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Narrative transportation and travel: The mediating role of escapism and immersion

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ABSTRACT

The experience of escaping the real world and losing oneself in a fictional one brings pleasure to many. We draw on the overarching theory of narrative transportation (see Gerrig, 1993) to advance knowledge in screen tourism. The aim is to develop and empirically test a conceptual model of TV series consumption, escapism, immersion, and travel intentions with partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). Results confirm that narrative transportation is a structured gradual process: TV series consumption first leads to escapism, escapism to immersion, immersion to travel intention. The mediated relationships (via escapism and immersion) between media consumption and travel intention are found to be significant. The novelty of our model lies in the travel-centred operationalizing of the narrative transportation theory. Based on our results, tourism marketers are advised to implement a tourism ad campaign building on the different stages of narrative transportation to create emotionally engaging tourism marketing products.

Impact statement: The main contribution of this research to society in general is that it recognises the cultural phenomenon of TV series consumption and the benefits of narrative transportation as a kind of travel-experience into a fantasy world. We map the stages of narrative transportation, exploring the journey from media consumption to travel intention; the data obtained is of relevance because filming locations often become popular tourist destinations. Whether tourism planners aim to reduce or increase tourist flows awareness of (1) the process of narrative transportation experienced by viewers, and (2) how this process influences travel intentions is key to the effective management of media-induced tourism flows.

1. Introduction

The experience of escaping reality and losing oneself in a fictional world brings pleasure to many (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Moscardo, 2020). The act of watching a TV series is not necessarily passive and can instead be construed as an active search for pleasurable experiences lived through a story (Woodside, 2010). According to Green et al. (2004), the pleasure of being immersed in a story explains why good narratives can transform attitudes, beliefs, and moods. Prolonged media consumption strengthens viewers' emotional and cognitive connections with the objects of their fandom (Lundberg, Ziakas, & Morgan, 2018). Such connections are built on persuasive storytelling (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008) and are enhanced by fans' active engagement in narrative transportation (Gerrig, 1993; Green, 2004; Green et al., 2004).

Narrative transportation is what turns mental escapism into the perception that one is actually travelling (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000). Narratives, like actual journeys, provide individuals with real drives into fictional worlds (Lash & Urry, 1994). To be engrossed in a story is to be detached from mundane reality, and such deep involvement implies entrance into an alternate, narrative world (Van Laer, De Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzels, 2014). Narrative transportation draws its objects into the story being told, and allows temporary escape (Green & Brock, 2000). Gerrig (1993:10-11) defined narrative transportation as a process in which '*someone (the traveller) is transported, by some means of transportation, as a result of performing certain actions. The traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin, which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible. The traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey*.' In this paper, the above analogy with actual travel is adopted to investigate the stages of narrative transportation and how the act of consuming TV series shapes viewers' travel intentions. To identify the different stages of immersing oneself in a story, the TV series consumers' mental representations of the travel

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experience must be understood.

The central proposition of the present article is that TV series consumers' immersion in a story can be a prelude to actual travel. We still do not fully understand what prompts viewers to dive into and immerse themselves in a narrative world. Unveiling the stages of the active process of diving into the narrative to live new experiences, to build emotional bonds with characters and places enhances our knowledge on the power of screen productions on human behaviour. This exploratory research draws on the theory of narrative transportation (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000) and evidences how immersion in a fictional world deepens, stage by stage. The novelty of our model lies in its travel-centred operationalizing of the narrative transportation theory. This operationalisation enables us to better understand the affective and cognitive processes which anticipate travel. The present research enriches the literature on screen tourism by operationalizing narrative transportation and by capturing the pivotal mediating role of escapism and immersion.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1. Film tourism and narrative transportation

Past research on tourism and media entertainment has investigated the potential of films (Beeton, 2016; Connell, 2012), TV dramas (Kim, Agrusa, Lee, & Chon, 2008), soap operas (Balli, Balli, & Cebeci, 2013) and reality shows (Fu, Ye, & Xiang, 2016) to enhance a destination's image, to increase visitor numbers and to diversify tourism products. The destination marketing implications of narrative have been widely discussed (Hosany, Buzova, & Sanz-Blas, 2020; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Wen, Josiam, Spears, & Yang, 2018) and noteworthy examples of fantasy media production-led travel are found in New Zealand (*Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* [Li, Li, Song, Lundberg, & Shen, 2017]) and the UK (*Harry Potter* [Lee, 2012]).

As Kim & Kim (2018:259) argued, it is crucial to grasp the context and the impact mechanisms of media consumption in order 'to understand the antecedents of film tourists' behavioural intentions. The different stages of narrative transportation must first be carefully investigated, only then can we fully recognise the contextual factors that shape media-induced tourism. This exploratory research builds on an interdisciplinary literature grounded in the fields of communication, marketing, and tourism.

