UAE: Cultural Representation and Re-Creating Emirates Environment in International Films and its Implications for Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to highlight the role and importance of the cinema in raising tourism, introducing the UAE's tourism potential, promoting and attracting tourism, and increasing local development. Because 'there is [.] a lack of data-driven academic research that measures the effects of film industry on local tourism' (Tkalec et al. 2017, p.705). Further, 'the impacts of film tourism still appear to be under-appreciated. Though the effects of film tourism can have significant long-term benefits' (Hudson, 2011, p. 165). Likewise, Connell and Meyer argue that 'understanding of the experiences of screen tourists in film and TV locations remains an emerging area of inquiry' (2009, p. 194). This article 'evaluates the effects of film industry on tourism outcomes' (Tkalec et al. 2017, p.705) in the UAE.

The article interpreted the films' portrayal to reveal how UAE's culture and the environment were represented in the international movies filmed in the UAE. Cities of UAEs are not merely replicated in international films but constructed anew; reimagined, or repurposed according to filmmakers' and cinematographers' points of view and the role of those cities within that vision. Huge attention, however, is paid to representing the UAE's cities in international films. How do the filmmakers contribute to portraying the UAE and represent the knowledge on-screen in the filming process? Reviewing international filming in the UAE will explore possible answers to these informed questions.

Keywords: Representation, Filming, Tourist Destination, recreating, Tourism development, UAE.

Introduction

Films are often viewed as documentation platforms and mirrors of reality; 'one of the magical functions of cinema: a perceived mental space is created by – and depends on – cinema's power to suggest an off-screen space; an illusory, non-visualised space outside our field of vision [..]' (Koeck, 2012, p. 99). Cinema has become accessible to audiences of all segments, regardless of linguistic ability, educational status or cultural background. After the significant support of the UAE official authorities in providing all the facilities, filmmakers from Hollywood, Bollywood and other international cinema productions see the UAE as an exceptional destination to shoot their films representing the UAE. Dyer (2002) writes that representations are always necessary to use codes and conventions of cultural forms available for presentation. Emirati streets have become a home for cinema cameras and a destination for prominent actors and filmmakers. It can describe UAE landmarks as the ideal place for cinematography, as it is a perfect blend of East and West landmarks and as 'an example of a positive orientalism' (Granholm 2012, p.495). International filmmakers went to convey a lovely and positive image of the UAE, a crucial step to encouraging tourism and introducing people to the UAE. Avraham & Ketter describe the Middle East as 'the Middle East occupies a place of honour in the world because of its long history' (2015, p. 83).

Undoubtedly, the art of cinema has essential cultural and economic dimensions that the UAE cannot overlook. It seeks to occupy a prominent position on the world stage through the cooperation of several government agencies in the UAE to provide the necessary support to the film's teams and the infrastructure for high-quality production services. Further, to attract the best experiences working in the film industry globally, encourage local capabilities and find talents in various film industry sectors. This intellectual and political rhetoric by those in charge ___the intellectuals __ for building positive images of the UAE and its various cultures results in supporting the cross-fertilisation of cultures between East and West. They transact within an ideological framework full of passion, impartiality, and objectivity. As Arabs intellectuals, their significant role comes as a discourse because 'Said's Orientalism presents a profound methodological challenge' (Mani and Frankenberg 1985, p. 191).

In his book *'The Representations of the Intellectuals'*, Said invites the intellectuals not to adhere to double standards and to "practice universality". The intellectual for him is "[…] an individual with a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced to being a faceless professional. […] the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public." (Said 1994, P. 11). Also, he recommends that intellectuals' efforts rise above prevailing conventions and beliefs. As such, the UAE's intellectuals are burdened with taking responsibility and assuming a specific role to challenge the Orientalist and dominant discourse ___ that Said (1987) described as gradually building up a frame of reference to the world about

Islam and Arab Muslims __ through providing the suitable environment for film productions from around the world. This framework's facility made it easy to understand Arab/Islam as anything other than Orientalist discourse by representing UAE which competes well with developed countries.

The role of the intellectuals is challenging; their missions were to adjust to modernity while hanging on to the spirit of their Islamic identity and heritage. Furthermore, restoring the discussion between Eastern culture and Western to reconnect humanity as an end, not a means. Intellectuals' role is to participate in the prospect, beliefs, loves, and anxiety of the 'Orient'. Their mission is to create a new and actual reality about the Orient. Mani and Frankenberg (1985) argue that '[..] there is a real Orient in the sense of a geographical place peopled with actual human beings. If it did not exist except as an imaginative realm there would have been no raison d'ttre for an Orientalism' (p. 186).

