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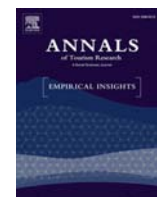
# Marketing 'Literary England' beyond the special interest tourist

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the likelihood of mainstream (US general sample) and special interest tourists (literary society members) travelling to English literary tourism destinations. The study applied a mixed methods approach comprising a correlational study of two comparative consumer surveys together with interviews with travel agents. Findings indicate that literary society members have a greater propensity to visit literary tourism destinations. However, they are more likely to visit when familiar with the associated book or film, whereas the general tourist is prepared to visit regardless. Moreover, literary society members profess a greater preference for independent – over organised – travel than mainstream tourists when travelling internationally. This paper thus offers implications for how 'Literary England' can be better promoted to different market segments.

## 1. Introduction

There is a growing international market for literary tourism which has, in part, been driven by links between literature, literary characters and film productions that embed characters in real or imagined places, sharing narratives and attributes that appeal to the consumer (Connell, 2012). Despite this trend, there is little knowledge regarding these links vis-à-vis the behavioural patterns of individuals engaging in literary tourism. Mirroring the literature into special interest tourism, focus has almost exclusively centred on the 'hard' end of market participants, despite the recognition that travel companies are increasingly targeting more 'novice' consumers (Trauer, 2006, p.184). Research has spotlighted the bibliophile tourist typology rather than seeking to understand why people, more broadly, travel to and engage with literary places (MacLeod, Shelley, & Morrison, 2018).

This study – commissioned by Visit Nottinghamshire[1] – arose from the need for greater understanding of the American market interest in literary tourism in light of a newly designated UNESCO City of Literature, Nottingham, UK. A recent VisitBritain (2017a) study reported that the overall tourism market *and* US market both ranked Britain fourth amongst global destinations in terms of it being 'an interesting and exciting place for contemporary culture such as music, films, art and literature' (p.46). Yet, despite this (overall and US) ranking, American tourists reported as more likely than the international market to consider visiting a film/TV/ literature attraction in England, i.e. 51% and 46% respectively (VisitEngland, 2017, p.35). This presented an impetus for further conceptual examination of the appeal for, and likely visitation to, Literary England amongst the US outbound market - both in terms of special interest (literary society members) and mainstream (general tourists) consumers.

Watson (2006) asserts that literary tourism is 'so naturalised in the British Isles that one sees literary sites detailed in guidebooks and marked on the road map, and expects (and feels expected) to visit the museum shop and to buy the soap, the postcard and the bookmark' (p.5). England is the birthplace of many of literature's well-known authors and their characters, such as Jane Austen and Elizabeth Bennet, Charles Dickens and Oliver Twist, and Beatrix Potter and Peter Rabbit. A Year of Literary Heroes in 2017 has even celebrated the many anniversaries associated with key figures and renowned works (VisitBritain, 2017b). Events included an exhibition at the British Library to commemorate the 20th year of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone,* activities at Royal Horticultural Society gardens to mark 75 years of Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five,* and big picnics to recognise 200 years since Jane Austen's death (Lonely Planet, 2016). Given such rich history, it is unsurprising that the UK has been presented as a prime literary destination for non-UK tourists (Iwashita, 2006).

The purpose of this paper is to further understand US tourists' awareness of, and intention to visit, sights and sites in 'Literary England'. More specifically, it situates literary tourism within the broader framework of heritage

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[1] Visit Nottinghamshire is a "division of Marketing Nottingham [Marketing NG] responsible for driving leisure and business visitors to the city and county" (MarketingNG, 2020).

tourism and offers a comparative analysis of literary tourism through the lens of special interest versus mainstream tourists. The paper makes a distinction between members of US literary societies (special interest) and general members of the US population (mainstream) in an attempt to conceptualise the motivational and behavioural patterns that lead to (non)participation in English literary tourism. The aim of this research, therefore, is to uncover new insights into the drivers of literary tourism between the two groups, establish any subsequent differences, and consider the implications these differences have for destination marketing and its overall effectiveness.

The paper provides a critical review of the literature before subsequently formulating three respective research hypotheses. The mixed methods approach is outlined and results from the (bottom-up) survey-based correlational study are discussed alongside findings from the (top-down) interview data. Concluding remarks and implications are offered and avenues for future research are suggested.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Visiting literary places

Previous studies into literary tourism have commonly attended to the relationships between authors, texts and places (Robinson & Anderson, 2002). It is the importance of, and associations with, place that has led to literary tourism being depicted as a form of heritage tourism (Hoppen, Brown, & Fyall, 2014). The concept of place encapsulates both the real and the fictional, with tourists visiting real heritage sites associated with a writer's birthplace or home, such as Beatrix Potter's Lake District (Squire, 1994), real sites associated with fictional characters, like Sherlock Holmes' London-based crime-detective tours (van Es & Reijnders, 2016), or at least partly fictional places based on fictional characters, for example Harry Potter's United (Magical) Kingdom (Lee, 2012). Similar to heritage tourists' motivation to encounter the sites where specific historic events occurred (see Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996), literary tourists seek out physical places that are represented in literary accounts. For heritage tourists, however, it is argued that they are likely to be motivated by personal connections to historic events and note links between their own individual heritage and the historic significance of the heritage site (see Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004). Other detailed motives have also been examined, including educational, entertainment and social motivations (Moscardo, 1996). Indeed, similar personal, emotional and leisurely associations have been observed amongst literary tourists.

A better understanding of the market potential for literary tourism to the UK requires an analysis of the drivers of tourist consumption to specific destinations by visitors with particular interests. Visits to literary sites may be incidental or central to destination selection, determined by the supply-side characteristics of the tourism system and motivations which position special interest tourism along a continuum of psycho-sociological types and forms of behaviour (Brotherton & Himmetoğlu, 1997; Trauer, 2006). Special interest tourism is framed in distinction to mass, standardised tourism offerings, reflecting a degree of personal or interpersonal involvement in a leisure pursuit (Derrett, 2001). Involvement is central to marketing efforts to create distinct consumer segments for destinations (Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1993), which have become increasingly specialised and granular as the tourism market has developed greater levels of sophistication. Literary characters or places can serve as a stimulus to raise destination awareness and a sense of familiarity as seen with film tourism.