Scholars in communication studies (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000) have studied the ways in which story receivers (viewers or readers), while immersed in a fictional world, fill in the gaps in the story to imbue the narrative with meaning. Sense-making evolves through different stages (Woodside, 2010). Studying the cognitive and affective processes involved at each stage allows researchers to investigate the effects of media exposure. When viewers are lost in a story, they adjust their attitudes in accordance with the narrative, which explains the persuasive power of stories (Escalas, 2007). In marketing, transportation is seen as an effective advertising strategy which elicits positive attitudes to the brands concerned. Escalas (2004) argued that narrative transportation facilitates the elaboration of an ad's claims and stimulates positive, story-consistent affective responses (Escalas, 2007). In tourism, McCabe and Foster (2006) revealed that tourists base the mental organisation of their travel experiences in stories, thereby making sense of these experiences, and giving them meaning. In order to identify and to better understand the processes which influence TV series consumers' travel intentions, the phenomenon of narrative transportation must be explored. In the following sections, Gerrig's (1993) analogy with actual travel is adopted to investigate the stages of narrative transportation.

2.2. Someone (the traveller) is transported by some means of transportation

Emily Dickinson compared the act of reading to a means of transportation, praising this engaging experience for fulfilling the purposes of the human soul: 'There is no frigate like a book/To take us lands away' (Franklin, 2005). The analogy with actual travel is strengthened by Gibson (1950) who argues that every time we immerse ourselves in a narrative we embark on a new adventure, and that, because of the experience, we emerge with a somehow transformed self. Travellers in the fictional world are far from being merely the passive recipients of a story: they are like the captains of a ship (Gerrig, 1993). Bordwell (1985), writing on filming narrative argues that viewers interact with films, draw inferences, make assumptions and test hypotheses, in other words, they live the story and create fictional worlds in their minds.

2.3. The traveller goes some distance from his or her world of origin

As Van Lear et al. (2014: 799) observed, 'the state of narrative transportation makes the world of origin partially inaccessible to the story receiver, thus making a clear separation in terms of here/there and now/before, or narrative world/world of origin'. In on-demand TV-shows, each episode makes the fictional world more complex and immersive (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016). Elements of real and fictional worlds are interwoven in narratives allowing the story receiver to experience different situations and perspectives safely and without consequences. Multiple twists in the storyline keep viewers absorbed in the narrative world and detached from their everyday lives. The wider the distance between the real and the fictional world, the more viewers have to adjust and participate as they seek to develop the narrative world in their minds (Green & Brock, 2000).

2.4. Some aspects of the inaccessibility of the world of origin

The fantasy genre in literature is often linked to escapism, although neither Tolkien (1966) nor Gaiman (1999) agree with the simplistic assumption that fantasy is purely escapist. As Gaiman (1999) argued on mythology 'if we are lucky, the fantasy world provides us with a map, a guide to explore the territory of the imagination, because this is the function of fictional literature, to show us the world we know but from a different perspective.' Narrative transportation is a temporary experience, and to comprehend an assertion in the fictional world story, a receiver must accept its truth (Green & Brock, 2000). Cognitive effort is required to critique a story, or to approach its elements with a degree of healthy scepticism: such questions hinder viewers' narrative transportation (Gerrig, 1993). Propositions that are only true in the fictional world (e.g. flying dragons exist) do not impede narrative immersion.

2.5. The traveller returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey

Narrative transportation has the capacity to alter story receivers' beliefs and actions when they are back in their world of origin (Van Laer et al., 2014). Stories are mental representations located in the memory, and the experience of in-narrative world-building can change the construction of such mental representations (Berger, Ha, & Chen, 2019). The persuasive efficacy of a story depends on various factors. The human mind can process information in a story of seemingly minor relevance and hold it in the story-memory for some time. These low levels of narrative transportation do not lead to significant story-related evaluations and beliefs. In contrast, narratives that succeed in transporting their receivers when, for instance, the latter experience belief-relevant imagery, *do* have a significant influence (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000). An overview of Gerrig's (1993) analogy with actual travel and its application to TV series is provided in Table 1.

2.6. Hypotheses development

Our conceptual model, operationalizing the narrative transportation theory, proposes that TV series consumption, escapism and immersion in

Table 1
Stages of narrative transportation in the case of TV series, based on Gerrig (1993: 10–11).

Stages of narrative transportation	Application of the stages to TV series	Concepts in the research
The traveller is transported, by some means of transportation, as a result of performing certain actions	The viewer is in front of the screen, highly expectant before watching the series and intending to be carried away by the story. Storytelling in TV series is the means of transportation.	TV series consumption
The traveller goes some distance from his or her world of origin	The viewer turns into the story receiver, an active interpreter, and loses track of physical reality, entering the world evoked by the narrative.	Escapism
Some aspects of the inaccessibility of the world of origin	The story receiver is completely immersed in the fantasy world and leaves his/her original world behind. This feeling may endure in the post-consumption stage as well.	Immersion in fantasy world
The traveller returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey.	The story receiver is likely to change his/her real-world beliefs and attitudes in response to the narrative. Travel intention to visit the filming locations might be one of the potential effects of media exposure.	Travel intention

Source: The authors' own elaboration.

fantasy worlds prompt viewers to adopt certain behaviours. Several different hypotheses can be formulated, all based on the overarching theory of narrative transportation.