I would argue that the goal of those in charge ___the intellectuals __ is to build positive images of the UAE. Its various cultures present models of Edward Said and other scholars through 'Said's assertions, [..] that the Orient is a richly differentiated and complex place' (Mani and Frankenberg 1985, p. 191). It is not to capture the cognitive differences and discussions in these models but to prove how they unite and reach the ultimate goal of promoting peace, justice and democracy. Hence, the UAE goal is appropriate and compatible with the scholars because the primary responsibility rests with the authorities in UAE to have an increasingly important role through the endless support for filming inside UAE. Representing UAE in films will help shape public opinion by defining and assigning meaning to the East. This positive Orientalism attempts to correct understanding, so '[..] in the light of positive orientalism, becomes a lens through which the familiar can be seen in new ways' (Granholm 2012, p.513).

Because in the UAE, 'an increasing number of film and tourism industry stakeholders have begun to work together with the dual goals of attracting film production and then capitalising on the subsequent exposure' (Cynthia and Beeton, 2009; cited in Hudson, 2011, p. 166). The success of some international films filmed in UAE exposed UAE's landscape as portrayed as a modern/urban Middle-East, to a vastly growing number of tourists. 'If we consider the visual intensity that cities present today, through the presence of various forms of urban advertisement, and in particular through sign structures and street canvases, one wonders if these could be interpreted as mere requisites of a theatrical or cinematic play in which the city acts as a stage set for narratives that are directed by various interest groups' (Koeck, 2012, p. 161).

Filming to a revival of tourism and the economy: Global experiences and the Emirati experiences

1. Global experiences

Since its inception, cinema has significantly influenced individuals' lives, decisions, and choices, positively or negatively. It has become a wide field for passing ideas, beliefs and desires and spreading them among individuals and societies in various areas of life, including political, social, psychological, cultural and even the field of travel and tourism. People have found their inspiration for travel with the emergence of TV series and movies that have become more popular than literature and reading in recent years. That is why it is not surprising that in recent years, what is known as "movie tourism" has emerged as one of the most growing and widely sought-after tourism sectors compared to other types of tourism. 'In the UK, for example, around one in ten foreign visitors come as a result of seeing the country depicted in film' (Hudson, 2011, p. 166). Film tourism is that type of tourism associated with a specific movie so that the places where the film was filmed become popular tourist destinations for movie fans. Therefore, fans get to know the site closed to experience an escape to a "different world", the world of films and series they watch.

Regarding the sustainability of film tourism, research indicates that film tourism can play an essential role in reviving local economies in the long run. Hudson (2011) writes that New Zealand and Australia benefited from the considerable success of the films that were shot there and used a coordinated strategy to promote tourism in the wake of the films. It also turns out that owning a movie for a city or tourist destination can effectively market tourism.

In the film "Food, Pray, Love," for example, where Julia Roberts begins a journey of searching for herself after meaninglessness and boredom take over her entire life. She begins a journey of transformation, changes, and gaining meaning little by little with every place she visits and explores, starting from Italy, passing through India, Bali and others. This movie will make one dream about eating more pasta in the lanes of ancient Italy, riding a bike around Bali, dancing the night away on its beaches, walking through rice fields in Indonesia or even joining religious groups and temples in India. The good news is that many people decided to immediately implement the desire and start their journey targeting the filming locations.

The "Lord of the Rings" and "The Fellowship of the Ring" films put New Zealand on the world's map of distinctive tourist destinations. Most tourists visited rural areas and enjoyed the stunning panoramic views that appeared before their eyes just as they appeared in the movies.

'The Lord of the Rings (LOTR) film trilogy has exposed New Zealand to a global audience of potential travellers. By packaging and promoting it as the 'Home of Middle-Earth', New Zealand – and destinations within it – have become the iconic landscapes of the trilogy' (Carl et al., 2007, p. 49)

As for tourism inspired by the series "Game of Thrones", it is also one of the most significant tourism and travel destinations, as it has reshaped the tourism economy of many countries, like Ukraine and Iceland. Iceland has allocated several walking and roaming trails led by dedicated guides to track the lands and areas in which the scenes of the series and its wars were filmed. (Tkalec et al., 2017) argues about the effect of this TV series on tourism in Ukraine that 'we find a robust and positive effect of filming the TV series in Dubrovnik on the number of tourist arrivals. Additionally, we show that there is positive spill over effects on other counties and the whole country' (p.705). Likewise 'the location of Ubud is unique as a research area for those studying the impact of film tourism on residents as it was already a famous tourist destination in Bali long before the EPL film phenomenon' (Kim et al., 2018, p. 128).

