



Tourism Transformed: How Netflix's „Wednesday” Enhanced Destination Marketing in Busteni, Romania

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ABSTRACT

The recent success of the Netflix series 'Wednesday' has placed Cantacuzino Castle in Buşteni, Romania, at the center of film-induced tourism. This study examines how the phenomenon of set-jetting, contributed to a rise in both domestic and international tourism in Buşteni, Romania. Drawing on data from 2021 to 2023, including tourist numbers, revenues, accommodation statistics, and the media response, this paper analyzes how Buşteni capitalized on its association with Wednesday to boost destination marketing efforts. This case study of Buşteni underscores the growing potential of entertainment media in reshaping tourism dynamics and offers insights for destination marketers looking to harness the power of film-induced tourism to drive growth. The findings underscore the potential of entertainment media to transform destination marketing strategies and provide valuable insights for practitioners in the field of both marketing and tourism development.

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1. Introduction

Television series are increasingly shaping tourist behavior, recent studies show (Beeton, 2010). The influence of film-induced tourism, where travelers are motivated by the portrayal of a destination in popular media, has grown considerably over the past few decades (Beeton, 2015). In recent years, streaming platforms such as Netflix have further amplified this trend, creating global cultural phenomena that extend beyond mere entertainment. Destinations featured in these media productions often experience a surge in popularity, benefiting from increased tourism, economic gains, and heightened visibility on the international stage.

One of the most compelling recent examples of this phenomenon is the impact of Wednesday (2022), a Netflix original series directed by the prolific Tim Burton. Set in the fictional Nevermore Academy, the series was filmed in various Romanian locations, with Cantacuzino Castle in Buşteni serving as one of its central filming sites. The gothic ambiance of the castle, paired with Romania's dramatic landscapes, made it an ideal location for the show. Since the series' debut, Buşteni has witnessed an influx of visitors, the small mountain town having transformed into a destination for film-induced tourism.

This article explores how the television series Wednesday and its portrayal of Buşteni catalyzed this transformation, delving into the relationship between media exposure and destination marketing. Specifically, it contextualizes this case within existing literature on film-induced tourism and its implications for destination marketing, while examining first hand the economic impact of the series on tourism in Buşteni, Romania.

Film-induced tourism far from being a new concept, with scholars having long explored the ways in which films and television shows influence travelers' destination choices (Connel, 2012). The allure of visiting a location that has been immortalized on screen creates a sense of connection amongst the travelers, as often, these destinations experience an increase in visitor numbers, as viewers of the film or TV show seek to experience those locations firsthand. This form of tourism provides destinations with unique opportunities to leverage the cultural cachet of a film or series to enhance their destination marketing strategies for increased tourism. From New Zealand's Lord of the Rings to the Scottish Highlands featured in Outlander, the ability of films and series to shape tourist behavior has been well-documented (Beeton, 2016). However, as the global reach of streaming services like Netflix continues to expand, the scale and speed at which film-induced tourism impacts destinations have increased. This rapid transformation is also evident in the case of Romania's Buşteni and its Cantacuzino Castle, where the success of Wednesday generated a notable surge in tourist activity within the matter of a year.

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2. Literature review

This chapter delves into the theoretical foundations underlying the intersection of tourism and media, focusing on key concepts such as destination marketing, film-induced tourism, set-jetting, and the promotion of TV destinations. As destinations increasingly leverage popular media channels, streaming services included, to attract visitors, understanding the influence of film-induced tourism on destination marketing approaches becomes crucial. By exploring existing literature on these themes, this review aims to provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the impact of Netflix's Wednesday on tourism in Bușteni, Romania, and the broader implications for destination marketing strategies in a consumerism-driven tourism landscape.

