On the Tracks of Musical Screenscapes: Analysing the Emerging Phenomenon of Bollywood Filmi-song Tourism in Iceland

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Abstract
Around the world, cities and regions are welcoming tourists after being in the spotlight of popular movies, games, novels, TV series or other forms of popular media culture. Popular Hindi cinema (Bollywood) too has long impacted destination imaginaries and the ensuing travels. What remains scarce in existing research is how its crucial component – Filmi-songs – impacts tourists’ imaginaries of a destination, and consequently how they perform their travels. This study investigates the role and significance of filmi-songs in tourism practices, by focussing on the case-study of ‘Gerua’ from the film ‘Dilwale’ (2015), after which Iceland experienced a rise in Indian tourism. Employing 18 in-depth interviews with tourists, but also various local stakeholders in the business of media-tourism, this study attempts to understand what impact Bollywood songs have on travel motivations of its audiences, how tourists experience the filmi-song location on-site, and finally how the phenomenon is perceived and evaluated by local stakeholders in Iceland. Results show that filmi-song tourists are actively engaged in reconstructing scenes from their beloved filmi-songs by indulging in shot re-creations and song re-enactments. By drawing links between Bollywoodized narratives and locations in Iceland, and by sharing these performances online, these tourist practices contribute to the imaginative heritage of Iceland in the global imagination.

Keywords
Bollywood tourism, fan re-enactments, filmi songs, media tourism, tourist experience

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Introduction

The popular Bollywood film *Simmba* (2019), which was predominantly set in Goa, India, has a ‘dream’ sequence titled *Tere Bin* (‘Without you’) where, almost instantaneously, the lead couple is shown romancing at various picturesque locations of Switzerland. This sudden disruption in spatial continuity is far from uncommon in Bollywood movies; *filmi*-songs are often intended to offer a break from the narrative space of the movie, conflating with the romantic encounter between the protagonists and therefore intentionally set in picturesque landscapes. However, in the case of *Tere Bin* there is a more implicit reason for the sudden ‘escape’ to the Swiss terrains: the lead-actor of the film, Ranveer Singh, is the brand ambassador for the Switzerland Tourism Board (Chandrashekar, 2017). Therefore, the song is perhaps consciously produced to revive the Swiss imagery amongst Bollywood audiences as a response to other European destinations entering the Bollywood screenscapes. *Tere Bin* is an example of such increasing convergence and legitimization between Bollywood cinema and global tourism industries. It is precisely these implicit and explicit links between *filmi*-songs, place and tourism practices that will be investigated in this paper.

Bollywood cinema and its music has undergone an evolution in terms of its content and production values, making it one of the most highly recognizable storytelling devices globally (Gehlawat and Dudrah, 2017). Particularly, ‘song and dance’ scenes are regarded as the ‘single most enduring feature of popular Hindi film’, lending these films enormous popular appeal and cultural value in India and beyond (Gehlawat and Dudrah, 2017; Gopal and Moorti, 2008, p. 1). The visual and aural dimensions of these songs act as hooks for the audiences, adding retention value to the films, while also functioning as significant points of promotion for the films. This set-up may therefore offer filmmakers the possibility to utilize different techniques of production, scout picturesque ‘never-seen-before’ locations for songs, and also employ the musical element to create a captivating, fantastic world on-screen.

Interestingly, Ganti (2012, 2013) argues that *filmi*-songs are a crucial part of the film narrative, underlining that many films would lose their narrative coherence if the song-sequences are removed from the film (2013: 92). However, one can debate the concept of coherence when looking at the spatial dimension of the music-videos. Bollywood films including its music are increasingly shot on foreign locales with little to no logical connection to the storyline (Cucco and Scaglioni, 2014; Matheson, 2005; Mishra, 2018). While the storyline may be predominantly set in India, the songs often portray spectacular locations abroad, inviting the viewers to instantaneously break free from the quotidian, to create aspiration and pockets of excitement in the film viewing experience. Indeed, many Bollywood songs have been shot in ‘exotic’ places such as Alaska, Cuba, Mexico, New Zealand, etc. (Ganti, 2013, p. 99), merely performing functions of ‘spectacle and novelty’ (p. 99). Partly because of their independent character, *filmi*-songs often enjoy an autonomous following, and are circulated independently on local music channels or popular digital platforms like YouTube, garnering millions of views, reinstating destination imaginaries.
The popularity of *filmi*-songs has contributed to the growing interest of audiences to the locations shown therein (Middha, 2016). This ‘tourism potential’ of *filmi*-songs has also been recognized by the industry, leading to more professional efforts towards the choice of offbeat destinations that tease aspirations of the burgeoning Indian middle-class with an increasing purchasing power and a (created) need to travel to ‘exotic locations’ (Rao, 2010). This globalization of Bollywood cinema has, amongst other, created an evidenced surge in Bollywood productions (and related tourism) in European countries, Switzerland, France, Spain to name a few (e.g. Frank, 2016; Gygimóthy, 2018; Cucco and Scaglioni, 2014).

Recently, one such Bollywood music-video succeeded in putting a brand-new location on the Indian tourist’s map, creating a rise in Indian tourism to a small country in the periphery of Europe. Shortly after the release of the song ‘*Gerua*’ (saffron) from the film *Dilwale* (The ones with a heart, 2015), the number of overnight stays made by Indian visitors in various parts of Iceland almost quadrupled. According to the official tourist survey held in 2016, many tourists to Iceland were indeed inspired by international movies, TV series and music videos. Of course, the level of fan interest varies. Some of these visitors will be strongly motivated by specific films or music videos and show a deep desire to visit the related filming locations (e.g. Lundberg and Ziakas, 2019; Reijnders, 2016), potentially as part of a larger ‘cinematic itinerary’ (Nanjangud and Reijnders, 2020); other visitors will be motivated by a larger cluster of sources, in which the cinematic representation of Iceland neatly merges with more general tourism imaginaries. But in both cases, the influence of Bollywood popular culture is undeniable (Visitor Survey Report, 2016, p. 61). According to the Iceland film commissioner, interviewed as part of this project, the country has successfully opened up towards the Indian tourism market majorly because of the song *Gerua*:

“I think *Dilwale* (the film) itself is the best marketing tool we’ve ever had to India and the two things that would help us increasing tourism from India is the direct flight, and the embassy will take care of the visa. That is actually both in process” (Einar Tomasson, Film Commissioner, Iceland)

The song *Gerua* is a romantic ballad that primarily depicts actors Shahrukh Khan and Kajol dancing and singing against the natural, vast and idyllic landscapes of Southern Iceland (PTI, 2016). This song reportedly even facilitated the introduction of a direct flight from New Delhi to Reykjavik (The Statesman, 2018) and is said to have strengthened the bilateral relations between India and Iceland (MFA, 2018).

