

ROMANCING “FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS”: DOES IT BENEFIT NEW YORK AS A TRAVEL DESTINATION?

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This study examines whether the romantic comedy as an information source can impact on and shape viewer attitude toward and intention to visit a place. Data were collected from patrons at a large cinema chain located in a major shopping center in Australia. Using an experimental approach, the experimental group watched a romantic comedy set in New York, whereas the control group did not. Subjects in the experimental group had significantly higher empathy, past experience, place familiarity, attitude toward, intention to visit New York, and significantly lower performance/financial risk associated with visiting New York than the control group. Furthermore, perceived social risk played a significant role in influencing place familiarity in the control group. This suggests that romantic comedies can be an effective information source in allaying viewers' concerns about a movie location. This article provides researchers with theoretical underpinning for future empirical studies in movie-induced tourism. It also encourages more collaboration between government, movie producers, and destination managers to deliver a movie that provides consistent branding in its story, location, and product placement strategies.

Key words: Movie-induced tourism; Intention to visit; Place image

Introduction

The romantic comedy is a movie genre that holds appeal for the young and the young at heart. Yet, for each stakeholder, it fulfills a different expectation. For the film producer, the need to return a good investment from the movie is critical. For instance, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* grossed \$845.3 billion in box office sales worldwide (Munafo, 2012). For the movie director, the movie serves as a calling card for artistic interpretation and direction. In fact,

Bridesmaids was hailed as “not another romantic comedy championing love [but] a relationship story [told] in a funny, real way” (Clarke, 2011), garnering critical acclaim for Paul Feig, its director. For viewers, the romantic comedy opens doors into a world of entertainment and enchantment (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). This accounted for 37.3 million American viewers of *There's Something About Mary* that championed an average guy's (played by Ben Stiller) bid to win the heart of an “it girl” (played by Cameron Diaz) (Munafo,

2012). For destination managers, movies serve as unique vehicles that give exposure to and communicate an image of a place (Im & Chon, 2008). With 881 million people engaging in travel to an international destination and spending US\$852 billion in 2009 (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2010), clearly, the more visible a destination, the more likely it is to attract visitors.

In tourism literature, it is widely acknowledged that visual media such as movies, videos, and television plays a role in communicating information about destinations (Frost, 2006; H. Kim & Richardson, 2003). Since contemporary society depends less on print media and travel products are intangible in nature (Tasci, 2009), "what is shown in movies, videos and television [is] even more important" (Tooke & Baker, 1996, p. 88). Such visual information is essential to tourist decision making, creating awareness, interest, and desire, resulting in action (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Tasci (2009) has concluded that visual media is particularly important since it "represents the actuality of the destination . . . acting as a pretaste of the . . . visitation" (p. 495).

M. Young, Gong, and Van der Stede (2010) have highlighted the appeal of movies, observing that "Consumers spent nearly \$50 billion dollars in 2008 to watch U.S. movies in a variety of formats" (p. 35). As a promotional tool, a movie has advantages over other information sources. First, its extended format offers longer exposure that enables a more vicarious interaction with the destination. Second, it enhances viewer recall of the destination with alluring settings, state-of-the-art technological effects, and an association with famous actors. Third, the publicity it receives from awards it wins and rereleases during commemorative years sustains its exposure (Tooke & Baker, 1996). Fourth, it has greater access to an audience than any other information source can afford to do (Hahm & Wang, 2011). Fifth, it is consumed by the target market at no expense to the destination. Finally, its soft sell approach does not exert any time pressures on the viewer to discover the destination (Riley, Baker, & Van Doren, 1998).

The notion of "movie-induced tourism" in which movies "become 'pull' factors (attractions) situated in 'push' locations (tourism generating areas)" was first introduced by Riley and Van Doren (1992, p. 270).

Since their seminal article, studies have focused on movies for their different impacts on movie locations (e.g., Frost, 2010; Im & Chon, 2008; Jewell & McKinnon, 2008). First is the increased awareness of movie locations (Riley et al., 1998; Tooke & Baker, 1996). Second is the heightened interest in visiting movie locations (Frost, 2010; Tasci, 2009). For instance, Im and Chon (2008) have surveyed subjects for their responses to *The Sound of Music* and have attributed the movie's exposure to subjects' increased awareness and intention to visit Salzburg. Finally, the most tangible impact is the increased tourist arrivals to movie locations (Butts, 1993). In fact, Hudson and Ritchie (2006) have observed that *Four Weddings and a Funeral* generated full bookings for the Crown Hotel, Amersham, England for 3 years after the movie's screening.

Despite growing interest in movie-induced tourism, gaps in the literature remain. First, limited empirical support exists for the impact movies have on location image and visitation to these locations. The majority of studies cite singular instances, anecdotal accounts (e.g., Mayfield, 1993; Rice, 1994), or utilize secondary data (e.g., Frost, 2006, 2010; Riley et al., 1998; Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Tooke & Baker, 1996). In their review, A. F. Young and Young (2008) have highlighted the "relatively unscholarly assertion[s] of the importance of movie tourism to the economy" (p. 196), making it difficult to "bridge the gap between intuitive belief and empirical evidence" (H. Kim & Richardson, 2003, p. 220). Second, individual studies have considered influential factors separately, namely empathy (Beeton, 2005, 2008), perceived risk (Mura, 2010), past experience, and place familiarity (Tasci & Knutson, 2004) that can impact on a movie location's image (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002) and shape attitude toward and intention to visit the location. The result is a fragmented approach to the research area.

Consequently, the key objective of this study is to introduce and test an integrated decision-making framework that empirically explains how the romantic comedy as an information source impacts on people's travel destination choices. In doing so, it explores the link between watching the romantic comedy, *Friends With Benefits*, set in New York and visiting the city. Specifically, the study examines empathy, perceived risk, past experience, place

familiarity, and place image for their impacts on attitude toward and intention to visit New York.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

H. Kim and Richardson's (2003) research model that examined movie viewer responses was extended for the purpose of this study. In their study, these authors explored viewers' place exposure via a movie, place familiarity, empathy, cognitive/affective place image, and interest in visiting a movie location. In this study, all these constructs are included and the research model is extended by introducing four new constructs: perceived risk, past experience, information sources, and attitude toward visiting a place. The conceptual model can be seen in Figure 1.

