Making parasocial identification tangible: Can film memorabilia strengthen travel intention?

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Abstract:

Purpose: The main purpose of this paper is to expand on the theories of parasocial identification and transitional objects, and to pioneer the investigation into how imaginative practices become tangible aspects of tourist behavior.
Methods: Based on a survey data with 385 Game of Thrones fans, a hypothesized model was tested using PLS-SEM.
Results: This paper suggests that identification with media characters is a gradual structured process, and memorabilia are transitional objects that further enhance viewers' travel intentions. Findings show that film memorabilia make illusory experiences tangible and enable individuals to cross the threshold between the imagined and the mundane.
Implications: The study offers tourism marketers and service providers insights into how to shorten the psychological distance between seemingly unattainable fictive worlds and screen tourism destinations.

Keywords: *film tourism, TV series, hypothesis development, travel motivation, material culture*

1 INTRODUCTION

Memorabilia is closely linked to travel experiences, cultural identity, and generalized perceptions of a culture or particular place (Pomian, 2019). It preserves memories of people, groups, or events and acts as a tool for memorizing. A vast variety of tangible items connected to historical, cultural, or individual significance are included in the category of memorabilia (Bennett, 2022). These items can include fan memorabilia, which can related to music, relics, souvenirs, and antiques, each carrying cultural and historical value (Hitchcock, 2013).

Parasocial relationships (PSRs) refer to the one-sided connections individuals form with media figures such as celebrities, vloggers, and fictional characters (Hoffner & Bond, 2022) For example, Caterina, who is eight, frequently mimicks Lucky, the protagonist of the computer animated Netflix production Spirit Riding Free, but most of the time, running and jumping all around the house, she is Spirit. Her strong identification with the wild mustang gives her the hugely enjoyable opportunity to act like a horse and to interact with the other characters as if they were real. Collecting memorabilia makes such parasocial relationships tangible.

Psychologically real relationships between viewers and media personae are the quintessence of the entertainment industry (Cohen, 2001; Dias, Dias & Lages, 2017; Russell & Stern, 2006). Scholary work on audience members' imaginative engagement with characters as one of the predictors of consumer behavior reflect the implicit and explicit influence of parasocial relationship theory in the field of screen tourism (Beeton, 2016; Bi, Yin & Kim, 2021). The theory posits that viewers of television shows establish a pseudo-social interaction with media personae which influences viewers' attitude and behavior (Eyal & Dailey, 2012; Russell & Stern, 2006). A better understanding of audience members' imaginative practices and subsequent consumer behavior can provide new insights.

It is difficult for TV show viewers to identify movie settings as viable travel destinations (Chan, 2007; Beeton, 2016; Lundberg, Ziakas & Morgan, 2017; Luong, 2024). How to create a tangible pre-trip connection between the dream world and the film setting is another problem with screen tourism. The majority of legends and fairy tales have characters who change and traverse the boundary between multiple realities through the use of artifacts, such as a lamp, wand, or ring (Bettelheim, 1976).

In this paper we argue that these locations can gain such recognition by building on viewers' parasocial identification with TV show characters and by using memorabilia. The blurred borderland between the realm of the TV series and the mundane world in which travel intentions can manifest in behavior is crossed through the act of collecting memorabilia. By making viewers' illusion of being part of a fantasy world tangible, memorabilia collection strengthens the meaningful emotional connections that they make between seemingly unattainable fictive worlds and screen tourism destinations.

To widen the theoretical frame of film memorabilia, we draw on the theory of transitional objects developed by the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1953). Winnicott referred to certain objects as 'transitional' for their power to connect different spaces, the imagined and the mundane. Objects, beyond having magical power, unintentionally link associations. Belk (2018) argues that the meaning of objects as markers and signifiers is socially and individually constructed. For the entagled connection between owner and object the latter is an extension of the self (Belk, 2018). The psychological possession theory (Pierce & Peck, 2018; Yagmur & Demirel, 2024) proposes that collecting material objects is relevant to the self and provides individuals with a feeling of ownership linked to an illusion that they possess something which cannot be physically possessed.

