

# ” Not all those who wander are lost” - From Fantasy Readers into Travelers

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## Abstract

Literary tourism is a segment of cultural tourism involving literary texts, authors, and space fiction. While these traditions have nurtured the connection between literature and travel, this study suggests that literary tourism is more than merely visiting the homes of writers and buying souvenirs, but it has transformed into specifically branded tourism attractions. Fantasy literary tourism is a growing niche in which fans travel to fictional locations, usually part of a fantasy saga. This research explores the psychological and emotional motivations that drive fantasy literature readers to become travelers and explores how perceived destination image and marketing influence these decisions. The study is a combination of 24 semi-structured interviews and 566 TripAdvisor reviews of fantasy-related destinations of important series like *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Game of Thrones*, *Narnia*, and *The Hunger Games*. The data was then analyzed using Leximancer software, which highlighted the key recurring themes of the dataset. The resulting findings point out the importance of nostalgia, immersion, and authenticity as the main drivers, with travelers seeking to connect with their childhood memories and experience the world they could only imagine while reading the books. Marketing strategies are also highly relevant: social media, theming and strategically guided storytelling contribute to the formation of travel intentions and destination appeal. This study makes a novel contribution to the under-researched context of literary fantasy tourism through its focus on symbolic consumption and provides practice-based insights into how destination managers and marketers can design emotionally engaging and thematically authentic experiences.

### Key words:

- Fantasy literary tourism
- Experiential Travel
- Psychological motivations
- Emotional motivations
- Destination Image
- Fan Motivation

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## Resumo

O turismo literário é um segmento do turismo cultural que envolve textos literários, autores e ficção científica. Embora esta tradição tenha estabelecido uma ligação entre literatura e viagens, este estudo sugere que o turismo literário vai para além da visita a casas de escritores e da compra de recordações: trata-se de uma atração turística que corresponde a uma marca específica. O turismo literário de fantasia é um nicho em crescimento, no qual os fãs viajam para locais fictícios, geralmente associados a sagas de fantasia. Este estudo explora as motivações psicológicas e emocionais que levam os leitores de literatura a tornarem-se viajantes, analisando como a imagem percebida do destino e o marketing influenciam essas decisões. A investigação inclui 24 entrevistas semiestruturadas e 566 avaliações do TripAdvisor em destinos relacionados com obras de fantasia. Os dados foram analisados com recurso ao *software* Leximancer, que destacou os principais temas recorrentes. Os resultados evidenciam a importância da nostalgia, da imersão e da autenticidade como principais impulsionadores deste tipo de turismo, revelando que os turistas procuram ligar memórias de infância à experiência única proveniente da leitura dos livros. As estratégias de marketing também são relevantes: as redes sociais, os temas e as narrativas contribuem para promover a intenção de viajar para um determinado destino. Este estudo contribui de forma inovadora para o turismo literário de fantasia. Adicionalmente, permite aos operadores turísticos e profissionais de marketing criar experiências emocionalmente envolventes e autênticas.

### Palavras-chave:

- Turismo literário de fantasia
- Viagem experiencial
- Motivações psicológicas
- Motivações emocionais
- Imagem de destino
- Motivação dos fãs

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*"The world will be saved and remade by the dreamers."*

– Sarah J. Maas, Throne of Glass

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## 1. Introduction

Literary Tourism involves the literary heritage of places, mostly connected to visits to sites related to literary works and the lives of the writers. Its role is to link literature and tourism, a connection which is becoming increasingly recognized as a significant driver of cultural enrichment of destinations and sustainable tourism practices (Rodrigues et al., 2024). It occurs when authors or their works become so popular that people are drawn to visit either the locations mentioned in their books, museums associated with books, theme parks, or those locations associated with the authors, such as their birthplace, home, or graveside (Busby & Klug, 2001). This form of tourism blends cultural and heritage tourism with personal imagination, allowing visitors to interact with the authors they admire and engage with the literary worlds they love (Hoppen, Brown, & Fyall, 2014) as stated by Robertson & Radford, 2009, p. 206: “Literary pilgrims seek ‘a physical body to enable their senses to connect with objects read”.

Although literary tourism is not uncharted territory, it has captured the attention of scholars only in the last few decades (Çevik, 2020), perhaps given the most recent and significant shift from niche to mass tourism with the advent of literary festivals that are now expanding and reaching many countries around the world (Hoppen, Brown, & Fyall, 2014). In particular, travel narratives, poetry, literary works, or myths with tourism themes, which are used as a way for tourism promotion and branding (Nursaptini et al., 2020), contribute to the uniqueness of literary tourism, implying that tourists cannot find similar experiences at another destination (Fox, 2008). Examples are guided tours in Shakespeare’s Stratford, the Bronte’s Yorkshire, Hardy’s Dorset (Squire, 1994), and even experiences such as the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Orlando (FL), Parc Asterix near to Paris, Dickens World in England and The Holy Land experience in Orlando, Florida (Hoppen, Brown, & Fyall, 2014). In fact, literary places are no longer considered just as the ones with a link to authors of classical literature (Herbert, 2001), but more writers came into the scene, most specifically relevant fantasy literature authors such as J.K Rowling or Stephanie Meyer (Mintel 2011).

According to Knudsen et al. (2016), tourists tend to pursue fantasies to escape from the mundanity of their everyday lives. In fact, fantasy literary tourism, relies on a concept called “hot authentication”, different from “cool authentication”, which is defined by Cohen (2012) as supported by proof, whereas “hot” authentication is founded on belief (Cohen and Cohen's, 2012), meaning that more and more tourists’ fantasies are fueled by the desire to encounters with a more-than-human, intersubjective, magical world (Lovell & Thurgill, 2021). This

phenomenon is well highlighted in literary tourism associated with *Harry Potter*, in which case Lovell (2019), identified 6 possible sites in the UK that are said to have inspired J.K. Rowling in the depiction of the famous street *Diagon Alley* in her fantasy series, even if never confirmed by the author herself. Therefore, based on hot authentication, even if inspiration from such places comes from the author's subconscious (Corbin, 1972; Blanchot, 1955), visitors tap into their *Mundus Imaginalis*, establishing a dialogue with their myths and symbols, and engaging with them as if they are real parts of everyday life (Alves, 2018). Additionally, according to Pan (2006), the experience behind literary tourism is intangible, since it requires the visitors' imagination to be part of the process to trigger motivation to visit these places, and this is driven by the desire to realize the dreams, fantasy, and imagination stimulated by reading the books (Bu et al., 2021). Furthermore, the success of these destinations is sustained through interactive branding (Park, Treen, Pitt, & Chan, 2023) and digital storytelling (Lundt et al, 2018), which reinforce the blurred boundaries between fantasy and reality in tourism (Can, Ekinci, & Dilek-Fidler, 2025).

Despite studies point out that literary tourism has high research potential as an academic field as an increasing recognition as a niche within cultural tourism, and that it provides numerous benefits to destinations when developed as a special interest tourism type (Çevik, 2020), in the academic context, literary tourism remains an under-researched area (Smith, 2003). In addition to this, while many studies explore literary tourism as a whole by scholars such as (Hoppen et al., 2014), (Çevik, 2020), (Sudardi, 2024), (Squire, 1994), (Baleiro & Quinteiro, 2018), (Bu et al., 2021), (Intel 2011), (Rodrigues et al., 2024), (Herbert, D. 2001), there is a significant research gap regarding the motivations behind fantasy literary tourism and how marketing influences travelers' decisions to visit fantasy-related sites. Addressing this gap, this study investigates the role of marketing strategies and fan engagement in shaping the appeal of fantasy literary tourism.

This research has two main objectives:

First, to analyze the key **psychological and emotional motivations** that drive travelers to visit destinations associated with **fantasy literature**.

Second, to examine the **marketing strategies** used to promote **fantasy-related destinations**.

Accordingly, this study uses a qualitative approach to better understand the visitors' motivations and the destination marketing strategies concerning fantasy literary tourism.

Interviews with readers of fantasy literature and travelers will be conducted in order to understand psychological and emotional triggers. These will also be accompanied by the examination of a wide range of reviews dedicated to popular fantasy sites, to investigate more commonplace marketing narratives and practices. This will help to answer the following underlying research questions:

What psychological and emotional factors motivate travelers to visit fantasy literary destinations?

How does the perceived destination image influence travelers' motivations to engage with fantasy literary tourism experiences?

This research is organized into five main sections. The first section, "Literature Review," examines key themes relevant to this study by analyzing previous research. The following section, "Methodology," outlines the data collection methods used in this study. Next, the "Results" section presents the collected data, which is then explored in greater depth in the "Discussion" section. Finally, the "Conclusion" summarizes the main findings, providing insights that address the study's primary research question.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Fantasy Literary Tourism

Fantasy literature is a genre that includes both fictional and cultural themes, and which usually involved the presence of magic, mythical and supernatural beings, as well as enchanted objects (Boucher, 2024), and thus involve imaginative stories and characters, who are driven by events that are said to be “fictional” (Bennett, Matos et al., 2023; Laing et al., 2009). Unlike realist fiction, which is characterized by the representation of real life, or science fiction, which is based on the scientifically possible (James and Mendlesohn, 2012), fantasy is often categorized as a “literature of the impossible” (Boucher, 2024, p.102). According to J.R.R. Tolkien in his essay “On Fairy-Stories”, fictional stories are based on the restoration of mental balance, escape from reality, and happy ending. This means that fantasy worlds are a way for people to get rid of common stereotypes and see things as they truly are, be free from the restrictions of modern society, and to sort of uplift their soul, all outside the realm of scientific validity (Naumchik, 2024). In fact, narratives are a way to give order to reality by giving shape to people’s imaginations (Gottschall, 2013).

