

Current Trends in Film Tourism in Romania. Case Study: The Wednesday Series

Marian-Andrei VINTILĂ*

*University of Bucharest, Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Studies
(CISA-ICUB), Bucharest, Romania*

**Corresponding author, marian.vintila@s.unibuc.ro*

Florentina-Cristina MERCIU

*University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania
cristina.merciu@geo.unibuc.ro*

Andrei DUCMAN

*University of Bucharest, Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Studies
(CISA-ICUB), Bucharest, Romania
andrei.ducman@s.unibuc.ro*

Cristian Constantin DRĂGHICI

*University of Bucharest, Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Studies
(CISA-ICUB), Bucharest, Romania
cristian.draghici@geo.unibuc.ro*

Abstract. *The choice of topic was based on numerous assets of attractiveness regarding the film tourism and assets that led to the evolution of this type of tourism. The purpose of the study is highlighting the impact of the film industry on tourism by analyzing the frames presented in Wednesday film production that illustrate certain cultural touristic objectives of local or national interest. The methodology approached for the elaboration of this study referred to the review of specialized literature and the analysis of the case study, which was completed by the quantitative analyze method focused on the elements posted on social media and on the online metrics related to the case study. The results of the study highlighted how cinematographic industry can influence tourist motivations for travelling and how this industry can provide new opportunities in the local economy. At the same time, the research results also emphasized the cinematographic elements that make up this type of tourism and their degree of attractiveness and to what measure the Wednesday series influenced the local touristic flow. Cinematographic tourism represents for Romanian hospitality industry a new exploitation niche that can bring numerous benefits from an economic point of view, but which can also increase the visibility of the country and national identity assets at European or even international level. This study sheds light on the opportunity to develop cinematographic tourism in Romania by evaluating an interesting case study that includes representative cultural objectives Romania's touristic image.*

Keywords: film tourism, Cantacuzino Castle, quantitative analysis, impact factors, touristic flow.

Introduction

Cinematographic tourism represents that type of tourism generated by all activities in the field of cinematography and filmography, such as: casting a film in certain places with a vast culture, with unique touristic objectives and presenting natural landscapes (Kanaan et al., 2019; Hudson et al.,

2006; Liu et al., 2020) and cultural complex landscapes, respectively locations that have monumental cultural-historical objectives (Lopes et al., 2018).

The connection between cinematography and tourism is considered to be naturally reciprocal. Thus, when we refer to the cinematographic set, we point out to the scenes that are filmed within the natural and cultural landscapes, respectively to the locations outside the cinematographic studios and that form the framework of the related story (Eskandari, 2017). If a film has uniqueness, it will increase the tourist potential of a destination (Riley et al., 1992).

Cinematographic tourism is made up of two distinct components: one represented by the production of media materials and the other by the development of tourist activities based on media materials in certain destinations that have in their composition a diverse set of natural and cultural objectives and well by the local influences of that area (Bolan, Williams, 2008; Pruseviciute, 2014). Moreover, this type of tourism is also based on visiting film studios and cinema centers of notoriety (Gunesh, 2017).

Destination image is a fundamental element in the popularity and succes of a destination, influencing tourists' decisions, travel quality, satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Araújo-Vila et al., 2024; Chen et al. 2007). The image can be influenced by media products, such as those from cinematographic industry. Thus, through the propagation of these products, especially on social media networks, a positive impact is generated on tourism and its economic capacity, the tourist potential of the destinations being directly related to the prolonged online exposure of these products (O'Connor 2011; Araújo-Vila et al., 2024).

Tourist destination marketing through cinematographic tourism present a complex dynamic that requires understanding in order to have a competitive tourism market (Nakayama, 2024). Thus, to attract the widest possible audience, marketers must combine cultural attractions with compelling stories (Mele et al., 2021). Movies can influence the image of a destination in certain contexts, and the authenticity and sensory elements of a virtual travel positively affects tourist immersion (Reichenberger, 2019; Nakayama, 2024). The emergence of specific attractiveness generators can contribute to the structural dynamics of the local economy and to the generation of multiplier effects that in the long term can lead to sustainable development by acting as catalysts of local development (Ianoş et al., 2012; Drăghici et al., 2015; Herman et al., 2020).

