Research Article

Towards an Analysis of Tourists' "Smartphone" Photography

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Abstract

In an era that almost everyone has access to photography and public media, tourists' behaviors are greatly influenced by "Smartphone" photography. Examining how people perceive their photography behaviors using Smartphone or are influenced by others' behavior is of necessity. This study investigated the topic based on a qualitative approach. It is of value to the understanding of tourists' behaviors related to the application of modern technology. The research findings could also provide implications for the site management of tourist behaviors or customer interaction.

Introduction

Seeing exists before language. Since the moment a baby is born, it begins to discover and understand the world. Thus, seeing is human being's instinct. It is seeing that establishes our position in this world [1]. With the development of the techniques for photography, the ways of people's seeing or being seen has been changed. With cameras, either independent ones or those in "smartphones", the behaviors of seeing and being seen are solidified and materialized. Also, these behaviors are accordingly characterized by sociality and publicity [2], as is revealed by a "Defecation Gate" in Hong Kong (HK).

On April 15, 2014, a clash happened in Mong Kok between a tourist couple and a HK resident. The HK resident, Mr. Wang, found that the couple, Mr. and Mrs. Xue from Mainland China, helped their daughter defecate on the street. Thus, he took the photos of the scene. As a result, a conflict occurred because Mr. Xue took away the memory card in Mr. Wang's camera.

This incident was called "Defecation Gate" and it raised extensive discussion. Some people said that it was inappropriate for Mr. Wang to take the photos because it violated the privacy of the little girl; and that was the reason why Mr. Xue took away the memory card. Thus it can be seen that ethical issue may emerge when people take photos without restriction, which is so common today. Tourists' "Smartphone" photography, as shown in this case, may cause trouble and result in a terrible tourism experience, for both photographers and those being photographed.

Indeed, with a smartphone at hand, everyone could be "Mr. Wang" consciously or unconsciously. An early study by Chalfen [3] revealed the three rules of many travelers: carry a camera that is fully charged everywhere; take the photo of any possible view; never let anyone or anything block the best viewing angle. Today, these three rules are followed by numerous people. When you are in the street, in a restaurant, taking MTR, you may see people taking photos with "smartphones". A lot of people are thus the target of being captured. Consequently, this attracts more attention and there is a rising concern about the issues such as disturbance and privacy protection [2]. And this topic is the focus of this study.

Theoretical explanation

Sigmund Freud's Scopophilia theory indicates that people obtain pleasure from peeping the scene of sexuality [4]. This finding is carried over into photography by researchers. Photography meets people's needs of discovery and voyeuristic desire, just as Susan Sontag mentioned: The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, and cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy the flâneur finds the world 'picturesque' [5]. As a result, photographers are especially excited when they find and take a view that is abnormal and negative [6]. It is reported that Ground Zero (World Trade Center site) after 9/11 Attack becomes the most frequently photographing view in New York. Thus, people may have special interest in negative objects, which makes ethical issues unavoidable.

To see is to believe. A photo of a person with HK's night scene as background is the best way to prove that this person has been to The Peak. Thus, photography serves as various purposes, such as memory and proof [7]. Whether it is good or not, as long as a person regards the view as valuable to him/her, he/she may take the photo of it. This is actually the result of human beings' possessive desire [8]. The possessive instinct of mankind plays an important role in the "beautiful" views. Due to the characteristics of scenery, the best way to own the "beautiful" scenes is to take photo of it [9]. The materialized photos make people feel a sense of permanent possession [7].

Many people love taking photos, but it does not mean that photographing in public places is without restriction, especially when it may disturb others. However, some people use natural rights as argument [10]. Chalfen explained with respondents' words in his study that travelers' photographing is "God-given right": whenever you want, wherever you are, take what you want to photograph [3]. This is especially obvious when the photographers come from advanced civilization. For example, at the beginning of 20th century, western photographers created plenty of photos in aborigines in Australia and

these photos reflect various aspects of the local tribes [11]. Because of photographers' "inherent right" of photographing everywhere, the public characteristic of photography is more obvious [2]. Meanwhile, when being refused, some journalists usually claim that they have the right to photograph because the public need to know. As a result of these opinions, photographing in public using "Smartphone" seems reasonable.

