

# Exploring the Perceived Influence of Cinema on Destination Image, Destination Attributes and the Intention to Travel

Alexandra Lavaredas<sup>1</sup>, Purva Hegde Desai<sup>2</sup> and Paulo Almeida<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Instituto Politécnico de Leiria, Citur, Leiria, Portugal

<sup>2</sup>Goa University, Goa, India

[alexandra.lavaredas@ipleiria.pt](mailto:alexandra.lavaredas@ipleiria.pt)

[purva@unigoa.ac.in](mailto:purva@unigoa.ac.in)

[palmeida@ipleiria.pt](mailto:palmeida@ipleiria.pt)

**Abstract:** Cinema has long been acknowledged as a cultural mediator capable of shaping perceptions, imagery and attitudes associated with tourism destinations. However, empirical evidence regarding its influence on destination perceptions beyond single case studies remains limited. This quantitative exploratory study investigates how individuals perceive the influence of cinema on travel decision, mediated by destination image and destination attributes. An online survey was administered to 262 participants, examining patterns of cinema consumption, attention to filmed landscapes and self-reported predisposition to travel after watching films. Descriptive and inferential analyses do not demonstrate direct relationships among cinema consumption, destination image, destination attributes and travel decision. Rather, findings suggest that cinema may operate as an indirect experiential and symbolic stimulus within a longer decision-making trajectory. The study contributes a broader empirical perspective to the field of film-induced tourism and highlights the need for further research addressing contextual, motivational and demographic variables that may mediate these relationships

**Keywords:** Film-induced Tourism; Cinema; Destination Image; Destination Attributes; Travel Behaviour; Exploratory Study

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## 1. Introduction

Cinema and audiovisual media have become central components of contemporary destination promotion and cultural mediation. The role of cinema as a cultural element capable of stimulating tourism imaginaries has been widely discussed, especially in studies concerning film-induced tourism. Research on film-induced tourism has shown that audiovisual narratives may influence tourist motivations and stimulate interest in particular places. However, most empirical works in this field rely on case studies centred on specific films or discrete locations, which limits broader theoretical generalisation. It is therefore relevant to deepen the understanding of how audiovisual contents may contribute to representations of destinations and possibly stimulate tourism interest.

Within this context, the present study adopts an exploratory approach and seeks to preliminarily map individuals' perceptions regarding the possible influence of cinema on the willingness to travel. Rather than analysing a specific audiovisual product or location, a broader and perceptual perspective is adopted, focusing on how participants evaluate the relationship between cinema consumption and travel-related ideas. By adopting a quantitative exploratory approach, this research aims to identify preliminary perceptual patterns rather than test causal relationships.

The paper has six sections: it introduces the research topic, reviews concepts on travel decisions, destination image, attributes, and Cinema, and theorizes their relationships. It then presents the methodology, analyses the data, and discusses the findings, concluding with the study's contributions, implications, and suggestions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

The phenomenon of Film-Induced Tourism (FIT) has been recognized in academic literature as an area of growing interest, driven by the capacity of audiovisual productions to shape destination image and influence traveller behaviour (Barrado-Timón & Sáez-Cala, 2020; Novack, 2022)

Existing research highlights films are able to generate emotional bonds with destinations through imagery, symbolic interpretation and narrative identification, contributing to travel-related imagination (Beeton, 2004, 2016; Kim & Richardson, 2003). Within tourism studies, destination image and destination attributes are widely recognised as determinants of tourist evaluation, decision-making and market positioning (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Tasci et al., 2021). However, most research focuses on specific films or locations, so little is known about how cinema is perceived by audiences independently of particular audiovisual contexts, which justifies an exploratory approach.