Tourist motivations represent an essential element in the development of travel and also in the sustainable development of tourism sector. In the case of cinematographic tourism, motivations are directly influenced by numerous factors that have an impact on the formation of perceptions towards certain locations that hold specific cultural values (Heitmann, 2010). The main factors underlying tourist motivations are represented by: attraction factors or pull-factors and "push" factors or push-factors (Dann, 1977). The attraction factors are represented by: the film itself, the attractiveness of the location and the influence that film has on the perceptions of tourists. The push factors are correlated with tourists' experiences while watching films, view on cinema and emotional influences (Heitmann, 2010).

In this context, the paper aims to analyze the influence of the film industry on tourist destinations through social networks and online search parameters and how this influence constitutes an element in the sustainable development of the local tourism industry. The paper answers the research questions: How does the film industry influence the image of the tourist destination through online promotion? How does the film industry influence the generation of a flow of tourists in the post-viewing stage of films? Are the media elements of cinematography a decisive factor in planning a tourist trip?

A first hypothesis of the study is related to the positive impact of media representation of touristic objectives on the development of touristic perceptions and motivations related to these objectives. A second hypothesis is focused on the increase in the flow of tourists following the release and viewing of Wednesday series.

Literature review

Regarding cinematographic tourism, the language of the film represents one of the most important mechanisms in the formation of tourists' perception of the presented place (Hao et al., 2013). Thus, consumers can be very sensitive to images, a determining factor in the purchase process in the field of services, including tourism after watching films. The image is directly related to the cinematic environment that has an influence on the audience (Bolan, Williams, 2008).

The parameters of cinematographic tourism are multidimensional, generating territorial impacts, but also opportunities and challenges associated with the management and marketing of tourist destinations. By casting film scenes, interest in cultural heritage objectives is encouraged, thus the touristic dynamics of destinations also stimulates the process of territorial entrepreneurship (Lopes et al., 2024). Currently, more and more tourist destinations are focusing on cinematographic tourism as a distinct tourism strategy, and when properly capitalized it can bring significant economic and social benefits to the tourist destinations that choose to develop it (Velasco-Ferreiro, 2021).

Various studies have highlighted the link between tourism and popular culture. The latter has an influence on destinations and consumers through movies, TV shows, literature and music (Heitmann, 2010; Whang et al., 2016; Reichenberger, 2019; Velasco-Ferreiro et al., 2021). It represents a global phenomenon whereby tourists visit a tourist objective or destination because popular culture describes a destination through an epic story presented by media products, movies having a strong influence on tourists (O'Connor, 2011; Whang et al., 2016). Trips related to popular culture have a special meaning for tourists, this gives them both the opportunity to immerse themselves in the world that is often fictional, represented in films (Reichenberger, 2019).

In the current context, we can highlight the fact that elements from online environment represent both a basis for tourism promotion (Mele et al., 2021; Muslimah, Keumala, 2018), but also a mechanism for influencing tourists' intentions (Molinillo et al., 2018). The three main characteristics of social media are represented by communication, sharing and involvement, contributing to the creation of the image of the tourist destination and to the marketing of the destination. Thus, through the posts made by various users, the visibility of a destination increases, ultimately resulting in the choice of the destination by users in search of authentic tourist products (Sultan et al., 2021; Sharmin et al., 2021; Marine-Roig, 2019). Data obtained through online platforms, which contain certain hashtags or sharing locations, provide qualitative information on destination marketing (Kilipiri et al., 2023), and the prevalence with which a tourist destination was chosen for planning a vacation.

In the cinematographic tourism literature, the authors identified gaps regarding the analysis of social media elements (Instagram) and online search parameters, which constitute relevant databases for the analysis of film locations. This study proposes a detailed analysis of social media elements and search parameters to highlight the influence of cinema on tourist destination and motivations despite the lack of an official tourist flow database for cinematographic tourism.