Previous studies into film tourism – based on literary works – demonstrate how tourists create an authentic experience of a hyperreal place (e.g. Middle Earth) through visiting the real destination or movie setting (e.g. New Zealand) (Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010). O'Connor and Kim (2014) go as far as to describe the relationship between literary tourism and film tourism as 'integrated' (p.4), asserting that 'literature has a strong power to attract tourists to places associated with films, novels and writers' (p.5). For instance, books turned into movies have subsequently been shown to affect visitation at one destination, such as *Captain Corelli's*

*Mandolin*, Island of Cephalonia (Greece) (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006b). Indeed, their influence can also extend visits to multiple destinations with examples including, *The Da Vinci Code*'s impact at Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer (France) (Badone, 2008) and Rosslyn Chapel (Scotland) (Martin-Jones, 2014), as well as the *Twilight Saga*'s effect in Forks (WA, USA), Volterra (Italy), and British Columbia (Canada) (Larson, Lundberg, & Lexhagen, 2013). Nevertheless, as found by Croy and Heitmann (2011), the majority of film tourists are incidental, or serendipitous, with many not even having seen the film associated with a film tour. This trend was confirmed by the study of Korean Wave, or *Hallyu* tourism to South Korea, which found that only 10% of tourists to the film set location were motivated by a special interest in the genre (Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). This close association between the filmic with the literary space in tourism research suggests a need for further investigation on the characteristics of potential visitors based on literary interests.

### 2.2. Tourists' association(s) with literary works and places

It is not surprising that central to research on literary tourism is the concept of fandom. Reijnders (2011) provides two main reasons for *Dracula* fans engaging in a literary tourism experience: first a need to compare a physical place and a much-loved mental image, and second the desire to make emotional connections between the two. Banyai (2010) recounts how visitors to Bran Castle – the home of Dracula – often post pictures of themselves reproducing the iconic character's image through costume (e.g. fangs and capes) and impersonation (i.e. stance and voice). Another mode through which enthusiasts pay homage to their literary heroes is by undertaking a pilgrimage, often to a grave. Brown (2015) acknowledges that visiting an author's grave is an important way for individuals to recognise a writer's influence on their own life. This influence can also extend to graves associated with literary characters, with Harry Potter fans, for instance, visiting the burial site of the real Thomas Riddell – the namesake of J. K. Rowling's Tom Riddle (Lord Voldemort) – at Greyfriars Kirkyard (McCracken Fletcher, 2019).

Despite the prevailing attention to fans, Müller (2006) argues that literary places are not exclusive to literary enthusiasts. Literary places can exhibit multiple attributes that are important to many visitors, with Herbert (2001) distinguishing between exceptional and general qualities. Exceptional qualities include links with the writer (e.g. Bath, the residence of Jane Austen), associations with settings for stories (e.g. Paddington Station, the namesake of Paddington Bear), and association with affective values, nostalgia, memory, and symbolism (e.g. Dorset, featured in Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*). While exceptional qualities evidence a clear literary connection, general qualities add to the broader appeal of a literary tourism destination, namely attractive setting, facilities or services, and location on tourist itinerary.

Some factors, such as authenticity, have been found to supersede the importance of literariness (Wang & Zhang, 2017). As a result, authenticity is actively guarded by site managers, such as the authentic portrayal of L. M. Montgomery – author of series, *Anne of Green Gables* – at literary attractions in Prince Edward Island (Fawcett & Cormack, 2001). Gothie (2016) asserts that experiences of authenticity through interaction(s) with place facilitate a tourist's performance of identity; for instance, the desire to 'play Anne' compels individuals to wear props, such as a hat adorned with two red braids, to resemble Montgomery's protagonist.

Research has found that Americans' willingness to participate in tourism more generally is influenced by factors such as perceived travel benefits (e.g. experiential benefits), value relevance and social influence, as well as travel knowledge (Chen, Zou, & Petrick, 2019). While literary tourism has been painted as a 'booming industry' (Lowe, 2012, p. 6) in the United States, it remains to be seen whether US tourists would be equally familiar with English authors and their associated places as they are with American equivalents. The significance of place marketing thus becomes especially pertinent when targeting (outbound) literary tourists. This aligns with Hargrove's (2017, p. 260) recent argument that 'cultural heritage tourism is threatened if visitors don't know that you exist'. She claims that

'destinations and cultural heritage institutions must define the most desired audiences and determine how best to reach them' (p. 261).

On the one hand, destination marketing can be consumer-led, with Månsson (2011) highlighting how tourists themselves mediatize literary places (e.g. Rosslyn Chapel, *The Da Vinci Code*) through their social media accounts, inspiring consumption of literary tourism amongst other tourists. In terms of more traditional media, empirical findings of Hosany, Buzova, and Sanz-Blas (2019) demonstrate that advertising had a significant effect on Spanish tourists' intention to visit the Swiss Alps, the setting for *Heidi*. Additionally, findings by Iwashita (2006, p.75) show how media representations of popular culture (e.g. the television series, *Sherlock Holmes*) gave Japanese tourists a sense of 'familiarity' with UK destinations. Film tourism, in particular, has been identified as an effective marketing initiative for promoting destinations more broadly (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006a), and has been studied in relation to US tourists specifically. Hudson, Wang, and Gil (2010), for example, found that South America became an attractive destination for North Americans after being shown the film, *Motorcycle Diaries*.

### 2.3. Tour type preferences for literary tourism

Niche tourism, by nature, is frequently presented as a juxtaposition to mainstream or mass tourism and the packaged product, ostensibly resulting in a more meaningful experience for tourists (Robinson & Novelli, 2005). Carson et al. (2013: 47) draw on Chambers' (2009) post-structuralist notion of the 'new tourist', proposing that a literary tourist wants to escape the confines of a pre-determined schedule; asserting that 'while some will want to visit literary sites out of historical curiosity, others will seek to challenge and expand the way they conceive of [literature]'. Spotlighting the touring reader, MacLeod et al. (2018) find that literary tourists prefer to avoid organised literary tourism and instead independently navigate an author's works for 'clues' in a more 'hard-earned' fashion (p. 397). That is not to say that they eschew organised tourism completely however, with Earl (2008), for example, concentrating his research on a touring Book Excursions Group. He argued that it was through the lectures he gave at locations, in conjunction with its interpretation, that lent authenticity to destinations for the group.

