

Video game induced tourism - a critical literature review

Turizam podstaknut video igrama – kritički pregled literature

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Abstract

Video games have become an integral part of the lives of many people around the world. Dynamic technological development and growing popularity have enabled them to provide almost realistic experiences and immerse players in their virtual world, shaping their thinking, attitudes and creating a high emotional connection. Therefore, video games allow the presentation and promotion of tourist destinations and their attractions realistically and in detail through the game world, while players are motivated to visit these destinations in the real world. The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the existing literature that studies this new and insufficiently researched topic, in order to create a perception of the level of existing knowledge, to see the shortcomings of the previous and show the potential directions for further research. A critical literature review determined the existing base of knowledge with conclusion that there are great possibilities for additional research in this field.

Keywords: *tourism, video games, destination, promotion, video game induced tourism*

Sažetak

Video igre su postale sastavni deo života velikog broja ljudi širom sveta. Dinamičan tehnološki razvoj i rastuća popularnost, omogućili su im da pruže gotovo realistična iskustva i igrače udube u njihov virtuelni svet, oblikujući njihovo razmišljanje, stavove i kreirajući visoku emotivnu povezanost. Samim tim, video igre omogućavaju da se kroz svet igre detaljno i realistično predstave i promovišu turističke destinacije i njihove atrakcije, dok se igrači motivišu da posete ove destinacije u realnom svetu. Cilj ovog rada je da kritički analizira dosadašnju literaturu koja izučava ovu novu i nedovoljno istraženu tematiku, kako bi se stvorila percepcija o nivou postojećeg znanja, uvideli nedostaci dosadašnjih i prikazali potencijalni pravci daljih istraživanja. Kritičkim pregledom literature utvrđen je postojeći nivo znanja uz zaključak da postoje velike mogućnosti za dodatna istraživanja u ovoj oblasti.

Кljučне речи: *turizam, video igre, destinacija, promocija, turizam podstaknut video igrama*


1. Introduction

Video games have become one of the most important forms of entertainment in the world. In recent years, the video game industry has developed rapidly, so that today it represents the most profitable entertainment industry in the world, surpassing music and film industries combined (Divers, 2023; Balbo, 2024). The estimated number of video game players in the world is over 3 billion (Katatikarn, 2024; Howarth, 2024; Gilbert, 2024). Video games have been on the market since the 1970s. However, the pixelated arcade games from earlier times hardly compare to modern video games. Video games have evolved into immersive, realistic experiences that

immerse players into their virtual world (Dyer, 2022). As such, video games have transcended their basic function. Today, gaming is not only a hobby and a way of spending free time, but it influences music, fashion, the way people communicate with each other and provides the opportunity for networking and interaction between people around the world. It also inspires creativity and innovation, as well as enabling the development of new technologies. Video games have become a significant part of human culture, with a growing influence on different spheres of human life (Maggioli, 2023). Today, they represent a medium for thinking, socializing, learning and working. They have a high educational, sociological and

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economic impact, and in some cases they are even used for therapeutic purposes (Thau, 2024).

Existing academic literature analyzes many of the aforementioned impacts of video games. However, one gets the impression that insufficient attention has been devoted to the study of the impact of video games on tourism, that is, the ways in which real-world tourist destinations can be presented and promoted through the virtual world of video games. A video game world is a virtual environment in which the plot of the game takes place. The main elements that make it up are geography, characters, objects, rules and the story, that is, the narrative of the game. Some abstract games do not have a virtual environment. Some place their action in a world of fantasy. However, it is typical to implement a digital recreation of real-world locations as a video game world (Filimowicz, 2023). If the previously mentioned is taken into account, the question arises whether video games motivate players to visit tourist destinations presented through the world of the video game, as well as whether video games promote the destinations based on which the game world is created?

Video games as a driver of tourism do not have as much interest of the academic community as film. Film and television as initiators of tourism activities have been the focus of research in academic literature in recent years. *Media-induced tourism* is a term that denotes tourist visits to destinations associated with film or television programs. Certain destinations that were the filming scene of famous films and series or were featured in them, later gained significant advantages in the tourism sphere (Yen et al., 2015). Thus, film and television became a factor in attracting tourists to the destination (Huang, 2013). The famous film series *The Lord of the Rings* which was filmed on the territory of New Zealand, according to conducted research, influenced the increase in the number of tourists visiting this destination (Gjorgievski & Melles Trpkova, 2012). Also, one of the most watched television series, *Game of Thrones*, had the role of a motivator for a tourist visit to Dubrovnik among numerous tourists (Li et al., 2021). Although until the 1990s, academic literature did not pay much attention to the influence of film on tourism, in recent years interest in this field of science has increased significantly (Nakayama, 2021; Oshriyeh & Capriello, 2022). The overriding reason why much less attention has been paid to the research of the impact of video games is due to the shorter period of existence, especially when considering the fact that technologically advanced video games that realistically depict destinations have appeared on the market in the past ten years (Vincent, 2024; Jessey, 2023). Also, academic literature often studies video games from the aspect of their psychological and emotional impact on children and adolescents (Grancic, 2014), thus focusing on video games in the role of "entertainment for children". Current data shows that the largest number of players are between 30 and 40 years old, and the average player is 35 years old (Stojanovic, 2024; Clement, 2024; Jovanovic, 2023), which shows that video games are played by people of almost all ages, negating the aforementioned stereotypical role of video games.

