely respects, is interested in, and loves a particular series. I know it's information you can upload, that I can upload, but I know it will be verified in the end. If I come in after you and see that you've posted something inappropriate, I'll correct it.

Differences are observed in the age of the testimonies regarding the reliability of information. The only testimony that has read content generated by artificial intelligence is that of the youngest (I3), aged 22. The others prefer to search in different sources of information. I2 and I7, both between 40 and 50 years old, specify that they like to compare and contrast different content to determine the veracity of the information: “I make sure to check it well, because some things aren't entirely correct. I always try to make sure that at least a couple of websites agree on where it was filmed” (I7). Furthermore, I2 indicates that they trust

epitexts that are “well-written, with the corresponding links, with evidence for what is stated.”

In general, information published on social media such as Facebook or Instagram is considered less reliable (N1, N2, among others). N7 points out, “I look up anything. I double-check the information. If I find it on social media, I check it in more detail than on a website, because on social media someone could make it up.”

4.5. Generation of New Epitexts

After visiting the location, satisfaction with the audiovisual tourism experience varied significantly. It was particularly negative for three participants. Two felt the destinations were overcrowded (N3, N6). N1 felt that the visit “somewhat diminished the magic. The magic is mostly on screen, and bringing it to life requires imagination.” However, the majority (N=16) had a more positive perception of the attractions and tourist destinations after the visit, particularly those participants with a high level of engagement with the series, as it allowed them to recall *Game of Thrones* moments associated with the location and recognize the settings (N8, I4, I5). I4 also rewatched the series after the tourism experience, which allowed them to relive it and simultaneously reinforce the connection between the attractions and locations/settings shown.

Although the visit left no tourist indifferent, only six testimonials shared their experiences on social media (Facebook and Instagram). In other words, they generated new narratives that can be consulted by other viewers/potential tourists and influence their perception of the attractions and destinations, as well as their intentions to visit. The photos posted on Instagram of specific locations where scenes from the series were filmed are particularly noteworthy. Also relevant are the posts by I8 and I7 on the Facebook page @Film locations- Then and now, where followers upload images of filming locations. Some testimonials, like N8, uploaded images to Instagram that they hadn't publicly shared.

The generated epitexts reveal differences by gender and age. Women post more on Instagram, and men on Facebook. By age, Facebook is more used by people over 35, while those under 35 prefer Instagram. In contrast, only one person mentioned the social media platform X and confirmed the use of this platform for work purposes. Beyond social media posts, nearly all of the interviewees stated that they had taken tourist-style photos and shared them with friends and family through private channels (WhatsApp messages and others). Four of the respondents, all of whom are big fans of the series, also took photos of specific locations featured in scenes from the series. One of them (N7) even imitated the main characters in those scenes. However, several respondents, such as N2, indicate that they would never take this type of photo.

I think I took a couple of photos of the cathedral, but I don't remember posting them on my Instagram. I took them for myself, but I didn't recreate a scene. That's a bit much, especially since there's a scene on the stairs where a character is riding a horse, and I wasn't riding one. I mean, pretending to be on a horse is a bit ridiculous, but hey, some people do that.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research analyzes the audience's journey from the screen to audiovisual attractions. To this end, it studies viewers'/tourists' consumption of epitexts and other texts containing information about the attractions and destinations depicted in the audiovisual fiction, as well as their potential to enhance the impact of *Game of Thrones* on tourism. Although the search for information about the locations shown in the series is its primary and essential behavioral effect, and although the research's practical applications emphasize the need to generate epitexts that link the settings to the attractions, the topic has received scant attention from researchers. This study, therefore, is exploratory in nature.

Based on the results, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) Consuming epitexts from *GoT* enhances the image of attractions and destinations generated by the series, links real places to fantasy ones, and increases visit intentions and expectations regarding the visit.
- 2) Epitexts can be intentionally sought out or discovered while consulting other information about *Game of Thrones*. Texts with practical information are exclusively sought out. Furthermore, contrary to what Mitev et al. (2017) suggest, epitexts that identify locations are not consumed at a specific moment. According to testimonies, information can be sought during viewing, decision-making, trip planning, at the destination, and even after the visit. In this last case, the objective is to verify that the visited location corresponds to the fictional one and may lead to rewatching the series. Texts with practical information, however, are consumed during decision-making, planning, and at the destination.
- 3) The level of engagement with *Game of Thrones* and the type of film tourist are related to the consumption of epitexts and texts with practical information about the destination. Specific tourists, who travel to the destination motivated primarily or exclusively by the series, consume more epitexts and at all times, unlike general tourists who consume them when planning their trip and while at the destination. Specific tourists also use other sources of information (Google Maps Street View), beyond epitexts, to thoroughly investigate the relationship between the settings and locations.
- 4) Almost all respondents consider official or well-documented epitexts to be more reliable. Some also compare different sources of information and consider social media posts to be unreliable. However, tourists who are most involved with *GoT* are open to epitexts written by other fans.
- 5) *Game of Thrones*, its epitexts, and the texts with practical information about the location generate positive expectations regarding visits to the attractions. In most cases, the experience meets or exceeds these expectations. However, this does not, in most cases, lead to tourists posting new epitexts on social media.

The main limitation of this study stems from its exploratory nature. Furthermore, while the method employed (the semi-structured interview) helps to clarify an area of analysis that requires further study, it only allows for preliminary conclusions.

It is necessary, for example, to expand the sample. In this study, it consists of testimonies from people who watched the series and visited some of its locations. In all cases, the epitexts and texts with practical information about the destinations reinforced or amplified the effects of the audiovisual fiction. However, it would be worthwhile to analyze the effects of the epitexts and texts with practical information on those viewers/potential tourists for whom *Game of Thrones* generated intentions to visit, but these intentions did not materialize into an actual visit. In this way, it could be possible to more clearly define the mediating capacity of these texts.

This research has important practical implications. It is essential that managers and the tourism industry understand the processes and information channels through which a viewer transitions from the screen to visiting a real-world tourism attraction. This will contribute to the creation of epitexts that link the settings of audiovisual fiction to tourist attractions. More specifically, two recommendations can be made:

- 1) Following Quintal and Phau (2015) and Oviedo-García et al. (2016), it is important that epitexts be linked to the promotion of the audiovisual fiction itself. In this way, initially, the information linking the places shown to tourist attractions is presented incidentally, which can subsequently stimulate the search for more specific information.
- 2) Since the consumption of epitexts cannot be confined to a specific moment, even though it is higher during trip planning, they must be available even before audiovisual production begins. However, they must be tailored to the needs of the viewer/potential tourist at each stage. The

following groups do not require the same type of information: (1) viewers who have a positive impression of the tourist attraction after watching the content, (2) those who intend to visit and are evaluating the possibility of turning that intention into an actual visit, and (3) those who have already made up their minds and need to plan their visit. Similarly, it is important that the epitexts contain differentiated information that meets the needs of viewers based on their level of engagement with the series and the different types of audiovisual tourists.

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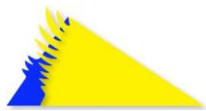
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