This paper attempts to investigate the emerging phenomenon of ‘Bollywood tourism’ (Nanjangud, 2019), by specifically looking at the role of *filmi*-songs – one of the characteristic traits of Bollywood cinema. We seek to understand what meanings the tourists draw from visiting locations related to their favourite *filmi*-songs, and by engaging with the *filmi*-song locations on-site and sharing their experience online, they contribute towards (re)shaping the destination image. In doing so, we are also interested in how the stakeholders perceive this emerging trend, as facilitators of these experiences on-site. The stakeholders’ perspectives become prominent in order to grasp the ways in which these tourist experiences are being perceived on location. It is important to shed light on the reception of such tourist experiences earlier on when the trend is slowly
emerging so as to develop the tourism offerings for the inflow of upcoming tourists in a systematic manner (Croy, 2010). This study intends to make meaningful contributions to the growing corpus of research on the interrelation between popular culture, place and tourism (Månsson et al., 2020; Reijnders, 2016 etc.) by bringing in a (critical) Indian perspective that is still largely missing in media tourism research (but see: Angmo and Dolma, 2015; Biswas and Croy, 2018; Mishra, 2018; Nanjangud, 2019; Nanjangud and Reijnders, 2020, 2021). Such a critical commentary fills in for much elusive discussions on the storytelling format and the specificities of the films from the region that has global effects on transnational mobilities that, perhaps cannot be generalized using existing research dominated by western case-studies. This research is an attempted step in that direction.

The question that guides this research is “how do Bollywood tourists motivate, experience and value visiting locations related to their beloved filmi songs and how do the local stakeholders perceive this change?” By understanding the tourists’ experience and performance of travel, we also underscore the rising significance of Bollywood cinema on transnational tourism flows using this contemporary case-study.

Filmi-music tourism: An emerging form of media tourism?

Bennett (2002) conceptualizes the ‘musicalized tourist gaze’, referring to the ways in which locations are framed due to their representation in music-videos. Mostly, ‘a musicalized tourist gaze’ is based on positive connotations with the protagonists, the ambience of the landscapes and the melodies together eliciting emotional and persuasive responses. As Reijnders (2016, p. 675) suggests, such narratives can lead to positive evaluation of places, associating itself with values such as happiness, or freedom. Connell and Gibson (2006) note that images from music-videos have the power to create imaginary trips to distant places and at the same time mobilize specific narratives of a place. Because of their almost timeless, idyllic representations of place, music-videos can stir the imagination and create new symbolic layers of associations on a destination.

However, newer studies on media-tourist experiences have departed from the focus on merely the ‘gaze’. The emphasis is increasingly laid on the way how tourists actively co-contribute to the making of a tourist location, transforming tourists from ‘passive gazers to participants in the creation of the destinations visited by their performances’ (Månsson, 2015: 51; cf. Baerenholdt et al., 2004; Crouch, 2004; Edensor, 2009; Urry and Larsen, 2011). Tourists not only visit a location, viewing it passively, but actively interact with the locations – both physically and emotionally, turning the visit into a multi-sensory experience (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994). In line with this, Månsson (2015) states that media tourists ‘co-create’ the destinations ‘through their embodiment and performances’ (p. 50). Likewise, Crouch et al. (2001) suggest that the ‘tourist sites, destinations, cultures and places are (at least in part) made significant through the way we encounter them, and the encounter happens in an embodied way’ (p. 259). While popular culture products affect the destinations, this impact is seldom direct; it is mediated through the embodied performances and on-site experiences which are instantly or at a later moment in time recirculated via social media, ultimately leading to the creation of the ‘destination’ both online and offline.
Tzanelli (2021) critically looks at the role of the media, tourism and the tourists’ role in the creation of a location story asserting that when a destination emerges from popular media texts, it also holds potential to mobilize different ideals of people and places. Frank (2016) further notes – albeit in the context of Switzerland – as to how the performances of the Indian Bollywood tourists have accelerated changes in the local tourism sector, adapting to the tourists who arrive often solely to live the Bollywood experience over experiencing the location for its historical significance (p. 526). This for instance is also visible in *filmi*-song tourists’ romanticization of Icelandic landscapes. This, for instance, is also visible in *filmi*-song tourists’ romanticization of Icelandic landscapes; that is, seeing Iceland through the Bollywood lens, that may disregard local original contexts (discussed more in the analysis). Speaking of local contexts and communities, Beeton (2005) rightly stresses the need for inclusion of local communities and stakeholders as active participants in terms of tourism planning that arises from media tourism, perhaps also because tourism arising from popular media tends to increase rapidly congruent with the rapid success of the media product. Accordingly, this paper also engages with the perspectives of the local stakeholders involved in the business of tourism in order to see their viewpoints in how tourists experience the locations and what it means for them as a location (Heitmann, 2010). As such, it is known that impactful images and media guide and promote tourism by encouraging ‘sensory and extrasensory constructions’ of tourist spaces (Hottola, 2002, p. 83). These frameworks rightly underscore the increasing importance and agency the tourists have in place-making and reconfiguring the destination narratives.

In media tourism, the creation of destination images is not just due to the way tourists view the sites, but also due to the rich narrative-worlds they take with them when they visit a site (Williams, 2017: 98), thereby adding new narrative layers to the ‘imaginative heritage’ of a place (Gyimóthy, 2018; Reijnders, 2020). Gyimóthy (2018) says, destination narrative-building is ‘constantly reconfigured through new layers of meaning, which are produced by tourism and other mobilities’ (p. 295).