Based on the previously mentioned, the purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the existing academic literature that deals with the topic of the impact of video games on tourism and the promotion of tourist destinations through video games, to determine the level of existing knowledge, to see the shortcomings of the past and potential directions for further research. The motive for conducting the research is reflected in the fact that this topic is insufficiently researched in the existing academic literature, and at the same time, one gets the impression that there is not enough awareness of the importance of video games as a driver of tourism, both among representatives of the video game industry and among representatives of the tourism industry, and also among the creators of tourism policies.

2. Methodology

In order to establish the existing level of literature that studies the topic of the impact of video games on tourism and the promotion of tourist destinations through video games, papers published in international journals and proceedings of international conferences, as well as dissertations, were collected. The search was conducted on 01.09.2024. based on the keywords and phrases "Video game induced tourism", "Promotion of tourist destinations through video games" and "The influence of video games on tourism" in the Web of Science (WoS) and Google Scholar databases. Guided by Dimitrovski et al. (2023), only the papers in English language were included, while short announcements and editorials were dismissed. Also, the sample did not include papers that study virtual reality and gamification, since the mentioned topics are not the focus of the research. Finally, papers were analyzed manually in order to single out the most relevant to the researched topic. Using the aforementioned filters, a total of 25 relevant scientific papers were collected and critically analyzed.

3. Literature review

After collecting and analyzing the papers, it is noticed that most of the papers were published in the last 6 years, which indicates the actuality and insufficient research of the topic of the impact of video games on tourism. Dubois and Gibbs (2018) were among the first to introduce the term video game-induced tourism into the academic literature with the purpose of expanding the literature that includes media-induced tourism by incorporating a new, promising research zone. Referring to film as a driving factor for tourism activities, the authors noted that video games have similar possibilities and that it is necessary to further investigate their potential contribution, as well as that they should not be neglected by the creators of tourism policies and by representatives of the tourism industry. By collecting and analyzing online comments linking travel motivation and two popular video games, *Assassin's Creed II* and *Assassin's Creed Unity*, the authors pointed out that video games share similar motivations for travel as film, and can be considered as a driver of tourism. Also, the authors suggested that destinations should consider using video games as a platform for tourist motivation and destination promotion.

The summarizing of existing knowledge about video game-driven tourism was additionally conducted by Zemla and Bielak (2024). They also created theoretical frameworks based on literature and video game market analysis. The authors presented three different ways in which destinations can be presented in video games. The first is a realistic presentation, that is, the destination is presented almost identical to the real world. Another way is the transferred presentation, where the elements of the real location are the basis for creating the virtual world of the game. Additionally, there is the extended presentation, which indicates the presentation of the real-world destination imagined in the past or future. It has also been suggested that popular video games create a stronger emotional connection with users than most films. Acir (2019) also examined video games outside of their basic function by discussing the possibility of a successful use of video games for the promotion of tourism, highlighting their impact and the importance of the video game industry in general. Further more, the author presented ideas about the use of video games as a promotional tool for raising awareness about the destination and the driver of tourism, and also highlighted the importance of videos related to video games and e-sport events. Additionally, Estevez and Brito (2020) emphasized the importance of using video games as a means of promoting tourist destinations, supporting the development of new marketing strategies when it comes to tourism. A while later, Tobing (2024) further builds on the idea of how tourism can be stimulated by video games, that is, by developing video games through the creation of immersive virtual experiences, and then allowing players to explore fictional worlds that have an attractive landscape but also a recognizable culture and historical heritage taken from different regions around the world. The author suggested the need to shape thoughts about video game design in order to increase and improve concepts that support tourism.

