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Playfulness, immediacy, spontaneity, simultaneity and sociality: Towards an understanding of smartphone photographic practices by younger generations of (Chinese) tourists

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Playfulness, immediacy, spontaneity, simultaneity and sociality: Towards an understanding of smartphone photographic practices by younger generations of (Chinese) tourists

Mohan Li*

Abstract: This interdisciplinary study aims to investigate the younger generations of tourists’ (That is, those who were born either in the 1980s or 1990s) photographic performances other than taking a selfie. In order to achieve this aim, the innovative research method of visual autoethnography is employed. Based upon the empirical research undertaken amongst Chinese younger tourists in the UK, this study unpacks that, for Chinese younger tourists, who appear to be becoming postmodern, the smartphone has potentially become a “toy” and photo-taking a means to fulfilling their insatiable desire for hedonism in travel. Notably, in the fieldwork, the Chinese respondents were identified to play an interactive game of photo-taking and photo-sharing, casting the focus of their gaze on each other and engaging with the destination in the child-like fashion. In so doing, the playful, immediate, spontaneous, simultaneous and sociable characteristics of tourist photography in general might have been reinforced further. Also, the life-span for smartphone-based digital snapshots is found to have become much shorter, and smartphone-based digital snapshots have potentially become a kind of artifacts more suitable for instantaneous consumption than a part and parcel of representation files useful to stage myths for tourist places.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohan Li is a Postdoc at the School of Tourism Management, Sun Yat-sen University (China). He was awarded his PhD at the University of Central Lancashire (UK), where, together with Professor Richard Sharpley and Dr Sean Gammon, he formulated the conception of the Chinese tourist gaze, encapsulating what the Chinese tourist prefer to see in travel, and manifesting how their gazes are socially, culturally and technologically fashioned. Mohan's research interests include smart tourism, urban tourism, tourism mobilities and the visuals and visuality of tourism. And currently he is researching the relationship between Augmented Realities and the tourist practice of walking in the urban context.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Taking and sharing photographs today have already become an unthinkable ritual both in people's travel and in their everyday life. To study how and why tourists take and share photographs is very important, because it reflects how they engage in their travel and interact with the destination they are visiting. This study has focused upon the younger generations of tourists' photographic practices. Specifically, based upon the research with 6 Chinese respondents, it is found that the younger generations appear to be becoming postmodern. For them, the smartphone camera has potentially become a “toy” and photo-taking a way of fulfilling their desire for fun and pleasure in travel. In the fieldwork, the Chinese respondents were identified to play a photo-game. And this kind of photo-game enabled them to engage with their travel playfully and creatively. Also, digital snapshots are found more like fast food, suitable for instant and spontaneous consumption.
1. Introduction

To date, the photography and tourism have been married for almost two centuries (see Urry & Larsen, 2011). And the establishment of the intimate relationship between the two social entities was preconditioned fairly by multiple, more or less, inter-related historical events and social changes occurring in the Western society since the Enlightenment, notably, but not exclusively, the Romantic Movement in the eighteenth century, the First Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, Louis Daguerre’s invention of photography in 1839 and Thomas Cook’s first organised railway tour in 1841, an event that for many marked the beginning of modern mass tourism (Garlick, 2002; Urry, 1995). Today this marriage is still being strengthened constantly, with a hiking number of smartphone cameras widely used both on people’s holidays and in their everyday lives (see Van House, 2009, 2011; Zhang, 2017). Thus, the boundary between travel and everyday photography becomes mobilised accordingly (Mohan, Richard, & Sean, 2017).

Meanwhile, partly due to a series of social changes as well as widely use of information and communication technology (e.g. smartphones), a growing number of tourists, notably the younger generations (That is, those who were born since the 1980s) might be becoming increasingly post-modern (see Lash & Urry, 1994; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Becoming post-modern tourists literally means that they might be less obsessed with authenticity and unique choice of experience, but more with pleasure and multi-choices of consuming tourist places open to them (see Feifer, 1985, p. 269). Meanwhile, post-tourists might particularly fancy adopting various types of smart photographic devices (e.g. smartphones and smart tablets) to “elevate otherwise ordinary objects/events to photo-worthy occurrences” (Okabe & Ito, 2003, p. 206), to entertain themselves (see Xu, Tian, Buhalis, Weber & Zhang, 2015) and to boost interactions with the destinations they are touring.

