



Smartphone (dis)connectedness and vacation recovery



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ABSTRACT

Given ubiquitous connectivity provided by modern smartphones and tablets, this research aims to determine whether the use of smartphones for social purposes (work and non-work related) during a vacation enhances or hinders the potential of tourism environment to promote a sense of recovery. In other words, which role does omnipresent connectivity play in facilitating tourists' recovery? Drawing on Attention-Restoration Theory, Social Presence Theory, and survey data of working Chinese population, we show that frequency of work-related social presence acts as a negative moderator while quality of work and non-work social presence are positive moderators in the relationship between destination restorative qualities and vacation recovery. We discuss how these results problematize the current understanding of tourist experience as liminal and "encapsulating."

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Introduction

Little Palm Island Resort, located in the Florida Keys, may appear like many other resort properties offering its guests unforgettably luxurious and rejuvenating experiences in the tropics. However, guests should not expect to find televisions in their room, nor should they anticipate being able to access Wi-Fi. Granted, such services are available in a special room upon a personal request but not extended to other parts of the resort. Moreover, employees are encouraged to ask guests who use cell phones to take the conversation to their private rooms not to disturb other vacationers. As often claimed in such instances, these policies are in place to facilitate a sense of recovery, when guests are free from business-related matters and outside disturbances (Little Palm Island Resort, 2015). Such claims, however, have yet to be supported by direct empirical evidence, thus providing a research avenue for the current study.

Rest and relaxation is a fundamental and one of the earliest known motivations of individuals embarking on vacations during their time off work (Pearce, 2011), and vacations have been long viewed as a means of preserving and enhancing one's working capacity (de Bloom, 2015). In fact, numerous studies have linked vacations to, for example, reduced absenteeism from work (Westman & Etzion, 2001), mental flexibility (de Bloom, Ritter, Kühnel, Reinders, & Geurts, 2014), decreased fatigue (Chen & Petrick, 2013), and reduced health risks (Gump & Matthews, 2000). The magic of restoration in a vacation trip has been attributed to two sources: the tourism setting and the nature of tourist experience itself.

On one hand, grounded in *Attention Restoration Theory* (ART) (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989), studies have been conducted to investigate the perceived restorative qualities of vacation destinations and their contribution to tourist satisfaction (Lehto, 2013; Lehto, Kirillova, Li, & Wu, 2015). Specifically, it was shown that vacation environments (e.g., destination

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attributes) contribute to tourist recovery by creating a sense of being physically and mentally away, compatibility, extent, and fascination with a destination (Lehto, 2013). On the other hand, the mechanism of restoration in a vacation context has been attributed to the capacity of tourism to provide the liminal experience (Urry, 1990a), in which people are freed from social obligations of everyday life and the world of production (Perkins & Thorns, 2001). In this sense, tourists have been defined as subjects with the touristic desire for spatial separatedness and liminality (Jafari, 1987; Jansson, 2007; MacCannell, 1976/1999; McKercher & Lui, 2014; Turner, 1974). Thus, any factors that influence tourists' liminal experience and take tourists out of touristhood (Jafari, 1987), a temporary psychological and emotional metamorphosis of disassociation from the normal (Carr, 2002), can moderate the influence of tourism settings on vacation recovery. In fact, the destination attributes that can create a sense of awayness, both mentally and physically, have been associated with enhanced vacation recovery (Lehto, 2013).

