

Traveling for Celebrities: Fandom Tourism and the Creatively Repurposing of Urban Spaces

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Abstract

In recent years, celebrity-related travel across cities in China has increased markedly, reflecting emerging trends where consumption converges with production, and emotional attachment intersects with community participation. This article proposes the concept of fandom tourism to address the limitations in existing popular culture and media tourism literature, particularly in accounting for fans' active cultural and spatial practices. Based on exploratory interviews with Chinese fan travellers, the study identifies key patterns of fandom tourism, examines the affective and community-driven decision-making processes underlying travel behaviour, and explores how such practices contribute to the re-inscription and symbolic revalorisation of urban space. The fandom tourism framework offers a critical conceptual lens for understanding the affective economies and participatory dynamics that shape contemporary popular culture-induced mobility.

Keywords: fandom tourism; cultural consumption; urban regeneration; tourism behaviour; China

"Travelling for concerts" has become a popular tourism pattern in China (He and Fu, 2024). Besides attending performances, travellers would often explore the host city and enjoy local cuisine. A growing number of people—especially celebrity fans—are now willing to travel to another city for a single event. According to the China Association of Performing Arts, the total box office revenue of offline performances in 2024 reached nearly 580 billion Chinese Yuan (approx. 81 billion USD) (Zheng, 2025). Over 60% of attendees at large-scale events such as concerts were from outside the host city (Zheng, 2025), indicating that more than half of the audience consisted of non-local tourists. This influx of visitors has brought significant economic benefits to host destinations, with total audience-related spending exceeding 2000 billion Chinese Yuan (approx. 280 billion USD) (Zheng, 2025). This emerging consumer trend, which integrates cultural consumption and tourism activities, has drawn increasing attention from municipal cultural and tourism departments across China. In collaboration with the local service industry, tourism sector, and performance organisers, these departments are upgrading urban hospitality services and infrastructure to attract more audiences, fans, and visitors (Zhou and Zhou, 2024).

This form of tourism driven by cultural, or media consumption is not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1980s, researchers observed that television and drama series could motivate audiences to visit filming locations and influence their travel decisions (Nakayama, 2021). This type of travel behaviour was conceptualised as film (induced) tourism and has since attracted sustained attention within tourism studies. Later, the impacts of novels (Reijnders, 2011; Belarmino, 2023), anime (Jang, 2020), sports competitions (McManus, 2020), and music festivals (Kinnunen & Honkanen, 2021) on tourism experiences was also acknowledged. Popular culture and media products could act as key drivers of tourism. In response to this widespread phenomenon, several interdisciplinary frameworks have been developed, such as content tourism and event tourism. The former emphasises the cross-media experiences offered to tourists through the integration of various media forms—such as films, television series, manga, anime, novels, and video games—with real-world destinations (Graburn and Yamamura, 2020). The latter focuses on planned events that are strategically developed and marketed in an integrated manner, including commercial, sporting, and festival activities (Getz, 2008).

These concepts and frameworks are typically defined around specific media products or events, as these serve as the core motivational forces behind such forms of tourism. The impetus usually stems from audiences' or fans' desire to establish a physical connection with beloved celebrities or media personas. For example, American fans of Japanese anime may travel to Japan to visit locations featured in the animations (Clyde, 2020), while

Chinese fans of Korean idols often take photos outside their favourite idols' entertainment agencies in Seoul (Li et al., 2025). These meaningful sites are perceived as unique attractions—or even secular “sacred places.” For fans, travel becomes a form of pilgrimage, a notion widely discussed in tourism studies (Reijnders, 2010; Goh, 2014; Clyde, 2020; Waysdorf, 2021; Li et al., 2024). However, existing research has primarily examined fan tourism through a consumerist lens, overlooking fans' active role as producers within these practices.