2.6.1. TV series consumption and escapism

The concept of TV series consumption is defined here as an actively, consciously and repeatedly lived media experience which gives people pleasure (Jansson, 2002; Woodside, 2010). Films and TV series provide viewers with a set of carefully designed, vivid images and emotionally engaging music, a powerful combination which draws individuals into the narrative world (Green et al., 2008). Escapism is a pivotal concept in media studies (Jones, Cronin, & Piacentini, 2018). Here, it is defined as an affective and cognitive mechanism of the mind: the person is mentally transported into an alternate world; they pay little attention to their immediate surroundings (Green et al., 2004). Escapism, as conceptualised by Halfmann and Reinecke (2020), is a coping strategy which has several beneficial effects on viewers. Thus, we predict that:

H1a. : TV series consumption has a positive direct effect on escapism.

2.6.2. TV series consumption and immersion

TV series are consumed in an environment where the surrounding physical world is hardly perceived and a fictional world is consciously experienced (Green et al., 2004; Warren, 2020). Green et al. (2004) suggested that humans have an innate desire to immerse themselves in narrative worlds. The ability to be transported is fundamental to the experience of pleasure in fictional worlds. The concept of immersion is defined as active engagement with a narrative using one's imagination (Ryan, 2001). Sustained media exposure provides viewers with immersive experiences that draw on their imaginations and memory and involves conscious participation in the narrative (Gwenllian-Jones, 2004; Jones, 2020). The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1b. : TV series consumption has a positive direct effect on immersion in the fantasy world.

2.6.3. TV series consumption and travel intentions

Previous studies on film-induced tourism (Beeton, 2016; Connell, 2012) widely explored the power of films to influence tourist intentions. Iwashita's (2008) study of Japanese audiences showed that exposure to television dramas influenced media consumers' travel intentions over the long-term. The understanding of travel intention employed here is based on several studies (Bagozzi, 1992; Yuzhanin & Fisher, 2016): travel intention is defined as an individual's behavioural intention to visit a filming location stimulated by the consumption of a TV series. TV-screens are windows through which tourists vicariously experience destinations (Hosany et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2018). Thus, we can postulate that:

H1c. : TV series consumption has a positive direct effect on travel intentions.

2.6.4. Escapism and immersion in the fantasy world

The concepts of escapism and immersion are inextricably linked; the difference is in the cognitive effort involved (Green et al., 2004). Escapism requires less active cognitive engagement (crossing the threshold). Immersion involves more complex mental activity, producing vivid mental images and allowing individuals to lose themselves in the narrative world (Ryan, 2001). This is consistent with studies in tourism on the theoretical significance of vicarious and emotional immersion in narratives as a transformative experience (Beeton, 2016; Reijnders, 2016). Jones et al. (2018:498) stated that media consumption 'inducts escapists into the more active arena.' Thus, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

H2a. : Escapism has a positive direct effect on immersion in the fantasy world.

2.6.5. Immersion in the fantasy world and travel intentions

In the context of narrative transportation, the constructs of escapism and immersion help us to understand the intensity of TV series viewers' emotional and cognitive involvement. From the screen tourism perspective, escapism, and immersion in a fictional narrative play an important role in building emotional bonds with characters and places and in contextualising the antecedents of travel (Kim & Kim, 2018). Thus, escapism and immersion in a narrative can elicit story-consistent positive outcomes and influence viewers' attitudes and behaviour intentions (Escalas, 2004; Woodside, 2010). Accordingly, we can predict that:

H2b. : Escapism has a positive direct effect on travel intentions.

H3. : Immersion in the fantasy world has a positive direct effect on travel intentions.

2.7. Mediating role of escapism and immersion

In addition to the proposed relationships, we expect a mediating role of escapism and immersion between TV series consumption and travel intention. Although previous studies have suggested some determinants of travel intention including fantasy proneness (Li, Tian, Lundberg, Gkritzali, & Sundström, 2020) and imagination proclivity (Hosany et al., 2020), the link between TV series consumption and escapism still needs to be considered. Hosany et al.'s (2020) findings reveal that viewers develop emotional bonds with places through narratives which might influence travel intention. As Table 1 summarized, narrative transportation is a step-by-step process, a journey in the fantasy world with gradual immersion. Because of graduality, it is assumed that between consumption and immersion indirect paths (via escapism) exist. Escapism opens up the possibility to be fully immersed in the fantasy realm. It has been suggested that escapism is mainly passive (Jones et al., 2018), while immersion „requires an active engagement with the text and a demanding act of imagining" (Ryan, 2001:15). We predict that immersion and escapism play a role in this process. Based on these

findings, we propose that:

H4. : The relationship between TV series consumption and immersion is mediated by escapism.