## 2.1 Travel Behaviour

Motivation theories have traditionally explained how travellers seek to satisfy psychological needs, including self-actualisation, belonging, security or physiological comfort (Maslow, 1943; Dann, 1981; Pearce, 1988; Pearce & Lee, 2005). Maslow's hierarchy has therefore been widely applied to interpret motivations underlying travel behaviour (Jumaday et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2018; UK Essays, 2021), although several authors note that behavioural drivers extend beyond basic needs and are also influenced by additional psychological and contextual variables (Dann, 1977; Tikkanen, 2007; Shin et al., 2022; Shaikh et al., 2020).

Beyond motivation, travel decision-making has evolved from classical behavioural models (Fourie, 2015) to digitally driven frameworks that recognise the complexity of contemporary information environments. Following this line, Dimitriou and AbouElgheit (2019) argue that decisions now occur simultaneously across multiple channels and devices (Wei, 2016), initiated by internal or external stimuli that activate need recognition and subsequent evaluation, booking and post-travel assessment (UNWTO, 2024).

## 2.2 Destination Attributes

In addition, travellers are drawn towards destinations not only due to internal motivations but also because of destination attributes such as natural resources, culture, accessibility, infrastructures or safety (Dann, 1977; Coban & Aydin, 2020; Ciro & Toska, 2021; Mwawaza et al., 2022). Attributes influence perception, selection and post-travel behaviour including revisits and word-of-mouth (Chi & Qu, 2008, 2009; Ozdemir et al., 2012), reinforcing their strategic relevance.

## 2.3 Destination Image

These attributes interact with destination image, understood as the sum of beliefs, impressions and attitudes formed through organic, induced and complex processes (Gunn, 1972; Crompton, 1979; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Tasci et al., 2007). Organic images emerge through informal media consumption and interpersonal communication, often exerting a stronger effect than induced promotional communication (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Campo et al., 2011; Shani et al., 2009). Because images shape decision-making and competitive advantage, destinations must integrate organic and induced elements across communication strategies (Howie, 2003; Selby, 2010; Eom et al., 2020; Foroudi et al., 2018).

Through this lens, cinema functions as a distinctive and comparatively non-intrusive mechanism of organic imagery formation (Butler, 1990; Busby & Klug, 2001), capable of raising awareness, encouraging information search and enabling vicarious experiences of place (Kim & Richardson, 2003). The economic, social and cultural impacts of cinema therefore align with wider strategies of film-induced tourism, a field studied increasingly since the 1990s (Beeton, 2016) and recognised for shaping destination images and attracting potential visitors (Ahmed & Ünüvar, 2022; Barrado-Timón & Sáez-Cala, 2020).

## 3. Methodology

Based on the literature review, Cinema is recognised as a powerful agent influencing behaviour, with the potential to affect travel decisions. Previous studies suggest that exposure to destinations on screen can increase the likelihood of choosing to visit those locations (Beeton, 2016; Kim & Richardson, 2003).

To better understand this phenomenon, the present investigation is structured around a model that places Cinema (the independent variable) as an initial indirect stimulus, influencing the Decision to Travel (dependent variable) through a sequence of cognitive and perceptive processes, represented by Destination Image and Destination Attributes (mediating variables).

Cinema is operationalized as the perceived or recalled exposure to a tourist destination through films and series. Its influence is based on the theory of Film-Induced Tourism, which argues that the visual narrative and emotional representation of a location create an organic and non-intrusive link with the audience (Beeton, 2016; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006a). To measure this variable the model proposed by Macionis (2004) which consists in 3 dimensions and 9 items was used. These items were answered in a 6-point Likert scale. The exploratory factor analysis resulted in three factors, excluding one item, that explained 76,47% of the variance: Place ( $\alpha = 0,70$ ), Personality ( $\alpha = 0,90$ ) and Performance ( $\alpha = 0,77$ ).

Destination Image is the first theorized mediator. Cinematic exposure contributes to the formation of the destination's "organic image," i.e., the beliefs and attitudes formed outside of promotional efforts (Beeton, 2005;

Gartner, 1994). This variable was operationalised using 6 items adapted from Foroudi et al. (2018), Byon and Zhang (2010), Echtner and Ritchie (1993), Beerli and Martin (2004). These items were answered in a 6-point Likert scale. The exploratory factor analysis resulted in one factor, excluding one item, that explained 54,28% of the variance ( $\alpha = 0,79$ ).