In such a context, though, tourists’ photographic practices should be re-investigated. Specifically, building upon some geographers’ (e.g. Schatzki, 1996; Reckwitz, 2002) insights into social practice, tourist photography, as a social practice, may be considered a collection of routinised ways of photographing in travel, deploying a range of objects, devices, knowledges, bodily gestures and emotions. It is through this practice that certain social relations and institutions are established, sustained or transformed, and thorough this practice that subject positions and identities are performed (see Rose, 2010; Van House, 2011). Therefore, the preceding studies have either investigated, performativity, embodiment and reflexivity of photographic performances per se or scrutinised the social relationship and personal/family’s identity that have been produced by this social practice.

Specifically, a proliferation of studies insofar have been undertaken to research tourist photography either as a nostalgic practice of staging individuals'/families' travel experience (Boerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004; Garlick, 2002; Scarles, 2009; Sontag, 1979; Yeh, 2009), of mediating host landscapes/communities (Cherry, 2003; Scarles, 2004), of negotiating with pre-script discourses (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010; Scarles, 2009), of refiguring the host-guest relationship (Martinez & Albers, 2009; Stalker, 1988; Teymur, 1993), of sustaining tourists' personal relations with “the remote, intimate other” (Elliot & Urry, 2010; Molz, 2012; Villi, 2014) or of enacting tourists’ self over various social media platforms (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Paris & Pietschnig, 2015; Van House, 2011; Zhang, 2017).

Nevertheless, it is still of necessity to re-research tourist photographic practice, inasmuch as some of its assembling elements are in transformation, notably, but not exclusively, the affordance of photographic devices, the characteristics (and knowledge) of tourist photographers and the social relations re-situated in this mobile world (see Elliot & Urry, 2010; Larsen, 2014). Not only might these social, cultural and technological changes literally be refiguring content, essence and life-span of
photographs but also diversifying the ways of taking and sharing photographs in travel. Indeed, recently it is becoming increasingly hot to scrutinise how tourists’ selfies have been taken and how those snaps have re-figured tourists’ personal identity and social relations (Paris & Pietschnig, 2015). But it is noteworthy that taking selfies is only one of the plural ways of taking photographs by deploying smartphones and social media today. And heavily relying on the study of this photographic performance appears impartial, in terms of understanding tourist photography today. To explore many other photographic performances of tourists, thus, seems fairly rewarding, such as playing a game of photo-taking and photo-sharing, as Van House (2011) suggests in his essay, which potentially enables tourists to subvert the pre-figured discourses, to shift their gaze to themselves and to engage with destinations in the child-like fashion (Crouch, 2005).

This study, thus, aims specifically to bridge the gap identified above. As it will discuss latter on, for many younger tourists (particularly Chinese younger tourists), the smartphone has potentially become a “toy” and the smartphone photography an attempt to fulfill their insatiable desire for hedonism. As such, the playful, immediate, spontaneous, simultaneous and sociable characteristics of tourist photography might have been further reinforced. Meanwhile, the life-span for smartphone-based digital snapshots become much shorter, inasmuch as they become a kind of artifacts more suitable for instantaneous consumption than a part and parcel of files of representation useful to stage myths for tourist places (Rojek, 1997). But prior to discussing the results for this study, the author will first introduce how the vision, visuals, technology and tourism intertwined historically. Then, he will move on to discuss the research method of Visual Autoethnography and procession of the fieldwork. And finally, the research outcomes will be elaborated before drawing a conclusion.

2. Vision, visuals, technology and tourism
The intimacy of these intertwined social entities is fairly preconditioned by the well-established relationship between human beings and the natural world. Indeed, despite the significant and irreversible transformations in ideology with respect to the natural world in general and, following the Enlightenment, the decreasing relevance of religion and adherence to traditional religious ritual and practice in many Western societies—replaced, perhaps, by the individual search for spiritual meaning (see Houtman & Aupers, 2007)—in particular, it has long been claimed that Western collective attitudes towards the natural world, more or less, remain determined by a religious context. That is, the relationship between people and nature is implicitly influenced by the conviction that nature is “God-given” (see Nicolson, 1959). Hence, individuals in Western societies have not only collectively felt privileged to be the owner of the objective (natural) world but also, as a consequence, consider it to be what might be described as a “standing-reserve”. In other words, the natural world is considered to be a “stand-by”, a resource or raw material, rationally ordered and ready to be exploited (Heidegger, 1977; see also Sartre, 1956).

