

How celebrity involvement affect destination image, the mediating role of celebrity worship

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Abstract: The film industry plays a significant role in influencing tourists' travel destination choices. This study aims to explore the relationship between celebrity involvement and destination image, with celebrity worship serving as a mediating variable. This research depicted the case of Chinese film industry to examines how films and celebrities affect destination image. This research uses quantitative research methods with the PLS-SEM research model. the study surveyed 310 Batam residents who have watched Chinese movies or TV series. The findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between celebrity involvement and destination image, mediated by celebrity worship.

Keywords: celebrity, destination image, film industry, tourist.

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Introduction

In today's digital age, streaming platforms have revolutionized the way audiences engage with television shows and films. Entertainment programs from around the world can be easily accessed through digital streaming platforms, such as Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, iQIYI, WeTV, and many more, breaking down geographical and cultural barriers (Djamzuri & Mulyana, 2022).

This shift has been particularly impactful in countries like Indonesia, where the film industry has seen significant growth. Between 2015 and 2018, the number of movie audiences in Indonesia surged by over 100%, rising from 16.2 million viewers in 2015 to more than 50 million in 2018 (Indonesia.go.id). Furthermore, 91.58% of Indonesians over the age of 10 now prefer to watch television/movies (Puspa et al., 2022), with an increasing preference for over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms over conventional TV (Sulivyo et al., 2022).

Online streaming platforms like Netflix, WeTV, and iQIYI have taken advantage of this trend to gain more user by offering a wide range of films based on everyone's personal interests (Sulivyo et al., 2022). As a result, people can watch whatever film of their liking anywhere anytime just by a click on their device.

Kwan & Scheepers (2022) stated that celebrity's star power, expertise in acting, critic review, and public opinion are the main factors that may contribute to a film's success. The involvement of popular celebrities in films plays a crucial role in shaping audience perceptions, not just of the story, but also of the locations where the film is set. When a well-known actor stars in a film, it attracts their fanbase, which can significantly boost the film's view count. This finding were supported by Hofmann (2021) as he explain that the involvement of well-known actors plays a key role in a film's success. Famous actors can increase public interest and awareness, which in turn attracts their fans to watch the film. This increase in viewer often leads to greater recognition of the film's locations.

Those places once depicted on-screen have now become popular tourist destinations, with more people visiting them. For instance, Zhangjiajie National Park in Hunan Province, which was

introduced in the film series "Avatar". According to Zhangjiajie Tourism Bureau, after the movie "Avatar (2009)" aired, there was a 30% higher increase in tourist arrivals in 2010 (Hao et al., 2024). In addition, Dali City in Yunnan Province, China experienced an increase in tourism revenue in early 2024 to 38.4 billion yuan after the airing of the serial "Meet Yourself (2023)" featuring the famous Chinese actress, Liu Yi Fei (China Daily, 2023).

The increasing popularity of film locations were the perfect example of the involvement of celebrities in films can significantly influence public interest and perception. Chen (2018) argues that tourism advertising involving celebrities are able to increase the attractiveness of destinations and form a positive image of destinations. An individual's perception and emotion of a place are shaped by various factors, this contributes to how individuals understand and attach themselves to a destination, especially when the destination is presented through media associated with celebrities. This connection between celebrity presence and tourist attractions can be further understood through the concept of celebrity involvement, an emotional connection and attachment fans develop towards a celebrity (Lee et al., 2008). Understanding how this involvement shapes viewers' perceptions of a place is key to exploring how films and celebrities affect destination image.

Involvement refers to an individual's consistent interest or emotional connection to an activity, which influences their behavior, even if it doesn't always imply active participation. This concept has been described as an unobservable motivation or interest in a particular activity or product (Steinhardt et al., 2022; Havitz & Dimanche, 1999). Therefore, in the context of celebrities, Lee et al. (2008) explain celebrity involvement as a form of emotional bond and attachment towards a celebrity, intensified by media portrayals and personal admiration. Since celebrities are viewed as a primary source of entertainment for their fans, leisure involvement forms as the basis of celebrity involvement (Zhu et al., 2022). Kara (2024) explains that celebrity involvement can be broken down into 3 main dimensions, namely attraction, centrality, and self-expression. Attraction describes the level of interest and happiness of a person from participating in an entertainment activity. Centrality describes how important the role of entertainment activities is to a person's life. Self-expression describes the role of entertainment activities as a medium for a person to reflect their identity in social life (Kara, 2024).

