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EXPLORING VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF POPULAR CULTURE TOURISM IN SLEEPY
HOLLOW, NEW YORK

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management

by
Danielle Baker Kreh
August 2022

Accepted by:
Dr. Gregory Ramshaw, Committee Chair
Dr. William Norman
Dr. Alana Seaman

ABSTRACT

Popular culture tourism can present itself in many forms including travel based on popular literature, film, and television series. Popular culture tourism destinations exist from the assumption that tourists wish to visit destinations based on their popular culture connections. In fact, destinations may choose to emphasize their popular culture connections for the purpose of attracting more visitors. Such is the case with Sleepy Hollow, New York, which has many popular culture connections including the original short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving. Using the village of Sleepy Hollow as an example, the purpose of this study is to understand if tourists are making connections to popular culture in Sleepy Hollow, including the original short story as well as its many adaptations, and if so, to which adaptations are they making connections. The study employs a social constructionist perspective and uses qualitative methods. Thematic analysis was conducted using electronic word of mouth (eWOM) data collected from prior visitors’ reviews published online. Findings suggest tourists do make connections to popular culture, attractions within the study site employ different ways of demonstrating the connections to popular culture, and the connections can be explicit or implicit. Armed with the understanding of visitors’ perceptions of popular culture, destination managers can make informed decisions for the marketing and branding of a destination, making popular culture tourism a viable market segment for tourism operators.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand popular culture tourism, one must first become familiar with popular culture. Popular culture is defined as popular beliefs, practices, and objects rooted in local traditions and/or mass beliefs, often generated from political or commercial centers. Typically objects that are part of popular culture are “readable”, meaning they are written or visual materials for which there can be traditions of interpretation and criticism (Mukerji & Schudson 1986). Popular culture tourism is then defined as tourism at destinations with associations to popular culture that make them popular places to visit. They are made up of constructed realities that transform local communities into fictional servicescapes (Lundberg & Lindström 2020). Popular culture tourism can present itself in many forms including traveling based on popular literature, film, and television series. Popular culture associated with a destination has been shown to have significant influence over a destination’s image (Lee & Bai 2016). One subset of popular culture tourism is literary tourism, where tourists may choose to visit a destination based upon its association with a literary text or its author. Squire (1994) simply puts that literary tourism destinations are “places celebrated for associations with books or authors” (p. 104). Traveling due to the love of an author, poem, or book dates back to the 18th century (MacLeod et al. 2018), but it is gaining traction in the modern world as more tourists decide to visit the sites of their favorite books (Fawcett & Cormack 2001). This study is about popular culture tourism broadly, but literary tourism specifically. Although the definitions of some terms are found throughout this chapter, key terms are listed in table 1.1 at the end of the chapter for convenience.

Literary places acquire meaning from writers and settings of novels, which create connections between real and fictional worlds (Herbert, 2001; Squire, 1996). Although there is a growing interest in tourism based on fictional (literary) places, a recent study described the literary tourism sector as an “embryo” since existing literary tourism assets have not been completely calculated (Lee 2012; Tran 2020 p. 72). Seaman (2016) addressed literature as travel motivation, finding a positive correlation between background knowledge of popular culture and a desire to visit the connecting literary destination. This is important because Seaman noted that thousands of tourists are visiting places of literary importance every year (Seaman 2016), making literary tourism a viable market segment for tourism operators and creating the opportunity to educate guests on not only the associated popular culture, but also other aspects of the destination. Literary tourism can help with revenues at a destination through options for guided and unguided tours based on the associated literature or popular culture. Nowadays, literary destinations may choose to emphasize their literary connections in order to encourage visitors to travel to their destination over other similar or regional competitors (MacLeod et al. 2018). This is the case with Sleepy Hollow, New York, which held a vote to change their name officially in 1996 and has since embraced their literary roots with festivals, tours, and landmarks surrounding the short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving (Berger 1996). Sleepy Hollow has also been featured and spoofed in media to the point where Sleepy Hollow and its associated character of The Headless Horseman is recognizable outside of the original story (Century 2021). The short story has seen many relevant popular culture adaptations by well-known creators such as Disney and Tim Burton. In addition to fully reimagined adaptations, the original story has also been featured and spoofed in other popular culture media such as The Smurfs (Century 2021). Fawcett and Cormack (2001) point out how the themes of literature

surrounding a destination can be the same themes that create a thriving tourism environment and, in this case, Sleepy Hollow represents idealized Halloween and gothic themes.

MacLeod, Shelley, and Morrison (2018) found that literary tourists use visiting a literary destination to solidify the reading experience of favorite books. Reading the associated literature before a visit can help a reader establish a connection to the destination even before the visit, and prior studies suggest that tourists want to experience a literary tourism destination based on prior knowledge of the literature (Otay et al. 2021). Prior knowledge of the literature means that visitors have expectations and assumptions about the destination before they even arrive. This brings into question if visitors to Sleepy Hollow, NY, make connections to the popular culture, including literary associations, of the town during their visit. Connections consist of any notice of the popular culture that is associated with the destination which the visitor acknowledges from their visit. Some visitors will pick up on the relationship between popular culture and Sleepy Hollow, and then state observations about that relationship, whether explicitly or implicitly, which will delineate a connection being made. The purpose of this study was to understand if tourists are making connections to popular culture in Sleepy Hollow, including the original short story as well as its many adaptations, and if so, to which adaptations are they making connections. Data to accomplish this purpose was gathered via electronic review sites TripAdvisor and Yelp, using electronic word of mouth (eWOM). eWOM is useful when making observations about places or products of which people on the internet have freely posted their opinions. The aim is to provide understanding of popular culture's influence on tourists' perceptions of Sleepy Hollow. Armed with this knowledge of how to understand visitors' perception of popular culture at a destination, destination managers are able to make more informed decisions for the marketing and branding of a destination.

Background and Rationale

Popular culture tourism is worth studying because popular culture has the potential to drive tourists to a destination (Lee & Bai 2016). The representation of a destination in media can play a role in tourists' decision-making processes, which can influence a tourist interested in popular culture to choose to visit the associated popular culture destination over another destination (Iwashita 2006, Hua et al. 2021). Destination managers and marketers have the power to utilize popular culture in their destination image in order to attract more tourists or influence what attractions they are drawn to at the destination (Hua et al. 2021). While some popular culture attractions are purposefully constructed, such as The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort, other popular culture attractions gain notoriety accidentally through features in media such as television, film, or literature (Hua et al. 2021). Most destinations are not directly involved in marketing or promotion of outside media, so the resulting draw is derivative (Hua et al. 2021).

When Sleepy Hollow changed its name from North Tarrytown in 1996, it was for the purpose of connecting to its famous past (Steiner n.d.). The famous past of Sleepy Hollow comes from it being the setting of Washington Irving's short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow". The short story has since been adapted into movies, tv shows, theme park attractions, and loose adaptations or spoofs. The town of Sleepy Hollow's association to Washington Irving and the deriving popular culture has the benefit of not only being a source of pride for its locals, but also a draw for tourists. The expense and labor associated with legally changing the name of the town had to have been worthwhile to the townspeople of Sleepy Hollow. The name change was a gamble, and is only worthwhile if visitors are in fact making connections with popular culture to the town. Through online reviews, we can observe if trying to position itself as a popular culture

destination by changing its name has paid off, by observing if people are making the desired associations.

In changing its name, Sleepy Hollow put itself on the map next to destinations like Salem, Massachusetts, for heightened engagement in dark tourism. Dark tourism is a popular form of tourism which thrives off the inherent human fascination with the macabre (Light 2017). While dark tourism has ties with thanatourism, meaning relating explicitly to human death, modern definitions posit that dark tourism does not have to include relation to death (Light 2017). Stone (2006) proposed a typology of dark tourism that ranged from the lightest sites, which are sites associated with death and suffering but exist mainly for entertainment purposes, to the darkest sites, which are sites that are the location of death and suffering and exist for education purposes. Although Sleepy Hollow would likely be incorporated into the lightest category, as it exists for mainly entertainment purposes, this definition still doesn't fully fit the destination. This story has little to do with death itself, and therefore doesn't fit the existing definition of dark tourism, thanatourism, or ghost tourism. However, because dark tourism is an already widely researched term, a review of dark tourism literature is utilized in this study to get a better understanding of the study site. Light (2017) posits that motivation for why people visit dark tourism sites is still currently poorly understood. It is for this reason that eWOM was utilized to observe what, if any, connections visitors make to Sleepy Hollow in relation to its roots in popular culture.

Background on Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

eWOM is user-created data about a product or company, shared via the internet for the purpose of sharing experiences with other potential consumers (Cheng & Zhou 2010). It is similar to traditional word of mouth marketing, but it occurs on the internet. Different platforms

can be used for eWOM, including social media and opinion sites. eWOM can be useful as a cache of information that spans back years and is readily available to the public. It has been used by companies and tourism providers to observe customer experiences in order to make decisions and necessary changes to improve their products or services (Litvin et al. 2018). As this study focuses on tourism, it utilizes TripAdvisor and Yelp in order to collect a substantial amount of relevant information about the study site in order to answer the research questions. TripAdvisor and Yelp are well-known review sites in the United States that allow users to post and read reviews for places, attractions, activities, and restaurants. These review sites are often used in preparation prior to traveling to an unfamiliar location, in order to gain knowledge from the experiences of others who have chosen to leave a review. Reviews may talk about what to expect at a location, what was enjoyed by the participant, or what was potentially a disappointment.

Research Questions

Research questions have been created based on Sleepy Hollow being a tourism destination with many popular culture connections, however it is not known to what extent tourists are making connections to popular culture during their visit.

Q1: Are tourists making connections between the town of Sleepy Hollow and the popular culture associated with it?

Q1a: Which forms of popular culture play the biggest role in attracting tourists, as observed through eWOM?

Using eWOM can help to establish whether or not visitors make connections between the destination of Sleepy Hollow and its popular culture media, and which instances of popular culture are mentioned by reviewers. The town of Sleepy Hollow chose to go through the process of legally changing their name in order to emphasize their history and their connection to “The

Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in all of its popular culture associations. The name change associated Sleepy Hollow with its popular culture for locals as well as tourists, effectively establishing the destination as a popular culture and literary tourism destination; therefore, this study seeks to understand if tourists are making the intended popular culture connections. This is important to know because many tourism destinations have associations with popular culture that are not being utilized. Sleepy Hollow chose to emphasize its popular culture associations, whereas some do not, such as Romania essentially avoiding their affiliation with Dracula (Light 2017). If this study can show that connections are being made to popular culture at this destination, it stands to reason that the same methods can be utilized at other destinations in order to understand their popular culture associations.

Study Site

Sleepy Hollow, NY, meets the criteria as a popular culture destination primarily through its literary connection with Washington Irving’s 1820 short story, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”, written under the pen name Diedrich Knickerbocker and published in the *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (Irving 1820). Since its initial publication in 1820, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” has seen many iterations including an animated short by Disney in 1949 titled “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and the Tim Burton cult classic starring Johnny Depp from 1999 titled “Sleepy Hollow” (Century 2021). The story has also been featured in other lesser-known iterations such as the 1922 silent film “The Headless Horseman”, and the straight to TV movie in 1980 starring Jeff Goldblum called “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (Century 2021). Each of these examples have followed the source material relatively closely, however there are also iterations of the story that are only loosely based or mention the story only in passing. The comic *Chopper*, which currently has three issues published between 2011-2012, is loosely based

upon a Headless Horseman-type character, taking place in modern day and reimagining the Headless Horseman as a motorcyclist at Daytona Beach during bike week (Century 2021). The story of Sleepy Hollow and the Headless Horseman has also been loosely adapted and featured in *Wishbone*, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*, and *the Smurfs* (Century 2021). Fox aired a series from 2013-2017 titled “Sleepy Hollow”, which was a supernatural drama series loosely adapted from the original short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”, but also incorporating elements from “Rip Van Winkle”, another short story by Washington Irving (Garcia 2013). According to an article from October of 2013 on USA Today.com, the town of Sleepy Hollow saw an increased number of visitors after the airing of the Fox show (Garcia 2013). The name “Sleepy Hollow” is also featured in Walt Disney World in Orlando, FL, with a quick service snack window by the same name, located in Liberty Square at the Magic Kingdom. The “Return to Sleepy Hollow” event at Fort Wilderness Resort in Walt Disney World features The Headless Horseman and has been available for select nights during the Halloween seasons of 2017-2018 (Smith 2018). These examples show how “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and its iconic character of the Headless Horseman, have become ubiquitous popular culture icons. Similar to Dracula or Frankenstein, the Headless Horseman is recognizable outside of its own story and setting. While there are some timeless forms of popular culture, some are reliant on trends. The brand of Sleepy Hollow is ubiquitous at this point, however there can still be ebbs and flows, like we saw with the Fox tv show causing a noticeable increase in visitation in the Halloween season of 2013 (Garcia 2013).

According to Henry Steiner, Village Historian of Sleepy Hollow, “In the 1980s it was proposed that the village rename itself Sleepy Hollow in an effort to reconnect with its famous past” (Steiner n.d. para. 15). In 1996, the township then known as North Tarrytown held a vote to

change their name to Sleepy Hollow, as it was in their town that the original short story by Washington Irving was based (Steiner n.d). The vote was 1,304 to 710 in favor of the switch (Berger 1996). Since this name change, Sleepy Hollow has emphasized its image as a popular culture tourism destination, with tours based on the story of the Headless Horseman, “Sleepy Hollow Cemetery Tours”, and fall events such as “The Great Jack O’Lantern Blaze” (“Halloween in Sleepy Hollow”, 2022).

Washington Irving himself has deep roots in this area of the northeast. In 1798, Yellow Fever was running rampant through New York City, causing then 15-year-old Irving’s family to send him to stay with his friend James K. Paulding in Tarrytown, NY (Hodara 2014). In 1835, Irving bought a farmhouse called Sunnyside located on the border of Tarrytown and Clinton, which would later be known as Irvington (Hodara 2014). Irvington, New Jersey, was renamed from Clinton Township in 1852 in order to honor Washington Irving and is located a mere three miles away from Sleepy Hollow, New York (Siegel 2020). The association with not only the short story but also strong ties with its author make Sleepy Hollow the perfect place for a literary tourism study.

The map shown in figure 1.1 displays the area surrounding Sleepy Hollow in order to give context to the study. The map is available on the Sleepy Hollow Convention and Visitors’ Bureau (CVB) website (“Directions” 2022). Figure 1.1 shows the town of Sleepy Hollow’s location on the Hudson River and proximity to Tarrytown and Irvington. It also shows the major roadways which can be used by visitors for accessibility to the destination, as well as highlighting some of the locations which tourists can choose to visit in this area, such as Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Old Dutch Church, and Sunnyside.



Fig. 1.1- Map from Visit Sleepy Hollow’s “Directions” tab on their website (“Visit Sleepy Hollow” 2022)

Major visitation times to Sleepy Hollow happen in the fall, namely the month of October due to the Halloween theme of many of the destination’s attractions. The Visit Sleepy Hollow website mentions specifically to expect travel delays during weekends in October, implying that these are the busiest times to visit (“Directions” 2022).

Some restaurants and lodging in Sleepy Hollow have associations with popular culture, such as the Bridge View Tavern referencing the bridge ridden over by Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman in the original short story (“Bridgeview Tavern” 2022). The food served here is described as comfort and pub food with a creative twist (“Bridgeview Tavern” 2022).

Horsefeathers is another restaurant in the area that embraces the popular culture affiliations with art on the walls of Irving, as well as the sale of Headless Horseman merchandise such as t-shirts and tote bags, as seen in figure 1.2 (“Horsefeathers” 2022).

The Sleepy Hollow Hotel and Conference Center boasts that it is situated in the home of Washington Irving's “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (“Sleepy Hollow Hotel and Conference Center” 2022). It is a venue with proximity to shops and restaurants, which is emphasized on their website for its elegance rather than its connections to popular culture. The name itself is the only connection, and arguably could just be named after the town rather than any popular culture (“Sleepy Hollow Hotel and Conference Center” 2022).



Fig. 1.2 - T-Shirt available for purchase from the restaurant Horsefeathers in Sleepy Hollow, featuring the likeness of The Headless Horseman (“Horsefeathers” 2022).

From a practical standpoint, there is ease of access to Sleepy Hollow for both national and international tourists. It is accessible by car via I-87 and I-287, I-95 also runs close by. By car, Sleepy Hollow is 30 minutes from NYC, 2.5 hours from Philadelphia, 3.5 Hours from Boston, and 5 hours from Washington DC. Sleepy Hollow is also a quick train ride out of Manhattan. The Metro-North Railroad- Hudson Line has an express service between Tarrytown station and Grand Central Station. There are also long-distance Amtrak connections in Penn Station and Metro-North's Croton-Harmon station. Tourists also have easy access from multiple airports if they choose to fly. Westchester County Airport is about a 30-minute drive to Sleepy Hollow. Stewart International Airport is about an hour drive to Sleepy Hollow and rental cars are available on the premises. John F. Kennedy International Airport and LaGuardia Airport service New York City, from which one can access Sleepy Hollow via rental car, the aforementioned train service, or taxi service ("Visit Sleepy Hollow" 2022).

This study gathers data from the review pages of six attractions in the greater Sleepy Hollow area. These six attractions were chosen because they have associations with the popular culture of Sleepy Hollow. Relevancy of reviews determined which eWOM channel reviews were collected from and the date range which these reviews have been published), which assured the relevance of data collected. The number of reviews available for collection also played a role in the selection of these attractions, as an adequate number of reviews was needed in order to have a rich data set; as a result, 291 reviews in total between all six attractions were collected.

Places:

- Sleepy Hollow Cemetery
 - The Sleeping Hollow Cemetery is the cemetery for the town and the resting place of Washington Irving himself. It is open to the public during visiting hours and

guided walking tours are also available. It is a non-denominational resting place consisting of about 90-acres of land (Logan 2021).

- Old Dutch Church
 - The Old Dutch church was founded around 1685 and appears in Washington Irving's short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" ("Old Dutch Church" 2022).
- Sunnyside
 - Washington Irving's Sunnyside is the author's own estate located south of Sleepy Hollow on the Hudson River. Tours are provided of the estate which focus on sharing stories with visitors about Irving's life and literary works ("Washington Irving's Sunnyside" 2021).