Parasocial interactions have changed over time and have the potential to affect many facets of marketing and tourism. On the other hand, direct data regarding the connection between relics and parasocial ties is scarce. While significant insights exist on parasocial relationships, there is a dearth of direct knowledge regarding the precise relationship between memorabilia and parasocial ties. This research contributes to academic knowledge by expanding the parasocial theory with weak and strong identification; additionally, it provides a theoretically solid conceptualisation of memorabilia as transitional objects for the first time in tourism academia; and finally it isenhancing the understanding of memorabilia as a potential tool for boosting travel intentions. This exploratory study investigates such strength by assessing parasocial identification with the aim of understanding the identification levels on which screen tourism marketers and practitioners can build their communication and shorten the psychological distance between seemingly unattainable fictive worlds and film tourism destinations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Parasocial phenomena: Weak and strong identification

Horton and Wohl (1956) coined the term 'parasocial interaction' to conceptualize viewers' engagement in interpersonal communication with media personae. Cohen (2001, p. 250) defined parasocial identification as 'an imaginative process invoked as a response to characters'. Specifically, he argues that identification is not an attitude rather a process of loosing self-awareness while viewing. Psychological relationships are perceived to be real by many audience members (Eyal & Dailey, 2012; Schiappa, Allen & Gregg, 2007) and these imaginative practices are crucial to maintaining TV series consumption (Reijnders, 2010). Parasocial identification is a psychological merging with the character allowing viewers to vicariously participate in the character's experiences and viewers often establish 'friendships' with their preferred mediated personality (Eyal & Dailey, 2012; Tian & Hoffner, 2010).

But, if parasocial identification is a process it can be gradually structured. We argue that the identification process is not linear, rather it builds upon levels according to the intensity of the phenomenon. To expand the parasocial relathionship theory, we refer to Cupchik (1997) who justified the difference between weak (functionalist) and strong (psychodynamic) mode of identification and suggested that the media consumption differs from one viewer to another: some just see the situation through the characters' eyes while others identify with them. The boundary between weak and strong identification, in Cupchik's view, lies in the engagement with the self. Weak identification means that audience members sympathize with characters, while strong parasocial identification entails a vicarious participation in the character's experiences (Cupchik, 1997). Our research is novel in suggesting that weak identification is antecedent to strong identification: if viewers cannot internalize a character's point of view, they cannot identify with him/her. The effects of the imaginative process of adopting a character's perspective and imitating their behavior brings the concept of parasocial identification into the field of screen tourism (Kim & Kim, 2018).

2.2. Memorabilia as transitional objects

The popularity of fantasy films and TV shows has led to the growth of global merchandising. The practice of building collections extends a viewer's self (Belk, 2018), if we accept that individuals define themselves by the objects they own. In the context of tourism, memorabilia have been studied for their capacity to evoke past tourism experiences (Kim, Kim & Petrick, 2019; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Wilkins, 2011) but less attention has been paid to memorabilia as tangible representations of the interconnectedness between individuals' imaginaries and travel behavior.

To expand the theoretical frame of film memorabilia, we draw on the theory of transitional objects (Winnicott,1953). Certain material representations of reality can be defined 'transitional objects' because, as Winnicott argued, these objects allow passing the threshold. Threshold-crossing activities (leaving everyday life behind to enter another world) – a common tourism ritual – are of paramount importance to connect the imagined and the mundane (Kim & Long, 2012; Reijnders, 2010; Daa et al., 2022). We suggest that memorabilia linked to a character act as transitional objects and through the enhancement of parasocial identification shape potential tourists' imaginaries.
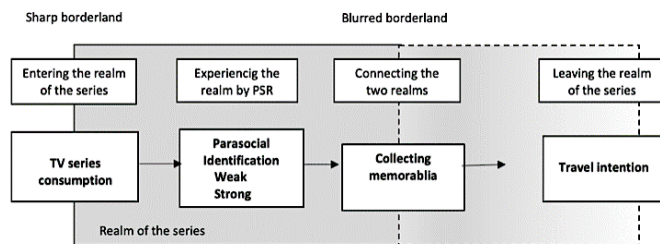

Figure 1. The conceptual framework

2.3. Hypotheses development

The conceptual model in Figure 1 shows the paths from TV series consumption to travel intention with mediating effects. TV series consumption is defined here as a consciously and repeatedly practised media experience (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Reijnders (2010) suggested that detective television programs effectively influence their viewers to establish an emotional bond with characters confirming that parasocial bonds are established while consuming a media product. Tian and Hoffner (2010) argued that viewing the TV drama Lost had an impact on identification with positive characters. Beeton (2016) also suggested that one of the reasons of the popularity of TV shows like All Creatures Great and Small or Heartbeat is that fictive characters were crafted to reflect audiences' self-images. Increased activation of a character's trait qualities within the viewer's self-concept can result from high identification with the character (Sestir & Green, 2010). While watching a TV show with more depth and utilizing transmedia storytelling might help viewers identify more with the fictional characters, especially when it comes to more sentimental or emotional content (Sánchez Castillo & Galán, 2016). Here we assume that weak and strong identification are two separate constructs, we test the impact of viewing on each of them with the hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: TV series consumption has a direct positive impact on weak identification with fictive characters.
Hypothesis 1b: TV series consumption has a direct positive impact on strong identification with fictive characters.