How mainstream tourists prefer to travel to literary places remains under-researched. Focusing on overseas travel more widely, Becken and Gnoth (2004) segment six types of American traveller: (i) packaged *coach tourists*; (ii) semi-packaged or independent *auto tourists*; (iii) independent *backpackers*; (iv) independent *camper tourists*; (v) independent or semi-packaged *comfort travellers*; and (vi) independent visitors of friends/relatives. A similar understanding of the general US tourist's preference for (non)independent travel – given their (presumed) comparative lack of knowledge vis a vis the special interest literary tourist – is essential for increasing the accessibility of, and visitation to, 'Literary England' beyond niche consumers to other market segments.

### 2.4. Hypotheses

An interesting dilemma sits at the centre of this study. The tourism industry constantly seeks to reinvent itself towards new trends, or niche market activities, and literary tourism could be representative of a niche market trend (Novelli, 2005). To be successful though, niche products must penetrate the mainstream when, to date, most studies continue to focus on identifying and describing new market trends in isolation from their potential to influence the mass market. This research thus views US travellers through *two* lenses. First, through the eyes of a special interest group, namely individuals who are members of US registered literary societies and, secondly, through the eyes of the mainstream traveller, considering a general sample of US outbound tourists.

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the two groups based on three different stimuli: i) likelihood to travel to an English tourism destination; ii) prior familiarity with the books and films associated with literary locations; iii) preference for (non)independent international travel. It is noted at this point that the decision to include familiarity with films, not

just books, was based on the aforementioned integration between literary and film tourism, which influences destination choice (O'Connor & Kim, 2014).

Research has most commonly focussed on the lure for 'fans' (Herbert, 2001, p.326), but it is recognised that literary places may and can appeal to non-literary enthusiasts (Müller, 2006). The question arises as to whether the mainstream, international traveller ('novice' consumer) would actively seek out, or be interested in, English literary destinations and attractions comparative to the special interest traveller ('hard' consumer) (Trauer, 2006). Thus, the first hypothesis seeks to confirm whether members of literary societies will demonstrate greater likelihood to travel to an English literary tourism destination than the general sample.

**H1.** Members of a literary society have a greater tendency to travel to an English literary tourism destination compared to the general US market.

Linking back to Hargrove (2017) – who acknowledges the importance of awareness relative to subsequent visitation – this paper next examines how lack of familiarity with literary work(s) influences interest to visit an associated literary destination. It is possible that American tourists – whether special interest or mainstream – might not have the same awareness of or associations with literary work when travelling as an international tourist (to England) compared to when travelling as a domestic tourist (in the US). This may cause them to (un)intentionally overlook the value of visiting lesser-known literary sites in favour of more iconic literary attractions. Again, this paper presupposes that 'hard' consumers (literary society members) are more likely to visit a literary place than 'soft' or 'novice' consumers (general sample) when unfamiliar with the corresponding literary work.

**H2.** Having not read the associated book or watched the associated film, interest in visiting a literary destination is higher for literary society members than the general US market.

Previous findings have been mixed when analysing the travel preferences of the literary tourist (Earl, 2008; MacLeod et al., 2018). This paper maintains that, due to their (presumed) greater awareness of Literary England, 'hard' consumers (literary society members) are more likely to favour independent travel to 'novice' consumers (general sample). The third hypothesis reflects this reasoning and states:

**H3.** Literary society members have a greater tendency to travel independently, compared to the general US market.

Overall, the three hypotheses will enable us to establish *whether* mainstream tourists and literary society members are potential future visitors of English literary tourism destinations (H1) – and/or even aware of associated literary works (H2) – before going on to ascertain how the 'Literary England' product can then be best packaged, advertised and sold to the two groups (H3).

## 3. Research design

This project was commissioned by Visit Nottinghamshire, who were interested in understanding the potential US market demand for literary tourism in order to inform the creation and marketing of a range of literary products and experiences in England. Firstly, the brief necessitated an understanding of tourists' propensity to visit England in order to discover literary based destinations – e.g. Stratford Upon Avon (Shakespeare), Hampshire (Jane Austen), Nottinghamshire (Lord Byron, DH Lawrence, and the Robin Hood story). Secondly, the brief required an assessment of visitation relative to appeal, examining travel based upon famous (or familiar) stories, writers and places, both in film and literature. Thirdly, there was an interest in tourists' likelihood to travel independently, as well as the resources used when planning for, and participating in, their trip. These key thematic areas heavily informed the research hypotheses and research design therein.

The research adopted a mixed methods design, consisting of: (i) a correlational study utilising two surveys for comparing two populations, namely literary society members and a general sample; and (ii) semi-structured interviews with travel companies, to ascertain the current types of literary tourism tours that are sold and to whom. This combined approach enabled quantitative (bottom-up) understanding of future demand for the literary 'product', alongside qualitative (top-down) insights into current supply and customer base.

This research – mirroring an increasing number of other mixed-methods studies in the field of tourism (Prayag, 2018) – adopted a pragmatist philosophy. This ontological basis regards knowledge as centred on real-world experiences as well as practical applications to real-world issues (Veal, 2017). This philosophical worldview was deemed extremely pertinent to the research objectives, not only due to the contracted nature of the project, but, more especially, in light of the 'bricolage' (Veal, 2017) of methods; whereby the quantitative survey findings were substantiated – and, in some cases, challenged – by the qualitative interview data, to bring about practical, real-life knowledge from both (potential) tourists and travel companies alike.

### 3.1. Correlational study

The correlational study sought to examine and compare two samples, namely registered members of US literary societies and members of the general US population. The study was facilitated by the use of two respective surveys in an attempt to record the main differences in the following thematic areas associated with the three hypotheses: *likelihood to visit the UK for literary tourism purposes, book and film association as a signal of interest in literary tourism,* and *tour type if/when travelling to a literary tourism destination.* The survey design provisioned for identical scale measurements, and questions allowed direct cross comparisons between the two samples for the three hypotheses. Additional components considered: *awareness*, exploring general familiarity with English literary works, destinations and writers and – for the literary society members – influence of English authors on future visitation; *resources*, the materials drawn upon when planning an international vacation; and *travel preferences* for an international vacation. Both surveys were designed online using Qualtrics.