Destination marketing

Lately, the concept of 'destination' has become subject to various definitions. If according to Leiper (1995), a destination encompasses the place for individuals to travel to and stay at with the purpose of experiencing a specific feature or a specific attraction, according to Buhalis (2000), destinations represent rather perceptual concepts; they remain influenced by the subjective interpretation of a traveler, considering one's own personal traits and experiences. In Franzen and Bouwman's (2001) research, further attention is paid to the physical attributes a destination encompasses, including how they are being perceived, positively or not, by the tourists. Furthermore, Shaw & Williams (2004) suggest that a destination will include not only physical characteristics, but also aspects related to products, facilities, services, all responsible for bearing an impact upon the experience of travelers. It is Vengesai (2003) who further elaborates on the definition of destinations in terms of attractiveness and competitiveness, where attractiveness refers to the destination's ability to provide desirable experiences, and competitiveness refers to its comparative advantage over other destinations.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2008) characterizes destinations through their physical spaces which stand equipped with essential tourist products, services, and management systems. For these, factors including accessibility, amenities, attractions, human resources, image, character, and price play crucial roles in attracting tourists. What's more, destinations can vary in scale, from entire countries or regions to cities or self-contained centers, and can cater to different temporal scopes, depending on the wish of the traveler and ranging from one-day trips to extended vacations (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009).

In present literature, destination marketing refers to the overall strategies and activities undertaken by a city, region, or country to attract tourists. It involves a comprehensive approach that includes advertising, promotion, partnerships, events, and campaigns aimed at showcasing the destination's unique attractions with the goal to increase visitor numbers, improve the destination's visibility, and boost its economic benefits from tourism (Buhalis, 2001). Destination branding, on the other hand, is the process of creating a distinctive, memorable identity for a location. It goes beyond mere promotion and focuses on developing a consistent image or 'brand' that captures the essence of the destination's identity. This involves defining a unique value proposition that differentiates the destination from others (Anholt, 2006). If the term 'destination' is typically used in tourism contexts (Govers & Go, 2009), destination branding, a primary focus in place branding literature, is essential for enhancing the market position of a place (Hankinson, 2005), focusing specifically on tourism.

Recent decades have brought a surged interest in destination branding, as it grew based on previous earlier research in branding physical goods, services, and corporate entities (De Chernatony, 1999). Tourism marketing is now focusing more and more on destination brands in recent years (Cai, 2002). However, despite its incremental international growth, there remains a lack of clarity and consistency in its definition (Almeyda-Ibáñez et al, 2017). According to Ritchie & Ritchie (1998), branding in tourism implies applying traditional branding techniques to destinations, which are characterized by their unique attributes and complexities. Effective destination branding must balance both tangible factors, like infrastructure or accessibility, and intangible factors, like cultural experiences, to create that compelling competitive advantage (Morgan, 2011). Thus, elements of a destination's brand could include its natural scenery, cultural heritage, history, or even associations with films and TV shows.

Film induced tourism

Over the past decade, numerous studies have analyzed how films influence tourists' destination choices. These studies often grapple with the complexity of human psychology and emotions, which play a significant role in travel motivation. Despite ongoing research, understanding the complete impact of films on tourist behavior remains an area of continuous inquiry and exploration.

'Film tourism' as a concept originates in the 1990s United Kingdom and United States, referring to a specific form of tourism focused on merging film and television with the tourism experience (Riley et al, 1998). This type of tourism appeals to modern travelers who seek novelty, a blend of knowledge, appreciation, and a sense of dream-seeking. In the literature on film-induced cultural tourism, much of the research has focused on filming locations in the U.S. and the U.K., largely due to Hollywood's dominance in global filmmaking (Connell, 2012). Cohen (1986) was one of the earliest to identify the potential of film tourism to boost tourist

demand, a view supported by more recent research showing that film and television's influence on tourism destinations is expected to grow (Du et al, 2020).

In a straightforward context, film-induced tourism is defined as "tourist visits to a destination or attraction as a result of the destination being featured on the cinema screen, video, or television" (Busby & Klug, 2001, p. 316). This definition highlights the direct influence of media portrayals on travel behavior. Iwashita (2003) expands on this by noting that exposure to destinations through films, television, and literature can significantly affect individuals' travel preferences and choices. According to Beeton (2005), this phenomenon involves on-location tourism driven by the success of films shot or set in specific regions. Alternatively, Macionis (2004) offers a broader interpretation, describing film-induced tourism as a post-modern experience where individuals engage with places depicted in media presentations. This perspective highlights the personalized nature of the experience, shaped by each person's interpretation and consumption of media imagery.