Methodology

The analysis of specialized literature, the case study method, the comparative-qualitative analysis, the analysis of social media elements and of search parameters were used for the elaboration of this study.

The authors used a qualitative comparison for analysis the representation of the cultural objectives presented in the Netflix Wednesday series and the cultural assets in reality, highlighting the image of the tourist destination under the influence of an authentic character. At the same time, the authors proposed an in-depth analysis of the social media elements correlated with the topic, resulting in a database that reflects the impact of the series on tourist motivations to plan a trip to the cultural attractions represented in the cinematographic production.

The first stage was defined in the analysis of the specialized literature regarding the defining elements of cinematographic tourism and the in-depth analysis of some particular case studies, establishing a detailed understanding of the topic correlated with the case study selected by the authors. Also, during the first stage, the frames where the tourist objective is represented in the series were identified, realizing a qualitative comparison between these frames and the real image of the tourist objective. This qualitative analysis aims to highlight the fact that the selected objective stands out for its authenticity and certain cultural-architectural values that constituted a motivational basis in its selection for the realization of a series with a sober theme. Moreover, this stage emphasizes the qualitative representation of the cultural objective within the series and how this image represents a form of tourism promotion.

The second stage is defined by analyzing the social media elements that are correlated with the proposed case study and that are carried out in the post-launch period of Wednesday series. Thus, this method highlights the degree of promotion of the tourist attractions and how they were selected as holiday locations after watching the series. This analysis focused on the identification, through the Instagram Scraper software, of promotional posts at an official level, and by extracting the database, a number of 23 posts made on the official account of Cantacuzino Castle (@cantacuzinocastle) correlated with "Wednesday" series were identified. Also, through this social media analysis, a manual selection of a number of 30 posts made by different users presenting the idea of visiting the location correlated with the proposed topic was made. The 30 posts were selected from a number of over 17,000 posts that include the hashtag #nevermoreacademy in the description, this common element being the name of the school from the series "Wednesday" (Mele, 2021).

The third stage is represented by the second methodological component of this study, being complementary to the first method already discussed. The method involves an analytical approach based on online search metrics to evaluate the influence of the television series "Wednesday" on interest in visiting a real touristic location, Cantacuzino Palace, located in Bușteni, Romania. This component of the methodological framework of the study is derived from a methodology that was used to evaluate a cultural park functionality and integration (Bazac et al., 2023). It is designed to dynamically obtain, examine, and model the users' online searches conducted globally in English and nationally in Romania, in the Romanian language, by using the popular Google search engine. The focus is to analyze the potential correlations between the search spikes for the phrases representing the "Wednesday" series and its fictional Nevermore Academy, and the online search interest of the users in Romania for the real Cantacuzino Palace.

At the outset, we established as a general research objective, to evaluate the extent to which "Wednesday" series and its fictional setting, Nevermore Academy, have influenced online searches

related to Cantacuzino Palace as a tourist attraction. Derived from this main objective, the specific research objectives are as follows:

- Identify key online search phrases that reflect public interest in Cantacuzino Palace;
- Analyze monthly search trends for the phrases taken into account in this study (as shown bellow), from January 2022 to December 2024, in order to assess temporal variations in digital engagement;
- Determine the extent to which the global and national peak search interest in November and December 2022 for "Wednesday" series and the fictional Nevermore Academy, influenced tourism interest regarding the Cantacuzino Palace in Bușteni;
- Provide insights into the role of media-driven digital engagement in shaping touristic interest and potential promotional strategies.

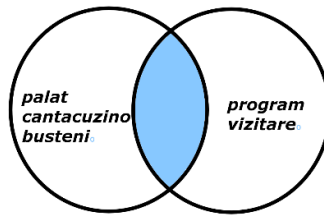
The study's methodological approach involves identifying an initial set of search phrases related to Cantacuzino Palace, by applying the Boolean logic. This way, the Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) were used to refine search phrases, ensuring relevance.