TV series consumption is an intangible experience which occurs repeatedly with the active participation of audience members (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Russell and Stern (2006) employed the balance theory to investigate viewers and characters' interactions and found a positive relationship between TV show watching and purchase of products placed in TV shows. Viewers often become entangled with consumer experiences and identify themselves as fans

through the objects in their possession (Belk, 2018). In fact, consumer goods such as memorabilia are manifests of dedicated TV series consumption practices. This resonates with Hudson and Ritchie's (2006) findings that selling or exhibiting film memorabilia serves as a useful marketing tool to attract tourists to the destination. Gyimóthy (2018) demonstrated the impact of viewing Indian TV shows and using memorabilia as parts of the material performances co-created by screen tourists. Lowell and Thurgill (2021) suggest a positive link between watching Harry Potter movies and products from the world of wizardy as both contribute to the construction of the fantasy world what tourists seek for when visiting film locations. Our hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: TV series consumption has a direct positive impact on collecting memorablia.

TV series consumption can shape travel intentions (Reijnders, 2010; Shani et al., 2009). Travel intention is probably the most studied behavioral concept in the field of screen tourism, defined as an individual's intention to visit a film location stimulated by the consumption of an audiovisual product (Beeton, 2016). Prior research provides robust support for the hypothesis that media exposure has positive effects on travel intentions (Kim, 2012). Using a sample of 460 audience members, Li et al. (2021) highlighted the positive impact of watching Game of Thrones on the willingness to travel to one of the filming locations of the TV show. The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: TV series consumption has a direct positive impact on travel intention.

When a narrative creates a kind of resonance between the fantasy world and audience members' life-situation a meaningful relationship is established (Reijnders, 2010). Therefore, to test whether parasocial identification can be understood as a gradual structured process with different strength, we assume an enhancing interconnectedness between weak and strong identification. This active process builds on the emotional bonds that viewers establish with character. We suggest that weak identification anticipates strong identification because the viewer's ability to construct a meaningful mental representation of a character is a necessary condition to connect the former's personal history with the latter's situation. The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Weak identification has a direct positive impact on strong identification.

The gradual structured process that leads from weak to strong parasocial identification explains viewers' propensity to become emotionally involved in characters' experiences. Kim (2012) suggested that as parasocial relationships between viewers and characters intensify some media consumers collect memorabilia. The collecting of material objects linked to such parasocial relationships is an expression of a sense of psychological ownership (Pierce & Peck, 2018). Memorabilia are both embracing objects of desire and transitional objects between illusion and reality. In screen tourism transitional objects gain meaning when linked

to fictive characters. Based on studies on product placement (Dias, Dias & Lages, 2017; Russell & Stern, 2006) we assume that collecting memorabilia linked to a character is influenced by parasocial identification. To test it, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5a, b: (a) Weak and (b) strong identification have a direct positive impact on collecting memorablia.

The propensity to become emotionally involved in fictive characters' experiences shape viewers' attitude and behavior at various extent (Reijnders, 2010). Kim (2012) investigated audiences' involvement with a television drama and showed the soap opera's impact on travel intention is a multidimensional construct worth to further explore. Identification with the admired character in The Jewel of the Palace, a popular Korean TV drama, stimulates screen tourists to travel (Kim & Long, 2012). Exploring audiences' emotional involvement, Kim and Kim (2018) found that through parasocial identification viewers shape their personal identities. They also highlighted the multiple dimensions of such relationships suggesting that strong emotional bonds with characters are precursors to travel intention. Parasocial identification is closely associated with immersion in a story (Moscardo, 2020). Similarly, deep emotional bonds linking Harry Potter fans to the world of wizardy have a positive impact on their travel intention (Lovell & Thurgill, 2021). Bi, Yin and Kim (2021) suggest that identification with characters in the documentary TV show A Bite of China triggers viewers' emotional responses and the wish to travel. Thus, we predict that:

Hypothesis 6a, b: (a) Weak and (b) strong identification have a direct positive impact on travel intention.

Russell and Stern (2006) found a positive link between the appeal of products used by TV show characters and viewers' purchase behavior. Psychological ownership theory (Pierce & Peck, 2018) posits that collecting meaningful objects leads to behavior outcomes. Memorabilia are meaningful consumer goods (Belk, 2018) and collecting memorabilia linked to TV show characters are the extension of the fan-self of viewers. The assumption that memorabilia are transitional objects is tested with Hypothesis 7 which states that:

Hypothesis 7: Collecting memorabilia has a direct positive impact on travel intention.