Festivals:

- The Great Jack O' Lantern Blaze
 - The Great Jack O' Lantern Blaze is a festival in Sleepy Hollow that runs on select dates from September-November, annually. The town provides an 18th century backdrop for more than 7,000 jack o' lanterns, designed and carved on site. The lanterns are illuminated and synchronized with lighting and a soundtrack ("The Great Jack O'Lantern Blaze" 2022).

Monuments or Landmarks:

- The Headless Horseman Bridge
 - Although the bridge which Ichabod Crane is chased over by the Headless Horseman in Irving's story doesn't exist in the real Sleepy Hollow, the Headless Horseman Bridge serves as a stand-in for visitors. The Headless Horseman Bridge is actually the cemetery bridge and lives just inside the cemetery's south gate. It is

perfect for photo opportunities and many visitors cite the connection to literature as a reason for visitation (“Headless Horseman Bridge” 2021).

- Headless Horseman Sculpture
 - The Headless Horseman Sculpture is an 18-foot tall art piece depicting Ichabod Crane being pursued by the Headless Horseman. Created by local artist Linda Pearlmutter out of 11 tons of steel, the statue was unveiled on Halloween day, 2006 (“Headless Horseman Sculpture” 2022).

Methodology

eWOM was collected from TripAdvisor and Yelp, which are review sites that can be used by travelers to share their experiences or read reviews posted about others’ experiences. There is a rich cache of data readily available on TripAdvisor and Yelp from past experiences from visitors to Sleepy Hollow. TripAdvisor and Yelp were chosen because they are free to access and are well-established brands of review sites that many people use before and after travel to a destination (Galov 2022, Marinova 2022). TripAdvisor was chosen as the default collection site due to its larger user base, however Yelp was used in the cases where a TripAdvisor page was not available for an attraction (Galov 2022). These two sites were also selected because of the relevance of the comments, which include reasons that people chose to visit destinations and their experiences there. Twelve days of continuous data collection, starting on April 6, 2022 and finishing April 18 2022, from these sites provided adequate information in order to open code the comments, for a total of 291 reviews.

Social constructionism was utilized in this study and eWOM was used to collect data. Social constructionism posits that knowledge of the world is the product of human thought and is ultimately not provable (Burr 2015). Constructionism is not objective, therefore making it an

ideal framework for a popular culture attraction, as each guest lives a different cognitive experience. Constructionism also asserts that knowledge is constructed, not discovered (Crotty 1998; Burr 2015). These attributes of social constructionism make it ideal for the subjective nature of guest experiences at popular culture destinations.

Significance of Study

Some reviewers make connections between an attraction and how it was the inspiration or site of Washington Irving's original story. This shows that people are observing the connections between popular culture and the destination. On top of observing it, they were moved enough to write and post a review on TripAdvisor and Yelp. Guests feeling moved enough to write a review regarding popular culture connections at a destination shows that it is making an impact on that visitor that causes them to review.

There can be possibilities for profiting off of popular culture tourism, as can be observed in Sleepy Hollow with how they have embraced their popular culture and used it in some of their tourist attractions. This can be done with naming and theming attractions, restaurants, and lodging to the popular culture. A drawback of this is that there may be other attractions in an area that do not get attention because they are not associated with popular culture. It could also be an opportunity for growth, as popular culture may be enough to draw in tourists initially, but then destination managers encourage visitation to their other offerings in the area.

The nature of popular culture lends itself well to having preconceived notions about a destination before one arrives. Popular culture tourists have an idea of what to expect from a destination going into the experience. For example, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", as well as its many adaptations, tend to center around spooky, haunted, and/or Halloween themes. Therefore, guests with prior knowledge of the popular culture of Sleepy Hollow expect the same

vibes from the destination itself. The town of Sleepy Hollow emphasizes this with fall and Halloween events and festivals, amping up their attractions in October to accommodate a larger crowd of tourists.

Popular culture tourism can be a viable market segment for tourism operators to undertake if using eWOM to observe the connections visitors make to popular culture at a tourism destination can help destination managers to market these popular attractions more effectively. eWOM is useful to tourism providers because it is feedback on their products and services directly from the customers themselves. This study compiled and reviewed eWOM relating to Sleepy Hollow, providing an understanding of how visitors perceive popular culture at this location and a blueprint for other locations to use this same method in the future.

Literary tourism is a viable market segment for attracting tourists to a destination associated with literature or a specific author. Given that Sleepy Hollow has roots in literary tourism, we need to know if tourists make the connection between the town of Sleepy Hollow and the popular culture associated with it. Additionally, if tourists are making a connection, which attractions are the most associated with popular culture, and which instance of popular culture that mentions Sleepy Hollow seems to elicit the most connections. eWOM can be used to answer these questions, and the key terms that will be referenced throughout this study can be found below in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 - Key Terms

Term	Definition
Tourism	Engaging in travel away from one’s everyday environment in order to seek novelty (Cohen 1972).

Popular Culture	Popular beliefs, practices, and objects rooted in local traditions and/or mass beliefs, often generated from political or commercial centers. Typically objects that are part of popular culture are “readable”, meaning they are written or visual materials for which there can be traditions of interpretation and criticism (Mukerji & Schudson 1986).
Heritage	Historical associations to important people or events, aesthetic/architectural qualities, or physical relation to surrounding context that creates cultural or personal significance (Déom & Thiffault 2013).
Popular culture tourism	Destinations with associations to popular culture that make them popular places to visit. They are made up of constructed realities that transform local communities into fictional servicescapes (Lundberg & Lindström 2020).
Heritage tourism	Travel revolving around a destination that is associated with personal or cultural heritage; based upon both merits of the destination and tourist motivations/perceptions (Poria, Butler, & Airey 2001)
Literary tourism	A subset of popular culture tourism with connections to literary places, author-related places, and festivals relating to books or fictional worlds from literature (Hoppen, Brown, & Fyall 2014).
Gothic	Something that is characterized by mystery, horror, and gloom- especially in literature (www.vocabulary.com).

eWOM	User-created data about a product or company, shared via the internet for the purpose of sharing experiences with other potential consumers (Cheng & Zhou 2010).
Thanatourism	The phenomenon of tourists' visitation to sites associated with suffering and death (Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood 2007).
Dark Tourism	Used as an umbrella term for any form of tourism related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy, or crime (Light 2017).
User-Generated Content (UGC)	Content created by one user of a platform on the internet for the purpose of consumption by other users (Manap & Adzharudin 2013).
Social Media	Media that allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010).
Legend Tripping	An activity traditionally characterized by adolescent exploration surrounding folklore, legends, and the supernatural, for the purpose of testing the credibility of the legend and proving adolescent bravery (Ironside 2018).

The following chapters will explore the connections to popular culture tourism that visitors notice in Sleepy Hollow, New York. Chapter two includes a literature review on popular culture tourism, including an extensive background on literary tourism and other forms of relevant niche tourism. Chapter three outlines the methodology and methods of this study, including eWOM and its reliability and uses in tourism. Chapter four will provide an analysis of

the data collected from TripAdvisor and Yelp from the designated attractions in Sleepy Hollow. Chapter five will conclude the study, with a discussion and conclusion about the findings, listing limitations as well as opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review explores popular culture, heritage, literary, and dark forms of tourism in order to provide a better understanding of what these concepts are and how they apply to the current study of Sleepy Hollow. As this study utilizes electronic methods, the literature review also includes a look at how electronic media and tourism go together. The review addresses what has been concluded about research in these areas in order to point to gaps that can be filled through this study.

Popular Culture

Popular culture has been defined as popular beliefs, practices, and objects rooted in local traditions and/or mass beliefs, often generated from political or commercial centers- typically objects that are part of popular culture are “readable”, meaning they are written or visual materials for which there can be traditions of interpretation and criticism (Mukerji & Schudson 1986 p.48). Popular culture studies were identified as worthy of academic study by sociologists Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson in 1986, despite the subject being considered generally unworthy of this kind of attention at this time (Mukerji & Schudson 1986). When this article was published in 1986, the range of readable cultural systems had expanded to include household objects, fashion, television, advertisements, food and drink, and youth cultural styles (Mukerji & Schudson 1986). More recently, popular culture has been identified as playing a social significance through mass culture, with mass media and the commercialization of culture and leisure (Strinati 2004). Mass produced popular culture media came from the press, cinema, and radio around the 1920s and 1930s (Strinati 2004). There is also significant profitability of culture when it is mass produced (Strinati 2004).

The understanding of popular culture comes from general cultural studies. Cultural studies have remained changing and fluid as history unfolds, responding to changes in political and cultural conditions (Storey 2010). “To put it simply, culture is how we live nature (including our own biology); it is the shared meanings we make and encounter in our everyday lives” (Storey 2010 p. 2-3). Culture ultimately comes from the production, circulation, and consumption of meaning (Storey 2010). Popular culture arises as an interest of a dominant group, which can cause issues with subordinate groups (Storey 2010). Some views of popular culture use the lens of hegemony since the very nature of popular culture is to be the dominant narrative, or else it would not be “popular”. However, popular culture has also historically been viewed as the voice of the people (Storey 2010). Popular culture is a way for authentic, working-class citizens to express agency of the culture they consume and enjoy (Storey 2010).

Popular culture is arguably the simple culture of our everyday lives (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Popular culture does not limit itself to one gender, race, class, ethnicity, or socio-economic group, but is widely available for consumption for all (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Popular culture is embedded in nationalism and heritage, history, and the lived everyday experience, providing a window into human nature and ultimately “popular culture reveals who we are as a society” (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019, p. 9). Body art, film, literature, music, collectibles, sports, clothing, crafts, cars, mass media, television, cell phones, and leisure are presently considered forms of popular culture (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Literature and films are situated within popular culture and are merely two examples of forms that popular culture tourism can take.

Popular Culture and Tourism

Popular culture and tourism both participate in the commodification and memorialization of certain aspects of a place (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Popular culture tourism must be examined from the perspective of commoditization, authenticity, staged performance, hyperrealism, and dealing with how the experience appeals to visitors and gauges its genuineness (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Celebrities' associations with places can influence tourist perceptions, including celebrity cemetery tourism, which is exemplified in Sleepy Hollow with the grave of Washington Irving being a tourism destination (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Popular culture has, in the past, been viewed as a trivial aspect in comparison with "higher" forms of culture, like the consumption of art (such views seem to be rather elitist); however, it depends on how popular culture is treated, defined, and developed (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Destinations can both acquire and lose meaning through their associations with popular culture, from the perspective of political, economic and socio-cultural circumstances (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). But that doesn't change the fact that destinations associated with popular culture have cultural significance and symbolic meanings (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Readable cultural systems in popular culture tourism destinations are interpreted and reinterpreted by both consumers or producers, leading to new meanings on a case by case basis for each visitor, resulting in different emotional connections or ideological attachments (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019).

Recent studies have shown that popular culture associated with a certain destination has the power to drive in tourists who are interested in that popular culture (Lee & Bai 2016). Popular culture media representation at a tourist destination plays a role in the tourist's decision-making process, potentially influencing tourists who are interested in this particular popular culture to choose to visit this destination over another (Iwashita 2006). Hua et al. (2021) found

that there exists a significant relationship between popular media, destination image, and the tourist decision-making process. This study shows how destination managers and marketers can and should utilize the popular culture association of their destinations in order to attract more tourists (Hua et al. 2021). Some popular culture attractions are purposefully constructed, while others gain notoriety accidentally through their features in media like TV, films, or literature (Hua et al. 2021). Oftentimes these destinations are not directly connected with tourism marketing or promotion, and the resulting draw to the destination is derivative (Hua et al. 2021). Because tourism is often associated with escapism, it is inherently compatible to be coupled with popular culture.

Popular culture does not just have to be associated with specific media. Popular culture can also include icons that are ubiquitous such as Dracula. Light (2017) conducted a study on Dracula tourism, attempting to place it where it belongs among dark tourism and popular culture tourism. Similar to Sleepy Hollow and its association with the Headless Horseman, places in Romania have been the sources of Dracula tourism, with associations with vampires and the supernatural colliding with cultural heritage (Light 2007). However, unlike Sleepy Hollow, the approach to Dracula tourism in Romania has been one of tolerance rather than encouragement (Light 2017). Places in Transylvania with direct associations to Bram Stoker's original *Dracula* novel have made little attempt to cater to popular culture or literary tourists' interest (Light 2017). This can be contrasted to efforts that have been made in the town of Sleepy Hollow to emphasize the popular culture associations and promote tourism around the Headless Horseman, who makes appearances in the town.

Heritage Tourism

Popular culture tourism is a facet of heritage tourism; therefore, one must take a closer look at heritage tourism in order to understand popular culture tourism. According to Doganer & Dupont (2013), between 35 and 40 percent of tourism today represents heritage tourism. Heritage tourism benefits the tourism industry by contributing to economies, a sense of national pride, and education of tourists (Doganer & Dupont, 2013). Heritage tourism is complicated to manage because it strives to be as authentic and respectful as possible and in order to manage such destinations successfully, managers must know why tourists are interested in the place and how they use the heritage (Ashworth 2000).

Heritage tourism's rise in popularity can partially be attributed to the fact that it is an alternative to mass tourism and offers more of an opportunity for place-based engagement (Doganer & Dupont 2013). Doganer & Dupont (2013) explore not only the economic and cultural benefits of heritage tourism, but also the infrastructure developments that come with it. Heritage tourism is valued as an authentic experience and Ivanovic (2014) addresses differences in authenticity perception between international and domestic tourists, however results indicate that tourists do generally perceive the heritage locations as authentic. Such studies have shown that there needs to be a measurement for authenticity at heritage tourism sites. This raises questions in this study of what infrastructure has been developed specifically for heritage tourism in Sleepy Hollow and how it impacts the sense of place without putting a burden on authenticity. Much of the infrastructure associated with heritage tourism is associated with "lived space" and "everyday life", and a major goal is to not disrupt local inhabitants (Doganer & Dupont 2013 p. 20). Many sites at Sleepy Hollow existed prior to the official name change and do not disrupt the community's everyday life ("Visit Sleepy Hollow" 2022).

The connection between heritage tourism and popular culture tourism has been studied in the past from the position of heritage tourism but using popular culture tourism attractions. Frost (2008) discusses the renaming of a road in Australia to AC/DC Lane, after the country's successful rock band group AC/DC. Frost argues that establishing a physical site for popular culture of a country for tourists to visit is an alternative form of heritage tourism (Frost 2008). Other examples of this include filming locations creating new heritage for places, appealing to different types of tourists rather than traditional heritage (Schofield 1996). Other studies have looked at the tourism surrounding celebrity's lives and influence (Pearce et al. 2003). Popular culture tourism based on people who are famous or considered icons is "tak(ing) control of the heritage of the individual" (Pearce et al. 2003 p. 74). Popular culture exists as an alternative form of heritage and the study of heritage tourism includes instances of popular culture tourism.

Literary Tourism

Definitions and forms

Literary tourism is a subset of popular culture tourism, since literature is a form of popular culture (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Seaman (2016) finds that data confirms the desire to visit a literary destination often stems from having read the related text. Other studies confirmed that literary texts have the potential to incite desire to visit the destination for those who have read the associated literature (Demir et al. 2021). From current research, it can be ascertained that previous knowledge of the literature is an incentive to visit a literary destination.

Literary tourism destinations have unique power in shaping visitors' experiences, as people have an opportunity to play a role in their interpretation. Prior studies explore the deep emotional experience associated with literary tourism, since tourists feel a connection to the literary work associated with the site (Jiang & Yu 2019). Imagination also plays a role in literary

tourism (Macleod et al. 2018, Jiang & Yu 2019). This fits in with a social constructionist standpoint when looking at visitor experiences at literary destinations, because tourists interpret their own meaning of the destination.

People may travel to their favorite literary destination for many reasons. Macleod et al. (2018) found that literary pilgrims “are using travel to solidify their reading of favourite books” (p. 388). Additionally, Squire (1994) emphasizes consumer experience in relation to Beatrix Potter’s house (which is now a tourist destination). In this study, Squire (1994) explains how the author or book can be symbolically interpreted in other ways. Squire (1994) found that tourists visit Beatrix Potter’s home not only because she was the author of beloved children’s books, but because the destination symbolizes childhood, nostalgia, and heritage.

This study also addresses a concept cultivated by Brown (2015), debating how literature tourism pilgrims are different from regular tourists. Literary tourists who go on pilgrimages to visit literature destinations take part in a secular pilgrimage (Brown 2015). This experience is different from a regular tourist, who may simply be visiting Sleepy Hollow for reasons other than the association with literature.

Literary Heritage

Herbert (2001) explores the connection between visitor experience and literary heritage tourism, stating that awareness of the literature influences the satisfaction that a tourist receives from a destination, but simultaneously bringing up questions of authenticity of that destination. Authenticity is usually a concern with heritage tourism (Herbert 2001, Ivanovic 2014, Doganer & Dupont 2013). This brings into question how to assure authenticity at a literary heritage tourism site, since literature tourism destinations become a part of a place’s heritage and help to shape it (Fawcett & Cormack 2001, Squire 1994).

Some benefits of literary heritage tourism have also been explored in regard to destination marketing and branding, which literature-based tourism can create (Demir et al. 2021). Literary heritage tourism can be utilized as destination marketing after finding out what role literature plays in the place experience of the destination. While literature can be used for branding, another concept of importance is the successful development of literary canon at the destination (Yiannakis & Davies 2012). The lines between the “real” and “fictional” worlds become blurred as visitors find themselves immersed in the destination (Squire 1996). In this way, visitors’ expectations should be monitored and managed. There also exists concern from prior studies with sustainable tourism developments and limits to growth (Squire 1996, Ashworth 2000). This is a concern in many heritage tourism sites because of their finite nature.

Additionally, literary heritage tourism providers should encourage the co-creation of knowledge and discourage the passive tourist gaze often associated with mass general tourism (Kastenholz & Gronau 2020). In heritage tourism especially, tourism providers should enable construction of an experience with the tourist themselves contributing to their involvement. This type of engagement encourages creativity from the guest. Tourists who have read the associated literature prior to their visit to a literary heritage destination take part in the co-creation of an experience that began, not when they first arrive at the destination, but when they first picked up the literature.