Celebrity involvement not only affects how fans consume media but also how they perceive and interact with the world around it. Fans with high levels of celebrity involvement may follow their favorite celebrities' activities, buy products they endorse, and visit places associated with them. This connection often leads to increased consumer behavior and loyalty toward products or locations associated with the celebrity (Li et al., 2023).

According to Chen (2018), the level of celebrity involvement has a significant effect on the emotional connection and attitude of individuals in showing interest in destinations associated with favored celebrities. Admiration for a celebrity can influence an individual's view of a destination, this statement is supported by Zhou et al., (2023) which explains that the audience's view of places related to celebrities or films can be influenced by the audience's admiration for the celebrity who play a role in the film.

Lee & Yoo (2015) further argue that it is the intensity of celebrity worship, a stronger form of celebrity involvement, that amplifies the effect of celebrity involvement has on destination image. Hidayah et al., (2020) and Brooks (2021) explained that celebrity worship, also known as idolization, is a form of intense admiration and obsession that a person has for a celebrity, which can significantly shape the way a person sees products, places, and things associated with the celebrity. Halim & Kiatkawsin (2021) note that individuals with high levels of celebrity worship often focus on the personal aspects of a celebrity's life, forming a one-sided relationship. In contrast, those with lower levels of worship tend to engage with a broader range of entertainment content rather than concentrating on one celebrity or group. Andira et al., (2023) explained that the characteristics of a celebrity worshipper are characterized by behaviors such as collecting information about their favorite celebrity, buying products related to the celebrity, and attempting to meet them. These studies aligned with the idea that celebrity worship transforms casual interest into a profound emotional connection, changing how fans perceive and are attracted to destinations linked with their favorite celebrities. This excessive admiration can lead to a heightened

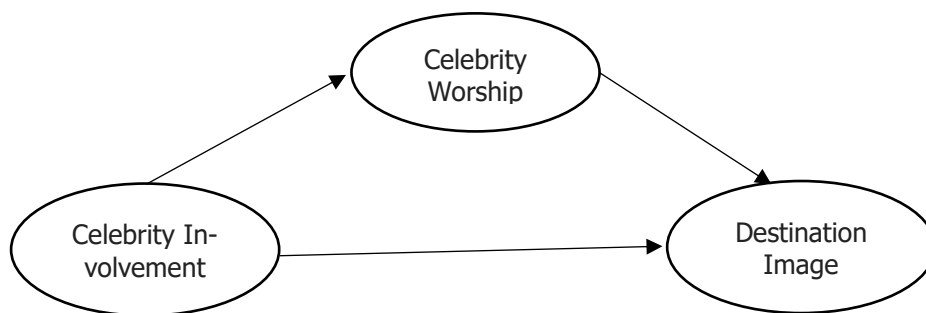
desire to visit these locations, thereby enhancing the location's destination image as a desirable tourist destination.

Marković et al., (2022) and Zhou et al., (2023) define destination image as individual's perception and impression of a particular location as a whole, influenced by various factors such as media representations, personal experiences, or information received about the destination. Putri & Hariyanto (2022) and Anggraini & Idris (2023) added that generally, destination image can be seen as an expression of all understandings, biases, impressions, and emotional thoughts held by individuals or groups about a specific object or place. There are two main factors that shape how people perceive a destination: cognitive image and affective image. The cognitive image are the beliefs and thoughts that people have about a place, such as how they view its features, attractions, or overall characteristics. On the other hand, the affective image focuses on the emotional feelings and personal connections individuals experience when thinking about a place. This can include feelings of excitement, nostalgia, or warmth towards the location (Marques et al., 2021). Gholamhosseinzadeh et al. (2023) explained that celebrities are able to support a positive correlation between the cognitive and affective components of destination image when they, as public figures, engage audiences by sharing stories about their experiences related to a destination. Kim et al., (2019) in their study stated that the involvement of celebrities in films develops positive perceptions of the location's image and raising the visit intentions to the place portrayed in the film.