Destination Attributes, constitute the second mediator. This variable was operationalised using 10 items, according to the model proposed by Foroudi et al. (2018) and Datta (2019). These items were answered in a 6-point Likert scale. The exploratory factor analysis resulted in one factor, excluding four items, that explained 62.01% of the variance ( $\alpha = 0,87$ ).

Cinema provides visual and contextual insights that fill information gaps and inject symbolic meaning into the destination, creating a more vivid, engaging, and emotionally charged image. A more positive, clear, and affective destination image, influenced by cinematic exposure, increases perceived attractiveness and reduces uncertainty, culminating in a higher propensity to travel (Nazir et al., 2021; Matarín Rodríguez-Peral & Gómez-Franco, 2024).

The way Cinema represents these attributes can alter the perception the viewer has of them. Cinema acts as a visual validation of certain attributes that would otherwise be just textual or promotional information. Exposure can highlight attributes that were not previously noticed. The positive and validated perception of a destination's attributes is a determining factor for the final evaluation and subsequent travel choice (Chi & Qu, 2008; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

The Decision to Travel is the final outcome, measured by the behavioural intention to visit the destination following cinematic exposure. Therefore, this study proposes that Cinema, mediated by destination image and destination attributes, may positively affect travel decisions.

### 3.1 Exploratory Hypotheses

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the study aims to identify patterns and relationships rather than test causal effects definitively. The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the investigation:

H1: Cinema positively influences the decision to travel to tourism destinations.

H2: Destination image positively influences the decision to travel.

H3: Destination attributes positively influence the decision to travel.

H4: The relationship between cinema and the decision to travel is mediated by destination image and destination attributes.

### 3.2 Research Design

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to 262 participants using a convenience sampling strategy. The instrument was structured into four sections: socio-demographic profile, cinema consumption habits, perceptions of destination image and attributes, and travel intention. The study does not aim at statistical representativeness, but at identifying exploratory perceptual patterns.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 16.0, including: Normality tests: Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk; Exploratory factor analysis to verify the validity of scales; Cronbach's Alpha to assess internal consistency ( $\alpha$ , significance level 0.05); Descriptive and inferential statistics to explore patterns and relationships.

The assumption of normality was not met for all variables. In such cases parametric and non-parametric tests were carried out, and since the results obtained were the same, results of parametric tests are reported (Fife-Schaw, 2006).

Given the exploratory approach, results are interpreted as preliminary insights rather than evidence of causality. Findings are intended to inform future hypothesis-driven studies and identify key dimensions for further investigation.

#### 4. Results

When analyzing the sociodemographic variables, results show that the majority of the respondents are female (58%), 41% are male and 1% didn't identify with any specific gender. Regarding age, 42% of the respondents have 27 years old, or less, 30% are aged between 28 and 43 years old. Only 19% have 44 to 59 years old, and 5% of the respondents have 60 years old, or more. Most respondents have concluded high school (52%), 25% have gained a bachelor's degree and 13% of the sample has a master's degree. Only 2% of the respondents have finished doctoral studies.

Regarding the attitude of respondents towards Cinema, most respondents watch movies daily (57%), or every week (34%). A small percentage of the sample (7%) consume Cinema at least once a month, and only 1% do it seasonally or yearly. The favorite genre of films are comedies (22%), followed by drama, action, real life stories, romance, documentaries, music, and video songs (10% to 15%). Cartoons (6%), terror (4%) and soap operas (3%) rate lower.

When images of a tourism destination are displayed on the movie screen, 25% of respondents are very likely to have their attention caught by the landscapes, the overall image (24%), the actors (23%), the characters (19%), the destination attributes (17,5%), and the sceneries (17%).