Literary Tourism in America

There are many examples of literary tourism in the United States. Houses and haunts of authors are popular as tourist destinations because they can reveal more about a favorite author, providing insight into their interests through private literary spaces (Hazard 2016). Some examples include the Hemingway Home and Museum, which is the home of American Literary

legend, Ernest Hemingway (“The Hemingway Home & Museum” 2022). The museum was home to Hemingway and his wife from 1931 to 1939 (“The Hemingway Home & Museum” 2022). Tours are offered that engage and educate visitors about Hemingway’s connection to the home, his literature, and Key West in general (“The Hemingway Home & Museum” 2022). Another example of literary tourism in America is the Carl Sandburg home, a literary destination not only because of its famous prior inhabitant and namesake, but also because it was known to be a place where other notable authors of the time would visit (Seaman 2019). Additionally, there is tourism surrounding famous 19th century literary legends Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson who were neighbors in New England. Now, their homes and graves are sites for literary tourists to feel more connected with these authors (Ugc 2015). This is not an exhaustive list but provides examples that are similar to Irving’s connections to Sleepy Hollow and the surrounding areas of New York.

Literary Tourism and Washington Irving

Lowe (2017) stated that one cannot talk about the development of American literary tourism without mentioning Washington Irving. Irving was reportedly a literary tourist himself, making trips to literary destinations in Europe and England including Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace (Lowe 2017). Irving felt that visitors to literary destinations are seeking objects and locations linked directly to the author and/or the author’s works, claiming that there was a lack of this at Stratford-upon-Avon and relishing that Abbotsford (the home of Sir Walter Scott in Scotland) is a better execution of a literary destination (Lowe 2017). Irving observed that the ultimate thrill of a literary tourism destination was to be in the company of an author himself (Lowe 2017). Armed with this belief, Irving purchased Sunnyside in 1835 with the goal of making it the first American literary tourist attraction, using the draw of himself as the

resident celebrity author who would mingle with visitors (Lowe 2017). The website description of the 2020 “Home of the ‘Legend’” event mentions: “A special exhibit highlights how the Legend has lived in the imagination of popular culture through the centuries since its publication” (Historic Hudson Valley 2020). Although Irving has been passed on for many years, his direct and intentional impact on Sleepy Hollow, Sunnyside, and the surrounding areas translates into the deep roots of literary tourism that are experienced there to this day.

Dark Tourism

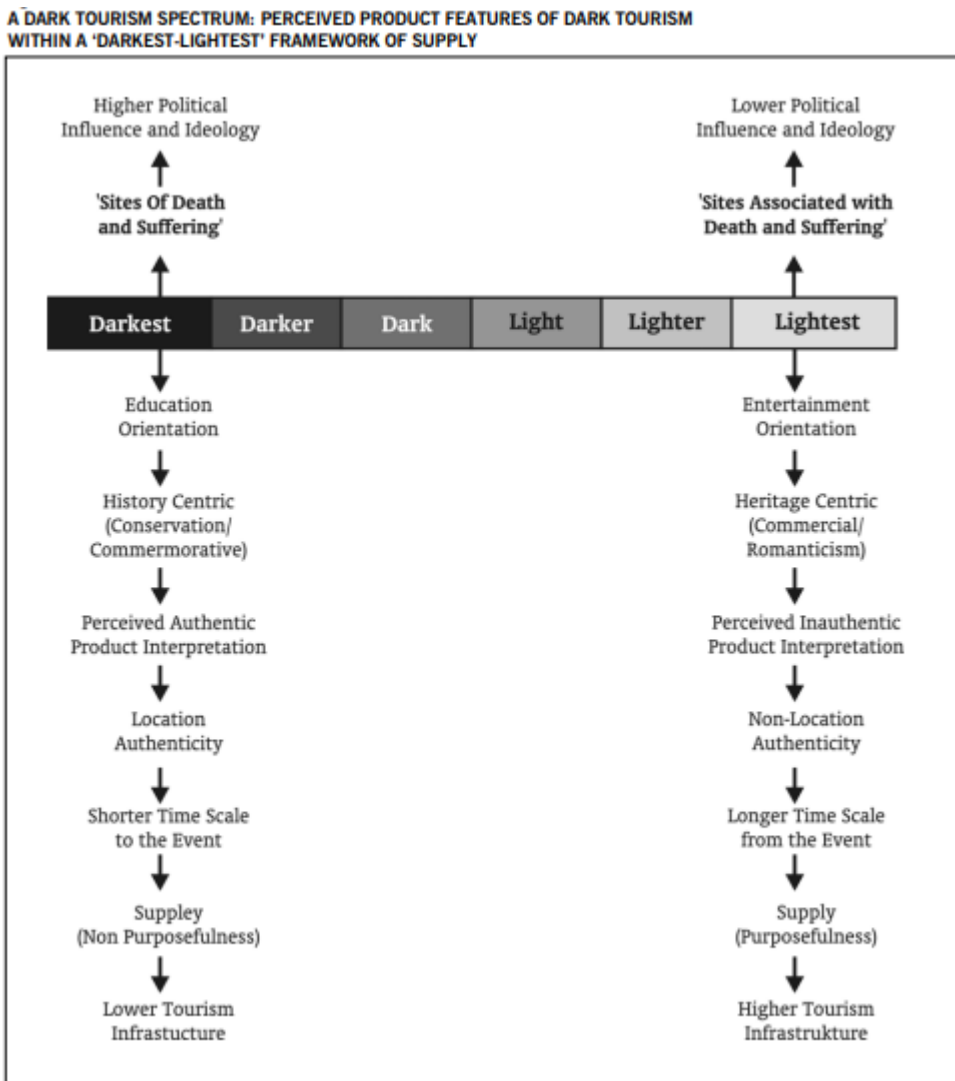


Fig. 2.1- Stone (2006) Dark Tourism Typology

Dark tourism has been making its way into the current cultural zeitgeist for over a decade (Stone 2006). Dark tourism is an umbrella term for any form of tourism related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy, or crime (Light 2017). Attractions revolving around death or the macabre have the tendency to draw in visitors with a morbid fascination (Stone 2006). There are certain levels, or “shades” of dark tourism, from lightest to darkest according to a typology created by Stone shown in figure 2.1 (2006). The lightest form of dark tourism exists primarily for entertainment, while the darkest form of dark tourism exists for mainly educational purposes (Stone 2006). Determining where a dark tourism destination falls in this typology of lightest to darkest can help tourism managers explore consumer demand, motivation, and experience (Stone 2006). In light of this typology, the entertainment-oriented Sleepy Hollow would fall furthest to the light side. However, it must be noted that the source material, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” itself, does not include a death. Dark tourism can also be associated with myth, legend, and folklore, even though the traditional definition of dark tourism (having to do with human suffering and death) does not always apply. Like the Headless Horseman, Dracula is a monstrous and macabre figure, but it must be considered to what extent dark tourism accepts death that has taken place in fiction (Light 2017). It has been argued that fictional death can be the basis for dark tourism experiences, while others have argued that providing this label to places of fictional death “stretches the concept beyond its limits” (Stone 2006; Light 2017 p. 8).

Dark tourism and legend tripping have overlaps that are worth mentioning. Although this study does not address legend tripping associated with Sleepy Hollow, this is a potential opportunity for future research. Legend tripping is an activity traditionally characterized by adolescent exploration surrounding folklore, legends, and the supernatural, for the purpose of testing the credibility of the legend and proving adolescent bravery (Ironside 2018). Local

legends have become commercialized as some towns have taken the opportunity to utilize their spooky associations or historical legends to occupy a unique market share (Ironside 2018). Entire cities have made it their identities in order to provide visitors with engagement in dark histories to be exciting, experiential and educational (Ironside 2018). Such is the case with Sleepy Hollow, who learns into their darker side in order to attract tourists.

The Netflix series *Narcos* increased in Colombia this study addresses how popular culture and tourism memorializes and commodifies dissonant heritage and violence (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Even though *Narcos* takes place in a dramatized landscape, the fiction is inspired by the violence-infused *Narcos* culture in the Colombia mediascape (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Shops in Colombia commonly sell t-shirts with the likeness of Pablo Escobar, regardless of his history of inciting violence (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Popular culture like this show have a tendency to romanticize certain elements of violence and create a draw for dark tourists who want to experience the place where real suffering has taken place from their perception of the fictional landscape.

Another example of dark tourism in popular culture and, specifically, literary tourism is celebrity cemetery tourism. It is not uncommon for the burial places of famous people to become attractions in their own right; for example, Elvis' home and burial place, Graceland (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Many iconic literary authors have public gravesites where fans of their work can visit (Brown 2016). The places associated with an author's death and burial can become a site for secular pilgrimages and have been used by tourism operators to promote destinations (Brown 2016). Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Luisa May Alcott are all buried in the same cemetery in Concord, MA, which attracts literary tourists who want to see the so-called "Author's Ridge" (Ugc 2015). In Sleepy Hollow, NY, the Sleepy

Hollow Cemetery is the burial ground of Washington Irving, making it another aspect of dark literary tourism that exists in the town.

Electronic Word of Mouth

Simply, eWOM is user-created data about a product or company, made available for the purpose of sharing experiences with other potential consumers via the internet (Cheng & Zhou 2010). More specifically, Jalilvand et al. (2011) describes it as follows: “Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”. eWOM is a modern way for opinions and experiences from one user to reach another quickly and efficiently. Some of the benefits of eWOM include its accessibility, ease of use, and anonymity (Cheung et al. 2008). eWOM also changes the way information travels from person to person, since it is able to move beyond the traditional boundaries of word of mouth, such as physical proximity (Jalilvand et al. 2011). Twitter and other forms of microblogging have become prevalent on the eWOM scene as channels for people to share their experiences and encourage others to try the same ones (Jansen et al. 2009). Current literature points to the rise of eWOM as the next powerful form of marketing.

With the development of the internet, companies increasingly rely on digitized communication for the success of their business. Using digital methods of communication and marketing can be very cost efficient, since eWOM is usually done on a voluntary basis and does not require an expensive marketing campaign (Jalilvand et al. 2011, Litvin et al. 2008). New technologies that introduce new forms of communication have served to empower producers and consumers- with eWOM, feedback can be more easily provided by the consumer as well as easier to access by the producer (Jalilvand et al. 2011). eWOM can take place between people

across the world who have never met in real life, yet their opinions are trusted by others when making purchase decisions (Jalilvand et al. 2011). In this way, eWOM is a very interpersonal form of communication. Additionally, eWOM has many advantages over traditional WOM, such as information spreading faster and further (Jalilvand et al. 2011).

Electronic Media in Tourism

The emergence of electronic media and its growth in the 21st century has played a role in tourism. Practically, the use of the internet by hotels and other offerings creating an online booking system has played a role in the accessibility of tourism (Leung et al. 2013). Search engines such as Google have also impacted the tourism industry by making experiences easier to find and research (Leung et al. 2013). Products and prices can be easily compared online when researching a tourism service (Wynne et al. 2001). The use of the internet helps word to travel faster and makes it easier for guests to share photos, videos, and other information about their trips. Social media, specifically, has changed the way that people communicate and can influence decision making in travel (Manap & Adzharudin 2013). Content on social media is referred to as User-Generated Content (UGC), which is content created by one user of the platform for the purpose of consumption by other users (Manap & Adzharudin 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). It has been observed that tourism and hospitality companies can utilize social media to engage potential customers, leading to more bookings and greater revenues (Leung et al. 2013). Social media is also useful in retaining customers and maintaining brand loyalty to the product by keeping it in the tourists' mind even after they have returned home, increasing their exposure and potential to book a return trip (Leung et al. 2013).

Social media marketing allows for the move from passive consumption to active, promoting interactions with marketing content such as photos, videos, or blog posts (Manap &

Adzharudin 2013). UGC on social media, as well as review sites, plays a role in consumer decision-making (Litvin et al. 2008). Social media can be used by tourists to search, organize, and share their experiences (Leung et al. 2013). Some examples of how the internet can be used to share information about tourism experiences are through blogs, microblogs, online communities, media or knowledge sharing sites, or review/opinion sites (Leung et al. 2013). It is through these that UGC can become a form of eWOM marketing. eWOM marketing can play a role in the decision-making process for potential tourists to a destination (Loncaric et al. 2016). eWOM lends itself well to the tourism industry because of the intangibility of the product. Often, hearing what other people say about their travels, or reading about them on social media and review sites, is the best way to understand the experience before booking your own travels. Through online reviews, eWOM is the mediator between the destination and future tourists, establishing trust and the positive expectations using social media (Kakirala & Singh 2020).

Electronic Word of Mouth in Marketing

eWOM has been studied extensively in the past regarding marketing and consumer motivations. eWOM has become recognized as one of the most influential methods of information transmission in recent years (Jalilvand et al. 2011). eWOM emerged from the need to measure customer-generated media alongside more traditional marketing (Dwyer 2007). The internet, which is the typical vessel for eWOM, has been shown to be the new preferred source for consumers to learn about products and experiences before they make their purchase decisions (Huete-Alcocer 2017). One of the benefits of eWOM is that it is not confined to the limited social contact boundaries that traditional word of mouth is (Jalilvand et al. 2011). Jalilvand et al. (2011) explores the benefits of utilizing new technologies, such as the (then emerging) social networking sites, to facilitate eWOM. The study also affirms that eWOM on digital sites can

play a major role in consumer purchase decisions (Jalilvand et al. 2011). This study also explores a tendency for consumers to imitate one another into following certain social patterns when it comes to purchase decisions (Jalilvand et al. 2011). In this way, even the clothes that are worn in a post could be considered a form of eWOM.

eWOM has been found to influence perceived value of products, brand loyalty, and product acceptance (Jalilvand et al. 2011). Personal conversations and informal exchanges have been shown to influence purchase decisions, and this applies to eWOM as well as traditional WOM (Jalilvand et al. 2011). The power of eWOM is also explored through how it shapes consumer expectations, attitudes towards the product or service, and how the consumer may feel about the product or service after the experience (Jalilvand et al. 2011).

The impact of eWOM has also been studied specifically in the context of social media, such as Twitter and opinion sites. Web-based technologies, such as those which encourage consumers to leave reviews and rate a product or experience, impact online retailers as the information provided by their customers becomes more easily accessible to not only the company but also the public (Cheung et al. 2008). Studies have demonstrated that eWOM on social media can be utilized as a profitable and efficient way to promote a business or product through online communication (Cheung et al. 2008, Litvin et al. 2008).

One article specifically mentions Twitter as a catalyst for being able to microblog consumer opinions (Jansen et al. 2009). The study finds that Twitter is an effective way for eWOM to be spread and companies to promote their goods and services, as well as monitor feedback from customers (Jansen et al. 2009). In addition to Twitter, other opinion sites have been explored in the context of eWOM. A study was also conducted using Opinions.com to assess the motivations of consumers in utilizing such sites for eWOM purposes (Hennig-Thurau

et al. 2004). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2003) uses an empirical study of online communication behaviors to show that eWOM for a good or service does impact consumer behavior. The study develops a typology which finds the prevalent motivations for using eWOM to be related to desire for social interaction, concern for other consumers, and economic incentives (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). In addition, eWOM from consumer to consumer has been shown to impact the success of the goods and services that a company is trying to sell (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2003).

Electronic Word of Mouth in Hospitality and Tourism

eWOM has also been studied prevalently in hospitality and tourism marketing. eWOM has become popular among tourists who want to explore aspects of a destination before and during their visit, while also giving them access to post about their own experiences after their visit has concluded (Seaman 2019). One study shows that eWOM and interpersonal influence overlap when it comes to consumers making purchase decisions partially because intangible products, such as travel experiences, can be difficult to fully evaluate prior to their consumption (Litvin et al. 2008). Because of the intangible nature of these products, eWOM is one of the best ways to know if the experience is going to be the right fit for the potential consumer (Litvin et al. 2008). Therefore, eWOM becomes an effective and cost-efficient way of marketing hospitality and tourism to potential visitors (Litvin et al. 2008).

Litvin et al. (2018) takes a retroactive look at eWOM compared to their initial findings in 2008, concluding that eWOM has remained a major influence on the hospitality and tourism industry and continues to play an essential role in tourism marketing. The study cites successful digital media campaigns used by hospitality and tourism businesses that have been strategically implemented to raise eWOM for a destination (Litvin et al. 2018). Another study utilizes Twitter

to determine to what extent eWOM from social media impacts tourists' decision-making (Sotiriadis & Van Zyl 2013). The study determines that social media is a new marketing channel that can and should be utilized in communications marketing of tourism services (Sotiriadis & Van Zyl 2013). Additionally, Chen & Law (2016) discuss how social media and eWOM makes customer feedback available at unprecedented speeds and numbers, as well as how positive reviews are essentially free advertising for the company.

Some distinctive characteristics of eWOM in regard to tourism are channel-variety, presentation of contents, opportunities for information solicitation, and motivations for disclosure (Tham et al. 2013). In addition to naming these characteristics, this study considers opportunities for past visitors to narrate memorable experiences, industry partners to build destination images on social media, and destinations to promote greater engagement with social media (Tham et al. 2013). Finally, Loncaric et al. (2016) highlights the importance of eWOM in the travel decision making process. Empirical research from this study shows that, for tourism providers, eWOM can provide an objective evaluation of services at little to no cost to the company, which then has the potential to reach more potential consumers than more traditional forms of marketing (Loncaric et al. 2016).

eWOM is an increasingly prevalent way for consumers to share their opinions via digital platforms, as well as gain insight into what others have thought about the same experiences. eWOM can help businesses by providing a cost-efficient and easy marketing strategy, helping gain insight into what their customers like about their products or services, and how to improve based upon these massive amounts of opinions available online. eWOM helps consumers by allowing them to evaluate a product or service based on other opinions before they make a purchase, as well as making it easy after a purchase or experience to share their opinions with

others. eWOM is a wonderful strategy for tourism services as well because of the inherent intangibility of the product of travel.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to understand if tourists are making connections to popular culture in Sleepy Hollow, including the original short story as well as its many adaptations, and if so, to which adaptations are they making connections. The researcher has accomplished this purpose by evaluating eWOM from five attractions at the destination on the review sites TripAdvisor and Yelp. As these review sites are free to access, no budget was required for this research project. The schedule consisted of twelve continuous days of data collection, from April 6, 2022, to April 18, 2022, during which the researcher collected 291 reviews. The 291 reviews were posted between May 2016 to January 2022. The research questions are:

Q1: Are tourists making connections between the town of Sleepy Hollow and the popular culture associated with it?