Place Familiarity

Familiarity is defined in marketing literature as the repetition of daily life that is conducted with "habitual and automatic ease" (Papas, 2009, p. 47). This suggests that people who are accustomed to doing something will behave repeatedly, without consciously analyzing their behavior. Thus, people who know a specific consumer brand/product

and are satisfied with it tend to purchase the same brand/product again. This observation is generally relevant to consumer products/brands.

A tourism product differs from a consumer product because the former is often intangible, and unfamiliar, making it more subject to perceived financial, physical, and psychological risk (Tasci & Knutson, 2004). Thus, when encountering a new experience, some tourists become distressed and require a "degree of familiarity . . . be supplied for the security and comfort qualities of the tourist experience" (Tasci & Knutson, 2004, p. 88). In fact, MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) have reported that tourists perceive attractive locations and built landmarks as high in familiarity, whereas unique scenes are perceived as low in familiarity. This has prompted Schofield (1996) to conclude that media incursions into our perceptual space such as cinematography can help to mold our images of places outside of those with which we are familiar.

Empathy

Empathy is defined in psychology literature as "sharing the perceived emotion of another—'feeling with' another" (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, p. 5). Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, and Miller (1989) have

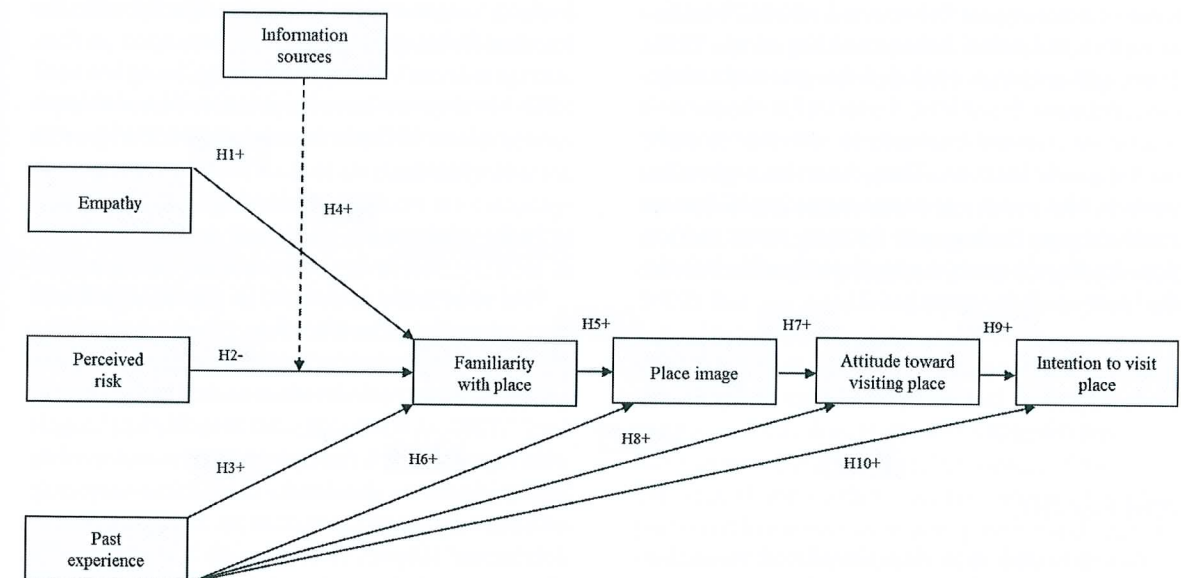


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

observed that empathy originates from "apprehension of another's emotional state or condition and is congruent with the other's emotional state or condition" (p. 108). Empathy is synonymous with *empathie* (Fogle, 1962), which expresses a visceral feeling into someone else's life. The construct is identified in marketing literature as the vicarious experience that allows a person to participate in the "posture, motion and sensations of someone or something other than the self" (Stern, 1994, p. 612).

According to Azar (1997) and Costa and Glinia (2003), there are four components of empathy. First is affect, which refers to sensing what others feel. Second is cognition, which relates to understanding what others feel. Third is communication, which refers to verbalizing an understanding of or affective response to others' feelings. Finally, perception relates to observing others and taking in their postural, facial, verbal, tonal, content, and timing cues.

Movie viewers "completely immerse themselves in the situation . . . and react to the actors as if they were real persons in their immediate environment" (H. Kim & Richardson, 2003, p. 221). In fact, Hahm and Wang (2011) have observed that "Viewers often make a connection with the characters . . . that could influence their decision of a destination" (p. 177). Generally, there is a time lag of 1 year between a movie's release and viewers' development of empathy for the movie location, intention to visit it, and actual behavior (Riley et al., 1998). These authors have concluded that growth in visitation continues for at least 4 years after the movie's release as viewers continue to develop empathy for the movie location. Thus, it can be argued that viewers who watch a romantic comedy will demonstrate stronger feelings and thoughts about its location, leading to greater perceived familiarity with the location. Subsequently:

H1: Movie viewers who develop greater empathy toward a place will perceive more familiarity with the place.

Perceived Risk

Perceived risk was first introduced to marketing by Bauer (1960), who defined the construct as an "action of a consumer that will produce consequences which he cannot anticipate with anything

approximating certainty, and some of which at least are likely to be unpleasant" (p. 21). Six different types of perceived risk in terms of loss are identified by Laroche, McDougall, Bergeron, and Yang (2004) and Mieres, Martin, and Gutierrez (2006) from buying behavior literature: (1) performance loss refers to the probability of a functional benefit loss; (2) financial loss is the likelihood of monetary investment loss; (3) social loss relates to the possibility of eliciting disapproval from reference groups; (4) psychological loss refers to the probability of self-image loss; (5) physical loss is the likelihood of health and safety loss; and (6) time loss relates to the possibility of effort and convenience loss.