The initial search phrases we created by using the Boolean logic were processed using the GetKeywords software platform, which identified other related keyword variations for which the online users did searched on Google, and ensured this way, the completeness of the search database. This software helps refine the data set by capturing user-generated keyword modifications and semantic variations, including (Figure 1):

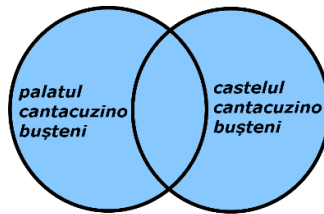
- palatul cantacuzino (Cantacuzino Palace)
- castel cantacuzino bușteni (Cantacuzino Castle Bușteni)
- castelul cantacuzino bușteni (the Cantacuzino Castle Bușteni)
- muzeul cantacuzino bușteni (Cantacuzino Museum Bușteni)
- palat cantacuzino bușteni program (Cantacuzino Palace Bușteni visiting schedule)
- palatul bușteni (Palace Bușteni)
- palatul cantacuzinilor bușteni (Cantacuzino Family Palace Bușteni)
- palatul cantacuzino bușteni restaurat (Restored Cantacuzino Palace Bușteni)
- palatul cantacuzino bușteni program vizitare (Cantacuzino Palace Bușteni visiting hours)
- palatul cantacuzino din bușteni (Cantacuzino Palace in Bușteni)

In this currently ongoing study, the collected data is extracted from the Google cloud by GetKeywords, and is further processed using Microsoft Excel. This way, all the numeric values acquired are aggregated for each main phrase and its semantic derivatives, allowing precise determinations, the creation of referential values and graphical models such as the mean of the monthly search values and the monthly peak searches for specific intervals.

ȘI / AND (Both of the terms)



SAU / OR (Either of the terms)



FĂRĂ / NOT (Just one of the terms)

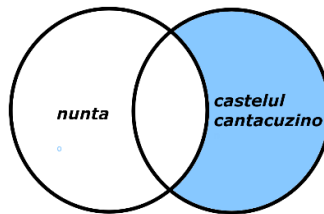


Figure 1. Examples illustrating Boolean logic application: “palatul cantacuzino” AND “program vizitare” (Cantacuzino Palace AND visiting hours) to assess interest in cultural tourism; “palatul cantacuzino busteni” OR “castelul cantacuzino busteni” (Cantacuzino Palace in Bușteni OR Cantacuzino Castle in Bușteni) to analyze the semantic variant searches. The NOT operator was applied to exclude unrelated results, such as the commercial reference to “nunta palatul cantacuzino” (wedding at the Cantacuzino Palace).

Source: Author's own research.

Results and discussions

The paper analyzes several aspects related to the relationship between the film industry and tourism. Through a qualitative comparison between the representation of the objective in the series and the objective in reality, the cultural-architectural characteristics of the objective, represented by the Cantacuzino Castle, are highlighted, which constituted the motivation for choosing this location to represent the Nevermore Academy from Netflix series, Wednesday. Cantacuzino Castle was built between 1901-1911 by combining two architectural styles: neo-Romanian and neo-Brancove, the result outlining a unique architecture. The castle belonged to Prince Gheorghe Grigore Cantacuzino, one of the richest and most influential politicians of the time.

The frames presented with the Cantacuzino Castle in the “Wednesday” series are a form of tourism promotion and also its representation in the series gives the tourist objective a new revitalizing image that can turn into a motivation to visit among those who watched the series.

The similarity between the two frames, namely the Nevermore Academy (Figure 2) and the Cantacuzino Castle (Figure 3), can be noted, emphasizing the fact that the objective has certain cultural-architectural values that reflect the uniqueness of the actual tourist objective.



Figure 2. Nevermore Academy in the Wednesday series

Source: capture realized by the author from Netflix.



Figure 3. Cantacuzino Castle from Busteni.