2.4.The Mediating Role of Collecting Memorabilia

It is expected that the collection of memorabilia to play a mediating role between TV show consumption and travel intentions. Iconic media characters act as signifiers and as such are associated with specific products or places (Kim, 2012), memorabilia, therefore, are meaningful when they strengthen links with fictive characters. Due to the central role of memorabilia (which connect different worlds, can be purchased even when we cannot travel, and are transitional objects) the following hypotheses can be formulated:

Hypothesis 8: Collecting memorabilia mediates the effect of TV series consumption on travel intention.

Hypothesis 9: Collecting memorabilia mediates the effect of weak identification on travel intention.

Hypothesis 10: Collecting memorabilia mediates the effect of strong identification on travel intention.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample characteristics and data collection
Data used in this research were collected using 'snowball' sampling. One of the advantages of the snowball technique is its ability to penetrate 'hidden' populations with specific knowledge like TV show fans (Geddes, Parker & Scott, 2018). Despite the sample bias, this method is suitable for gathering information from individuals with particular characteristics and from various backgrounds (Noy 2008). We used a hard copy of the questionnaire administered by trained data collectors who followed a protocol to ensure consistency. Respondents were selected on the basis of having watched at least one of the eight seasons Game of Thrones series (without missing an episode), on the assumption that the viewers of long-running TV shows will have experienced some degree of parasocial identification. The GOT TV show was a mainstream global success, thus justifying the sample selection. To reduce bias, we employed open-ended interviews with pre-test participants to gather data on parasocial identification with characters, interest in collecting memorabilia and intentions to travel to film locations.

The sample consisted of 385 respondents (50.3% female). Almost all of the respondents were young (M_{age}=26.10 years; SD_{age}=10.24), unsurprisingly given that the TV show was highly popular among individuals in this age cohort. The measurement scale was pre-tested with Game of Thrones fans (n=25) to assess scale validity and reliability. Before finalizing the survey, talk aloud protocol (Dolnicar, 2013) was used to track ambiguous wording or repetitive items, this improved the overall quality of the survey. The survey completion time was less than 12 minutes, and respondent fatigue was minimal.

3.2. Instrument
Drawing on past studies, the pre-test and the expert validation results, (14) items were developed to assess TV series consumption, weak and strong identification, memorabilia collection and travel intention. Measurement scales included items presented on a 7-point scale from (1) totally disagree to (7) fully agree. Scale reliability was acceptable. TV show consumption was assessed using four self-developed items following Tian and Hoffner's (2010) conceptualization. The three items to assess weak identification were adapted from Cohen's (2001) parasocial identification scale. The concept of strong identification as a separate construct, instead, was assessed using three self-developed items inspired by Cupchik (1997). Furthermore, based on Belk (2018) and Morgan and Pritchard (2005) three items were developed to assess collecting memorabilia. Finally, the scale developed by Shani et al.'s (2009) was employed to measure travel intention.

3.3. Data analysis

The model was tested using Partial Least Scale Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM has been used in film tourism studies exploring perceived authenticity of filming locations and tourist loyalty (e.g., Li et al., 2021). In our study, the use of PLS-SEM is justified by (1) the small sample size (n=385) and (2) the exploratory nature of the study. The risk of systematic measurement error was avoided by assessing internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

4 RESULTS

4.1. Model measurement

To test convergent validity, factor loadings were used to assess the properties of the constructs. The factor loadings were well above the favourable 0.7 value in all cases (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). In Table 1, Dijkstra and Henseler's ρA values provide evidence of internal consistency and, according to Henseler et al. 2014, ρA is the most important reliability measure.

Table 1. Measurement of the model constructs and reliability

Construct (Rho)	Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Factor loading
TV show consumption (ρA = 0.874)	I cannot wait for the next episode.	5.81	1.728	0.9051
	I am able to watch several episodes all at once.	6.16	1.455	0.8610
	For me it is impossible to skip even a single episode.	5.90	1.857	0.8712
Weak identification (ρA = 0.827)	I am able to feel the character's emotions.	5.11	1.580	0.8304
	I try to adapt myself to the character's point of view.	5.09	1.704	0.8701
	I try to understand the feelings, thoughts and reactions of the character.	4.92	1.741	0.8845
Strong identification (ρA = 0.822)	I think that I am like the character or very similar to him/her.	3.73	1.725	0.8553
	I can identify myself with this character.	5.05	1.619	0.9315
Collecting memorabilia (ρA = 0.743)	I like buying Game of Thrones memorabilia for myself.	2.23	1.656	0.7838
	I would love to receive Game of Thrones memorabilia as a gift.	3.69	2.145	0.8891
	I would be happy to receive a Game of Thrones themed tour as a gift.	5.14	1.976	0.7503
Travel intention (ρA = 0.837)	I often think that it would be nice to travel to one of the filming locations	2.98	1.805	0.8263
	I am considering travelling to one of the filming locations in a near future	2.50	1.710	0.9125
	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	0.8373

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

To check the convergent validity of each construct, the average variance extracted (AVE) was calculated. According to Hair et al. (2017), AVE values should exceed 0.50, and as the results on the diagonal of Table 2 show, this was achieved.