When considering the influence of Cinema in the desire and decision to travel, almost all respondents claim to have felt the desire to travel after watching a movie (96%), but only 53% have decided to travel after consuming Cinema.

Regarding the frequency of travelling, most respondents travel once per year (47%), or every two years (26%). Around 14% of the sample do seasonal displacements for tourism destinations, while 3% and 1% of the sample travel every month or every week, respectively. The number of respondents that never travel ascends to 8%.

When travelling, most respondents stay between 4 and 7 days at the destination (58%). Around 25% of the sample spends 8 to 14 days abroad. Those who travel for less than 3 days, or more than 15 days, represent 5% and 4% of the sample, respectively.

Regarding expenditure, participants spend, in average, less than 500€ (20%) or between 501€ to 1000€ (38%), while travelling. A percentage of 13% claim to spend between 1001€ and 2000€. Around 4% and 2% of the sample seems to spend 2001€ and 3000€ or above. A percentage of 14 respondents is not aware of their travelling expenditure.

Portugal (92%), Europe (66%) and Africa 11% are the destinations to which respondents have travelled the most, being Europe the continent to which 14% of the respondents have travelled two times. America was visited once by 17% of the respondents, while Europe and Africa were visited once by 13% of the sample. To Asia 11% of the respondents have been one time.

The least visited regions are Oceania (97%) and Asia (84%), followed by America (71%) and Africa (70%). Only 7% of the sample has not visited Europe at all, and 1% seem not to know Portugal as a travel destination.

No significant differences were found (all  $p > 0.05$ ) between male and female participants regarding cinema consumption. Results also show no significant differences (all  $p > 0.05$ ) for the analysis comparing participants who have decided to travel after watching a movie, and those who have not. In this sense hypothesis 1 'Cinema influences the decision to travel to tourism destinations', is rejected.

The same is valid for destination image and destination attributes, meaning that the analysis comparing participants who have decided to travel after watching a movie, and those who have not, in what concerns destination image and destination attributes didn't show any significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ). Results force us to reject hypothesis 2 and 3. Destination image and destination attributes do not influence the decision to travel to tourism destinations.

Given the fact that it was concluded that Cinema, destination attributes and destination image seem to have no influence in the decision to travel, there is no mediation role established between the variables. Therefore, hypotheses 4 is rejected: the influence of Cinema in the decision to travel is not mediated by destination image and destination attributes.

## 5. Discussion

Understanding the influence of cinema on travel decisions, mediated by destination image and destination attributes, was the central aim of this exploratory study. The literature traditionally highlights the relevance of these variables for encouraging travel motivation and affective engagement with places (Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Busby & Klug, 2001; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Tzanelli, 2008; Beeton, 2004, 2005, 2016; Sellgren, 2011). Accordingly, none of the proposed direct or mediated relationships between cinema, destination image, destination attributes and travel decision were statistically confirmed.

These findings resonate with previous research acknowledging that the specific influence of cinema on travel decision-making has received limited scholarly attention. Araújo et al. (2015) note that only one study directly examined this question—Im & Chon (2008)—and that subsequent publications have mostly focused on specific films or particular destinations, frequently adopting case-study, experimental or survey-based exploratory designs that cannot be easily generalized. Examples include Akhajam's (2015) study on Ouarzazate (Morocco), Daniel & Halford (2021) analysis of Forks in the United States, and Vila et al. (2021) examining the Spanish context.

A similar dynamic seems to apply to destination image. Despite substantial emphasis in tourism literature on the capacity of a positive and attractive image to stimulate tourism demand (Hua et al., 2021; Foroudi et al., 2018; Macionis, 2004), the present research did not confirm a direct association between image and travel decision either. Likewise, no direct impact of destination attributes on travel decisions emerged from the data. This aligns with Rewtrakunphaiboon (2009) and Dellaert et al. (1998), who argue that destination attributes operate indirectly by influencing phases of the decision-making process rather than determining the final decision itself.