Following the set theoretical frameworks and the drawing of attention to the need to create awareness about the importance of video games, primarily in the tourism sector, as a support for the thesis that video games promote destinations and encourage the development of tourism, numerous research was conducted that analyzed the impact of video games on the perception and image of a tourist destination, but also the influence of video games on increasing the number of tourists visiting the destinations. With the aim of determining the degree of the aforementioned influence of video games, Paul (2021) created a game related to the Croatian event of medieval fights known as jousting, in order to measure the effectiveness of video games to promote the destinations and activities presented in the video game. The result showed that because of the game there was a 20% increase in awareness of Croatia as a destination, as well as a 10% increase in awareness of jousting as an event. Research conducted by Carvalho et al. (2019) also indicates that video games induce an increase in demand for tourism services. Focusing on user generated content, taking into account the video games *Assassin's Creed II* and *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, the authors confirmed that by playing video games, people become more aware of

destinations, and their desire to visit these destinations increases. Sharma et al. (2023) investigated the impact of players' interactions with game characters and other players on their emotional solidarity, destination image, and desire to visit real-world destinations associated with the video game world. By collecting and analyzing data from 538 players of *Grand Theft Auto V*, it was established that there is a positive association towards the image of the destination and the desire for a tourist visit to the destination. Shushua et al. (2024) analyzed the impact of the video game on the players' perception of the image of the destination as well as their desire to visit it in the real world with a questionnaire distributed to players of the video game *Assassin's Creed Unity*. The results of the research confirm that the player's experience in the video game creates a positive effect on the perception of the destination and the desire to visit. Research on the relationship and boundaries between real and virtual tourism caused by realistic virtual worlds was carried out by Yang (2024). By analyzing a discussion on the online platform Reddit between players of the video game *Ghost of Tsushima*, depicting the medieval Mongol invasion of this Japanese territory, this video game has been found to create a sense of immersion that can generate a desire to experience Tsushima and Japan in real life. Most of the aforementioned analyzes are focused on video games with a historical theme, given that historical attractions and sights are highly attractive to tourists and the most important element of a tourist visit to a large number of destinations. The question of the historical environment in video games, and whether they can provide an authentic experience towards a historical landmark, similar to a physical visit to these landmarks in the real world was asked by Mochocki (2021). With the video game *Assassin's Creed Unity* as a central example and its interpretation of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, it was determined that the player's experiences in relation to historical places in video games can be similar to visiting a historical landmark. The influence of video games on historical landmarks is also studied by Shaheer (2022) with the aim of proving that tourism induced by video games encourages the preservation and maintenance of historical landmarks in destinations. In the papers, not only the impact of video games on historical landmarks related to historical events is analyzed, but also mythological factors can be seen as elements of the attractiveness of destinations that are presented in video games. A case study of the video game *Resident Evil Village* compared the real elements of the tourist attractiveness of Romania with the elements shown in the virtual world of the game. Elements and locations associated with Transylvania and its vampire folklore are identified within the video game, shaping the tourist image of this historical province (Vintila & Merciu, 2024). All of the mentioned examples confirm the positive impact of video games on tourism, the promotion of a tourist destination through video games and the improvement of its image. However, it is important to point out the fact that to a lesser extent, video games can negatively affect the image of a destination. An experiment involving the consumption of media content related to the US state of Montana discovered that participants who played the violent video game *Far Cry 5*

gave less positive evaluations to the destination than participants who gathered information about the destination from a brochure or a film (Dubois et al., 2021). Although the positive influence of video games on tourism prevails and the presented papers have confirmed the importance of video games from the aspect of promoting a tourist destination and activities in the destination, the papers emphasize insufficient awareness of representatives of the tourism industry as well as video game development teams. There is a successful practice at the destination of Yokosuka in Japan, where the importance of the video game Shenmue was understood. Visitors of this destination can get a map in the style of the video game which serves as a tourist guide, primarily for fans of the mentioned video game. Even though this represents a good marketing campaign and an attractive factor (Ramirez-Moreno & Leorke, 2021; Leorke & Owens, 2021), there can be seen an insufficient awareness of the potential of video games as an initiator of tourist activities.

Xu et al. (2013) investigated the motives of player-tourists, that is, the reasons why tourists play video games at a destination during a tourist trip, as well as showed the possibilities of marketing tourist destinations through video games. However, their research includes an analysis of the reasons why players would play specialized, tourism video games that would be created with the purpose of promoting tourism. Nevertheless, video games as an informative platform where players can get information about the destination and socialize with other players is a significant contribution to the further study of this topic. The player-tourist connection was presented by Salmond and Salmond (2016) labeling individual players as tourists within the virtual world of the game, where these players, playing the game, within the plot of the video game, imitate tourists at the destination and undertake activities that tourists would undertake on their travels. Also, the authors suggested that players who have played certain video games get a desire to see live the environment they experienced in the video game. However, the question arises, in what way do video games influence players, that is, motivate them to visit tourist destinations presented in video games, as well as to raise their awareness of those destinations? What are the factors that allow video games to create such an impact on players? Authors Dong et al (2021) complement the literature on the connection of video games and tourism by providing a conceptualization of specific psychological drives that can create feelings and behavior towards a given destination in gamers. They noted that sense of presence, immersion, as well as nostalgia are some of the key factors and mechanisms of video game induced tourism. Brinkman (2020) also apostrophized nostalgia as a driver of tourist trips by gamers who feel a strong emotional connection with the video game world and want to recreate experiences in real-world destinations. In addition to the mentioned, other factors can be drivers of tourism under the influence of video games. Research in China found that in addition to emotional connection, the triggers can also be factors such as historical experience, that is, the experience of historical events and getting to know historical locations through video games, scenic