The context in which decision making occurs may shape people's risk perceptions. If a similar travel destination is offered at a lower price, it is likely that most people will choose the one with less financial risk. Alternatively, if a similar destination poses less threat to people's health, then again, most people will choose the one with less physical risk. This has prompted Pizam and Mansfield (1996) to observe that "most tourists will not spend their hard earned money to go to a destination where their safety and well-being may be in jeopardy" (p. 1). Thus, it can be argued that viewers who watch a romantic comedy set in an attractive location will perceive less risk with the location, leading to greater perceived familiarity with the location. Subsequently:

H2: Movie viewers who perceive less risk with a place will perceive more familiarity with the place.

Past Experience

Past experience is defined in psychology literature as earlier consideration, purchase, and use (Triandis, 1971). In buying behavior literature, this earlier purchase and use affect social behavior (J. A. Lee, 2000), knowledge, and familiarity. People who regularly visit family and friends or routinely repeat travel to a certain destination may rely entirely on past experience as an internal information source (Chen, 2000; Etzel & Wahlers, 1985). Thus, it can be argued that viewers who watch a romantic comedy set in a location they have previously visited will have more experience with the

location, leading to greater perceived familiarity with the location. Subsequently:

H3: Movie viewers who have previously visited a place will perceive more familiarity with the place.

Information Sources

In buying behavior literature, two types of information search exist: (1) internal search and (2) external search (C-S. Lee, Kim, & Chan-Olmsted, 2011). In the internal search, consumers retrieve information stored in their long-term memory, gained either actively from past information searches and previous experience or passively by low-involvement learning (Fodness & Murray, 1997; Money & Crotts, 2003). If the internal search proves inadequate, tourists may decide to acquire additional information from external sources (Chen, 2000).

People consult two information sources that include: (1) non-marketing-dominated (Money & Crotts, 2003) or organic (Gunn, 1972) information sources not directly associated with tourism interests such as newspaper reports, individual blogs, chat rooms, as well as accounts from family and friends; and (2) marketing-dominated (Money & Crotts, 2003) or induced (Gunn, 1972) information sources directly associated with tourism interests such as corporate websites of tourism offices, airlines and travel agents, dedicated TV travel programs, supplements in travel sections of newspapers, travel guides, and Internet travel sites. Non-marketing-dominated or organic sources are third-party sources, whereas marketing-dominated sources are company-endorsed sources that make a conscious effort to reduce public perception of travel risk (H. Kim & Richardson, 2003).

Because travel constitutes a high involvement purchase, people "search for information and move back and forth between search and decision-making stages" (Jun, Vogt, & MacKay, 2007, p. 267). These authors have observed that travel planning is information intensive and often leads to searching and processing more amounts of information than for any other goods or services. People "perceiving greater risk are more likely to search for information about destinations" (Carneiro & Crompton, 2010, p. 455). Movies act as an important information

source that can define and disseminate the identities of national destinations (A. F. Young & Young, 2008). Thus, it can be argued that viewers who watch a romantic comedy will use it as an information source in reducing the risk associated with its location as they become more familiar with it. Subsequently:

H4: Exposure to the movie as a key information source will weaken the negative relationship between perceived risk and place familiarity.

Place Image

Place image is defined in tourism literature as the "sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person holds of it" (Gallarza et al., p. 60). Place image comprises three hierarchically interrelated components. First, cognition involves a person's cognitive structure (the brain) and includes awareness, knowledge, and beliefs. Second, affect explains a person's feelings toward an object. Finally, conation refers to the intent or action component that drives behavior (Beeton, 2005; Pike & Ryan, 2004).

In communication sciences literature over the last 60 years, researchers have highlighted the psychological nature of image and the way movies reflect people's mental commerce with the world (e.g., Morin, 1956). In fact, movie "images are not reality but its representation" created by an author, depending on the sense of what they intend to suggest to their audience (Mestre, del Rey, & Stanishovski, 2008, p. 185). For marketers, this is a crucial observation because "perceptions, rather than reality are what motivate consumers to act or not act" (Guthrie & Gale, 1991, p. 555). Thus, when people view a movie location, they form subjective images (Beeton, 2008) that are manifested by their perception and behavior toward the place.

How a movie's story and its setting are framed can shape favorable or unfavorable images about the movie's location. H. Kim and Richardson (2003) have observed that the "specific content of the movie can significantly affect viewers' image of a place portrayed in the movie, in both positive and negative directions" (p. 231). Thus, it can be argued that viewers who watch a romantic comedy set in an attractive location will become more familiar with its location and develop a greater positive image of the location.

Further, viewers who have pleasant past experiences with the location are also likely to have a more favorable image of the location (Tidwell, Sadowski, & Pate 2000). Subsequently:

H5: Movie viewers who are more familiar with an attractive place will have a more positive image of the place.

H6: Movie viewers who have previously visited an attractive place will have a more positive image of the place.

Attitude Toward Visiting a Place

Attitude is defined in psychology literature as a "mental and neutral state of readiness" (Triandis, 1971, p. 2). Attitude acts in four ways (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). First, it helps people understand the world by simplifying input from the environment. Second, it protects people's self-esteem by helping them to avoid undesirable truth. Third, it enables people to adjust to the world by maximizing environment benefits. Finally, it allows people to express their values. According to attitude theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the theory of hierarchy of effects (Ray, 1973), beliefs about a product influences attitude toward the product and intention to purchase it in high involvement purchases.

Tourist attitude is defined as "psychological tendencies expressed by the positive or negative evaluations of tourists when engaged in certain behaviors" (T. H. Lee, 2009, p. 218). Because travel constitutes making high involvement choices, people are likely to draw on their evaluation of a destination's image when forming an attitude toward the destination. Thus, in their study, which has examined the conceptual and operational definitions of destination image, Gallarza et al. (2002) have observed that attitude can be a "significant component of the destination image formation" (p. 59). Because place image comprises an affective element that explains an "individual's feeling toward an object" (Pike & Ryan, 2004, p. 334), it is likely that viewers who watch a romantic comedy set in an attractive location will develop a greater positive image of its location that will influence their positive attitude toward visiting the location. Further, viewers who have pleasant past experiences with the location

are also likely to have a more positive disposition toward the location. Subsequently:

H7: Movie viewers with a more positive image of a place will have a more favorable attitude toward visiting it.