In order to master/civilise the natural world, tools were designed, created, and widely used by human beings (Marx, 1973, p. 706). Whilst, human beings were progressively transformed either, with some senses, such as vision and hearing, gradually overshadowing the other ones, namely, touching, tasting and smelling (see Ingold, 2004). Nevertheless, the eye (seeing) at least in most Western societies eventually ascended over the ear (hearing), especially as Western travellers’ focus of interest collectively shifted from (divine) discourses to geographic features and beauty of landscapes after the Enlightenment (see Adler, 1989; Cosgrove, 1984). And due to the rise of vision and shifted social taste, a huge number of landscapes and townscapes (at least) in Europe were produced, transformed, appreciated, framed and judged across more than a hundred years, initially against the aesthetical criteria of “being picturesque” and then of “being sublime” (Adler, 1989).

Overall, all of these social, bodily and aesthetical transformations jointly paved the way for the birth of mass tourism and invention of some visual technologies (e.g. Claudian Glass and photography) around the year 1840 (see Crawshaw & Urry, 1997; Urry, 1995). From that benchmark year
onwards, vision, tourism and technology gradually fused together and the “tourist gaze” (Urry & Larsen, 2011) was stretched, enacted and mobilised progressively (Crang, 1997).

More specifically, since 1840, a proliferation of photo-prints (especially brochures and postcards) were mobilised, exhibiting places around the world. Particularly, at the turn of the twentieth century, either attending photo exhibitions or collecting photo-prints already became a prevailing activity in the Western countries. Meanwhile, various transport means and photographic devices were successively invented and widely used by tourists. Notably, in stark contrast to the heavy, clumsy, expensive and complicated primordial camera, which had ever deterred ordinary tourists from widely employment (see Urry & Larsen, 2011), the user-friendly, lightweight and cheap Kodak Brownie camera, which was officially launched in the late 1880s, afforded a hiking number of middle-class families in the Western societies to appreciate, materialise and stage their travel experience (and memories) as object of nostalgia (West, 2000). It, thus, became not unusual to observe millions of Western middle-class tourists to travel extensively either by air, sea, car or by train, who were typically armed with a Kodak analogue camera, a travel brochure and, of course, a pair of curious eyes. As such, being a tourist became being, almost by necessity, a photographer (Markwell, 1997). Photography equally became a practice of nostalgia (Larsen, 2005), a “technology of self” (Foucault, 1982/1997, p. 225) and a practice of concealing and revealing (Markwell, 1997; Scarles, 2009). It served to constitute a peculiarly modern configuration of power-knowledge-subject (Batchen, 1999, p. 190). Since then, for some scholars, the modern world has relentlessly been framed and recreated as a world of visual consumption, a world of exhibition or a “museum-without-walls” (Sontag, 1979, p. 110) whilst, for others, it has been reduced to “cheap and transportable” surfaces (Wells, 2003, p. 20).

In spite of its hey days, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the Kodak analogue camera had to give its throne to the digital camera (Urry & Larsen, 2011), which was then outrun by the smartphone ten years later (see Larsen, 2014). Compared to its two predecessors, the smartphone today is used almost everywhere by individuals, especially by those who want to capture images but could not be labelled as photography enthusiasts. Indeed, the enhanced functionality of a smartphone with a quality in-built camera means that the tourist no longer needs to also take a more cumbersome and heavy digital camera along with them. Moreover, to carry a large traditional camera around the neck has ironically been criticised as representing “commercialism, superficiality and a distinct lack of coolness” (Larsen, 2014, p. 36). Shooting with a much smaller and more lightweight one goes a long way to reducing the user’s identity as a tourist.

Smartphone cameras arguably inherit many rewarding characteristics from digital cameras. Particularly digitalisation of photographic images, built-in front-facing camera and selfie sticks jointly afford tourists to experiment freely, playfully and creatively in the way of photographing either places (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010), objects (Zhang, 2017) or their self as a tourist gaze (Dinhopli & Gretzel, 2016). In effect, some researchers (e.g. Dinhopli & Gretzel, 2016; Paris & Pietschnig, 2015; Zhang, 2017) recently have discovered that, for some social (e.g. sociality in mobile lives) and psychological reasons (e.g. narcissism), many tourists, especially the younger generations fancy excessively taking a selfie both in travel and in everyday life. In so doing, individuals’ self is othered, stylised, re-presented and consumed frequently (Dinhopli & Gretzel, 2016).

As immediately as a snapshot is taken, tourists nowadays might feel compelled to consume and inspect it on phone-screen (see Larsen, 2014). If the photograph were deemed unsatisfactory, they could delete it and then shoot another one, without a hint of hesitation (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010). Conversely, if the snapshot were considered eye-pleasing, they might employ an installed photo-editing application to gently improve it. Then, as long as there is complimentary or affordable Wi-Fi available, the photograph might be disseminated and shared instantly either with the “remote, intimate other” or ordinary social-networking “friends” over, at least, one of the installed social media applications (e.g. Facebook, Instagram and WeChat) (Elliot & Urry, 2010; Molz & Paris, 2015). In other words, smartphones facilitate photo-sharing with spatial and temporal immediacy (or in Bell and Lyall’s (2005, p. 136) words, “digital immediacy”), thereby partially transforming the essence of
tourist photography from “having-been-there” into “being-there” (Barthes, 1991, p. 40) and, commensurately, mediating an event from “there-then” to “here-now” (Villi, 2014, p. 50).

