



MEDIATING TOURIST EXPERIENCES

Access to Places via Shared Videos

Iis P. Tussyadiah
Daniel R. Fesenmaier
Temple University, USA

Abstract: The emergence of new media using multimedia features has generated a new set of mediators for tourists' experiences. This study examines two hypotheses regarding the roles that online travel videos play as mediators of tourist experiences. The results confirm that online shared videos can provide mental pleasure to viewers by stimulating fantasies and daydreams, as well as bringing back past travel memories. In addition, the videos act as a narrative transportation, providing access to foreign landscapes and socioscapes. **Keywords:** tourist experience, consumer-generated media, technology-assisted mediators, mediascape. © 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Tourists travel to different places, interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, and bring back travel memories, and as suggested by McCabe and Foster (2006:194), “these [travel] activities become embedded within the totality of lived experiences.” Thus, the tourist experience is a socially constructed term whereby the meaning of the tourist experience is associated with multiple interpretations from social, environmental, and activity components of the overall experience. Several writers have attempted to chronologically and temporally define the term *tourist experience* (Jennings 2006). According to Graburn (1989), temporality is central to the tourism experience. He argues that the tourism process begins with the “ordinary,” progresses into the “heightened” moments, and returns to the “ordinary.” However, several other scholars interpret the tourist experience beyond the chronological dimension (Jennings 2006). Cary (2004), for example, proposes the term *tourist moment* so as to define the highest of Graburn's heightened moments. Urry (1995, 2001), on the other hand, introduces the term *tourist gaze* to describe the process through which a tourist objectifies and interprets the place that he or she visits.

Iis Tussyadiah is Assistant Professor at the School of Tourism & Hospitality Management (STHM), Temple University (Philadelphia, PA 19122 USA. Email <iist@temple.edu>). She conducts researches on technology-assisted mediation of tourist experiences, destination marketing, consumer generated media, and tourist spatiotemporal behavior. Daniel Fesenmaier is the Professor and Director of the National Laboratory for Tourism & eCommerce at the same institute. His main research interests include tourism marketing, advertising evaluation and information technology.

More recently, Beeton, Bowen, and Santos (2006) argue that the tourist gaze is becoming more and more mediated. That is, people often engage with others who and which serve to mediate their experience (Jennings and Weiler 2006). Indeed, Jansson (2002: 438) argues that “[t]he more organized tourism gets, the more mediatized it becomes.” The terms *mediation* and *brokerage* in the tourism setting refer to an individual’s active attempt to facilitate and/or interpret the tourism experience of another individual. Jennings and Weiler (2006) suggest that mediators for the tourist experience can be *personal* (e.g., other tourists, tourist providers, governments, and host communities) and *non-personal* (e.g., signage, design, aesthetic, and *setting-scape*). A well-known example of an on-site experience mediator is a professional tour guide who is responsible for linking tourists to attractions, facilities, and hosts. Based on the temporal dimension of the tourist experience, mediators not only exist at the experiential phase (i.e., on-site), but also at the anticipatory (i.e., planning) and the reflective (i.e., recollection) phases.

Today, there has been a growing interest in the development of technology-based mediators including the Internet, mobile phones, and digital cameras. Numerous mobile tourist guides have been developed to support tourist experiences on-the-move, e.g., CRUMPET (Poslad, Laamanen, Malaka, Nick, Buckle, and Zipf 2001), INTRIGUE (Ardissonno, Goy, Petrone, Segnan, and Torasso 2003), and P-TOUR (Maruyama, Shibata, Murata, Yasumoto and Ito 2004). Also, people can visit virtual destinations (e.g., through SecondLife.com) and virtual travel agents have started to operate on the Internet (e.g., Synthtravels.com). Finally, destination marketing organizations provide features such as images, videos, podcasts, and blogs on their websites to better support tourists. These advances allow people to benefit from being able to use multimedia features including text, images, video streaming, and virtual reality to enhance and add value to their tourism experiences.

The images, videos, and films available through the various systems provide various messages that represent destinations and serve as mediators of tourist experiences. Urry (1990:148) argues: “people are tourists most of the time, whether they are literally mobile or only experience simulated mobility through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images.” The development of technology-assisted mediators has brought time and space compression, enabling people to experience touristic activities using different modes of travel: corporeal, virtual, or imaginative (Urry 2001). Strain (2005) suggests the concept of *mobilized virtual gaze*, comparing the virtually mobile gaze of a static film (or video) with the actual mobile gaze of real travelers. This concept is similar to Jansson’s concept of *mediatization* of the tourism experience (Jansson 2002). Indeed, Jansson argues that the globalized media culture enables people to travel mentally and emotionally (i.e., experience tourism activities) without moving in physical geography.