H8: Movie viewers who have previously visited an attractive place will have a more favorable attitude toward visiting it.

Intention to Visit a Place

Finally, intention is defined in psychology literature as the likelihood to act, which in most cases, leads to behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This definition infers that measuring intention accurately is the most appropriate way to predict behavior. Thus, people who assert their intention to visit a place are likely to translate this intention into the actual behavior.

It is widely acknowledged in tourism literature that a positive relationship between attitude and behavioral intention exists (e.g., Bamberg, Ajzen, & Schmidt, 2003; T. H. Lee, 2009; Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010). There is also a general consensus that movies impact on intention to visit a place (Riley et al., 1998). These authors have asserted that movies are a unique communication vehicle because there is a time lag of 1 to 4 years between a movie being released, and viewers' intention to visit with the actual behavior of visiting the place. Thus, it can be argued that viewers who watch a romantic comedy set in an attractive location will develop higher intention to visit it. Further, viewers who have pleasant past experiences with a location are also likely to have greater interest in revisiting the location. Subsequently:

H9: Movie viewers with a more favorable attitude toward visiting a place will have a higher intention to visit it.

H10: Movie viewers who have previously visited an attractive place will have a higher intention to revisit it.

Methodology

This study adopted a posttest-only control group experimental design, which was also utilized by

H. Kim and Richardson (2003) and justified by two key reasons (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). First, subjects who undertake both the pretest and posttest are likely to develop desensitization to experimental manipulation (Parasuraman, 1986). Further, interviewee bias in subjects taking the tests twice may confound the findings. Second, it is generally assumed that assigning subjects randomly to an experimental and a control group ensures equality of the subjects in them. Subsequently, the posttest-only control group with an experimental cross-sectional design was adopted. This ensured that different cohorts were subject to the same experimental manipulation at one specific time.

The experimental and control manipulations comprised the romantic comedy "produced for the entertainment of the general public employing plot and characters" (H. Kim & Richardson, 2003, p. 223). New York was selected as the focus of the study. This is because New York is a long-haul destination for Australians. Because considerable costs and effort are involved in the destination choice, this makes the decision-making process more complex and risky.

Data were collected from two patron samples at a large cinemaplex chain, which housed eight movie theaters and was located in a major shopping center in Perth, Western Australia. The researchers worked in advance with management at the cinemaplex chain to identify two romantic comedies that would screen in its movie theaters concurrently. The first romantic comedy, *Friends With Benefits*, that focused on New York was selected for the experimental group. The movie's plot revolves around a couple who meets in New York and naively believes adding sex to their relationship will not lead to complications. Over time, the couple develops deep mutual feelings for each other and debate about staying in New York. The second romantic comedy, *Dezi Boy*, that focused on London and India was selected for the control group.

During the weekends of September through to November 2011, two data collectors waited outside the two movie theaters that screened the selected two romantic comedies. Every third exiting movie patron was approached to complete the questionnaire. Subjects were given a brief introduction about the study's purpose and were asked to complete their questionnaire individually to

reduce response bias. As an incentive to complete the survey, subjects were presented with a sponsored \$6 food voucher, which was redeemable at the shopping center.

Subjects in both groups were asked for their responses to New York immediately after viewing either movie. Subjects in the control group who had watched *Friends With Benefits* previously were screened out immediately. Because exclusion of these subjects was not due to the nature of experimental manipulations, it is not believed that this significantly affected the validity of the study design (H. Kim & Richardson, 2003). There were 228 usable responses in the experimental group and 230 in the control group.

Instrumentation

The data were collected using a 15-minute self-administered pen and paper questionnaire. Measures for each of the eight constructs were selected from existing scales for their reliability and adapted to fit the context of the study. These included: (1) six items for empathy (H. Kim & Richardson, 2003) ($\alpha = 0.87$); (2) four items each for perceived performance, financial, psychological, social, physical, and time risk (Laroche et al., 2004; Mieres et al., 2006) ($\alpha = 0.78-0.96$); (3) three items for past experience (Carneiro & Crompton, 2010); (4) five items for place familiarity (H. Kim & Richardson, 2003; Shapiro, MacInnis, & Heckler, 1997) ($\alpha = 0.79-0.80$); (5) 17 items for place image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011) ($\alpha = 0.71-0.89$); (6) five items for attitude toward visiting a place (Bagozzi, Dholakia, & Basuroy, 2003) ($\alpha = 0.85$); (7) three items for intention to visit the place (Bagozzi et al., 2003) ($\alpha = 0.78$); and (8) 12 items for information sources (Quintal et al., 2010). For instance, place image was measured with a statement, "I think New York has the following . . ." followed by the 17 scale items. With information sources, respondents were asked "What information source(s) have helped you in learning about New York?" followed by 12 market-dominated and non-market-dominated information sources. The scale items were measured with Likert-style scales, anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The exceptions were the attitude scale,

which was bipolar semantic, the past experience scale, which was ordinal, and the information sources scale, which was categorical.

Results

Initially, exploratory factor analysis using a VARIMAX rotation with SPSS 19 examined the 60 scale items that represented empathy, perceived risk, familiarity, place image, attitude toward, and intention to visit the place. As can be seen in Table 1, in the experimental group, the final eight-factor solution identified 44 items that explained 73% of the variance with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value (KMO) of 0.85 and Bartlett's test of sphericity of 8996.09. The first factor related to the *place image* of New York's lifestyle and landscapes ($\alpha = 0.94$). The second factor represented *attitude toward visiting* New York ($\alpha = 0.93$). The third factor related to *familiarity* with New York ($\alpha = 0.89$). The fourth factor represented *empathy* toward New York ($\alpha = 0.88$). The fifth factor related to *perceived performance/financial risk* associated with visiting New York ($\alpha = 0.86$). The sixth factor represented *perceived social risk* associated with visiting New York ($\alpha = 0.95$). The seventh factor related to *perceived physical risk* associated with visiting New York ($\alpha = 0.90$). Finally, the eighth factor represented *intention to visit* New York ($\alpha = 0.97$).