landscapes and attractive locations, as well as the adventures undertaken by the players in the games. Additionally, the desire to "walk in the shoes of one's gaming character" is a significant factor in encouraging tourist travel due to the connection with the characters that players control in video games. A sense of heroism is also important, where players can visit a destination to recreate a sense of heroism based on the plot of a video game set in that destination (Sajid et al. 2018). The list of factors is extended by Junko et al. (2022), who stated that the story and presentation of the narrative of a video game is an important element of the creation of tourist experience. A case study was also conducted on the example of the video game *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*. By questioning the players of a video game that has a pronounced historical theme, the aim of the research was to determine how the game experience can contribute to the desire to visit the destinations presented in the video game. The purpose was to expand the understanding of the ways in which these experiences shape the perception of the destination by players (Rainoldi, 2022). One of the more recent studies conducted by Yahiaoui et al (2024) oriented itself at the impact of video games on the motivation to visit different destinations, focusing on video game maps. The study found that players' intention to visit destinations is influenced by the degree of freedom in the video game, emotional engagement, historical context, as well as cultural representation within the world of video games.

4. Shortcomings of the analyzed literature and future research directions

On the basis of the previously mentioned, shortcomings of the literature can be observed, as well as potential directions for further research. First of all, there is a lack of case studies of individual, influential and popular video games whose virtual world is created based on the motives of real tourist destinations, which would analyze the world of the video game with the goal of determining how the attractive elements of the destination are presented and promoted. By incorporating this kind of research into the existing literature, a better picture could be created about the way in which the world of video games, as well as its elements are presented to players, to what extent they are connected to the real tourist destination on the basis of which the video game world was created, and therefore point to aspects that can be influenced to increase the degree of connection of video games and tourism.

Studies have mostly surveyed video game players to understand their destination perceptions and motivations for visiting. In future research, it would be desirable to conduct an examination of other parties of interest. These can include streamers and other content creators in video games, as well as video game developers. Representatives of the tourism industry should also be included. Mainly representatives of destination management organizations who represent destinations that are presented in video games or that have the potential to be used as a baseline for creating the world of video games. This approach would broaden the understanding of the connection between video games and tourism, as well as other factors

besides the players themselves, which certainly opens up new possibilities and opportunities.

It is noted that the video games that have been the subject of research in most of the papers have a historical background. However, there are a number of games with different themes such as modern-day crime games or open world racing games that can be analyzed in order to get a more comprehensive and generalized picture of the impact of video games on tourism. The content analysis that was applied in the observed papers was focused on comments on social networks and online portals, while the analysis of video content and pictures or photos that speak in favor of the promotion of tourist destinations through video games and the motivation of players to visit those destinations as tourists had been largely neglected (Youtube, 2024).

5. Conclusion

The conducted analysis of the literature on the topic of tourism induced by video games has established that there is a recognition of tourism stimulated by video games, as well as the promotion of tourist destinations through video games. It was also determined that video games mostly have a positive impact on the motivation of players to visit tourist destinations, as well as improving the image, popularity and perception of the destination. Factors that affect the connection of players to the destinations presented through the world of the video game are analyzed and presented, which leads to the creation of an emotional connection with the destination and an increase in awareness of that destination, its image and the creation of a desire to visit the destination in the real world. The literature shows that video game players create a strong emotional connection with the world of a video game, and the psychological influence of a video game enables players to feel a certain connection with that world. Players are capable of learning about the presented destination and its attractions, as well as to experience the destination through the virtual world of a video game. The sense of heroism, historical context, nostalgia, adventurism and immersion are some of the key factors in connecting the players with the world of a video game. Additionally, near realistic depiction of a destination, followed by a strong narrative and overall quality of a video game, also contribute to player's experience of a destination through the world of a video game. The literature also laid the theoretical foundations and encouraged practical implications in the form of a need for the tourism sector on the one side, as well as the video game industry on the other side, to understand this connection and strive to increase its importance through mutual cooperation.

A potential limitation of the paper is the existence of potential relevant papers dealing with this issue, which were not found by the search performed through Google Scholar and Web of Science (WoS). This limitation often appears during the writing of literature review papers (Dimitrovski et al., 2023; Lukić Nikolić & Garabinović, 2023). In addition, papers that include the application and impact of virtual reality in tourism (Anaya-Sánchez et al. 2024; Ying et al., 2021; Calisto et al., 2024), as well as

gamification in tourism (Xu et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2017; Pasca et al., 2021), were not included in the research, and neither was analyzed their correlation with the observed topic, which may represent the direction of future literature review.

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