More specifically, fans would not merely visit sacred sites—they actively participate in creating them (Jang, 2020). For instance, fans may collaborate with cafés near concert venues to stage themed exhibitions, temporarily transforming these otherwise ordinary spaces into fan-relevant “attractions.” For those seeking a deeper connection with their favourite celebrities and fellow fans, such temporary sites often hold greater appeal than official tourist attractions—even when they have no actual interest in the café itself. Fans who visit these spaces typically take photos, socialise, and share content on social media, collectively imbuing the site with symbolic meaning. Through these shared cultural practices, fans could construct new sacred spaces out of otherwise unrelated urban settings.

This highlights how fans' active involvement could blur the boundaries between tourists, media content, and destinations—posing a challenge to existing theories that primarily focus on media-induced tourism. Furthermore, while current frameworks emphasise the emotional bond between individuals and media personas/products, they may fail to account for the significance of fan-to-fan relationships and fan community dynamics in shaping travel motivations and practices. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a new framework centred on fandom to better account for these complex tourism behaviours and experiences.

Fandom functions as an affective community, offering both emotional and practical spaces for fans to engage in production and consumption. It operates not only as a site of collective meaning-making, but also as a network of intimate relations (among celebrities, fans and communities) (Jenkins, 1992; Hills, 2002). In China, the fan economy is rapidly expanding, with fan-organised activities becoming increasingly diverse and visible. Fans actively appropriate urban spaces and transform otherwise ordinary places into new fandom attractions through their practices. As both consumers and producers, fans engage with the cultural functions of the city while simultaneously contributing to its spatial and symbolic renewal. These dynamics cannot be adequately explained by existing frameworks such as content tourism or event tourism.

To address the gaps in existing research, this study proposes a theoretical framework of fandom tourism, offering an exploratory overview of this emerging phenomenon. First, the study identifies three primary types of fandom tourism activities, outlines their key characteristics, and provides a foundation for understanding the structure of fandom tourism. Second, it examines the mechanisms behind fandom-related travel decisions, particularly those shaped by affective consumption and community-based interaction. Third, the study highlights how fans engage with and reconfigure urban infrastructure and physical space, offering new perspectives for understanding destination image formation.

Importantly, this research situates the entire fan travel experience within an integrated framework, rather than focusing solely on aspects directly linked to media texts or products.

Literature Review

Fan and Fandom

What is a fan? The term fan is derived from the abbreviation of fanatic, which in turn comes from the Latin word *fanaticus*, carrying connotations of religious devotion, fervour, or even madness (Jenkins, 1992). While this etymology implies a somewhat negative and pathologising view, such stereotypes have been increasingly challenged and corrected by the rapid development of fan studies. Scholars in media and audience studies have emphasised the distinctions between fans and general audiences or consumers. Fans are often seen as loyal audiences (Kozinets, 2001), or in some cases, excessive consumers (Fiske, 1992)—individuals who are intensely devoted to, or enthusiastic about, specific figures such as celebrities, actors, films, or more broadly, media content

and public figures, and who engage with these objects of affection in active and participatory ways (Kozinets, 2001; Yan and Yang, 2021).

This distinction has been attributed by media psychology researchers to various emotional mechanisms, including empathy (Taylor, 2015), worship (Chen et al., 2022), a sense of belonging (Fong, 2020), identification (Kim and Manoli, 2022), attachment (Stever, 2011), involvement (Bee and Havitz, 2010), and loyalty (Stevens and Rosenberger, 2012). In other words, emotional connection lies at the heart of what defines a fan. Motivated by such affective bonds, fans often develop intense feelings of intimacy and commitment towards celebrities or media characters—despite not having any real-life interaction with them—and are willing to offer various forms of support (Tukachinsky, 2010). Scholars have conceptualised this as an emotional connection that resembles real-world social relationships, with one crucial difference: it is non-reciprocal. Information, emotion, and resources typically flow in one direction—from the fan to the media persona. As such, these intimate yet one-sided relationships are referred to as parasocial relationships (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

This perspective helps explain why fans often engage in what might be termed “excessive consumption”—because such acts are understood not merely as purchasing behaviour, but as meaningful expressions of support. For example, repeat purchasing is a common practice among fans of East Asian idol groups, where individuals may buy dozens of copies of the same album to help their idols climb sales charts (Bai, 2021). Within parasocial relationships, fans are emotionally invested in the success and well-being of their favourite media figures (Tukachinsky, 2010), and this affective bond becomes a key driver of their consumption patterns and decision-making. Another way to understand excessive consumption is through the fan's desire to interact with and deepen their relationship with the media persona (Rubin and McHugh, 1987; Tukachinsky, 2010). However, given the non-reciprocal nature of parasocial ties, such desires cannot be fulfilled through direct exchange. Instead, fans repeatedly engage with media products—re-watching, re-purchasing, and re-circulating content—to sustain and simulate connection.

