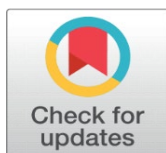


THE IMPACT OF IRANIAN FILMS AND TELEVISION SERIES ON TURKISH AND AZERBAIJANI INBOUND TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

Recently, Iran has employed different methods to attract international tourists, with film tourism emerging as one of the most effective strategies, owing to the export of television (TV) series and films. With this tool and approach, Iran increased the number of tourists and became a unique country to visit owing to the shared language, culture, and special geographic location with over 15 countries, including two independent and disconnected states in Iraq, Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Nakhichevan, alongside 27 heritage sites. Iran achieved remarkable success in exporting TV series and films. The 'film-induced tourism effect', which refers to the increase in demand for travel to Iran, is widely thought to be one of the most significant outcomes of exporting TV series and films. This relatively new field explores how TV series and films affect travel demand. The main purpose of this study is to analyse the impact of TV series broadcasting in other countries with cultural similarities such as language. For this, we examine the influence of Turkish and Azerbaijani citizens visiting Iran. The results indicate that visitors from both countries were affected by Iranian TV series post-2018.

Keywords: Film Tourism, Iranian TV Series, Iranian Inbound Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries and a major economic driver in the global economy [Fard & Salehi \(2014\)](#). Tourist destinations, both in the public and private sectors, have been attempting to boost visitor numbers and income. Therefore, several marketing and promotional strategies and initiatives have been employed. Among these, one of the most effective tools for tourist destinations is film tourism [Macionis \(2004\)](#). To influence the viewing public's purchasing decisions and convert them from viewers to customers, both public and private

sectors can be utilised to boost tourism and destination awareness, [Beeton \(2010\)](#) [Connell \(2012\)](#) and positively or negatively change the image of a city, region, or country. Their ability to boost travel demand has been confirmed on a global scale [Connell \(2005\)](#) Large film producers and travel destinations are located in close proximity [Hudson & Ritchie \(2006\)](#). Recently, the impact of film and television (TV) series has become known in many countries, which is why tourist destinations try to produce specific films and TV series to present themselves to tourists, domestically and internationally.

Iranian films and TV series have been very influential in promoting the nation and demonstrating the depth of its historical, cultural, religious, and natural attractions outside the region. For example, since its release in July 2021, the Iranian film 'The Law of Tehran' has sold over 150,000 tickets only in French cinemas in less than six months. In this study, we aim to determine how Iranian TV series and films affect foreign visitors' travel intentions, particularly among Turkish and Azerbaijani citizens, who share linguistic and cultural ties with Iran's north-western region.

1.1. FILM-INDUCED TOURISM

A specific type of tourism known as 'film-induced tourism' attracts visitors to locations featured in films or TV series [Beeton \(2010\)](#). Recently, motivated travel through films has dramatically increased and observed this phenomenon globally [Vila et al. \(2021\)](#). Film-induced tourism is a multidisciplinary field of study that encompasses history, marketing, psychology, and other disciplines [Beeton \(2005\)](#). Film tourism has the power to promote travel to filming locations [Macionis \(2004\)](#) consequently, it can draw tourists to a destination long after a film's initial screening such as "The Prophet Joseph". Film tourism can inspire visitors to visit a destination for several years after a film's release, reduce the problem of seasonality, and attract tourists at any time of the year [Vagionis & Loumioti \(2011\)](#) [Hudson & Ritchie \(2006\)](#). Films and TV series can provide valuable and exciting information regarding the filmed locations [Ahmed & Ünüvar \(2022\)](#).

If a destination is portrayed negatively in a film, it could have the opposite effect to what is intended [Pratt \(2015\)](#), which could be based on barriers such as transportation or politics [Hamedi \(2016\)](#). Additionally, problems such as uncontrollable increases in tourism, carrying capacity, privacy invasion, and price increases may have a detrimental effect on the community. Visitors may also become disappointed if the location appears to differ from its depiction in the film, which is dangerous [Heitmann \(2010\)](#). Different films can create portrait-different images of the filmed destination if the film is directed by domestic or non-domestic directors [Pruseviciute, \(2014\)](#).

