

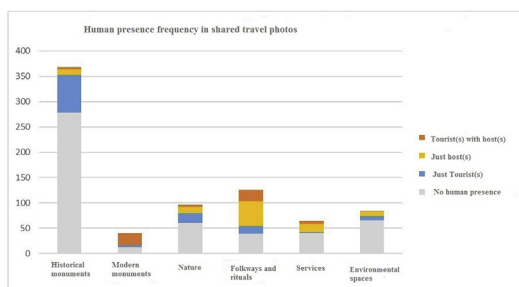
The presence of tourists and residents in shared travel photos

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GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the extent of human presence in travel photos shared in the social media by tourists who traveled to Iran. We unearthed the host-guest interaction that is distinctive in those photos. To do so, we investigated 812 random photos shared by 186 tourists on Facebook. We employed quantitative and qualitative content analysis to categorize and define photos. We found that people are absent in sixty percent of shared photos. The biggest share of photos with the presence of humans comprise those featuring tourists and their travel companions only, and in which portrait photos have the biggest share. About one third of photos with human presence include residents only, and the western-dominance and reporting approach is noticeable. Only in ten percent of all photos can tourists and hosts be seen beside each other, and we categorize these according to three levels of interaction.

1. Introduction

Photography has long been tied to travel activities and for many it seems impossible to imagine travel without taking any photos. Photographing plays various roles in travel, such as proving the presence of a tourist at a destination (Hillman, 2007) and constructing travel memories. The emergence of smartphones has made photographing less formulaic but more social (Larsen, 2008). To shape their relationships, travelers try to share knowledge and experience through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Trip Advisor, and so on (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Sharing travel

knowledge in this way creates meaningful tourism experiences (Wang, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2012). Thanks to the social media, tourists can be in more than one place and they not only present themselves at the travel destinations, but also in their own town and other places they have friends and relatives (Larsen, 2006). Tourists in this dual position are both actors and narrators, and they can share their travel experiences immediately as it happens (Bell & Lyall, 2005).

Tourists tend to take different types of photos, ranging from historical sites, modern attractions, nature, culture, and people (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). For many tourists, locals are merely objects similar to other tourist attractions, but others try to engage in

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deeper communication with locals, and taking a photo can serve as a way to start this communication (Yang, Hu, & Wall, 2017). Cohen, Nir, and Almagor (1992) argue that it is necessary to study the photographer–photographee interaction in travel.

Although some researchers have studied different aspects of travel photography, travel photo-sharing (Hillman, 2007; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011; Prideaux, Lee, & Tsang, 2018), the interaction between host and tourist (Yang et al., 2017), and the role of photography in this interaction (Cohen et al., 1992; Richard, 1979), many aspects of travel photography remain as yet under-explored. The penetration of social media through which tourists are able to share their travel photos and experiences provides a good opportunity for investigating their travel behavior. One of the travel behaviors that can be investigated through these shared photos is the interaction between tourists and hosts. In this study, we aimed to analyze human presence in photos shared via social media. So, we examine the presence of tourists and hosts in these photos, and then we focus on the relationships between tourists and hosts which can be identified from the photos.

2. Travel photography

Photography is evidence showing the presence of tourists at destinations. Tourists construct their travel memories and narrate their stories through travel photos (Hillman, 2007). According to Hall (1982), photographs are the results of peoples' attempts to make their surroundings more meaningful even if they fail to express their actual reality. According to Edensor (2000) tourists with a camera resemble the directors of theater performances, in which photographed destinations are a “stage” and locals, tourists, and their companions are the “actors”. This role helps tourists to start a new kind of social relationship with locals, and thereby produce myths and narratives (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012).

Before taking a photo, something needs to attract the attention of tourists. Urry started the literature on this specific area in 1990 through his analysis of the “tourist gaze”. In light of emerging new technologies, he later developed and refined the concept of the “tourist gaze”. For instance, while in *The Tourist Gaze 2.0* he referred the role of mass media in shaping tourists' gaze before their travel to the destination (Urry, 2002), in the latest version he argued that the role of mass media is decreased by blurring boundaries between tourism and everyday life (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Larsen (2006) understood the tourist gaze and tourist photography as intertwined practices. He argues that tourists interpret, evaluate and make a connection between signs and their referents, and then take photographs representing those signs. Maoz (2006) showed that the gaze is not confined to tourists, but locals experienced a mutual gaze with those tourists.

