MARKETING LITERARY ENGLAND TO THE US TRAVELLER

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Subtheme: Marketing tourism places, events and spaces

Short Abstract

This paper examines English literary tourism through the eyes of the bibliophile *and* non-bibliophile. It adopts an inductive between-subjects experimental design to investigate the likelihood of a general sample of the US population visiting literary attractions compared to that of US literary society members. The findings suggest that literary society members are aware of English literary destinations and are likely to visit independently these sites regardless of prior knowledge of the associated literary work. Non-members – once made aware of destinations – will also visit independently but demonstrate greater tendency to do so if they've read or watched the related book or film. By understanding the stimuli driving each group to engage (or not) in literary tourism, this paper gives rise to important implications for how the tourism industry can better market 'Literary England' to different segments so as to best capitalise on the US outbound market.

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Introduction

England is the birthplace of many of literature's well-known authors and their characters: be that Jane Austen and Elizabeth Bennet; Charles Dickens and Oliver Twist; or Beatrix Potter and Peter Rabbit. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the UK has been presented as a prime literary destination for international tourists (Iwashita, 2006). Focussing on a particular subset of international travellers, this paper examines US tourists' interest in and potential for visiting England to engage in literary tourism. It compares the awareness and propensity of two groups: namely a sample of literary society members and a broadly representative sample of the North American outbound market. The results are particularly pertinent to the subtheme 'marketing tourism places, events and spaces', with findings indicating the need for tailored marketing efforts given varying familiarity with 'Literary England' across the two samples.

Contribution

Agarwal and Shaw (2018) present literary tourism as a form of travel for the purpose of visiting sites associated with an author's writing and/or real-life. In this regard, literary tourism has frequently been depicted as a form of heritage tourism given the importance of, and associations with, place (Hoppen et al, 2014). For instance, Lee (2012) highlights the demand for visiting fantasy and fictional sites (i.e. Harry Potter's United (Magical) Kingdom), while van Es and Rejinders (2016) examine tourists' activities within cities (i.e. Sherlock Holmes' crime-detective tours). Another strand of research spotlights the tourists themselves, most commonly the literary "fans" (Herbert, 2001: 326). Here, studies have foregrounded the demographics, motivations and experiences of what MacLeod *et. al.* (2018) label as the 'touring reader'. Less attention, however, has been paid to literary tourism through the lens of the non-bibliophile. The question remains as to whether the general international tourist would actively seek out, be interested in, or even aware of, English literary sites and attractions.

This question is particularly significant in relation to Hargrove's (2017: 260-261) argumentation that "cultural heritage tourism is threatened if visitors don't know that you exist"; leading to her assertion that "destinations and cultural heritage institutions must define

the most desired audiences and determine how best to reach them" (ibid.) in order to be sustainable. To this end, it is important to establish whether the average US tourist is a likely customer of the literary tourism product, and if so, how this product can be best advertised and sold to them. Accordingly, the main objective of this paper is to investigate US tourists' tendency to engage in literary tourism based on different stimuli, namely: i) Awareness of possible UK literary tourism destinations; ii) Prior familiarity with the books and/or films associated with literary locations; and iii) Preference for independent or tour-organised travel. The motivation for, or rationale behind, this research is to uncover new insights into the drivers of literary tourism for members and non-members of literary societies, establish the differences between the two, and consider the implications these differences have for tourism marketing and its overall effectiveness.

Methods and Materials

In order to compare the two types of travellers, the paper employs an inductive between-subjects experimental design and compares findings from two questionnaires: one targeting a General Sample (GS, n=2033) of the US outbound market, and the other targeting a Literary Society Sample (LSS, n=220) based in the United States. For the former survey, quota sampling was employed to ensure demographic consistency. Participants were 18 and over, and passport holders. The latter survey targeted adult members of literary societies (i.e. Jane Austen Society of North America, D. H. Lawrence Society of North America). This design was also supplemented with telephone interviews undertaken with key stakeholders in the US outbound market, primarily tour operators (n=8).

This data collection process provided the relevant data to answer the following research question: *What is the likelihood of literary society members versus general US tourists visiting England to engage in literary tourism?*

Results and Discussion

Analyses from the first set of comparisons focused on whether likelihood to visit England would be affected by the experiment's manipulation variable, which heightened awareness of possible literary tourism destinations in the UK. Results from the paired sample t-tests which examined likelihood to visit, both before and after the survey, indicate that the Literary Society

Sample (LSS) was unaffected by the manipulation [$t(219)=1.525$, $p=.129$, ($p>.05$)]. This suggests that LSS possess significantly greater prior knowledge of English literary tourism destinations and are less susceptible to marketing stimuli that serve to prompt them to visit specific literary tourism sites. The General Sample (GS) of US tourists on the other hand, were found to have been significantly influenced by the manipulation [$t(2032)=25.815$, $p=.000$, ($p<.01$)], demonstrating significantly lower knowledge of possible UK literary tourism destinations and greater susceptibility to destination marketing stimuli.