Escapism can have a positive effect on travel intention directly and indirectly. Based on the results by Green and Brock (2000), we predict that the direct path between escapism and travel intention limits narrative transportation to be fully experienced. The indirect path through immersion allows a fuller experience transported by the narrative. Drawing on past studies, involvement was found to be important determinant of travel intention (Kim, Kim, & Petrick, 2019; Woodside et al., 2008). Viewers' bonding with a place or character, developed while immersed in the fantasy world can enhance their travel intention to the filming location. Thus, we aim to test if immersion plays a mediating role between escapism and travel intention and we propose the following hypothesis:

H5. : The relationship between escapism and travel intention is mediated by immersion.

One of the key queries in this research is how the path between TV series consumption and travel intention is mediated by escapism and immersion. The consideration of escapism and immersion in conjunction would provide a relevant insight to story receivers' experiences in the fantasy world and their travel intention. In accordance with previous findings (Green et al., 2008; Kim & Kim, 2018) we consider TV series consumption as the starting point of narrative transportation, and test if escapism and immersion play a mediating role. Furthering previous hypotheses, we predict three paths from TV series consumption to travel intention. We propose the following hypotheses:

H6a. : The relationship between TV series consumption and travel intention is mediated by escapism.

H6b. : The relationship between TV series consumption and travel intention is mediated by immersion.

H6c. : The relationship between TV series consumption and travel intention is mediated by escapism and immersion.

3. Research design and methods

3.1. Sampling and data collection

The sampling frame was made up of *Game of Thrones* viewers who had watched at least one of the eight GOT seasons, on the assumption that they would be readily transported by the narrative (Green, 2004). Survey participants were recruited through snowball sampling, beginning from the authors' own network; subsequently, 30 students from the Corvinus University of Budapest were involved as data collectors. All data collectors were provided with a detailed survey protocol to ensure consistency. The convenience sample consisted of 385 Hungarian respondents who self-identified as GOT viewers. The participants' average age was 26.1 years (ranging from 18 to 35). The descriptive analysis showed a balanced ratio between female (50.3%) and male (48.7%) respondents. The sample cannot be considered representative since we have no data on how many young Hungarians watch this TV series. This sample size is larger than both the one used by Shani, Wang, Hudson, and Gil (2009) and that of Semrad and Rivera (2018).

The data was collected (using a hard copy of the questionnaire) between 15th September and 15th November 2017 in Budapest (Hungary), where the authors were then located.

3.2. Research instrument

We chose to use a structured questionnaire survey (see Appendix A) as our research instrument and based our survey design on Dolnicar's (2013) evidence-based guidance. Multi-item scales were developed for construct measurement appropriate to our research aim following Diamantopoulos, Sarstedt, Fuchs, Wilczynski, and Kaiser (2012) guidelines.

The four constructs' (*TV series consumption, Escapism, Immersion in fantasy world, Travel intention*) used in this study have been elaborated on the basis of our previous research results on fandom and tourism (Mitev, Irimiás, Michalkó, & Franch, 2017). In our exploratory research we found that the resonance between landscape depiction and place attachment has a significant positive effect on TV series viewers' intentions to travel to filming locations. These initial definitions were tested to assess answer scale validity using short open-ended interviews with a sample of (n = 25) target raters who were asked about their narrative transportation experience and their intention to visit at least one of the filming locations. Based on the data from of the short interviews, multiple (18) items to measure the four constructs were generated. In the next phase, four experts were asked to validate the precision of the items' consistency. The two tourism experts helped us to better define the constructs, while the two experts in measurement development facilitated the latter's attribute classification. Only the items on which all the experts agreed were inserted in the scale, resulting in 13 items related to four constructs. Respondents' entity was specified in *Game of Thrones* viewers who watched at least one season of the TV series from the first to the last episode.