An important need of tourists is to share their experiences with others (Brown and Chalmer 2003). With the emergence of consumer-generated media (CGM), i.e., online content created primarily by Internet

users themselves, shared images of tourism experiences can be found easily on blogs, social networking sites, galleries, etc. Today, tourists can conveniently update their blogs directly from their mobile phones while they are still on vacation; this activity is called *moblogging*. Most moblog websites also allow for video blogging (e.g., *textamerica.com*) whereby users can simply capture the moment or scenery and upload it directly to their blogs. Thus, shared images or videos act as non-personal mediators for the tourist experience, particularly in the anticipatory and reflective phases and videos containing “foreign” landscapes and attractions enable viewers to access and experience the virtual gaze on tourist places. Furthermore, shared images help tourists at the post-visit stage in the recollection process and the remembrance of past experiences. Thus, the goal of this study is to examine the extent to which CGM mediates the tourist experience by enabling tourists to share their experiences with others.

THE ROLES OF SHARED VIDEOS AS MEDIATORS OF TOURIST EXPERIENCES

Early conceptualizations of the tourist experience emphasize its contrast to, or distinctiveness from the routine of everyday-life (Uriely 2005). Jansson (2002) argues that all tourism involves a hedonistic aspect, i.e., “a longing to experience different kinds of bodily and/or spiritual pleasure (p.436),” which implies a negation of everydayness. In early conceptualizations, tourist experience refers to a quest for strangeness and novelty (Cohen 1972, 1979), a new form of a religious quest for authenticity (MacCannell 1973), or a temporary visit to a place away from home to experience change (Smith 1978). Furthermore, explaining the experiential perspective of place and space, Tuan (1977:9) argues that “to experience in an active sense requires that one venture forth into the unfamiliar and experiment with the elusive and the uncertain.” However, the concept separating tourist experiences from everyday life has been challenged since the 1990s (Uriely 2005). Uriely (2005) argues that the distinction has been gradually decreased by means of media and technology through the process of mediatization whereby tourist experiences are easily accessible in various contexts of everyday life without the necessity for movement in actual space. Franklin and Crang (2001) agree, arguing that “people are constantly alerted to and routinely get excited by the flows of global cultural materials all around them in a range of locations & settings” (p. 8).

In the tourism setting, the process of mediatization co-exists with the principle of spatial appropriation, which is related to people’s mobility in physical, social, and mediated spaces. Jansson (2002:441) argues that “[t]he mediatization process creates a new potential for mobility in mediascapes, which also involves the naturalization of images and fantasies of foreign landscapes and socioscapes.” Also, he concluded that the process of mediatization causes a gradual shift from *realistic* hedonism to *imaginative* hedonism. According to Campbell (1987, 2005),

realistic hedonism relies upon bodily pleasures and imaginative hedonism relies upon pleasures sought via emotional and spiritual stimulation. However, as suggested by Campbell, modern hedonists do not pursue pleasure through the manipulation of external stimuli and the cultivation of the senses, but from more easily controlled internal stimuli and control of one's emotions in the cultivation of a fantasy life (Campbell 1987, 2005). That is, while realistic hedonism tends to seek out the same pleasures over and over again, hence taking into account past experiences, the driving force of imaginative hedonism is the media-generated fantasies of truly new experiences (Campbell 2005). On the other hand, imaginative hedonists indulge deliberately in phantasmagoria and daydreams (Jansson 2002) using the ability to gain pleasure from the emotions so aroused; for, "when images are adjusted, so too are the emotions" (Campbell 2005:78).

Csikszentmihalyi (1991), in his theory of flow experience, argues that enjoyment or pleasure is the driver of optimal experience, which is made possible by high concentration and involvement, clarity of goals and feedback, and intrinsic motivation. Specifically, drawing on the roles of cultural artifacts to improve human experience, Massimini, Csikszentmihalyi, and Delle Fave (1992) state that cultural artifacts (and cultural information therein) shape human consciousness because they contain behavioral instructions and explicit directions for actions. They further argue that whenever a new cultural form promises pleasure or enjoyment, "it will find a receptive niche in consciousness" (p. 61). In short, it is posited that the new media as a form of cultural artifact and the potential actions inherent in it can provide a certain type of pleasurable feedback to the investment of attention, cause a certain degree of involvement, and generate an enjoyable experience.

The mediation mechanism is illustrated in Figure 1. It is argued that within the concept of imaginative hedonism, images and representation as cultural values hold greater economic significance as they have the potential to act as effective marketing tools. As such, marketers por-

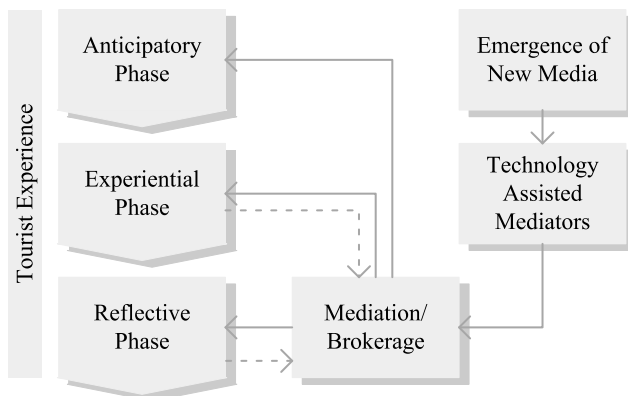


Figure 1. Mediation of Tourist Experience with Technology Assisted Mediators

tray images and representation of the media to create daydreams and fantasies in order to *intensify* consumption. However, it is further argued that the images portrayed by real travelers, which are not primarily meant to be marketing tools, have a strong social significance in the act of sharing, enabling others to derive the travel enjoyment from the mobility in these *mediascapes*. This study focuses attention on the extent to which videos that seek to represent the experience of place mediate tourist experiences. With this goal in mind, this study seeks to the extent to which:

Videos/moving images arouse mental pleasures and generate fantasies and daydreams; and,

The mental pleasures from daydreams and reminiscences mediate travelers narrative transportation to and within tourist places.

Study Method

This study attempts to assess the role(s) of online shared videos as mediators of the tourist experience using an analysis of videos published online by real travelers. This method is described as *netnography* by Kozinets (2002) and is used for diverse studies of online communities and individual blogs (Kozinets 2002; Woodside, Cruickshank and Dehuang 2007). YouTube.com is one of the leading Internet sources providing video streaming service. According to ComScore Media Matrix (2006), more than 63 million people globally visited YouTube in July 2006 (on average, 6.2 million people a day) and during this time, nearly 3 billion video streams were transmitted (100 million video streams on average daily basis).

The data collected in this study followed a purposive sampling process whereby all videos containing touristic activities in New York City, a major international tourist destination in the USA, were selected. The search was conducted on YouTube.com using multiple selection criteria. First, the search was conducted using these keywords: “New York,” “New York City,” “NYC,” “Trip,” and “Travel.” Videos having one or more combinations of the keywords in their titles, descriptions, or tags were included in the sample. Second, all videos of New York City that are not related to travel activities were excluded (i.e., comedy or creative videos). Third, the videos must have received at least one comment by a reviewer. The data collection effort was conducted on December 7th, 2006 and resulted in 120 videos uploaded from June 12, 2005, to December 7, 2006 and contained 576 viewers’ comments.

A series of content analyses that involved integrating videos and text were performed to gain in-depth understanding of the tourist roles of the shared videos. Following Rose (2001), the first step of video content analysis is the decomposition of the videos into sequences, scenes, shots, and frames. A video consists of series of still frames put together to generate a motion. A single frame is a still image whereas a shot is a single run of the camera or the piece of film resulting from such a run and comprises multiple shots. A scene is a dramatic unit consisting of a

single or several shots and usually takes place in a continuous time period, in the same setting and involving the same characters. Last, a sequence is a dramatic unit composed of several scenes, all linked together by their emotional and narrative momentum.

The video decomposition process required three basic steps: feature extraction, structure analysis, and abstraction. Analyzing the frames and shots was performed by exploring images, motion, audio and text. This analysis resulted in an identification of important features of each shot, which in turn, were used to determine key frames of a specific scene or sequence. Video structure analysis is a process of extracting temporal structural information of video sequences (Dimitrova, Zhang, Shahraray, Sezan, Huang and Zakhor 2002) and identifying the meaningful segments of the videos. Abstraction is a process of creating a presentation of visual information about the structure of video in a shorter version.

The video summarization process resulted in selected key frames of the videos. The representative key frames were selected based on the spatiotemporal flow of the videos, representing important events occurring in the videos based on a change in place and time. One representative key frame was selected for a scene featuring a particular site. However, if the scene had multiple shots of the site taken in different time intervals (indicated by, e.g., changes in the position of the sun, brightness, lights, etc.), more than one representative key frame was selected for the particular site. To understand the narratives and themes of the videos, several local concepts (low-level semantics) as well as a set of global concepts (higher-level semantics) were identified from the visual features of the representative key frames (Yang, Kim and Ro 2007). Based on the local and global concepts, video themes were identified to describe the narrative nature of the videos. The analyses were conducted using video editing software including Riva FLV Encoder™ and Windows Movie Maker™. The results of the video content analyses are preserved short important structure and semantics of videos which represent the patterns and interpretive meaning of each video. The other aspects of the videos such as music, color, and brightness are excluded from the video-content analysis for complexity reasons.

Text analysis was conducted to derive a conceptual scheme of video descriptions as provided by the directors and viewers; specifically, video titles, tags, descriptions, and viewers' comments were extracted and organized into single text files. These textual data were then analyzed using CATPAC (Woelfel and Woelfel 1997) to identify the high frequency keywords and clusters. Keywords and clusters from video titles, tags, and descriptions were then compared to the results from video content analyses to identify the video narratives. Keywords and clusters were also compared with those within the viewers' comments to confirm the resonance of the interpretive meaning of the shared videos to their viewers. It is posited that the keywords extracted from the viewers' comments are essential elements that describe the mediating roles of the shared videos for people at the anticipatory and reflective phases of tourism.

