Images of New Orleans: The Relationship Between Motion Pictures and Tourists' Expectations of a Travel Destination

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Introduction

Visual media help create perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the world, including how people imagine and perceive travel destinations.

Movies have the power to influence and even "pull" visitors to a travel destination (Riley and Van Doren 1992).

If more people are exposed to increasing amounts of visual media, one might assume that popular images depicted in movies play an important role in shaping city images and determining travelers' expectations of a particular destination.

What are the unofficial images of New Orleans that reach millions of potential travelers?

Problem Statement

▌ It is crucial for a city attempting to change its image, target a new segment of the population, or enhance its tourism industry to understand and identify the official images as well as the unofficial images of the city.

▌ Exploring some of the visual images of New Orleans through motion pictures is one of the ways to determine what tourists have been exposed to through the media and what they might expect to see on an actual visit to New Orleans.

Research Questions

- What images of New Orleans do visual media (selected motion pictures) project?

- Is New Orleans sending mixed messages to potential tourists?

- How do images of the city translate to travelers?

Unofficial Media Images

All sources of media that are not pre-packaged with the intention of selling a city to increase tourism. Unofficial media images can come in many forms and appear as negative, positive, or even neutral.

Examples: motion pictures, best-selling novels, photographs, television commercials, the Internet, and magazines.

Official Media Images

Promotions that cities construct to intentionally attract visitors. Advertising for official media may appear in magazines, television, newspapers, the Internet, and radio.

Methods

▪ Content Analysis

❖ Technique to determine dominant themes and images.

❖ Sample of New Orleans motion pictures from 1985-2000.

❖ A total of **331 images** were collapsed into **ten themes** to come up with a composite of unofficial images of New Orleans.

New Orleans Motion Pictures, 1985-2000

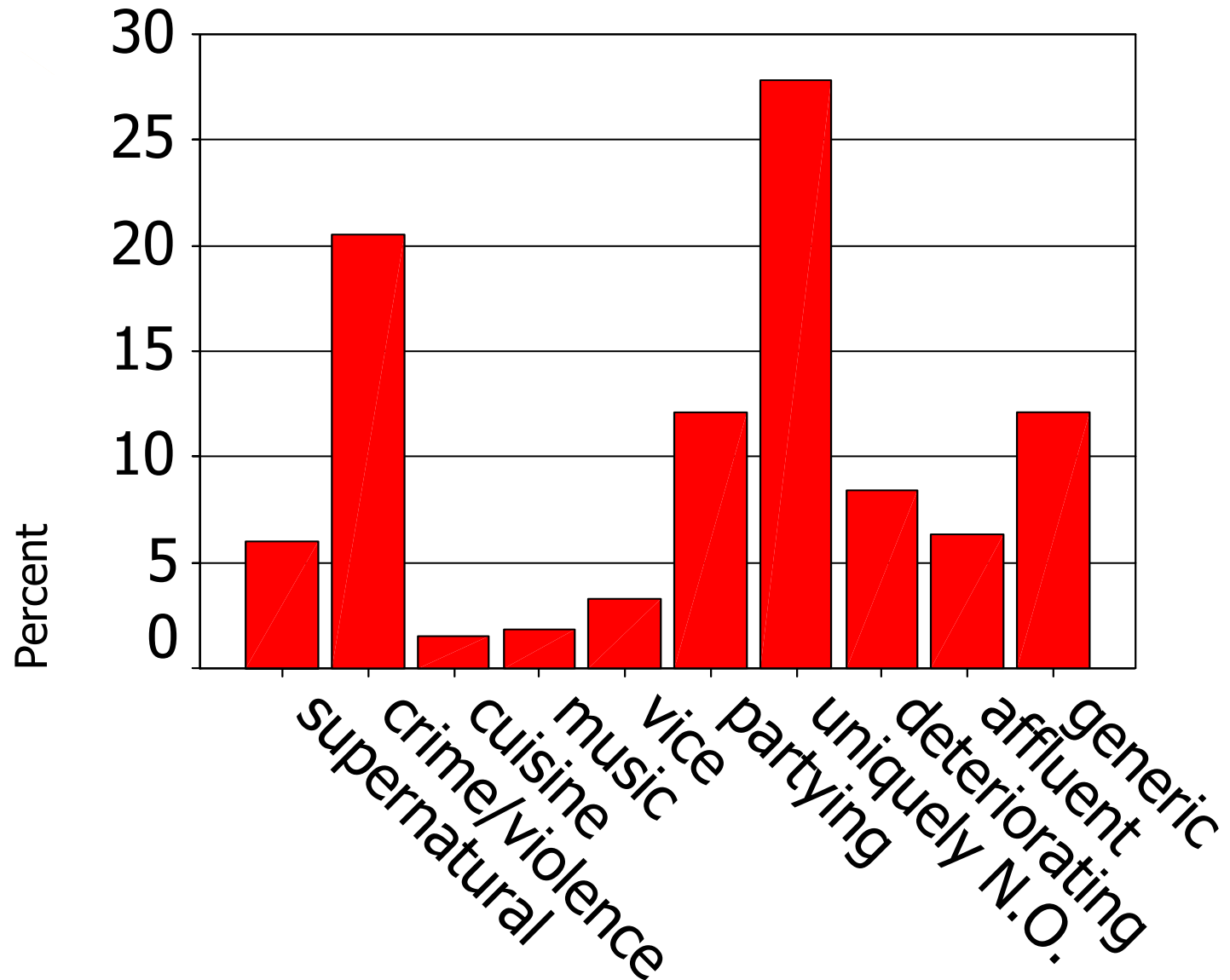| Title	Year	U.S. Gross*	N.O. footage**
Down by Law	1986	$1.4	65 minutes
Angel Heart	1987	$17.2	36 minutes
The Big Easy	1987	$17.7	108 minutes
Blaze	1989	$19.1	20 minutes
The Pelican Brief	1993	$100.8	37 minutes
Undercover Blues	1993	$12.4	75 minutes
Hard Target	1993	$32.5	55 minutes
Interview with the Vampire	1994	$105.3	43 minutes
Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh	1995	$13.9	90 minutes
Heaven's Prisoners	1996	$5.0	59 minutes
Double Jeopardy	1999	$116.7	39 minutes
Dracula 2000	2000	$33.0	80 minutes