But what do tourists capture in their photos? Bourdieu (2003) believes that tourists are not as free as they think when taking travel photos, and they only take the kinds of photos that they are supposed to take at tourism destinations. According to Albers and James (1988), promotional materials generate their effects on tourists' minds and they cannot escape from these pre-shaped imaginaries. They argued that tourists complete a hermeneutic circle and they merely take photographs similar to their imaginaries with their own cameras. In fact, the camera works as a filter or transparent wall distinguishing known from unknown and gives a sense of security and control (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). Schroeder, 2002 (p. 72) considers the superficiality of tourist experiences that leads to creating trivial and clichéd photographs: “the ritual act of photography seemed paramount—one must take a picture when confronted with such an important sight. The camera acts as a proxy for seeing”. So, the camera is an unsuccessful tool as far as making travel experiences more fruitful; rather, it is a barrier to gaining an authentic and pure travel experience (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). Some conventions such as structural factors, visual conventions, and cultural constructions of destinations, as well as photographic etiquette, can affect those personal photographs (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). In

contrast, some researchers (Gillet, Schmitz, & Mitas, 2016; Larsen, 2008) have viewed travel photography as an active process through which tourists create original and creative images that have special meaning for them.

An example of these conventions is the Western dominance perspective amongst some tourists. The “violence of the letter” occurs when a dominant culture encounters another culture and writes about it or reports it (Spurr, 1993). The dominance of the Westerner over exotic others is also observed in photographic performances in which locals are considered as natives, indigenous, and primitive representations of cultures (Scarles, 2012). In this case, locals are considered as passive and disempowered pawns whereas tourists are all assumed to be powerful individuals who act regardless of external factors (Edensor, 2001). To examine this phenomenon, Caton and Santos (2008) studied photographs taken by students during the “semester on the sea” program. Even in the ideal conditions in which students are encouraged to understand cross-cultural issues and reduce stereotypes, their photographs nevertheless presented locals as exotic others who were gazed upon by students through a lens of myth. Cohen (1989) showed that the remote, primitive, and authentic are considered desirable by all tourists. Perhaps this is why tourists and DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations) exclude mundane and unattractive tourists from their photographic frame in order to escape everyday routines and represent a sense of myth (Markwell, 1997).

Through emerging social media and digital cameras, the act of photographing behavior has become more social. The switch from the analog camera to the digital has made photographing less formulaic but more individualized (Larsen, 2008). Sharing activities during travel offers tourists the opportunity to create meaningful travel experiences (Wang et al., 2012). The camera is also turned into a useful tool for presenting the “self” (Van House et al., 2004). Tourists spend a lot of time presenting an ideal image of the self that represents their achievements and dreams, which they wish to be seen through the photos they capture in the course of their travels (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012).

One of the most encouraging aspects of photographing is the difference between tourists (Gillet et al., 2016; Nijland, Hastedt, & Mitas, 2014, p. 22) that leads to the creation of photos with different perspectives and personal meanings. Solo travelers, for instance, take fewer photos than people who travel with their companions (Konijn, Sluimer, & Mitas, 2016) or backpackers who gaze upon conventional and superficial behaviors of other tourists especially older ones (Holloway, Green, & Holloway, 2011). Regarding nationality, tourists from North and South America, as well as Asians, normally take more photos in a single day in comparison with Europeans (Konijn et al., 2016).

3. Tourism interaction

Residents of a destination at first behave in a friendly manner with tourists, offer their hospitality with no expectation of return, and sometimes treat tourists as their distinguished guests (Berno, 1999). This friendly approach is exposed to change with the rapid development of tourism and the appearance of negative impacts of other cultures on the destination (Berno, 1999). Gradually, the original psychological and sociocultural communication between host and guest is replaced with an overt transaction with money in which hosts gain money through entertaining tourists (Dann & Cohen, 1991). In this kind of commercialized hospitality, the role of residents has evolved from host into merchant (Cohen, 1988; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1995). Host-guest interactions can be categorized into five types; a) presence of tourists and locals in the destination with no meaningful interaction, b) seeking information and help by tourists, c) business relationships, d) mutual understanding by both sides, and e) deep social interactions (Su, Long, Wall, & Jin, 2016). Thus, the interaction between tourists and hosts has different aspects and includes emotional expression such as

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