2.   The Emirati experiences

UAE has made great strides in attracting foreign film and television production to the United Arab Emirates as part of an ongoing effort to diversify from its oil-based economy. We should consider the significant material benefits for the local population in UAE during the films' productions stage; (Kim et al., 2018) argue that 'the material impacts perceived were mainly related to the direct monetary benefits injected into the local community, which can be categorised as follows: 1. Extra job opportunities through individual participation in the film's production, for example, as supporting actors or extras, site managers, or film crew assistants. 2. Lending out of shops, land (e.g., rice fields), properties, or other facilities (e.g., parking) for the film's production. 3. Financial compensation for the blocking off of some roads and neighbourhoods for filming. 4. A sudden increase in food and beverage sales for local vendors and warungs to accommodate film crews and domestic visitors' (p. 130). In this context, it becomes logical for governments to incentivise filmmakers and production companies to shoot a movie in their countries to encourage tourism and thus achieve growth and recovery in the local economy. As with the UAE, can our other Arab countries achieve the same thing one day?

The quality of the facilities that the UAE provides filmmakers to shoot a movie is top-notch, 'especially those who work in the tourism industry or who see the direct economic benefit of the film' (Kim et al., 2018, p. 132). It is played a significant role in choosing filming locations and ensuring the completion of production operations according to specified schedules. The filmmakers have everything available here, from crew to equipment. Moreover, with its sprawling space, the studio (Twofour54 Abu Dhabi) offers stand-up sets that replicate ancient West Asian and African towns amid desert landscapes.

 Hollywood filmmakers and stars have become significant clients to shoot in the UAE. The most famous international artists and actors from Bollywood and Hollywood have chosen to shoot many different films in UAE. For example (Fast and Furious 7) (2015), most scenes were filmed in Abu Dhabi. Also, in Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps (2010), some of its scenes were filmed in Dubai, showing the

extent of the impact of the global financial crisis on the financial markets in Arab countries. Syriana (2005), some of its shots were filmed in Dubai, starring George Clooney, Matt Damon and Amr Waked; (Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol) (2011) - was filmed in Dubai, precisely in the Burj Khalifa, where the journey began quietly from the world's tallest skyscraper. This film gained very high viewership ratings. The film also contains shots from the famous Palm Jumeirah, Armani Hotel and Zabeel Saray. In addition to more Hollywood films shot in UAE, for instance, The Kingdom (2007), Star Wars Episode VII, The Force Awakens (2015), Star Trek – Beyond (2016), 6 Underground (2019), Vanguard (2020), The Misfits (2021), and Dune (2021).

Besides Hollywood, in recent years, Bollywood has become a significant client, with an increasing number of Indian films choosing to shoot in the UAE, which has become convenient. An example is *Vikram Vida* (2017), *Happy New Year* (2014), *Welcome* (2007) and *Welcome Back* (2015), *Partner* (2007), and *Humari Adhuri Kahani* (2015). 'At the pre-production stage, it is important to assess a film's merit carefully in terms of its promotional value for target markets. Films that reflect an authentic image of the country and capture the essence of a place – whether it is scenery or cultural content – tend to be the most successful. At this pre-production stage, it is also very important for locations to negotiate credits for being used in the film – even if the location is a backdrop for another' (Hudson, 2011, p. 167).

Therefore, the existing cooperation between the UAE intellectuals and those in charge of attracting foreign films produced its fruits, as these films are shot in different places around the UAE, reflecting the famous architecture of the United Arab Emirates. The quotes below from Koeck's theoretical texts, *Cine-scapes: Cinematic Spaces in Architecture and Cities* (2012), highlight cinematic spaces' role in the cities. The UAE authorities start from the principle of '[..] should we bother about a cinematic approach to architecture and urban spaces in our everyday existence?' (Koeck, 2012, p. 108). As such, an epic action scene between the Etihad Towers, the Emirates Palace Hotel, Liwa Desert and Yas Island, the Meydan Race Track, The Jumeirah Lakes Towers, in the city of "Maidan", which is the largest horse track in the Middle East, Downtown Dubai and Burj Al Arab. Took advantage of the towers and skyscrapers that characterise Dubai as a backdrop for events, as they are "enchanting to the eye" and create an enjoyable atmosphere on the cinema screen. Filmed Malls, Atlantis hotel and Dubai Airport, the aquarium and the giant aquarium in the Dubai Mall in shopping centres and hotels in the emirate where 'the city goes soft and begins to shape itself around our cinematic memory' (Koeck, 2012, p. 160). As such, 'the residents of the UAE have strong and positive perceptions of the social, cultural, and economic impacts of tourism, and they support tourism development in the UAE. The most important antecedent of support for tourism development is culture, followed by the economic and social benefits associated with tourism' (Papastathopoulos et al., 2020, p. 1132).