Table 2. Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Construct	Travel intention	Weak identification	Strong identification	Collecting memorabilia	TV show consumption
Travel intention	0.7388				
Weak identification	0.0430	0.7430			
Strong identification	0.0386	0.2835	0.7996		
Collecting memorabilia	0.2143	0.0962	0.0456	0.6560	
TV show consumption	0.0763	0.0789	0.0401	0.1666	0.7731

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

Two methods were used to evaluate discriminant validity. First, the Fornell and Larcker test showed that the AVE values for each construct were greater than the squared latent variable correlations (Table 2). Second, the heterotrait-heteromethod ratio of correlations (HTMT) was significantly smaller than one (Table 3), the measurement model was thus

deemed to demonstrate good discriminant validity in accordance with the established guidelines (Hair et al. 2017).

Table 3. Heterotrait-heteromethod ratio of correlations

Construct	Travel intention	Weak identification	Strong identification	Collecting memorabilia	TV show consumption
Travel intention					
Weak identification	0.3409				
Strong identification	0.3509	0.7304			
Collecting memorabilia	0.6668	0.4986	0.3847		
TV show consumption	0.3871	0.4293	0.3624	0.5720	

Note: All values are significantly less than one.

In sum, enough statistical evidence was found to demonstrate (a) the existence of the five constructs, (b) that the assessed variables are appropriate indicators of the related factors and (c) that the constructs differ from each other.

4.2. Structural model and hypothesis testing

To evaluate our structural model, we used R2 estimates, standardized path coefficients (β), t-test (t values), and significance (p values), results are shown in Figure 2. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) with its cut-off value of 0.08, was applied in PLS modelling. The results of the SRMR value for the model (0.070) were deemed acceptable (Hair et al., 2017).
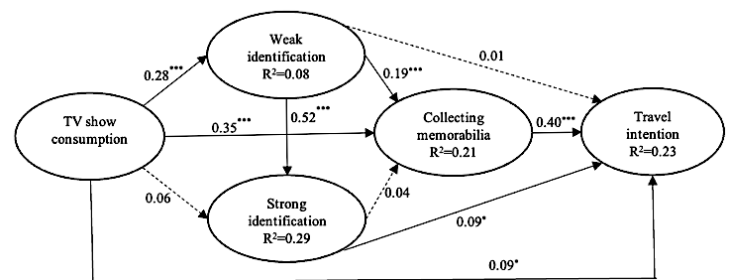
Note: all coefficients are standardised (***p < 0.001; *p < 0.05).
Source: authors' elaboration.
Figure 2. The structural model and results

The PLS path models contain exogenous and endogenous constructs and show the relationship between the constructs (Hair et al., 2017). TV show 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 (Figure 1). Table 4 shows the standardized path coefficients, t-values and p-values for the model. The results (Table 4 and Figure 2) demonstrate which hypotheses were supported/rejected.

Table 4. Direct Effects in the model

The hypothesized path	Direct effect			Results
	Coeff.	t-value	p-value	
TV show consumption → Weak identification (H1a)	0.2808***	5.1220	0.0000	Supported
TV show consumption → Strong identification (H1b)	0.0551	1.0288	0.1519	Rejected
TV show consumption → Collecting memorabilia (H2)	0.3462	8.6063	0.0000	Supported
TV show consumption → Travel intention (H3)	0.0910**	2.4156	0.0079	Supported
Weak identification → Strong identification (H4)	0.5170***	11.2071	0.0000	Supported
Weak identification → Collecting memorabilia (H5a)	0.1899***	3.3859	0.0004	Supported
Strong identification → Collecting memorabilia (H5b)	0.0432	0.8088	0.2094	Rejected
Weak identification → Travel intention (H6a)	0.0107*	0.2123	0.4160	Rejected
Strong identification → Travel intention (H6b)	0.0861*	1.7053	0.0442	Supported
Collecting memorabilia → Travel intention (H7)	0.4041***	8.7508	0.0000	Supported

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001
Source: authors' own elaboration, using Adanco software

TV show viewers enter the fantasy world of GOT and establish parasocial relationships with characters; differences in weak and strong identification can be observed in these processes. Hypothesis 1a, proposing a positive direct effect of TV show consumption on weak identification ($\beta = 0.28$; t-value = 5.12; p-value = 0.000), was supported. Hypothesis 1b was rejected ($\beta = 0.06$; t-value = 1.03; p-value = 0.1519). Weak identification with a character leads viewers to adopt 'empathic' emotions that relate to the character's experience in the fictional world: if film makers consider such dramaturgical aspects, viewer empathy will naturally be evoked.