One of the defining theoretical contributions to fantasy studies is Boucher’s (2024) concept of the “affective novum”, which, according to the author, is what differentiates fantasy from science fiction. While science fiction typically presents a “cognitive novum”, meaning that they are based on visionary aims like impossible new laws of physics, fantasy deals with constructed subjectivity, dealing with unattainable desires, emotions, and beliefs (Boucher, 2024).

#### 2.1.1 Fantasy Literary Tourism and Imagination

Fantasy literary tourism is built on complex fictional realities, which are reproduced in the imagination of the readers as they proceed with the storyline (Adams, 2014; Ehn et al., 2010: 142; Laing et al., 2009). According to John Caughey (1984) people live in two different worlds at the same time, on one hand, there is the reality they can perceive through their senses, which allows them to perceive the environment around them, on another hand there is the spiritual world that comes from memories, fantasies, and daydreams (Reijnders, 2016). Fantasy tourism is experiential, and it relies on the concept of topophilia/topophobia, the love or fear for a place which arises from the love or fear for the story (Reijnders, 2016). This can also be explained with the concept of *escapism*, which relates to the wish of getting away, escaping, travelling, or to the reader’s imagination, but both ways provide a short-term illusory perception of being elsewhere (Lipovšek et al., 2015). Thus, it can be affirmed that fantasy literary tourism extends

beyond physical travel, but it's rather a psychological journey. Fantasy literature provides a safe space for readers to process trauma, a phenomenon that extends to tourism, where fans use travel as a form of personal transformation (Army, 2022).

Salazar (2012) conceptualizes this phenomenon with the term "tourism imaginaries", according to which imaginaries are socially transmitted representations that interact with people's personal imaginings and which tourism marketers use to sell dreams, since a fantasy or illusion arises as a reaction to a psychological need (Lacan, 1977) that they want to satisfy. In fantasy literary tourism, destinations are not just geographical locations, but they are places where readers can immerse themselves in their favorite fictional realm, and where visitors engage with the *affective novum* of their loved stories (Boucher, 2024). Some examples that can be identified are that of New Zealand, which is the filming locations of *The Lord of the Rings*, which has become a global hub for Tolkien fans (Reijnders, 2016). London with sites like King's Cross Station (Platform 9¾) and Warner Bros. Studio Tours, that immerse visitors in the Harry Potter universe (McLeod, 2022), or Transylvania, home of Dracula and vampires (Light, 2009).

### 2.1.2 Economic Impact of Fantasy Literary Tourism

The economic impact of fantasy literary tourism is substantial, and it is linked to both how destinations are fictionalized and the creation of these imaginary worlds. As Doležel states "the universe of possible worlds is constantly expanding and diversifying thanks to the incessant world-constructing activity of human minds and hands" (Doležel, 2000, p. 30). The recreations of these fictional places follow the notion of *chronotopic* (Bakhtin, 1981), according to which the fiction-induced tourism has become easier thanks to text interpretations and media adaptations, with locations increasingly being branded and commercialized to accommodate fans (Lipovšek et al., 2015). This phenomenon, known as fiction-induced tourism, has caused the commodification of literary places, that is, literary spaces become tourist products, and are transformed into theme parks, merchandise, and tourist packages. (Florido-Benítez, 2023).

However, as it has been happening with fantasy literary tourism, the search for economic gain has turned fantasy spaces into commodities and this has brought some sustainability and cultural issues mainly related to over-tourism with consequent environmental destruction and cultural exploitation, for example the case for Transylvania, where it may be that Dracula's home will eliminate the region as it really, with its local history and identities (Light, 2009). For example, the Warner Bros. Harry Potter Studio Tour in London and the Hobbiton set in New Zealand, by

contrast, are highly uplifted tour experiences, reclaiming the Harry Potter and The Lord of the Rings environments in a new format, but these are cinematic restorations, rather than historical or authorial (McLeod, 2022), and scholars worry it would lead to the over-commercialization of turning serious literary experiences into theme-park attractions (Reijnders, 2016).

## 2.2 Experiential Travel

In the past decades, the travel sector has moved from mass tourism to experiential travel, reflecting a growing desire of travelers for deeper and more meaningful experiences (Dridea et al., 2023). While traditional tourism revolves around more standardized itineraries, experiential travel engages visitors with local cultures and communities, allowing them to have a role in shaping the places they visit (Pandey et al., 2021).

According to self-determination theory (SDT), which investigates individuals' innate psychological tendency toward self-motivation and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000), tourists are driven by social esteem, desire for experiential travel, and uniqueness (Chan et al., 2016). These constructs rely on the fact that the purchase of a special tourist product or service is a way to cultivate individuality, as the ownership of unique items plays an important role in defining one's own identity (Snyder, 1992). This shift in tourism preferences has crucial implications for destination marketing, travel consumption patterns, and tourism management innovations (Chan et al., 2016).

### 2.2.1 The Role of Experiential Marketing in Tourism

Tourism research is moving away from the traditional view of "tourists-as-rational-decision-makers", and it's adopting a more comprehensive approach that considers both experiential and rational determinants of tourist decisions (Le et al., 2019). When travelling, people can make both experiential and material purchases (Hwang et al., 2019), the former refer to those types of purchases made to obtain intangible life experiences (like visiting a famous museum, or attending a play at a Broadway theater), while the latter involves the purchase of tangible objects to be owned (e.g. clothes, new iPhone) (Van Boven et al., 2003). The average consumption timing of these purchases reveals that people generally prefer to consume experiential purchases at a later stage in their travels since they tend to have greater satisfaction from those (Kumar et al., 2016) due to their preference for a happy ending, thus building up a memory advantage on the overall perception of their journey (Murdock, 1962; Varey et al., 1992). In fact, according to Uysal et al. (2016), tourism activities are the ones that have the most beneficial influence on tourists' overall well-being, given that such activities are a central component of the "during-

travel” experience itself (Xiang et al., 2015), as well as the “post-travel” feelings that come when the experience is remembered (J. H. Kim et al., 2012).

When it comes to the “pre-travel” experience, Köchling (2021) highlights the role of experiential marketing in shaping travelers’ expectations and emotions. When tourists look for information before their travels, they are also looking for anticipated experiences and inspirations for experiences (Fesenmaier et al., 2019; Larsen, 2007; Tung et al., 2011; Volo, 2010). Because of this, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) tend to achieve the stimulation of positive pre-travel Online Destination Experiences (ODEs) by using their websites (Ketter, 2018). These platforms aim to go beyond the sole characteristics of different places but also try to engage travelers’ senses and emotions (Hudson et al., 2009; Ketter, 2018; Nelson, 2014). This aligns with findings by Le et al., 2019, who point out that theories based on psychological processes, called “dual-processing theories” address the limitations of traditional theories like utility theories (Lancaster, 1966) and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), which don’t consider the experiential aspects of tourism consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) but rather focus solely on product characteristics and functional benefits, and this may not lead to the intended results since pleasure tourists seek experiential benefits such as fantasies, feelings and fun (Barnes et al., 2016). The rise of experiential travel has redesigned tourism marketing strategies, leading to the adoption of experiential marketing techniques, which uses sensory and symbolic stimuli designed to trigger imaginative and emotional responses throughout the decision-making process (Schmitt, 1999; Tsaour et al., 2007).

Moreover, after an in-depth analysis of the impact of website design on emotions travelers get before their journeys, Björk (2010) found out that the content and structure of information, and pictures, were two of the most important details on the marketing organizations’ websites. His work is backed up by research from scholars like Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, Jeon et al., 2018, An et al., 2021, who focused on mechanisms related to destination websites’ informativeness, design, and interactivity and, in virtual reality travel, sense and information quality, all of which positively relate to flow experiences. This form of marketing leverages Schmitt’s (1999) experiential marketing modules, which focus on sensory, affective, behavioral, intellectual, and social dimensions that contribute to consumer engagement by measuring brand experiences (Brakus et al., 2009).

Le et al. (2019) suggest that fantasies and emotions are two core components of tourist experiences, and for this reason, experiential marketing should be further used to deliver better results. Therefore, they strongly recommend customizing experiential marketing messages to target different tourist segments.

## 2.3 Motivation

According to Gredler et al. (2004), motivation is defined as “the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something” (p. 106), which aligns with Guay et al.'s (2010) definition of motivation as “the reasons underlying behavior” (p. 712). Motivation itself combines a set of beliefs, perceptions, values, interests, and actions that are all strongly linked (Lai, 2011), and for this reason Roberts et al., (2022) position it as the second domain of personality, even though it accounts for a more diverse set of phenomena compared to that of personality traits, including achievement motivations (Elliot et al., 1996), aspirations (Kasser, 2016), power motivations (Schultheiss et al., 2005), life values (Schwartz, 1994), and professional interests, such as practical and entrepreneurial interests (Nye et al., 2012).

While early studies of motivation primarily focused on extrinsic reinforcement (Stipek, 1996), which is motivation based on reward structures, contemporary research highlights the significance of intrinsic motivation (Broussard et al., 2004), which is based on pursuing an activity based on pure interest and enjoyment, rather than on external motives, to look for unfamiliarity and challenges, to explore, and to learn (Ryan et al., 2000). With intrinsic motivation, people dive into an experience for pure interest and satisfaction (Di Domenico et al., 2017).

This section will look at motivation through three main lenses: psychological motivations, emotional motivations, and fan motivation.