As can be seen in Table 1, in the control group, the final eight-factor solution identified 41 items that explained 76% of the variance with a KMO of 0.89 and Bartlett's test of sphericity of 8506.85. The first factor related to the *place image* of New York's lifestyle and landscapes ($\alpha = 0.93$). The second factor represented *familiarity* with New York ($\alpha = 0.91$). The third factor related to *attitude toward visiting* New York ($\alpha = 0.97$). The fourth factor represented *perceived social risk* associated with visiting New York ($\alpha = 0.94$). The fifth factor related to *empathy* toward New York ($\alpha = 0.89$). The sixth factor represented *performance/financial risk* associated with visiting New York ($\alpha = 0.93$). The seventh factor related to *perceived physical risk* associated with visiting New York ($\alpha = 0.88$). Finally, the eighth factor represented *intention to visit* New York ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Then, one-factor congeneric models with AMOS 19 examined the constructs to refine the factor

Table 1
Final Scale Items for the Key Constructs

Empathy

While watching the film, I became very involved in the New York setting.
While watching the film, I experienced the vibe of New York.
While watching the film, I could feel as if the events taking place in New York were happening to me.
While watching the film, I really got involved with the feel of the place.

Perceived performance/financial risk

When I think about visiting New York, the experience would not provide the benefits I expect.
When I think about visiting New York, the trip may not really "perform" the way it is supposed to.
When I think about visiting New York, New York cannot be relied upon to give me a good experience.
When I think about visiting New York, it could involve important financial losses for me.
When I think about visiting New York, the visit would not live up to my expectations.

Perceived social risk

When I think about visiting New York, my decision would make others see me in an unfavorable light.
When I think about visiting New York, travelling to New York would make others think less of me.
When I think about visiting New York, the esteem my family/friends have for me will decline.

Perceived physical risk

When I think about visiting New York, I could be confronted by a hostile environment.
When I think about visiting New York, I could get sick.
When I think about visiting New York, I may get hurt.

Past experience

How many times have you travelled to New York?
When was your last visit to New York?
How long was your last stay in New York?

Place familiarity

I am familiar with the cultural/historical attractions in New York.
I am familiar with the entertainment in New York.
I am familiar with the landscapes in New York.
I am familiar with the lifestyle of the people in New York.

Place image

Iconic buildings
Trendy shopping facilities
Extensive range of entertainment
Tasty cuisine
Vibrant surroundings
Interesting cultural/historical activities
Good variety of outdoor activities

Attitude toward Visiting New York

Dislike/like
Bored/excited
Unenjoyable/enjoyable

Intention to Visit New York

I plan to visit New York in the next 12 months.
I intend to visit New York in the next 12 months.
I will expend effort to visit New York in the next 12 months.

structures in both the experimental and control groups. Items with high cross loadings and low factor scores identified in the modification indices were deleted from the scales. In total, 32 items represented the 8 constructs in the experimental group and 29 items in the control group. The final scale items can be seen in Table 1. The resultant items had composite reliabilities above 0.85 and average variance extracted scores above 0.58, suggesting face and convergent validity and acceptable fit (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Further, there was support for discriminant validity because correlations between the constructs did not exceed 0.60 (Currie, Cunningham, & Findlay, 2005).

Descriptive analysis examined the sample profiles of the experimental and control groups, as can be seen in Table 2. As expected, there was a higher distribution of females to males in both groups because the romantic comedy genre appeals to more female viewers (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). In the experimental group, the majority of subjects (51.8%) was in the 20–29 age group, whereas in the control group, the majority (53.9%) was 30 years and above. Because *Friends With Benefits* has a storyline about 20-somethings, it is expected that its target market would be in this age group. Thus, more subjects in the experimental group (51.8%) were single, whereas more in the control group (45.4%) were married or in de facto relationships. Students constituted 44.1% of the experimental group, whereas professionals and administrative workers constituted 37.2% of the control group. However, the majority in both groups either worked full or part time, earning over \$50,000, and had not visited New York previously (71.5% and 80.9%, respectively).

Next, descriptive analysis examined the information sources consulted by the experimental and control groups, as can be seen in Table 3. From the 12 different information sources identified, 9 were marketing dominated and 3 were non-marketing dominated. Chi-square tests demonstrated some similarities in the information sources consulted. Across both groups, the majority of frequencies did not differ significantly for marketing-dominated and non-marketing-dominated information sources. However, a few of the frequencies differed significantly across both groups for marketing-dominated information sources. These included Internet travel

sites as well as travel books, guides, and magazines, with higher use of both these sources in the experimental group.

Independent groups *t* tests examined the means and standard deviations of the experimental and control groups, as can be seen in Table 4. There was a consistent trend in the findings, with the experimental group having significantly higher average scores for empathy (4.27), past experience (1.50), place familiarity (4.50), attitude toward visiting New York (5.60), and intention to visit New York (3.55), and significantly lower average scores for performance/financial risk (2.63) than the control group.

An aim of this study was to extend H. Kim and Richardson's (2003) research and integrate into the research model key influential factors, namely, empathy, perceived risk, past experience, and place familiarity that impact on a movie location's image and shape attitude toward and intention to visit New York. Because the research model proposed causal relationship between the factors, path analysis with SPSS 19 was adopted. This was achieved in a multigroup analysis of the experimental and control groups. As can be seen in Table 5, the goodness-of-fit indices were acceptable for the experimental and control groups ($\chi^2/df \leq 1.9$; RMSEA ≤ 0.04 ; CFI ≥ 0.95 ; TLI ≥ 0.94 ; and GFI ≥ 0.87). Although the GFI was under 0.90, all other goodness-of-fit indices were above the critical levels (Hair et al., 2010) and the model was deemed acceptable.