1.2. IRANIAN TV FILMS AND SERIES

Recently, Iranian TV series have gained popularity outside of Iran, in the South of Asia, East of Europe, North of Africa, and Arabic countries [Moazen \(2023\)](#). Iran exported these products to foreign markets because of their notable improvements in screening and production quality. More than 45 countries purchased Iranian TV series and shared production with some countries, including Pakistan and China, which are already planned [Marzoughi \(2023\)](#). Approximately 300 million people across the Middle East, Central and South Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe watch Iranian TV series; however, there is more potential if some barriers are solved [Lebanese guest Iranian TV series. \(2019\)](#).

The most impressed TV series, ‘Mokhtarnameh’, was produced in Iran in 2011. However, the first TV series, ‘The Men of Angelos’ was produced in 1997. The next popular series, ‘The Saint Mary’, was released in 2000, and the most popular one, ‘The Prophet Joseph’, was released in 2009. According to the Iranian Cultural Ambassador in Turkey ‘The Prophet Joseph’ and ‘Mokhtarnameh’ were broadcast on the TRT Seven channel in Turkey; furthermore, ‘Children of Heaven’ has been broadcast in Turkey over 50 times since 1997 (Which Iranian TV series do Turkish people like?, 2022). There are more TV broadcasted TV series, including ‘Skin of Lion’, ‘Blue Whale’, and others, and it is believed that Iran should emulate Turkey and South Korea’s policies as its main competitors, as stated by Ali Satrapy in interviews with Hamshahri Online [Iranian series in 15 countries from 4 continents Exporting TV series according to the cinema producer. \(2022\)](#)

Iranian TV series promote Iran’s popularity around the region, serving several aspects such as culture, tourism, religion, and trade. Despite its enormous success, there are no specific policies or incentives in Iran to support the competitiveness and sustainability of the TV industry. The primary issues endangering the industry are poor institutionalisation, specialised infrastructure, company vulnerabilities, and price inflation. TV series can also send a positive image to other sectors, such as trade, to increase the demand for tourism in Iran.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Turkey and Azerbaijan were chosen because both countries share a border with Iran and their geographical proximity means they exhibit many cultural similarities, including language, food, and family’s relatives. Turkey has a close population of over 85 million with Iran. Azerbaijan has a similar group of people with northwest of Iran as it was part of Iran before 1828, and there are approximately 30 million Azeris (Turkish) in Iran. Turkish and Azerbaijani languages are the main shared factor among Northwest Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan.



A majority of Azerbaijani people are living in Iran in different provinces including East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan, and parts of other provinces.

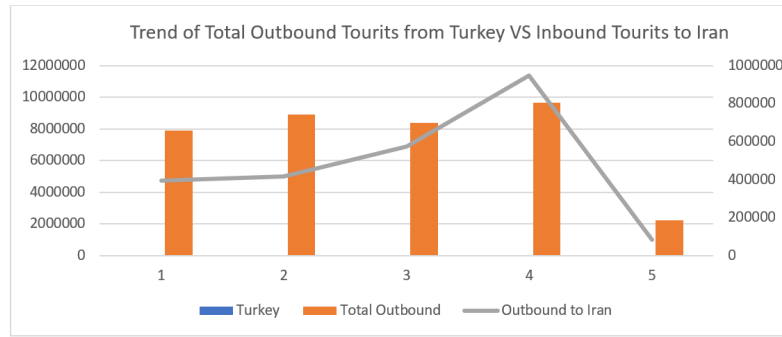
Table 1

Table 1 The Number of Total Outbound Visitors and Outbound Visitors to Iran from Türkiye			
Turkey	Total Outbound	Outbound to Iran	
2016	7892000	394218	
2017	8887000	415011	
2018	8383000	573849	
2019	9651000	947033	
2020	2243000	83065	

Source Ministry of Heritage, Culture and Tourism of Iran, 2022, United Nations Data, 2022.

According to the World Bank, the number of Turkish tourists dramatically increased between 2018 and 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. The combo

trend analysis shows that the percentage of outbound tourists from Turkey to Iran increased after 2018 compared with other countries.



We detected a structural brake that occurred after 2018 before COVID-19 (2020), once broadcasted films had become popular in communities, and then the rest and the vital influence, which is believed to have affected audiences. There is a structural brake both before and after the TV ser broadcasting; furthermore, TV series have significantly influenced Turkish audiences who aspire to travel to Iran.

