Using Visitor-Employed Photography to Study Travel Photos on the Internet

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Abstract

It has become popular for tourists to share their travel photos online with the public. While studying the roles that photos play in tourism is emerging, relatively little research has examined tourists’ online photo-sharing behaviors. Focusing on the personal blogs that their travel photos were posted, this study engages the visual analysis technique of Visitor-Employed Photography (VEP) to examine how travelers (the blog-owners) reconstruct their travel destinations through photos. Additionally this study pays attention to the tips and advises that tourists gave out regarding not only touring in particular sites, but also their experiences of using certain personal or digital gadgets. That is, through working with the online materials, this study explores how travel experiences are represented visually, verbally and materially, and furthermore it aims to investigate what motivated people to post their traveling experiences online.

Keywords: Visitor-Employed Photography, travel photos, the Internet
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1. Introduction

Travel and tourism are uniquely visual experiences, and photography plays a predominant role in their modern manifestations. Songtag (1979) suggested that travel has become a strategy by which to accumulate photos, while Urry (1990) writes of photos serving as a means of transcribing the reality of an event. The majority of people travel with cameras with 89% taking photos during their journeys (Lo, et al., 2011) and 41.4% posting travel photos online. Studies of the roles that photos play in tourism are as yet emerging, and to date relatively little research has examined the behaviors of tourists with respect to online photo-sharing. Somewhat more is know of the profiles of tourists who post photos online, thanks to Lo, et al. (2011), who compared users across different media platforms, finding age and income differences.

In this study there is an attempt to deconstruct tourists’ online photo-sharing behaviors, and to categorize and classify tourists’ profiles and how they make use of online media. It is intended to provide a deeper understanding of traveler’s online photo-sharing behaviors. Focusing on the personal blogs where travel photos are posted, this study engages in the visual analysis technique of Visitor-Employed Photography (VEP) to examine how travelers (the blog-owners) reconstruct their travel destinations through photography. Additionally, the study pays attention to the tips and advice that tourists give regarding tours of particular sites and their experiences using certain personal or digital gadgets.

2. The role of photography in tourism and travel

Modern tourism and photography emerged around the same period of time (Urry, 1990), and are now recognized as exciting aspects of everyday life (Garlick, 2002). Urry (1990) thinks tourism has played a significant role in shaping modern life experiences, and Garlick (2002) indicates that photographic images represent a powerful parallel role in constructing experience. Urry (1990) indicated photography is intimately bound up with the tourist gaze. Photographic images organize our
anticipation or daydreams about the places we might visit. Urry develops the paradigm of the tourist gaze as a means of understanding how tourism is produced and reproduced as a socially constructed phenomenon. The tourist gaze is elaborated as a particular “way of seeing”, and the fundamental motivation of tourists presented as a yearning to gaze on the panoramas, landscapes, buildings, people and other manifestations of places they already viewed in tourism advertisements, movies, brochures, travel guidebooks, and significantly in respect of this paper, travel photos on the Internet. Those things and place that are best represented assume an almost iconic status. The imagery is readily called to mind: the Great Wall of China, Taipei 101, the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty. Jenkins (2003) argues that not only do these photographic representations inspire tourists to visit various destinations, but that taking photographs constitutes a major focus of the activities of tourists. Personal photographs provide proof that the tourists have indeed visited a destination. In this way, tourists’ photographs reinforce the tourist gaze.

Travel photography plays multiple roles in the social construction of travel. Larsen (2005) suggests that travel is a social practice that simultaneously shapes, and is shaped by the “complusive” photographic culture of cameras and images: it seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera. Hillman (2007) thought travel photos proved that a person had physically visited a place, while Chalfen (1979) goes further in suggesting that travel photos provide evidence that an individual has experienced some form of an authentic, exotic life. Photographs offer indisputable evidence that a trip was undertaken, that a program was carried out, that an adventure was had. But, photos play a much deeper symbolic role assisting in the construction of travel memories (Barenholdt, Frnmke, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004) and in shaping them into narratives or stories. Goodman (2007) emphasized that the experience of tourism exists in the interplay between places and stories. Travel photos convert intangible experience into something tangible (Osborne, 2000).

Travel photos also convey advantages in maintaining or constructing social relationships. Larsen (2005) suggests that photos produce and represent close family bonds. Groves and Timothy (2001) observed and analyzed a group of students’ photos and found that 82% of the images involved other members of their networks. The
reason for the buildup social relationships, Edensor (2000) argues, is that travelers use photos as a ceremonial means of capturing their relationships with one another, other places, and other cultures. By using photography to share their experiences, individuals build on their relationships to form deeper bonds with companions. Photo sharing also can improve connections with non-travel party members. Some studies (Strano, 2008; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005) imply that young people use online media to express, manipulate or construct a fanciful self-image -- sharing travel photos may similarly construct or reconstruct an individuals’ self-image. In such ways, photos both document and shape experience (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003; Larsen, 2008), provide opportunities to share experiences (Grove & Timothy, 2001), and to craft one’s self-representation.

Most previous travel studies have focused on real research sites, but the Internet is growing in usefulness and importance. The Internet is replacing many other entities in the way it is used. People now turn to the Internet in the way they used to turn to libraries, newspapers, magazines, brochures, travel agents, weather maps. Theobald & Dunsmore (2001) indicated the Internet is as an “Information Super-Highway” that anyone could access information anywhere in a matter of seconds. This information would be in any formats such as text, pictures, sounds, etc. Also, many users could travel from one entry on the web to another – reading history in India, tasting some cuisine in Thailand, viewing Angor Wat in Cambodia, etc. Surfing the Internet for some pursuits. The Internet full of hundreds of websites about tourism and travel that assist individual to access or locate in where you want to go. Therefore, the studies of tourism and travel may transfer angles or issue into this virtual space.