In such instances, media tourists play an active role in the ‘spectatorial consumption’ of leisure spaces and by placing themselves in the frame – they re-create shots and re-enact scenes in order to fill in the absence of their favourite characters (Roesch, 2009, p. 159). The performative aspect of tourism lends interesting insights into understanding the practices of *filmi*-song tourists, and most importantly, what emotional responses are elicited through their immersive on-site behaviour while re-creating parts from their favourite popular culture narratives. Producing media on-site for sharing online then becomes a part of the media tourist experience (Schneider, 2006, p. 158) where the sights being recreated act as backdrops for these recreations (Roesch, 2009, p. 159).

One of the most common ways in which film tourists experience a location is to re-enact scenes from their favourite songs reported in media tourism research (e.g. Reijnders, 2011; Roesch, 2009). However, in this paper we argue that *filmi*-songs that are an inherent storytelling device within Indian cinema are particularly apt for such scene reenactments and shot recreations because of their hybrid character, combining music, lyrics and drama on location. While they are also popular for autonomous consumption, *filmi*-songs host within themselves references to not only the previous parts of the film, but also to what is to come in the story narrative, thus giving layers of meaning to the tourists
to work with and base their reenactments on. The presence of celebrities in these videos further elevates the value of the text, encouraging onsite and, following this, online activities. By playing the music on-site, media tourists are able to get an immersive feel of the song-sequence, engaging themselves with the story-world in a musical, cinematographic and spatial way at the same time. Perhaps more than other media, music videos have the potential to draw their fans into another emotional state-of-mind instantaneously, creating a powerful atmosphere that brings the experience of media tourists to a higher level (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2018, Bolderman, 2020). As such the *filmi*-song offers a highly original case study to investigate more general patterns of media tourism.

Indulging oneself in embodied performances, by singing lines from the music or enacting certain dance sequence dressed up as the actors, can result in powerful experiences. In this regard, Seaton (2013) talks about ‘metempsychosis’: having the feeling of literally stepping into some else’s shoes. By ‘adoption and orchestration of temporary personae on holiday’ (p. 23) *filmi*-song tourists might experience a ‘light’ and playful form of such a metempsychosis. However, there is also the risk of overemphasizing the ‘serious’ nature of these tourist practices. According to Reijnders (2011, p. 15), play forms an important part of the behaviour and experiences of media tourists. Being involved in media tourism requires a certain suspension of disbelief; tourists recognize that they will never be able to fully enter their imagined worlds, yet they ‘play with the boundaries of what is real and what is not’ (p. 15). Ultimately, music and sound play a part in shaping tourist experience, adding an emotional and affective layer to the destination that the tourists use to engage with the place using their bodies (Waitt and Duffy, 2010).

**Methods**

This exploratory study investigates the question of how *filmi*-song tourists engage with and experience the locations on-site and how these experiences are perceived on ground. In order to achieve an all-round perspective of the phenomenon of Indian fan-tourists visiting popular destinations from *filmi*-songs, and recreating moments from the music videos, in-depth conversations were had with primarily tourists, and also other facilitators involved in the process. Therefore, this study benefits from an in-depth qualitative approach. In response to Beeton’s (2005, p. 43) reflection, that ‘quantitative data is rarely sufficient to illuminate expectations [of film location tourists] and subsequent experiences’, this study strives to go to the depths of how tourists engage with locations and on what levels do they do so. Therefore, the most suitable method that addresses the above requirement was that of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which involves questioning and conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Such qualitative understanding helps to grasp ‘how individuals experience and interact with their social world, [and] the meaning it has for them [. . .]’ (Merriam, 2002, p. 4).

We adopted a semi-structured interview technique, which allows for combining a discussion of set themes with more topical flexibility, and for allowing the emergence of additional strands of enquiry during the conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). A topic guide was created prior to the fieldwork. The interview topics with *filmi*-song tourists were based on topics such as: their underlying motivation for choosing Iceland as a desired travel destination, their reflections on their on-site experience, the cinematic
frame of reference towards the related destinations and what meaning they drew from the overall visit. Questions for the service-industry personnel were suitably tweaked to understand their perspective on the practices of \textit{filmi}-song tourists.

Respondents included tourists and local stakeholders in the business of tourism. They were purposively sampled on-site and also via various official websites, personal social circuits and social networking platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Social media platforms were used to identify and recruit tourists using hashtags such as \#GeruaIceland, \#Gerua and related combinations. They were first contacted by a message/phone call, after which snowballing helped in recruiting more respondents. The first round of fieldwork in Iceland took place between 25th August 2018 and 2nd September 2018, and the second round of fieldwork in Mumbai and Pune was conducted in December 2018 for about a month. The interviews ranged between 40 minutes to over an hour. In addition to the fieldwork carried out in Iceland, Mumbai and Pune, snowball and online recruitment broadened the geographic scope of data gathering and resulted in telephone interviews with other Indian tourists to Iceland.

Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in public café’s, respondents’ residences or workplaces. Additionally, telephone interviews were conducted to reach non-resident Indian (NRI) tourists living abroad. Telephone interviews proved to be a useful method because it enabled a large geographical scope and resulted in similar high-quality data when compared to the face-to-face interviews (Barrett, 2019) and also gave them time to assimilate their experiences. The tourists and their experiences therefore formed an important aspect of the data collected.

As complementary data to the tourists, we also interviewed tour operators, a tour guide, a government official from the ministry of Tourism, the Film Commissioner of Iceland, production assistant on the song, \textit{Gerua}, service industry personnel like restaurant owners, and a local Indian resident in Iceland. These stakeholders provided valuable insights into the rise and perception of Indian visitors to Iceland. For example, Haukur, manager of an Indian restaurant in Reykjavik said: ‘There’s a revolution in (Indian visits to Iceland). . .they had recently launched Bollywood movie. . .one of the famous actors taking videos of landscapes in Iceland. . .and it became very popular. Immediately after that. . .Indian tourists were beginning to emerge. The travel agent said that he would reckon there would be like 10 times more tourists coming in two years. And he has proven to be right’. (Haukur, Reykjavik). Such nuanced industry insights are useful to gain well-rounded perspectives that attest to the motivations of the \textit{filmi}-song tourists as can be seen in first section of the analysis. These are worth knowing as these practices work in connection with the local service industry and not in isolation. Furthermore, it also gives us an understanding of the local stakeholders’ awareness of the \textit{filmi}-song and the extent to which they connect it to the growing footfall of Indian tourists.