Considering the points discussed above, the hypothesis and the research model for this study are formulated as follows:

H1: Celebrity involvement (CI) has a positive effect on destination image (DI)

H2: Celebrity adoration (CW) mediates the relationship between celebrity involvement (CI) and destination image (DI).



(Source: Yen, C., & Croy, W. G., 2013)

Figure 1. Research Model

Methodology

This study uses quantitative research methods by analyzing numerical data in the form of variable measurement instruments based on statistical procedures (Adhi Kusumastuti et al., 2020). The collected data is processed using SmartPLS to test hypotheses and interpret results.

The primary objective of this study is to determine the effect of celebrity involvement on the destination image of places depicted in movies/TV series, a form of media representation associated with celebrities. Additionally, this study explores the role of celebrity worship as a mediator in the relationship between celebrity involvement and destination image. The case used in this study focuses on Chinese movies/TV series, which have gained significant popularity in recent years. Therefore, the sample of this research are people who have watched Chinese movies/TV series in Batam City.

The variable measurement indicators in this study were developed based on the measurement scale adopted from Yen & Croy's (2016) research. The celebrity involvement variable was

assessed using 12 indicators developed by Lee et al. (2008). Indicators of celebrity involvement variables are grouped into 3 dimensions, namely attraction, centrality, and self-expression with 4 indicators representing each dimension. The celebrity worship variable is measured using the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS) which contains 22 indicators developed by Maltby et al. (2004). The destination image variable was assessed using 14 indicators adopted from Baloglu & McCleary (1999). The destination familiarity variable was added as a control variable that serves to filter the influence of celebrity involvement on destination image. All variable test indicators were compiled into a questionnaire using a Likert scale. Respondents were given a choice between a 5-point scale, (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire consists of two main sections. The first section of the questionnaire started by collecting the respondents' personal information, such as gender, education, occupation, income, and whether they had ever watched Chinese movies/TV series. The questionnaire was then made into a Google Form to be distributed to the respondents using social media or Whatsapp.

According to Hair et al. (2017), the minimum number of samples that should be used is 10 times the number of all indicators. In general, a sample size of more than 100 is better, but a sample size smaller than 100 is acceptable, depending on the research background. The data in this study were collected from April to June 2024 with a total of 383 respondents. A total of 73 sample respondents were not used because they were identified as outlier data. Thus, the total sample in this study is 310 samples.

Results and Discussions

Sample Profile

Of the 310 respondents, 64.8% were female and 35.2% were male. The majority (79.7%) were aged 18-30 years, with smaller groups in the 31-40 years (3.9%) and over 40 years (2.3%). Most respondents (65.5%) had a high school or equivalent education. Regarding occupation, 42.6% were students, and 36.1% were private employees. Respondents were also grouped by the number of Chinese movies/TV series they had watched: more than 10 titles (50%), 6-10 titles (13.5%), 2-5 titles (22.6%), and fewer than 2 titles (13.9%).

Validity and Reliability Test

Outer model testing consists of testing convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability. Convergent validity represents the relationship between indicators and latent constructs. Convergent validity testing is measured by the outer loadings (loading factors) of each indicator and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, dan Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Celebrity Involvement	0.930	0.933	0.940	0.568
Celebrity Worship	0.967	0.968	0.969	0.590
Destination Familiarity	0.871	0.880	0.912	0.721
Destination Image	0.957	0.958	0.961	0.640

According to (Ariyanto et al., 2023; Hair, Risher, et al., 2019), the AVE value that meets the validity requirements is at least ≥ 0.50 . The results of testing the outer model in Table 1. show the AVE value of each variable > 0.50 . Therefore, it can be concluded that all latent variables have met the requirements of convergent validity.