### 2.3.1 Psychological motivations

A person's travel behavior is strongly linked to their related psychological tendencies, which are relevant to studying the components that motivate people to travel (Li et al., 2013; Simkova et al., 2014). Motivation is defined as one of many determinants behind people's travel behavior and their interest in making new experiences (Um et al., 1992), and some of the most important motivations are the encounter with different cultures, exploration of unfamiliar settings, appreciation of environmental and artistic treasures, the interaction with locals, and the connection with nature (Buffa, 2015). Psychological motivations are activated when an individual has the need to belong, and psychologists attempt to show how these motivations

differ both within a person at different times or among different people at the same time (Deckers, 2018).

This section explores the major psychological theories applied to tourism motivation to gain insight into what motivates tourists to behave in a certain way, helping service providers to optimize and adapt their offers to better suit their target market (Yousaf et al., 2018). These include Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Dann's theory of Push and Pull motivations, Iso-Ahola's seeking-escaping theory, and the travel career pattern (TCP) model.

### *2.3.1.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Travel Motivation*

Because of its wide scope, Maslow's (1943) five-level hierarchy of needs remains one of the most influential theories applied by researchers trying to understand travel behavior, since it helps clarify and explain the behavioral tendencies of tourists. Maslow (1943) divides human behavior into five different levels of needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs, in which the fulfillment of one need leads to another on a higher level, thus leading to the formation of a hierarchy (Yousaf et al., 2018).

When applied to the tourism industry, Maslow's model suggests that:

- Physiological needs are the basic needs travelers expect to find in their destinations and are satisfied through basic travel comforts such as accommodation and dining experiences. (Maslow, 1943).
- Safety needs influence tourists' preference for safe and secure environments, in which they feel protected from any harm. (Maslow, 1943).
- Social belonging needs to refer to the formation of relationships to create a feeling of being part of a group, of belongingness. (Maslow, 1943).
- Esteem motivates individuals to travel to impress other people being family, friends, or a broader social group to climb the social ladder (Maslow, 1943).
- Self-actualization needs are the highest in the hierarchy. These are the ones that fuel transformational travel, where individuals seek personal growth, spiritual experiences, and skill development. (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's five-level hierarchy of needs theory is generally accepted among scholars in the tourism industry (Jang et al., 2006). However, Goebel et al. (1981), have pointed out some possible weaknesses of the theory, assessing that a certain behavior may be triggered for more than one need at a time, and actions might follow a non-linear path through Maslow's hierarchy.

### *2.3.1.2 Dann's Theory of Push and Pull Motivations*

Another widely accepted, if not the most accepted, theoretical framework in tourism research is Dann's push and pull theory of motivations (Goossens, 2000; Jang et al., 2002; Yuan et al., 1990). According to Dann (1997), factors that motivate tourists to visit a particular destination can be divided into push or pull motivations. Push factors are those that motivate the tourist to travel at first, since they are the ones that spark the interest to travel. Pull factors are the elements that draw an individual toward a particular destination once the internal push motivation has been activated.

These factors are a way for marketers and destination planners to attract more tourists if exploited in the right way, and push factors, if leveraged in the right way, can become pull factors in later stages. On the other hand, also pull factors can help set off push factors. This is why it is crucial for destinations to be able to meet consumer demands when it comes to prices, facilities, and quality (Yousaf et al., 2018).

Two years after Dann's theory of push and pull motivations, Crompton (1979) proposed another model on push-pull factors, based on the previous one, in which he proved that seven factors motivate people to go on a trip in the first place, the push factors, and two pull motives (Nikjoo et al., 2015).

### *2.3.1.3 Iso-Ahola's Seeking-Escaping Theory of Travel Motivation*

In 1982, Iso-Ahola proposed a social-psychological model building on Maslow's work and departing from the push-pull approach (Jang et al., 2009).

According to Iso-Ahola (1982, 1983), there are two significant factors driving travelers' motivation:

- Seeking: also called approach motivation, is when tourists seek personal fulfillment, such as adventure, learning, and self-improvement.
- Escaping: also called avoidance motivation, is when travel is used as a means to escape stress, monotony, or negative social environments.

Iso-Ahola (1982) suggests that seeking and escaping are not opposing forces, since they often operate simultaneously when individuals seek unfamiliarity while escaping their routine. A tourist may try to escape from urban stress by going to a remote natural setting to reconnect with nature.

However, Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking framework and the push-pull model appear to be closely interconnected, since some typical examples of push motivations may be seeking or escaping, which are the core dimensions of motivation suggested by Iso-Ahola (1982, 1983).

#### *2.3.1.4 The Travel Career Pattern (TCP) Model*

In 2005, Pearce and Lee introduced the Travel Career Pattern (TCP) model, which is an expansion of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Iso-Ahola's theory. This model is an extension of the previous Travel Career Ladder (TCL) model, which suggests that an increase in travel experience often corresponds with a shift toward higher-order travel motivations. However, this model was criticized by Ryan (2002), according to which this approach considered more empirical concepts rather than motivational ones. The new TCP model, on the other hand, describes motivation as fluid and dynamic, which involves many levels at the same time, concentrating on 14 motivational factors ranging from the most important one being self-actualization to recognition and/or social status being the least relevant.

#### *2.3.1.5 The Role of Personality and Identity in Travel Motivation*

Personality traits significantly influence travel motivation and the traveler's choice of destination (Qiu et al., 2018). Personality encompasses the qualities that guide an individual's behavior, and it is shaped over time by experiences, culture, and education (Feist et al., 2009; Roy et al., 2007). People who have different psychological needs, as well as different personality traits, are motivated in different ways (Deckers, 2018). The behavior of tourists during their visits is summarized with the concept of "travel personality" (Plog, 1974; Gretzel et al., 2004), which has been shown by scholars such as, but not limited to Scott et al. (2007), Schneider et al. (2012), Frew et al. (1999), to be connected to fundamental personality structures, such as the Big Five Factors (BFF) of personality. These factors categorize personality traits into openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (John et al., 1999).

Jani (2014) demonstrated that personality traits differentiate among twelve distinct travel personalities. For example, he shows that travel personalities that are high in openness to experience include athletes, history buff, shopping, and boater, since they have characteristics like intellectual curiosity, which is an aspect associated with this particular personality trait (Cacioppo et al., 1982), while those low in that trait include beach bun and family. Another example is that of extraversion: people scoring low in this trait prefer activities that require minimum social interaction, like nature-based activities and cultural experiences.

All in all, the interaction between personality traits and travel personalities provides a rich framework for understanding the psychological motivations behind tourism behaviors, which is relevant and can be applied to niche contexts like fantasy literary tourism.

### 2.3.2 Emotional motivations

Human emotions represent a global, synchronized reaction that involves several domains, like behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and physiological (Deckers, 2018). When aligned, these domains help individuals deal with environmental threats, thereby supporting survival (Keltner et al., 2003). Emotion and motivation are concepts that are deeply interconnected, but motivation is only one component of emotion, which also contains unconscious psychological processes that drive both external emotional reactions and internal, subjective ones (Fanselow, 2018).

Emotions are pivotal to the experience of reading narrative fiction (Oatley, 1994, 2002), influencing individuals before, during, and after reading. Mar et al. (2011) conducted deep research on these three stages and found out that:

- Emotions are central when choosing the book to read, which is related to the current emotional state or mood of the reader.
- Arousal of feelings is even more central while reading, since people choose to engage with a novel, a poem, or a short story because they are seeking an emotional experience.
- Emotional responses to literary fiction can impact how we think and process information beyond the reading moment.

When it comes to tourism, emotions are defined as the link between the subject and the environment (Parreira et al.,2014). Through emotions, positive or negative feelings are attributed to a specific situation, and this phenomenon is at the basis of the traveler's decision-making options related to the destination choice, since for a specific location to be picked, it had to have evoked an emotional feeling in the traveler (Lewin,1951).

Motivation can therefore be defined as emotions, which are both push and pull factors, thus both intrinsic and extrinsic to the traveler (Martin et al.,2008). They are emotions that do not rely on the emotional state of a person but rather solidify into behavioral intentions that contribute to a sense of urgency and increased motivational intensity in choosing where to travel (Lee et al., 2009). Thus, the close connection between emotion and motivation is particularly reflected in tourist activities (Hernández-Lobato et al., 2006), since when the travelers make an

emotional connection to the destination, it also determines their post-consumption behaviors (Kwortnik & Ross, 2007), as well as key marketing principles, including service quality (Berezina et al., 2012) and purchasing patterns (Martin et al., 2008). The intensity of positive emotions derived from pull factors lead to customer satisfaction (Pestana, 2020), which extent is associated with travelers' motivation (Bigné et al., 2001), meaning that those who experience more satisfaction have a higher motivation to revisit the location that they liked (Bigné et al., 2004). According to Pestana (2020), there is a need for tourism providers to proactively understand the needs of their target market and develop strategies to better serve both younger and older senior travelers.

### 2.3.3 Fan Motivation

Literary tourism, together with film tourism, music tourism, special events tourism, food tourism and arts tourism, amongst others, is part of a broader tourism segment called popular tourism (or pop culture tourism) (Radomskaya, 2018), and as such is one of the primary factors influencing tourists' motivations (Bear, 2019). According to Connell (2015), film and literature locations are key motivating factors for tourists seeking media-themed destinations.

Those tourists who travel to pop culture-related destinations identify as fans (Labuschagne, 2022), since it provides them with the chance to visit and live in the fictional worlds portrayed in their favorite books or movies (Waysdorf et al., 2016). Brotherton et al. (1997) and Mackellar (2009) define them as 'special interest tourists', hence tourists who show a strong commitment to their interest, who are likely to plan multiple holidays centered around that interest, and who progressively become more sophisticated and demanding consumers. As they read novels or watch films, and then travel, they gradually embrace the human ability to imagine and empathize with others' imaginations (Salazar, 2014). These places of imagination, or *lieux d'imagination*, tie a non-physical concept to a tangible location (Reijnders, 2010).