The results also indicate that gender does not significantly influence cinema-related perceptions. In contrast, cinema consumption appears strongly shaped by age and education, with younger respondents reporting daily viewing habits and greater exposure to audiovisual content. This is consistent with Dimitriou and AbouElgheit (2019), who show that younger audiences are particularly receptive to visually driven media such as Instagram or TikTok.

In terms of preferences, comedies were identified as the most popular film genre, followed by documentaries and real-life stories. Given younger generations' high engagement with social digital media (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019), destinations may benefit from encouraging audiovisual content sharing on these platforms, emphasising elements to which viewers appear sensitive—landscapes, scenery, characters, actors, and specific destination attributes.

The data also suggest that travel decisions often take time to mature, especially among individuals who travel only once per year. This may explain why cinema does not produce an immediate decision but potentially contributes to intention formation by reducing perceived constraints and offering an organic, less intrusive informational approach (Butler, 1990). In addition, travel choices seem more attractive when destinations are geographically closer, indicating that promotional effort may be more effective when targeted at nearby regions.

Taken together, the findings suggest that cinema may play an indirect role within a multi-layered decision-making trajectory rather than acting as a single determinant. In this sense, cinema can be conceptualized as a symbolic, cultural or emotional stimulus embedded within a longer and more complex process influenced by socioeconomic factors, motivations, personal preferences and destination accessibility. Consequently, the results underline the complexity of tourism decision-making and reinforce the need to further investigate audiovisual mediation alongside other determinants.

## 6. Conclusion

This exploratory study provides initial empirical evidence regarding how individuals perceive the influence of cinema on destination image, destination attributes and the intention to travel. Although no direct statistical relationships were found between these variables, the findings highlight relevant perceptual tendencies—namely high visual attention to filmed landscapes and scenery, a recurrent desire to travel after film exposure, and a clear generational pattern in cinema consumption. These elements indicate that cinema may not function as a direct predictor of travel behaviour but rather as a symbolic, emotional and gradual trigger integrated into wider decision-making processes.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to film tourism literature by shifting emphasis from single case studies to broader perceptions of audiovisual content. This supports emerging interpretations that

conceptualise cinema as a mediated cultural stimulus rather than an immediate behavioural driver. The results therefore challenge linear causal assumptions and encourage a more nuanced framework in which film exposure interacts with motivations, socio-economic conditions, and digital media environments. By emphasising indirect influences, this work also opens theoretical avenues related to mediated imagination, symbolic consumption and audiovisual decision complexity.

In practical terms, several insights emerge for destination managers, marketers and public tourism authorities. Given the strong visual attention to landscapes and scenery, promotional strategies can capitalise on cinematic imagery and emphasise scenic elements through short-form audiovisual content. Generational differences also suggest opportunities for youth-oriented digital campaigns on platforms where audiovisual consumption is dominant (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, streaming services). Furthermore, destinations located closer to audiences may benefit most from cinematic promotion, indicating that regional targeting and proximity-based campaigns could be particularly effective. The findings also reinforce the value of encouraging user-generated audiovisual content, since it may enhance organic image formation and reduce perceived travel constraints.

The study is limited by its exploratory design, single-country sample and reliance on self-reported measures; therefore, findings cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, these limitations point towards directions for future research, including comparative cross-cultural studies, longitudinal designs, experimental exposure to audiovisual material, and a stronger integration of cinematic genres, narrative forms and digital platforms. Examining the articulation between travel intention and actual behaviour, together with motivational and demographic segmentation, would further strengthen theoretical development in the field.

Overall, by extending the analytical gaze beyond individual films and specific destinations, this study contributes a preliminary mapping of cinema's perceived influence on tourism-related representations. It proposes conceptual and empirical pathways for a deeper understanding of how audiovisual media participate, indirectly and symbolically, in the construction of contemporary travel imaginaries and in the evolution of film-induced tourism research.

## Ethics Declaration

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were fully informed about the research objectives and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

## AI Declaration

Artificial Intelligence tools were used to assist with English language correction throughout this manuscript.

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