TV show consumption was found to have a significant direct positive effect (hypothesis 2: $\beta = 0.35$; t-value = 8.61; p-value = 0.000) on collecting memorabilia, thus supporting hypothesis 2. TV show consumption means entering a fantasy world and collecting memorabilia creates a link between two realms, while memorabilia function as transitional objects. From a tourism perspective, one of the most important questions is whether TV show consumption strengthens travel intentions. Hypothesis 3 is supported because the direct effect between the two concepts is positive ($\beta = 0.09$; t-value = 8.41; p-value = 0.008).

The extent to which viewers can identify with a character is fundamental to parasocial theory. The positive relationship between weak and strong parasocial identification was tested in hypothesis 4, weak identification was found to have a significant positive impact on strong identification ($\beta = 0.52$; t-value = 11.21; p-value = 0.000), supporting hypothesis 4. The relationships between weak and strong identification and collecting memorabilia were tested in hypotheses 5a and 5b. While weak identification was found to be statistically significant ($\beta = 0.19$; t-value = 3.39; p-value = 0.000) (supporting hypothesis 5a), hypothesis 5b was rejected ($\beta = 0.04$; t-value = 0.81; p-value = 0.209). These findings suggest that identification significantly influences memorabilia collection, and even weak identification with a show's characters will arouse viewers' desire to collect memorabilia. Lastly, it is important to assess how identification and memorabilia collection affect travel intentions. The results show that weak identification has no direct effect on travel intention, thus hypothesis 6a was rejected ($\beta = 0.01$; t-value = 3.21; p-value = 0.416). Strong identification does have a direct positive effect on travel intention ($\beta = 0.09$; t-value = 1.71; p-value = 0.044), although the effect is not significant (hypothesis 6b accepted). Collecting memorabilia has a positive effect on travel intentions ($\beta = 0.40$; t-value = 8.75; p-value = 0.000), therefore supporting hypothesis 7.

4.3. Mediation effect analysis

Mediation analysis was employed, based on the assumption that the effect of parasocial identification on travel intention would be mediated by collecting memorabilia (Table 5). Following guidelines given by Zhao et al. (2010) and Nitzl et al. (2016) we used nonparametric bootstrapping to test whether the indirect effect was significantly different from zero (Sarstedt et al., 2020). To rigorously test multiple mediation models we included all mediators, the overall indirect effect is the sum of specific indirect effects (Nitz et al., 2016). Although we were only interested in a few specific indirect effects, we performed a mediation analysis for each

possible pathway, to provide a clear and comprehensive picture.

Table 5 Complete and specific indirect effects

Path	Specific indirect effect Coeff	95% PBCI		Type of mediation
TVC→WI→SI	0.1452***	0.0898	0.2075	Indirect-only
WI→SI→CM	0.0223	-0.0302	0.0776	Direct-only (non-mediation)
SI→CM→TI (H10)	0.0175	-0.0241	0.0604	Direct-only (non-mediation)
TVC→WI→CM	0.0533**	0.0197	0.0949	Complementary mediation
TVC→SI→CM	0.0024	-0.0056	0.0126	Direct-only (non-mediation)
TVC→WI→SI→CM	0.0063	-0.0079	0.0239	Direct-only (non-mediation)
WI→CM→TI (H9)	0.0767***	0.0312	0.1230	Indirect-only
WI→SI→TI	0.0445	-0.0075	0.1016	No-effect (non-mediation)
WI→SI→CM→TI	0.0090	-0.0129	0.0321	No-effect (non-mediation)
TVC→WI→TI	0.0030	-0.0258	0.0311	Direct-only (non-mediation)
TVC→SI→TI	0.0047	-0.0046	0.0190	Direct-only (non-mediation)
TVC→CM→TI (H8)	0.1399***	0.0964	0.1899	Complementary mediation
TVC→WI→CM→TI	0.0215**	0.0080	0.0385	Complementary mediation
TVC→WI→SI→TI	0.0125	-0.0019	0.0313	Direct-only (non-mediation)
TVC→SI→CM→TI	0.0010	-0.0024	0.0051	Direct-only (non-mediation)
TVC→WI→SI→CM→TI	0.0025	-0.0033	0.0099	Direct-only (non-mediation)

Path	Complete indirect effect Mediators	Coeff	95% PBCI	
TVC→SI	WI	0.1452***	0.0898	0.2075
WI→CM	SI	0.0223	-0.0302	0.0776
SI→TI	CM	0.0175	-0.0241	0.0604
TVC→CM	WI, SI	0.0620**	0.0271	0.1073
WI→TI	SI, CM	0.1303***	0.0620	0.1994
TVC→TI	WI, SI, CM	0.1852***	0.1386	0.2390

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; p < 0.001; PBCI: percentile bootstrap confidence interval (lower bound – upper bound)
TVC: TV show Consumption, WI: Weak Identification, SI: Strong Identification, CM: Collecting Memorabilia, TI: Travel Intention.