International films produced in the UAE have impacted many excellent aspects of the emirates, '[..] movies in which cities and urban visualisations play an important role [..]'(Koeck, 2012, p. 146). It includes its various cultural landmarks and the manifestations of urbanisation and economic, cultural, and social development. It helps strengthen these emirates' position locally and globally for its combination of golden desert dunes, towering skyscrapers, and architecture, particularly its attractions and notable landmarks. 'We could consider more spaces and places, not only for their visual but also their sonic-spatial signature. Film and digital video are undoubtedly useful tools to capture, analyse and generate spaces with clear temporal qualities in architecture in the future. With this in mind, are filmmakers better designers of architectural and urban spaces? [...], cities are increasingly becoming visual constructs which, [..], are inhabited by a population that is deeply visually literate. It is an intriguing thought that, in the future, we might want to consult film professionals with a track record in the articulation of certain film spaces for comment or advice on how to increase the tactile, sensory or sonic qualities of architectural spaces' (Koeck, 2012, p. 106). Hence, it has an impact on attracting More and more tourists who will be eager to get to know these aspects up close, which considers '[..] the appeal of a positive orientalism where the "East" is valued [..]' (Granholm 2012, p.509).

Through those films, one can see how effective the visual and cultural representation of the UAE can be. The UAE's distinctive icons and film locations are considered part of the narrative where 'architecture and urban form can be understood as cinematic apparatus' (Koeck, 2012, p. 108). As such, international film shooting in UAE is considered to be a revival of tourism and the economy, and films can view an alternative to advertising. Significantly, the international cultural collaboration results in outstanding technical expertise from which the Emirati Youth generation benefits through their work with global technical teams. As such, these young talents can, in turn, innovate and take on the financial, technical, artistic and legal issues related to filmmaking in their country. 'In the film industry, there is a growing realisation that leveraging film tourism can bring significant benefits to the local film industry' (Hudson, 2011, p. 166). Moreover, Kim (2018) mentioned the local culture and the identity of the residents reflected in these films as another benefit.

Expectations

Tourists always expect good destinations and landscapes according to their expectations; they build their expectations on the visual images through films. "Destination images are not necessarily grounded in experience or facts, but they are always powerful motivators in leisure travel and tourism" (Middleton and Clarke, 2001, p. 126). Tourism research has shown that films encourage tourism by excess the realisation of the destinations and stimulating to experience the locations portrayed in the films. Riley and Van Doren (1992) write about the role of cinema in promoting tourism; they analysed some films through the sites and mentioned the numbers of tourists in the USA, Georgia, and Australia who visit these sites.

Conclusion

The article highlighted academic discussions on representation in films and the impact of filming in locations on the tourist experience of those locations. The film can promote sites and portrays authenticity. There are several examples where a film portrayal can reveal the identity of a whole country, as in the UAE. The films' content represents the UAE's environment to act as various icons in these films, which viewers can consider as "extraordinary or captivating" features that will awaken the desire of filmic tourists. In the context of these films, tourists will be attracted to revisit these locations and experience them inside the UAE. This article contributes to existing knowledge of the relationship between filming and tourism, describing the UAE's culture and geography. I can say there is a relationship between the successful films that portray the UAE and the increase in tourist numbers in the UAE.

Through the facilities that attract international film production to the UAE, the UAE's positive representation in these films proves that Western writings on the Orient and concepts contained in Orientalist literature should not be treated with their apparent value. Because they are cultural perceptions based on illusions and Western perceptions of the East, through its representation by the films, the way of approaching the identity, multicultural, and environment of UAE would challenge the negative Orientalism and its problematic discourses on the Orient. However, this representation is '[...] engaged in positive orientalist discourses that cast a longing gaze to the exotic Orient, a feature so central to much esoteric discourse' (Granholm 2012, p.516).