Respondents of the literary society sample were aged 18 and over. They were briefed on the nature of the research relating to literary tourism and the principal investigators conducting it, given assurance of full anonymity, and informed of overall completion time. The research description was purposely vague in order to ensure that general perceptions in relation to the covered topic were captured. Participation was incentivised through the option to enter a prize-draw upon completion for a chance to win a $150 Amazon voucher.

The survey was sent to contacts of ten US literary societies and/or organisations; six were provided by Visit Nottinghamshire, while four were found by the research team in order to widen the potential participation pool (see Table 1). As highlighted in Table 1, three outlets went on to disseminate the survey link to their membership base. Overall, 259 responses

were recorded, 39 of which were partial, resulting in a final sample size of 220 (N = 220) wherein 42 US states were represented.

The general survey was distributed to the target population by a digital data collection company, ResearchNow. ResearchNow formed a consumer panel of US adults, all of whom were aged 18 and over and holders of a passport. Participants were screened out of the survey if they had not taken an international vacation within the last five years or discounted visiting England within the next three years. These quotas were utilised to identify adult individuals who were active (or willing) international travellers with a high likelihood of visiting the UK in the future. ResearchNow incentivised participation and ran the necessary quality checks, while the principal investigators also ensured that the panel conformed to the desired sampling requirements. Overall, 2098 responses were recorded, 65 of which were partial, resulting in a final sample size of 2033 (N = 2033) with all 50 US states being represented.

Panel demographics for the two samples are presented in Table 2. Previous literature acknowledges the presence of a strong proportion of females in the participation of literary tourism (see Hoppen et al., 2014), and this trend is mirrored in the samples within literary tourism research. For example, Iwashita's (2006) paper specifically highlights that the majority (72%) of their sample was female. The demographic composition of the literary society sample (94% female, 6% male) was, therefore, not deemed problematic in regard to the population it represented. Educational differences were non-significant while age was marginally higher for the literary society sample. The latter is concordant with previous findings that book-club membership increases with age due to more time and the desire for intellectual stimulation or challenge (Morgan-Witts, 2015).

### 3.1.1. Measurements

Five-point semantic differential scales were incorporated for all interval measurements, using polar adjectives depending on the covered topic (i.e. likely/unlikely, aware/unaware). Measurements and items were adopted from, or similar to, those in previous literature (e.g. Herbert, 2001; Iwashita, 2006) and the *5*-point scale measurements were in line with Preston and Colman's (2000) recommendation of optimum number of response categories in consumer research and Suarez-Alvarez et al.'s (2018) insights on consistency of reversed signed scales.

Subsequent to the aforementioned screening, both questionnaires commenced with *eight* demographic questions. Questions on likelihood to visit the UK for literary tourism purposes were adapted from Chen and Chen (2010) and Chen and Tsai' (2007) future behavioural intention predictors for heritage and literary destination visitation (i.e. *What is the likelihood that you would visit an English literary tourism destination based on its association with a writer? 1 = very likely – 5 = very unlikely*). This facilitated a factor

**Table 1**
Contacted literary societies and survey distribution.

| | Literary society/organisation contacted (Including associated Facebook page*) | Survey link disseminated |
|---|---|---|
| Provided by Visit Nottinghamshire | D. H. Lawrence Society | ✓ |
| | Byron Society | • |
| | Alan Sillitoe Society | • |
| | Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA)* | ✓ |
| | New York Literary Society | • |
| | Shakespeare in Rochester* | • |
| Additional outlets | New York Public Library | • |
| | Alliance of Literary Societies | • |
| | Dickens Fellowship | • |
| | D. H. Lawrence Society of North America* | ✓ |

**Table 2**
Sample demographics for general sample and literary society sample.

| Sample demographics | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Demographic variable | Type | General (n = 2033) | Literary society (n = 220) |
| Gender | Male | 45% | 6% |
| | Female | 55% | 94% |
| Age | 18–24 | 12% | 4% |
| | 25–34 | 30% | 6% |
| | 35–44 | 22% | 11% |
| | 45–54 | 12% | 21% |
| | 55–64 | 13% | 25% |
| | 65 + | 11% | 35% |
| Education | < High school graduate | 3% | 1% |
| | High school graduate | 12% | 1% |
| | College credit | 13% | 4% |
| | Trade technician | 6% | 1% |
| | Bachelor | 36% | 29% |
| | MSc | 17% | 41% |
| | Professional degree | 6% | 8% |
| | PhD | 7% | 16% |

**Table 3**

Factor analysis.

| Constructs | Factor Loading | Cronbach's α | AVE* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Likelihood to visit an English literary tourism destination* | | 0.824 | 0.589 |
| How likely would you visit an English literary tourism destination based on its association with a writer? | 0.792 | | |
| How likely would you visit an English literary tourism destination based on its association with a character? | 0.800 | | |
| How likely would you visit an English literary tourism destination based on its association with a real destination? | 0.826 | | |
| How likely would you visit an English literary tourism destination based on its association with a fictional destination? | 0.707 | | |
| How likely would you visit a literary tourism site during a future vacation to England? | 0.704 | | |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

KMO measure of sampling adequacy p = .753 (recommended p > .60)

Bartlett's test of sphericity: p < .01

☐ Average Variance Extracted

analysis for the multi-item measurement for likelihood to visit a literary tourism destination (see Table 3).

A *single item* measured (un)familiarity with associated literary work as a signal of interest to visit a location (i.e. *Would you be interested in visiting a literary tourism destination if you had not read or watched an associated book or film? 1 = very interested - 5 = very uninterested*). A second *single item* examining preference for independent travel was based on Mo, Howard, and Havitz's (1993) work on tourism services dimension (i.e. *Would you be more likely to visit a literary tourism destination in England if you were travelling independently? 1 = very likely - 5 = very unlikely*). The single item measurements were incorporated in alignment with Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007, 2009) and Diamantopoulos et al.'s (2012: 439) view of composite reliability and predictive validity retainment comparative to multiple items, which lead to semantic redundancy and are predicted to generate weak effect sizes. The inclusion of the two single items abided by the suggested guidelines of the aforementioned authors.