Source: <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/travel/castelul-cantacuzino-din-busteni-povestea-mai-putin-cunoscuta-a-locului-unde-s-a-filmat-serialul-zwednesday.html>

Regarding the official promotion part, carried out in the online environment directly by the Cantacuzino Castle administration, the authors used the Instagram Scraper software to identify the posts related to "Wednesday" series on the official page of the castle. Through this software, a number of 23 posts made in the period after the launch of the series were identified. The 23 posts had various themes, such as: "Halloween at Nevermore" (Figure 4), "Welcome to the filming place of Wednesday" (Figure 5), "A Day in Wednesday style" (Figure 6) and many others, identified by the hashtags used in the post description. The hashtags identified were: #Wednesday, #Nevermore, #Addams. Descriptions containing identity elements linked to the "Wednesday" series constitute a form of current tourism promotion that outlines a revitalizing image of the tourist destination. The marketing of the tourist destination is defined by the realization of these tourist promotion posts, thus the tourist destination focuses on maximizing the benefits brought by the film industry in the local economic circuit.



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Figure 4. Instagram post from the official page of Cantacuzino Castle

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/cantacuzinocastle/>



Figure 5. Instagram post from the official page of Cantacuzino Castle

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/cantacuzinocastle/>



Figure 6. Instagram post from the official page of Cantacuzino Castle

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/cantacuzinocastle/>

In order to add value to this analysis, a number of 30 posts made by other users at the tourist objective, identified with the hashtag #nevermoreacademy, were manually selected. It is observed that the influence of the series in terms of the development of motivations to visit and the generation of a flow of tourists in the post-viewing period of the series had a positive impact. Through an analysis of the posts made by tourists from Cantacuzino Castle, it was identified that they have different nationalities: Italians, French, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Arabs, Germans, but also Romanian tourists.

Influencers (paulinedarley, wadaq.t, mirkopadoin) or people who make travel blogs (golden_leyla, _silvia___93, martynenko_mary) were also identified among the users of the Instragram platform who visited the Cantacuzino Castle and who made a suggestive post related to their trip correlated with the famous Netflix series. Thus, the impact of posts in the online environment is much more prominent, these users having a high influence within the platform. For the most relevant posts made, we can mention the following descriptions that highlight the motivation to visit Cantacuzino Castle after watching the series: "Who knows the series?" (Figure 7), "Visiting the Nevermore Academy!" (Figure 8), "At the filming location of @wednesdaynetflix: Nevermore Academy is in Romania!" (Figure 9), "A little film trip - we go to the castle where the popular series "Wednesday" was filmed. „Do you recognize the landscapes of the Nevermore Academy?".