Q1a: Which forms of popular culture play the biggest role in attracting tourists, as observed through eWOM?

Epistemological and Theoretical Framework

Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study because research seeking to make observations of phenomena as they occur naturally is well-suited to observations that are not easily reduced to numbers (Babbie 2017). Social constructionism was chosen for this study because experiencing popular culture at a tourism destination is a constructed, subjective experience. Any guest's visit is subjective based on lived experiences up to that point, such as having consumed the associated popular culture prior to visiting its associated tourism destination. Social constructionism allowed the researcher to identify how the tourist constructs meaning out of their experiences. Burr (2015) states in "Social Constructionism" that our

knowledge of the world, including that of humans, is the product of human thought and is ultimately not observable or provable. Crotty (1998) also explains that a key tenet of constructionism is that it is not objective. In relation to the current study, there is not one single objective way to experience a literary attraction. It is for this reason that popular culture destinations cultivate positive experiences- each guest acquires something different out of the experience. Social constructionism subscribes to knowledge being constructed, not discovered, by those who seek it, and that all meaning is socially constructed (Burr 2015). This idea fits well with guest experiences, especially in popular culture destinations where the attractions are not naturally occurring but rather constructed based on the associated media. This concept is especially important within popular culture tourism, where the participant may have a strong connection to the destination and motivation to visit, having experienced the popular culture separately and wanting to experience it first-hand. Social constructionism can be useful when interpreting online reviews from tourists because destinations are always interpreted differently depending on each tourist.

Methodology

A process of comparison was used to review the data collected from eWOM channels, comparing the reviews and comments to seek patterns in what tourists found meaningful in their experiences (Caton & Santos 2007). The analysis of eWOM provided in-depth insight into connections visitors are making. The application of eWOM was developed based on Seaman (2019), which was a study done on The Carl Sandburg Home. The study consisted of gaining insight into whether people enjoyed the destination, did not enjoy it, or felt indifferent to it, also exploring the role the associated literature played in visitors' enjoyment or lack thereof (Seaman 2019).

The data gathered from TripAdvisor and Yelp was categorized and coded to reveal the connections visitors are making to popular culture in Sleepy Hollow. This was done by open coding the comments from the aforementioned opinion sites, constructing the researcher's first impression of the qualitative data (Brown et al. 2002). The data collected was sorted into digital piles, and then labeled accordingly (Brown et al. 2002). Each label became a category and, as themes emerge, the categories were combined into themes. The categories were then studied to find patterns in visitor responses. By sorting the reviews into categories, then combining those to make broader themes, patterns emerged to present what popular culture tourists are making connections to in Sleepy Hollow.

Method

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

New communication technologies, such as social media, opinion platforms, and review sites, expose a previously inaccessible perspective into connections that visitors are making at tourism destinations. These technologies can be used when planning a trip, while on the trip to make the most out of the experience, and after a trip when the visitors can share their opinions about it with others. eWOM is user-created data about a product or company, made available for the purpose of sharing experiences with other potential consumers via the internet (Cheng & Zhou 2010). eWOM has become popular among tourists and as a result has been used in the study of hospitality and tourism.

eWOM has been used previously by Seaman (2019) in a study of the Carl Sandburg Home, a literary tourism destination located in North Carolina. Reviews of the home were collected from TripAdvisor in order to explore the connections between visitor attitudes towards the destination and their travel intention (Seaman 2019). Seaman (2019) noted that eWOM is

user generated with little to no reward for posting. It is a way for researchers to collect from a large cache of relevant, pre-existing data, and offers a presumably unbiased view into tourists' opinions on a destination (Seaman 2019).

eWOM is a cost-efficient and convenient way for researchers and tourism operators to gain insights into what tourists think about their products or services, and how to improve based upon these opinions. The use of eWOM as a method for studying tourism is a wonderful strategy because of the inherent intangibility of the product of travel.

Data Collection

This study utilized eWOM to observe connections tourists make to the popular culture at a destination such as Sleepy Hollow, which has many popular culture associations. This was done by evaluating the destination via eWOM channels and organizing comments and reviews using open coding. The digital nature of this method is useful in that the researcher can gather primary data from anywhere in the world from a massive, pre-existing cache of visitor opinions.

Twelve days of continuous data collection took place, starting on April 6, 2022 and finishing April 18 2022. Reviews were selected based on availability, timeframe, and saturation. There are 291 reviews available during the timeframe that has been selected across all six attractions in Sleepy Hollow. The timeframe over which the 291 reviews were posted by users was between May 2016 to January 2022. This timeframe was selected because it successfully encompasses a timeframe that is closer to the relevancy of some of the popular culture (such as the Sleepy Hollow Fox television series that concluded in 2017) but also gives a more general idea of how the popular culture is noticed on average. Having reviews across the six attractions selected that range over a six year time span allows the researcher to make observations that may not be present in the span of one year. There are no qualifications for reviews being included in

the data collection that are in the allotted time frame. All reviews specified within the timeline were collected, transcribed, and placed into an excel sheet in order, without skipping around or displaying bias towards any reviews.

The reviews were scraped manually, first copying the reviews into a word document including the date of the review, reviewer name or username, title of review (when applicable), and entire review. Then, after all 291 reviews were copied into the word document, the reviewer created an excel spreadsheet. The categories identified were listed across the top of the excel sheet in their own cells. The review titles were listed down the left side of the excel sheet. If a title of the review was not provided on the original review site, the name or username of the reviewer was used in its place. From there, the reviews were manually open-coded, with connections to popular culture being identified. When the connections to each category were identified in the review, a “1” was placed in the corresponding cell to designate a mention of that category. After each review was coded, the corresponding row in excel had a “1” for each category for which it applied. The categories were then placed into themes in order to understand what popular culture connections are noticed in visitors’ experiences.

In the case of this study, four attractions’ reviews collected until saturation, and two attractions reviews are being collected completely based on their limited availability. The digital platform from which reviews or comments were collected was up to the richness of data available. If the destination is small and does not have social media pages, a combination of reviews from opinion sites may be necessary. In the case of Sleepy Hollow, it was not necessary to collect data from social media accounts, as a rich supply of data is available via TripAdvisor and Yelp. When choosing the digital platform from which to collect data, it is imperative to assure the relevancy of the reviews. For example, if Facebook only provides irrelevant comments

from people who have never visited the destination, seek data elsewhere. Reviews and comments were collected and initially assessed without expectations. After the data pool was identified and assessed with no expectations, the reviews and comments were open-coded. This included conducting a close reading of the comments and reviews for any mentions of what a visitor may have liked or disliked at a destination. From there, categories were created based on what visitors mention, such as Washington Irving, the Headless Horseman, the original short story, or other associations with popular culture. Specific categories were merged together into broader themes to determine underlying contributors.

In the initial round of open coding, mentions of one icon of popular culture were compiled with reviews also mentioning that connection. Then, those labels were combined with other reviews mentioning other popular culture connections of the same category, such as all mentioning Irving, or all mentioning the Headless Horseman. Finally, these labels were all combined into broader themes, which were then used to determine which factors lead to the most reviews for popular culture connections. Some reviews mentioned multiple connections, which needed to be double coded and placed into multiple categories accordingly. The manual coding was done in an excel spreadsheet, with review titles in the far-left column and categories in the top row. The researcher recorded on the spreadsheet each time a category applied to a review. At the end, the researcher had a spreadsheet with marks that correspond to the relevant category (or categories) for each review. The categories that were identified were then used to determine with which popular culture elements of the destinations visitors are making associations.

The results of collecting eWOM data and open coding these comments and reviews to flesh out dominant interpretations resulted in a better understanding of visitors' perceptions of popular culture at Sleepy Hollow. This can then be used to determine motivation for visitation

and future opportunities for marketing. Collecting eWOM data is appropriate for this study because it is a readily available collection of primary data, providing valuable user opinions that can and should be used to improve a destination.

Analysis

Data was collected from six attractions in Sleepy Hollow, NY, from the review sites TripAdvisor and Yelp. The location of Sleepy Hollow was selected based on the criteria that it is a literary tourism destination with many popular culture affiliations, including literature, film, and television, with which visitors could be making connections. TripAdvisor and Yelp were selected for data collection because they are widely recognized and trusted as review sites. As of January of 2022, TripAdvisor had 490 million monthly active users (Galov 2022), and as of March 2022 Yelp has 178 million monthly active users (Marinova 2022). TripAdvisor has a larger user-base and is commonly used in tourism, therefore it was the default site. Yelp was used as a secondary option only if a TripAdvisor page is unavailable for a given attraction. TripAdvisor only requires guests to put the month and year of their trips, so exact dates were not available for TripAdvisor reviews. Yelp uses exact dates for their reviews, so exact dates were provided when Yelp is used for data collection.

As gathering reviews of the town as a whole would be restrictive and not provide adequate data, six attractions in the village have been selected. For four out of the six attractions, a maximum of 70 reviews were collected. This limit has been set because the date range begins with the most recent reviews, and goes back to the most recent 70 reviews. 70 is an adequate number of reviews to reach saturation based on a similar study done by Seaman on the Carl Sandburg home in North Carolina (2019). The remaining two attractions did not have 70 reviews

available, so all the reviews available were collected. A total of 291 reviews were collected from the following six attractions:

Places:

- Sleepy Hollow Cemetery
 - The Sleeping Hollow Cemetery is the cemetery for the town and the resting place of Washington Irving himself. It is open to the public during visiting hours and guided walking tours are also available. It is a non-denominational resting place consisting of about 90-acres of land (Logan 2021). Since the Sleepy Hollow cemetery is the burial place of the author of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”, it is a literary tourism destination and a prime place for literary tourists to connect to the story. Tours are also conducted in the cemetery, so it is an attraction that encourages tourists to visit and explore rather than trying to keep the general public away. Reviews were collected from this attraction’s Tripadvisor page, from August of 2019 to January 2022, for a total of 70 reviews.
- Old Dutch Church
 - The Old Dutch church was founded around 1685 and appears in Washington Irving’s short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (“Old Dutch Church” 2022). Since the Old Dutch Church is directly mentioned in Irving’s original short story, this location is prime for literary tourism. It is also in close proximity to the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Tripadvisor reviews were collected from September of 2016 to November 2021 for a total of 70 reviews.
- Sunnyside

- Washington Irving's Sunnyside is the author's own estate located south of Sleepy Hollow on the Hudson River. Tours are provided of the estate which focus on sharing stories with visitors about Irving's life and literary works (*Washington Irving's Sunnyside* 2021). Sunnyside was chosen for its literary tourism connection of being iconic American author Washington Irving's home. Like the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery where Irving is buried, Sunnyside has the potential to attract literary tourists and those on literary pilgrimages. Reviews were collected from Tripadvisor ranging from May 2016 to October 2021 for a total of 70 reviews.

Festivals:

- The Great Jack O' Lantern Blaze
 - The Great Jack O' Lantern Blaze is a festival in Sleepy Hollow that runs on select dates from September-November, annually. The town provides an 18th century backdrop for more than 7,000 jack o' lanterns, designed and carved on site. The lanterns are illuminated and synchronized with lighting and a soundtrack ("The Great Jack O'Lantern Blaze" 2022). The attraction was chosen in order to widen the range of attractions that are being looked at in this study, as it is a festival rather than a stationary place or object. The festival is widely advertised on Sleepy Hollow's CVB website. This attraction does not have an inherent connection to literary tourism, unless an artist chooses to render depictions from the Legend of Sleepy Hollow story on their pumpkins, but it brings in many tourists during the fall season. While other attractions on this list have obvious connections to literature or popular culture, the festival is mainly connected to

popular culture through physical proximity to Sleepy Hollow. As of March 2022, there is no TripAdvisor for this attraction, therefore Yelp was used to collect data. Comments were collected from October 17, 2018 to November 13, 2021, for a total of 70 reviews. It should also be noted that this is a seasonal offering in the fall, therefore the existent reviews occur mainly during the fall season, unlike other attractions which may experience reviews year round.

Monuments or Landmarks:

- The Headless Horseman Bridge
 - Although the bridge which Ichabod Crane is chased over by the Headless Horseman in Irving's story doesn't exist in the real Sleepy Hollow, the Headless Horseman Bridge serves as a stand-in for visitors. The Headless Horseman Bridge is actually the cemetery bridge and lives just inside the cemetery's south gate. It is perfect for photo opportunities and many visitors cite the connection to literature as a reason for visitation ("Headless horseman bridge" 2021). This location was chosen because of its literary affiliations with the original short story by Washington Irving. Reviews were collected from TripAdvisor from September 2020 to October 2020 for a total of three reviews. At the time of the research collection, these are the only reviews that exist for this attraction.
- Headless Horseman Sculpture
 - The Headless Horseman Sculpture is an 18-foot tall art piece depicting Ichabod Crane being pursued by the Headless Horseman. Created by local artist Linda Pearlmuter out of 11 tons of steel, the statue was unveiled on Halloween day, 2006 ("Headless Horseman Sculpture" 2022). This attraction was chosen because,

similar to the Headless Horseman Bridge, it is a standalone attraction that is basically a photo opportunity. It is directly associated with “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” story, and it is therefore easy for guests to make connections to the popular culture of the town. Since there is no TripAdvisor for this attraction, Yelp reviews from October 9, 2020 to June 12, 2017 for a total of eight reviews. At the time of writing, these are the only reviews that exist for the attraction.

Initial data analysis occurred during the translation and transcription process through manual open coding. A list of topics was kept in order to form clusters of the same meaning and, from those clusters, themes. These themes presented the connections guests are making on their trips to Sleepy Hollow. These themes consisted of comments which show what visitors notice during their visit to the selected six attractions, and it was noted what connections are being made in reference to popular culture (RQ1). From there, it was observed which popular culture tourists are making connections to, and if they are making a general connection or referencing a specific representation of Sleepy Hollow in media (RQ2). Thematic analysis was utilized because it is appropriate for categorizing participant’s views, opinions, and experiences (Nowell et al. 2017). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to find patterns in responses, as well as identify broader themes in the reviews. Themes can be examined to determine perceptions and motivations.

Addressing Validity and Reliability

Reviews were coded the same as they are collected in order to ensure reliability and not cause confusion. Potentially confounding variables were considered, such as another event in the area bringing in more tourists as opposed to the popular culture and literary aspects of the destination. To ensure reliability and validity, Seaman (2019) participated in memoing and

reflexivity. Through memoing, findings and conclusions were written as they are found throughout the analysis, which helps confirm validity. Reflexivity must be used to examine one's own beliefs about the literary tourism destination. As a researcher studying something they feel strongly about, they must acknowledge that not every tourist is as excited about the literature associated with the destination. Keeping any personal bias towards the literature out of the data collection helps ensure reliability and validity.

Self-Reflexivity Statement

I am approaching this study from a perspective based on lived experiences as a white, female, heterosexual person born in the United States. My identity influences my perception and interpretation, even when I may not realize it consciously. I am also approaching this as a literary and popular culture tourism myself, as I love destinations with these associations and seek them out more than the average tourist. I feel connected to Sleepy Hollow because I have an affinity for and fascination with spooky places and tend to seek out attractions like ghost tours in every city I visit. I am approaching this study of Sleepy Hollow as an outsider to the town. Based on my research, there seems to be much pride from locals about their history and famous associations with Irving and his stories. As someone who has never lived in the area, there are likely nuances I will not pick up on with a study like this

For Sleepy Hollow specifically, I am a fan of the short story and think it is beautiful writing with a strong message cautioning against greed. I am a fan of the Headless Horseman as a popular culture icon, and as a representation of Halloween and "Spooky Season". Through studying Irving's life, his writing, and the area where he chose to purchase his estate, I understand some of his perspective. There is an autobiographical nature to the character Ichabod Crane, who had a similar career trajectory as Irving himself. This understanding of the short

story and its author provides some context for the study site. However, it is worth pointing out that although the main popular culture association is the short story, it has been adapted so many times and the story/its characters have become ubiquitous in the popular culture, meaning that it is nearly impossible to have contextual understanding of every popular culture association that a visitor could be making with the study site.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

This section details findings based on data collection that took place beginning April 6, 2022 and finishing April 18 2022, which consisted of 291 reviews across six attractions in Sleepy Hollow. The breakdown of number of reviews and date ranges across each of the six attractions are listed below:

- Sleepy Hollow Cemetery: 70 reviews collected from this attraction's Tripadvisor page, with a date range of August of 2019 to January 2022.
- Old Dutch Church: 70 reviews collected from this attraction's TripAdvisor page, with a date range of September of 2016 to November 2021.
- Sunnyside: 70 reviews collected from this attraction's Tripadvisor page, with a date range of May 2016 to October 2021.
- The Great Jack O' Lantern Blaze: 70 reviews collected from this attraction's Yelp page, with a date range of October 17, 2018 to November 13, 2021.
- The Headless Horseman Bridge: Three reviews collected from this attraction's TripAdvisor page, with a date range of September 2020 to October 2020.
- Headless Horseman Sculpture: Eight reviews collected from this attraction's Yelp page, with a date range of June 12, 2017 to October 9, 2020.

The findings are laid out and discussed in this chapter in the following way: first, the six attractions selected are evaluated together as a whole, and then individually in order to flesh out what connections to popular culture were made by reviewers. Then, there will be an overall discussion of the themes that emerged during the open coding process, with the themes being

introduced and then discussed. These themes will be used later in the conclusion to address the research question and sub question, as well as justifying the purpose of the study.