Questions further captured awareness of British authors, England, and literary locations and were adapted from Iwashita's (2006, 2008) work. As aforementioned, the literary society survey was – at times – more specific or tailored due to an assumed increased awareness or 'fandom' (Banyai, 2010; Reijnders, 2011). For example, the general sample was asked '*Do you associate any of the following writers with England?*' whereas the literary society sample was asked to rank '*Which of the following writers would most appeal in terms of influencing a visit to a literary tourism site?*' (see Table 4). A comparison between 'aware of' and 'most likely to visit' can be seen in VisitBritain's (2016, p. 6) report, examining the awareness and consideration of fifteen British destinations amongst Brazilian, Chinese and Italian tourists.

*Four* identical questions were included on travel preferences, examining, for example, expected length of stay and travel partners. This mirrored VisitBritain's (2016) survey content on the decisions and influences of twenty countries when travelling to the UK (i.e. *Who would you be travelling with if you went on vacation to Britain?*). Lastly, *two* identical items were included on travel resources, again similar to VisitBritain's (2016) survey – i.e. 'Thinking about your holiday to Britain/the last holiday you took to a foreign country, which of the following [online/other] information sources influenced your choice of destination' – namely, *When planning an international vacation which of the following sources of information do you tend to rely on?* (see Table 5).

### 3.2. Interviews

As part of the contracted brief, VisitNottinghamshire required insight from travel companies that they knew to be operating in the business-to-consumer US outbound market. The aim was to establish the types of tours and excursions sought and sold around literary heritage places and figures; the current (perceived) consumer base and their decision drivers; alongside the types of resources their customers relied upon when researching travel destinations and experiences. The authors contacted all (40 +) travel companies listed in a database provided by VisitNottinghamshire. Eight representatives – owners, managers and employees – agreed to be interviewed from eight respective travel companies (N = 8). In line with the pragmatist position, the sample size – although small – was deemed unproblematic given that each interviewee gave a contextual, real-world insight into the services offered (and to whom) by their respective company (Prayag, 2018). In this respect, the sample proffered a flavour of what business-to-consumer organisations currently sell to, and understand of, the US outbound market without claiming to represent all travel companies selling literary tourism products.

The interviewees gave their verbal informed consent at the commencement of the interview. The interviews were semi-structured and contained five main overarching questions. The interview guide first asked respondents about the tours currently offered in addition to subsequent questions on and around the following four themes: (i) consumer profile, namely the typical demographic of clientele associated with their literary tourism offerings; (ii) consumer demand, based on (un)familiar characters from books and films and/or well-known or lesser-known authors and locations – with an aim of establishing whether *specific* literary excursions and destinations were sought after, or whether literary tourism was incidental to being

**Table 4**

Awareness (general sample) and influence (literary society sample) of authors.

| Author | General sample | | Literary society sample | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Awareness[1] (%) | Top 10 | Influence[2] (%) | Top 10 |
| A. A. Milne | 21 | | 9 | |
| Agatha Christie | 47 | **4** | 21 | **8** |
| Alan Sillitoe | 9 | | 0 | |
| Arthur Conan Doyle | 39 | **5** | 23 | **7** |
| Beatrix Potter | 33 | **7*** | 31 | **5** |
| Bram Stoker | 23 | **10*** | 2 | |
| Brontë sisters | 27 | **8*** | 47 | **3** |
| Byron | 23 | **10*** | 5 | |
| Charles Dickens | 59 | **2** | 39 | **4** |
| C. S. Lewis | 33 | **7*** | 16 | |
| Daphne Du Maurier | 9 | | 12 | |
| D. H. Lawrence | 19 | | 8 | |
| Enid Blyton | 5 | | 0 | |
| George Eliot | 21 | | 14 | |
| Jane Austen | 37 | **6** | 93 | **1** |
| J. K. Rowling | 58 | **3** | 25 | |
| J. M. Barrie | 9 | | 1 | |
| J. R. R. Tolkien | 33 | **7*** | 17 | **10** |
| John Keates | 18 | | 5 | **6** |
| Roald Dahl | 17 | | 7 | |
| Rudyard Kipling | 27 | **8*** | 3 | |
| Virginia Woolf | 24 | **9** | 20 | **9** |
| William Shakespeare | 69 | **1** | 64 | **2** |
| William Wordsworth | 22 | | 12 | |

☐ Joint (e.g. 3 authors were equally ranked 7th, 2 authors ranked 8th, and 2 authors 10th).

[1] General survey, Q14: Do you associate any of the following writers with England? (Please check as appropriate).

[2] Literary society survey, Q16: Which of the following writers would most appeal in terms of influencing a visit to a literary tourism site? (Please rank the five most appealing, where 5 has the highest appeal and 1 has the lowest appeal).

**Table 5**

Role of resources.

| Resources | General (%) | | Literary society (%) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (i) Resource generally relied upon when planning an international vacation | (ii) Resource informing image of England as a literary tourism destination | (i) Resource generally relied upon when planning an international vacation | (ii) Resource informing image of England as a literary tourism destination |
| National tourism websites (inc. VisitEngland, VisitBritain and others) | 55 | 55 | 74 | 62 |
| Search engine | 56 | 39 | 67 | 47 |
| Tour operator websites | 29 | 16 | 33 | 18 |
| Travel guide / brochure | 47 | 27 | 59 | 34 |
| Airline website | 21 | 12 | 11 | 2 |
| TripAdvisor (or other review sites) | 45 | 25 | 43 | 15 |
| Social media | 29 | 21 | 24 | 26 |
| Blogs | 17 | 11 | 22 | 15 |
| Magazines | 22 | 16 | 25 | 30 |
| Other | 5 | 3 | 24 | 27 |
| None of the above | 2 | 16 | 1 | 6 |

a tourist more broadly; (iii) tour types, ascertaining whether customers more commonly travelled independently or as an (at least partly) organised package or tour; and (iv) travel resources, considering the materials consumers draw upon when planning and booking, such as search engines, national tourism websites, social media, etc. Overall, these (top-down) thematic areas were deemed to broadly complement the (bottom-up) themes explored by the two surveys. More specifically, a general overview of tour operators' typical consumer mapped on to the potential visitors' (or participants') perceived 'likelihood to visit'; consumer demand for, and familiarity with, certain literary products linked with 'book and film association as a signal of interest' alongside general 'awareness' and 'resources'; while tour type largely encompassed 'travel preferences'.