There were similarities in some hypothesized results for both groups. Empathy and past experience produced positive and significant effects on place familiarity, supporting H1 and H3 in both groups. Also, positive and significant effects were observed for place familiarity on place image and in turn, place image on attitude, supporting H5 and H7 in both groups. Finally, in both groups, attitude had a positive and significant effect on intention to visit, supporting H9. However, and more importantly, there were differences in some hypothesized results in both groups. Past experience produced positive and significant effects on attitude and intention to visit, supporting H8 and H10 in the experimental group. On the other hand, a negative and significant effect was observed for social risk on place familiarity, supporting H2 in the control group.

An objective of this study was to examine the importance of the romantic comedy as an information

Table 2
Sample Profile: Experimental Group and Control Group

	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Gender				
Female	162	71.1	163	70.9
Male	66	28.9	67	29.1
Age				
18–19 years	39	17.1	33	14.3
20–29 years	118	51.8	73	31.7
30–39 years	36	15.8	57	24.8
40 years and above	35	15.4	67	29.1
Marital status				
Single	118	51.8	77	33.6
In a relationship	49	21.5	48	21.0
Married/de facto	61	26.7	104	45.4
Occupation				
Manager	9	4.6	20	8.7
Professional	43	22.1	56	24.5
Technician/tradesperson	9	4.6	6	2.6
Community or personal service	10	5.1	5	2.2
Clerical and administration	17	8.7	29	12.7
Sales	12	6.2	9	3.9
Machinery operator/driver	1	0.5	3	1.3
Student	86	44.1	44	19.2
Retired	6	3.1	15	6.6
Other	2	1.0	42	18.3
Working status				
Full time	95	41.7	119	52.0
Part time	49	21.5	43	18.8
Casual	55	24.1	28	12.2
Not working	29	12.7	39	17.0
Annual personal income				
Under \$14,999	62	27.2	44	21.2
\$15,000–\$29,000	37	16.2	27	13.0
\$30,000–\$49,000	26	11.4	30	14.4
\$50,000–\$74,999	59	25.9	44	21.2
\$75,000–\$99,999	27	11.8	34	16.3
\$100,000–\$149,000	15	6.6	23	11.1
\$150,000 and above	0	0.0	3	1.4
Previously visited New York				
Never	163	71.5	186	80.9
Once	36	15.8	22	9.6
Twice	9	3.9	12	5.2
More than 3 times	20	8.8	10	4.3
Last visit to New York				
Less than a year ago	15	6.6	10	4.3
Once	2	0.9	6	2.6
2 years ago	8	3.5	8	3.5
3 years or more	40	17.5	20	8.7
Duration of last visit to New York				
Less than a week	27	11.8	14	6.1
1–2 weeks	23	10.1	21	9.1
3–4 weeks	4	1.8	5	2.2
Over 5 weeks	11	4.8	4	1.7

Table 3
Information Sources Consulted About New York: Market Dominated and Non-Market Dominated

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Market-dominated information sources		
Internet travel sites	120 (52.63%) ^a	88 (38.26%) ^b
Travel books, guides, and magazines	95 (41.67%) ^a	68 (29.57%) ^b
Articles in travel sections of newspapers and magazines	87 (38.16%) ^a	73 (31.74%) ^a
TV travel programs	140 (61.40%) ^a	147 (63.91%) ^a
Travel agents face to face	13 (5.70%) ^a	13 (5.65%) ^a
Travel agents Internet	29 (12.72%) ^a	18 (7.83%) ^a
Airlines face to face	7 (3.07%) ^a	4 (1.74%) ^a
Airlines Internet	21 (9.21%) ^a	16 (6.96%) ^a
Tourism office brochures	35 (15.35%) ^a	22 (9.57%) ^a
Non-market-dominated information sources		
Blogs and chat rooms	41 (17.98%) ^a	27 (11.74%) ^a
Family and friends who have visited New York	124 (54.39%) ^a	118 (51.30%) ^a
Family and friends who live(d) in New York	54 (23.68%) ^a	38 (16.52%) ^a

Note: Counts that share the same subscript letter are not significantly different from one another ($p < 0.05$) using chi-square tests.

source and its dominance over other information sources, as premised in H4. Consequently, the extent of search rather than the types of sources consulted was examined. This was achieved by combining the 12 information source items to form an extent of information search construct. From here, subjects with high and low information search were identified in the experimental and control groups. Thus, subjects who practiced low information search and substituted movies for other information sources were examined. This was achieved in a multigroup analysis of low information users in the experimental and control groups. As can be seen in Table 6, the goodness-of-

fit indices were acceptable for both the experimental and control groups ($\chi^2/df \leq 1.7$; RMSEA ≤ 0.05 ; CFI ≥ 0.94 ; TLI ≥ 0.93 ; and GFI ≥ 0.82). Again, while the GFI was under 0.90, the other goodness-of-fit indices were above the critical levels (Hair et al., 2010) and the model was deemed acceptable.

There were similarities in some hypothesized results for the low information users in both groups. Empathy and past experience produced positive and significant effects on place familiarity, supporting H1 and H3 in both groups. Also, a positive and significant effect was observed for place familiarity on place image, supporting H5 in both groups.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics: Experimental Group and Control Group

Constructs	Experimental Group	Control Group
Empathy	4.27 (1.31) ^a	3.13 (1.43) ^b
Performance/financial risk	2.63 (1.25) ^a	2.90 (1.39) ^b
Social risk	1.64 (0.97) ^a	1.66 (1.02) ^a
Physical risk	2.59 (1.39) ^a	2.76 (1.44) ^a
Past experience with New York	1.50 (0.93) ^a	1.33 (0.77) ^b
Place familiarity	4.50 (1.17) ^a	3.54 (1.44) ^b
Place image	5.44 (1.17) ^a	5.57 (1.06) ^a
Attitude toward visiting New York	5.60 (1.44) ^a	4.96 (1.57) ^b
Intention to visit New York	3.55 (2.04) ^a	2.37 (1.78) ^b
Number of information sources consulted	3.36 (1.65) ^a	2.75 (1.80) ^a

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Means that share the same subscript letter are not significantly different from one another ($p < 0.05$) using independent groups t tests.