Reliability testing is measured from the Cronbach's Alpha value and composite reliability. Ghozali (2014); Sarstedt et al. (2021) explain that 0.70 is the minimum value limit for latent variables to meet reliability standards in Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability testing. Table 1. displays the results of testing Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (ρ_a and ρ_c) ranging from values of 0.871 - 0.969. This figure indicates that all latent variables in this study meet the reliability criteria.

Discriminant validity testing serves to ensure that constructs have significant differences with other constructs in a research model (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity can be measured based on the fornell-larcker criterion and cross loading. However, experts argue that the fornell-larcker criterion does not have a sufficient level of sensitivity to properly assess discriminant validity (Hair et al., (2019); Henseler et al., (2015). As an alternative, Henseler et al. (2015) suggested heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) correlation. Latent variables are valid in proving discriminant validity between reflective constructs if the HTMT value does not exceed 0.90.

Table 2. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) correlation

Variable	Celebrity Involvement (CI)	Celebrity Worship (CW)	Destination Familiarity (DF)	Destination Image (DI)
Celebrity Involvement				
Celebrity Worship	0.876			
Destination Familiarity	0.705	0.754		
Destination Image	0.634	0.624	0.641	

The test results of HTMT value in Table 2. show that the latent variables fulfill discriminant validity well because no variable has an HTMT value of more than 0.90.

Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis testing is carried out in 2 stages, namely, the first is hypothesis testing by involving the destination familiarity (DF) control variable in the accounting model to obtain the results of the direct and indirect effect test of the CI and CW variables on the dependent variable (DI) with the influence of the control variable (DF) on the DI variable. Then in the second stage, the control variable (DF) is removed from the measurement model to obtain the test results of the direct and indirect effects of the CI and CW variables on DI without the influence of the control variable (DF).

Table 3. Path Coefficients With Control Variable

Path Coefficients	With Control Variable (DF)				
	Original sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CI -> CW	0.835	0.837	0.021	40.105	0.000
CI -> DI	0.223	0.229	0.099	2.244	0.025
CW -> DI	0.229	0.221	0.115	1.998	0.046
DF -> DI	0.293	0.297	0.076	3.838	0.000

Table 4. Path Coefficients Without Control Variable

Path Coefficients	Without Control Variable (DF)				
	Original sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CI -> CW	0.835	0.837	0.021	40.105	0.000
CI -> DI	0.283	0.291	0.105	2.686	0.007
CW -> DI	0.383	0.375	0.115	3.338	0.001
DF -> DI	-	-	-	-	-

The results of hypothesis testing shown in table 3 and table 4. show that in the presence of control variables (DF) the statistical t value in all relationships between variables is above 1.96 and the p value in all relationships between variables is smaller than 0.05. This means that there is a significant influence in the relationship between latent variables (Hair, Sarstedt, et al. 2019). Thus, H1 is proven to be acceptable. This finding is in line with the research of Yen & Croy (2016); Chen (2018) which states that celebrity involvement has a direct and significant influence on destination image.

Then, it also appears that the removal of DF from the measurement model has a considerable effect on the relationship between CW variables and DI, from a statistical t value of 1.998 to 3.338 and a p value of 0.046 to 0.001. The difference in value indicates that the presence of DF can affect the relationship between CW and DI. This means that the higher a person's destination familiarity (DF) can reduce the effect of celebrity worship (CW) on destination image (DI).

Table 5. Indirect Effects

Specific Indirect Effects	With Control Variable (DF)					Without Control Variable (DF)				
	Original sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Original sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CI -> CW -> DI	0.191	0.184	0.095	2.008	0.045	0.319	0.313	0.094	3.389	0.001

The next stage in hypothesis testing is the indirect effect between latent variables. Table 3. shows the results of indirect effect testing in the presence of DF control variables have a positive significant effect, seen from the t statistical value of 2.008 (greater than 1.96) and p value of 0.045 (smaller than 0.05). Furthermore, the removal of DF from the measurement model is shown to affect the relationship between latent variables. Nevertheless, the test results still show that the CI variable has a significant positive indirect effect on the DI variable through CW as a mediating variable. This result proves that celebrity worship (CW) has a mediating function in the relationship between celebrity involvement and destination image. Therefore, H2 is accepted. The results of this finding are in line with Yen & Croy's (2016) research which states that celebrity worship has an indirect and significant influence on destination image.