However, the media industry can only provide a limited range of content for specific fan groups, which often fails to satisfy the full spectrum of desires embedded in parasocial relationships. As these relationships are constructed within the fan's imagination, some fans attempt to bring their imagined connections into the physical world. For instance, they may visit celebrities' former workplaces, favourite restaurants, or hometowns (Yan et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025). Such practices help bridge the gap between fantasy and reality by providing tangible experiences that anchor intangible emotions, thereby creating a sense of closeness. Fans often describe these journeys as acts of pilgrimage, and particular sites become sacred because they hold deep symbolic meaning (Jang, 2020; Li et al., 2024). The notion of “pilgrimage” is widely recognised across global fan cultures (Jang, 2020).

Consumption is not the only way fans seek connection with media figures—they also engage in creative production. Fans often appropriate original media texts to produce new content, such as writing sequels to a TV series after its conclusion. Jenkins (1992) describes such activities as part of participatory culture, in which fans actively participate in textual construction and content creation. Fans are thus both consumers and producers. This creative practice also extends to place-making: fans may designate previously unrelated locations as sacred sites through ritualised visits and symbolic validation via social media (Li et al., 2024).

The creation of such “sacred spaces” is rarely an individual act; rather, it is often a collective endeavour within the fandom community. Through negotiation, sharing, and imitation, ordinary locations are imbued with meaning, sanctified, and granted a sustained cultural presence. The fandom community not only operates as a site of symbolic production (Jenkins, 1992), but also as a network of intimate relations, since fans form parasocial relationships not only with media figures but also with each other (Elfvig-Hwang, 2018). Hills (2002) conceptualises fandom as an affective community, one that provides both emotional and practical space for fan-based production and consumption. Sacred sites, for example, are collectively recognised, sustained, and re-signified through repeated visits and ongoing acts of communal interpretation.

In sum, fan practices are rooted in emotional attachment and forms of intimacy—both between fans and media figures, and among fans themselves. These cultural practices blend consumption and production, driven by a fundamental desire to translate imagined meanings into real-world experiences.

Media and Tourism

In media studies, visiting sites associated with beloved celebrities or media content is commonly regarded as a form of fan practice. In tourism studies, however, such activities are conceptualised as a specialised form of tourism. One of the earliest frameworks to enter the field was film (induced) tourism (Lexhagen, Ziakas and Lundberg, 2023), defined as “visitation to sites where movies and TV programmes have been filmed, as well as to tours to production studios, including film-related theme parks... (any) tourist activity associated with the film industry, be it on-site in the field, or at (or near) the production studio” (Beeton, p. 11). This concept sparked widespread scholarly interest, especially in relation to its economic impact—such as the role of film in shaping destination image and marketing (Vagionis and Loumiotis, 2011; Busby & Haines, 2013; Camprubi, 2020)—as well as its influence on tourists’ decision-making processes (Frost and Laing, 2015; Waysdorf and Reijnders, 2019; Zhou et al., 2023).

Subsequent studies have shown that the intersection between media content and tourism extends well beyond film, encompassing sports (McManus, 2020), music (Roberts, 2014), literature (Belarmino, 2023), video games (Thompson, Taheri and Scheuring, 2022), and manga/anime (Clyde, 2020). Audiences and fans of these different media forms often travel to relevant destinations in pursuit of experiences associated with particular content, subcultures, or celebrities (Lee, Bai and Busser, 2019). Accordingly, the field has seen the emergence of new sub-categories such as sports tourism, literary tourism, video game-induced tourism, and animation tourism.