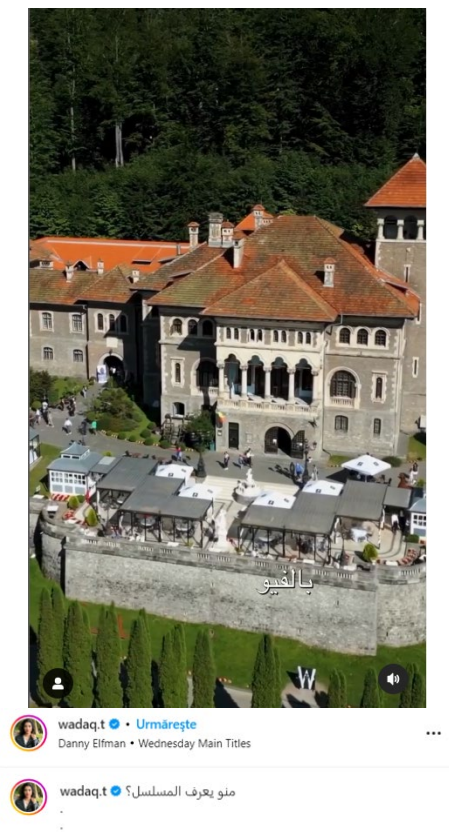


Figure 7. Instagram post from the page of an Arabian influencer

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/wadaq.t/>



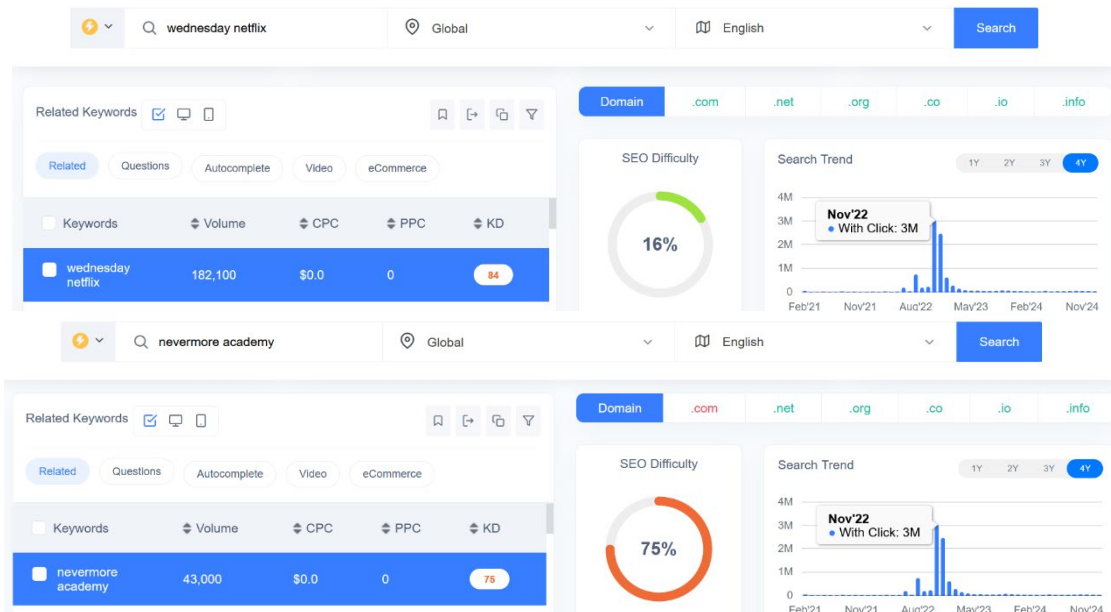
Figure 8. Instagram post from the page of an Italian influencer



Figure 9. Instagram post from the page of a French influencer

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/mirkopadoin/>

The analysis of online search metrics confirms a significant increase of the public interest in Cantacuzino Palace following the release of the television series “Wednesday”. Search volume data indicates that inquiries related to Cantacuzino Palace and its associated phrases nearly doubled in November and December 2022 compared to the majority of other months under review (Figure 10). If before November and December 2022, the values were in the range of 1500-2000 searches per month, during those two months they increased in the 3500 to 4000 monthly searches. This surge aligns with the peak popularity of “Wednesday” and global interest in “Nevermore Academy”.



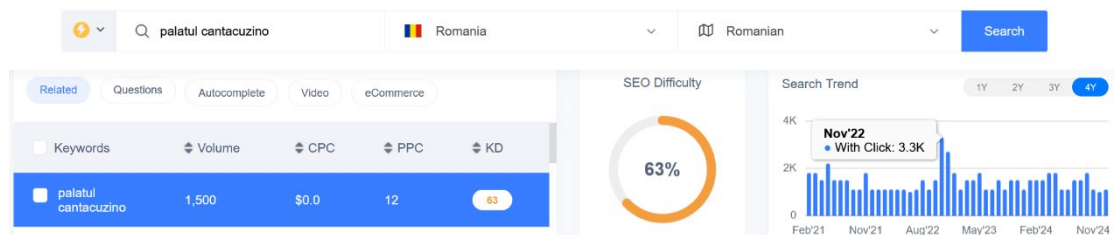
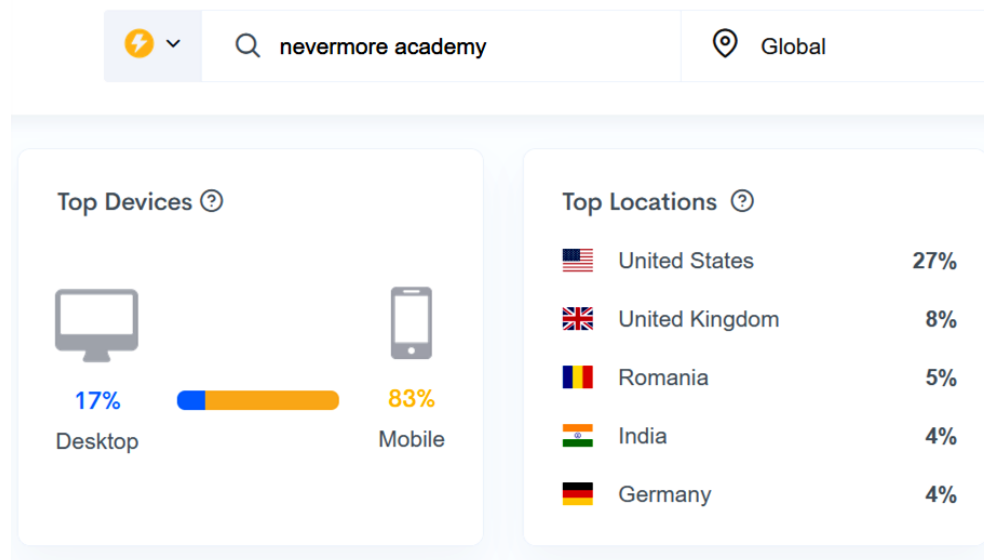