When a group of fans gather based on their shared passion, they form what's known as a 'fandom', in which individuals are highly involved internally with the original content, externally through strong engagement, and socially through their desire to connect with like-minded fans (Thorne et al., 2006). Furthermore, this type of tourists the concept of escapism regarded as moving to a physical place cannot be applied, since they look for experiences that involve fantasy narrative that is not always tied to a geographic location, thus they turn to places which resemble an imagined place (Christou et al., 2023; Månsson, 2011; Milazzo et al., 2022).

### *2.3.3.1 Harry Potter Tourism: From Platform 9¾ to the Wizarding World*

The Harry Potter series, written by J.K. Rowling, is described by many as their beloved fantasy series (Anelli, 2008). As of 2024, the Harry Potter book series has sold around 600 copies and was translated in more than 80 languages (Bloomsbury 2024). Harry Potter fans define themselves as “Potterheads” and “Pottermania” (Beatty, 2016) is the term used to describe this profound cultural interest in the series, which resulted in a worldwide increase in Harry Potter fan engagement (Matheson, 2018). Some of the key destinations for Harry Potter fans include:

- Platform 9¾ at King’s Cross Station, London, which, after the publication of the first novel in 1997, became one of London’s most visited attractions by fans of the series after they started cross-referencing the novels with London's physical geography. In 2012, a trolley and platform display, together with the Harry Potter shop, was placed in King’s Cross Station to mimic the experience of going to Hogwarts. (Milazzo et al., 2022).
- The Warner Bros. Studio Tour in London is a permanent exhibition showcasing original sets, costumes, and props from the films (Simonetta, 2024). It opened in 2012, and since then, it has welcomed over 17 million Harry Potter fans (Warner Bros. Discovery, 2023) and has been rated the ‘No. 1 Thing to Do in the United Kingdom’ (Visit London, 2023).
- The Elephant House café in Edinburgh, where J.K. Rowling wrote sections of the novels, and which has been idealized as the “birthplace of Harry Potter” (Lee, 2012, p.58).

Milazzo (2023) explores the phenomenology of Harry Potter tourism, emphasizing its liminal quality, which is where fans feel they are transitioning between reality and fantasy as they step into locations depicted in the books and films. His research reveals that fan tourists often engage in "imaginative reconstruction," mentally blending real-world settings with the fictionalized versions from the franchise.

### *2.3.3.2 Theming*

Many stakeholders use theming to facilitate the transition from the real world to the imaginary, guiding visitors in their pursuit of imaginative travel experiences (Urry et al., 2011; William, 2009). Theming was first adopted by Walt Disney in 1937 to attract more tourists (Korkis, 2012), and it involved helping people to create a tangible sense of place for an imagined environment through staff members wearing costumes and/or performative storytelling (Bryman, 1999). In order to perform it in the best possible way, it is necessary to pay a lot of

attention to the details contained in the original novels in order to get the visitors' attention (Urry et al., 2011). This is the case of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Orlando, Florida, where fans look at the park as a genuine medium through which they can interact with the Harry Potter-related material, and the environment (Waysdorf et al., 2016).

Theming is based on bringing the tourists' attention to the visual experiences around them by relying on deeper socio-cultural dynamics that influence their experience (Milazzo et al., 2022). However, even if the curated spaces do not resonate with the original novel to certain degrees, tourists may continue to associate the surrounding landscape, built environment, and cultural practices through the symbolic filter of the pop culture text (Bolan et al., 2011). Moreover, theming has the power to enable the so called tourist gaze, which is evident in media where ordinary places are transformed into themed *lieux d'imagination* (Milazzo et al., 2022), and this has the capability to encourage visitors to visit and engage with locations once portrayed on their screens or book pages, and influence their perception and interaction with the experience of the destination itself (Reijnders, 2010; William, 2009).

## 2.4 Destination Image

The study of destination image is a particularly important topic in tourism marketing since it influences the psychological processes, the evaluation of the destination, and the future intentions of tourists (Bigné et al., 2001). However, scholars tend not to give a specific definition of the term (Echtner et al., 2003), as many believe that the concept is vaguely defined and conceptually underdeveloped (Fakeye et al., 1991; Mazanec et al., 1981). Based on research by Pearce (1988), the meaning of "image" is always evolving and changing meaning, this is why the most common definition remains the one given by Crompton, 1979, p. 18, according to which destination image is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination".

Even if the study of destination image is relatively recent, many studies have shown that destination images have a strong impact on tourist behaviour (Hunt, 1975; Pearce, 1982). All in all, research shows that locations that convey positive images are more likely to be taken into account when it comes to the final destination choice (Goodrich, 1978; Woodside et al., 1989), and this is why destination image plays a crucial role in existing models of travel decision-making developed thus far (Schmoll, 1977; Moutinho, 1984; Woodside et al., 1989).

During the years, building on [Crompton \(1979\)](#) definition of destination image, more researchers have started to realize and address it as a more complex phenomenon ([Wang et al., 2023](#)).

#### 2.4.1 Dimensions of Destination Image

In 1994, [Gartner](#) proposed a more intricate depiction of destination image, defined by three components, which was further developed by [Dann](#) in 1996:

- Cognitive Image, which includes how tourists perceive various characteristics of a destination, such as its attractions, environmental features, public amenities, and infrastructure. This measure was then adjusted by [Ong et al. \(1997\)](#) and contains 17 groups of opposing adjectives being: dirty/clean; easily accessible/isolated; friendly/cold; harmonious/hostile; innocent/sinful; interesting/boring; lively/stagnant; natural/artificial; overcrowded/sparse; pretty/ugly; quiet/noisy; sophisticated/simple; old/new; underdeveloped/overdeveloped; upmarket/poor; safe/unsafe; and very touristy/not at all touristy.
- Affective Image, which denotes tourists' mental representations of a destination, shaped by their individual attitudes and value systems. This measure considers the previous classification done by [Russell \(1980\)](#) using four opposing items being: distressing/relaxing; gloomy/exciting; sleepy/arousing; and unpleasant/pleasant.
- Conative Image, which represents the possibility or willingness of tourists to travel to a destination, reflecting their general travel inclination.

Later, [Echtner et al. \(2003\)](#) divided destination image into six components, further categorized into three main groups:

- Functional-Psychological: On one side, functional characteristics are those that belong to directly observable or measurable attributes of a destination. On the other hand, psychological characteristics are intangible and abstract attributes that affect visitors emotionally and psychologically.
- Attributes-Holistic: Attributes are specific, individual features or traits of a destination. Holistic impressions refer to the overall mental picture or general feeling a visitor has about the destination.
- Common-Unique: Common features are attributes that many destinations share and upon which they can be compared directly. Unique characteristics or features are

specific and distinctive to one or very few destinations, often serving as symbolic or iconic representations.

Further research on the matter was also done by scholars such as Fakeye et al. (1991), who concluded that after visiting the location, visitors will have an image of that place based on their experiences, Baloglu et al. (1999b), who proposed a division in two factors being stimulus and personal factors, with the former referring to external influences, and the latter to the tourist's own characteristics, Tasci et al. (2007), who analyzed destination image using the lens of supply and demand, Huang et al. (2021) who took into consideration environmental factors. The analyses conducted validate the idea that the destination image is a result of the interaction between tourists and the destination (Wang, 2023).

#### 2.4.2 Factors Influencing Destination Image

According to the model proposed by Stern et al. (1993), destination image is influenced by both external and internal factors. The image-formation factors can therefore be divided into stimulus factors and personal ones (Baloglu et al., 1999a).

Stimulus factors are defined as information sources, and they refer to the extent and variety of information to which individuals are exposed to and that may determine their choice of travel destination (Beerli et al., 2004). According to Gartner (1993), the process of the formation of images is a continuum of different information sources that he divided into overt induced, which are found in conventional advertising in the mass media; covert induced, using celebrities in the destination's promotion activities, reports, or articles; autonomous, which include mass-media regarding the place broadcasting news, documentaries, films, television programs among others; organic, involving friends and relatives who give information about places based on their own knowledge or experience, and this can be both requested or volunteered; and a visit to the destination, which is the end point of the continuum.

Personal factors regard an individual's personal characteristics since the beliefs around the image of a destination are embedded in the internal attributes of the person (Um et al., 1990). Consequently, the individuals' perception of the destination is affected by their own needs, motivations, and preferences, so that they can build their own personal viewpoint of the place (Ashworth et al., 1990; Bramwell et al., 1996; Gartner, 1993). These personal factors are the sociodemographic characteristics of the individuals, like gender, age, level of education, etc., as well as those of a psychological dimension, such as and not limited to motivations, values, personality (Beerli et al., 2004). Moreover, individuals tend to compare past experiences to

present situations (Schreyer et al., 1984), and the former are found to be more important in determining the destination choice (Mazursky, 1989).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Approach

In order to address the research questions -What psychological and emotional factors motivate travelers to visit fantasy literary destinations? - and - How does the perceived destination image influence travelers' motivations to engage with fantasy literary tourism experiences? - a qualitative methodology was adopted. Given the exploratory aim of this research, this approach gives the opportunity to have a more holistic understanding of the phenomena behind travelers' motivations, focusing on a wide range of concepts, from cultural to social and personal (Stake, 2010). Qualitative research helps better understand how people give meaning to reality together with core beliefs that guide their behaviors (Njie et al., 2014). Therefore, this research is conducted using both semi-structured interviews and the gathering of online reviews from TripAdvisor.