These forms of tourism are generally defined by their specific motivating media content. Some involve visiting fixed, long-term, and relatively static attractions—such as film locations—while others are driven by short-term, temporary, or cyclical events, such as the Olympics or music festivals. In response, some scholars have proposed the concept of event tourism to describe travel motivated by planned and strategically marketed events, including festivals and celebrations, entertainment, and leisure events, political or state occasions, scientific and artistic gatherings, commercial and corporate events (e.g. conferences, conventions, expos, and exhibitions), as well as personal milestones such as weddings or fan-based social activities (Getz, 2008). In short, event tourism focuses on the planned and integrative development and promotion of events (Getz, 2008).

Some scholars have argued for a more integrated approach that brings together different types of popular cultural content under a unified analytical lens. One prominent interdisciplinary framework is contents tourism, originally introduced by the Japanese government as a strategy to stimulate regional tourism. It refers to tourism that is wholly or partially motivated by narratives, characters, locations, and other creative elements found in various forms of popular media—including films, television dramas, manga, anime, novels, and video games (Graburn and Yamamura, 2020). Contents tourism emphasises the multi-platform use of the same content across different media formats (Lexhagen, Ziakas and Lundberg, 2023), and treats the site itself as a form of media, highlighting the importance of transmedia experiences for tourists (Graburn and Yamamura, 2020). For example, a novel, its manga and anime adaptations, and the real-world locations depicted across these formats can all be understood as part of the same content universe. In addition, some scholars have proposed the broader concept of popular culture tourism in an effort to encompass the wide-ranging intersections between popular media and the tourism industry (Lexhagen, Ziakas and Lundberg, 2023).

Fandom and tourism behaviours

Although these different types of tourism are defined in various ways, one prominent research focus across the literature is their economic impact. It is widely acknowledged that such niche or media-induced forms of tourism tend to generate positive economic outcomes, partly because associations with popular culture can enhance a destination’s perceived distinctiveness (Lexhagen, Ziakas and Lundberg, 2023). This perceived uniqueness can directly or indirectly influence both travel intentions and decision-making. For instance, Lee, Scott and Kim (2008) found that celebrity attachment positively affects fans’ familiarity with and intention to visit destinations

linked to those celebrities—such as their hometowns or filming locations—which in turn influences their travel decisions. In addition to directly motivating travel, media content may also indirectly shape tourism intentions through its influence on destination image and place attachment (Yen and Croy, 2016; Wong, Song, and Zhang, 2021; Lexhagen, Ziakas and Lundberg, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023).

However, not all studies report positive correlations. Rajaguru (2014) for example, found that although respondents reported emotional connections with Korean actors in media content, this did not significantly influence their intention to travel to South Korea. Similar findings have been echoed elsewhere: while film can play a significant role in shaping the travel decisions and experiences of certain tourists, for many others, film remains a minor or negligible factor in travel decision-making (Busby & Klug, 2001; Croy & Heitmann, 2011; Heitmann, 2010; Lee, Bai and Busser, 2019)—even when it positively affects destination image (Croy 2007).

One possible explanation for these discrepancies is that different samples may yield different measurements of media content's influence on tourism decisions (Yen and Croy, 2016). Lee and Yoo (2015) argue that fans with higher fandom levels tend to show greater loyalty toward both the destination and celebrity-related activities. This suggests that it is insufficient to treat tourists, fans, and general audiences as a homogenous group when analysing media-related travel behaviour. Even among travellers emotionally connected to specific cultural content, the degree of fandom matters. For instance, highly devoted fans may revisit the same destination repeatedly, viewing the experience as a form of homecoming (Waysdorf and Reijnders, 2019)—a behaviour rarely observed among casual viewers or less engaged fans.