The Directors and the Messages

The majority of the New York video samples within YouTube.com are characterized as “Travel and Places” (82%); the rest of the videos were categorized as “Entertainment” (8%), “People” (8%), “Arts & Animation” (1%) and “News & Blogs” (1%). YouTube.com users, referred to hereafter as directors, have to choose one out of 12 provided categories when they upload the videos. The durations of the video samples ranged from ten to 615 seconds (10’15”), with an average of 190 seconds (3’10”). The shortest video (ten seconds) features the view of New York City from the top of the Empire State Building, while the longest video features a detailed coverage of the trip from the moment the traveler got in the car heading to the airport. The features of the videos range from slideshows of still images, time-lapses, videos (moving images), and a combination of these.

Directors of the videos, the individuals who uploaded the videos to YouTube.com, and, presumably, the ones who created the videos, are varied in ages and nationality. A YouTube.com user has the freedom to choose his/her username, nationality, age and other profile for display. Because of this freedom, there is a chance that some users, for private reasons, do not want to reveal their true profiles on the YouTube user page. This may reduce the accuracy of the user profile data. The directors’ stated ages ranged between 15 and 77 years old, with an average of 30 years old. The majority of directors are from the USA (38.4%), followed by the UK (17.2%), Canada (10%), The Netherlands (9%) and Germany (6%). The rest of the directors are from countries throughout the world including Brazil, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Uzbekistan. Although the majority of the video directors are from the USA, all samples contain touristic activities or sights in New York City.

The procedure for uploading a video on YouTube.com starts with filling out a form where a director has to describe the content of the video. The form contains boxes for giving a title, description, tags, video category, and language. At this first step, besides the video category and language, for which the choices are provided by the system, all directors have freedom to explain their videos in their own words by selecting a title, writing a description, and choosing words for video tags. Therefore, video titles and descriptions are the first form of media for directors to communicate their messages about the videos to the viewers. Once the videos are available for viewing, the communication and interaction between (and among) directors and viewers is supported by posting comments and subsequent replies.

A total of 168 words were obtained from the titles of 120 video samples, 127 of them are “New York” (which was denoted on the text as “NewYork” to make it a unique word describing one of these: “New York,” “New York City,” “NY,” “NYC,” or any other form intended to describe the name of the city). Three other main words used in the video titles are: “Part,” “Subway,” and “Trip.” The word “Part” is used by the same directors to distinguish videos of the same trip

uploaded in sequences (e.g., “New York Part 1”). The word “Trip” is generally used as a generic word to describe the videos (also “Video” and “View”), while “Subway” is a unique word that describes a specific theme of the videos (also “Christmas,” “Street,” “Empire State Building,” and “Times Square”).

Directors can enter a larger number of words to describe the video. However, based on the text document, the descriptions of all video samples contain only 202 unique words, which is only slightly higher than the video titles. Interestingly, a larger portion of them (134) are “New York.” Also, compared to the keywords on video titles, there are more specific words describing the video themes on the descriptions, i.e., “Subway,” “Empire State Building,” “Manhattan,” “Times Square,” “Christmas,” “Statue of Liberty,” and, to some extent, “USA.” The most popular keywords found in the descriptions are “Trip” and “City.”

In the process of video uploading, the director can include one or more words as tags—keywords that enable the video to be easily found by other users on YouTube. The system separates the unique tags by spaces; if the director types “New York” on the tag box, the system will recognize it as two separate tags: “New” and “York.” However, in order to understand the intended message of the directors, the keyword extraction process of the video tags was also performed by replacing words that are supposedly tied with each other as one unique word or tag, albeit the real tag system. In this case, the tag “New” followed by “York” was replaced by “NewYork” as in the video titles and descriptions. The tags contain 201 words with a large portion (129 in frequency) being “New York.” Since the purpose of giving a tag is to enable other users to find their videos, the directors tend to use more generic words describing New York City, assuming that others will try to search the videos using those generic words, such as “Trip,” “Video,” “City,” and “View.”

New York City subways and streets appear to be perceived as significant attractions of the city along with other sites such as the Empire State Building and Times Square. Following [Lew \(1987\)](#), even though some tourists are not necessarily attracted to specific locations to use infrastructure and service facilities, such facilities serve as attractions in that they contribute to the overall tourist experience. The subway trains and stations can be considered as New York City attractions, and hence can be categorized as the human-oriented attraction in Lew’s category from the ideographic perspective. For most, the touristic value of such infrastructure and facilities in this context is significantly related to the tourists’ perception, the cognitive perspective of tourist experience. Pearce defines a tourist place as “any place that fosters the feeling of being a tourist” (1982:98); hence, MacCannell points out that “no naturalistic definition of the (tourist) sights is possible” (1989: 41). In the study subway trains and subway stations of New York City with all kinds of social activities therein are perceived by the directors as tourist attractions (comparable to the Empire State Building and Times Square). The processes of making videos of interesting infrastructure and facilities, uploading (i.e., sharing) the videos online

with additional information, and maintaining the YouTube page by constantly interacting with the viewers are actually parts of the process of making sense of their tourist experiences.