Table 5

Path Analysis: Experimental Group and Control Group

	Beta Value (β)	Hypothesis
Experimental group		
H1: Empathy → Place familiarity	0.45***	Supported
H2: Performance/financial risk → Place familiarity	-0.09	Not supported
H2: Social risk → Place familiarity	-0.02	Not supported
H2: Physical risk → Place familiarity	0.13	Not supported
H3: Past experience → Place familiarity	0.32***	Supported
H5: Place familiarity → Place image	0.38***	Supported
H6: Past experience → Place image	0.06	Not supported
H7: Place image → Attitude	0.21**	Supported
H8: Past experience → Attitude	0.22**	Supported
H9: Attitude → Intention to visit	0.27***	Supported
H10: Past experience → Intention to visit	0.15*	Supported
Control group		
H1: Empathy → Place familiarity	0.38***	Supported
H2: Performance/financial risk → Place familiarity	0.02	Not supported
H2: Social risk → Place familiarity	-0.17*	Supported
H2: Physical risk → Place familiarity	-0.06	Not supported
H3: Past experience → Place familiarity	0.33***	Supported
H5: Place familiarity → Place image	0.42***	Supported
H6: Past experience → Place image	0.05	Not supported
H7: Place image → Attitude	0.54***	Supported
H8: Past experience → Attitude	-0.01	Not supported
H9: Attitude → Intention to visit	0.36***	Supported
H10: Past experience → Intention to visit	0.10	Not supported

Note: Chi-square = 775.84, df = 418; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.04); Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.95); Tucker Lewis Index (TLI = 0.94); Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.87).
 * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Finally, in both groups, attitude had a positive and significant effect on intention to visit, supporting H9. However, there were differences in some hypothesized results for low information users in both groups. Past experience produced positive and significant effects on attitude and intention to visit, supporting H8 and H10 in the experimental group. On the other hand, a negative and significant effect was observed for social risk on place familiarity and there was a positive and significant effect for place image on attitude, supporting H2, H4, and H7 in the control group.

Discussion

This study's key objective examined whether the romantic comedy as an information source is pivotal in impacting on empathy, perceived risk, past experience, place familiarity, place image, and shaping viewer attitude toward and intention to visit a place. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses suggested the scales used to measure the resultant

eight constructs had sound psychometric properties. Further, the constructs had acceptable composite reliabilities and demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity, suggesting they have rigor and can be replicated in other tourism studies.

Significant differences between the experimental and control groups were examined with independent groups t tests. As expected, empathy, past experience, place familiarity, attitude toward, and intention to visit New York were significantly *higher*, whereas performance/financial risk was significantly *lower* for the experimental group than the control group. This provides some empirical support that the romantic comedy as an information source and past experience have a direct effect on viewer perception, attitude, and intention to visit a movie location. Up to this point, the body of literature in the area has mainly relied on secondary data and is without an empirically tested framework that can validate this premise (A. F. Young & Young, 2008).

For low information users who had viewed *Friends With Benefits*, H1, H3, H4, H5, H8, H9,

Table 6

Path Analysis: Low Information Sources (Experimental Group and Control Group)

	Beta Value (β)	Hypothesis
Low information sources (experimental group)		
H1: Empathy → Place familiarity	0.44***	Supported
H2: Performance/financial risk → Place familiarity	-0.13	Not supported
H2: Social risk → Place familiarity	-0.01	Not supported
H2: Physical risk → Place familiarity	0.17	Not supported
H3: Past experience → Place familiarity	0.28***	Supported
H5: Place familiarity → Place image	0.39***	Supported
H6: Past experience → Place image	0.01	Not supported
H7: Place image → Attitude	0.14	Not supported
H8: Past experience → Attitude	0.25**	Supported
H9: Attitude → Intention to visit	0.29***	Supported
H10: Past experience → Intention to visit	0.17*	Supported
Low information sources (control group)		
H1: Empathy → Place familiarity	0.26**	Supported
H2: Performance/financial risk → Place familiarity	0.14	Not supported
H2: Social risk → Place familiarity	-0.27**	Supported
H2: Physical risk → Place familiarity	-0.09	Not supported
H3: Past experience → Place familiarity	0.41***	Supported
H5: Place familiarity → Place image	0.37***	Supported
H6: Past experience → Place image	0.04	Not supported
H7: Place image → Attitude	0.55***	Supported
H8: Past experience → Attitude	0.06	Not supported
H9: Attitude → Intention to visit	0.35***	Supported
H10: Past experience → Intention to visit	0.10	Supported

Note: Chi-square = 798.52, df = 464; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.05); Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.94); Tucker Lewis Index (TLI = 0.93); Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.82).
 * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

and H10 were supported. Findings suggested these subjects developed greater empathy for New York as they watched and became more familiar with the city. In turn, familiarity with New York helped to shape subjects' impressions of the city's culture, food, and entertainment. Positive past experience with New York also increased their familiarity and favorable attitude toward it. In turn, positive past experience and favorable attitude toward visiting New York produced higher intention to visit it. Interestingly, H2 was not supported, with perceived risk playing no significant role in influencing place familiarity. It is likely that for low information users, the romantic comedy may have served as a sufficient information source about New York. Because the movie presented New York in a romantic setting, subjects would have developed such high empathy and favorable attitude toward visiting the city that they did not perceive any risks with it.

For low information users who had not viewed *Friends With Benefits*, H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H7, and H9 were supported. Because subjects were not

exposed to *Friends With Benefits* and the New York setting, they could not use the romantic comedy as an information source. Instead, it is likely that they drew on other less immediate, non-marketing-dominated information sources about New York at this time. As expected, this translated into their significantly higher perceived social risk when thinking about New York, supporting H2 and H4.