Importantly, the “black box” in existing research is not limited to treating fans and general audiences as undifferentiated. Waysdorf (2021) raises a crucial question about how tourists interpret the tension between media representation and reality. While travel offers fans an opportunity to connect the sacred spaces of media texts with real-world environments (Reijnders, 2011; Waysdorf, 2021), a gap always remains. Waysdorf (2021) highlights the role of individualised imagined experiences, whereas Belarmino (2023) focuses on shared experiences constructed within fan communities. These findings underscore the fact that fans, as tourists, are not merely consumers—they are also producers. They may even create new destinations, such as turning subway advertisement boards featuring beloved characters into newly recognised sacred sites through collective ritual and social media recognition (Jang, 2020). Moreover, Belarmino (2023) notes that more creatively engaged fans behave differently during travel compared to casual fans or general audiences.

In discussing the limitations of contents tourism, Graburn and Yamamura (2020) point out that fans' active forms of production blur the boundaries between tourism producers and consumers, destabilising the clear-cut roles of tourist, content, and destination. This makes it difficult to explain such phenomena solely through the lens of contents tourism. Nor do other existing frameworks sufficiently address this gap. These observations reinforce the need to construct a new framework centred on fandom. Current research has yet to fully explore how fan emotions shape travel decision-making. The dual role of fans as both consumers and producers during travel also warrants greater scholarly attention. Furthermore, fans often travel not as isolated individuals, but as members of a fandom community, sharing affect, coordinating actions, and co-creating experience. Such communal travel practices differ significantly from those of conventional tourists. Existing theoretical models remain limited in their ability to account for these affective, collective, and participatory travel experiences rooted in fandom communities.

Methods

Building on the identified gaps in the existing literature, this study explores travel experiences driven by fandom as a core motivational force. It focuses on three key aspects: (1) the individual and collective experiences that fans undergo during travel; (2) the role of multiple forms of intimacy—including but not limited to relationships between fans and celebrities, between fans themselves, and between fans and their wider communities—in shaping travel decisions; and (3) how fans engage with and utilise urban space in the course of their travels. The research concentrates on tourism activities within the context of Chinese fandom culture. Accordingly, the

sample consists primarily of celebrity fans based in China. Participants were recruited through open calls on social media platforms and snowball sampling. The selection criteria were: (1) participants must be long-term fans of a specific celebrity; and (2) they must have undertaken at least one instance of cross-city travel primarily motivated by participation in celebrity-related activities. Given the exploratory nature of the study, in-depth interviews—an approach well-suited for understanding how phenomena operate and how different factors are interrelated—were employed for data collection (Denscombe, 2021).

The research draws on semi-structured interviews with 16 participants, focusing on their most memorable travel experiences. Topics discussed included their fandom histories, the celebrities they support, the activities that motivated their travel, their interactions with other fans, the overall travel experience, their decision-making processes, and their emotional responses. Interviews continued until no new insights or information were emerging. Interview durations ranged from 45 to 90 minutes, totalling 973 minutes of recorded data. The participants were fans of a range of public figures, including idols, actors, singers, musical theatre performers, and athletes. The collected data were coded and analysed using thematic analysis. This process led to the identification of three main types of fandom tourism activities, as well as the mechanisms that underpin how these activities structure the fan travel experience.

Findings

Three types of activities in fandom tourism

Based on the level of direct association with celebrities, this study identifies three typical types of activities within fan tourism: core activities, related activities, and other activities, ranked from highest to lowest in terms of their proximity to the celebrity figure. This categorisation forms the foundation for understanding the structure and behavioural logic of fan tourism.

1. Core Activities

Core activities are the primary motivators of fan travel. They are directly related to the celebrity and typically form the most fixed and non-negotiable part of the travel itinerary, regardless of a fan's level of enthusiasm. Examples include concerts, sports events, fan meetings, and other occasions involving direct physical presence or interaction with the celebrity. These events are usually organised by official entities or authorised representatives and take place in formal, large-scale venues such as cultural and sports complexes. As such, they place specific demands on a city's infrastructure and event-hosting capacity.