Complementary mediation (direct and indirect paths are both significant) was revealed between TV show consumption and travel intention, with a higher level of indirect mediation ($\beta = 0.19$; t-value = 7.13; p-value = 0.000). The specific path TVC→CM→TI was shown to be significant, supporting hypothesis 8 and demonstrating the mediator role of memorabilia collection. Results revealed a complementary mediation effect on the TVC→WI→CM→TI specific path, because bootsrapping showed that the 95% PBCI for the mediating effect does not straddle zero either [0.008; 0.039]. Hypothesis 9 and 10 proposed that the effects of weak and strong identification on travel intention are mediated by collecting memorabilia. The results support hypothesis 9, revealing the indirect effect of weak identification on travel intention ($\beta = 0.13$; t-value = 3.66; p-value = 0.000). While hypothesis 10 is rejected, since the results revealed direct-only non-mediation, the direct path SI→TI is significant, and is not mediated by collecting memorabilia.

In summary, TV show consumption acts not only directly but also indirectly on collecting memorabilia, through weak identification. Most importantly, collecting memorabilia directly affects travel intentions, and it also has a significant mediation effect on the path between TV show consumption and travel intention. Thus, the more memorabilia viewers collect, the stronger their travel intention becomes.

5 DISCUSSION

The main contribution of this research is that it reveals that collecting memorabilia serves to strengthen travel intentions;

previous research (Kim & Jang, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2018) has only considered them as a tangible aspect of tourism experience memories. Memorabilia function as bridging objects that link different times and places and can give individuals the satisfaction of psychological possession. Most audience members establish parasocial relationships with the characters and our findings evidence that weak and strong identification are two separate constructs and should be addressed accordingly. A person's enjoyment of a film, or their sustained watching of a TV series, is largely due to the on-screen characters: parasocial relationships with media personae is not a new phenomenon. But as our findings suggest, there is no need to search for hard-core fans to promote a destination.

It was hypothesized that media consumption affects memorabilia collection which further enhances viewers' intentions to travel to film locations. Our findings reveal that media consumption alone has a relatively small effect on travel intentions, although this effect can be amplified by encouraging viewers to immerse themselves in the fantasy world, this immersion is facilitated when viewers identify with the characters at some level.

Most importantly, the effect can be increased by collecting memorabilia. Memorabilia allow viewers to cross the threshold between the two worlds; they not only act as transitional objects between the fictive world and reality, but also pave the way for business and tourism marketing opportunities. Viewers who collect TV show memorabilia may find it hard to completely leave the show's (fantasy) world, and the more immersed they are in this narrative world, the more likely their film experience is to influence their behavior. The study findings also indicate that the indirect path from media consumption to travel intention is significantly mediated by collecting memorabilia, supporting our hypothesis. By analyzing the implications of viewers' parasocial identification and positive attitudes towards characters, our findings uncover the positive attitudes towards portrayed film destinations. Parasocial identification leads viewers to immerse themselves in fictive worlds but the nexus between these worlds and reality is established by memorabilia.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This research theorized that parasocial identification with TV series characters plays an important role in media consumption and that the latter is a key antecedent of travel intentions. In this era of global broadcasting and given the formidable fandom culture that has been constructed around fictive characters, such parasocial relationships must be considered in the broader tourism context. To widen the theoretical frame of parasocial identification, this study draws on Cupchik's (1997) distinction between weak and strong identification to reveal the effects of each on behavior and empirically tested their validity. The first theoretical implication of this study is to expand the parasocial theory which needs to be understood as a gradual structured process in the minds of viewers.

In line with past studies (Eyal & Dailey, 2012; Reijnders, 2010; Tian & Hoffner, 2010), this paper advances knowledge by assessing the role of parasocial identification with two separate constructs and their impact on consumer behavior. Our analysis of parasocial identification sheds light on the gradual structured nature of this process and shows that viewers ongoing entanglement with fantasy worlds is reinforced by the strength of the bond that they establish with its characters. This findig has further implications. The theory of dramaturgy, enhanced by interactive video on demand services - when viewers decide how the plot should continue -disrupts our understanding of parasocial identification. Moreover, in the dramaturgy of some recent TV shows, characters' identities often change: villains become heroes and vice versa. It might be fruitful to explore how this impacts consumer behavior.