A total of 291 reviews were collected across the six attractions and open coded, revealing the following 14 categories: Washington Irving, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Headless Horseman, Fall/October, Knickerbocker, Halloween, Historic, Rip Van Winkle, Ichabod Crane, Folklore, Spooky, Book/Literature, Disney, and Authenticity. These categories were chosen in order to assist in answering the research question and sub question. Of the 14 categories, eight of them (“Washington Irving”, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”, “Headless Horseman”, “Knickerbocker”, “Rip Van Winkle”, “Ichabod Crane”, “Book/Literature”, and “Disney”) are directly linked to the research questions. These categories represent mentions of popular culture and specify the popular culture that is being referenced. The category “Folklore” is somewhat linked, as the folklore referenced in the town often refers to the folklore of the headless horseman and his tale. The categories of “Historic” and “Authenticity” are relevant to this study because, in the context of the reviews, the historic and authentic references being made involve Irving or the village. The final three categories, “Fall/October”, “Spooky”, and “Halloween”, are all indirectly linked to the short story. These categories reference the general gothic implications of the short story and how that theme has been carried over into the village. While the first eight categories have obvious links to popular culture, it was also necessary in this study to record observances of the latter six categories because of their indirect references to The Legend story. The distribution of mentions of each of these categories among all the reviews can be viewed in figure 4.1.

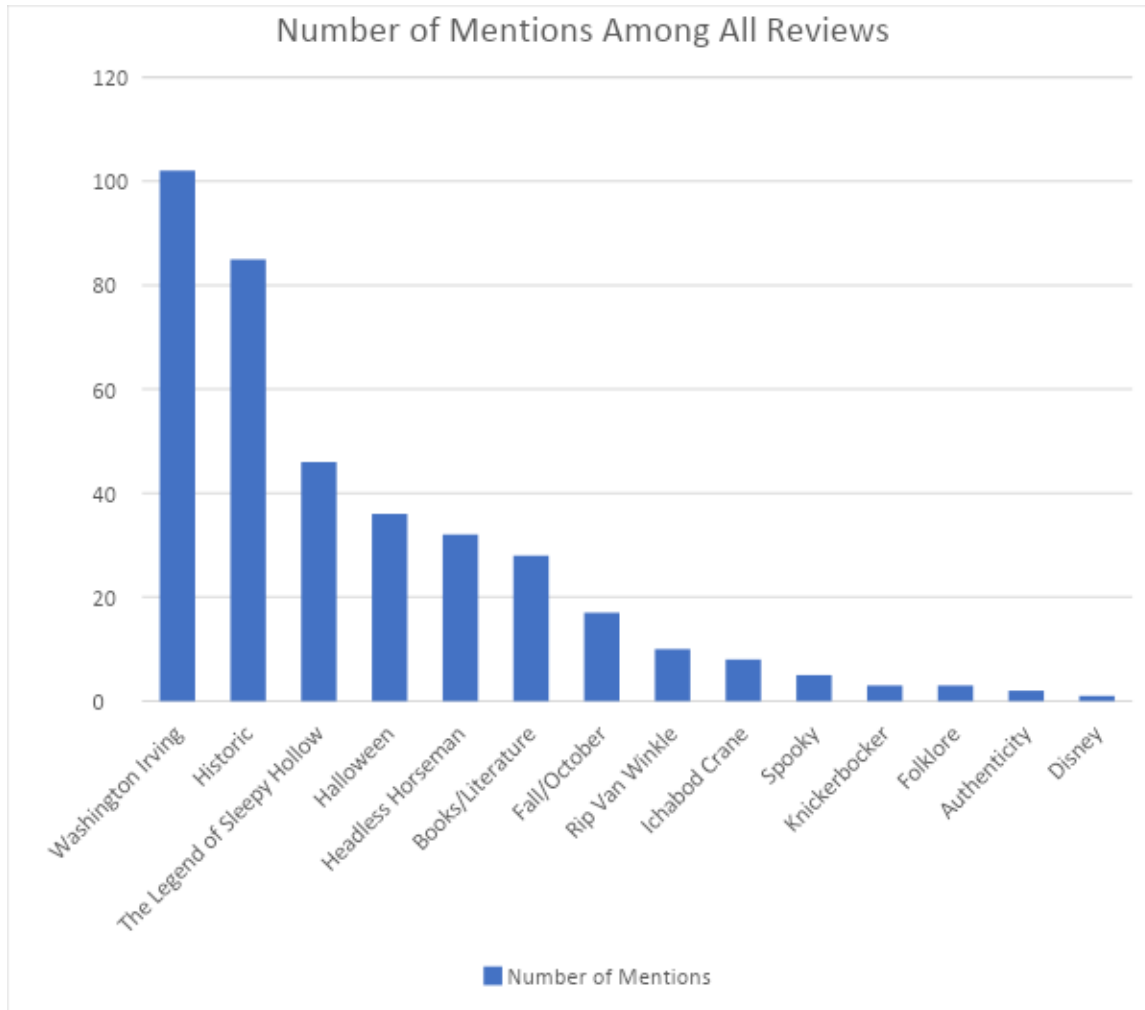


Fig. 4.1- Graph of 14 Categories Identified in Data Collection

From these categories there emerged three overarching themes: Halloween, history, and literature. Of the three themes, literature has the most direct connection with popular culture. The theme of literature was derived from all the categories that specifically mention a place or person directly associated with the literature, such as Washington Irving (the author) or Ichabod Crane (main character). Halloween tangentially is connected to the popular culture in Sleepy Hollow. The original short story, as well as its adaptations, all center around a gothic and/or spooky theme. The categories that contributed to this category included mentioned of the Halloween itself, as well as fall and October. The idea that people want to visit in the season surrounding fall

contributes to the idea that Sleepy Hollow is a destination based upon Halloween popular culture. The final category, history, contributes to the research by providing the historical context for people to make connections. Many of the reviews that contributed to the historical categories came from mentions of Washington Irving's home and the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Although Washington Irving is heavily contributed to the popular culture connections of the town, he was also a notable historical figure and prolific author of the time. Irving's life and works are interwoven throughout the culture of Sleepy Hollow, making the history of the town inseparable from its popular culture connections. These three categories will be discussed in greater length throughout this chapter, with examples of reviews provided in each attraction.

Some connections made to these themes were overt, such as reviews specifically mentioning visiting during the Halloween season. Some categories can be placed into multiple themes: for example, "Washington Irving", the most mentioned category observed throughout all the reviews, can contribute to both the themes of "History" and "Literature". Washington Irving was a literary icon often associated with his written works, but he is also a significant historical figure in the infant years of America.

Theme 1: Halloween

One of the themes identified in the reviews is the Halloween atmosphere associated with Sleepy Hollow. There were specific mentions of Halloween as well as subtle mentions of Halloween atmosphere such as the mention of "spooky" in many reviews. The Headless Horseman is another multi-faceted category, as mentions of the Headless Horseman can either contribute to the original literature or his other popular culture associations, or mentions of the character can be a more general reference to Halloween culture. The Headless Horseman is a Halloween icon/symbol and, taken out of context of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" story, the

Headless Horseman is still recognizable as a “spooky” figure along with the likes of Frankenstein and Dracula. Many reviews mentioned coming to Sleepy Hollow around Halloween, some stating that this is an annual trip every October for their families, others suggesting to other potential tourists that fall is the best time to come. While the Halloween theme may not have a direct focus on popular culture, it is still connected as Sleepy Hollow would not be a Halloween destination without the influence of its popular culture associations.

Theme 2: History

Many of the historical connections made in the town revolved around Irving himself. These connections are due to the fact that Irving has deep roots in this area of the Northeast. It is his place of burial and also the location of his estate, both of which are open for tourists. The study found that many people do make connections to Irving as a historical figure, some of whom were aware of these connections before visiting and sought out this destination specifically because of them. Some reviews indicated that Irving and the original literature are intertwined to the point of being inseparable, but many reviews mentioned only Irving and not his works directly.

Theme 3: Literature

Across all six attractions, the original literature had many connections, specifically at attractions that made explicit connections such as the Old Dutch Church hosting dramatic retellings of the story, and the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery tour talking about Irving and his original story. There is also a connection in Sunnyside where they sell copies of Irving’s works that some reviewers mentioned purchasing upon visiting this attraction.

Subthemes:

- i) Connection to original literature indirectly through Irving: There are many connections made to Washington Irving that have overlap with connections to the original story.
- ii) Influencing purchase decisions: Guests choosing to purchase copies of Washington Irving's literary works at the Sunnyside gift shop as a result of learning more about him.

Locations

Sleepy Hollow Cemetery:

The first attraction to be discussed is the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Reviews were collected from this attraction's TripAdvisor page, from August of 2019 to January 2022, for a total of 70 reviews. The graph in figure 4.2 displays mentions from the 14 categories from reviews collected.

The most mentioned category at this location was "Washington Irving", with 21 reviews mentioning the author. This can potentially be attributed to the tour that is given there titled "The Original Knickerbocker" (Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, 2022), which focuses on Irving, his life and literary works. One reviewer said after their tour: "My group of four took a tour of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery on October 31, 2021 at 11:30 a.m. It was 'The Original Knickerbocker: Washington Irving & The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' tour. We thoroughly enjoyed our tour and our amusing tour guide, who has a wealth of knowledge about the cemetery. Beautiful grounds that you are free to roam after the tour" (sheiladoherty 2021, p.1). This person found the connection with Irving and admired the knowledgeability of the tour guide.

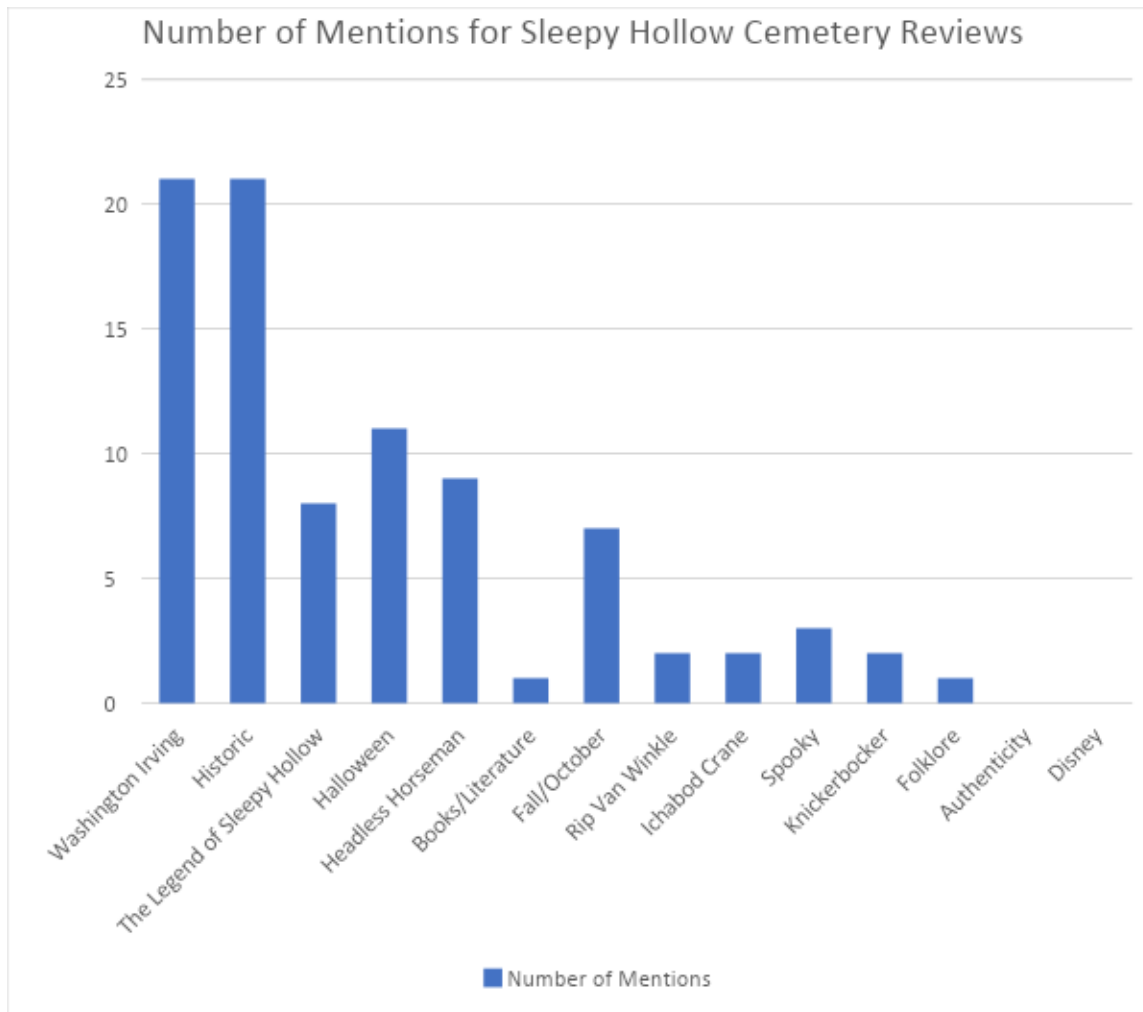


Fig. 4.2- Graph of frequencies of mentions of each category from the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery

The category of “Halloween” also made an impression with 11 mentions in reviews. It seems from some reviews, like this example, that the cemetery is a popular Halloween attraction annually: “This place is normally PACKED during Oct due to Halloween season. We come every year ” (Hgtravl 2020, p.3) . This review confirms that some families do make Sleepy Hollow an annual trip, and the fact that it is usually packed solidifies Sleepy Hollow as an atmospheric Halloween destination. While this may not seem to have direct connections with popular culture, it must be explored why this destination is a Halloween destination, specifically, if not for the popular culture connections. For example, this reviewer states: “Everything was

fun, maybe it's because my kids watched 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' a million times, and the weather was gorgeous. We saw Washington Irving's grave, bought souvenirs at a big canvas tent" (Steveage 2020, p.3). This review makes a direct connection to one of the adaptations of The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, though it is not explicitly stated which one in the review. The reviewer also made a connection to Washington Irving, understanding the significance of seeing his grave in connection with the adaptation he previously mentioned.

Some reviews also mentioned expectations, which included the expectation of making connections to popular culture before arrival: "We did expect to see names from Washington Irving's story, and that was well-rewarded from the start. The cemetery itself lends a nice backdrop to the story, which I'll never forget. We made the trek to the Horseman's bridge (not original) and were surprised to see it was so different from what was in our imaginations. The church on grounds was extraordinarily beautiful. I also really like the balance of referencing the story, but not overly capitalizing on it - if that makes sense. Highly recommend a visit" (AnnTravelsALot 2021, p.1). This reviewer was previously familiar with the story and had expectations about it going into it. These examples and quotes show how reviews of the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery make direct connections to popular culture, and solidify the themes that have emerged in this study.

The Old Dutch Church:

The Old Dutch Church was the next attraction to be evaluated in this study. Tripadvisor reviews were collected from November 2021 to September of 2016 for a total of 70 reviews. The graph in figure 4.3 displays mentions from the 14 categories from reviews collected.

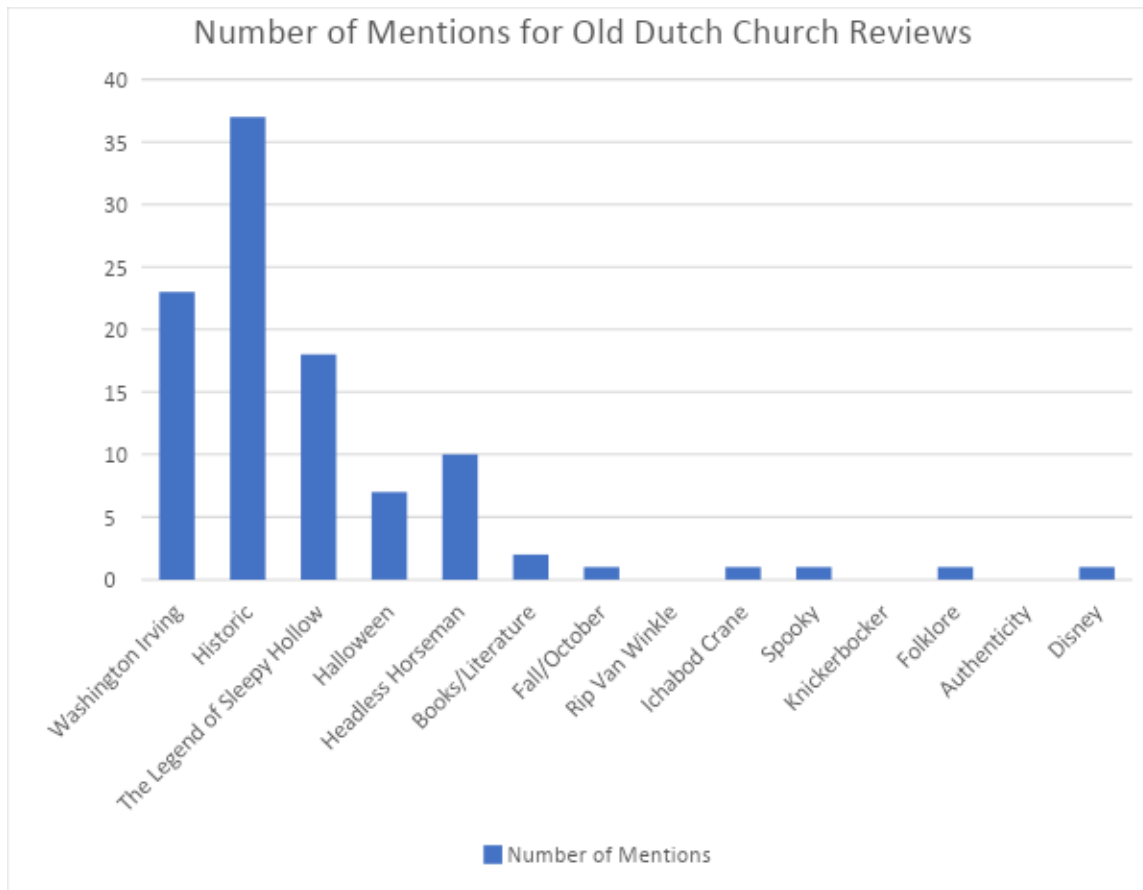


Fig. 4.3- Graph of frequencies of mentions of each category from the Old Dutch Church

The Old Dutch Church also has direct connections to the story as it was directly mentioned in Irving’s original “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”. It also hosts dramatic retellings of the story during special ticketed events, titled “Irving’s Legend”. A storyteller is accompanied by theme music on piano, and both are dressed in century appropriate garb (Visit Sleepy Hollow 2021). One reviewer of the Old Dutch Church referenced reading the literature beforehand: “Sometimes we forget about the rich history of our nation so close to home. After reading a book that took place in Tarrytown and referencing the headless horseman and the legends of Sleepy Hollow this became an educational trip to bring the story to life” (psudino 2020, p.1). Based on this and other reviews, it seems that this location may have been the one with the most direct references to the book. An additional review also stated: “The fact that the church of such a well

known story can be accessed so easily makes the Sleepy Hollow stories so much more realistic, because you can say for the scenes that happen in and around the church, ‘I’ve been there’” (psudino 2020, p.1). Followed by another review directly stating that they seek out literary tourism destinations: “I love places from books you can visit. This one was great. We went in a weekend in October where many events are happening. We were lucky enough to attend a Docent’s history presentation in the church and it was great. The graveyard was right outside and was visited by the headless horseman. This is a must see in the area” (only1kirk 2019, p.2). In addition to the reviews that praise the destination for its literary associations, there was another review that made connections between the literary world and historical significance in our own: “There is some history here that has been woven into our literary world” (erodrig26 2017, p.7). Finally, one review referenced the Disney version of the Legend of Sleepy Hollow, but more so to call out the difference between that version of the popular culture of Sleepy Hollow and the actual place: “This is not a Disney horror film but a very old Colonial church reflecting Dutch heritage and village life 100 years or more before the Revolution” (Joseph C. 2017, p.7). This was the one and only review that directly mentioned Disney, but it is worth drawing attention to as it references pop culture but then draws attention to the differences between it and the actual destination.