The Travel Narratives

Based on an analysis of the video samples, 20 local concepts (concepts having less than four in frequency were removed from the analysis) and seven global concepts were identified from the key frames (Table 1). Among the highest frequency of local concepts are “Building” (89 samples), “People” (64), “Sky” (55), “Street” (48), “Car” (38), “Water” (36), and “Lights” (35). Major global concepts are “Outdoor” (48), “Architecture” (47), “Skyline” (47), and “Night Scene” (37). Some of the local concepts are identical to the keywords given by the directors on video titles, descriptions, and tags (e.g., “Subway,” “Street,” “People”). Some specific keywords such as “Empire State Building” and “Statue of Liberty” are represented generally in the local concepts as “Building” and “Statue” and in the global concept as “Architecture.” Some generic keywords such as “Trip” and “City” and time-and-place-related keywords such as “Manhattan” or “Christmas” are represented by combinations of two or more local and global concepts. For example, a key frame containing “Building,” “Street,” and “Car” seems to be a representation of the keyword “City” given by the directors.

Based on the key frames as well as the local and global concepts, the video contents were categorized into four different themes: *site-centric*, *activity-centric*, *self-centric*, and *other-centric*. Videos in the site-centric category feature a number of attractions in New York City sequentially, most likely based on the temporal nature of the trips without so much coverage of activities or people. These videos provide a touristic posi-

Table 1. Identified Local Concepts, Global Concepts, and Themes

Local Concepts (1)		Local Concepts (2)		Global Concepts		Narratives	
Semantics	Freq.	Semantics	Freq.	Semantics	Freq.	Themes	Freq.
Bridge	21	Ship	4	Architecture	47	Site-centric	59
Building	89	Sign	31	Indoor	23		
Car	38	Sky	55	Night Scene	37	Activity-centric	8
Cloud	14	Snow	4	Outdoor	48		
Face	22	Statue	25	Performance	12	Self-centric	27
Flag	9	Street	48	Skyline	47		
Furniture	8	Subway	14	Waterside	11	Other-centric	23
Lights	35	Sun	6				
People	64	Tree	18			Unidentified	3
Rail	9	Water	36				

tioning of the spectators, enabling viewers to *access* and *tour* many places of interests in the city. Videos in the other-centric category focus on “things” in the city that are perceived as “foreign” and “special” to the directors. These include lifestyle, habit, performances, or even the transportation system (e.g., subway). In most cases, the directors act as spectators of the events/activities. Both site-centric and other-centric types of videos enable viewers to be the virtual spectators of “foreign” things, as the former emphasizes the landscape (i.e., a manifestation of “Let’s take a tour!”), while the latter portrays the *socioscape* of New York City (i.e., a manifestation of “It’s different here!”).

Videos in the activity-centric category focus on different kinds of touristic activities that people do in the city. Examples include coverage of people biking, children playing with water, people partying, etc. The self-centric videos focus on expressing the directors’ self image and experiences to the viewers. These videos are similar to documentaries—travelogues or travel lectures—featuring the director’s trip as an individual or a group. The coverage of tourist sites and activities in the self-centric videos is so much associated with their personal preference and image, and are, therefore, far from being generic. Both activity-centric and self-centric videos focus on the side of tourists as the self or as the other tourists, the former emphasizes the activities (i.e., a manifestation of “It’s fun here!”) and the latter on self-expression (i.e., a manifestation of “Hey, I’m cool!”). These types of videos offer pleasures to viewers from two different kinds of gaze: the pleasures of gazing at the tourists (and activities they performing) as attractions and pleasures from imaginative actions of being *the* tourists. MacCannell (1976) argues that tourists themselves may be an attraction in their own right; tourist watching is an important aspect of the touristic experience. For most, tourists’ behavior, not their mere presence, is the fundamental nature of attraction. Furthermore, Lovelock (2004) identifies tourist-created attractions, referring to objects or artifacts created by tourists which contribute to the aesthetics of the surrounds. Videos portraying tourists in their normal behavior offer viewers the possibility of having touristic experiences by tourist watching; enjoying how tourists interact with other people and artifacts, and make impacts, in a foreign setting. The other kind of pleasure can be derived from the imagination of being *the* person in the video; viewers placing themselves as the actor, performing the touristic activities guided by the spatiotemporal narrative illusion offered in the videos.

Perceived Mediating Roles of the Shared Videos

The underlying messages interpreted from the video content analyses indicate that the directors are aiming to provide tourist experiences to viewers: access to foreign landscape and *socioscape*, as well as access to “tourist watching” and imaginative actions. It is important to analyze how viewers perceive the roles of the shared videos and interpret the directors’ messages. For some travel videos, users’ comments become

important since users (directors and viewers) tend to construct a meaningful conversation and form a small (and briefly temporal) online travel community. Within the conversation, users share rich travel-related information and personal opinion or perception about the video subjects. A text analysis of the viewers’ comments was performed to identify how viewers perceive the role of the videos in their personal travel experiences.