Appointments were sought from the tourism officials, and the necessary tours were booked in the routes where the song was filmed. The tour and the tour guide were not specific to the \textit{filmi}-song tour. The total number of interviews conducted in Iceland and India was 18, made up of 10 tourists and eight stakeholders. Another expert interview was also conducted around this time, but it was not used towards the analysis as it was not in direct relation to this case. Additionally, as a background method, the first author participated in guided bus-tours to the locations shown in the music video \textit{Gerua}. This
not only helped in finding respondents, but also proved to be worthwhile to fully understand the spatial context of these tourist practices.

All the respondents were provided with the official brochure of the project stating its goals, and how their input would be utilized. Additionally, all the interviewees provided their informed consent in both written and verbal manner prior to the starting of the interviews. The participant was provided with an option to choose anonymity. This kept the process ethically compliant and built trust between the interviewer and the interviewee.

The interviews were recorded with the help of a dedicated voice recording device. Once the data gathering process was done, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read and re-read multiple times to get familiarized with the broader themes emerging. Once the transcripts were organized, they were uploaded on the computer-assisted analysis software, Atlas.ti. This made the process of qualitative data analysis efficient, and transparent (Rambaree, 2013). Firstly, the process of open coding helped identify codes on a broader level. Once all the transcripts were coded until no new codes emerged, those that were similar were grouped into various thematic clusters, until major overarching themes were identified. Such an exercise of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of interview data resulted in several central themes, of which the most recurring ones are presented below – each of which is furnished with relevant quotes from interview data to support the arguments made. Quotes may be slightly treated to improve for readability.

Analysis

Motivations of the filmi-song tourists

When the respondents were asked about the reasons for visiting Iceland, the song ‘Gerua’ was an almost instantaneous reference for many. The song was undeniably an introduction to Iceland that prompted them to find more about the place. Additionally, what enhanced the motivation of visiting Iceland was the natural vastness of the destination (Macionis, 2004) as portrayed in the music-video, which was unlike any other usual cityscape and therefore ‘off-beat’. This recurred amongst almost all respondents. Esha says:

“We had gone to see the movie Dilwale, and I...really hated the movie (laughs) but I thank the movie just because it exposed me to this wonderful country. When I saw the song Gerua I was like, what are these locations!? . . .and immediately started Googling and I was like, Oh My God! All of this is Iceland!”

Another participant Priyanka adds:

“That song (Gerua) also did add a bit of...contribution to select the place. Because after that I did more research and looked for more specific places where the movie was shot”.

These quotes suggest that the song not only made the filmi-song tourists curious about their main travel destination, but also stimulated them to actively search locations within Iceland where the song was filmed, to chart their travel itinerary, almost following the
trail left by the song-sequence – a Cinematic Itinerary (Nanjangud and Reijnders, 2020). This is not to imply a strict causality between the \textit{filmi}-song and the ensuing tourism, but to say that the \textit{filmi}-song provided a window to Icelandic landscapes and implicitly encouraged potential \textit{filmi}-song tourists to consider Iceland as a destination through its descriptive and musical presentation. As Waysdorf and Reijnders (2017) say, tourists pursue their visits to the location perhaps driven by the media, but also use it as an introductory point to discover more about the location. As such, the above quotes also indicate that the allure of the ‘Place’ was one of the prime motivators that was enhanced by the ‘Performance’ (the \textit{filmi}-song) in the terms of Macionis (2004).

Many respondents did actively ‘google’ or ‘research’ various platforms on the internet to identify the locations shown in the song \textit{Gerua}. Apparently, the process of planning \textit{filmi}-song tourism is increasingly done by making use of internet-driven media, blurring the lines between new and traditional media platforms in media tourism for the respondents. This further indicates the central role of the \textit{filmi}-song in prompting the search for further information about a previously ‘unknown’ place by Googling or by researching online (e.g. Croy, 2010; Waysdorf and Reijnders, 2017). Secondly, it points to a critical issue of using places in \textit{filmi}-song videos for visual pleasure alone. Not acknowledging the destinations onscreen compels the audiences to rely on internet research to find more about the destination. This engages with the work of Matheson (2005), who calls such ambiguity as ‘placelessness’ as the destination is used as a backdrop alone stripping it off its cultural specificities.

Like Esha’s quote indicates her love of the film is not a direct reason to visit a country like Iceland, but it has indirectly introduced her and many others to Iceland as a potential tourism destination, in particular because of its romantic, off-beat and unique locations, potentially providing them with exclusive travel experiences that will make them stand out in their social surroundings. Setting a precedent in their social circle clearly rendered an added motivation. The combination of novel destination and being the first to visit this destination indicates how \textit{filmi}-song tourism offers the individual tourist a distinctive social standing amongst peer groups. This aspect of social distinction seems to present a very valuable insight into the motivational profile of the interviewed tourists albeit in different cultural contexts (e.g. Connell and Meyer, 2009; Croy and Heitmann, 2011; Macionis, 2004). As Deepali explained, ‘yeah we were the first ones in our town and friends circle. I didn’t see anyone else go there. Once we went there and posted pictures, everyone was like ’wow, let’s put this on our bucket list!’’ (Deepali, USA). Participants in this study noted that travel to a unique place associated with Bollywood attributes a special social status on to the visitor, something that has not been commonly observed in other film-fan research. This comparative ‘social standing’ element appears to bring in a culturally distinctive insight of class consciousness within the broader context of studying media tourism (e.g. Croy et al., 2021; Roesch, 2009)

As mentioned previously, \textit{filmi}-songs increasingly attempt to showcase unknown and unheard locations, to create a utopic world on-screen. As the current study shows, these production choices within Bollywood cinema, the so called ‘placelessness’ (Matheson, 2005) unintentionally creates a powerful incentive for travel destination choices of their audiences. Esha says:
“These places are not (commonly) heard... if anyone has actually visited these countries... if I see these places onscreen, I get some confidence that (going here) is very much possible and we can definitely visit these places. Thanks to these new filmmakers, who are not only focusing on Switzerland and Austria, or London and Paris, I’m so happy that they’re actually considering taking their shooting to these offbeat kind of countries... they are like a medium... through them, people get to know about all these locations” (Esha, Mumbai)

This chimes the work of Macionis and Sparks (2009, p. 99) who suggest that the factors such as novelty and prestige are often important motivators for the participants.