From this study's findings, it is apparent that people are utilizing more contemporary visual media such as movies instead of traditional print media to acquire information about intangible travel products (Tooke & Baker, 1996). This is consistent with the growing dependence on visual media in society (Tasci, 2009). Fodness and Murray (1997) have observed that people engage in three travel search behavior patterns: (1) routine search where the process is carried out promptly with few sources; (2) limited search where the process is restricted either by time (i.e., quick search but higher than average number of sources) or sources (i.e., above average planning period but fewer sources); and

(3) extensive search where the process takes more time and information sources. From the findings, movies appear to be an important information source when people conduct routine or limited searches about travel destinations. This has impacts on how movies can be utilized as vehicles to inform and influence people's location preferences.

Limitations

A few limitations are acknowledged in this study. First, only one large cinemaplex chain in a major shopping center in Western Australia was used to keep conditions in the experiment consistent. However, situational factors specific to the venue (e.g., seating capacity, seat comfort, temperature control, and car park availability) may have impacted on subjects' experience with the romantic comedy and their perception, attitude, and behavior toward the movie location. Second, it would have been pertinent to have screened both groups for any intention they had to visit New York prior to the experimental manipulation. This would have provided stronger empirical support for the direct impact the romantic comedy had on subjects' intention to visit New York. Third, respondents were asked about their perceptions, attitude, and behavior toward New York. While New York and New York City offer different experiences, it should be noted that non-American populations such as Australia do not make this distinction and tend to use both location references interchangeably when referring to New York City. However, further studies that are intended to be replicated in the US will take note of this distinction and make specific reference to New York City. Fourth, the study was conducted at one static point in time. Subjects' attitude toward and intention to visit New York may have changed from the time they started viewing the movie to its conclusion. However, as already justified, administering a pretest and posttest may have resulted in desensitized and biased samples.

Future Directions

An aim of this study was to extend H. Kim and Richardson's (2003) research and integrate into the research model, key influential factors, namely, empathy, perceived risk, past experience, and place

familiarity that impact on a movie location's image and shape attitude toward and intention to visit the location. While the majority of findings supported the causal relationships proposed in the hypotheses, further studies related to this research will consider interaction effects and correlations between the factors. For instance, empathy and perceived risk are likely to impact on place familiarity and vice versa. Additionally, information sources are likely to correlate with empathy, place image, and attitude toward the visiting the place.

This study's findings appear to support buying behavior literature that perceived risk is multidimensional (e.g., Laroche et al., 2004; Mieres et al., 2006). This suggests the construct may have second-order factors such as performance/financial, social, and physical risk. Some of these dimensions may interact with each other and have more significant influence over the others. For instance, it is likely that social risk will exert a stronger influence when interacting with factors such as peer pressure and in-group approval. Alternatively, physical risk may exert a stronger influence when the movie location is less known and movie viewers do not have a sense of security and comfort (Tasci & Knutson, 2004). Thus, the differential impacts of each of the risk dimensions require more consideration.

In future studies, it may be pertinent to study how movies impact on viewers' nostalgia with a movie location. Although nostalgic images have been used to market travel destinations, such images are a "fabrication of events and places that are 'nostalgia-ised' for tourist consumption" (Vesey & Dimanche, 2003, p. 57). These images may be a false representation of a place but they create nostalgia (Jewell & McKinnon, 2008) and romantic scenes that induce people's intention to visit the place (Martineau, 1958). This has prompted Boym (2001) to observe that a nostalgic movie image is "a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life" (p. 14). Viewers who watch a movie are likely to demonstrate stronger nostalgic feelings about the movie location (S. K. Kim, 2012). Thus, integrating nostalgia into the proposed decision-making model will test for its effectiveness in influencing intention to visit the destination.

For the proposed decision-making model to have general applicability, it will require replication across

different viewing venues and different genres. While this study focused on an indoor cinema, other venues such as an outdoor cinema, a drive-in movie, or a home theater also need to be explored. Each venue offers unique servicescape factors such as the weather, setting, temperature, lighting, acoustics, seating, food, drinks (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996), and companions that may produce mood effects on viewers' attitude toward a movie location and intention to visit it. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no decision-making model that incorporates servicescape factors of viewing venues currently exists. For researchers, this would make for an interesting comparative study. For destination managers, understanding key predictors of such mood effects can help them to select viewing venues that best showcase their destination during invited or advanced screenings.

While this study focused on one specific movie genre, namely, the romantic comedy, other movie genres such as the drama, action, musical, horror, and thriller also require some examination. With a drama such as *Under the Tuscan Sun*, which showcases an iconic setting and even carries place image in its movie title, viewers may develop a more positive attitude toward and intention to visit Tuscany. However, with an action movie such as *The Italian Job*, which also carries place image in its movie title but focuses on a heist in Venice, viewers may be too absorbed by the plot to develop a more positive attitude toward and intention to visit Venice. Again, for researchers, the various genres make for an interesting comparative study. For destination managers and brand marketers, identifying the genre as an information source that can most successfully promote the ethos of their destination and brands would be crucial toward the allocation of communication budgets.

Up to this stage of the study, only the positive outcomes of movie-induced tourism have been highlighted. However, the negative outcomes need to be acknowledged. Such outcomes that impact on society, culture, the economy, and environment are two-fold. First, negative outcomes occur during filming when there are issues of crowding, loss of facilities and privacy for locals (Beeton, 2005), the destruction of the natural environment, and inflated prices driven by the influx of production crews (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). Second, negative outcomes occur

after filming when local filming jobs have dried up and a new intrusive style of tourist emerges. Such tourists may experience frustration and disappointment when there is little evidence of the film at the destination. Introducing new tourist profiles to the destination may also disenfranchise the destination's traditional tourist and drive them away (Beeton, 2005). These impacts on the cultural landscape require further investigation.

In conclusion, this study proposes a tourist decision-making framework that empirically explains how the romantic comedy as an information source impacts on travel destination choices. Developing such an integrated framework will provide researchers with theoretical underpinning for future empirical studies. This can benefit the collaborative work of movie distributors and destination marketers in identifying movie attributes that they can use to responsibly promote the movie and its location.

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