Nevertheless, heavily relying on smartphones might cause tourists negative feelings and emotions. As Tribe and Mkono (2017) recently reveal in their netnographic research, tourists might become alienated and, therefore, feel meaningless, self-estranged and isolated towards ubiquitous use of smartphones. Also, some smartphone users, especially those “flashpackers” might worry about availability of free/affordable Wi-Fi in the destination that they will travel to. If it were not available, high charges might be applied to the users as a result of the high volume of photographs uploaded. (Larsen, 2014).

3. Research method and the fieldtrip

This study employs the paradigm of Constructivism and the qualitative research method of visual autoethnography. In addition, when carrying out data-analysis, some supporting materials including field notes and photographs taken and shared by the respondents were drawn upon. In so doing, more opportunities were realised to relive the tour and interview setting, to further critically review the subjectivity performed by the researcher and the respondents (see Lacan, 2004) and to access additional valid insights into their photographic performances.

3.1. Visual autoethnography

Visual autoethnography is a new but innovative research method. Though Scarles (2009, 2010, 2012) does not provide a clear definition, following clues in her explanations and discussions, it becomes evident that, resting on the intersection of visual elicitation and autoethnography, visual autoethnography can be regarded as Scarles’ attempt to transcend the controversial textual representation of the autoethnographer’s memory and first-hand experience, largely by subjugating them to discussion and reconstruction with respondents in photo-elicitation interviews. In other words, unlike conventional autoethnography (see Reed-Danahay, 1997), visual autoethnography does not take the authenticity established by the researcher’s positionality of “being an insider” for granted. Thus, it does not require the researcher to write reflexively and evocatively his/her own personal travel stories, alongside which the behaviour or experiences of respondents in the study can be described. Rather, it accentuates the requirement that the researcher’s situated knowledge should be vocally shared, discussed and reconstructed with the respondent/interviewee during the course of interview, preferably in response to visual stimuli, such as photographs that have been taken by the respondent and introduced in interview for elicitation purposes.

More specifically, some scholars claim that the representation of the insider’s voice appears problematic (see Pillow, 2003). Moreover, being a genuine insider throughout the fieldwork seems difficult to achieve, not least because the researcher sometimes has to be an outsider who also observes, records and analyses ongoing events and conversations (Anderson, 2006; Crang, 2003). Thus, visual autoethnography has potential to successfully transcend the confining positionality of insiderhood, although the collected data might continue to be biased as the researcher is still very close to the culture and respondents in the field. To be more precise, although it does not demand “extended, detailed immersion” or “full membership” (Anderson, 2006) in order to “facilitate an understanding of grounded ways of life and worldviews via observation” (Scarles, 2010, p. 909), visual autoethnography nevertheless requires the researcher to corporeally engage in the field/community together with respondents, and to become a “researcher-as-insider” (or “researcher-as-tourist” in the context of tourism studies (see Scarles, 2010, p. 911)).

Indeed, being engaged in the field only makes the researcher’s voice par excellence a part of the (rather than the exclusive) data source. Accordingly, it does not preserve the power to single-handedly represent the social life under investigation. Hence, the researcher is not only responsible for recollecting and analysing his/her own first-hand experiences as the other (see Atkinson, 2003; Pillow, 2003) but must also collect data from the respondents in the field. Here, it should be noted that reflexivity not only acts as a strategy for situating knowledge; that is, as a means of “avoiding the false
neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge” (Rose, 1997, p. 306). It is also instrumental in initially analysing the researcher’s autoethnographic experience through linking it to literature and the socio-cultural context. Due to its embracing multiplicity and shifting identities, the authenticity established by “insiderhood”, which has been taken for granted for several decades by many autoethnographers (see Reed-Danahay, 1997), is de-constructed.

Furthermore, as an outcome of this duel positionality, the researcher is, on the one hand, able to use his/her testimony to heighten understanding of respondents’ experiences; while, on the other hand, his/her autoethnographic experience is also an integral part of the data source, its understanding, analysis and even reconstruction, in turn, benefiting from respondents’ stories (see Kiesinger, 1998).