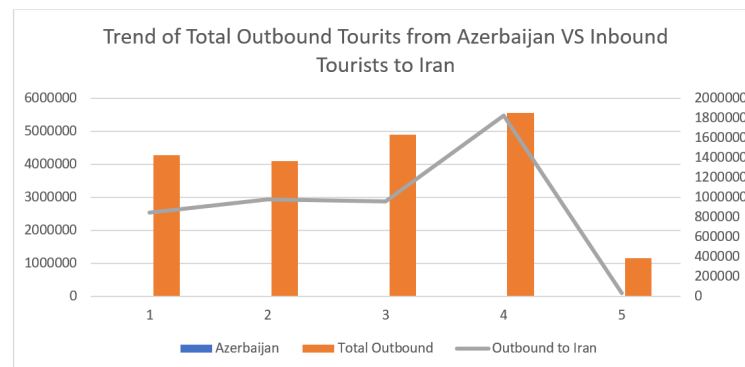
Regarding comparing this analysis, the second country is the eastern neighbour, Azerbaijan, while Turkey is the western neighbour of Iran. The same TV series were released in Azerbaijan, according to the Farhikhtegan Newspaper [What are the Reactions of Broadcasting Iranian Series in Islamic Countries ? \(2021, April 18\)](#) According to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Heritage of Iran, the number of Azerbaijani tourists in Iran also increased between 2018 and before COVID-19.

Table 2

Table 2 The Number of Total Outbound Tourists and Outbound Tourists to Iran from Türkiye		
Azerbaijan	Total Outbound	Outbound to Iran
2016	4282000	848000
2017	4109000	979319
2018	4908000	959653
2019	5568000	1829434
2020	1165000	29910

Source Ministry of Heritage, Culture and Tourism of Iran, 2022, United Nations Data, 2022.

Based on the combo trend analysis, Azerbaijani tourists exhibited a slightly lower tourists percentage increase than Turkish tourists post-2018. However, a structural break in travel patterns remains evident.



Therefore, we further examined whether Iranian TV series influenced the number of tourists visiting Iran to determine whether the impact occurred after the

Iranian TV series were broadcast. There is a structural brake before and after the broadcast. Thus, there was a structural brake in Azerbaijani tourists between 2018 and before COVID-19.

To examine whether Turkish or Azerbaijani people are motivated by TV series to visit Iran, the number of outbound tourists to all destinations from these countries is graphically displayed to observe the general trends in [Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#). The number of outbound tourists visiting Iran from both countries was extracted from data by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2022. The data related to the total outbound numbers from both countries were obtained from United Nations Data 2022.

According to the data from 2016 to 2020, the number of visits was the same; a large increase was observed in 2019, and a sudden significant decrease was observed in 2020, mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of tourists has decreased worldwide, and this decrease has also been observed among Turkish tourists visiting Iran.

Figure 1

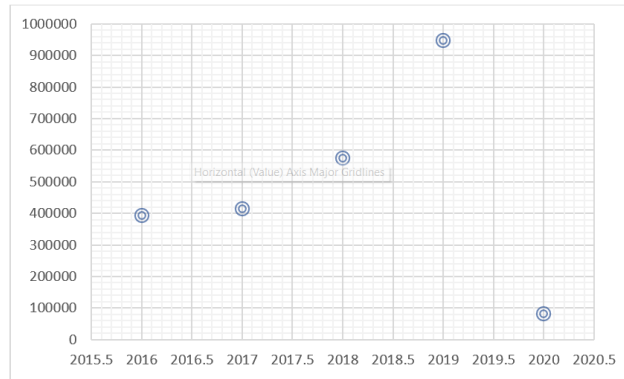


Figure 1 Outbound Tourists from Turkey to Iran

According to the data in [Figure 2](#), which is related to Azerbaijani tourists, the number of tourists visiting Iran between 2016 and 2018 exhibited a constant increasing trend. In 2019, this increase was very high. In 2020, there was a significant decrease in the number of Iranian films and TV series broadcast in Turkey and Azerbaijan, encouraging people to visit Iran.