Tourist countries, including the UAE, have realised the importance of cinematic discourse and its prominent role in tourism promotion. They hastened to give excellent facilities and opportunities to attract international film productions to their distinctive tourist places for filming in their cities, villages, mountains, deserts and streets. With all that, the scenes of these films bear from the dress, traditions, dishes and popular customs of the region's people. It would encourage the recipient of the cinematic discourse to visit these places, that is, to achieve tourist attractions so that some of the places where some scenes were filmed will turn into an important tourist destination. (Papastathopoulos et al., 2020) argue that 'the tourism industry is considered one of the major drivers of economic diversification and growth for the Middle East' (p. 1119). Cinema contributes to a large extent to documenting the mental image of countries and promoting tourism, directly or indirectly; it enables communities to coexist, communicate and build new perspectives.

Most tourist countries like the UAE, which are full of excellent tourism potential, seek to attract visitors and many tourists. So, they are working to promote their various landmarks and cultures through various means and methods that can reach vast numbers of audiences, and among these means is the "cinema" that was made for it. 'If leveraged well, film tourism can have large economic gains for countries and regions' (Hudson, 2011, p. 166). A popular position among the masses, the film

industry today publishes many promotional messages for the places in which its films are shot to learn about the cultures of countries, their music, archaeological landmarks, folklore and advanced technology.

The UAE stands in the ranks of countries considered destinations that have embraced the relationship between film and tourism; some international films have exposed UAE's environment, landscapes and culture to the audience. In addition to being one of the world's multicultural countries, the UAE is committed to its heritage, historical traditions, authentic ancestors and parents, such as national celebrations, clothing, and forms of human relations that shape its identity. Hence, these films directly or indirectly represent the UAE's identity, environment, participation in the revival of its culture, and architecture and the city; as Koeck (2012) argues, 'can we view architecture and the city through the lens of a camera? [..] architecture and the city can be regarded through film and cinematic concepts (such as 'sequences and events', 'movement and passage' and 'rhythm and sound')' (p. 107).

Thus, these films reflect intercultural communication methods to ensure that the film can be accepted in all communities. They create a new perspective when we recognise the experiences of 'Others'. Hudson (2011) writes that the period after the release of the film is 'the period of time during and following the film's release is when many DMOs get involved in marketing activities related to film tourism. At this stage, the challenge for DMOs is to convert the audience's interest in a film into a commitment for a future visit and capitalise on additional visitors brought through film' (p. 169). This article is assumptive by the role played by representing the UAE's environment in international films and its implication for tourism in tourists' experiences and their numbers grew.

Recommendation

Some recommendations to increase tourist spending in the UAE include the UAE tourism bodies and all local tourist agents and visitor information centres to offer information on all film locations filmed in UAE. Further, to put signposts pointing to some famous scenes' positions and camera angles and allow easy access to the sites. Moreover, the tour guides could hold a celebration every year in the style of some of these films' portrayals by dressing up and using the same accessories. Also, encourage tourists to do as well, and re-enact a famous scene, for instance, Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible or George Clooney in Syriana. As such, the sustainability of film tourism will benefit the UAE for a long time.

To stimulate tourism, I highly recommend the role of tour guides to show tourists the unconventional production techniques of films set in the UAE and celebrate it as a kind of realism.
Generally, representing reality properly enhances tourist experiences because tourists prefer to experience the adventure of entering filming sites and using the actors' accessories to feel fully immersed in the films' events. In this context, the tour guides
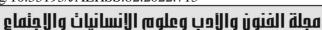
should have a prominent role in introducing all these sites by making tours around the country for tourists to experience the impression they saw on the screen. It seems that the UAE practices professionalism in supporting international filming inside the UAE and tourism management, which benefits the country and its people. (Kim et al., 2018) conclude the benefits of films for tourism in their book (Film tourism in Asia). To quote their words 'during the film production stage, the vast majority of respondents perceived immediate positive impacts generated by direct and indirect economic development and benefits, as well as non-material or nonmonetary benefits such as new life-changing experiences, improved self-esteem, personal growth, learning opportunities, and enhanced collective local community pride' (p. 138). Though the efforts shown by the UAE are tremendous, it is necessary to work on finding a robust cinematic policy that would introduce more about the tourism potential that the UAE abounds.

Suggestions for Further Research

This article does not claim to be an integrated study about the representation of UAE in films and western attitudes and perceptions towards them; there is more to say about the representation of the UAE in films than the issues addressed in this article. Through it, I hope to stimulate more dialogues and critical thinking and encourage other researchers to do this topic to give a comprehensive conception of representation, especially cultural representation. It can be more research on the long-time economic post-production impacts of filming in the UAE. Further, in more detail, another study can expose the effect of the films on tourists' conception of the UAE.

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