To capture TV series consumption, pathmaking research on media entertainment and consumer behaviour were reviewed (e.g. Jansson, 2002; Jones et al., 2018; Lash & Urry, 1994). Three affective responses to TV series consumption, identified in media studies (e.g. Green, 2004; Reijnders, 2016) were selected for this study. TV series consumption was modelled as a construct following Green et al. (2004). The self-developed items used in the survey were: 'I can't wait for the next episode.' 'I am able to watch several episodes all at once.' 'I can't bear to miss a single episode.' Scale reliability is good (Cronbach α = 0.85). The other constructs were assessed with adopted scale items. Following Hosany and Witham (2010), escapism was operationalised as a reflective construct and was measured using the items adapted from Semrad and Rivera's (2018) scale. The adapted items were: 'Watching GOT makes me feel like I am in another world', 'GOT 'gets me away from it all", 'I was so emotionally involved in GOT stories I forgot everything else', 'Watching GOT makes me forget about myself – I am fully absorbed in it.' Scale reliability is good (Cronbach α = 0.86). Participants immersion in fantasy world was measured using items adapted from Green and Brock's (2000) Transportation Scale and Appel, Gnambs, Richter, and Green's (2015) Transportation Scale – Short Form. The items were: 'I like to immerse myself in the world of Game of Thrones.' 'I like to be surrounded by the world of Game of Thrones.' 'I feel I am part of the world of Game of Thrones.' Scale reliability is good (Cronbach α = 0.81). Finally, to measure travel intention items from Shani et al.'s (2009) scale were adapted. Scale items were: 'I often think that it would be amazing to travel to one of the filming locations.' 'I am thinking about travelling to one of the filming locations very soon.' 'It is very likely that in the near future I will travel to one of the filming locations of Game of Thrones.' Scale reliability is good (Cronbach α = 0.82). For the constructs, in line with the guidelines set out by Diamantopoulos et al. (2012) and with the format adopted by previous studies, participants rated their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

To minimise the risk of lack of scale validity, several steps were taken. To ensure reliability, the survey was thoroughly tested in a two-wave pilot study before the final delineation of the items. Talk aloud protocols were used with 25 participants in the pretesting procedure. The pretesting was done in a classroom where the first author sat next to the respondents as they read the answer options aloud and said whether or not they thought the survey questions were unambiguous and whether the answer options were meaningful for them: unclear, irrelevant or repetitive answer options were removed, and the wording of the queries was modified where needed. To mitigate respondent fatigue, in the final version of the survey we reduced the number of questions;

participants completing the questionnaire took approximately 10 min to do so.

3.3. Data analysis

The study investigated the influence of TV series consumption, immersion, and escapism on people's intentions to travel to filming locations (using path analysis). The model was tested using Partial Least Scale Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Due to its capacity to model both factors (latent variables of behavioural research) and composites (strong concepts), PLS-SEM has been used in marketing, in business studies (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016) and, recently, in tourism research (Hosany et al., 2020). The use of PLS-SEM is justified by (1) the exploratory nature of this study; (2) the small (385) sample size; (3) the scale development assessed in this study in which items are measured on a 7-point scale (see e.g. Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Data analysis was conducted with ADANCO software (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). Internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity were measured in order to avoid the risk of systematic measurement error.

4. Results

4.1. Model measurement

Factor loadings were used to assess the properties of constructs to test convergent validity. All factor loadings were well above the favourable 0.7 value in each case (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). In Table 2, Dijkstra & Henseler's ρA values provide evidence of internal consistency and ρA is the most important reliability measure (Henseler et al., 2016).

The index applied to measure convergent validity is average variance extracted (AVE), where values should be above 0.5 in each construct (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). The AVE can be found on the diagonal of Table 3 and shows that our data meet this required criteria.

Discriminant validity was examined using two methods. First, with Fornell and Larcker's criterion, which demonstrated that in all cases the AVE measurement was larger than the squared latent variable correlations (Table 3). Second, in accordance with the established guidelines (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2016), measuring the heterotrait-heteromethod ratio of correlations (HTMT). As shown in Table 4, all HTMT ratios were significantly smaller than one, and thus discriminant validity was found to be appropriate.

PLS-SEM is a nonparametric statistical model – unlike CB-SEM – and it does not require data to be normally distributed (Hair et al., 2017). Nonetheless, we carefully examined distributions, and skewness and kurtosis for scale items were within absolute values (<1) (Hair et al., 2017). In sum, enough statistical evidence was found to verify (a) the existence of the four constructs, (b) that the measured variables are appropriate indicators of the related factors and (c) that the constructs are distinct.

4.2. Structural model and hypothesis testing

As shown in Fig. 1, the structural model was evaluated using R^2 estimates, standardized path coefficients (β), t-test (t values), and significance (p values). In accordance with the established guidelines (Hu & Bentler, 1999), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), with its cut-off value 0.08, was applied in PLS modelling. The SRMR value for the model (0.070) was deemed acceptable (Henseler et al., 2016).

PLS path models contain exogenous and endogenous constructs and shows the relationship between the constructs (Henseler et al., 2016). TV series consumption is an exogenous construct, and its value is expected to come from outside the model. In fact, no arrows in the structural model point to this construct (Fig. 1). Table 5 shows standardized path coefficients, t-values and p-values for the model. The results (Table 5 and Fig. 1) demonstrate that each hypothesis was supported.

One of the key steps in narrative transportation is to stimulate viewers to leave the mundane world behind to enter the fictive world. TV series consumption has a positive direct effect on escapism ($\beta = 0.45$) and watching TV series stimulates escapism (H1a supported). TV series consumption has a positive direct effect on immersion ($\beta = 0.24$), showing that viewers completely immerse themselves in the narrative world (H1b supported).

