

Gastronomic tourism essay examples

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Introduction

An ‘armchair tourist’ is a term that refers to an individual that travels to different places and experiences people and culture in other countries in the comfort of his or her own home. The armchair tourist lives vicariously through the hosts that travel around the world for a living and share their experiences in the media. The travel series genre feature these kinds of shows where hosts travel and experience local culture to inform the audience but mostly to entertain viewers and communicate underlying messages to them. Often, the message of travel shows exemplifies the consumer culture, that is, travel shows are well-structured to influence the audience to take on roles of the consumer by traveling themselves. Within this context, travel shows play a role in urging people to engage physically and making featured content in shows as their travel goals. Similarly, the media can create a type of culture depending on its features. For armchair gastronomic tourists, travel shows that feature exotic and authentic food or <https://assignbuster.com/gastronomic-tourism-essay-examples/>

cuisines are most influential. Hence, travel shows can influence armchair gastronomic tourists, for instance, to travel to other places to sample exotic and authentic dishes in other countries that they formerly seen on television. The succeeding discussion describes the armchair gastronomic tourism phenomenon within the context of media culture and globalization.

The Travel Series as a Genre: A Culture of Consumption

Ideally, media coverage of places around the world, whether it is in the form of an advertisement, a television show, or a documentary among others, should feature truthful content. In essence, the purpose of a travel series is to feature places and aspects of culture in other countries. Hence, the media should maintain a sense of journalistic integrity by featuring factual information that accurately represents places, people, and culture, and therefore, a balanced reportage of the good and bad. Moreover, these kinds of shows must be educational or information as is the purpose of this genre. Nevertheless, the majority of media coverage on travel and tourism does not embody these ideal characteristics. Instead of featuring factual information, most media content about travel and tourism aim to entertain. Instead of using this medium to educate the audience, it offers glossy images of people, places, and culture to feed the concept of tourism and traveling as a lifestyle, not as a way of life. Consequently, the ‘lifestylization’ so to speak, if we can call it that, blurs the journalistic nature of shows about traveling because it glamorizes the experience and limits features on television in a way that the images would bring about commercial value not only to the entities behind these shows but also to tourism and hospitality businesses that will benefit from the media exposure. As long as the travel series genre

is categorized as entertainment, it would fail to deliver an accurate representation of travel and tourism because it would remain driven by consumerism. This aligns with Waade's argument that the contemporary travel series "deal with global culture and travelling in delightful, promotional and touristic ways, in which the educative element relates mainly to consumer culture and not to a democratic, journalistic rationality" (2009, p. 100).

Indeed, shows that feature travel experiences are well put together, carefully constructed and abridged to benefit the show, the show's sponsors, advertisers, and the businesses that will be featured on the show. When featuring a place, for instance, the host will mention names of hotels or inns, restaurants, and other tourism and hospitality establishments in the area. Often, the host visits well-known tourist destinations with the objective of keeping the audience interested in the feature. Within this context, the aim of a travel series then is to entertain rather than inform or educate. The problem with this media framework or model is that content that is supposed to feature factual information and educate the audience gets muddled in favor of romanticized or gift-wrapped content that targets a niche audience, specifically an audience that belongs to the high income population. Such is the media that spurs armchair gastronomic tourism (Waade, 2009).

Waade (2009) applied reception aesthetic as the primary approach to study Danish travel series, specifically the shows' relationship with the audience and representation of places, people, and culture being featured weekly.

Waade also explored the audience's role in this relationship. Through a thorough analysis of the travel series, Waade discovered that these kinds of shows prioritized aesthetics by portraying travel-specific activities, such as

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backpacking, as a lifestyle, focusing on elements that are specific to a place or culture, and working with celebrities as hosts to maintain the shows' pull of its audience. Moreover, these kinds of shows may add in a documentary feature that informs the audience, but the factual entertainment and consumerist features are more prevalent. Hence, the role of the armchair traveler is to absorb information in a way that entertains him or her and makes him or her feel good. In the process, the relationship of the host, often a well-known celebrity, with the viewer is supposed to be persuasive enough to stir consumerism among the audience.

The Role of the Armchair Tourist

The intended role of the viewer is best represented by the concept of the tourist gaze. Essentially, the tourist gaze refers not only to the visual images seen through a medium, but also other aspects of content such as the sound, and the feeling that these images evoke in the viewer. Within this context, the tourist gaze simply means aspect of media content that makes the viewer play the role of a tourist. In travel series that focus on factual entertainment and consumerism, the travel gaze is well-structured from the celebrity host to the reverential mood established throughout the show in order to place the audience as consumers. Consequently, the show influences the audience to think like a tourist and to act on this aspiration. Simply put, the show is mechanized to manipulate the audience into assuming their roles as tourism consumers. It is for this reason that travel shows that spur armchair tourism, armchair gastro-tourism in particular, assume the function of taking the first step to influencing people's physical involvement in tourism. As previously noted, the tourism series genre may

aim to inform or entertain its audience but since it is part of media that also relates to marketing and advertising, these kinds of shows do not merely aim to educate because they also aim to drive consumerism (Waade, 2009).