3. Issues of using VEP to study photos on the internet

Visitor-Employed Photography (VEP) is a technique that has been used successfully in understanding landscape aesthetics, outdoor recreation, and community planning (Chenowith, 1984; Cherem& Driver, 1983; Hawkins et. al., 1999; Flick, 1995). The technique involves distributing cameras to participants and asking them to photograph aspects of a site related to research areas. Previous studies asked participants to record diaries or notes of the photos that they had just taken. Initially,
most VEP focused on landscapes, rivers (Chenwith, 1984), nature or hiking trails (Cherem and Driver, 1983), and natural scenic areas (Hull and Stewart, 1992). There been relatively few applications of VEP in the field of tourism. Haywood (1990) examines tourists’ perceptions of the city of Toronto; Jutla (2000), who compares tourists’ and residents’ visual images of the hill town of Simla in India; Groves and Timothy (2001) use VEP to measure the importance to tourists’ satisfaction of particular components of a trip to Quebec City; and Mackay and Couldwell (2004) examine the visual components of the tourist image of an outdoor heritage museum in Canada. But, some researchers also recognized the potential of VEP for measuring human perceptions in constructed environments (Cherem and Driver, 1983), and investigate playground activity patterns and preferences (Cunning and Jones, 1999). Other research applications are in the field of health and well-being, where the techniques have been used to investigate the experiences of both health practitioners and patients (Hurworth et al, 2005; Rapport, Doel, and Elwyn, 2007). VEP has been used in a variety of contexts that is also a successful method to study related issues in tourism and travel.

Mackay and Couldwell (2004) indicated the potential of VEP for capturing and analyzing people’s perceptions of scenery has been hinted at for decades, but there have been remarkably few empirical implementations, possibly due to cost factors. Chenowith (1984) pointed that the researcher used a reasonably priced and good-quality disposable camera due to its accessible as a research tool. Taylor, Czarnowski, and Flick (1995) used disposable 12-exposure cameras donated by a major manufacturer to assess the importance of water resources in a national park. Because VEP involves distributing cameras to participants who are instructed to shoot scenes based on stated study objectives, the cost of cameras were provided from the researchers. If there are 20 participants of a study, each was given a 27-exposure single-use camera which costs about 10 US dollars. 20 times 10 are totally 200 US dollars. If the participants are more than 20, the cost will be much more. Based on the success of VEP in capturing perceptions of natural and built-up environments, and in generating destination images, the technique seems intuitively well suited to understanding travel photos on the Internet.
Travel photos posted on personal blogs are often taken by the bloggers themselves, as indicated by the narratives that accompany the photos. While studying travel experience via photos online, the related studies will economize the use of cameras that solve the cost factor. It also can directly analyze the content that the researcher doesn’t asking participant to record diary or note. On the other hand, since posting photos on the personal blogs took by blog-owners, it can be assumed the blog-owner shot photos via pleasure and free willing. The use of VEP is particularly appropriate it employs photographs that have been taken by tourists themselves, who adopt an active role in the research as generators of the pictures.ing. Unlike a number of VEP studies, the researcher needs to hand over a camera to participants, and entailed having participant to take pictures according to study objectives or goal. But, studying travel photos on personal blogs will be reduces the researcher’s social expectations of participants and may raise the reliability and validity of study.

Moreover, a wide variety of traveling photos can be browse on the internet, which also can dig out multi study issues. First, the researcher can focus on motivations about posting photos of bloggers. Why do these bloggers like to post travel photos online? Is it possible to generating similar meanings or findings as previous studies? Secondly, previous studies reveled that posting photos online was for self presentation that perhaps extended into other study issue. According to Veblen, he thought leisure were symbol and sign of class and status for individuals. Travel is a way of leisure. When people travel, they take pictures and some of them post online. These traveling photos show including which destination they went, what kind of foods they ate, what souvenirs they bought. In another words, these traveling photos may mirror at individuals’ image value. As Urry (1990) said, travel and going on a vacation are conspicuous consume that also embody on individual’s behaviors. Is it possible that post travel photos online is a conspicuous behavior?

Because of complexity between network culture and societal phenomenon, VEP can implement with other methodology such as netnography. The internet embody communication space both social mobility and privatization. While cyberspace is a research site not only break the limit of site bond, but also trans-sited (Hakken, 1999). The researcher also can stay at research site and observe for longer period.
Furthermore, the participants will be much more diversification that can focus on specific group or multilevel people. VEP is a visual analysis technique that can combine with other study methods, in order to completely understanding and investigating meanings and representation of travel photos on the internet. Using VEP to analyze photos on personal blogs is a feasible study strategy.

4. Conclusion

A number of studies in tourism and travel tend to explore or investigate travel experience that also limited at time and space. However; more and more people share and post their travel experience including information searching, package, itinerary, feelings or experiences after trip and so forth on the personal blogs. In other words, the researchers need to stretch study angles of travel experience into space and time dimensions in order to fully understanding travel experience upon the internet era. The travelers’ behaviors of construction and communication in travel experience are on the personal blogs that have to systematic observed and realize. Based on the foundations of previous studies and taking platform of sharing or posting travel photos online into consideration, this study aimed to discuss how to use VEP to investigate representation of travel photos online that also expect to find a new path studying travel photos on the internet.

References