Film tourism can be categorized into two key components: film tourists and tourist film destinations. Film tourists are those whose travel motivations are influenced by film-related factors, while tourist film destinations are locations, events, or characters showcased in films. Understanding these components requires examining the motivations behind travel decisions. Although numerous theories attempt to explain these motivations, none provide a comprehensive answer. Each theory, however, contributes to the ongoing exploration of this complex topic. One approach to understanding travel motivation is through the "push and pull" theory proposed by Dann (1977), which distinguishes between pull factors—attractions like sunshine or beaches that draw tourists to a destination—and push factors—personal reasons such as nostalgia, fantasy, or self-actualization that drive individuals to travel. In the context of film-induced tourism, the "3 P's" as in the concepts of place, personality, performance—serves as the pull factor, while push factors include fantasy, escape, status, prestige, self-identity, ego enhancement, and the vicarious experience associated with the destination.

Despite the varied terminology, a central theme emerges: film-induced tourism involves a post-modern engagement with locations depicted in media. This experience is highly personalized, shaped by individual interpretations and consumption of media content. The rise of the internet has dissolved traditional boundaries, allowing individuals to form interest-based communities within digital networks, which in turn fosters new relationships and interactions. This has broken down barriers between film culture and tourism activities, creating innovative forms of tourism centered on film. Scholars have noted that it is not just the films that generate tourist interest, but the broader consumption of various media products and consumer-to-consumer interactions. This shift has opened up new avenues for research into how these interest-driven communities interact and influence tourism.

Films are also recognized as 'hallmark events' with significant potential impact on destinations (Ritchie, 1984). Although films are not created specifically to drive tourism, they can enhance awareness and appeal of the locations featured, thereby influencing tourism. Riley and Van Doren (1992) described films as a non-marketer controlled category of hallmark event, which underscores the role of mass media in promoting tourist destinations beyond traditional marketing efforts. Consumer-centric approaches to defining film-induced tourism emphasize the behavioral aspects of film tourists, often framed within the concept of the 'tourist gaze'. This framework suggests that films create a gaze through which individuals view and subsequently seek out the locations they have seen on screen (Riley, Baker & Van Doren, 1998). When individuals visit these sites, they are engaging in film-induced tourism.

Set jetting and the promotion of TV destinations

Tourism plays a critical role in the economic development of various regions, cities, and towns, contributing to socio-economic progress by generating employment, expanding tourism infrastructure, and creating unique tourism products. These developments lead to an enhanced quality of life for residents. Additionally, tourism has become an essential aspect of how people spend their leisure time (Sawińska & Smalec, 2023). For many cities, creating a distinctive local tourism product and marketing it innovatively is crucial. As a result, local authorities are constantly searching for new ways to differentiate their regions. Film tourism, also known as set jetting, has emerged as a powerful driver of tourism development, as media significantly shape destination images and influence tourists' travel intentions (Connell, 2012).

Set jetting, involves visiting locations featured in movies or TV series, providing tourists with a tangible connection to the fictional world. The effectiveness of set jetting as a promotional tool is reinforced by Pham and Hwang (2022), whose research found that the attractiveness of a filmed location positively influences tourists' intentions to visit. However, set jetting's long-term impact on destination promotion is limited if not accompanied by sustainable tourism products, such as regular events or museums, that leverage the area's cultural and architectural assets. Films and tourism are both highly emotional experiences, closely linked through the promotion of destinations. As films transform urban spaces and inspire tourism products, there is potential to promote locations, although this can sometimes compromise a place's authentic identity. Nonetheless, incorporating local heritage, traditions, and unique attributes into films or series can offer significant benefits to regions looking to attract tourists and investors.

In fact, set jetting has become one of the leading trends in tourism for 2023, as today's audiences are drawn to interactive, immersive, and creative experiences that elicit emotional responses (Pham & Hwang, 2022). This evolving consumer preference highlights the need for unconventional promotion strategies (Thalassinos, Cristea & Noja, 2019). Tourism promotion has been extensively studied in the literature (Adamopoulos & Thalassinos, 2020), often within the frameworks of territorial marketing, place marketing, destination marketing, and place branding. Tourism products are typically composite offerings, including various sub-products such as services, events, and site-specific attractions like museums, trails, or souvenirs. City or region placement in films and television series has proven to be an effective and appealing promotional tool, as it is perceived as non-intrusive. City placement is closely linked to set jetting, where the goal is often to create tourism products associated with the featured location, potentially even generating a trend for specific tourist destinations. A significant advantage of city placement is its lasting impact. This form of promotion engages viewers more deeply than traditional advertisements, as they are focused on the storyline rather than distracted by commercials. City placement also functions as a "visual postcard," showcasing local landmarks and cultural attractions in a way that aligns with the promotional intentions of local authorities. This strategy enhances a location's visibility, emphasizes its uniqueness, and indirectly attracts tourists and investors (Sawińska & Smalec, 2023).