Media Developing Consumer Value for the Exotic and Authentic

Media plays an important role in gratifying the audience whether it is by informing them, entertaining them, or communicating with them. Media coverage of tourism such as travel shows, therefore, satiate the armchair tourist's desire for the exotic and authentic (Lu & Fine, 2005). As a response to this demand, travel shows feature exotic places and authentic aspects of culture such as food or way of life in general. In this way, travel shows can maintain the audience's interest not only for the purpose of informing viewers about other cultures but to entertain them. On the contrary, since most travel shows aim to entertain, they are risking the journalistic integrity of their shows and exchanging factualness in favor of stereotypes. Hence, instead of featuring places, people, and cultures as they are, the show becomes an exploration of these from the perspective of the intended audience (Waade, 2009).

The foregoing discussion highlights the link between the travel series as a genre to marketing or advertising and tourism. As previously noted, the travel series is more than a means of informing, educating, and communicating with the audience because it is also an instrument for advertising and promotions. It may be true that the travel series aims to show the audience different types of cultures but the format or framework of media works in a way that targets consumerism. Hence, the motivation of let

us say armchair gastronomic tourism, for instance, is to satiate the audience's desire for exotic and authentic food experiences in a way that would inveigle them into physically interacting or experiencing cultures featured in shows. It is akin to looking for exotic experiences and featuring authentic finds in travel shows to challenge the audience to engage by showing them the feel-good, adventurous, and exciting feeling of immersing themselves in these exotic and authentic travel experiences (Symons, 1999). Food and dining happen to be two of some of the aspects of culture that can provide exotic – exotic food – and authentic – authentic means of preparing food – experiences. Herein lays the role of media in allowing armchair gastro-tourists to acquire cultural capital. Travel shows educate armchair tourists and offers them knowledge about places, culture, or food in specific, especially the exotic ones that only a few people know about (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Within this context, the media helps armchair gastro-tourists acquire cultural capital. In essence, cultural capital refers to knowledge or information that people gain about an aspect of culture, in this case food culture. Travel shows help armchair gastro-tourists gain cultural capital because the media, as an instrument that facilitates knowledge-gathering, can feature exotic and authentic food that would be of more interest to them.

Globalization and Cultural Capital

Media, such as travel shows, can be a source of cultural capital for armchair gastro-tourists because these shows educate them about food and dining in other cultures, especially those that are exotic and authentic. In the coming years, however, it is uncertain whether cultural capital in the form of

knowledge or information gleaned from the media can maintain its value due to the impact of globalization. The globalization of cultures is gradually homogenizing various cultural aspects, thus, blurring cultural differences. Similarly, information about travel and tourism, such as those covered in travel shows, help the audience remain knowledgeable about exotic and authentic food and dining cultures. As much as globalization is homogenizing cultures, Bell (1997) emphasized the importance of highlighting cultural differences in consumption. Because globalization is making the world smaller, and thus, making food and dining experiences less exotic, Bell argued that the audience would be more inclined to experience exotic and authentic cultures. Hence, the armchair gastro-tourist would more likely be drawn to travel shows that feature exotic and authentic cuisines. As a consequence, the audience would also be more inclined to travel just to experience exotic and authentic cuisines that differ from common food options that are popular in the global community. This explains the popularity of exotic food in the global marketplace and the ‘lifestylization’ of consuming exotic food that not all people can get to eat (Bell). This has, in fact, become a culture or practice among the new middle class. “The search for the ‘exotic’ in food, often related to the quest for the ‘authentic’, is usually seen as the territory of the so-called ‘new middle class’ or ‘new service class’ (Bell, 1997, p. 193). Knowledge about exotic food defines this class and they feed their status or position by obtaining cultural capital from travel shows that feature exotic and authentic cultures.

Conclusion

The discussion about the role of media, armchair tourism, gastronomic tourism, cultural capital, and globalization comes in full circle. Each aspect links with other aspects and sometimes these overlap, thus, showing the complexity of the issue. In the coming years, globalization would have homogenized culture and this is inevitable. Nevertheless, the culture of consumption goes against this tide because of the existence of a market that desires or values the exotic and the authentic. These are people who refuse to content themselves with homogeneous goods and services in the market. Value for the exotic and authentic is one of the reasons why travel shows thrive. While these shows are similarly driven by consumption, armchair tourists, including armchair gastro-tourists, watch these shows to gain cultural capital. From these shows, armchair gastro-tourists become knowledgeable about exotic food and they take pride in knowing more than common knowledge about food and dining. Overall, the discourse illustrates the tension between globalization and the consumer population that values exoticism and authenticity, and the implications of this in the global marketplace – that is the emergence of exotic and authentic goods.

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