2. Related Activities

Related activities revolve around the core event but are indirectly linked to the celebrity and more directly associated with the fandom community. One common example is the creation of new sacred sites, such as temporary exhibitions about the celebrity held in cafés near concert venues. These sites typically feature fan-generated content, serve as spaces for social interaction, and are actively shared through social media. Such activities are often the result of collective fan production and are accompanied by rituals and group dynamics rooted in the fandom community. They fulfil a strong social function and generate demand for communal spaces. Emotional interaction is central to these activities, and their occurrence is closely linked to the fan's level of engagement and the accessibility of the venue. These activities are typically organised either by fans or by event organisers and often take place in public urban spaces near the core event, such as commercial districts, parks, or open plazas.

Related activities reflect more complex forms of community participation and meaning-making. Fans creatively reinterpret urban spaces, turning them into new "attractions" or sacred sites that become significant within the shared narratives of the celebrity, the fans, and the fandom community.

3. Other Activities

Other activities refer to elements of the fan travel experience that are not directly connected to either the celebrity or the fandom community. These typically include visiting local attractions, shopping, or engaging in social

interactions with non-fans. These parts of the itinerary tend to be more flexible and are entirely controlled by the individual fan. Interestingly, even during these more conventional tourist activities, fans may incorporate elements of fandom—such as carrying printed images of their favourite celebrity and taking photos with them at landmarks. In such cases, urban spaces are used for their original functions, but may still acquire secondary symbolic meanings.

Although these activities resemble conventional forms of tourism, many fans report experiencing higher levels of enjoyment and relaxation during them. The blend of everyday tourism practices with subtle fandom expressions adds an extra emotional layer to the travel experience, making even ordinary moments feel more meaningful.

The structuring mechanisms of fandom tourism

1. Community interaction and emotional reward models in fandom tourism

This study finds that an individual's fandom level is a decisive factor in shaping their fandom tourism itinerary, as it is closely tied to what can be described as a community interaction–emotional reward model. Three typical fan types were identified:

1.1 Active content producers

These fans take on organising and content-creating roles within fandom communities and are often perceived as opinion leaders. They tend to gain attention by providing scarce resources—such as exclusive celebrity updates, high-quality images, or video content—or by coordinating community efforts. Their decisions around travel are often influenced by how they use and maintain cultural capital within the fan community. Beyond interactions with the celebrity, the emotional reward for this group is derived from building and sustaining influence within the fandom.

1.2 Highly engaged social participants

This group forms the core of the active fan base. They engage in practices such as creating fan support materials, participating intensively in fan-related social interactions, and exchanging gifts. Their emotional rewards are largely drawn from a sense of identity, belonging, and active participation within the fan community, in addition to their admiration for the celebrity.

1.3 Experience-oriented individual fans

These fans are more passive in community engagement and primarily act as consumers. While they may not actively contribute to or maintain a position in the fan community, they are by no means rare. Their emotional reward is primarily derived from the celebrity and from their own travel experiences, rather than from social interaction within the fandom.

2. Influencing mechanisms behind the distribution of activities in fandom tourism

The way in which the three types of fandom tourism activities are distributed within an itinerary is influenced by three major factors: individual fan attributes, travel duration, and destination characteristics.

2.1 The influence of fandom level on activity distribution

Fandom level influences identity formation and determines a fan's emotional needs, shaping their preferences for community interaction and emotional reward. These factors, in turn, influence how much time and energy is invested in different types of activities:

- Fans who engage in content production tend to focus intensely on core activities, closely following the celebrity's schedule. Their itineraries are usually fixed and streamlined.
- Fans who are socially motivated invest more time in related activities, such as community rituals and social events, in addition to attending core events.
- Experience-oriented fans, while still attending core activities, tend to allocate more time and energy to other activities like sightseeing and shopping. Their decision-making more closely resembles that of general tourists—though interestingly, they report greater enjoyment and relaxation during fandom tourism compared to

conventional travel.

2.2 Travel duration

The amount of time available for travel directly affects the arrangement of activities. While core activities are fixed and form the primary motivation for travel, the time available beyond these events varies among fans and enables different levels of participation in related and other activities. Although energy levels and personal stamina also play a role, in general, longer trips allow for greater flexibility and a wider variety of engagements.