Washington Irving’s Sunnyside:

For Washington Irving’s Sunnyside, reviews were collected from Tripadvisor ranging from May 2016 to October 2021 for a total of 70 reviews. The graph in figure 4.4 displays mentions from the 14 categories from reviews collected:

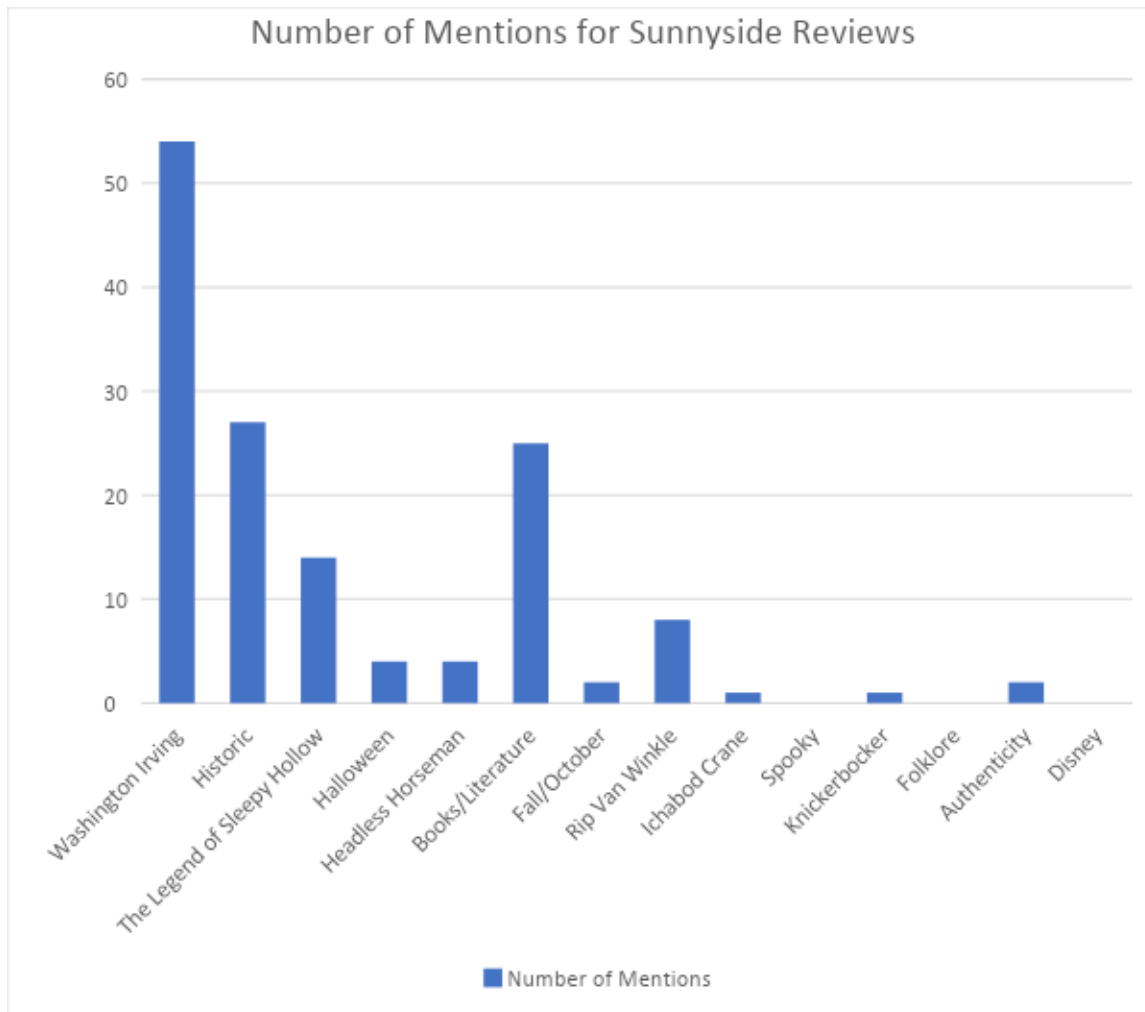


Fig. 4.4- Graph of frequencies of mentions of each category from Washington Irving’s Sunnyside

Sunnyside is Washington Irving’s home and understandably had many mentions of Irving himself, as well as his works. One reviewer revealed that they were on something of a literary pilgrimage, visiting other sites with associations with authors before making their way to Sunnyside: “I traveled to Sleepy Hollow as I have always loved the story. Being that I am an author myself and having just come from Salem and visiting the House Of Seven Gables and Nathaniel Hawthorne home I was very excited to visit the home of Washington Irving and learn more about him” (9195brandonk 2021, p.1) Another reviewer brought attention to Irving as the

author other works besides just the iconic Legend story: "'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' was not Irving's only book. He was a prolific writer, but most known for his legend story. The time to visit is during the Halloween season because of the town wide activities" (retdvm@comcast.net 2019, p.1) This review identifies Irving and his works, plus the Halloween connection of the town as a result of the story, bringing the two themes together.

Another reviewer of Sunnyside cited not only their own piqued interest in reading more about Irving and studying him after visiting his estate, but also suggested to future travelers to look into his stories in order to enrich the experience of visitation: "The visit stimulated more interest in Irving's life, a truly exceptional one. I plan to read (his) biography next. I do recommend reading Rip van Winkle and Legend of Sleepy Hollow prior to the visit" (bilsue 2019, p.1). Other reviewers mentioned how literary fans should visit this location: "This place is great to visit for Washington Irving fans or literary fans in general" (schmayla98 2017, p.3). While another reviewer mentioned how they have a new appreciation for Irving and his history: "Our tour of Washington Irving's home was presented by a knowledgeable guide in period dress! The estate is well-preserved and reflects the man's interests, travel and literary work... He was so much more than Ichabod Crane or Rip Van Winkle!" (traveling writer 2016, p.7). Reviewers of Sunnyside are making connections to the popular culture that made the town what it is today, and the historical significance of Irving being one of its residents.

Another reviewer described exactly what it is to be a literary tourist in their review: "We love to do literary tours (read a book and then visit the place that inspires the author). We started our day at Washington Irving's Home... Next stop was Washington Irving's grave and the Old Dutch Church Burying Ground. Irvings stable area was converted into a nice little gift shop with

lot's of Headless Horseman gifts” (Lisa V. 2016, p.7) This review perfectly embodies how the themes of history and literature intertwine.

In addition to the many references to the literary works of Irving at this destination, this location was the only one with a specific mention of the NY Knicks, which is an interesting popular culture connection: “I had to see the homestead of Mr Washington Irving! The first paid USA writer with multiple pseudonyms!...Must see sight if you’ve enjoyed the Legend of Sleepy Hollow or are a NY Knicks fan!!! Make the connection!” (Christine C. 2019, p.1) One of Washington Irving’s pseudonyms was Diedrich Knickerbocker, and his first novel was titled *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty, by Diedrich Knickerbocker* (1809). He popularized the term and the New York Knicks basketball team is named for this (*What's a Knickerbocker?* 2012).

Headless Horseman Sculpture:

Even though the Headless Horseman Sculpture had few reviews posted at the time of this study, it is important to include those that do exist because of their direct associations with the short story. Yelp reviews from June 12, 2017 to October 9, 2020 were collected for a total of 8 reviews. The graph in figure 4.5 displays mentions from the 14 categories from reviews collected.

The Headless Horseman Sculpture is one of the least reviewed attractions examined in this study, with only eight reviews posted on Yelp, however those reviews offer valuable insights into visitors’ perceptions of popular culture in Sleepy Hollow. One reviewer took it upon themselves to give their background knowledge of the character in their review, writing: “The Headless Horseman is a fictional character from the short story ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’ by American author Washington Irving. The story, from Irving's collection of short stories entitled

The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., has worked itself into known American folklore/legend through literature and film” (Rob S. 2017, p.1). This is precisely the type of review that this study was seeking in order to discover if people are making connections to the original story in Sleepy Hollow. Not only does the reviewer give their own background knowledge of the story and its author, they also explicitly state that the legend has worked itself into American folklore through literature and film.

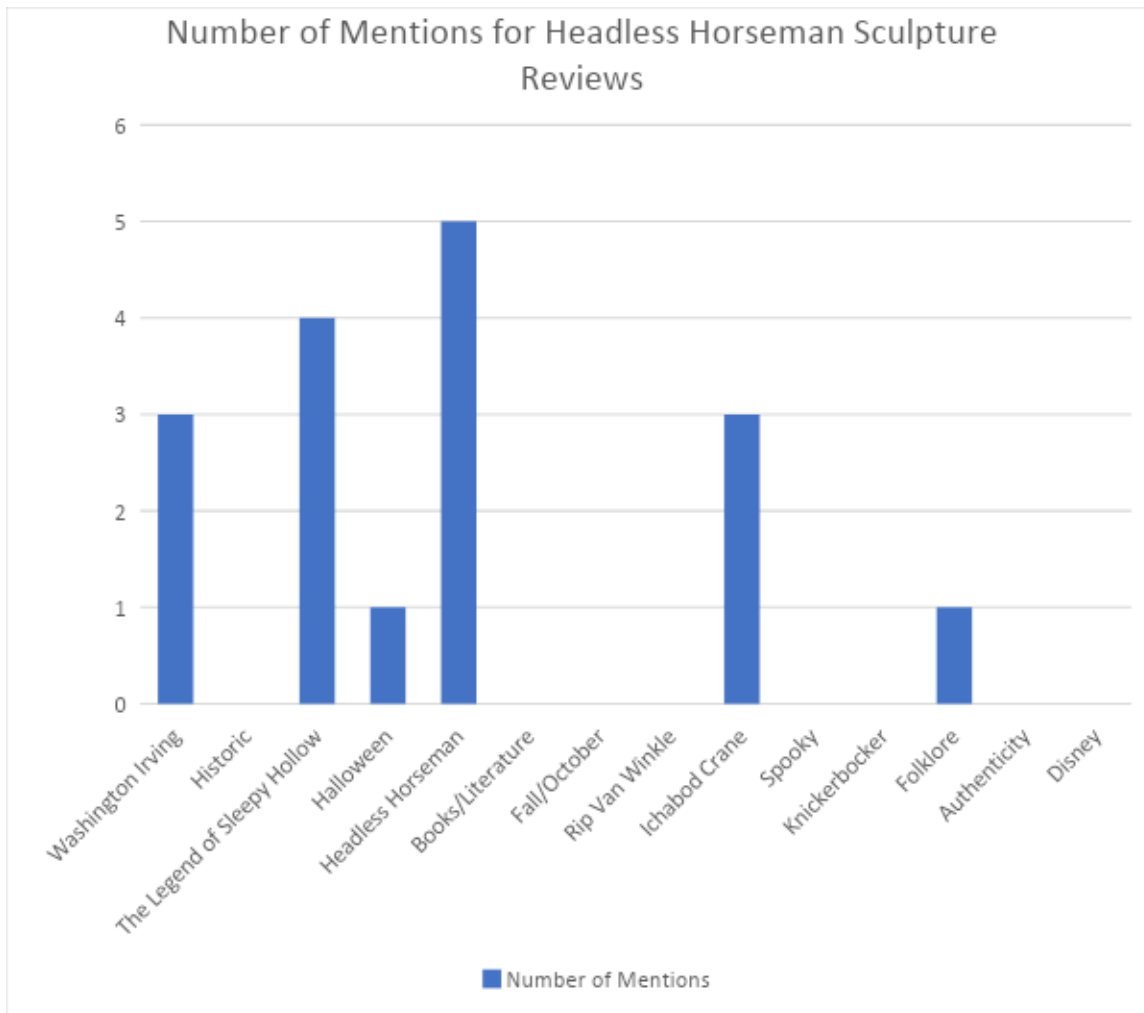


Fig. 4.5- Graph of frequencies of mentions of each category from Headless Horseman Sculpture

Aside from reviews making connections to popular culture and the original literature, another review of the sculpture brought to light the significance of visiting the town around

Halloween time: “It's that time of year again, Sleepy Hollow Halloween!! Why not freak out! Must visit the Sculpture of Headless Horseman” (Native Q. 2020, p.1). This reviewer seems to enjoy the Halloween festivities or perhaps just the general ambiance of Sleepy Hollow during Halloween time. It is also interesting that this reviewer not only made a connection to Halloween in Sleepy Hollow, but additionally took their statement a step further with the connection to making a visit to the Headless Horseman sculpture, implying the direct connection between the town, Halloween, and the Headless Horseman.

Headless Horseman Bridge:

Similar to the Headless Horseman Sculpture, the Headless Horseman Bridge has accumulated a staggeringly low number of reviews online, however those few reviews offer valuable insight for this study. Reviews were collected from TripAdvisor from September 2020 to October 2020 for a total of 3 reviews. The graph in figure 4.6 displays mentions from the 14 categories from reviews collected.

The Headless Horseman Bridge was the attraction with the least amount of reviews in this study, coming in with a total of three reviews on TripAdvisor. The people who were dedicated enough to seek out this spot and then review it, however, made obvious connections to the story. For example, this reviewer mentioned how being in the village calls for a commemorating photo with the bridge because of the tale: “Good for a quick photo opp - if you're in Sleepy Hollow it makes sense to get a shot commemorating the Headless Horseman tale” (Steve O. 2020, p.1). Another reviewer addressed how the bridge is significant to the story (though they appear to have mixed up the short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” with another name): “The Headless Horseman Bridge was made famous in Irving's novel The Headless Horseman. It was the scene where the pumpkin head was thrown at Ichabod Crane.

Today there is a sign that marks the spot near the Old Dutch Church and Sleepy Hollow Cemetery” (Lolly’s Look 2020, p.1). Although the bridge is a photo opportunity that doesn’t seem to garner much attention or reviews, those that choose to visit do make connections to the significance to the story.

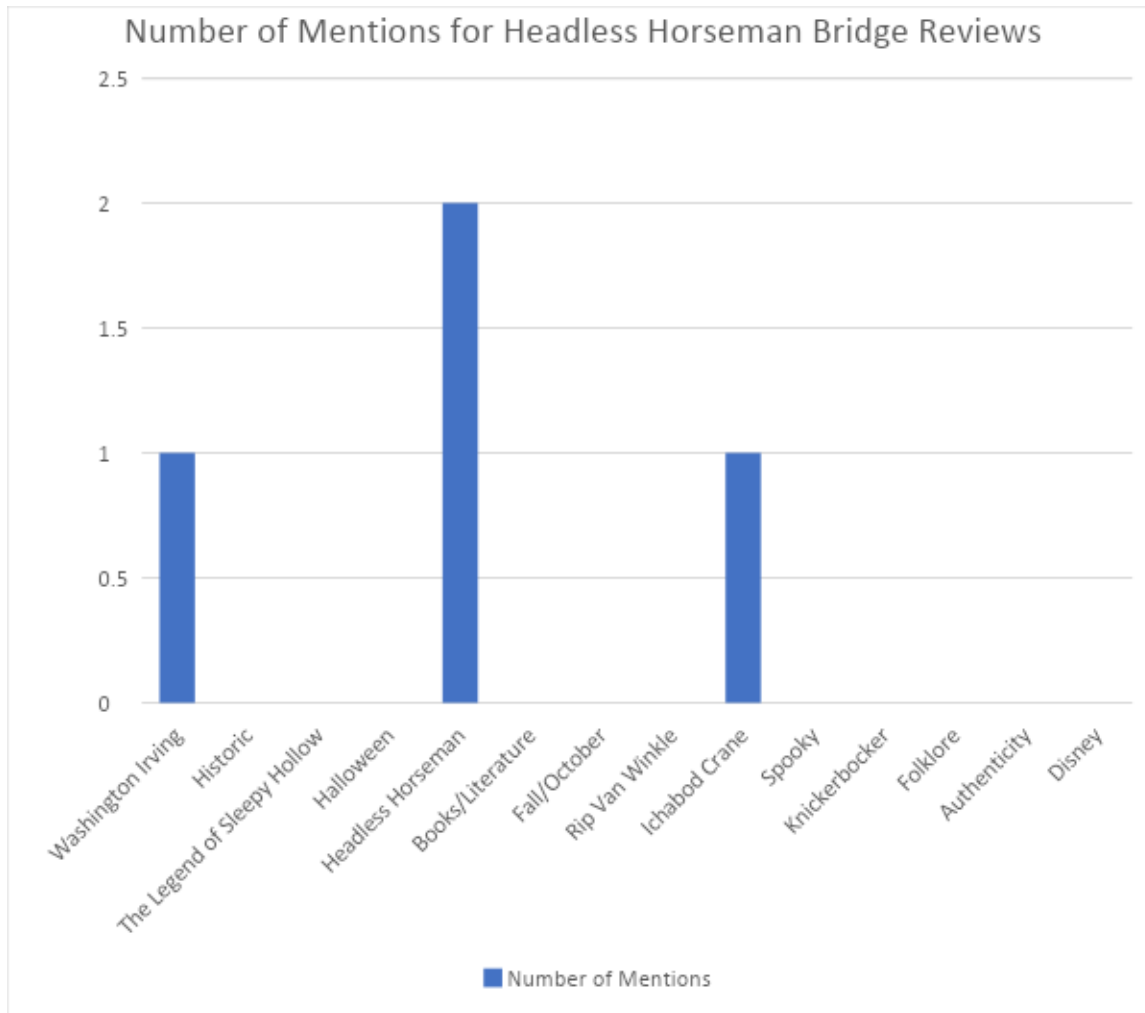


Fig. 4.6- Graph of frequencies of mentions of each category from Headless Horseman Bridge