Nowadays, however, rarely tourist (and recovery) experiences stay clear of interferences associated with the realm of mediated perception, e.g. facilitated by information communication technology (ICT) such as smartphones. Offering ubiquitous connectivity, smartphones allow for continuous social contact with tourists' families and friends regardless the space and time, via SMS, social networks, e-mails, or phone calls (Brown, Green, & Harper, 2001; Wang, Xiang, & Fesenmaier, 2016). In this way, tourism has become "emblematic of a new mobility nexus" (Molz & Paris, 2015, p.174), in which tourists use mobile devices, computers, and Internet to communicate with people in their daily life context, maintaining an intermittent co-presence with distant events, places, and people during the corporeal travel process (Mascheroni, 2007; White & White, 2007). Jansson (2007) captured this phenomenon in his framework of encapsulation/decapsulation describing how the liminal (encapsulated) experience of tourism is always haunted by its double (decapsulation). Then, if the freedom from responsibilities imposed by work demands and social roles is assumed to be the engine behind tourism power to rejuvenate, then how does "decapsulation" of tourist experience by smartphone usage influence this power?

This question becomes more pressing in the context of currently inconclusive empirical evidence which found that the ICT mediated communication with distant social networks generated both positive and negative impact on tourist experience (MacKay & Vogt, 2012; Mascheroni, 2007; Molz & Paris, 2015; Pearce & Gretzel, 2012; Wang et al., 2016). Collectively, these findings provide ambiguous implications for destinations and resorts to make decisions on facilitating or constraining tourists' communication through ICT. Therefore, the goal of this study was to investigate the role of smartphone facilitated communication with the distant social circles in the relationship between destination restorative environment and tourists' recovery. Specifically, drawing on the Attention-Restoration Theory (ART), which conceptualizes recovery as directed attention fatigue, and insights from the Human-Computer Interaction literature, we attempt to determine whether the use of smartphone for social purposes during a vacation enhances or hinders the potential of tourism environment to promote a sense recovery.

Theoretical background

ICT mediated tourist experience

From a conventional viewpoint, tourists embark on a leisure trip with a purpose to be separated from the world of everydayness, which has also been deemed the goal of tourism and of various service providers who jointly work to create the tourist experience. MacCannell (1976/1999) argued that the tourist experience "rests on an elaborate set of institutional mechanisms, a twofold process of sight sacralization that is met with a corresponding ritual attitude on the part of tourists" (p. 42). On one side, through design, service, and media representation, different parties in the tourism sector aim to convey a sense of being a tourist. On the other side, in order to enjoy attractions, tourists are expected to adhere to what is seen as an appropriate social behavior in terms of clothing and consumption patterns. Jansson (2007) named this concurrent process "encapsulation." The traditional view of tourist experience emphasizes tourists' desire for a liminal experience in which tourists accept the separateness from daily duties to enjoy anonymity and freedom (Jafari, 1987; Kim & Jamal, 2007). Pearce and Gretzel (2012) used a "threshold" (p. 6) metaphor to virtualize the transition of a person from daily life to the tourism context.

Along with the paradigm shift (Uriely, 2005), the view of liminality as a necessary condition for a tourist experience to occur is challenged by the argument that travel and everyday life experiences actually interpenetrate (Lash & Urry, 1994; Munt, 1994; Urry, 1990b). Scholars argue that work-related activities and daily social relationships are very often spilled over into the contexts of trips and break a state of limbo during which social norms are thought to be suspended (Pearce & Gretzel, 2012; Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000; Uriely, 2005). The development of ICT has been identified as one of the important forces blurring the contexts of tourism with those of everyday life. With the penetration of ICT devices (e.g., smartphones, laptops) and ICT-based communication style (e.g., instant message applications, online social networks) into individuals' lives, tourists usually remain electronically linked to their routine world during trips, the phenomenon termed as "digital elasticity" (Pearce, 2011, p. 41). Scholars acknowledge that tourist experience is transforming from liminal experiences to the one mediated by ICT (Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014; Molz & Paris, 2015; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Pearce and Gretzel, 2012), and becomes unavoidably decapsulated (Jansson, 2007).

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the impact of mobile technology on tourists' behaviors and emotions during trips. These studies show that the smartphone use mediates tourist experience in multiple aspects including movement, unplanned behavior, decision-making, and communication with distant social networks (Wang, Xiang, & Fesenmaier, 2014). The latter networks are an extensively studied area due to its relevance to the increasingly decapsulating nature of

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