3. Methods

In this study, we employed a qualitative methodological approach, emphasizing the subjective interpretation of the data. Our research relied on secondary data sources to assess the impact of Netflix's Wednesday series on tourism in Bușteni, particularly focusing on Cantacuzino Castle. Data on tourist numbers, both Romanian and foreign, as well as revenue, accommodation units, average accommodation rates, and the average number of nights spent in the area from 2021 to 2023 were obtained from official sources, including the National Institute of Statistics (INS) and Tempo Online.

By utilizing existing data, we aimed to trace patterns and trends that emerged after the show's release and to explore how these changes align with established theories in film-induced tourism, such as the 'push and pull' theory. Our subjective design allowed us to interpret the data in the context of Wednesday's role in destination marketing, drawing connections between the surge in visitor interest and the series' widespread media coverage.

4. Netflix's 'Wednesday' and the emergence of a new destination

Film and television tourism initially emerged in Europe and America, where the field has developed a comprehensive research framework (Askanova, Askarkyzy, Balgimbayeva & Temirshotova, 2021). Studies show that film and television productions can create awareness and enhance interest in destinations, ultimately leading to travel. Research in the 1990s primarily examined the general influence of the film and television industries on tourism, but later studies delved deeper into the relationship between cinematic products and destination marketing.

Modern cinema has evolved beyond mere entertainment, becoming a powerful promotional tool for national culture, heritage, and values. Unlike feature films, television series exert a greater influence on international audiences. As viewers engage with TV shows over multiple episodes, they are repeatedly exposed to the culture, values, and lifestyle of the producing country (Askanova et al, 2021). This frequent exposure helps shape perceptions of the national culture and environment, which may later motivate viewers to visit the country, positively impacting the tourism sector.

The concept of film and television tourism has been recognized for many years, with the film industry consistently contributing to tourism development. Modern TV shows and films have sparked tourism booms, attracting fans to visit filming locations. TV shows, in particular, are more influential in driving tourism than films, as viewers are continually drawn to the narrative and eagerly await new seasons. Despite higher production costs, TV shows have a stronger and more lasting impact on viewers, making them a more effective tool for promoting tourism (Askanova et al, 2021).

Given this, TV series are a more rational choice for promoting tourism through cinematic products. While much research has explored the relationship between film and television and tourism development, the role of TV series in promoting tourism in Romania remains underexplored. There is a growing need to examine the key drivers of future tourism demand and the evolving preferences of modern tourists. Leveraging the film industry to increase the visibility of Romania's tourist sites presents an opportunity to create competitive advantages in the tourism market. By integrating tourism resources into cinematic products, audiences are guided towards experiential tourism, which enhances their perception of the destination and encourages them to visit. The integration of tourism resources into films fosters experiential tourism, shaping audiences' perceptions of a destination and motivating them to visit.

The Netflix series Wednesday (2022), directed by Tim Burton, serves as a prime example of how a media production can transform a relatively unknown destination into an international tourist hotspot. Filmed predominantly in Bușteni, Romania, the show has sparked renewed interest in this small mountain town, with

Cantacuzino Castle playing a pivotal role as the fictional Nevermore Academy. Romania, already recognized for its medieval architecture, gothic landscapes, and cinematic history, proved to be the ideal location for Wednesday. As Icon Film's Alma Bacula, head of production explains, Romania's unique blend of architectural styles and picturesque settings offered the production team an ample opportunity to create the eerie and atmospheric backdrops central to the show. Cantacuzino Castle, built in 1911 in the Neo-Romanian style, was selected by Burton for its gothic appeal, edging out other locations like Peles Castle, as per David Minkowski, co-executive producer ("How Netflix's Smash Hit Wednesday Came to Life in Romania," n.d.). The castle's dramatic presence added significant visual depth to Wednesday, enhancing its appeal to viewers and indirectly promoting Bușteni as a travel destination.

Not only did the physical location lend itself to the show's gothic themes, but the broader cultural context of Romania added authenticity to the production, drawing attention to the country's historical sites and landscapes. By showcasing Romania's built environment, Wednesday functions as a conduit for potential tourists to engage with the country's rich cultural heritage.