TV series consumption has a positive effect on travel intention ($\beta = 0.09$); this direct effect is statistically significant (the H1c hypothesis is

Table 2
Measurement of the model constructs and reliability.

Construct (Rho)	Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Factor loading
TV series consumption ($\rho_A = 0.891$)	I cannot wait the next episode.	5.82	1.713	0.8991
	I am able to watch several episodes all at once.	6.17	1.442	0.8627
	For me it is impossible to skip even a single episode	5.9	1.857	0.8768
Escapism ($\rho_A = 0.868$)	Watching GOT makes me feel like I am in another world	5.15	1.638	0.7781
	GOT 'gets me away from it all	5.25	1.576	0.8163
	I was so emotionally involved in GOT narratives I forgot everything else	4.32	1.808	0.8702
	Watching GOT makes me forget about myself to be fully absorbed	4.52	1.775	0.8805
Immersion in fantasy world ($\rho_A = 0.814$)	I like to immerge in the world of Game of Thrones.	5.45	1.489	0.8512
	I like to be surrounded by the world of Game of Thrones.	4.27	1.775	0.8970
	I feel to be inseparable from the world of Game of Thrones.	2.52	1.619	0.7957
Travel intention ($\rho_A = 0.833$)	I often think that it would be nice to travel to one of the filming locations	2.98	1.805	0.8242
	I consider travelling to one of the filming locations in a near future	2.5	1.71	0.9121
	It is very likely that in the near future I will travel to one of the filming locations of Game of Thrones	2.05	1.495	0.8405

Note: Items were measured with a 7-point scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = fully agree.)
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Table 3
Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker criterion.

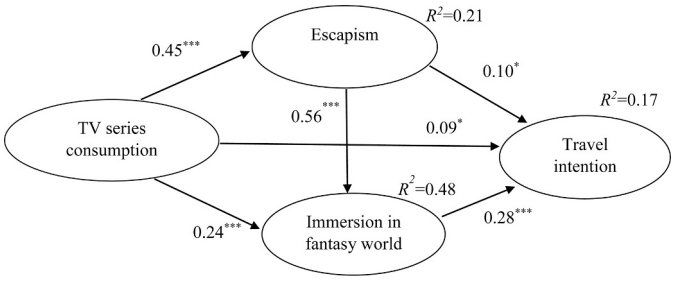
Construct	Escapism	Immersion in fantasy world	TV series consumption	Travel intention
Escapism	0.7011			
Immersion in fantasy world	0.4392	0.7208		
TV series consumption	0.2053	0.2394	0.7738	
Travel intention	0.1084	0.1558	0.0755	0.7393

Note: AVE values can be found on the diagonal, values under the diagonal are the squared latent variable correlations of each construct.
Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4
Heterotrait-heteromethod ratio of correlations (HTMT).

Construct	Escapism	Immersion in fantasy world	TV series consumption	Travel intention
Escapism				
Immersion in fantasy world	0.8428			
TV series consumption	0.5970	0.6487		
Travel intention	0.4591	0.5653	0.3872	

Note: All values are significantly less than one.



Note: all coefficients are standardised (***p < 0.001; *p < 0.05).
Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 1. The structural model and results.
Note: all coefficients are standardized (***$p < 0.001$; *$p < 0.05$).
Source: own elaboration.

Table 5
Direct effects in the model.

The hypothesed path	β	*t*-Values	*p*-Values
TV series consumption → Escapism (H1a+)	0.4531	10.7462	0.0000
TV series consumption → Immersion in fantasy world (H1b+)	0.2377	6.1566	0.0000
TV series consumption → Travel intention (H1c+)	0.0905	2.1851	0.0146
Escapism → Immersion in fantasy world (H2a+)	0.5550	14.9553	0.0000
Escapism → Travel intention (H2b+)	0.0998	1.6810	0.0465
Immersion in fantasy world → Travel intention (H3+)	0.2842	4.2662	0.0000

Source: The authors' own elaboration using Adanco software.

supported), but the effect is not strong. As assumed when formulating the hypothesis, escapism has a strong positive effect on immersion in the fantasy world ($\beta = 0.56$) but has a significant positive but weak effect on travel intention ($\beta = 0.10$) (H2a and H2b hypotheses are supported). The weakness of the positive effect may be explained by the fact that escapism is centred around the TV series rather than the shooting locations. Finally, immersion in the fantasy world has a positive effect on travel intention ($\beta = 0.28$) and the H3 hypothesis is thus supported.