To analyse the interview data, a thematic analysis was conducted. The approach was broadly inductive, in that the analysis was data-driven albeit within the confines of the contracted brief. Braun, Clarke, and Weate (2016) present thematic analysis as useful for practice-based research for public consumption yet simultaneously facilitative of nuanced interpretation. Following Braun et al.'s (2016) phases of thematic analysis, recordings were partially transcribed in accordance with 'fit' with the aforementioned areas (i-iv), serving to reduce the data. Transcripts were then read and re-read – as part of a familiarisation process – before an initial round of coding was undertaken. Codes were subsequently grouped into subthemes (e.g. 'interested', 'educated') before being compiled into overarching themes (e.g. 'awareness') (see Section 4.3.1). It is highlighted that characteristics of the individual travel company (i.e. size, reach, etc.) were not recorded alongside the data excerpts, nor deemed relevant. This was because the aim was not to capture any (dis)similarities between the companies themselves, but (in)congruities between the types of products sold and to whom.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Tests and approach

Prior to data analysis, it was acknowledged that the two populations under study significantly differed in size, with the general US population being axiomatically larger than the population of US literary society members. The respective samples reflected this observation (literary society, N = 220; general, N = 2033), thus preliminary analyses examined homogeneity of variance for suitability of parametric comparisons between the two. The Levene's test of homogeneity was found to be significant with $F_{(1,2251)} = 16.658$ p = .000 (p > 0.01) indicating that the samples were non-homogeneous. Based on this, subsequent analyses focused on non-parametric comparisons to external validity. The marketing literature accepts the Mann-Whitney U test as a superior alternative to parametric t-tests when population samples are non-homogeneous, and its application is widely embraced (see Nachar, 2008). Analyses for each hypothesis

focused on the utilisation of the U statistic and the findings are presented below.

### 4.2. Hypothesis testing

#### 4.2.1. H1 – likelihood to travel to an English literary tourism destination

To test H1, the first round of analyses focused on comparing likelihood to travel to an English literary tourism destination. The Mann-Whitney U test was found to be significant with U = 153267.5, Z = −8.131, p = .000, (p > 0.01) [Literary Society (M = 1.50, SD = .659); General (M = 2.01, SD = 1.024); 1 = very likely - 5 = very unlikely] indicating that the literary society sample have a significantly higher likelihood to travel compared to the general sample. H1 was thus supported here, confirming that those with literary society membership have a greater proclivity to visit a literary location compared to the mainstream US traveller.

#### 4.2.2. H2 – (un)familiarity with associated literary work as a signal of interest

The second hypothesis focused on interest in visiting a literary tourism destination (e.g. Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth) in light of (un)familiarity with the associated work (e.g. Charlotte Brontë's, *Jane Eyre*). Here, the Mann-Whitney U test comparison demonstrated higher likelihood for the general sample to visit when unfamiliar relative to the literary society sample, with U = 157171.5, Z = −7.544, p = .000, (p > 0.01) [Literary Society (M = 2.80 SD = .934); General (M = 2.26 SD = 2.073); 1 = very interested - 5 = very uninterested].

H2 is unsupported, therefore, as literary society members are more interested in visiting a literary tourism site having read the associated book and/or watched the related film compared to the general sample. This indicates that literary society members are in fact more likely to visit destinations when they have contextual knowledge – further implying that literary connections should be made explicit when promoting literary locations to this market segment. Nonetheless, the willingness of the general sample to visit an attraction without considerable familiarity of the book or film is of interest vis-à-vis Buchmann et al.'s (2010, p. 236) finding that *most* tourists participating in a Lord of the Rings tour did not self-report as 'geeks' of the film. It is clearly prudent not to overemphasise, or generalise, the role of 'fandom' (e.g. Reijnders, 2011) or 'fan' (Herbert, 2001) status as a precursor for participation, as it fails to adequately capture the behavioural intricacies of all – and often the majority – of visitors to literary tourism sites.

#### 4.2.3. H3 – tour type

The final round of analyses examined the preference of each sample to travel independently should they visit England in the future. Results from the Mann-Whitney U test showed that both samples exhibit significant differences regarding their preference for independent travel over guided

tours with U = 193610.5, Z = − 2.342, p = .019, p > 0.05; [Literary Society (M = 1.91, SD = .763); General (M = 2.07, SD = .899), 1 = very likely - 5 = very unlikely]. The findings show that the literary society sample have a greater preference for independent travel relative to the general sample – supporting H3.

*4.3. Understanding the international (US) market for literary tourism*

*4.3.1. Awareness and resources*

As stated in Section 4.2.2, H2 was found to be unsupported, with results indicating that literary society members have greater interest in visiting a literary tourism destination when familiar with the associated literary work (book/film) compared to the general US population. It is noted here that the importance of awareness was highlighted as central by the tour operators interviewed, who claimed that their consumers were 'more interested in something they are familiar with' (Interviewee 1). Knowledge of and interest in the associated author was deemed especially pertinent, for example:

*It has to be related to a specific author […]. We would very rarely succeed trying to sell someone a literature tour if they didn't have an existing interest* (Interviewee 3).

*They have to have an interest in the author, and know about that. They don't mind the secondary information that might come along with it, but they would certainly need an interest first off* (Interviewee 6).

Aligning the quantitative and qualitative results, the findings from this research indicate that cognisance of the literary object is important for both literary society members and the general tourist. Yet, for the general sample, it is not as strong as it is for the literary society sample, where lack of association can go as far as to hinder engagement. To this end, Table 4 highlights the top ten authors who would most appeal (comparative to others) in terms of influencing literary society members to visit a literary destination – revealing that Jane Austen (93%), William Shakespeare (64%), and the Brontë sisters (47%) are viewed as most appealing.