Seven clusters of keywords were identified from the analyses. They were categorized based on the similarities and relationships between keywords within the clusters. They are: *Information Sharing* (clustered keywords: “best,” “city,” “go,” “love,” “New York,” “video,” “nice,” “great,” “cool,” “place,” “live,” hope,” “will,” “want,” “good,” “song,” “times square”), *Daydreams and Reminiscences* (clustered keywords: “can’t wait,” “memories,” “remember,” “going to,” “dream”), *Testimonials* (clustered keywords: “awesome,” “better,” “trip”), *Perceived Attractions* (clustered keywords: “park,” “subway”), *Travel Stimuli* (clustered keywords: “wish,” “amazing”), *Tourists* (clustered keywords: “people,” “world”), and *Video Quality* (clustered keywords: “beautiful,” “music”). To represent the roles of the videos in

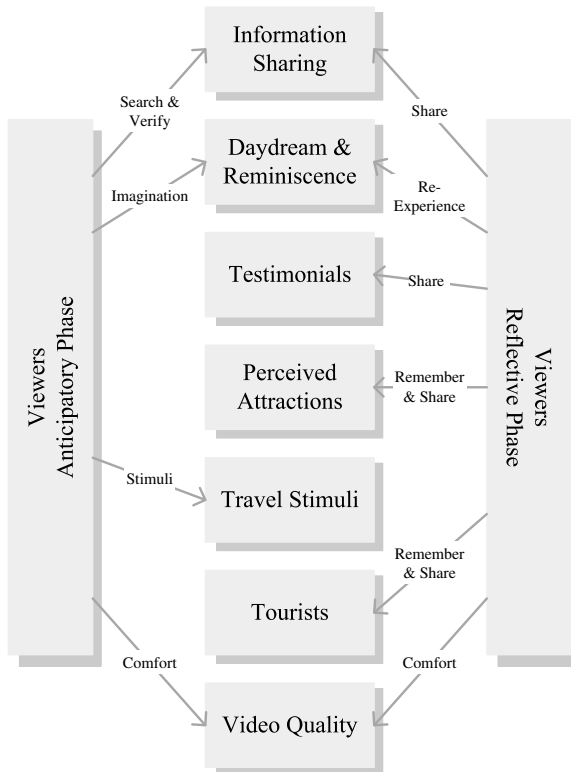


Figure 2. Identified Mediating Roles of the Videos for Viewers

the tourism settings, interpretation of the keywords within each keyword cluster were performed to identify the perceived roles of the videos at the anticipatory and reflective phases (see [Figure 2](#)).

The biggest cluster of keywords seems to represent the first identified role of the videos as media for sharing and searching for information. Viewers at the reflective phase of experiences perceive the videos as reminders of their “knowledge” of New York City as a tourist place as they use the comment form to share the information with other viewers. Viewers at the anticipatory phase of experience utilize the videos (and the community) to seek or verify information about the city for future travel planning. Examples of comments in this category are:

“ok people if u go 2 nyc chck out 5th avenue (i live in ny) check out F.A.O Schwartz (wow its the most expensive store lol) if u go 2 nyc be-sure 2 bring money like for a whole lasting year seriously lol its true, its like so EXPE(N)SIVE i’m not kidding. n the best part is that central park the most beautiful place is FREE!!! lol. n if u go b-sure 2 have FUN!!!” (tzlil218 (n/a, USA), a comment to video by happynullipara (35, UK))

“I’m staying at the Crowne Plaza next week so this (video) is very useful for me” (duchy2000 (46, UK), a comment to video by tipsfortravellers (47, UK))

The role of videos as pictorial information about the touristic place and samples of tourist experience has an implication toward the concept of marker. MacCannell (1989) defines the tourist attraction “as an empirical relationship between a tourist, a sight and a marker, a piece of information about a sight” (p. 41). According to MacCannell’s concept, nobody just goes to a sight and experiences it immediately; tourists consider a number of meanings and structures to organize the experience, which is provided by markers. Being perceived as sources of information, the shared videos act as the markers; they provide meanings and structures to different sights that can be visited and activities that can be done in New York City. After watching the videos, viewers planning to visit the city may include the attractions portrayed on the videos, whether it is the Empire State Building or the subway, in their itineraries. The videos can signify that a particular sight is worth viewing, as it is portrayed to be gazed at by other tourists.

The second role of the videos is related to the concept of imaginative access to touristic spaces. Viewers who have never been to New York appear to perceive the videos as a source of living their dreams and fantasies of visiting the city, while viewers who have experiences of visiting the city perceive the video as a media to bring back travel memories and re-experience the trip. These roles confirm the term *tourist imagination* by Crouch, Jackson, and Thompson (2005) which “designates the imaginative investment in the crossing of virtual boundaries within the media” and “suggest(s) a creative potential inherent in free movement between different spheres of life” (p. 2). As indicated in the video content analyses, the narratives on the videos provide viewers

what they may actually see, do, touch, feel, and think in New York City. The viewers' comments indicate how these imaginations offered on the narratives are encountered, confronted, and consumed. Some of the comments in this category are:

"WOW, it's the biggest Dream of me that I can fly to New York, I think it's so wonderful there..." (1992lensche1992 (14, Germany), a comment to video by StephanieHarris63 (33, USA))

"... I travelled to New York from London for St. Patricks Day 2006 and it was one of the best weeks of my life and something i will never forget. Watching this video has brought back many happy memories." (blueeyedbho (21, UK), a comment to video by youtube13 (38, USA))

The comments clearly indicate that, by watching the videos, the viewers derived mental pleasures of imagining: living the dream of experiencing a "wonderful" city and re-experiencing "one of the best weeks of his/her life." The comments also indicate the process of "narrative transportation" (Escalas 2004) within the concept of virtual mobility; the viewers feel so immersed in the narratives of the videos that they could be mentally transported to the touristic space. In summary, the tourists' experiences within technology mediated environment are derived from the process of mental apparatus guided by, and, in turn, create the mental pleasures of living fantasies and reminiscences and self-interpreted meanings of the virtual mobility itself.

Three small keyword clusters about testimonials, perceived attractions, and tourists represent the informative roles of the videos for viewers at the reflective phase of experiences as a media for sharing and re-sharing experiences. Meanwhile, the category of travel stimuli represents how viewers are stimulated to have travel intention. Viewers' comments about the quality of videos (including pictures, audio, and editing in general) do not simply express personal appreciation of the directors' works; videos with good quality enable viewers to experience the tourist gaze with imaginative access in a more realistic sense. Some of the comments related to the video quality are:

"Your beautiful video made me cry..." (ShaytanBozorg (n/a, USA), a comment to video by bkp0968 (38, USA))

"Nice vid(eo), you really get the feeling you're just strolling down the street, and straining your neck to look up at the skyscrapers!" (thombo1 (n/a, UK), a comment to video by kaisermisato (34, n/a))

To identify how viewers respond to different types of videos, viewers' comments were grouped based on the video themes, i.e., site-centric, activity-centric, self-centric and other-centric. Keywords were extracted from each group of comments to identify the possible differences. Viewers' comments to site-centric videos are larger in number (because of the larger number of the videos) and also richer in nature. Based on the highest frequency keywords and the manual interpretation of the comments, it appears that the videos can effectively stimulate tourists to experience and re-experience the place (as daydreams and reminiscences). The site-centric videos also seem to generate more information exchange among the viewers. However, there is no substantive difference identified from the comments to activity-centric and

other-centric videos, partly because the number of comments is relatively small. Some of the keywords on the other-centric videos are site specific, discussing some particular subjects featured on the videos. On the other hand, viewers' comments to the self-centric videos are dominated with responses to the quality of the videos (good editing, good angles, good music, etc.), with a relatively small portion commenting on New York City.

CONCLUSION

The videos downloaded from YouTube.com feature touristic aspects of New York City: the site-centric videos feature landscape, the activity-centric videos feature tourist activities, and the other-centric videos feature the *socioscape* of New York City. The results of this study clearly indicate that such videos have the potential to substantially affect touristic experiences. Based on the perceived roles of the videos for viewers, the videos appear to generate mental pleasures through imagination that bring to life people's dreams and fantasies of visiting New York City and, in turn, their imaginations of re-experiencing the past real trips to the city. The analysis of the keyword cluster categorized as "Daydreams and Reminiscences" specifically describes the role of videos that stimulated such fantasies. These generic travel-related videos are shown to be powerful as media of "transportation" within the concept of virtual mobility.

Thus, these findings confirm that videos can be a powerful tool that can be used to intensify the interest of potential travelers. Moreover, the nature of interactions between directors and viewers enables YouTube.com (and potentially other such sites) to develop a travel community where important experiential information is being shared and exchanged. The process of information sharing can benefit tourists who are actually planning to visit the place. As videos can be regarded as a means of "transportation" to destinations, facilitating the sharing of such experiences through videos can be viewed as a process of opening or providing access to (realistic and imaginative) tourist experiences.

This study enhances and strengthens the current understanding of tourism experience mediation by evaluating the role of technology, specifically online communication media, as a means of exploring hedonism within tourism encounters. This contributes not only to tourism experience literature, but also to the field of information systems and communication media within the context of tourism. This study also exemplifies the crucial importance of assessing applications, implications, and impacts of online communication media to tourism by providing a new direction for future investigation of technology-assisted experience mediation in tourism. Research that includes other online media for targeting different audiences (e.g., other forms of online community websites or online 3D virtual reality) and/or other destinations will be valuable to better understand

the roles of the digital media and technology in mediating tourism experiences.