Figure 2

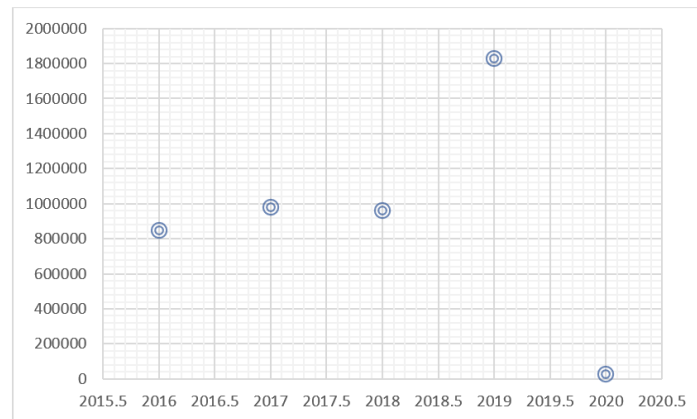


Figure 2 Outbound Tourists from Azerbaijan to Iran

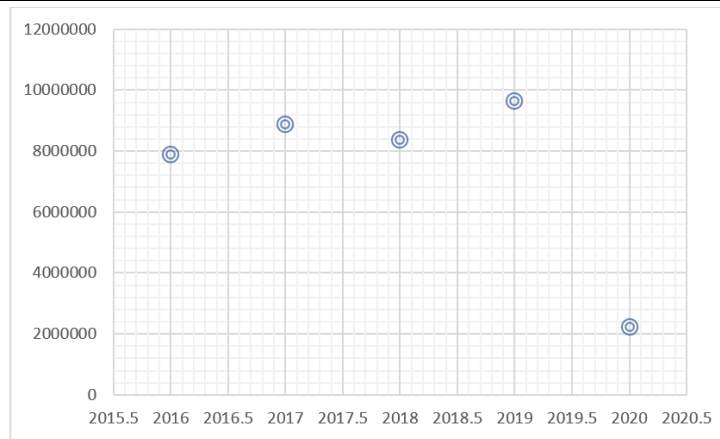


Figure 3 The Number of All Outbound Turkey Tourists

Figure 3 indicates the total number of tourists who travelled from Turkey to other countries. This number exhibited a constant growth trend in all years other than 2020.

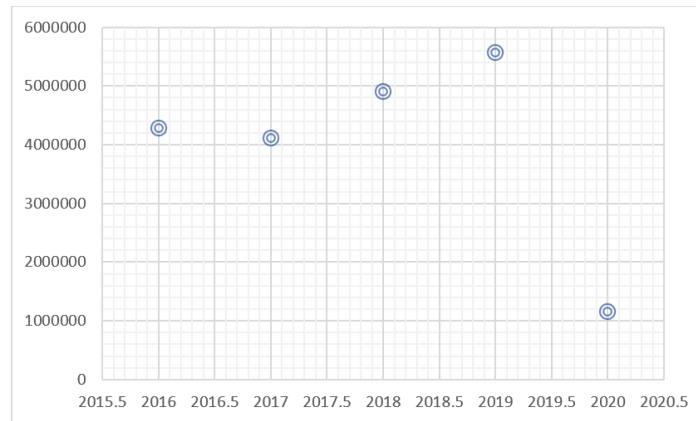


Figure 4 The Number of All Outbound Azerbaijan Tourists

Figure 4 illustrates the total number of outbound tourists from Azerbaijan to other countries. The growth trend was constant between 2016 and 2018; in 2018, there was more growth, and in 2020, there was a decrease in growth.

A Chow analysis was conducted to understand whether a trend change in outbound tourists from Turkey and Azerbaijan visiting Iran occurred after broadcasting the TV series. The results are summarised in Table 2.

Table 3

Table 3 Chow Analysis Result Regarding Türkiye and Azerbaijan			
Country	Test Statistics	Table Value	Result
Azerbaijan	94.21	16.25	Trend changed due to equal parameters
Turkey	92.21	16.25	Trend changed due to equal parameters

3. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that broadcasting TV series raised the interest and travel intentions of tourists from Turkey and Azerbaijan to visit Iran. Before 2019, citizens from both countries followed a different trend than they did before 2018,

when Iranian TV series' first year of broadcasting ended. Thus, it can be concluded that, after 2018, the Turkish and Azerbaijani trends changed upward. One critique of this argument is how the influence of TV series and films caused a structural brake. To consider this criticism, it is evident that Iran does not advertise in Turkey or Azerbaijan as one of its travel destinations; the only thing that has changed is the broadcast of TV series in this nation. To further capitalise on this trend for future, the Iranian Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Heritage should develop specific strategic plans and policies in collaboration with the film industry to embed and merge some film locations in TV series for image and demand development. Through this integration, public and professional contributions to the film industry can increase. This method can boost cultural and creative sectors to support tourism industries in reaching the top rank of tourists in the region that Iran has planned and a long-term plan to achieve a high rank in the world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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