The Netflix era: from unpopular castle to international attraction

Netflix's extensive global reach through its streaming platform has been a key factor in Wednesday's success in transforming Bușteni into a popular destination. The viral nature of the show, coupled with fan engagement on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, has allowed fans to share their experiences visiting the filming locations. These digital narratives further drive interest in the destination, as user-generated content serves as an authentic form of destination promotion (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006).

According to the official website of the Cantacuzino Castle ("Castelul Cantacuzino într-o lumină complet nouă în serialul 'Wednesday'," n.d.), Wednesday achieved a new record for Netflix, with over 341.23 million hours viewed in its first week, ranking in the Top 10 in all 93 countries where it was broadcast and reaching first place in 83 of them. This immense popularity has generated significant interest in the castle, drawing attention to Romania as a unique filming destination.

The production team and cast members have spoken highly of the castle and its surrounding areas. Their glowing remarks, featured prominently on the official website of the attraction, have played a crucial role in boosting the castle's visibility and appeal, making it an essential element of the show's destination marketing efforts. Jenna Ortega, who stars as Wednesday Addams, expressed her admiration for both the castle and its surroundings, stating: "the place where our school is located (Nevermore Academy) is very beautiful... it fit very well with the aesthetic of the show" ("Castelul Cantacuzino..." n.d.). Her comment highlights how the castle's architecture and atmosphere were a perfect match for the gothic visual tone of Wednesday, which undoubtedly amplifies its allure for fans of the series. Gwendoline Christie, who played Larissa Weems, further emphasized the natural beauty surrounding the castle. She remarked, "nothing prepared me for the fabulous beauty of the Carpathian Mountains. They had an almost hallucinatory effect" ("Castelul Cantacuzino..." n.d.). When actors express such admiration for a location, it humanizes the destination, bridging the gap between the fictional world of Wednesday and the tangible experience of visiting Bușteni. Tourists are likely to be motivated by such endorsements, as they feel they are following in the footsteps of their favorite characters and actors.

In addition to these testimonials, the castle's architectural details were also praised by the series' production designer, Mark Scruton, who noted that a particular column in the castle embodied the gothic aesthetic of the Addams Family world. He remarked that Cantacuzino Castle's design perfectly aligned with the visual tone of the series. These artistic observations lend further credibility to the castle's appeal, particularly for those who appreciate design and architecture, adding another dimension to the pull factors associated with the location.

The transformation of Cantacuzino Castle from a relatively unknown tourist spot into a globally recognized destination owes much to the high praise it received from the significant international media coverage. Major publications such as Euronews and Architectural Digest highlighted the impact of Wednesday on Romania's tourism sector. For instance, Euronews noted that Wednesday gave Romania a significant boost in TV tourism, drawing in fans eager to explore the real-life locations of the series (Ponsard, 2023). Architectural Digest published an in-depth look at the castle, detailing its architectural intricacies and role in the show (Liebman, 2022). In addition, The Daily Mail ran an article on the castle, calling it the "REAL Nevermore Academy" and providing an in-depth overview of the property, which took over 10 years to build and features ornate Renaissance detailing. The article even pointed out the castle's affordability for tourists, with entrance fees under £10, making it an attractive site for international visitors (Johnston, 2022).

5. Results: The Wednesday effect on tourism in Bușteni, Romania

The economic impact of the Wednesday series on local tourism has been tangible. According to Kurt Neuschitzer, CEO of Cantacuzino Castle, the site experienced an unprecedented increase in visitors following the release of the series in late 2022 (Dumitrescu, 2022). The castle, traditionally popular among older tourists and history enthusiasts, has seen a shift in demographics, attracting younger audiences, including teenagers and fans of the show. This shift aligns with the general trends of film-induced tourism, where younger generations are more likely to travel based on media influences (Connell, 2012).

This chapter analyzes the tangible impact on tourist influx, accommodation patterns, and revenue generation in the town of Bușteni, leveraging data from 2021 to 2023. These trends are contextualized within the growing prominence of film-induced tourism, particularly in light of the success of Wednesday.

Cantacuzino Castle, now marketed as the filming location for Nevermore Academy, has developed themed tours and experiences to cater to fans of the show. This form of destination marketing capitalizes on the existing popularity of Wednesday and extends the reach of Bușteni to a global audience. According to Romania Insider (Dumitrescu, 2022), the spike in tourism has also benefited surrounding businesses, contributing to local economic growth and positioning Bușteni as a must-visit location for both domestic and international tourists.