It is worth noting that the general sample's awareness of connections between English authors and their respective characters was, at times, variable. Sometimes awareness of a book's character was higher than for the corresponding author, e.g. 91% were aware of Harry Potter while 58% were aware of J. K. Rowling, and 78% were aware of Sherlock Holmes yet 39% were aware of Arthur Conan Doyle. At other times, cognisance of an author was higher than that of characters, e.g. 47% were aware of Agatha Christie although 29% were aware of Miss Marple. What makes this variation particularly noteworthy is that the above authors all ranked in the top ten in terms of overall awareness (again, see Table 4). This suggests that even authors with which the general sample consider themselves aware in fact translate to varying degrees of actual awareness.

Interview data revealed that consumers' travel to an English literary tourism destination is often linked to the release of a new movie, when one can presume that awareness is heightened:

*Every time there is a period film featuring one of – Jane Austen in particular – they want to see the film sites. You know, the classic or stately homes used for the period films* (Interviewee 5).

This echoes previous research which shows that visitation is impacted by films based on literary works (e.g. Badone, 2008; Busby, Brunt, & Lund, 2003; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006b; Larson et al., 2013; Martin-Jones, 2014). However, given that the general survey suggests strong familiarity need not be a pre-requisite for visitation by the general sample, it might be worthwhile for destination marketers to also promote the existence (and merits) of literary places in and of themselves, rather than simply presenting them as a means of getting closer to authors and/or characters from much-loved books and movies. These findings ultimately present an opportunity for marketers to alter the way in which the marketing message is constructed and presented in order to attract both the special interest *and* mainstream traveller.

In terms of channelling marketing messages, tour operators propounded the importance of social media ('We would certainly highlight certain attractions using Insta[gram], and Snapchat, and Facebook, and the likes to try and target that younger market' (Interviewee 7)) and the internet (e.g. 'I would say online first' (Interviewee 1)), especially the role of search engines ('It's key word searches most often' (Interviewee 5)) and the resultant accessibility of information:

*We find that the customers are in these days much more educated and much more research oriented. So they're really coming a little bit more prepared than before… They still go home and check all the information we gave them against internet and other sources available to them… We use sources like VisitBritain and VisitScotland, and all of those places, because I think they post good information on it. And it's really very informative and very educational for people. They are really more of our partners – they are not our competitors. So those kind of sites we love people to look at because that keeps everybody a little bit happier* (Interviewee 4).

Nevertheless, the descriptive findings indicate that there is a current misalignment between the resources that participants reported relying upon when planning an international vacation (see (i) in Table 5) and those that inform their image of England as a literary tourism destination (see (ii) in Table 5). While the general sample consider national tourism websites (i.e. VisitEngland, VisitBritain) equally useful for both aspects, it is clear that there is an opportune space for market-controlled outlets (e.g. tour operator websites, airline websites, travel guides and brochures) to increase or improve their promotion of English literary tourism destinations within their marketing texts. This is an especially pertinent implication for producers of travel guides and brochures, given that nearly 1 in 2 mainstream tourists utilise this resource when organising a vacation (47%), yet closer to 1 in 4 reported them as informative on Literary England (27%). This is also true of market-controlled outlets that are hoping to target or capture the (more niche) segment of literary tourists (i.e. 59% and 34% respectively).

*4.3.2. Travel preferences*

Section 4.2.3 highlighted the support of H3, evidencing that literary society members have a greater preference for independent travel relative to general US tourists, who demonstrate a significantly lower tendency. The tour operators proffered some contextual insights as to why tourists were increasingly keen to travel independently, with one factor, for example, being confidence:

*It's to do with confidence in driving on the opposite side of the road. And money as well, so the younger the traveller, the more apt they are to a self-drive or an independent rail journey because they have the confidence to do that* (Interviewee 5).

Another tour operator conjectured that the increase in popularity was not only connected to confidence, but also the safety-net of a shared or common language:

*…[travelling] independently is becoming more popular now. Originally Americans were kind of afraid to go on their own, but now they do it – mostly in the UK, where English is spoken, so it's easy for them to get around* (Interviewee 4).

This could go some way to explain why the literary society sample have a preference for independent travel within the context of this research. They appear to be familiar with the literary tourism destinations they are visiting – i.e. being more interested in visiting having read or watched the

associated book or film (H2 – Section 4.2.2) – and thus perhaps have increased confidence to navigate their way to and around these places due to the shared language of their home (US) and away (England) environment. Furthermore, survey findings also showed that the literary society sample were more cautious than the mainstream sample when reporting envisaged length of time staying at a literary tourism site, with 40% versus 15% responding that it would depend on the specific destination. This too could suggest that independent travel may afford literary society members greater freedom or flexibility to travel to, around, and away from literary tourism sites in accordance with given location(s).

## 5. Conclusions

Consumer culture is heavily influenced by literature, either directly through literary works, or indirectly through corresponding film and TV representations. This is having an enormous influence in tourists' decisions to visit destinations and attractions – either fictionalised or real (e.g. Buchmann et al., 2010) – that are associated with scenes from stories, characters, or authors (Hosany et al., 2019; Iwashita, 2006). Thus, as the tourism industry constantly seeks to adapt to new market trends, it is clear that literary tourism has increasing potential to penetrate the mainstream (Novelli, 2005).

### 5.1. Research implications

With previous research focusing on special interest literary tourists (Earl, 2008; Herbert, 2001; MacLeod et al., 2018), less attention has been paid to the mainstream visitors of literary sites and sights or the comparative (in)consistent behavioural patterns and trends between the two groups. Our study contributes to fulfilling this academic research gap by revealing

that the literary tourism market is far from homogenous, leading to three main conclusions as conceptualised in Fig. 1.

It is perhaps unsurprising that literary society members are more likely to travel to a literary tourism destination than general tourists. Nevertheless, it also appears that they are more interested in visiting when familiar with the literary connections of a site comparative to mainstream tourists. Literary heritage relates to broader themes in heritage tourism in which tourists are motivated by perceived personal connections with sites they visit. Yet compared to heritage tourism, where tourists often note connections to the historic significance of the site (see Poria et al., 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004), it is apparent that literary tourists' emotional connections are forged from fictional works and/or media representations. In this sense, it appears that being a member of a literary society does not automatically extend to a corresponding interest in visiting *all* literary places, especially the locations for which they have not read or watched the associated book or film.