The second implication is to widen the theoretical frame of film memorabilia in screen tourism by drawing on the theory of transitional objects (Winnicott, 1953). Transitional objects, such as film memorabilia, make illusory experiences tangible and enable individuals to cross the threshold between the imagined and the mundane. The theory of extended-self (Belk, 2018) and the theory of psychological ownership (Pierce & Peck, 2018) have enriched our knowledge on the role of memorabilia and how they strengthen travel intention. Thus, we suggest that memorabilia can be tangible aspects of (potential) future tourism experiences and as such act as 'magical bridging tools' which intensify individuals' wish to travel.

Finally, by defining memorabilia as transitional objects that link illusion and reality, this study has captured a significant aspect of mediation which had, until now, remained unexplored.

5.2. Managerial implications: How to leverage memorabilia linked to characters

Parasocial identification with fictive characters impacts travel intentions. Based on this finding the psychological distance between seemingly unattainable fictive worlds and screen tourism destinations can be shortened in marketing communication. Memorabilia as 'magical bridging tools' connect the two realms. This finding has an immediate practical value: memorabilia are able to make intangible tourism products tangible. It is often a challenge for film locations to make themselves visible and tangible as potential tourism destinations memorabilia understood as transitional objects can serve in this process. Promotional materials showing media personae at a destination, whether backstage or enjoying tourism experiences, are likely to increase viewers' interest in visiting that destination. DMOs should be proactive and try to develop co-branding strategies and deal with eventual copyright issues.

Destination marketers are also advised to develop tangible, material memorabilia through co-branding: memory games, for example, in which the film location is matched with the characters, or with the destination's attractions. The tourism destination marketers need to consider that destination choice decisions often are spontaneous, intuitive, or irrational, so such games provide people with a transitional experience between illusion and reality (Krakover & Corsale, 2021). Such games provide people with a transitional experience between illusion and reality. Tourism marketers are advised to consider the impact of TV shows on tourists' attitudes and behaviors, especially when the latter are deciding where to go on holiday. Thematic tours offered at filming locations could benefit from our findings. Service providers might, for instance, give tourists the opportunity to choose their

favourite fictive characters at the pre-trip stage and then to build their visit (virtually), by following a character around the destination and seeing the place through their eyes. This process can be made tangible by booking confirmation with the visual representation of show's character. Tourists do not need to strongly identify with a character: if viewers can become immersed in a narrative world, and experience weak identification with its characters, they can be effectively addressed as a target segment. On-site themed tour providers can stimulate the booking of themed tours by the online selling of personalised memorabilia featuring TV characters. Accommodation services could (re)position themselves by building on tourists' parasocial identification with fictive characters and allowing tourists to visualize themselves as one of a show's characters. Menus in restaurants and bars which reflect different TV show characters' tastes and preferences or build on short narratives linked to the characters' experiences, could develop tailored services by leveraging parasocial identification.

5.3. Limitations and future research paths

This study is not free from limitations. First, although most GOT episodes were filmed in real rural or urban locations, the fantasy world in which the show is set was designed using special effects and digital technologies. The study needs to be replicated to test the validity of the model with different film genres. For example, a study of documentary or reality show viewers' media consumption and their propensity to visit a destination might produce different results.

Second, GOT had more than 330 characters and almost 60% of them died shortly after their first appearance; the viewers of TV shows whose characters survive for longer are very likely to identify more strongly with their favourites. Replicating the study with long-running TV shows whose protagonists are iconic characters might provide new insights into whether parasocial identification with a character induces viewers to visit actual film locations.

Nevertheless, while the data was collected and analyzed during the Covid-19 pandemic, the results are by no means obsolete. Under lockdown there has been a significant rise in online entertainment consumption, with videos on demand proving the most popular, therefore data gathered during and after lockdowns may produce different results. About 204 million Netflix subscribers are currently watching TV shows worldwide (Statista, 2021), the destinations where these shows were filmed can be leveraged by tourism marketers through potential tourists' parasocial identification with characters. Although this study provides important insights into the act of collecting memorabilia during the pre-trip stage, future studies could address several issues. Studies have shown that memorabilia play a role in post-trip experiences, by eliciting memories and generating word-of-mouth. Psychological distance theory could be expanded in future studies to shed light on how to overcome experiential, spatial, temporal and social distances between fictive worlds and tourism destinations. For example: what are the effects of online memorabilia collection on consumer behavior, more broadly? More specifically, at which consumer behavior stages can memorabilia influence the decision-making process? These questions can drive future research paths.

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