### 3.2 Data Collection

According to McGrath et al. (2019), semi-structured interviews are the favored method used for data collection when the goal of the research is to dig deep into the distinct and unique perspective of the participant rather than a more general understanding of the process. The interviews conducted are based on a literature review and scholars that investigated the motivational factors that trigger people's desire to visit certain locations, mostly based on their preferred fictional world. The outline of the semi-structured interviews is pre-defined and based on the literature review conducted for this research. At the beginning, some screening questions are designed to classify the interview, followed by warm-up questions to make the participants comfortable with the topic. The following questions are based on psychological, emotional, and motivational factors, to end with marketing strategies that captured their attention and motivated them to visit or augmented their desire to visit a certain place. Interviewees were selected among influencers, university students, and workers who like to travel and read fantasy books.

*Table 1: Interview Guide based on literature (Own elaboration, 2025)*

Structure	Questions
<b>Screening</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographics: Gender, age, education, and nationality</li> </ul>
<b>Warm-Up</b> (questions based on research by Carl (2004); Yu & Xu (2023))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me about your favorite fantasy book, or series?</li> <li>• How many times have you read the books or engaged in other activities related to them (e.g. watched related movies, played related video games etc.)?</li> <li>• Have you ever visited a place related to that story or a similar one? If not visited: <i>Is there a place from a fantasy story that you'd really like to visit someday?</i></li> </ul>
<b>Psychological Factors</b> (questions based on research by Yu & Xu (2023))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the destination you visited connected to the story you read or watched?</li> <li>• How did your knowledge of the book or media affect how you acted or experienced the site? If not visited: <i>How do you think your knowledge of the story would influence your behavior or feelings at the destination?</i></li> <li>• How did the visit match what you imagined based on the reading, or how did it surprise you? If not visited: <i>What are you imagining the place would be like, based on the book? What do you hope or fear might surprise you?</i></li> <li>• What does this destination, or your dream of visiting it, mean to you personally?</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional Factors</b> (questions based on research by Carl (2004); (Chang et al., 2007))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you had to describe the destination in three words, what would they be, and why?</li> <li>• Would you say this trip was a way to escape your usual routine or daily life? In what ways? If not visited: <i>Would you say this trip would be a way to escape your usual routine or daily life? In what ways?</i></li> </ul>
<b>Motivations to Travel</b> (questions based on research by Carl (2004); (Chang et al., 2007))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were your motivations for visiting this literary/fantasy site? If not visited: <i>What makes you want to travel to this place connected to the story or series you enjoy?</i></li> <li>• How important was the fact that the story was set here in your decision to visit?</li> <li>• What other locations connected to this or other fantasy stories would you like to visit in the future, and why?</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing Strategies</b> (questions based on research by (Chang et al., 2007))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me how you first found out about this destination or tour?</li> </ul>

For the second part of the research, to better find out the role of destination image in traveler's motivation, an extensive analysis on TripAdvisor reviews on several chosen fantasy-related destinations has been conducted, since TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel site (Egger et al., 2016), and as of February 2025, the number of visits the website is a total of around 120 million, making it one of the most visited travel and tourism websites worldwide so far in 2025 (Statista, 2025). For the purpose of this research 566 reviews were collected taking into account main tours organized to Harry Potter-inspired locations, varying from the Warner Bros. Studio Tour in London, guided tour around London with the Harry Potter film locations, to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando, as well as Hunger Games, The Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones and Narnia fiction-based settings tours.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

After the completion of all 24 interviews and the retrieval of the 544 reviews from TripAdvisor, both were analyzed using Leximancer, a content analysis software, which algorithm considers

both how often keywords (concepts) appear and how strongly they co-occur to then visually represent this relationship with a concept map (Leximancer, 2022). Leximancer starts with the identification of words that frequently occur and co-occur in the analyzed text, then it turns these words into seed terms, which are then expanded by a thesaurus builder algorithm by finding other words that appear in a similar context, shaping then a group of words that define a concept. These concepts, also called thesaurus, are used to build a concept map (Smith et al., 2006), where concepts are further grouped into color-coded themes, red being the most significant, then in order orange, yellow/brown, green, and blue/purple being the least important. Concepts that frequently appear together are positioned close to each other on the map, and the size of a concept's dot reflects how connected it is to other concepts, while the lines between them indicate the strength of their relationships (Leximancer, 2021).

## 4. Results

The following section will talk about the data collected between the interviews and the TripAdvisor reviews, and the results that were given using the Leximancer software, using the concept map generated by it.

### 4.1 Interviews

Starting with the interviews, participants were selected among travel and literature influencers and people passionate about both travel and fantasy literature. They were between 20 and 32 years old, with around 62% of them being younger than 25, and with most of them still studying at university. Moreover, the majority of the interviewees (around 67%) were female and Italian (around 45%), but with many coming also from France, Mexico, Germany, Portugal, Poland, and the USA. The following table summarizes the key demographic features of the participants:

*Table 2: Demographics Table (Own elaboration, 2025)*

#	Age	Gender	Country
1	23	Male	France
2	23	Female	Italy
3	22	Male	Mexico
4	24	Female	Italy
5	27	Female	Mexico
6	23	Male	Italy
7	24	Male	Portugal
8	23	Male	Italy
9	23	Female	Germany
10	25	Female	Italy
11	23	Female	Italy
12	26	Female	Italy

#	Age	Gender	Country
13	20	Female	France
14	27	Male	Italy
15	23	Female	USA
16	23	Female	Poland
17	27	Female	China
18	32	Female	Mexico
19	30	Female	Italy
20	23	Female	Poland
21	27	Male	Italy
22	24	Male	Germany
23	25	Female	Italy
24	28	Female	Mexico

#### 4.1.1 Concept Map Interviews

After having transcribed the interviews, they were analyzed by Leximancer to extract the main themes that came out from the participants' output. The software identified four main themes around travelers' motivations to explore fantasy-related destinations. The theme with the most hits (374) was "places", followed by "books" (251 hits), "imagine" (79 hits), and "media", which, with 41 hits, is the least important theme among the ones identified. On top of this, it is also relevant to point out that the most significant theme, "places", shares many of its boundaries with the themes "imagine" and "books", while the "media" theme is more isolated from the rest. The intersection of the boundaries points out a close relationship between those

themes. Being “places” the most significant theme, as well as the one with most hits, shows that locations play a central role, but it has to be associated with other concepts such as “experience”, “emotional”, “story”, “fantasy”, which are concepts that are shared also with the other two most important themes. In addition to this, we can also see how the “books” concept is the one with the most relevance (100%), and that it’s connected to concepts such as “read”, “movies”, “series” respectively with 38%, 30%, and 54% relevance; these connections lead to the bond with all the other themes: connects to “places” through “series”, “fantasy” (30% relevance), and “love” (71% relevance), to “imagine” going through “places”, “story” (51% relevance), “experience” (40% relevance), and “characters” (20% relevance), but also to “media” through “movies” (30% relevance), and “fan” (13% relevance).

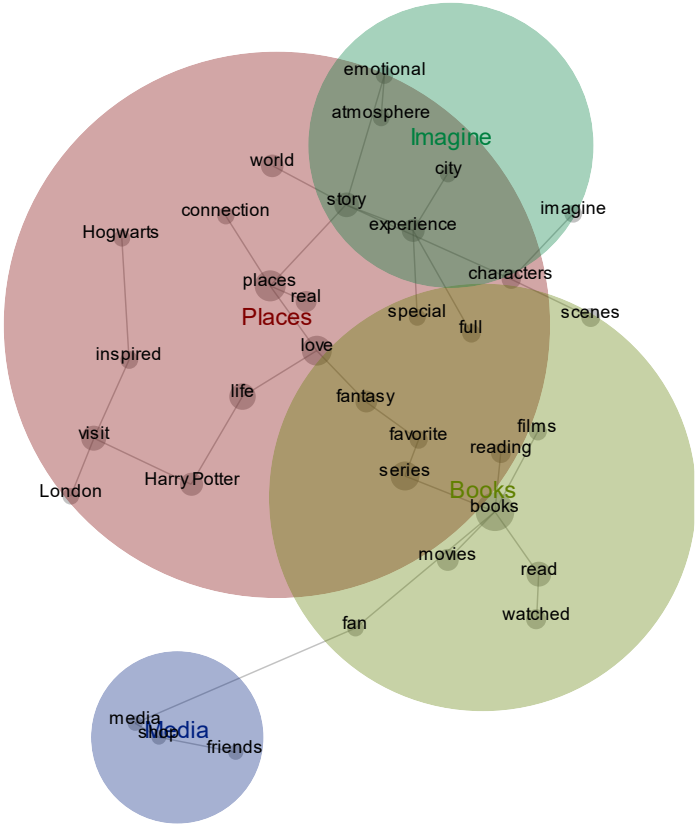


Figure 1: Concept Map Interviews (Leximancer Output, 2025)

### 4.2 TripAdvisor Reviews

In order to gain more insights on how travelers are motivated and evaluate fantasy literary tourism experiences, a dataset of 566 TripAdvisor reviews was collected and analyzed with Leximancer. The reviews cover five major fantasy series: Harry Potter, Lord of The Rings, Hunger Games, The Chronicles of Narnia, and Game of Thrones. Most specifically, for each one of them, reviews from different types of experiences were analyzed: for Harry Potter, Harry Potter Film Locations Guided Walking Tour, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal

Orlando Resort, and Warner Bros. Studio Tour London - The Making of Harry Potter; for Lord of The Rings, Pure Glenorchy Scenic Lord of the Rings Tours, Red Carpet Tours, and Trails of Middle Earth - Lord of the Rings Sightseeing Tours; for Hunger Games, Henry River Mill Village, Hunger Games Unofficial Fan Tours, and The Hunger Games Exhibition; for The Chronicles of Narnia, Elbe Canyon & Narnia Movie Locations Day Trip, and Penshurst Place & Gardens; for Game of Thrones, Game of Thrones Tour. Based on the data collected from all the tours, 53 distinct countries were represented. For Harry Potter, the UK was the most common nationality, making up to around 17% of the reviewers, with the USA following closely with 15%, same tendency can be observed for The Chronicles of Narnia, where the dataset is more internationally dispersed, with 86 reviews coming from 13 different nationalities and with the UK being the leading country (20%), closely followed by the USA (17%). For the other three series considered, the most common country is the USA, making up around 50% of reviewers for Hunger Games, 16% for The Lord of the Rings, and 24% for Game of Thrones. Other countries that are commonly represented are Canada, Australia, and Germany. As for the average rating of the tours, it is always higher than 4 stars, suggesting a high appreciation from the tourists (see Table 3). However, it is important to note, that the reviews considered are the ones written solely in English, and not all reviews provided the whole set of information.