US literary society members are also more likely to travel independently, comparative to the mainstream US international traveller. It is encouraged that future research examines these hypotheses with a broader subset of international tourists – beyond the US and UK study context – especially given the interview finding that shared or common language bolstered confidence to engage in independent travel. A different language may not only affect travel preferences for (non)organised tours, but also, more broadly, (un)familiarity with literary work as a signal of interest in literary tourism participation.

### 5.2. Industry implications

While mainstream tourists are less likely to travel to an English literary tourism destination than literary society members, the population of
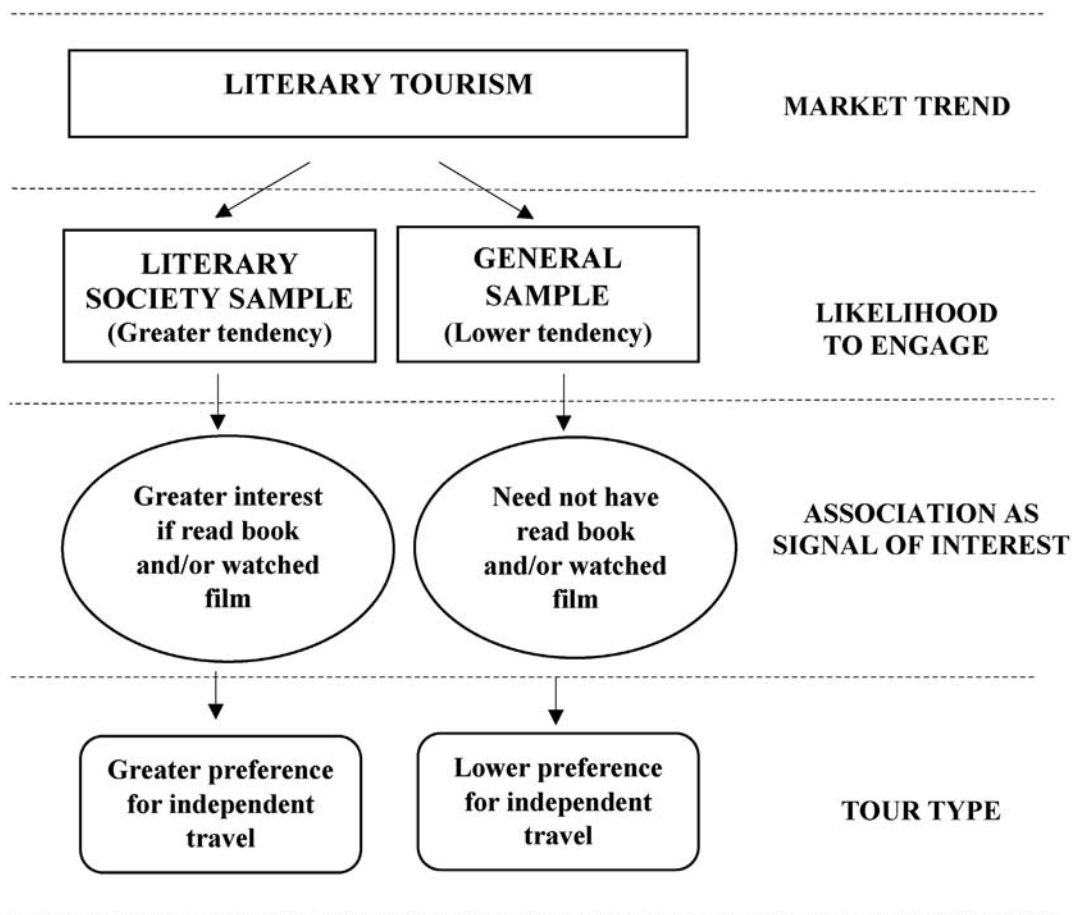


**Fig. 1.** Conceptualisation of General Sample and Literary Society Sample Comparison

literary society membership is axiomatically disproportionate to the US outbound market. As such, marketers should make every effort to promote Literary England to the average traveller just as much, if not more, than they target the literary enthusiast, in order to capture the full potential of this form of tourism and thereby yield the highest return.

When considering association as a signal of interest, there appears to be a clear need for a two-pronged marketing approach to reach the respective market segments: one which targets literary society members by marketing at a text-centric level, primarily promoting destinations at times when the literary work merges with popular culture (i.e. book-based movie releases, book and/or author centenaries etc); and one which targets mainstream tourists by marketing at a destination-centric level, predominantly focussing on the appeal of the sights and sites as opposed to the associated authors and works. Moreover, the findings suggest that, not only should the marketing message be better constructed, but the channel through which the message is communicated should be better tailored. Results have shown that, at present, the market-constructed resources that tourists tend to draw upon when planning a vacation are not sufficiently informing readers of what Literary England has to offer. Overall, the above two managerial implications suggest that Hoppen et al.'s (2014) recommendation of an umbrella marketing approach may not always be the most effective strategy in the context of promoting literary tourism to special interest *and* mainstream market segments.

Finally, in reference to preferred product type, literary society members' greater preference for independent travel when on an international vacation reinforces the above call for improved market resources, especially those that tourists consult in-situ – for example, guidebooks, tourist information centres, and national tourism websites. This will ensure that, for those travelling independently, Literary England remains an easily accessible and navigable tourism destination for all.

### 5.3. Research limitations

Despite a healthy sample size, this research is based on a rather small range of literary societies, given that only three distributed the survey to their membership (Table 1). It is possible that the demographic composition of the D. H. Lawrence Society, D. H. Lawrence Society of North America, and Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA) influenced levels of awareness and/or travel preferences that may vary for other literary groups. Hence, future research could compare the likelihood of general US tourists visiting Literary England vis-à-vis a more diverse sample of literary society members – associated with a broader range of authors – when greater access to the corresponding societies is facilitated.

There is also space for future research to interview US customers in the hopes of supplementing the current quantitative findings with a more indepth, qualitative analysis of potential participation in English literary tourism. Explanatory research seeking to explore the subjective views and behaviours of literary society members and members of the mainstream US outbound tourism market could provide an additional bottom-up perspective to complement the current top-down qualitative data (i.e. tour operator interviews) of this research. This may give rise to further novel market and marketing insights in order to improve how Literary England is presented to, and perceived by, international tourists.

### Declaration of interests

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