For many, *filmi*-songs not only provided a grand idea of which country to visit, but also directed them to the locations shown in the song sequence, enabling a connection between the dreamy world of cinema and the ‘real’ world one can visit as a tourist. Neha, who went to Iceland for her honeymoon, was not only inspired by the *filmi*-song towards the choice of her destination itself, but also took reference from its ‘making-of’ video to identify where exactly these locations can be found. She says:

“I did connect the rainbow (to the song), we knew this place is in the song. Because in the making also they show it, and, we both had seen the making of the song. So, we knew that we have to visit that place!” (Neha, Mumbai).

Similarly, Deepali said:

“It must be a year after it was released... I wanted to go to Iceland and see all those places and that song was just peaking. And I also watched ‘the making of Gerua’. That was even more interesting. More realistic, and it still looked good... I thought... Someday I’ll go there” (Deepali, USA)

Many respondents felt that the behind-the-scenes ‘making-of’ videos officially released by the same film company, invited them to see the real locations behind the elaborate narratives surrounding the *filmi*-song, lending realization and accessibility to the locations. Together, the inspiration from the *filmi*-song, and the mysteriousness of the location added to the attractiveness of the place and enabled decision making to visit the location (e.g. Buchmann et al., 2010; Roesch, 2009). Searching for the locations shown therein through the internet and the making-of video, added to its accessibility and desirability. What is also interesting is that the popular mass medium of Bollywood music-videos guided respondents to identify something out-of-the-box, interesting potential travel destinations formerly outside of their ‘tourism radar’. Abhishek agrees:

“Iceland isn’t really a mainstream travel choice. Especially for an Indian. Iceland - I didn’t even know from anyone else like my friends or relatives haven’t been to Iceland. It was the movies” (Abhishek, Dubai)

Similarly, Deepali says:

“I’m happy that we’re able to witness in-person what I saw onscreen and loved, and same with the plane site or the waterfalls... who knew where Iceland was until people saw that song... these are hidden gems... that won’t be discovered that quickly and easily if it weren’t for Bollywood movies”. (Deepali, USA)
Chiming with the previous quotes, Jess says:

“Gerua was the main eye opener for us. That’s how we decided to go and see it, and look at different itineraries online and then I wanted to see the location at which the film was shot. What places they covered...” (Jess, USA)

However, there were other respondents who did visit Iceland mainly because they were inspired by the song, longing to re-create some sequences from the video by virtue of being there, but did not overtly associate being there with the song, adding to the incidental nature of media tourism that is amply discussed in literature above (see Macionis and Sparks, 2009). One participant, Rohit, exemplifies this:

“We did a few slo-mo videos in front of that waterfall and black sand beach... we clicked only 7-8 pictures over there... it's always nice to flaunt with your friends; that ‘okay! I went and visited the place where you know... Gerua was shot’. That’s a nice feeling but it wasn’t very inspiring in terms of you know uh... okay, Shahrukh did this, so I need to do that! It wasn’t really like that!” (Rohit, UK)

Finally, as those stakeholders involved in promoting tourism to Iceland pointed out, motivation to travel to this region is made possible by the high purchasing power of the Indian middle class, whose numbers are increasing in global tourism markets. As one promoter explained:

“With the right conditions, it can be a very important market. Because... India is a powerhouse, the middle class is getting stronger... which means that they have more opportunities to travel and when you have direct flight... visa and you have someone like Shah Rukh Khan making a music video, it becomes like the dynamic trio” (Thorleifur Thor Jonsson, Promote Iceland)

Realizing the promise filmi-songs hold, and what different elements contribute to the successful generation of tourism numbers, opens several doors for discussions on how filmi-songs can be leveraged towards development of cultural policies. This includes easier travel between India and Iceland, which provides more opportunities for film makers to visit, as well as incentives such as concessions, rebates and facilitated visas for artists and tourists. Furthermore, filmi-songs can also be utilized as a potential tool for cultural sensitization which is now on the rise in tourism studies (Marques, 2021).

As the findings of this study proposes, the song-video-Gerua, provided strong motivation and opened possibilities for many respondents to go outside of their regular comfort zone, and venture into an off-beat destination like Iceland, ironically popularized by a mass medium like cinema. However, once they are on-location, what do they really do? What kind of experiences do they have? In the following section, we further understand the various fan practices on-site, and their underlying meaning making process.

**Tourist’s filmi-song re-enactments: Dance when no one’s watching**

One of the interesting issues that recurred in the interviews was how the tourists engaged with the locations of the song in various ways – playing the song on-site, dressing the
part, re-enacting and re-creating shots from the songs to archive. Films to a great extent have an impact on the tourist’s destinations and clues for how tourists should behave on-site (Siripis et al., 2016). Therefore, as singing-dancing is central to filmi-songs, this activity also returns as one of the key behaviours of filmi-song tourists on-site. A common response from many participants – many of whom were incidentally couples – was that they at least once tried to recreate parts of the song-sequence and played the song on-site for a complete embodied experience.

Petur, an experienced Icelandic tour guide and familiar with Indian tourists (and whose tour the first author participated in as an observer), reflected that filmi-songs provide ample opportunities for tourists to engage in an immersive experience in specific locations depicted in these films. He explained:

“They (Indian tourists) wanted to stop in places that they’d seen in the video. . . especially when we stopped at the Black Beach they had these. . . frames and they had the music-I don’t know how many times I heard that song during the days but quite often” (Petur, Tour guide, Iceland)

He added, ‘they . . . had all seen the film and . . . a big part of (the tour was) built around it (the song)’ pointing to its relevance for Indian film tourists visiting Iceland.