REFERENCES

- Ardissono, L., A. Goy, G. Petrone, M. Segnan, and P. Torasso
2003 INTRIGUE: Personalized Recommendation of Tourist Attractions for Desktop and Handset Devices. *Applied Artificial Intelligence: Special Issue on Artificial Intelligence for Cultural Heritage and Digital Libraries* 17(8-9):687–714.
- Beeton, S., H. Bowen, and C. A. Santos
2006 State of Knowledge: Mass Media and its Relationship to Perceptions of Quality. *In Quality Tourism Experiences*, G. Jennings and N. Nickerson, eds. Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Brown, B., and M. Chalmer
2003 Tourism and Mobile Technology. *In Proceedings of the Eight European Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, K. Kutti and E. Karsten, eds. Kluwer Academic Press.
- Campbell, C.
1987 *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
2005 *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. London: WritersPrintShop.
- Cary, S.
2004 The Tourist Moment. *Annals of Tourism Research* 31:61–77.
- Cohen, E.
1972 Toward a Sociology of International Tourism. *Social Research* 39(1):164–182.
1979 A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences. *Sociology* 13:179–201.
- comScore Media Metrix
2006 comScore Data Confirms Reports of 100 Million Worldwide Daily Video Streams from YouTube.com in July 2006 <<http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=1023>>.
- Crouch, D., R. Jackson and F. Thompson, eds.
2005 *The Media and the Tourist Imagination: Converging Cultures*. New York: Routledge.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M.
1991 *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper Perennial.
- Dimitrova, N., H.-J. Zhang, B. Shahraray, I. Sezan, T. Huang, and A. Zakhor
2002 Applications of Video-Content Analysis and Retrieval. *IEEE Multimedia* (July – September):42–55.
- Escalas, J.
2004 Imagine Yourself in the Product: Mental Simulation, Narrative Transportation, and Persuasion. *Journal of Advertising* 33(2):37–48.
- Franklin, A., and M. Crang
2001 The Trouble with Tourism and Travel Theory? *Tourist Studies* 1(1):5–22.
- Graburn, N.
1989 Tourism: The Sacred Journey. *In Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, V. Smith, ed., pp. 21–36. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Jansson, A.
2002 Spatial Phantasmagoria: The Mediatization of Tourism Experience. *European Journal of Communication* 17(4):429–443.
- Jennings, G.
2006 Perceptions on Quality Tourism Experience: An Introduction. *In Quality Tourism Experiences*, G. Jennings and N. P. Nickerson, eds. Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

- Jennings, G., and B. Weiler
2006 Mediating Meaning: Perspectives on Brokering Quality Tourism Experiences. *In Quality Tourism Experiences*, G. Jennings and N. Nickerson, eds. Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Kozinets, R.
2004 The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities. *Journal of Marketing Research* 39(February):61–72.
- Lew, A.
1987 A Framework of Tourist Attraction Research. *Annals of Tourism Research* 14:553–575.
- Lovelock, B.
2004 Tourist-Created Attractions: The Emergence of a Unique Form of Tourist Attraction in Southern New Zealand. *Tourism Geographies* 6(4):410–433.
- MacCannell, D.
1973 Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings. *American Sociological Review* 79:589–603.
1989 *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Maruyama, A., N. Shibata, Y. Murata, K. Yasumoto, and M. Ito
2004 P-TOUR: A Personal Navigation System for Tourism. *Proceedings of 11th World Congress on ITS*, Vol. 2, pp. 18–21.
- Massimini, F., M. Csikszentmihalyi, and A. Delle Fave
1992 Flow and Biocultural Evolution. *In Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness*, M. Csikszentmihalyi and I. S. Csikszentmihalyi, eds. Cambridge University Press.
- McCabe, S., and C. Foster
2006 The Role and Function of Narrative in Tourist Interaction. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 4(3):194–215.
- Pearce, P.
1982 *The Social Psychology of Tourist Behavior*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Poslad, S., H. Laamanen, R. Malaka, A. Nick, P. Buckle, and A. Zipf
2001 CRUMPET: Creation Of User-Friendly Mobile Services Personalised For Tourism. *In Proceedings of the Second International Conference on 3G Mobile Communication Technologies*, 2001 pp. 28–32.
- Rose, G.
2001 *Visual Methodologies*. London: Sage.
- Strain, E.
2005 *Public places—Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Smith, V., ed.
1978 *Host and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tuan, Y.-F.
1977 *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Uriely, N.
2005 The Tourist Experience: Conceptual Developments. *Annals of Tourism Research* 32:199–216.
- Urry, J.
1990 *The Tourist Gaze*. London: SAGE Publication.
2001 Globalising the Tourist Gaze <<http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Urry-Globalising-the-Tourist-Gaze.pdf>> (November 12, 2006).
- Woodside, A., B. Cruickshank, and N. Dehuang
2007 Stories Visitors Tell about Italian Cities as Destination Icons. *Tourism Management* 28:162–174.
- Woelfel, J., and J. Woelfel
1997 *Catpac Version 2.0*. Galileo Corporation.
- Yang, S., S. Kim, and Y. Ro
2007 Semantic Home Photo Categorization. *IEEE Transactions on Circuits and Systems for Video Technology* 17(3):324–335.

*Submitted 8 August 2007. Resubmitted 14 January 2008. Resubmitted 2 July 2008. Final Version 15 August 2008. Accepted 5 October 2008. Refereed anonymously. **Coordinating Editor: Philip Pearce***

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