Most core activities (e.g. concerts, fan meetings) are scheduled on weekends to maximise attendance. As a result, many fans opt for short trips lasting one to two days. However, trips lasting three days or more allow fans to engage in more diverse, loosely structured activities, resulting in richer travel experiences.

2.3 Destination characteristics

The type of city influences the physical and cultural infrastructure available to support different types of activities. Urban environments with a well-developed commercial landscape, strong tourist appeal, and convenient services offer more opportunities for related and other activities. Moreover, fans' perceptions of the destination—shaped by its reputation, accessibility, and consumption options—also affect how they plan and anticipate their trip.

3. Spatial distribution mechanisms of activities in fandom tourism

The spatial distribution of activities in fandom tourism is shaped by both the location of core event venues and their relationship to urban public and commercial spaces. These factors determine the range and positioning of fan activities. In addition, fandom level, travel duration, and the quality of urban infrastructure jointly influence the degree of spatial dispersion and the number of activity cores. Overall, the findings suggest that the spatial layout of fandom tourism activities emerges from situated behavioural choices and path constructions under specific event-driven, social, and geographical contexts.

At the foundational level, the location of core activity venues—and their proximity to public and commercial spaces—forms the primary structure of spatial distribution. Large-scale cultural facilities such as concert arenas, stadiums, exhibition centres, or sites directly associated with celebrity appearances (e.g. filming studios, commercial events, broadcasting stations) serve not only as geographical anchors but also as emotional centres for fandom communities. These venues, when coupled with adjacent public spaces (e.g. plazas, metro stations, green spaces) and commercial establishments (e.g. shopping malls, cafés, restaurant clusters), shape patterns of fan aggregation and dispersion. On this structural base, a fan's level of enthusiasm influences the overall extent of spatial activity.

Furthermore, fandom level, travel duration, and urban infrastructure collectively determine the extensibility and structure of spatial activity. Fans with more time and higher mobility—particularly in geographically larger cities—are more likely to move across multiple areas and change accommodations, thereby forming secondary activity clusters and additional cores. The quality of urban infrastructure significantly affects the feasibility and efficiency of such inter-district mobility.

More specifically, in cities with well-developed infrastructure and abundant tourism resources, fans are more likely to distribute their activities across different areas. This results in a shift from a single-core spatial model to a multi-core networked pattern. In contrast, in smaller or resource-constrained cities, fan activity tends to remain highly concentrated around a single core location.

The impact of fandom tourism on urban space and the construction of city image

Fandom tourism affects urban space on multiple levels. These impacts range from the utilisation and reconfiguration of urban infrastructure and physical space to fans' subjective impressions and emotional attachment to the city. The study finds that the spatial distribution and experiential depth of the three main types of fandom

tourism activities directly shape how fans move through, perceive, and relate to the urban environment. Specifically, core activities establish the baseline expectations for the city, related activities drive micro-renewals of urban space, and other activities influence the upper limits of city image construction and play a key role in inspiring intentions to revisit.

Core activities place concrete demands on a city's infrastructure and governance capacity. On the one hand, large-scale events such as concerts and fan meetings are typically held in major cultural complexes—stadiums, arenas, and performance halls—which require advanced logistical support, including crowd management, security, and technical facilities. These events also test the city's ability to deliver effective transport, service provision, and public order. On the other hand, even smaller-scale events such as programme recordings or commercial appearances still rely on basic infrastructure and urban governance. The fan experience at core activities establishes their baseline evaluation of the destination. In other words, if significant negative experiences occur during these events, they can strongly diminish both overall satisfaction and emotional assessment of the city.

Related activities are often held in commercial and public spaces surrounding core venues and involve creative repurposing of urban infrastructure. These include spontaneous fan gatherings, merchandise exchanges, and social rituals such as group check-ins. Usually organised informally by fandom communities, these activities are temporary and highly interactive. They not only generate short-term increases in foot traffic in commercial and public areas, but also hold potential to stimulate micro-scale urban renewal. In post-industrial cities, such activities may provide new models for space activation beyond top-down planning. Some Chinese cities have already seen such practices emerge: in certain commercial centres, management collaborates with fan groups by providing venues for fan events and organising themed campaigns—such as playing celebrity-related songs and videos on birthdays or offering fan merchandise in exchange for in-store purchases. These models demonstrate alternative pathways for urban revitalisation and spatial reproduction through fan-driven participation.