*Table 3: Summary Table Reviews (Own elaboration, 2025)*

<b>Fantasy Series</b>	<b>Total Reviews</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>	<b>Dominant Nation</b>	<b># of Countries</b>
<b>Harry Potter</b>	120	4.61	UK	11
<b>Hunger Games</b>	120	4.38	USA	6
<b>Lord of The Rings</b>	120	5	USA	5
<b>The Chronicles of Narnia</b>	86	4.81	UK	13
<b>Game of Thrones</b>	120	5	USA	18

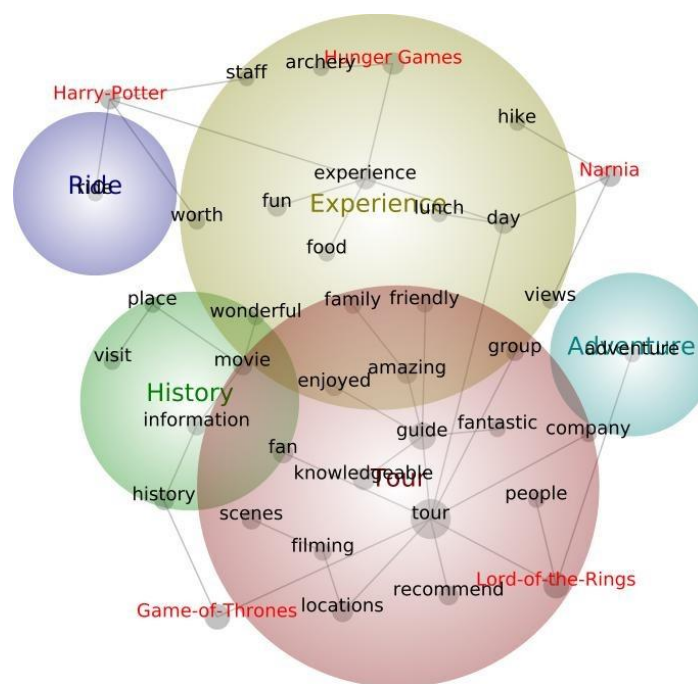
#### 4.2.1 Concept Map Reviews

From the conceptual map generated by Leximancer, five main themes regarding the experiences in the tours were identified. As mentioned in the previous section, warmer colors like red and orange are the themes that are most significant, while colder colors like blue and purple are the least important themes. It is also important to point out how close the circles are to one another

to highlight a stronger or weaker relation. The five themes identified by the software are Tour, Experience, History, Adventure, and Ride.

“Tour” is the most significant concept with 1255 hits, making it the most important theme on the map. Some of the concepts belonging to this theme are “guide” with 40% relevance, “knowledgeable” (23%), recommend (23%), and group (22%), which highlights that well-structured and guided experiences are what tourists are looking for the most when visiting a fantasy literature-related site. “Experience” is the second most significant theme, with 756 hits. It connects concepts like “fun” (15%), family friendly (8%), and amazing (18%), this is important to understand that tourists value their experience on the site a lot and are looking for emotional fulfillment, enjoyment and shared leisure with their family and friends when it comes to fantasy tourism. The third relevant theme is “history”, which, with 438 hits, connects concepts such as “information” (20%) and movie (19%), highlights the tourists’ motivation coming from their fan base, as well their desire to learn more about the real-world context in which the series takes place, and the behind the story of the settings, this is mostly relevant for destinations that regard filming locations or adaptations in historical sites. The two themes which are the least significant are “adventure” and “ride”, with respectively 35 and 32 hits, with the former being mostly connected to Lord of the Rings and the latter to Harry Potter and the theme parks associated with it.

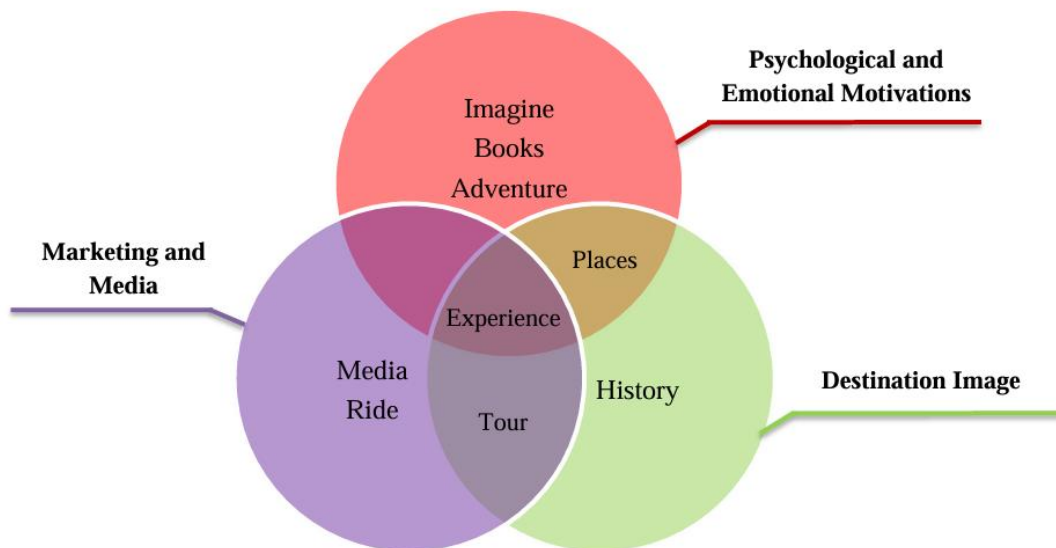
On top of this, the themes “experience”, “tour”, and “history” have a strong connection to one another, overlapping on the concept map and sharing some key terms like “fun”, “group”, “enjoyed”, and “fan”, while the other two themes are more isolated, highlighting the fact that they are more related to specific cases like Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter, rather than fantasy tourism as a whole.



**Figure 2: Concept Map Reviews (Leximancer Output, 2025)**

## 5. Discussion

The concept maps that were generated with Leximancer give a solid basis to address both research questions and objectives. In order to do so, this section is divided into three subsections to tackle psychological and emotional factors that motivate travelers to visit fantasy literary destinations, the role that the perceived destination image plays, and the role that media and marketing have on tourists traveling to fantasy literary locations. Each cluster is paired up with the different themes shown by the Leximancer outputs (Figures 1 and 2), both for interviews, and reviews and put together to form a Venn Diagram displaying the interconnections between the three clusters (Figure 3).



*Figure 3: Summary of Clusters (Own Elaboration, 2025)*

### 5.1 Psychological and Emotional Motivations

The results from both the interviews and the TripAdvisor reviews strongly highlight the psychological and emotional motivations of fantasy literary tourism. From the data collected from both interviews and reviews, the themes “Books”, “Imagine”, “Places”, “Adventure”, and “Experience” show that many travelers are more motivated to visit those fantasy literature-related destinations because of deeply personal, emotional attachments to the books. Nostalgia, immersion, and personal identity were some of the key themes that came out through the sessions, many aspects being linked to the interviewees’ childhood experiences, as well as the desire to immerse themselves in their loved fantasy universe.

As [Holak et al. \(1998\)](#) state, nostalgia is a phenomenon that occupies an emotional space where memory and identity converge, and it creates meaning for tourists in such a way that it can positively impact future intention to visit by elevating the quality of the experience ([Leong et al., 2015](#)). The analysis done with Leximancer supports these statements by highlighting one of the most dominant theme, which is “books”, mentioned 138 times, and the association with concepts such as “read”, “series”, and “movies” being mentioned respectively 53, 74, and 41 times, which highlights how books motivate the visitors to travel to fantasy literature destinations, also thanks to movie adaptations and media. This is further supported by [Singh & Best \(2004, p. 101\)](#) who researched on the motivations of visitors traveling to the Hobbiton Movie set from the fantasy series *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, and who quote “The experiential gaze of a visitor may not only be reinforced through scenes in the film, but also by impressions created through reading Tolkien’s novel”. This means that travelers first start their fantasy journey by engaging with the narrative universe of their choice. On top of this, the theme “imagine” further underlines this connection with connected concepts being “story”, “fantasy”, “love”, “experience”, and “emotional”, with the most mentioned being “story”, highlighting how deeply the participants saw their trip to physically experience the fantasy world they could only envision in their minds. In fact, immersion is identified as the means by which an individual can disconnect from the real world either with an abrupt dive or a more gradual one ([Fornerino et al., 2008](#)). As [Minkiewicz et al. \(2013\)](#) suggest in their empirical study, when travelers choose a destination on their own, based on their personal motivations, they are able to fully immerse themselves in the experience and not be easily distracted. This is proven through both interviews and reviews, where the participants actively engaged in the activities in the locations, noticing every single detail, comparing it with what they had envisioned by reading books. This is supported by the analysis done with Leximancer, where the theme that was most frequently talked about is “Places”, and the concepts associated with it are “story”, “fantasy”, “life”, “visit”, “experience”, and “emotional”, which indicates that travelers see these destinations as symbolic spaces, full of meaning and emotional attachments, rather than just geographic locations. This statement is supported by [Campelo et al. \(2014\)](#) and [Williams et al. \(2003\)](#), according to which place attachment refers to the attachment that individuals have to a specific place regardless of the physical place, but more connected to the meanings they associate with it, and if the attachment is strong, it can lead to emotion-filled memories and other positive associations to the experience ([Mikulincer et al., 2001](#)).