This view is supported by Esha, who observed:

“We would have our Bollywood moments. . . if we were at a spot where there was not enough public, I would tell my husband let’s just act like you know, two people in a Bollywood song and just dance away (laughs)” (Esha, Mumbai)

Many of our respondents also talked about feeling shy in openly dancing, re-enacting the sequences, or expressing fandom in public spaces – especially in the presence of onlookers. This kind of hesitation was felt not only while performing in front of a non-Indian audience but also overall with many participants framing such acts in terms of a guilty pleasure. Such hesitation is not widely known in fan behaviour although Roesch (2009) in one case acknowledges that reenactments are done with full potential in the presence of least onlookers. This interestingly appears to be a continuation of the in-group social standing that also emerged in the motivations of visitations. Often, the participants mentioned that the presence of people was a deterrent to their expression of fandom. While in their minds they really wished to break free, they felt restricted by the presence of others, often feeling that their embodied expression of fandom would embarrass them. Many of the respondents wished to re-enact the sequences but waited for a moment when least onlookers were around.

For example, Esha mentions:

“When we were at the Diamond Beach, I was like, because at that time there was no one, I said let’s just do like a small Bollywood dance, and you know we actually. . . just sang it (the song out loud) ‘Rang de tu mohe Gerua’ (laughs)” (Esha, Mumbai)

Interestingly, while on one hand there is a common reservation about being seen while re-enacting, on the other hand the respondents often resorted to social media to share
their pictures and videos that they produced on-site, sometimes even live. Neha said, ‘We actually. . . played the song and I was standing on the plane and he was shooting the whole thing and he uploaded on Snapchat also I guess’ (Neha, Mumbai)

Shivani talks of a similar experience, saying, ‘I became quite mad (crazy) on social media, like okay this is Gerua I’m posting everything and people are like, “Okay, like this is where Gerua has been shot, Oh My God you’re here!” I became super excited. . . (Laughs)’ (Shivani, Pune).

As was understood by the responses, while there was a level of shyness in reenactments on-site, the respondents wanted to record and demonstrate their experiences promoting a recognizable filmic experience to the peer group who would value them, and this would further enhance their social standing in their social circles. This suggests that sharing the re-enactment of Gerua in Iceland with a (non-travelling) peer group who are then able to post feedback and responses could potentially re-affirm one’s perceived social standing. When discussing this in contrast to Roesch’s (2009) work on the activities of fans and Star Wars, this study demonstrates how those who re-enact scenes from Star Wars felt safe and a part of the fan community when engaging in re-creations, not experiencing much of restraint while reenacting. What may have contributed to the potential restraint and shyness of the filmi-song tourists, is the perceptions of a broader public unfamiliar with the song Gerua and its related activities. Furthermore, the impression that Icelandic landscapes were also primarily known for other reasons, beyond the filmi-song meant not all tourists were present there with the same intent. There is an interesting paradox that the same activity can induce shyness or pride depending on the audience at the location of the re-enactment, yet this is not communicated to the intended home audience. Nonetheless, filmi-song tourism and film tourism more broadly demonstrate how tourists can engage in unique systems of cultural circulation through the tourist who steps into the ‘real landscapes to re-enact scenes from the hyper-real landscapes of the films’ (Carl et al., 2007: 60) (Also see: Buchmann et al., 2010; Kim, 2010; Macionis and Sparks, 2009; Kim, 2012).

Our interview material firstly indicates how fan-tourists who travel to Iceland in search of similar onscreen moments, engage with the locations on-site. The data further indicates how the respondents document the re-enactments, indicating the personal value it holds for them, as a proof of ‘being there’. Tourists’ image-making, or producing media on-site, contributes to the tourist-experience (Schneider, 2006: 158) and provides longevity to the experience, so that tourists can relive over and again through their recorded memories. Likewise, Elisabet who worked on the production of the filmi-song, Gerua, who runs her own production facility and facilitates requests from the tourists says:

“I think it’s new now that when people get married they want to. . . have everything, like a small crew with them and shoot everything. . . make their own Gerua video. Really”

This quote shows that the trend goes beyond one or two people, but is also indicative of the class and affordability of the fanbase that not only visits an expensive country like Iceland, but also seeks professional support if and when needed.
Figures 2–4 are illustrations of these shot-recreations done by the respondents Deepali and Jess, that support these arguments made. This chimes with the notion of ‘behavioural insiderness’, that the sights being recreated function as backgrounds for the photograph to be taken against (Roesch, 2009, p. 159). The positioning of the celebrities provides a stage for a ritualistic re-creation of the imaginary as seen in the film shot. This is clearly seen in the reference images, where efforts in maintaining the authenticity of the original filmi-song shots are evident. As Deepali says:

“I did a lot of research, google what all locations the song was picturized in, and I wanted to hit each one of them. I’m a Bollywood buff and a dancer too. So I made a list of all the places where the shooting was done”. She adds, “I watched the song there to shoot specific little bit from Gerua on the Reynisfjara Beach. . .We took a tour and didn’t have enough time. . .I was wearing a black top under the jacket. I was carrying a yellow maxi-skirt. . .I quickly wore that skirt and my husband and I did some steps. . .The pictures came out good. It is hard because there are people around and you really don’t want to look like a clown there”.

In a similar way, Jess – a self-confessed Bollywood fan, who recreated the scenes depicted in Figures 2 and 4 – said:

“when the song came out, I already had an outfit like that. I was still questioning if I should take it along with me. . .When I was leaving out the door, I didn’t want to have any regrets in life. So, I just grabbed my outfit!” (Jess, USA)

These respondents indicate the intrinsic motivation that drove these shot-recreations and underscores that the song not only provides an impetus to visit the filmi-song destinations, but also that they are highly motivated to re-create shots and sequences, the planning for which begins right from home, thus going beyond impromptu recreations on-site (Roesch, 2009).

However, re-enactments and recreations are critically evaluated by Elisabet, the owner of a production company, that supported the shooting of the original song. She says:

“We have actually had big problems in the glacial lagoon. Because, in the song they were. . .standing on ice. . .It was something that we made, like a fake ice. Because it’s too dangerous to stand on. . .ice. And we have a lot of tourists going. . .into the lagoon and stand on this and take a. . .photo. it’s really dangerous. But people think, because they saw this in the song. . .it’s okay”

As this quote shows, these planned efforts indicate a high level of emotional engagement. But are tourists engaging with the locations, with the filmi-songs, or with both? Would the filmi-song tourists visit the same location had it not been featured in a filmi-song? How does filmi-music add an ascribed value to these destinations, which otherwise hold no special meaning for them? We explore this in the following section.
Figure 1. Shot recreation photo copyright Deepali Phanse-Bhagwat.