Figure 10. GetKeywords dashboard graphics showing a sharp rise in searches for Cantacuzino Palace in November-December 2022, nearly doubling from previous months. This spike aligns with Wednesday's global popularity and interest in Nevermore Academy, highlighting the series' impact on the Romanian public's curiosity about the filming location.

Source: <https://app.getkeywords.io/dashboard>

An examination of international search trends reveals that approximately 5% of all English-language searches for the phrase "Nevermore Academy" originated from Romania, making it the third-highest country globally in such searches, after the United States (27%) and Great Britain (8%). This highlights the significant popularity of the series in Romania and the solid engagement of Romanian audiences with its themes and settings. It might also indicate a specific touristic interest but further sociological research is necessary to clarify this aspect.

Regarding the phrase "palatul cantacuzino" (Cantacuzino Palace) and its semantic or functional derivatives, the majority of these searches were concentrated in Bucharest and Prahova County. The search data suggests that, besides the potential tourists from Bucharest, many of these inquiries were generated by visitors already present in Bușteni (Prahova County), possibly indicating real-time searches by tourists seeking historical and cultural locations to explore during their stay. The increase in searches for "palatul cantacuzino bușteni program vizitare" (Cantacuzino Palace Bușteni visiting hours) and similar phrases also suggests an immediate intent to visit, reinforcing the direct impact of "Wednesday" on actual tourism behavior (Figure 11).