In the years leading up to the release of Wednesday, Bușteni experienced a steady increase in tourist numbers. However, following the series' premiere in late 2022, there was a marked increase in tourist activity, reflecting the show's international success and its role in promoting Romania as a filming location. Table 1 shows the yearly tourist data, illustrating the rise in both domestic and international visitors.

Table 1. Bușteni Tourist Data

Bușteni	2021	2022	2023
Tourist arrival	70.000-90.000	90.000-110.000	100.000-120.000
Average romanian/foreigner	90 % romanian 10% foreigner	85% romanian 15% foreigner	80% romanian 20% foreigner
Income	20-30 m RON	30-40 m RON	35-45 m RON
Accommodation Units	150	180	170
Average rate	150-300 RON/day	200-400 RON/ day	250-450 RON/ day
Average nights spent	3 nights	3 nights	3 nights

Sursa: INS România, Tempo online

There was a notable increase in tourist numbers between 2021 and 2023, with the biggest jump occurring between 2021 and 2022. This correlates with the release of Wednesday in late 2022, after which Bușteni became an international attraction for fans of the show. While the number of tourists increased each year, the data suggests that international interest in Bușteni grew substantially in 2023, with foreign visitors making up 20% of the total tourist population compared to 10% in 2021. Tourism revenues followed a similar upward trajectory, growing from 20-30 million RON in 2021 to 35-45 million RON in 2023. The substantial increase in income can be attributed to the rising number of tourists, higher demand for accommodation, and price hikes in the local hospitality sector. There was a noticeable shift in the number of accommodation units, which peaked in 2022 at 180, likely due to new investments responding to the growing tourist interest. However, the number dropped slightly in 2023 to 170, perhaps reflecting market adjustments after the initial surge of interest. Accommodation rates also saw a sharp rise, from 150-300 RON/night in 2021 to 250-450 RON/night in 2023. The increased demand for accommodations, particularly among foreign tourists, likely drove up prices. The average number of nights spent by tourists remained consistent over the three-year period, at approximately 3 nights. This figure suggests that Bușteni serves as a short-stay destination for both Romanian and international visitors.

The release of Wednesday and the global attention it garnered for Cantacuzino Castle as Nevermore Academy significantly boosted Bușteni's visibility on the international tourism map. Media coverage and social media promotion fueled this interest, with Bușteni becoming a must-visit location for fans of the series. Additionally, Wednesday has contributed to the rise of themed travel, with tour operators now offering specialized trips to explore the show's filming locations in Romania. According to Secret Romania (Wednesday locations in Romania: 10 Places You Shouldn't Miss, n.d.), an important national travelling platform, these tours not only promote Cantacuzino Castle but also include visits to other filming locations such as Bucharest and Sinaia, effectively expanding Romania's tourism market.

6. Discussion: transforming tourism and enhancing destination marketing through film

The phenomenon of film-induced tourism has long been a subject of academic interest, highlighting how media exposure can alter the economic and touristic landscapes of destinations. As Busby and Klug (2001) argued, films and TV series have the potential to market places and convert them into 'must-see' destinations by leveraging emotional and narrative engagement. Our research into the post-Wednesday tourism trends in Bușteni provides a real-world case that supports these theoretical frameworks, illustrating how Netflix's global reach acted as a vehicle for destination marketing.

Set-jetting, a term used to describe the phenomenon where tourists visit real-world locations featured in films and TV shows, has become increasingly popular (Macionis, 2004). The release of Wednesday on Netflix exemplifies this trend, with fans of the show traveling to Bușteni to experience Cantacuzino Castle in person. In Bușteni's case, the castle's neo-Romanian architecture and gothic aesthetic allow tourists to feel as if they are stepping into the show itself, adding layers of emotional and narrative engagement to their visit. Visual

media, especially films and TV shows, play a significant role in shaping perceptions and enhancing brand equity for lesser-known destinations (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). In this context, Bușteni's Cantacuzino Castle, exemplifies how cinematic locations can transcend their physical attributes to acquire cultural resonance. The architectural allure of the castle, coupled with its portrayal in a fictional, gothic universe, aligns with the concept of a 'constructed image,' transforming it into a place of global intrigue.