The Great Jack O’ Lantern Blaze:

For the Great Jack O’ Lantern Blaze, reviews were collected from Yelp from October 17, 2018 to November 13, 2021, for a total of 70 reviews. The graph below displays mentions from the 14 categories from reviews collected:

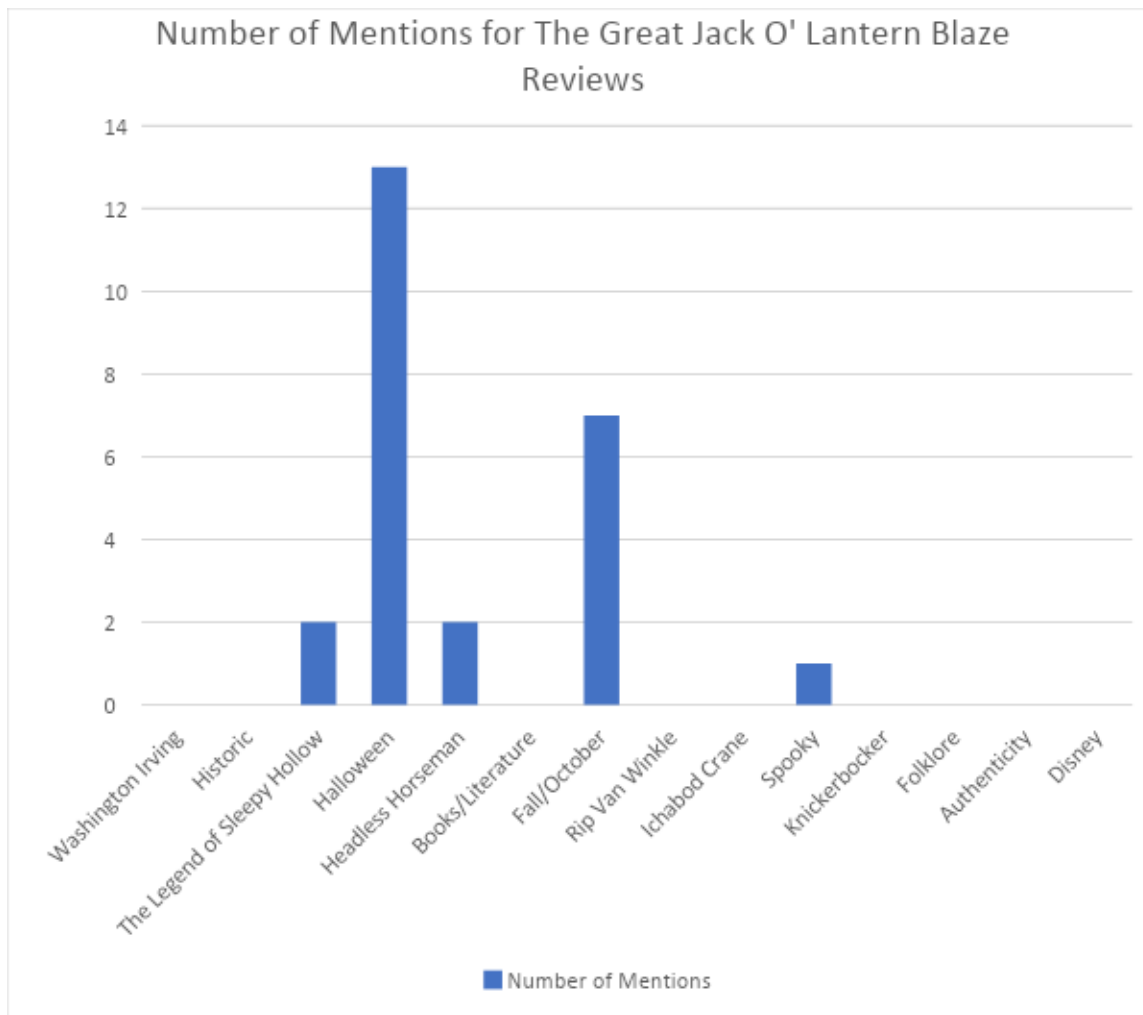


Fig. 4.7- Graph of frequencies of mentions of each category from The Great Jack O’ Lantern Blaze

Out of the six attractions chosen for this study, the Blaze was the attraction with the least popular culture associations, at least according to reviews. This is the attraction that seems to make the least explicit connections to popular culture. It should also be mentioned that it seems the price for admission has increased since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic. So, the 2020 season saw an increase in prices from the 2019 season, as the providers of the event had to limit

capacity and therefore make up for the loss by increasing prices. Many of the reviews that were included in this data collection centered around the complaints about the price increase.

The reviews that do mention the atmosphere center more around the Halloween spirit rather than the popular culture or the town, such as the following: “The Great Jack O’Lantern Blaze is truly a fun and immersive experience near Sleepy Hollow NY that adds that special touch of festive spirit during the fall / Halloween time” (Ashley L. 2021, p.1). Another reviewer wrote about how this area is perfect for a Halloween visit: “So much fun! Sleepy Hollow is best place ever for Halloween! A little campy, a little scary, really well crafted” (Elizabeth C. 2019, p.6).

One reviewer expressed disappointment in the attraction that they call a “tourist trap”, expressing the opinion that future travelers are better off going to Sleepy Hollow instead: “Don’t waste your Money! It’s high priced to look at lite pumpkins. Yes some are works of art, but I think the whole thing is a tourist trap. Go to Sleepy Hollow a little further down on route 9 you have more to see for less \$!” (Joanne W. 2019, p.4). This is an interesting perspective because it implies a sense of authenticity and respectability to Sleepy Hollow that apparently isn’t present at the Blaze. Finally someone mentioned that they have been to the Blaze multiple times, and “The first time we went they had the headless horseman and all the famous writers heads carved out” (Renee R. 2018, p.7).

One reviewer specifically mentioned visiting the Blaze as part of a larger Sleepy Hollow trip, centering around Halloween: “We do love making a day out of it though. We will go to the Sleepy Hollow cemetery and church. Eat lunch and dinner in the surrounding towns. And just do some sightseeing” (Jessi S. 2021, p.1). Although this review was for the Blaze itself, the person mentioned other offerings in the Sleepy Hollow area more prominently, showcasing how even though the Blaze does not have inherent popular culture connections, it can still be

connected to the popular culture of the town as a whole. Although the Blaze offered the least reviews mentioning popular culture, data provided from its reviewers still allows for valuable insight into visitors' perceptions of the area, especially as a Halloween destination.

Summary of Analysis

The three broad themes identified from these reviews were Halloween, history, and literature. These three themes can be interwoven together, as the literature associated with Sleepy Hollow has an overly Halloween theme, as well as carrying historical significance. While the reviews did not mention as much modern day popular culture as they could have, what with the vast availability of popular culture connections to Sleepy Hollow, the connections were still being made and can be observed through these three themes. That being said, there still existed many reviews that did not mention any type of popular culture. The reviews that did not mention popular culture instead mentioned more practical advice or warnings for future travelers. One example is from user Tina who wrote on the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery TripAdvisor page: "Peaceful place to visit and very beautiful this time of year. Pick up a map so you'll know where to go, it's easy to get turned around" (Tina 202, p. 1). This is an example of the type of review that is useful for other visitors who are planning a potential visit to the destination but not necessarily to the researcher when determining popular culture connections being made by visitors. For The Great Jack O' Lantern Blaze, many reviews focused on the increase in prices or the challenges of parking. One user wrote for the event: "This is definitely an event more suited for kids under 10 or for those who love visiting 'instagrammable' places. Other than that it's really not worth the hour drive. I also had an issue with parking. The car lines outside took forever. Not well organized" (Joanna M. 2019, p.5). This was a recurring issue for the

researcher, as they had to weed through the reviews that centered around the accessibility of the event instead of the potential connections to any of the three themes established in this study.

Overall, the 14 categories that were established for analysis provided insight into what visitors are making connections with, whether directly or indirectly to popular culture. From the 14 categories emerged the three themes, which all in some way relate back to the original popular culture of the destination. Many reviewers did in fact make connections to popular culture during their visit to Sleepy Hollow, though not all. Those that did not mention connections in their reviews either did not make any connections to popular culture during their visit or chose not to include a mention of the connections in their reviews.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main research question that guided this study was: Are tourists making connections between the village of Sleepy Hollow and the popular culture associated with it? According to the data collected and analyzed for this project, people are making connections between the village of Sleepy Hollow and the popular culture associated with it. While there are a significant number of reviews that mention popular culture, it is not everyone. Roughly two-thirds of reviewers mention popular culture in some form in their reviews. This could be due to a few reasons. Many of the reviews, especially those written at the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery and Sunnyside, came from people after they had taken the guided tours at the location. People often mentioned Washington Irving in a review of Sunnyside along with the mention of taking a tour. This means that the village itself is proud of their history that involves Irving and chooses to give tours emphasizing and highlighting his life, works, and overall impacts on the area. This would explain why, out of the 14 categories identified, Washington Irving was the most mentioned and the most noticeable connection to popular culture identified.

Based on the reviews collected, there is evidence to suggest that visitors come to Sleepy Hollow because of the popular culture associations, connection to Irving, and the general Halloween vibe of the town. There are also reviews shown in the study that suggest visiting the town piques the interest of tourists into the associated popular culture. This implies that visiting a destination associated with popular culture can create excitement and interest about said popular culture, which can play a role in keeping it relevant and extending the shelf life. This is important in the field of popular culture tourism studies as the shelf life of a destination is often a factor associated with how relevant a destination can stay throughout the years.

The sub question that guided this research was: Which forms of popular culture play the biggest role in attracting tourists, as observed through eWOM? This question proved to be the more difficult out of the two questions to answer. Very few reviewers specifically mentioned any kind of popular culture outside of the original short story. The data collected suggests that the original short story gains the most attention in the village, as well as Washington Irving as a literary figure and of course the Headless Horseman as a Halloween icon. There are also many mentions of history or enjoying the historical nature of the destination. According to such reviewers, people enjoy the literary history as well as the history of New York state and New England in Sleepy Hollow. The Old Dutch Church, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, and Sunnyside all have significant historical significance outside of the original short story. The Blaze is an attraction which itself does not have overt connections to literature or historical significance, but there are significant connections to the Halloween themes of the area, and the event brings in a lot of tourists which have the potential to visit other attractions.

In some cases, reviewers indicated that they traveled to Sleepy Hollow based on a desire for literary tourism. A few reviews identified in the analysis mentioned traveling based on a book or literature specifically. The dominance of Irving and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in reviews seems to be a combination of people being drawn to the literary associations, as well as the town framing the attraction around literature. While there seems to be many mentions of the original “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” story including tours, plaques and markers, and docents, there does not seem to be emphasis placed on other forms of popular culture associated with the village. Although the analysis of the destination included reviews as far back as May of 2016, there was no specific mention of the Fox television series *Sleepy Hollow*, which ran from 2013-2017 and would have been airing during 2016. While it is understandable that no one

would mention the Tim Burton “Sleepy Hollow” film, which released in 1999 and is not likely to be in the forefront of visitors’ minds, it is more confounding that the *Sleepy Hollow* television series would not be a reason for visitation. It is possible that the television series was a reason for visitation for some guests, but those guests either did not write reviews for the attractions selected, or chose not to mention the connection. It is also possible that visitors do not care about the connection from the village of Sleepy Hollow to the *Sleepy Hollow* television series. Even the Disney adaptation of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” was only mentioned once, in a review that essentially poked fun at how lighthearted the Disney version was compared to the real place. This seems to imply a certain amount of respect and reverence for the original story that is not given to the popular culture adaptations.

Judging by the vast amount of reviewers who specifically mentioned the connection to Washington Irving in their reviews, it seems that the historical author truly is more of a draw for tourism in the area than what one may have thought, as opposed to the more recent and “relevant” popular culture. Irving and his works have the advantage their deep roots in this area of the northeast: Irving spent time writing, based his most famous story, purchased an estate, and is buried in the area. The longevity and relevancy of his works is also an advantage, as they have withstood the test of time in a way that has yet to be experienced by other Sleepy Hollow popular culture examples. This is the reason why many mentions of the historical elements present in Sleepy Hollow relate to Washington Irving and his literary works. Many visitors come to Sleepy Hollow to experience the real-life history of Irving as a prolific author in early America. By contrast, the kitschy elements of popular culture may not fit into the narrative that the visitors are looking for at this historical destination. The whimsicality of popular culture, like Tim Burton’s Sleepy Hollow movie, do not fit into the authentic experience of the real Sleepy Hollow village.

Judging by the reviews collected for this study, visitors value the historical context and authentic elements of Sleepy Hollow, more than constructed or over-the-top elements.

Theoretical Implications

Popular Culture and Tourism

Previous literature establishes the significance of popular culture's influence on tourism and how it is commodified and authenticated in tourism (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). While popular culture can sometimes be looked down upon as a "lesser" form of culture, popular culture nonetheless has cultural significance and symbolic meaning (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Prior studies have established a correlation between destinations and popular culture associations in driving tourism (Lee & Bai 2016). This study confirms that people do in fact travel to destinations specifically for their popular culture connections. In addition, this study builds upon this concept with the conclusion that visiting a popular culture destination also sparks interest in the popular culture after having experienced the destination. Reviews in this study mentioned a newly sparked interest in the works of Washington Irving after experiencing his influence in Sleepy Hollow.

One form of popular culture tourism mentioned in prior literature is celebrity cemetery tourism, which is the act of visiting the grave site or place of burial of a celebrity (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). The Sleepy Hollow Cemetery elicited many mentions from reviewers of Washington Irving and his works, as this cemetery is the place of his burial. This specific location confirms the draw of celebrity cemetery tourism, which was an unexpected conclusion. The study by Hua et al. (2021) claim that destination managers can and should utilize their popular culture associations in tourism design, which is confirmed in this study. Sleepy Hollow not only renamed themselves for the popular culture, effectively making themselves a

fall/Halloween destination, but they also found a way to incorporate the story into attractions and tours. According to the reviews collected for this study, people enjoyed the literary/popular culture associations that were specifically constructed.

Prior literature established that popular culture does not have to be restricted by a specific media. The Headless Horseman is himself a popular culture icon that was mentioned heavily in reviews of attractions in Sleepy Hollow. Prior to this study, Dracula was the most similar figure studied in this capacity from a tourism perspective (Light 2017). These two studies (those of The Headless Horseman and of Dracula) bring into question what other popular culture figures could exist outside of their original story and still remain recognizable enough to become draws for tourism.

Literary Tourism

While the presence of popular culture is overt in the Village of Sleepy Hollow, it is actually more specifically the connection with literature that appears to be the most noticeable form of popular culture for visitors. Literary tourism is a subset of popular culture tourism, since literature is a part of general popular culture (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). Previous literature establishes the unique power that reading a book has in shaping visitor experience by allowing readers to connect to the location through the story prior to visitation (Jiang & Yu 2019). This study found less of the influence on the reading of literature on the experience, and more of the influence on awareness of the literature and its author. More broadly, destinations may believe that the reading of a book associated with their destination is the only way for people to connect with their literature, but that is not necessarily the case. Destinations may have associations with authors, characters, or themes from a book that are more impactful on the experience of the visitor than reading of the actual work beforehand. In Sleepy Hollow, the association with

Washington Irving, *The Headless Horseman*, and the Halloween season were among the most notable connections made by visitors, with few reviews specifically mentioning the impact of reading the literature beforehand on their experience.

Macleod et al. (2018) and Squire (1994) wrote on the consumer experience in relation to literary tourism. Squire (1994) set the groundwork in one of the first studies to establish the importance of consumer experiences specifically in literary tourism destinations, finding that literary destinations can symbolize nostalgia and heritage. There were symbolic experiences observed in *Sleepy Hollow*, specifically that of its historical significance and gothic/Halloween elements. Macleod et al (2018) built upon these concepts by establishing that literary pilgrims, those that travel specifically for the purpose of experiencing literary places, use travel to solidify the reading of books. Literary pilgrimages are a type of secular pilgrimage that have the potential to create a vastly different perception of a destination from the casual tourist (Brown 2015). In *Sleepy Hollow*, a few reviews specifically mentioned stopping at Washington Irving's Sunnyside estate as part of a longer journey of visiting other authors' homes. Although this study established that this concept exists in *Sleepy Hollow*, the method fails to establish how different an experience literary pilgrims have compared to the casual tourist. While there may yet be a significant difference between literary and non-literary tourists, this study leaves the extent of that difference unresolved.

Dark Tourism

Sleepy Hollow contributes to the existing literature on dark tourism, which attracts visitors who have a fascination with the macabre (Light 2017). Although there is some morbid fascination with certain elements of *Sleepy Hollow*, such as the cemetery and gravesite of Washington Irving, *Sleepy Hollow* is generally light compared to other dark tourism

destinations, such as Auschwitz. The typology proposed by Stone (2006) established some dark tourism destinations to be lighter and exist more for entertainment purposes, while darker destinations exist for educational purposes. While Sleepy Hollow is a lighter destination, it also has many elements of education, such as tours and plaques. Location authenticity was also cited by Stone (2006) as contributing to darker tourism, however Sleepy Hollow is authentically the location of the original short story, making it authentic in most regards (while some attractions are original to the story, such as the Old Dutch Church, the Headless Horseman Bridge is not original to the story). With these findings in mind, the typology previously established by Stone (2006) cannot be the infallible answer to every dark tourism destination.