Social media further enlarges the sociality and publicity of photography. Because of the ubiquity of the "Smartphone" usage and the popularity of quick photo-sharing technology, photographs are everywhere [12]. For example, in HK, most of the people use "Smartphone" and they have access to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo. With these media, people can easily take photos which are "interesting" and instantly share the photos with others almost every time and everywhere. Research indicates that some people share the photos on social media with the purpose of show [12]. The more abnormal the pictures taken, which are good ways to show, the more influence may be exerted on the people concerned [13]. Photo-sharing behaviors are followed by photographing; but the division between these two has gradually been curtailed and hampered, with the development of social media and cloud computing [14]. Tourists "click to share", thus photography is to sharing what means to end [14]. The broad sense of photography should involve the usage of the photos.

Thus, as is shown in Figure 1, the voyeuristic and possessive desire drive people to take photos, while the view of "natural rights" support their photographing in public occasions (sometimes causing inconvenience to others), which may lead to ethical problems if others are the target of the photographing. In addition, the widespread of social media further strengthen the influence. With these factors, it is not surprising to find that many people use "Smartphone" photographing without restriction. And this phenomenon has aroused people's concern.

Figure 1: Four factors driving the "Smartphone" photographing without restriction.
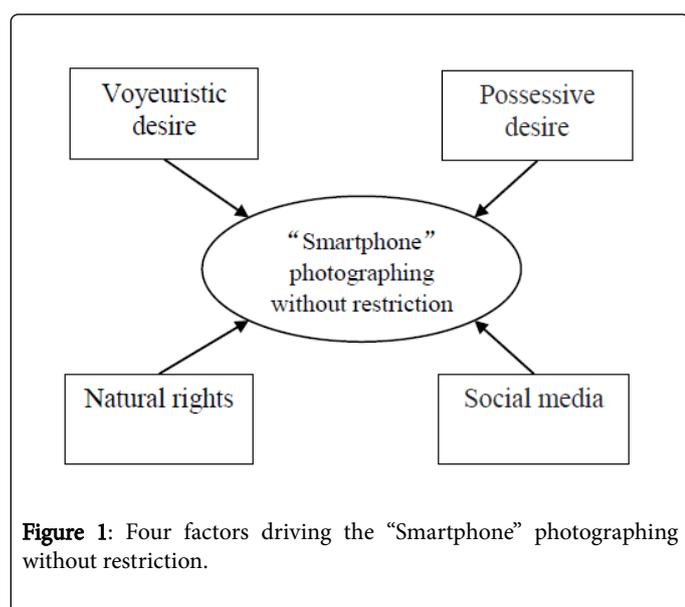
People's concern: A qualitative study

In order to find the concern of the people involved in this phenomenon, the researcher conducted a qualitative study in the Mody Road Plaza at Tsim Sha Tsui East, HK. There is not much

research focusing on people's concern about the abuse of "Smartphone" photographing. In addition, the author intended to see how people respond to such phenomenon as well as their internal views. In this case, qualitative research methods are preferable [15].

The study involves two periods. The first one lasted for two hours, from about 1 pm to 4 pm on April 16, 2016. Observations and in-depth interviews are carried out alternatively. The author first observed people's behavior using "Smartphone", especially for photographing. After that, the author made clear the purpose of this study and asked for interviews. The first observation started from 1 pm and lasted 30 minutes. About 49 people's behaviors were observed, with 9 people sitting on the benches next to the author's most of the time in this duration. About 22 people used "Smartphones", much less than I thought. Only half of them photographed with "Smartphones". The second observation was conducted from about 14:50 to 14:15. About 32 people were involved. Fourteen of them were seen using "Smartphones" and 9 people took photos in these 15 minutes. After a year, another observation and interviews were conducted from 1 pm to 2 pm on April 29, 2017, the Labor Day holiday. The result of the observation (13:00-13:25) indicate that among the 50 people involved, 31 used "Smartphones" and 22 took photos. Then two tourists were interviewed.

The three observations show that phones are frequently used by people when they are outside and some of them use "Smartphones" to take photos. As for these people involved, they were all very nice and tried to not involve others when they took photos. Also, the passers-by courteously made a detour when they found someone photographing. As can be seen from the observations, most of the people realized that they may involve others when photographing and they may be involved when others were photographing. Most of the time, people did not mean to involve others when they took photos, although sometimes they may find that in their pictures, others' behaviors were accidentally captured. During the observations, many tourists continued to play their phones, and some of them seemed to process the photos and share pictures.