Figure 2. Shot recreation photo copyright Jess Hundal.
Figure 3. Screenshot Gerua song, *Dilwale* (2015) Redchillis entertainment. 
*Source: Shetty (2015), Director.*

Figure 4. Shot recreation photo copyright Jess Hundal.
Filmi-songs’ role in reconfiguring destination narratives

Often, places get ascribed meanings due to their association with popular media products. TV series, films or games can turn seemingly insignificant places into a revered must-see destination. A fan’s reading of places can transform otherwise unremarkable places into sites of wonder and worship (Brooker, 2007, p. 434). Similarly, many tourists interviewed for this study said that they visited a particular spot in Iceland, not exactly knowing its historical or cultural background, but simply because it was a part of popular culture, indicating how powerful popular culture is in the lives of the respondents. For example, most respondents indicated visiting the plane wreck on a black sand beach due to its presence in the song video, Gerua. Located on the Sólheimasandur plain in the South Coast of Iceland, the remains of the crash landing of the plane visually symbolizes a dark spot, also for the locals. However, the song Gerua depicts a romantic imaginary against the wreck – re-narrativizing the values of the location in the minds of the filmi-song tourists. At the outset, it is a perturbing image of a plane crash which is ironically situated and normalized in the landscaped beauty. However, many Bollywood fans recognize the destination as a meaningful place, symbolic of a romantic destination, that is ascribed due to its presence in the song-video Gerua.

Neha said:

“There was one place we were driving. . . we saw a lot of cars. . .So we just stopped, randomly. . .it was about an eight kilometer walk. . . We kept walking, we knew there was a broken plane over there and. . .at least for two hours we kept walking. And then at the end we saw that plane, and then we recalled the scene from the movie” (Neha, Mumbai)
As Neha’s quote indicates, there was no historical context of the plane that drove them to visit. Another respondent says:

“When I first saw the song Gerua I saw that you know even Shah Rukh and Kajol are romancing over the plane and I was like, wow, like there’s a plane right on the beach!” (Esha, Mumbai)

Visiting locations without clearly knowing about the location is driven by the force of fandom, where the tourists’ aim to experience what they saw on screen, and step into the shoes of their beloved characters, often recreating the shots and sequences, indicating their high emotional investment in the media product. Celebrity involvement directly impacts visitors’ perception of a destination, suggesting that celebrities can shape fans perceptions of the destination (Yen and Croy, 2016). Furthermore, Bolderman (2018) suggests that the tourists who have had a prolonged emotional investment with music impacts the experience of place. The relatively new filmy-song Gerua (2015) relies on tropes of romance and features the lead couple that has a history of successful romantic numbers, leading to a similar emotional involvement of respondents which possibly enhances their place experience, changing their ‘sense of place’ (Månsson, 2011), despite not knowing what the place exactly meant outside that of their popular culture vocabulary. Filmi-songs like Gerua with their romantic storylines and appealing visuals and sound, not only encourage such emotional investment but also allow tourists to associate places with those emotions, thus encouraging them to feel those onscreen emotions in real life on-site. This is especially true in case of filmy-songs, as they hold much of the context that is built from the storyline preceding the song. This continuum of emotional engagement may extend from the film into the song, and also may extend to feelings about the location. In this vein, Shruti, a local Indian resident of Reykjavik lends important insights:

“In the movie, in Iceland there’s this famous wreckage of this airplane. For whatever reason it’s popular, people have been advised not to climb it. There has been a warning sent, like it’s on private land, you’re not allowed to do it but of course everybody does it. . .But they posted a link, to the song, from the Bollywood movie, now I think that song has become a part of what people here think of what others think of Iceland. And how its dictating other tourists behave, in Iceland”

Shruti’s quote provides a local’s perspective on how film narratives can dictate tourism behaviour, but also how film alters the national imagination of the visitors towards the country (Buchmann and Frost, 2011). Not many respondents would walk for over 2 hours one-way in search of the DC plane wreck had it not been featured in the song-video. Interestingly, many tourists interviewed pre-planned the long walk to the plane-wreck, making it a part of their Iceland itinerary. They also further engaged with this object of their fandom by climbing on the plane, photographing shot-recreations almost akin to the ones seen in the song-video (see, Figure 4). In thinking about these re-enactments, the work of Macionis (2004) becomes important in comparing how the combination of place, performance, and personality together motivate the desired experience of film tourism on site.
Neha’s quote indicates the difficulty in reaching the plane-wreck, involving long windy walks. These long walks that the tourists undertake seeking a feeling of ‘being there’ can be considered akin to pilgrimages (Beeton, 2005). Popular media influences the tourists’ travel destinations, but even within the chosen destination, film discourses have the potential to encourage tourists to visit specific locations and inspire them to seek immersive experiences, while going through the process of self-identification with the central characters. For participants like Neha, there involves a level of emotional investment in order to achieve such a meaningful and embodied tourist experience (Buchmann et al., 2010; Croy et al., 2021; Roesch, 2009). In the example of these long walks, such experiences create a deep filmic and emotional connection (Croy and Heitmann, 2011). On a related note, Deepali said,

“I chose the tour that goes there (plane wreck), and again it was little bit difficult. . .we must be reserving the place to do all those shots and shooting . . . we have 10 minutes there to see the plane and take a few pictures. I still kind of managed to go on top of the plane. Like Shahrukh (the actor) did - I took pictures of my husband. Basically, I’m happy to just go there!” (Deepali, USA)

Similarly, Priyanka shares her desire to wear a saree, the outfit romanticized by the song and replay the act:

“. . .When I was walking towards the . . .the plane wreck, I was of course playing the song Gerua and I really wished that I could have also gotten into a saree and done that but the weather wasn’t really permissible so I had to turn back” (Priyanka, Mumbai)

Jess added, “We waited quite a lot to get the shot. We thought that we’ve walked 2 hours and we should get the shot that we absolutely want. That was our requirement” (Jess, USA)