Electronic Word of Mouth in Hospitality and Tourism

The 21st century has seen a dramatic increase in technology and with it an increase in using technology in different industries. The tourism industry has not gone untouched by this change. The internet has made it easier to research potential trips and activities, as well as post online about experiences in order to encourage, warn, or guide future travelers. This has also made eWOM a significant contributor to the tourism industry and, subsequently, tourism research (Litvin et al. 2008). eWOM has the potential to influence consumer purchase decisions especially in the case of intangible products, such as travel, and is a cost-effective way of marketing hospitality and tourism products to potential visitors (Litvin et al. 2008). From a research perspective, eWOM offers access to a large cache of unbiased user data that can be cleaned in order to draw conclusions on a range of tourism related questions. This study utilized the reflectively new method of collected user-generated review data from established travel review sites. The study was able to successfully draw conclusions about the research questions based on the eWOM collected. This study confirms that scraping data from preexisting sites is

feasible and could also be used on social media if the data was applicable to a study. Although this study was qualitative, eWOM can also be used as a tool in quantitative studies. The frequencies of comments, as well as other distinctive information such as the amount of mentions of a topic and engagement numbers with a special post or page, would lend itself well to numerical analysis.

Applied Implications

Theming of these destinations does not happen by accident. Destination managers in a popular culture destination create unique events and tours around the themes that are sought in the area. Destination managers have the task of conceptualizing intangible elements of the tourists' experience- in the case of Sleepy Hollow, this means capturing and exemplifying themes of historic New York and haunted, spooky Halloween motifs. Cemeteries such as the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery have the advantage of being naturally spooky without too much added theming, but hosting tours that emphasize these themes also doesn't hurt. There is a niche of tourists who enjoy spooky destinations, which opens opportunities for marketing and engagement from the branding of Sleepy Hollow as a spooky destination.

“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” contributes to the theme of Sleepy Hollow in a literary and historical context. The gothic undertones from the original story and the subsequent popular culture contribute to the enchantment and haunting ambiance associated with the place. Because of the association with a gothic story and being the burial ground for Irving, Sleepy Hollow is also a naturally occurring dark tourism destination. Destination managers bring to life some of the dark elements featured in the story, including the character of the Headless Horseman. Halloween is inherently tied to the story and therefore with the village, which is an advantage when attracting those with an interest in dark tourism. Jonathan Kruk, author of *Legends and*

Lore of Sleepy Hollow and the Hudson Valley wrote in 2011: “Thousands gather every October at the sites most associated with this gallivanting ghost. They seek, at Philipsburg Manor and nearby at the Old Dutch Church, an authentic and uniquely American experience of Halloween” (Kruk 2011).

Sleepy Hollow as a destination associated with “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”, Irving and literature generally, it is prime for literary pilgrimages. In many ways, touring to the destination of Sleepy Hollow embodies the reading experience of the short story. But not only that, it embodies the theme of gothic literature, and other stories by Washington Irving. Some tourists specifically mentioned feeling surrounded by literature, visiting due to literature, or wanting to read the literature after visiting. Some visitors even mentioned “Rip Van Winkle”, another short story by Irving, which shows that visitors did not have to have direct knowledge of one specific story in order to understand the significance of Irving and the name of the village. Irving’s writing itself is on the whimsical side and lends itself well to the imagery of real life Sleepy Hollow. Thanks to the renaming and theming of Sleepy Hollow, his story and landscape has been brought to life. This can be interpreted as part of the reason that Sleepy Hollow is appealing for tourists and tourism providers. It has been relatively easy for tourism providers to bring to attention aspects of the short story in Sleepy Hollow, as they were already there but simply needed to be emphasized. This can contribute to a practical understanding of other popular culture tourism destinations which have the same elements, but which are not emphasized in the way that Sleepy Hollow does.

Many reviewers want to know more about the history surrounding Irving. They indicated that tours or docents piqued their interest in Irving and his history, and they intended to do more research into him on their own upon returning home. In this way, the village can be either a mid-

step in a literary pilgrimage, where people seek out the destination after reading the literature, or it can be the first step, where visitors' first encounter with the literature at the destination leads to further exploration afterwards. There were also some reviews that indicate a clear intent to return, as well as general satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Intent to return is relevant information for destinations that have an economic stake in tourism. Literary destinations have the ability not only to bring the reading of a book or story to life, but also to be the catalyst for the interest in the story in the first place.

While there are indisputable differences between the reading experience and the lived experience of a place, the reading experience is the first step in experiencing the place and adds to the experience of the physical location, as shown through some of the reviews suggesting to others that they read the literature before visiting. Therefore, this implies that some visitors get more out of the experience from knowing about the literature or other associated popular culture before visiting a literary or popular culture tourism destination. Review sites are often used to make recommendations or give warnings to other visitors doing research for future travel. If these reviewers saw fit to suggest reading the literature beforehand, it implies that they believe that will lead to a richer experience at the destination. Although it is difficult to encourage future visitors to experience the popular culture associated with a destination such as this one, it may be worthwhile to mention on a convention and visitors' website that it is suggested to read the associated literature in order to get the most out of one's time at the destination.

It is unclear from the reviews which reviewers have and have not read the short story, because few people mention this specifically. However, it is interesting to explore what about Sleepy Hollow as a literary destination makes people want to visit. It seems from the reviews that people are drawn to the Halloween aspect and/or the historical aspect, sometimes in addition

to the literature and sometimes instead of the literature. While the familiarity with Irving's life and work seems to add to the richness of the landscape of Sleepy Hollow, it isn't necessary. There is value in preserving and revisiting Washington Irving's work in the modern day, and there is an opportunity for modern destination managers and tourism operators in Sleepy Hollow and the vicinity to develop infrastructure to promote the history and whimsical associations. Other destinations can apply this same mindset, where preserving popular culture is a valuable asset to the destination but is not necessarily the only enjoyable aspect.

There also exists in Sleepy Hollow an element of educational experiences- specifically at the Cemetery, Sunnyside, and Old Dutch Church. These places have the ability to be "edutainment" attractions, a mix of education and entertainment. The tours and sharing of the stories associated with the area are meant to be fun as well as informative. This can be observed through the eWOM data collected where reviewers enjoying their time and indicating a desire to revisit, also share in their review what they learned from their experience. Educational elements are often associated with visiting a historic site, providing narrative as a background for visitors' embodied and tangible connections to the past. This is no different for certain Sleepy Hollow attractions, emphasizing memorable elements for visitors' education as well as enjoyment and entertainment. In addition to the tours offered, visitors may choose to read historic markers throughout the village, listen to a docent speak on the history, or observe the content of a display set up for the historical significance. These are ways to enrich the experience of the place that reviewers seemed to enjoy based on the data collected. Some of these reviews indicate that people made more connections to Irving, his stories (specifically the legend), and history after consuming these enrichments. Sleepy Hollow keeps history relevant, presenting a living past through their attractions. Tourism is the town's invitation to people to walk in the footsteps of

not just popular culture, but also significant history. When visitors experience history in this way at a destination, they recognize its influence on popular culture, and wider culture as a whole.

Limitations

Limitations include that not every tourist leaves a review, so those opinions reflected are only that of a select few. Therefore, any conclusion the results provide is only according to the tourists who took the time to leave a review. There may be potential reviewers who made connections to popular culture during their visits, but never felt the need to leave a review. Sampling bias could be present, as only some people choose to use either TripAdvisor or Yelp and no other reviews sites were used for data collections. This study does not account for the opinions of those that use different review sites or do not use review sites at all. There is also no way to verify the truthfulness of a review, or if a visitor has actually visited the site before reviewing. Also, reviews tend to mention information that is commonly deemed relevant for other potential visitors, not for researchers. A review could consist of nothing besides stating the bathroom was clean, or parking was horrible, because this is the type of information potential visitors look at on review sites. Not every review stated a clear reason for visitation or interpretation of the experiences. In addition, reviews often make implicit references rather than explicit mentions of popular culture. Halloween is a more implicit mention of a popular culture reference to the story, but there are also those that made no reference of any kind and didn't give any type of indication why they chose to visit that destination over another. Although it can be estimated that Sleepy Hollow is a popular tourist destination due to the popular culture affiliations, not every review stated this, making it more difficult for the researcher to draw exact conclusions. This also brings up the emerging challenges associated with conducting research via the internet. There are advantages to conducting internet research, such as the span of time over

which reviews were available to be collected and the ability to conduct research on any destination from anywhere. However, there are also drawbacks of this type of research collection, such as not being able to ask direct interview questions to participants in order to draw out explicit connections to popular culture the researcher was at the mercy of whatever the reviewers deemed to be relevant information in their reviews.

The six attractions from which comments were collected from TripAdvisor and Yelp were purposefully selected because they have direct or indirect affiliations with “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”. Therefore, the observations that are made on if tourists are connecting to popular culture have a better chance, because there is popular culture to be connected to. These observations may not be generalizable throughout the rest of the town, specifically to attractions in the area that have no organic connection to “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”. Future research could address other attractions in the village of Sleepy Hollow, such as the Rockefeller home, or attempt to gauge perception of popular culture connections in the town as a whole.

Additionally, this study is being conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of the reviews that are being gathered are from 2020-2021, which could have played an important role in the numbers of visitors, as well as the ability of Sleepy Hollow to put on events and host tourists. The Covid-19 pandemic significantly reduced traveling due to health and safety concerns, plummeting domestic tourism numbers (Lu et al. 2021). However, the range of years that data is being collected from could mitigate the effects of this limitation.

Not only did the Covid-19 pandemic heavily affect travel numbers, it also set new precedents for tourist behavior, such as avoiding more heavily crowded areas. While Sleepy Hollow’s proximity to NYC is usually a benefit, as transportation from the city makes it convenient for tourists to access Sleepy Hollow, it was not a benefit during the pandemic. NYC

was hit hard by the pandemic and went into multiple full lockdowns, limiting the numbers of tourists who came into the city and therefore limiting travelers who used the city as a gateway for Sleepy Hollow.

The Covid-19 pandemic was not all negative press for Sleepy Hollow, however. During the pandemic, the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery tour called “The Original Knickerbocker: Washington Irving & ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’” added to its description on the website: “Did you know Washington Irving lived through a viral epidemic, too?” (Sleepy Hollow Cemetery 2020). This was a way to bring the past and present into parallels where we in the present day can relate to a historical figure such as Irving.

Future Research

In Sleepy Hollow

Another opportunity for future research presents itself as The Historic Hudson Valley organization indicated their intention to expand the Great Jack O’ Lantern Blaze by opening a second location on Long Island (Historic Hudson Valley 2021). In this study, the Blaze was already the attraction with the least direct mentions of popular culture, even though it has the advantage of being in the vicinity of the source material of the original story. It would be interesting to observe what, if any, connections will be made at the second Jack O’ Lantern Blaze location as an homage to the area where it started. In addition to this expansion, there are also plans in place to expand the tourism season to outside of the Fall, according to the village website: “Explore strategies to grow the tourism industry throughout the year to bring visitors during other seasons, in addition to the strong fall season. The Village should work with local business and tourism groups to create a marketing strategy with an eye towards extending the tourism season throughout the year” (Comprehensive Plan, 147). Many of the reviews collected

for this study indicated visitation during the Fall season; it would be interesting in the future to observe what popular culture connections are being made outside of the season with which the town is most heavily associated. Sleepy Hollow is undoubtedly currently a fall destination, which is not the case for all popular culture destinations.

Another suggestion, from a practical perspective, is that the town may benefit from a connection with TripAdvisor or Yelp. For example, TripAdvisor has a larger user base than Yelp, yet The Great Jack O' Lantern Blaze (one of the area's largest tourist draws in the Fall season) does not have a TripAdvisor page. Based on the number of reviews that people leave, this is a missed opportunity for the destination. As mentioned in the literature review of eWOM in tourism, eWOM is a viable option for free marketing opportunities through past visitors sharing positive experiences.

With the covid-19 pandemic, there has been talk of taking Sleepy Hollow going virtual. Just after the lockdown began in America, in early April of 2020 the Historic Hudson Valley distributed an email that stated: "Our tours, special events, and especially our education programs encourage visitors to immerse themselves in the sights, smells, and feel of our history. So while the Hudson Valley remains on 'pause,' we are redirecting our traditional hands-on approaches to creating digital resources and virtual connections" (Historic Hudson Valley 2020). What would a virtual event look like for Sleepy Hollow? How much attention and attendance does it garner? Does Sleepy Hollow as a literary destination lose some of its rich culture and history when it is experienced virtually rather than in person? The concept of going virtual has very interesting implications for this destination as well as other literary destinations like it, and future research could observe and address virtual opportunities for Sleepy Hollow.

Beyond Sleepy Hollow

An opportunity for future research is a closer look at the implications of dark tourism in Sleepy Hollow and beyond. Currently, there is not a term for dark tourism that is more whimsical and does not have to have a direct association with death. For example, while Salem itself is a dark tourism destination because of its famous Salem Witch Trials, popular culture tourism also takes place there. Salem is the filming location of the cult classic Disney film *Hocus Pocus*, and tours are offered of filming locations (Destination Salem 2021). There is also a statue of Samantha from *Bewitched* in Salem, as some episodes of the show were filmed in Salem (Destination Salem 2021). Both of these are examples of dark tourism in popular culture tourism, instead of dark tourism which is defined by its associated with death. These associations in Salem are similar to the more whimsical popular culture associations with Sleepy Hollow, and there is an opportunity to name a niche form of tourism.

Future research in popular culture tourism should generally address the shelf life of popular culture and what makes a destination timeless. For example, based on this research Washington Irving pays a significant contribution to Sleepy Hollow remaining relevant. Although it may be thought that the ongoing revitalization of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” into other popular culture forms keeps the legend alive, based on the reviews collected in this study Irving is still the heaviest pull to Sleepy Hollow. Future research into popular culture should look for connections to timeless historical figures and make connections with how long a story or figure has been relevant in connection with the continued relevance of their destination.

Celebrity tourism is a form of popular culture tourism that has not historically garnered as much study as film and literature tourism (Lundberg & Ziakas 2019). However, this study established Irving as a major point of connection for visitors to Sleepy Hollow, more so than any of the modern retellings of the story. How does Sleepy Hollow compare to other literary

destinations? Is J.R.R. Tolkien a draw to Hobbiton in New Zealand? How about in other, larger popular culture destinations, do people visit Walt Disney World with Walt Disney in mind? My guess is not usually, so it would be interesting for future research to explore what makes a destination more about a celebrity or rather the popular culture that they created or influenced. Additionally, the idea of “celebrity” is changing in the modern world, especially with the rise of social media. Some of the most popular celebrities as of 2022 gain notoriety overnight because of going viral on the popular short-form video sharing site, Tik Tok. How will modern celebrities influence the landscape of popular culture tourism? Do modern celebrities have the capacity for the longevity, similar to celebrities from the past, or are people more likely to lose interest in celebrities today due to our rabidly shifting mediascape? The future of celebrity popular culture tourism has the potential to shift and become vastly different from the celebrity tourism being studied currently.

eWOM offers the unique opportunity to not only read about visitors’ experiences at a destination, but also to observe photos that the visitors may have attached to their reviews. Both TripAdvisor and Yelp give users the ability to attach photos to reviews, though most do not and choose only to leave a typed review with no photos. Although this study does not include photos from reviews, the concept of content analysis from review photos could contribute to the future of eWOM studies. Content analysis of eWOM could offer insight into what tourists noticed at a destination, as well as what they deemed important enough to photograph and then attach said photograph to a review. As previously mentioned, most reviewers do not leave photos, so it would be worth exploring what prompts visitors to attach photos and what these photos can tell researchers about a visitor’s interpretation of the place.

While eWOM is a valuable contribution to research and sufficiently answered the questions presented in this study, it should be paired with other methods to gain a better understanding of popular culture perceptions at destinations such as Sleepy Hollow. After using eWOM and open coding of reviews to establish categories and themes, it would be valuable to visit the destination in person and conduct interviews with managers, stakeholders, and tourists in order to answer questions that eWOM was not able to answer.

While Sleepy Hollow is an adequate example of popular culture tourism on a small scale, I am curious about the effects of popular culture on visitors' experiences at larger destinations. For example, theme parks such as Disneyland and Universal Studios have branded themselves on popular culture in their parks. Are these the ultimate form for popular culture tourism destinations? Do people travel to these parks because of their popular culture and, more specifically, because of the nostalgia associated with many of their intellectual properties? Would these parks even be able to exist without popular culture? It seems that an eWOM study could be conducted on a large-scale popular culture destination such as a theme park, but establishing the parameters of data collection would be a challenge.

Additionally, this study found that permanent, standalone attractions are the most relevant in connecting people with popular culture in the Sleepy Hollow area. In the future, studies should address seasonal events that focus more on popular culture tourism, such as literary festivals. While Sleepy Hollow honors its literary heritage through tours about their famous connection to Washington Irving, it does not have a festival dedicated to literature. The only festival investigated in this study was The Great Jack O Lantern Blaze, which has little to no literary affiliations, as reflected in the reviews. However, a study on a literary festival at a destination similar to Sleepy Hollow would be valuable, and may even be of interest to Sleepy

Hollow if they see a benefit to hosting their own. Future studies on this topic should address how many more visitors are likely to come to a literary destination because of a festival. Where should a literary festival for a literary tourism destination be advertised? For example, utilize book review sites such as Goodreads and book club pages on Facebook to advertise the literary festival so that the event reaches more eyes of people who love books.

The future direction of literary tourism destinations can be guided by the findings of this study. Sleepy Hollow renamed itself to more heavily associate itself with its literary roots, and it seems to have been worthwhile as visitors make the appropriate connections. However, the most notable association was with the author of the literature, with other elements trailing its lead. Did Sleepy Hollow have to rename itself in order to emphasize their association with Washington, Irving, or could they have kept their old name and continued to gain notoriety by being his home and final resting place regardless? Similar destinations may see what Sleepy Hollow has done and be tempted to go through the same name change to make themselves stand out as a popular culture or literary destination, but that may not be the case. Before carrying out an inconvenient and likely expensive official name change, other destinations should try to connect with their popular culture elements in other ways, such as tours and festivals.

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