Table 6. R Square

	Original sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard de- viation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CW	0.697	0.701	0.035	20.066	0.000
DI	0.450	0.460	0.051	0.8788	0.000

The R square value serves to measure the influence of exogenous variables on endogenous variables in the statistical measurement model (Hair et al., 2011). Hair, Sarstedt, et al. (2019) state that the R square value of 0.75 is included in the strong category, the R square value of 0.50 is in the moderate category and the R square value of 0.25 is in the weak category. The R square value for the CW variable of 0.701 is in the strong category, which means that CI is able to influence CW by 70.1%, while the remaining 29.9% is influenced by other variables not included in the research model. Then, the R square value for the DI variable of 0.460 is included in the moderate category, which means that the exogenous variables CI and CW are able to influence DI by 46%, and the remaining 54% of DI is influenced by other variables not contained in the research model.

From the AVE and R square values obtained from the test results above, the Goodness of Fit Index (GoF) calculation is carried out to validate the performance of the research model in PLS-SEM. The GoF calculation method developed by Henseler et al. (2015) is the root of the multiplication of the average communality (AVE) value and the average R square value. So that the average communality is 0.630 and the average R square is 0.581. Therefore, the GoF value can be calculated in the following way:

$$GoF = \sqrt{Comm \times R^2} \quad (1)$$

$$GoF = \sqrt{0.630 \times 0.581}$$

$$GoF = 0.605$$

The GoF value is categorized into three levels based on its range. A GoF value of less than 0.25 is considered "small," meaning that the model doesn't fit the data very well, and there might be significant room for improvement. A GoF value between 0.25 and 0.36 is considered "moderate," indicating that the model fits the data fairly well, but there is still some room for improvement. On the other hand, a GoF value greater than 0.36 is considered "high". According to the results of the GoF calculation, the GoF value of this study is 0.605 so that it can be interpreted that the level of fit between the measurement model and the general structural model is in the high category.

Conclusions

The results of this study reveal that celebrity involvement has a significant affect on how individuals perceive film destinations. Specifically, higher levels of celebrity involvement are associated with more positive perceptions of destinations featured in films. This finding underscores the power of celebrity influence in shaping destination image, as audiences are more likely to develop a favorable view of a place when they feel a strong connection to the celebrity associated with it. As celebrities appear in media, their image and the locations they visit on-screen become more appealing to their fans, which can contribute to heightened tourism interest in those destinations.

This research also highlights the important role of celebrity worship in mediating the relationship between celebrity involvement and destination image. The level of celebrity worship is strongly tied to celebrity involvement. Celebrity worship describes a condition where individuals have a very high level of celebrity involvement in themselves so that this involvement fosters loyalty and obsession with the figure of the celebrity (Brooks, 2021). For fans, the nature of celebrity worship can act as the catalyst for them to have curiosity and interest in films or destinations. This suggests that celebrity worship not only influences fans' overall perception of the celebrity but also enhances their interest in visiting locations associated with them. This statement supports the results of this study which prove that the level of celebrity adoration has a mediating role in the relationship between celebrity involvement and destination image.

Limitations and Practical Improvements

It is important to note that the sample of this study was confined to residents of Batam City, Indonesia, which may not represent the broader population. Future research could expand the sample to include a more diverse group of respondents from different regions or countries to further validate the findings.

Additionally, while this study examined the perceptions of film destinations, it did not directly explore the impact of celebrity involvement on actual tourist behavior, such as visit intention or decision-making processes. Future studies could investigate the direct effects of celebrity involvement on tourists' intentions to visit celebrity-associated destinations. Understanding how celebrity influence affects actual travel behavior would provide deeper insights into the motivations driving tourist visits to these destinations and a better approach for making strategies for tourism development.

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