As Wednesday continued to gain global traction, Bușteni has become a prime destination for set-jetters, offering them a tangible connection to the fictional world of Nevermore Academy. The surge in foreign tourists, particularly younger audiences, aligns with previous studies on set-jetting, which suggest that fans are drawn not only by the narrative but by the immersive experience of visiting filming locations (Connell, 2012).

The research data on tourist demographics from 2021 to 2023 show a marked increase in foreign visitors following the release of Wednesday, which correlates with previous studies on the immediate impact of film tourism. Bușteni's pre-Wednesday tourism numbers were predominantly driven by domestic tourists, with a lower influx of international visitors. However, the post-show period saw an upward trend in the number of foreign tourists, indicating that the series effectively rebranded Bușteni as a transnational destination.

Several scholars have noted that film tourism can generate a ripple effect on the local economy, stimulating not only visitor numbers but also revenue across multiple sectors, including hospitality and retail (Connell, 2012). This was evident in the case of Bușteni, where statistical data demonstrate a substantial increase in revenues during the post-Wednesday period, that supports the argument that film tourism extends beyond its initial surge, leading to longer-term economic gains. This is particularly relevant in Bușteni's case, where the combination of international press coverage and the castle's cinematic portrayal cultivated ongoing international curiosity.

Tourism is driven by a complex interplay of motivations, and various theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand what prompts individuals to travel. Among these, Dann's (1977) push and pull theory has emerged as one of the most significant. When applied to film-induced tourism, the theory provides an invaluable lens for understanding the motivations behind tourists' choices to visit locations made famous by movies or TV series. In the context of the Netflix series Wednesday, filmed at Cantacuzino Castle in Bușteni, Romania, the push and pull theory, along with the *3 P's framework: place, personality, and performance* can be used to explain how the show has enhanced destination marketing efforts in Bușteni.

The push factors related to Wednesday are grounded in psychological motivations that drive individuals to travel. Film and TV series often allow audiences to escape their everyday lives and experience a fantastical world. According to Kim (2012), viewers are more likely to visit a location if it allows them to step into a fictional narrative, fulfilling a need for adventure and novelty. In the case of Wednesday, Cantacuzino Castle stands in for the "Nevermore Academy," drawing fans eager to experience the eerie, gothic setting of the show. This desire of fantasy and escape, to physically immerse themselves in the world of Wednesday serves as a strong push factor. Tourists may seek destinations associated with cultural phenomena to boost their self-identity or enhance their social status (Macionis, 2004). A visit to Bușteni, linked to a globally recognized show like Wednesday, provides an opportunity for individuals to feel part of an exclusive group of fans. Social media amplification of such experiences enhances the ego enhancement motivation, as tourists often share their visit to these sites as a form of social capital. What's more, for many, visiting locations from favorite shows or films serves as a way to relive a beloved narrative. This is a key push factor, particularly for millennials and Gen Z audiences, who often look for experiences that provide an emotional or nostalgic connection to the content they consume (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006).

The pull factors for Bușteni, particularly its portrayal in Wednesday, can be understood through the lens of the *3 P's framework*, which includes place, personality, and performance. The most obvious pull factor in film-induced tourism is the physical setting of the series. Bușteni, with its majestic mountain views and the gothic architecture of Cantacuzino Castle, offers an alluring location that mirrors the mysterious and otherworldly atmosphere of Wednesday. According to Beeton (2016), the aesthetic appeal of such locations often acts as a significant pull factor, attracting tourists who want to experience the real-life versions of on-screen settings.

The second 'P' involves the personalities portrayed in the film or TV series. In the case of Wednesday, the main character (played by Jenna Ortega) has become a cultural icon, symbolizing an offbeat, gothic style that resonates with younger audiences. Celebrities and their personas often act as pull factors in film tourism (Connell, 2012). Fans may be drawn to Bușteni not just for its place-based appeal but to feel closer to the characters and actors who brought the world of Wednesday to life.

Furthermore, high production values, detailed set designs, and a captivating storyline are essential components that contribute to a series' success in influencing tourism. The performance of a film or series, as in the 3rd 'P', in terms of its cinematography and direction, plays a crucial role in making a destination more appealing. The quality of Wednesday, which blends gothic visual elements with modern aesthetics, makes Bușteni an attractive destination for fans who wish to experience the setting firsthand.