The author asked for interviews and was rejected by many people. In total, four people were interviewed in the first period and two in the second. The profile of them and the interviews are shown in Table 1.

Number	Gender	Origin	Age (about)	Length (min)	Interview language
1	Female	Harbin (China)	20-30	18	Mandarin
2	Female	Philippines	25-35	7	English
3	Male	Jiangsu (China)	25-35	9	Mandarin
4	Female	Shenzhen (China)	28-40	12	Mandarin
5	Male	Taiwan	25-35	19	Mandarin
6	Male	Philippines	30-40	13	English

Table 1: Profile of the interviewees.

Due to the language of the author, most of them are from Mainland and spoke Mandarin. This may cause some bias. The interviews were not recorded (because of the privacy) and the author took notes (the key points of the interviews) in a notebook. All the interviewees had experienced being captured by others' camera, although one of them is

actually photographed when she was on the stage. The three biggest concerns about "Smartphone" Photographing was derived from the interviews. The first concern is the intention of the photographers. An interviewee mentioned that if she was accidentally photographed, she would not care. After all, it is not intentional and we should keep our good image in public places. An interviewee (#3) shared, "I am not the kind of person who like to show himself in public. If someone use my photo without permission, I will not feel comfortable. However, if I am accidentally caught in others' Smartphone, which is usual in tourism, especially here in Hong Kong, I will try to let it go. They don't do it in purpose and you can use Photoshop to edit the pictures (blurring the background)" The second one is the behaviors being captured. An interviewee stated that if the good image of her was photographed, she did not mind it. She further explained even if her bad image was photographed, it ruined the photo too and photographer probably may delete it. A Chinese tourist (#4) in the interview mentioned, "The most beautiful photos are usually taken by accident. I feel at ease when I am not being observed, or at least I don't know that I am the target of a Smartphone. But who knows. Anyway, it is me myself that should take care of my image in the places such as this plaza… " The third concern is the usage of the photos. All the 4 interviewees held the view that a photo involving others, especially the bad image of others, was better not published in public media (e.g., Facebook), as stated in the following excerpt: "what it matters is not the way you take the photos of others, but the way you use them. When a tourist is far away from his home, security is very important. The photos could cause personal information disclosure and harm to security of person and property. Of course, that is not always the case…" (#6). Some of them also admitted that it was almost impossible to deal with the phenomenon especially in such a crowed city as HK.

About how to prevent the possible unethical use of the photos, an interviewee mentioned that first we need to avoid being photographed especially in the hot spots where photographers were everywhere. The male interviewee suggested people's using the technique of Bokeh, where the background is blurred and the focus is clear in the photos. Of course, this depends on the effort of "Smartphone" companies.

Discussion and Conclusion

This is an era that almost everyone has access to photography and public media. No matter when we go to Victoria Harbor, Golden Bauhinia Square or Causeway Bay, we may be the target of being captured by "Smartphone" photographing. "Smartphone" photographing is ubiquitous due to people's voyeuristic and possessive desire of photographing. In addition, the view of natural rights encourages people to do so in public places. This may cause ethical problems and these problems may enlarge with the social media.

These ethical problems can be avoided if "Smartphone" photographers pay attention to three aspects when they take photos. First, do not purposely capture others in the photos. Try to inform the people who may be involved and asked them to stay away. Secondly, if the bad image of others is being captured, delete the photos, or at least not use them. Thirdly, try not to publish the photos with strangers in them, to avoid possible unpleasant consequences.

For people being captured by others, it is better to stay away when others are taking photos. As discussed before, it is almost impossible to avoid being captured by other in public places nowadays. Perhaps the best way to prevent the unethical behavior of "Smartphone" photographing and unethical use of the photos is arousing people attention towards it. As long as people realize the ethical issue and try to deal with it, we can find ways that make photographers satisfied (even when they apply Chalfen's (1979) three rules) while do not disturb others and cause any problems.

As for the managers of tourism destinations or hotels, measures can be taken according to these perceptions of and attitude towards the tourists' "Smartphone" photographing (described by this study). For example, viewing platforms should be provided and well designed for tourists' photographing. Instructions and reminders should be given regarding the interactions among tourists or customer-to-customer interaction (C2C) in hotels.

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