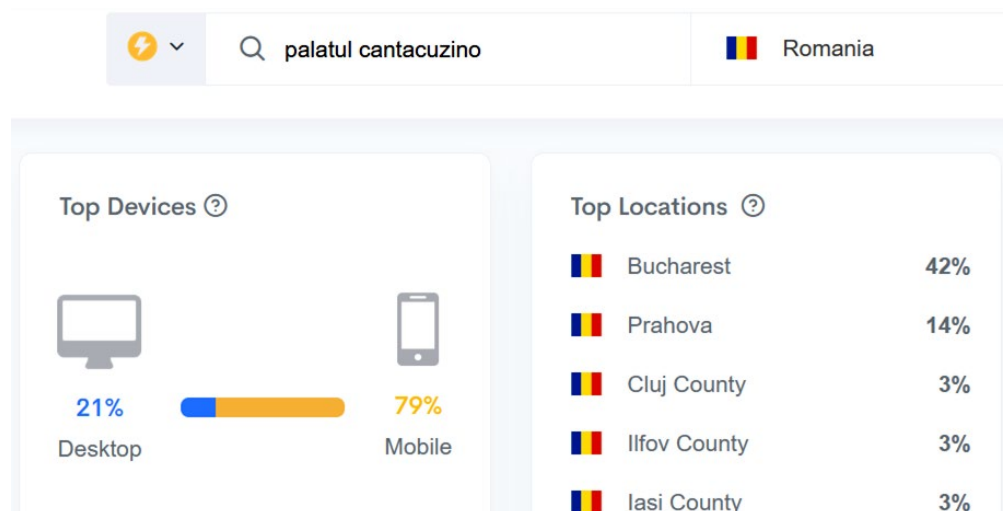


Figure 11. GetKeywords percentages of users' location from which they searched for the phrases "Nevermore Academy" and "Palatul Cantacuzino" (Cantacuzino Palace)

Source: <https://app.getkeywords.io/dashboard>.

The correlation between media-driven engagement and search behavior demonstrates the effectiveness of digital visibility in influencing tourism flows. The correlation of international search interest with regional search concentrations, and increases in queries about visiting hours and travel arrangements underscores Cantacuzino Palace's enhanced status as a tourist attraction following the release of "Wednesday" series.

The results of this study highlight the importance of online promotion of Cantacuzino Castle's image through posts made by both officials and tourists. Also, through the frames with the Cantacuzino Castle in "Wednesday" series, an increase in the popularity of the series and implicitly of the tourist objective promoted as the location of the representation of the Nevermore Academy was generated. As previously highlighted by the qualitative comparison of the images of Cantacuzino Castle and its representations in "Wednesday" series, the use of cultural heritage assets in films facilitates the identification by tourists of the sights and/or customs of certain areas. Films add value to heritage assets by highlighting their characteristics and the events that took place in relation to them (Heitmann, 2010; Lopes et al., 2024), thus contributing to the creation of the image of the tourist destination and its promotion. Therefore, films can influence people's travel decisions and stimulate the desire to visit certain destinations that they have seen in film productions (Araújo-Vila et al., 2024; Bolan, Williams, 2008; Ferreira et al., 2021; Heitmann, 2010; Lopes et al., 2024; Nakayama, 2024; O'Connor, 2011; Velasco-Ferreiro et al., 2021; Whang et al., 2016).

Online promotion is a marketing strategy for different tourist destinations, confirming the role of global digital trends in shaping global tourism demand (Molinillo et al., 2018; Muslimah, Keumala, 2018; Bazac et al., 2023). Popular culture represents an element of the identity of the tourist destination (Reichenberger, 2019) and often exerts a positive impact on creating the image and values of certain locations. Popular culture in relation to film tourism provides numerous benefits to tourists, with film being the pillar of influence on their perceptions (O'Connor, 2011, Whang et al., 2016).

Conclusion

The paper offers a detailed analysis focused on multiple elements from the online environment, emphasizing the influence of the cinematographic industry on tourism and the image of the tourist destination. The importance of the study is represented by the identification of the positive impact that cinema has and how it is reflected in the local economy and in the marketing of the tourist destination.

The cinematographic industry is emerging as a new form of promotion, but also a link in sustainable development for the local economy. Also, the ability to promote a location through film creates a revitalizing image with current characteristics that produces tourist motivations, having a positive impact on the purchase process in the local tourism industry. It is noted that the local tourist companies (Cantacuzino Castle) use a marketing policy based on the influence of "Wednesday" series, which accentuates its positive influence on the image of the tourist destination. Through the analysis of social media elements and online search parameters, it was confirmed that the "Wednesday" series was an important reference regarding the desire to visit the tourist destination to relive the feelings after watching the series. The online search phrase regarding "Wednesday" series contains the most suggestive name presented in the series, it being correlated with the Cantacuzino Castle tourist objective.

The limitations of the study are represented by the lack of data at the national level regarding the tourist flow generated for cinematographic tourism. Another limitation is represented by the lack of a software to perform an automatic analysis based on a hashtag proposed in the Instagram search page. Future research will be focused on considering a larger number of social media accounts from multiple tourist destinations in order to explore more deeply the promotion of cultural objectives representative of the tourist image of Romania in relation to cinematographic tourism on social networks.

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