At the same time, in line with the '3 P's' framework, the public endorsements by actors in the series enhance both the personality and performance aspects of the destination. The actors' experiences imbue the location with a human touch, while the castle's alignment with the show's aesthetic elevates its status as a must-visit destination for fans of Wednesday. These types of public endorsements are vital in promoting film-induced tourism. Studies suggest that celebrity associations and direct references to their experiences at a destination can strongly influence tourists' decisions to visit a particular location. In this case, the positive sentiments shared by Ortega, Christie, and Scruton contribute to an ongoing cycle of attraction, where fans are drawn to Bușteni not only because of the show's visual appeal but also because of the personal connections made by those involved in its production. These sentiments resonate with the audience's own desire to experience the world of Wednesday firsthand, enhancing the castle's marketability as a tourist destination.

The integration of both push and pull factors, alongside the '3 P's' has significantly enhanced destination marketing efforts in Bușteni. The town's portrayal in Wednesday highlights the aesthetic and narrative value of its landmarks, particularly Cantacuzino Castle, making it a key pull factor for tourists. At the same time, psychological motivations such as fantasy fulfillment and self-identity push individuals to seek out these locations. As a result, Bușteni has benefitted from a marked increase in tourism since the release of Wednesday, with visitors eager to connect with both the location and the cultural phenomenon associated with the show. This has allowed local authorities and marketers to leverage the destination's association with the series in their promotional campaigns, thereby enhancing its visibility on the global tourism stage.

7. Limitations and future implications

While the findings clearly illustrate a direct correlation between the release of Wednesday and the tourism surge in Bușteni, some limitations must be noted. Our study focused primarily on secondary data sources, including media reports, official tourism statistics, and testimonies from the cast and crew. Another limitation is the relatively short time frame analyzed, from 2021 to 2023. Since the show was released at the end of 2022, it is too soon to assess whether the surge in tourism is sustainable over time or merely a temporary phenomenon. The data on tourism patterns may also be affected by external factors, such as post-pandemic travel behavior, which might have caused an increase in tourism regardless of the series' popularity. Future studies could focus on longer-term data collection to better understand the sustainability of the film-induced tourism effect in Bușteni.

Additionally, the study focuses solely on one particular case—Bușteni and Cantacuzino Castle. While this case provides an excellent example of film-induced tourism, generalizations to other destinations based on this case may not be fully applicable. Different locations, genres, and production values can yield varied tourism outcomes, making it necessary to conduct comparative studies across different destinations to validate the findings.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this research suggest significant future implications for both film-induced tourism and destination marketing strategies. The global reach of streaming platforms like Netflix creates opportunities for lesser-known destinations, such as Bușteni, to gain international visibility. This shift marks a new era in destination marketing, where collaborations between local tourism authorities, production companies, and streaming platforms could become a key strategy in boosting tourism.

Lastly, this study underscores the potential for smaller, relatively unknown locations to harness the power of digital storytelling to elevate their profile on the world stage. As audiences become more globally connected through streaming services, new opportunities will arise for destinations to market themselves as iconic "set-jetting" locations. Future research could explore how destinations can best position themselves to capitalize on the film tourism trend, particularly in terms of building a unique brand identity that resonates with global audiences.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the global exposure provided by Wednesday has positioned Cantacuzino Castle as a key tourist destination, with the series acting as a catalyst for film-induced tourism in Romania. The data presented in this study reveals a marked increase in both domestic and foreign tourist numbers following the show's release, with corresponding rises in accommodation rates, revenue, and the length of stay. These changes reflect the immediate economic benefits of set-jetting, where popular media can reframe perceptions of a location and elevate it into a must-visit destination.

More than just a short-term trend, the case of Wednesday in Bușteni highlights the broader potential of leveraging film-induced tourism for destination marketing. By strategically promoting filming locations and capitalizing on the global reach of streaming platforms like Netflix, destinations like Bușteni can position themselves as culturally significant and visually captivating sites, appealing to fans and tourists alike.

Nevertheless, the transformation of Bușteni due to Wednesday offers a compelling case study on the power of modern media to reshape tourism landscapes. As streaming platforms continue to produce global hits, more destinations may look to replicate Bușteni's success, combining the allure of popular culture with strategic destination marketing to drive sustainable tourism growth.

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