4.3. Mediation effect analysis

To test the mediation effect, inference statistics (using bootstrap) were applied (Henseler et al., 2016). In PLS-SEM the use bootstrapping, instead of the Sobel test, is considered more appropriate (Hair et al., 2017). Bootstrapping procedure was used to calculate the confidence interval (CI) which provides valid information about the characteristics of the distribution of mediating effects. According to Nitzl, Roldan, and Cepeda-Carrion (2016) there is a significant indirect effect when zero is not included in the confidence interval. Mediation effect analysis was conducted using the logic of Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010) and Hair et al. (2017). Table 6 shows that all mediating effects, except one (C → E → TI), are complementary which means that mediated effect and direct effect both exist (partial mediation) and point at the same direction (Zhao et al., 2010). Table 6 shows mediating effects, enabling us to calculate the ratio of the indirect-to-total effect (VAF value). VAF determines the extent to which the mediation process explains a dependent variable's variance (Hair et al., 2017). "As a rule of thumb, a VAF value is classified in three different categories i.e. VAF $<$ 20%, $\geq$ 20% to $\leq$ 80% and $>$ 80%; which indicate no mediation, partial mediation and full mediation respectively" (Hair et al., 2017: 224).

Specifically, the results show that the direct path between TV series consumption and immersion is significant ($\beta = 0.24$), it is partially mediated by escapism. Since the bootstrap confidence interval do not include zero and VAF = 51%, H4 is supported. Our results revealed that escapism has a direct positive effect on travel intention ($\beta = 0.10$), but this relationship is partially mediated by immersion (VAF = 62%), therefore supporting H5. From TV series consumption to travel intention three paths were analysed. The first path was supposed to be mediated by escapism (C → E → TI), but the confidence interval includes zero [−0.0063, 0.2442] and VAF $<$ 20% revealing that escapism has no mediation effect (H6a rejected). The second path is through immersion (C → I → TI) and since the bootstrap confidence interval does not include zero, H6b is supported. Immersion significantly mediates between TV series consumption and travel intention. Lastly, the mediating effect of escapism and immersion in conjunction (C → E → I → TI) on travel intention was found to be significant, the confidence interval does not include zero, therefore supporting H6c. These results suggest that escapism and immersion exert a significant mediating role between TV series consumption and travel intention.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Theoretically, this paper investigated what prompts TV series consumers to dive into and immerse themselves in a narrative world. We considered an exploration of this process necessary to explain the context and impact mechanisms which stimulate screen tourists' travel intentions (Kim & Kim, 2018). Our aim was to develop and empirically test a conceptual model of TV series consumption, escapism, immersion, and travel intentions. Escapism and immersion are inextricably linked but reflect different stages of narrative transportation. Escapism requires less active cognitive engagement, immersion involves more mental

Table 6
Summary of mediating effect tests.

Path	Total effect		Direct effect		Indirect effect				Mediation	
	Coeff.	t-value	Coeff.	t-value	Specific path	Point est.	PBCI 95%	VAF		
C → I	0.4892***	13.3263	0.2377***	6.1566	C → E → I	0.2515***	[0.1969, 0.3100]	51%	Partial (compl.)	H4
E → TI	0.2576***	5.6230	0.0998*	1.6810	E → I → TI	0.1598***	[0.0856, 0.2394]	62%	Partial (compl.)	H5
C → TI	0.2748***	7.9799	0.0905*	2.1851		0.1843***	[0.1288, 0.2442]	67%	Partial (compl.)	
					C → E → TI	0.0452	[−0.0063, 0.2442]	16%	Non-mediation	H6a
					C → I → TI	0.0676***	[0.0321, 0.1097]	25%	Partial (compl.)	H6b
					C → E → I → TI	0.0715***	[0.0366, 0.1116]	26%	Partial (compl.)	H6c

Note: (***$p < 0.001$; *$p < 0.05$); C: TV series Consumption, E: Escapism, I: Immersion, TI: Travel Intention.
Source: The authors' own elaboration.

effort (Ryan, 2001). Results show that narrative transportation occurs through immersion, crossing the threshold of fantasy world is not enough. Based on the data collected from a questionnaire survey of GOT-viewers, our study found that TV series generate a potential interest in filming locations. Our findings confirmed that narrative transportation is a structured gradual process (see Gerrig, 1993). TV series consumption first leads to escapism ($\beta = 0.45$), escapism to immersion ($\beta = 0.56$), immersion to travel intention ($\beta = 0.28$). Due to the graduality of these stages we expected to find the strongest connections in these directions. Results confirmed the proposed relationships and identified the direct impact of being engrossed in a story and escaping into the fantasy world. TV series provide many people with '[it] gets me away from it all' experiences which lead to their immersion in the story, allowing them to experience an imaginary journey in a parallel dimension. When an audience is captivated and fully absorbed by a TV series, this effect is significant. Furthermore, the mediated relationships (via escapism and immersion) between TV series consumption and travel intention were found to be significant. To be immersed in a narrative is key travel intention. To sum up, this means that the more intense TV series consumption is, the more viewers can 'leave their world of origin behind' (Gerrig, 1993), and the more prone to immerse themselves in the fantasy world they become, the more intentioned to travel they are. The findings offer theoretical and managerial implications as well.