*U.S. box office gross in million (does not include foreign revenue or video/DVD rentals).

**Approximate running time of New Orleans footage.

New Orleans Motion Pictures (Genre)

Title	Genre
Down by Law	Drama
Angel Heart	Horror/Mystery/Thriller
The Big Easy	Drama/Mystery/Romance
Blaze	Drama
The Pelican Brief	Drama/Mystery/Thriller
Undercover Blues	Comedy
Hard Target	Action-adventure
Interview with the Vampire	Horror/Drama
Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh	Horror
Heaven's Prisoners	Mystery/Thriller
Double Jeopardy	Drama/Thriller/Mystery
Dracula 2000	Horror

New Orleans Motion Picture Themes

Percent

30
25
20
15
10
5
0

supernatural
crime/violence
cuisine
music
vice
partying
uniquely N.O.
deteriorating
affluent
generic

Findings

Unofficial images of New Orleans are pervasive and unpredictable.

Many film images of New Orleans are in direct contrast to images of New Orleans in official promotional videos and tourism commercials.

Motion pictures present a multidimensional view of New Orleans.

While unofficial images can capture the city at its best, they may also portray some of the city's less desirable characteristics.

Findings

New Orleans **official tourism** videos and commercials feature **music**, **food**, and **celebration**.

New Orleans **motion pictures** depict many images that are considered **"negative"** upon first glance:

Cemeteries
Public nudity
Vampires
Rainy nights
Voodoo ceremonies
Crowded streets
Abandoned houses
Violence
Prostitution

Findings

Movies present a different side of the city to potential tourists. For a city like New Orleans, whose culture and history lend themselves to images of vice and the supernatural, these unofficial images do not do any harm. Actually, they most likely help.

"Do you know where that cemetery from Ashley Judd's movie is located"?

-New Orleans Tourist

Findings

Uniquely New Orleans theme:
(27.8% of images)

-Mardi Gras Costume Ball

-Jazz Funeral

-Second Line Parade

-Street kids singing/dancing in French Quarter

-Crowds of people drinking on Bourbon Street

-Public Nudity on Bourbon Street

-Cemeteries

Conclusion

Recommendations for tourism agencies--

1) Take an inventory by conducting a content analysis of city specific movies to determine dominant themes and images.

2) Compile a list of selected films for potential tourists to view. This list could be added to the city's official tourism website and used by potential visitors and conventioneers as supplementary information.

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