The second round of analyses focused on likelihood to visit a specific literary tourism destination (e.g. Brontë sisters' birthplace) in light of (un)familiarity with the associated literary work. Here, unpaired t-test comparisons demonstrated higher likelihood for the LSS to visit the destination compared to the GS [$t(2251)=7.1759$, $p=.000$, $p<0.01$]. This indicates that the general US tourists' potential to visit a literary tourism attraction is more dependent on them having read/watched the associated book/film. This supports Hudson et al's (2010) findings on film tourism, wherein US viewers (amongst others) wanted to visit the countries shown within *Motorcycle Diaries* after watching the movie. Conversely, LSS were found to have a greater tendency to engage in literary tourism even when they had neither read nor watched the associated film. Interestingly, this latter finding differs from the interview data somewhat, with one tour operator claiming: "*We would very rarely succeed trying to sell someone a literature tour if they didn't have an existing interest*" (TO3). While overall these findings hint to an interest in systematic literary tourism for non-bibliophiles, and less dependence on popular culture cues and stimuli for bibliophiles, it is ultimately recommended that marketing efforts are increased to make the most of the US outbound market. Applying marketing opportunities from film tourism to literary tourism more broadly, efforts could include underscoring the authors, books and films connected to certain destinations, and/or heavily promoting destinations that have featured within new films based on famous literary works (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). This latter recommendation in itself is supported by the interview data, with one respondent stating: "*Every time there is a period film featuring one of – Jane Austen in particular – they want to see the film sites. You know, the classic or stately homes used for the period films*" (TO5).

The third round of analyses examined the preference of each sample to travel independently or with an organised tour. Results from the un-paired t-test showed that both samples have an identical preference for independent travel instead of guided tours should they engage in English literary tourism in the future, with insignificant differences between the two samples

[t(2251)=0.2844, p>0.05, p=.776]. This was supported by interview data, with a tourist agent highlighting that independent travel is becoming increasingly popular with American tourists:

"...travelling independently is becoming more popular now. Originally Americans were kind of afraid to go on their own, but now they do it – mostly in the UK, where English is spoken, so it's easy for them to get around" (TO4).

In light of this, it is recommended that the literary tourism product continues to be sold as an organised 'package', but that literary locations in themselves are marketed as significant and easily accessible sites for tourists to visit independently.

Conclusion

Overall, a key theoretical contribution of this research is the way in which it views literary tourism through the eyes of the non-bibliophile. The experimental design allowed a much-needed comparison between members and non-members of a literary society in an attempt to understand the drivers of literary tourism for the two types of tourist. The findings suggest that general US tourists (GS) are more influenced by statements that seek to raise awareness of literary tourism destinations, and that they have a significantly greater tendency to visit a literary location when they are familiar with the associated book or film. The findings indicate that literary society members (LSS), on the other hand, are unlikely to pay attention to simplified *awareness-raising* marketing tools. That said – in terms of managerial implications – it is clear that marketing mechanisms that provide literary society members with more *comprehensive* information about less famous literary tourism destinations can still be considered worthwhile, given that these individuals are prepared to visit literary tourism destinations even when unfamiliar with the associated literary work. Lastly, this paper has shown how both types of tourist have a self-reported preference for self-guided travel. This suggests that every attempt should be made for literary tourism destinations to be heavily marketed through more independently-accessed sources, such as guidebooks, tourist information centres, and websites (e.g. VisitEngland, VisitBritain).

A limitation of this research relates to the LS sample. While thirteen literary societies were originally contacted, only two were willing to distribute the survey to its membership, and therefore only the readership of Jane Austin and D. H. Lawrence were studied. It might be that

different demographics favour different societies, and thereby engender different levels of awareness, familiarity, and/or travel preferences. Hence, future research could compare the likelihood of general US tourists visiting Literary England vis a vis a more representative sample of literary society members. Moreover, future research could also interview non-bibliophiles in the hopes of supplementing the current quantitative findings with a more in-depth, qualitative analysis of potential participation in English literary tourism. This may give rise to novel insights into how Literary England could be more successfully marketed to better reach the US traveller.

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