*“I grew up reading the **books** and watching the **movies**, it’s a big part of my childhood. That’s really the main reason it’s my favorite. It’s been with me for so long.” ~#3*

*“I expected it to be fun, but I didn’t expect to feel so **emotionally connected**. Seeing places I’d only imagined brought back so many memories of reading the **books** as a kid. It was both nostalgic and magical.” ~#4*

*“Surreal, because the places felt both real and fictional at the same time. Iconic, because these are must-see spots for any fan. And nostalgic, because they brought back memories of reading the **books** as a child.” ~#8*

*“It was one of the first fantasy **books**, and like **fantasy series** that I’ve read when I was a teenager... walking through its streets felt like basically being inside of the show... it brought up a lot of memories and iconic moments and everything felt so **emotional** for me.” ~# 5*

*“After watching the films and reading the **books**, being there would allow me to fully immerse myself in the **story** and the characters.” ~#2*

*“Also memories, because being there instantly brought back key moments from the **series** and I could live again and remember all the characters, plots, and scenes from the **series**, and also immersive because I didn’t I felt like I had stepped into the **story**. It was like fantasy and reality were merging around me.” ~#23*

Furthermore, the data gathered from the reviews, further support this interpretation, particularly with the recurring theme “experience”, which connects emotional motivation to satisfaction with associated concepts being “fun”, “family”, “amazing”, and “group”, leaning towards the fact that when sharing memories, people create deeper emotions since memory sharing develops new emotional experiences (Wood, 2019). Notably, out of the 566 reviews, not considering the 187 reviews for which the information was not available, 326 were group travel, with 144 being family, 132 couples, 50 friends, and only 53 solo travelers.

The last main theme associated with psychological and emotional motivations is “adventure”, with 35 mentions. This suggests that when traveling to fantasy-related places, tourists seek to be engaged in experiences rather than pursuing traditional tourist attractions (Heidi et al., 1996).

*“This tour is great for history buffs, preservationists and Hunger Games fans so I recommend it for **group** and **family** outings. Everyone will find an interest.”*

*“While on a business trip to North Carolina for Winning Matters, I got the opportunity to go explore this place with our **group**. Taylor Edwards, the site director, was energetic and very knowledgeable about the village. Very fun **experience**.”*

*“Being a solo traveler the archery experience is quite boring and a little embarrassing to do alone. A **family** with children or a **group** of friends is who this experience is suited for.”*

*“Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey” is a thrilling ride that combines cutting-edge technology with stunning visuals, taking you on a spellbinding **adventure** through Hogwarts.”*

*“I recently embarked on an unforgettable **adventure** with Red Carpet Tours that combined my **love** for the Lord of the Rings movies with an exploration of New Zealand's natural beauty and rich culture.”*

## 5.2 Influence of Perceived Destination Image

The perceived destination image, characterized by a blend of imagination and real-world representations, is a relevant component of the motivation to travel to fantasy literature locations, since it is the mental representation of the overall perception of a particular location (Chen et al., 2007). From the interviews, the most common theme is yet again “Places”, that is also connected to concepts like “real”, “life”, and “characters”, indicating that when traveling to these destinations, tourists expect to find an accurate representation of what they had imagined by reading the story. This is in line with what Watson et al. (2004) and Hudson et al. (2006) researched on, stating that the reader has certain expectations to be met by the place they visit such as the sense and quality of the location, and they want these destinations to confirm this “sense of place” that they seek after reading the fantasy-related literary place.

*“I think I’ll be surprised by the special effects I expect to see. However, I’m also afraid that some elements that are difficult to recreate in **real life** might not meet my expectations.” ~#2*

*“I’m imagining that what's in the books would be kind of the same or similar in **real life** as well, at least the feeling.” ~#13*

*“I think it would make the experience much more exciting. I’d probably walk around remembering scenes from the book, imagining the **characters** passing through the same streets. It would add a fun, immersive layer to my visit.” ~#24*

*“I think it would be incredibly emotional and nostalgic. I would probably recognize landscapes from the books and films, and I’d imagine the **characters** there and feel like I’m a part of that world.” ~ #11*

*“What surprised me the most when I visited Sevilla was the contrast between the **real** locations and what I had imagined. Some spots were exactly like the ones from the books and tv series, while others were much smaller in scale than what we see on screen.” ~ #23*

These responses clearly reflect the influence that the expected destination image lying in travelers’ minds when visiting a place, they had previously pictured by reading the books, has on the experience they have when they get to visit the location. The importance of authenticity was significant for most interviewees, who also expressed feelings of disappointment when what they had previously imagined was not met. However, in literary tourism, authenticity is more of a subjective rather than objective experience, since it’s a combination of what the writer had imagined when thinking about the story and the world to build, and what the reader imagined while reading (Herbert, 2001).

*“I do worry a little about over-commercialization making some areas feel less authentic.” ~ #17*

*“The feelings that I got were better than what I was expecting, it was just like in the series.” ~ #5*

*“What might be disappointing is if the connection to Harry Potter felt too commercial or minimal, if there weren’t enough references or experiences that bring the magic to life.” ~ #6*

This is further proven in the analysis of the reviews, where themes like “Experience”, “History”, and “Tour” are most prominent. The former was often discussed in terms of comparison between expectations and the reality of the trip.

*“It was evident that the team’s meticulous planning and attention to detail were designed to provide a seamless **experience**, allowing us to fully immerse ourselves in the adventure.”*

*“The Hogwarts **experience** was something we were really looking forward to and we expected a magical experience; it was instead a real let down.”*

*“Was very disappointed in this as it was very expensive, so we expected a lot more out of it than some clothing displays, a couple information machines and a bout of archery.”*

The theme “History” is tied to concepts like “place”, “visit”, “information”, meaning that travelers also seek for thought-out educational experiences on top of more adventurous ones, appreciating also the historical background of those places. As Çevik (2024) explains, literary tourism does not just involve sightseeing and immersion, but also “learning for fun”, according to which travelers look for educational experiences. In addition, the most significant and most mentioned theme in the review’s dataset is “Tour”, with a total of 761 mentions. This theme contains concepts such as “guide”, “filming”, “group”, and “recommend”, suggesting that guided experiences help in enhancing the tourist experience and their perception of authenticity. The storytelling tour guides give is an important component of the interpretation of the physical space compared to the literary location. This is because those itineraries are structured to guide them following the mind process of the writer (Baleiro et al., 2014). According to Rabotić (2010), to provide a positive experience, tour guides need to be good presenters, as well as manage group dynamics well. Their commentary style should be both informative and entertaining, and adapt to the interests of the customers, encouraging interactions within the group.

*“Our **guide** was amazing and full of **information**. He told us all the **history** and about all the movies filmed in the area, since not everyone had seen the Lord of the Ring movies.”*

*“Solly was a fabulous **guide**. He was so knowledgeable, taught us much about the films & locations, including local Māori **history**. He also regaled us with songs, not just stories, and is super talented. As a huge fan, this is an excellent tour.”*

*“Pavla was our tour **guide** and did such an amazing job. She knew so much **history** about all the locations and interesting stories.”*

*“What a great day out! Our **guide** Tomas was fabulous, sharing pieces of **information** as we drove to the sites.”*

### 5.3 The Role of Media and Marketing Exposure

The third cluster focuses on the exposure of tourists visiting fantasy literature destinations to media, promotional content, as well as tour experiences, and how these affect the desire to visit these places and their decisions. In this case, the most significant themes highlighted by the Leximancer output are “Media”, “Ride”, “Tour”, and “Experience”. From the interviews, the main theme is “Media”, even if with lower significance compared to the other themes, it is still relevant to highlight the relevant role media play in influencing travelers to visit certain places

related to fantasy literature. Notably, as stated by [Leung et al. \(2013\)](#), social media are increasingly employed to search, organize, and share their travel experiences, playing an important role in tourism management, most of all in the promotion, research and management of the business. Moreover, social media helps the audience to learn information about a destination and thus generates higher motivation to visit ([Tussyadiah et al. 2011](#)). Word-of-mouth (WOM), has a high perceived credibility, making it an important information source for travel planning ([Murphy et al., 2007](#)). The theme “Media” appeared with concepts such as “friends” and “shop”, emphasizing how not only social media, but also word-of-mouth from close relationships like friends can have an impact on the traveler’s decision. Even if, according to [Linnet et al. \(1981\)](#), information shared with people we are not close to has a broader reach, the information we receive from our friends, family, or even acquaintances has the tendency to be more influential because of a higher level of trust ([Brown et al., 1987](#)). As shown in Table 4, when the interviewees were asked how they became aware of the destination, the majority of them (12 out of the 24 interviews) mentioned the usage of Instagram as their main source, followed by TikTok, social media in general, YouTube, and word-of-mouth from friends. As a matter of fact, research from [Statista \(2025b\)](#), has shown that 79% of marketers worldwide use Instagram as their leading social media platform, around 51% use YouTube, and 28% TikTok. When it comes to traveling, 48% of people worldwide used social media platforms as their main travel inspiration, closely followed by 44% of people relying on word-of-mouth recommendations ([Statista, 2025a](#)). Social media are seen to be a useful source, even because the share of consumers who believed influencers were a useful source of information when it comes to travel worldwide as of May 2024 was around 60% ([Statista, 2025a](#)).