Other activities play a particularly distinctive role by contributing to fans' emotional experience and shaping their impression of the city. Unlike traditional tourism, where sightseeing is often the main purpose, fans treat core activities as emotional anchors, which lowers expectations and removes pressure from the rest of the itinerary. As a result, fans are able to explore the city more casually, without the rigid time management and checklist mentality typical of conventional tourism. Even highly structured travellers report this sense of unplanned enjoyment. This freedom leads to moments of serendipity and unexpected joy, significantly enhancing fans' overall impression of the city. In this sense, other activities provide emotional surplus value, allowing fans to form unique affective connections and place-based attachments through spontaneous discovery. This mechanism suggests that the quality of urban services, atmosphere of local neighbourhoods, and lived texture of everyday life become key elements in shaping the city's image and encouraging return visits in the eyes of fandom tourists.

Conclusion

Similar to existing tourism frameworks, fandom tourism is also goal-oriented, with core activities remaining the primary motivation for travel. These core activities are centred around specific times, locations, and organisers, and are characterised by temporality, spatial concentration, and site-specific presence. Like other forms of event-driven tourism, they are influenced by uniqueness and non-repeatability. However, in fandom tourism, the emphasis is not on conventional events or media content per se, but rather on their close association with the celebrity figure and their perceived authority.

At the same time, as with contents tourism, many activities in fandom tourism are not strictly dependent on scheduled events. Instead, they are often driven by affective identification with the celebrity, symbolic meaning, and shared recognition within the fandom community. In addition, fandom tourism also generates economic and social impacts on destination cities. On the one hand, it brings short-term economic stimulation with potential for long-term conversion, demanding both consumption and experiential engagement. On the other hand, it contributes to the accumulation of emotional and brand memory within the destination.

In the context of post-urbanisation, many cities face challenges of transformation and spatial reorganisation. As a driving force for urban optimisation, cultural consumption has become a core element of the “beyond-growth” framework. This study develops an analytical model to better understand fandom tourism and its impact on urban space. Fandom tourism offers potential pathways to improve public services, revitalise underused urban spaces, and support the integration of cultural and tourism industries, while also advancing knowledge of contemporary travel behaviour and sustainable development.

From the perspective of urban development, fandom tourism provides an alternative lens through which to understand contemporary mechanisms of urban cultural production. In the post-urbanisation context, traditional capital-driven models of urban growth are increasingly revealing structural limitations, while lifestyle-oriented development logics centred on cultural consumption are gaining traction. Such logics suggest that urban regeneration need not rely solely on top-down planning. This study fills a gap in empirical research on fandom tourism in China and contributes theoretically by distinguishing fandom tourism from contents tourism and event tourism. It highlights three key features: emotional motivation, spatial creativity, and intensive community interaction. This framework offers a useful analytical tool for examining how different types of cultural consumers shape urban space, contributing to future research in urban cultural studies and tourism behaviour.

From a practical standpoint, this research provides policy insights for cultural tourism and urban regeneration in large Chinese cities during the post-urbanisation stage. Urban managers and tourism stakeholders should recognise and leverage fandom activity as a new tourism resource. By providing appropriate public spaces, infrastructural support, and policy guidance, cities can unlock the economic potential of fandom-based tourism. This not only enriches the city’s cultural functionality but also offers new strategies for reactivating urban space and advancing sustainable development under the beyond-growth paradigm.

That said, the study has certain limitations. First, the number of semi-structured interview participants is relatively limited, which may introduce sampling bias. Second, the current analysis does not fully account for the differentiated manifestations of fandom tourism across city types or its long-term impacts. Future research could expand the sample size and apply this theoretical framework to larger-scale behavioural studies. In addition, adopting a longitudinal perspective and conducting comparative analyses across different cities or regions would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the spatial and social implications of fandom tourism.

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