The above quotes indicate the different ranges of engagement that fan-tourists indulge in – it may mean playing a song while making the long walk, planning and dressing up like the onscreen characters to fully immerse in the song-narrative and re-create shots. While these indicate different activities, the underlying notion of place engagement and fandom prevails amongst all these different activities. Many respondents mentioned that they wouldn’t have considered going to the destination had it not been for its presence in the film-song, indicating a possible indelible place association for the film tourists with popular culture. That said, such multi-layered and emotional engagement with the film-song and the location can also lead to a revision of the destination narrative – reshaping the ‘imaginative heritage’ of Iceland (Reijnders, 2016). As Tzanelli (2021) also discusses, media narratives have the potential to mobilize ideals of place, and lead to reconfiguration of the location story, especially for ‘places’ that are born from the media themselves. In case of Iceland too, film-song tourists are central in enabling the creation of this image, by producing media on-site and circulating them within their peer groups, further feeding into the romantic imagery of Iceland.
Conclusions

This study has looked at how Bollywood fans motivate, experience and value visiting locations related to their beloved filmi songs. In particular, we examined the case of growing Indian tourism to Iceland in relation to the *filmi*-song *Gerua*. The research was based on 18 in-depth interviews with both Indian tourists who had recently visited Iceland as well as local tourism stakeholders.

Results show that the imagination of our respondents is very much inspired by the evocative qualities of *filmi*-music videos, primarily because the *filmi*-song creates a certain curiosity about the featured destinations, inviting them to further actively search for those (often not specified) locations online. Most of these destinations function merely as spectacular backdrops and aren’t acknowledged in the story-narrative (cf. Cucco and Scaglioni, 2014). In many *filmi*-songs, including *Gerua*, the songs are performed against unspecified backdrops. Unintentionally, this ‘placelessness’ of *filmi*-songs (Matheson, 2005) may paradoxically stir intrinsic motivation to travel to the featured locations, encouraging the audiences to actively search for the specific locations online, thus possibly enhancing the ‘reward’ that comes with finding and actually visiting the destinations. Additionally, the presence and persuasiveness of their favourite celebrities may enhance the motivation for the respondents to visit an off-beat landscape (Yen and Croy, 2016). The motivation to visit also is driven by the ‘off-beat’ nature of Iceland, that is not within the reach of a majority of the people in terms of affordability. Affording these unique experiences, intertwined with the appeal of the Bollywood narratives, puts the *filmi*-song tourists in a special position within their peer groups, creating social distinction by accumulation of symbolic and cultural capital (Jansson, 2018).

The respondents have an embodied, multi-sensory experience and have travelled mostly to experience the locations live – and relive onscreen moments. By engaging in shot-recreations from the *filmi*-song *Gerua*, many respondents entered a mental realm and stepped into the shoes of their favourite celebrities by posing against replica frames sometimes in similar attire to the protagonists in the song, and mostly in the absence of onlookers, producing media on-site to share, archive and enjoy later (Schneider, 2006). This indicates planned efforts in recreating a song as close to the screen version as possible – yet appropriating with what is available on hand – the planning for which begins at home. These findings are confirmed by Larsen (2015) who calls fan-tourism as a form of performance, a form of participatory fan culture in which fans can appropriate the text and, when necessary, to enact their own counter-narratives (2015: 40). While re-enactments indicate the elaborate story-worlds respondents build in their minds, a need for responsible re-enactments is urged by the local stakeholders to avoid any possible fatalities.

Featuring in a *filmi*-song adds layers of imaginative heritage over the locations (Gyimóthy, 2018; Reijnders, 2011) or sometimes creating an entirely new touristic place (cf. Månsson, 2015: 55). In some cases, these new narratives overwrite local histories. As this article demonstrates, *Gerua* reconfigured the meanings of the destination, transforming it from the ‘dark spot’ of a plane-crash to a romantic destination that respondents like visiting and romancing against. Moreover, we also find that *filmi*-songs like *Gerua* have
the potential to mobilize their fans, encouraging them to travel across the globe in search of specific spots from the 4-minute romantic song, and how their performances on-site – circulated through social media – have become a part of the image of Iceland. That said, even in the case of tourism arising from Gerua, the incidental nature of media tourism surfaces time and again. In these ways, respondents motivate, experience and value visiting filmi-song locations.

In conclusion, this research has shown that filmi-songs have a high ‘reenactment potential’, enabling engagement with the story-world in a lyrical, musical, cinematographic, and spatial way at the same time. We conclude that filmi-song videos provide a condensed snippet of the film – a prescribed frame of reference – that invites deeper levels of engagement from respondents by singing, dancing, dressing, reenacting, engaging with the location and documenting these activities through photos and videos. What makes it different from other kinds of media or music tourism, is that filmi-songs are in the end still an integral part of a film, encouraging associations of place with not only the song but in the end, also the film. In addition, this article has shown how the layered nature of the filmi-song tourists’ experience, and their sense of place, has the potential to feed into a reconfiguration of destination narratives by romanticizing or rewriting the imaginative heritage of Iceland, this based on genre of popular culture which is still largely unknown by the people of Iceland themselves. The distinguishing finding of this research has been the insight into the in-group novelty of filmi-song tourism. This is to say that, the novelty of the (often overseas) locations has added to its allure as a potential tourist destination giving the filmi-song tourists an off-beat destination distinguishing them among their peer groups. We understand that the filmi-song destination located overseas, perhaps somewhere the peer group hasn’t been too, adds social capital and a sense of distinction for the tourists as discussed above. That said, the role of filmi-song is still central in the experiences of the tourists on site, and the value that being there generates for the place. A destination is therefore created through the tourist’s re-creation, capturing of frames on-site, having embodied experiences and sharing with the peer group back home (via social media).

Local stakeholders largely credit the filmi-song, Gerua for impacting recent Indian footfall to Iceland and find filmi-songs a promising avenue to further develop cultural policies. That said, this research does not attempt to make generalizable claims. Instead, it intends to initiate a more systematic study intersecting global media-Bollywood, cultural industries and fan-practices arising thereof, contributing to the field of media tourism in a wider transnational context. We suggest further research into the role of the filmi-song format in relation to tourism, looking not only at the tourist experience but also at the interaction between tourists and locals in a variety of locations, analysing how Bollywood tourism can be leveraged into strengthening cultural policies and the bilateral relations that Bollywood tourism potentially fosters.

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