The theoretical contribution lies in the interdisciplinary agenda which integrates media and communication theory in our exploratory research. More specifically, our findings advance knowledge on screen tourism by operationalizing the theory of transportation into fantasy worlds and describing TV series viewers' narrative journey. The novelty of our model lies in the travel-centred operationalizing of the narrative transportation theory.

Our findings support those of several past studies and introduce new perspectives. Media induced tourist behaviour and travel intentions have been widely studied in leisure and tourism (Beeton, 2016; Iwashita, 2008; Kim et al., 2008; Kim & Kim, 2018; Lee, 2012; Wen et al., 2018). This study's fresh perspective is a product of our approach to the phenomenon, through an investigation of the narrative transportation experiences of TV series viewers, and our endeavour to understand whether being engrossed in a narrative fulfils the need to 'get away from it all'. This study responds to Beeton's (2016:xxiv) suggestion that different theoretical approaches be applied to the question of film-induced tourism, in order to more effectively develop our knowledge of the topic. Our findings are congruent with prior marketing research on storytelling (Woodside et al., 2008) and on the effectiveness of narrative as an instrument of persuasion (Escalas, 2004, 2007; Van Laer et al., 2014) which propose that stories are fundamental in consumer psychology. In the context of screen tourism, our findings are consistent with Kim & Kim (2018:270) who empirically tested a TV drama consumption model of film tourism, showed that 'audiences do not immediately become involved with a TV drama but are steadily committed through assimilation or a deep emotional involvement process including identification and referential reflection'. Our findings advance knowledge on the role of immersion in narratives through a 'deep dive' into the narrative transportation experience as actual travel.

6. Managerial implications

Narrative transportation theory framed the stages at which tourism practitioners and marketers can potentially engage to influence travel intentions (Gerrig, 1993; Green et al., 2004). Findings suggest that film destination marketers need proactive planning and communication strategies to leverage on a TV series success to attract tourists. Such proactive planning should consider the stages of narrative transportation and leverage on the unique features of each stage. The interventions may be intended to increase tourism arrivals in a filming location, or to make a destination stand out by highlighting its evocative power for viewers.

In the first case, tourism marketers should collaborate with film production companies to systematically reinforce the TV series' impact on viewers. As Hudson and Ritchie (2006) outlined, several marketing strategies can be implemented before, during and after the film or TV series release. Thus, tailor-made post-release marketing initiatives need to be elaborated and implemented to capture the attention of viewers. Destinations that host film productions should therefore at least consider developing a strategy for leveraging on media productions and making themselves stand out in the midst of the current information overload.

Our results show that escapism and immersion in a narrative reinforce viewers' bonds with a media production's characters and places. It has been demonstrated, for instance, that immersion in a narrative (a safe place where viewers can, if they wish, lose themselves) allows people to experience emotions that sometimes endure in the post-consumption stage (Escalas, 2007). The use of narratives in the destination marketing campaign may elicit such emotions (Hosany et al., 2020). Filming destinations using storytelling in marketing communication should leverage on the 'get away from it all' feeling and on viewers' wish to be transported into a safe and secure fantasy world. By implementing a tourism ad campaign around allusions to TV series vocative images from the relevant TV series and building on the different stages of narrative transportation, tourism marketers can create emotionally engaging marketing products.

7. Limitations and areas for future research

This study has some limitations. The first is that it explores intentions to visit rather than actual travel behaviours; nevertheless, the study does reveal a link between TV series viewers' media consumption and their propensity to be carried away by a narrative. The second limitation is that we do not investigate the moderating effects of variables such as nostalgia and memory (Kim & Kim, 2018), prior knowledge (Green, 2004) and imagination proclivity (Hosany et al., 2020) which very probably influence viewers' narrative transportation experiences and thus their behaviour intentions. In future research, the moderating effects of adverse factors which prevent viewers from immersing themselves in the narrative world, should also be tested empirically (Green et al., 2004).

Recently, our daily lives have been radically changed by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Travel restrictions, and a general lockdown in different countries, made travel wellnigh impossible for a certain period. Most of us have spent some time in quarantine. It can be reasonably assumed that people turning to streaming services were looking for escapist entertainment and the chance to be transported into other – lockdown-free – worlds. Under lockdown, with all its challenges, being able to travel through narrative has had several affective benefits, such as the opportunity to manage one's mood by leaving fears and worries behind and engage with positive stories (Green et al., 2004). Future research will certainly question whether, how and to what extent, TV series viewing, and narrative transportation experienced in the unnatural stay-at-home situation influenced behavioural outcomes and actual travel. Future tourism research will be strengthened if it can analyse the stages of narrative transportation in studies of film and screen tourism, and the virtual journeys made by viewers on a range of different devices (Serravalle, Ferraris, Vrontis, & Thrassou, 2019).

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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