**Table 4:** Media Usage Interviews Summary (*Own elaboration, 2025*)

TikTok	Instagram	Fan Forums	Social Media	Friends	Facebook	Pinterest	YouTube	Google
9	12	3	7	4	3	2	6	5

*“I discovered the destination through **social media**, mainly Facebook and Instagram, but also through people I know who had already visited the place”. ~ #2*

*“Through a mix of online fan communities and **social media**. I saw so many photos and videos on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok and it just looked too magical to miss.” ~ #4*

*“Mostly word of mouth. **Friends** or people I know would mention going to places like the studios in London, and I’d realize those places existed. Then I’d start looking into them more myself, researching online.” ~ #18*

When it comes to the reviews, three themes associated with this cluster are “Ride”, “Tour”, and “Experience”, and with associated concepts like “staff”, “recommend”, and “filming”, which points out to the fact that tourists not only evaluate the place they are visiting, but the all package that comes with it, from the tour guides, to the number of offered rides, merchandise or even themed services. This is supported by Voss (2004), who states that the customer experience starts with the first contact with the organization or place until the visitor goes back home, which includes all the touchpoints up until the end. The theme “Ride” is mostly associated with Harry Potter due to the theme parks taken into account for this research and connected to concepts which belong to the “Experience” theme, such as “staff” and “worth”, and proving that the features offered to consumers by the parks are key marketing tools that lead consumers to be immersed in the experience. In fact, when used strategically, theming generates an environment that is so emotional and so immersive that the consumer is engaged in the story, since the park becomes a way for the reader to extend the relationship with the story (Wong et al., 1999).

*“My son has CP and from the moment we arrived the **staff** did all they could to offer assistance and support in order to make our visit as stress free/inclusive as possible.”*

*“The **staff** are all very helpful and friendly and really do ask them for extra info.. you might miss things like Harrys actual makeup scars otherwise, or how to train a spider!”*

*“Visited for the first time today, we started our day with an afternoon tea which was just perfect and a member of **staff** called Steve was practically wonderful, helpful and funny, the tour was everything and more if you’re a Harry Potter fan or not the insight in how movies like this are made was Fantastic, all the **staff** were so polite and helpful recommend to anyone will be back again.”*

*“Hey I’m a Harry Potter fan and love everything in area go to shops and getting all **ride** in area. An so much you can do in there.”*

*“I can’t give this enough star! Amazing! Magical! The best part of Orlando! It really feels like you are in a Harry Potter movie! The butter beer, the shops, everything blew us away. The **rides** were fantastic. Never been on rides like that before!”*

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter covers the main conclusions from the research to address the research questions and to summarize the key findings. Moreover, it will also cover the theoretical and practical contribution, as well as some limitations and future research prospects.

The role of literary tourism is to link literature and tourism to drive the cultural enrichment of destinations and sustainable tourism practices (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Fantasy literary tourism is a growing niche that has become progressively renowned thanks to the advent of relevant fantasy literature authors and to the desire to pursue fantasies to break from everyday life. Based on a dual-method qualitative approach, pursued through 24 semi-structured interviews with fantasy literature readers and travelers and 566 reviews from TripAdvisor, this study was able to address both the key psychological and emotional factors motivating travelers to visit fantasy literary destinations and how the perceived destination image influences their motivation to engage with fantasy-related tourism.

The findings show that visitors are driven by deep emotional attachments to the fantasy books they love. Nostalgia was a common denominator among reviews and interviews as a key motivator to visit fantasy-related destinations, mostly regarding childhood memories and attachments to the series they loved. Another common denominator was a strong desire for immersion, to experience and live in the story they read, and to be in the places they could only picture in their minds before visiting the locations. These feelings lead to the desire to actually step into the fantasy world, rather than just sightseeing. On top of this, there is also the desire to feel part of something, to fit in, and to reinforce their identity.

The expectations that the travelers have before the visit also play a crucial role in influencing their motivations to engage with fantasy literary tourism experiences. They often build up an imagined version of those locations while reading or engaging in other activities related to the fantasy literary work, and authenticity plays an important role for them, in a sense that the location has to match what they envisioned before, and when that happens, motivation and satisfaction significantly increase, and the experience feels more emotional and immersive. However, if the expected destination image is not in line with the real-world version because of factors like over-commercialization or the lack of authenticity, the emotional impact decreases.

To preserve authenticity, tour guides, theming, storytelling, as well as social media shape destination image and influence travelers' motivation. This is because social media content

inspires off-site motivations, while tours and rides help the consumer enjoy a full experience package that positively contributes to perceived authenticity and overall satisfaction.

All in all, this research shows that fantasy literary tourism is an emotional, symbolic experience, and that destination marketing on and off site needs to work together to meet fan expectations, which come from imagination, memories, and emotional attachment.

## 6.1 Theoretical Contribution

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the shift from general literary tourism to a niche of the genre being, fantasy literary tourism. While many studies state that literary tourism has high potential to be further developed in the academic field (Çevik, 2020), it remains under-researched (Smith, 2003) and talked about in rather general terms of all literary genres. This study goes in depth in understanding the motivations that push travelers to visit literary destinations, with the focus on the niche segment of fantasy literature. Furthermore, this research looks into detail on how readers become emotion-driven travelers, and shifts the focus towards symbolic motivations, rather than purely behavioral frameworks.

Many studies previously focused on phenomena like nostalgia, author associations, and cultural value (Squire, 1994; Fox, 2008), but few of them researched on how fantasy worlds built by the writers activate the desire for immersion and motivations based on belief that push the reader to become a traveler.

Furthermore, this study builds on previous research done in the field with the theory of hot authentication, according to which is implicit and based on shared belief rather than experts' validation (Lovell & Thurgill, 2021), as well as the emerging calls to look into the role of imagination, narrative, and place attachment (Can et al., 2025; Ryan, 2016), thus reinforcing the idea that fantasy literary locations are not just geographical places, but rather emotionally charged destinations that give the reader a way to escape in their beloved fantasy story.

On top of this, this research uses both interviews and reviews from TripAdvisor, which results were then analyzed with Leximancer. In this way, this study further detaches from studies done in the field that are mostly single-method research (Çevik, 2020). In this way, the research focuses both on fan intentions and travel experience, opening new routes to further understand the role played by imagination, emotional storytelling, and symbolic consumption in travel experiences.

## 6.2 Practical Contribution

This study also offers practical contributions in the field of tourism, providing insights on how professionals in the field can effectively operate in the fantasy tourism segment. By analyzing the motivations behind fantasy readers to visit fantasy-related destinations and the perceived destination image, it pointed out what they seek before, during, and after their journey.

First of all, managers should invest more in experiential branding, theming, as well as more interactive design to make the place more authentic to the fans and the visitors in general. This research shows that fantasy readers give a lot of attention to every detail and seek emotionally immersive experiences that match what they imagined while reading or what they saw in the movies.

Second, fantasy destination marketers should rely more on both social media platforms, especially TikTok and Instagram, as well as address the importance of word-of-mouth, since these are the main sources of inspiration for fantasy literary travelers. Collaborating with influencers, as well as fan communities, could be a good way to mediate between imagination and real-world destinations. On top of this, the findings show the importance of good storytelling linked to emotional engagement, thus creating an area of focus for marketers.

Lastly, theming and guided tours were found to be critical in the evaluation of the overall experience on-site. This gives additional inspiration for managers and tour operators to curate the journey the consumer has at the location to reflect the authenticity that readers seek from the place.

## 6.3 Limitations

While this study offers significant insights into the field of literary tourism, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size of the interviewees is rather homogeneous, with the majority being European and under 30, which gives the research limitations in terms of diversity. At the same time, the TripAdvisor reviews considered were those that were composed in English, which consequently restricted the scope of communities of fans and travelers who spoke, or wrote the review in, a different language, and who may have offered more varied and diverse viewpoints to this analysis. Secondly, the majority of reviews concentrate on very popular fantasy series such as Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, Narnia, Hunger Games, etc., which suggests a more Western-oriented spread, and does not mirror the aspirations and desires of tourists travelling to places inspired by not-so-mainstream fantasy series.

## 6.4 Future Research

To address the limitations of this study, further research can be done in the field. Future research could adopt a cross-cultural approach by examining the role of fantasy tourism across different regions of the world, also aligning with local literary traditions. On top of this, the focus could be on the comparison between the Western and non-Western fantasy destinations as well as fantasy readers' perspectives, mainly on the difference in motivations and perceived destination image, thus revealing new motivational drivers and differing expectations.

Another approach could also be that of incorporating quantitative methodologies through means like surveys to complement the qualitative findings and thus offer more generalized insights. Researchers could also help managers understand how to leverage the presence of emerging technologies like augmented and virtual reality to enhance the traveler's experience on-site.

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