The interview in visual autoethnography inherits many of the characteristics from those in conventional autoethnography. Specifically, during the interview, the researcher is no longer a realist listener, who passively “seeks to mimic or attempt to replicate respondents’ experiences” (Scarles, 2010, p. 909), which reflect and even represent the assumed singular truth (see Davies, 2008). Rather, the multiplicity of truths is embraced and the interview “space” is imbued with reflexivity and interaction, as both the researcher’s and respondent’s autoethnographic experiences are shared, relived and reconstructed through conversations grounded on the visual images presented during the course of interview. Instead of merely serving as vehicles either for generation of visual data (Ownby, 2013) or the researcher’s own autoethnographic reflection (Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2007), these visual images, to a great extent, “offer gateways for merging reflexive subjectivities; the bridge that connects the researcher’s and respondent’s experiences as they emerge within the space of the interview” (Scarles, 2010, p. 8). Consequently, insights into the performative, experiential and emotional world of tourists may be mobilised, rather than pure representations of the tourist experience (see also Noy, 2007), since both the researcher and respondent are able to articulate the intensities of individual’s emotional feelings, memories and embodied performance through the visual images being discussed (Scarles, 2012). Nevertheless, it should be noted that as there are, perhaps inevitably, differences between the researcher’s and respondent’s worldviews and belief systems, the images may also evoke disagreements between subjectivities. However, such differences should not be of concern as they have the potential to further reveal the multiplicity of touristic performances that challenge discursive productions of the tourist gaze and imagination, thus “further enriching research and respondent understanding of the spectrum of encounters, emotions and feelings through which tourist experiences arise” (Scarles, 2010, p. 912; see also Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997).

Moreover, although the asymmetric power relationship between the two participants in the interview is further meshed (Ellis & Bochner, 2006), it is still usually the researcher who identifies a series of thematic priorities to be addressed and who guides the conversation to ensure that such issues are addressed properly (Scarles, 2010). Indeed, for the researcher, the ability to be flexible during the interview is crucial, as “conversations engage both the researcher and respondent in a mutual process of non-linear improvisation”, each offering or withholding remembrances, “selectively sharing experiences as deemed appropriate” (Scarles, 2010, p. 910), and / or denying the other’s viewpoint. Thus, interviews become fluid, dynamic and mutually responsive performances within which the unpredictable and the unexpected fuse with more apparent pathways of discussion.

Similar to conventional autoethnography, visual autoethnography also necessitates the unambiguous evidence of the researcher’s presence—typically in the form of a first- person narrative (see Scarles, 2009)—in the final published research report, reflecting the fact that the researcher’s body, experience and subjectivity is embraced by the research setting. In addition, as with analytical autoethnography, visual autoethnographic researchers also have the commitment to transcend collected data and generate theories (Anderson, 2006). Therefore, the final research report is usually written in a traditional academic format rather than one of the alternative, evocative styles referred
to above, such as “short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose” (Ellis, 2004, p. 38).

3.2. The research fieldwork

Since visual autoethnography as a research method requires the researcher’s unambiguous appearance, usually in the form of first-person narrative, in the final research report, henceforth the researcher now uses the authorial “I” and, on occasion, the existential “we” in this article (Spry, 2001). In order to access the nuanced details of the younger Chinese tourists’ photography practices, with 6 Chinese respondents I took a seven days’ holiday to the Isle of Wright. All of them had been born from the second half of 1980s to the first half of 1990s (and, hence, were between 22 and 29 years of age then) and, at the time, were studying at the University of Central Lancashire in the northwest, England (see Figure 1 for details).

With the agreement reached with the respondents, I organised a rather relaxing and flexible travel schedule, with visits to Osborne House, Rosemary Vineyard, Sharon Orchard, the Needles, Light House, Shanklin Old Village and Carisbrooke Castle arranged for the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth days respectively (see Figure 2). For the rest of the time, we could have relaxing meals, convene evening parties, and play on the seashore. The tourist attractions were selected primarily on the basis of information provided on the Visit Isle of Wight official website. Also, the selection was made because I believed those attractions would not only stimulate my respondents’ interests but would also be easy to reach by public transport from Sandown where our hotel was located, thus guaranteeing that sufficient time would be spent at each tourist site.

In this fieldtrip, I recast my self and became an “active agent” (Spry, 2001) or object of research. Throughout the journal I travelled, stayed, played, dined and engaged in almost all the activities with my respondents, the purpose being that, through active doing, “situated” knowledge (Hall, 2004, p. 137) and first-hand experience were acquired. At the same time, over the course of the tour I was equally responsible for analysing and reflecting upon my own testimony, which was literally considered an integral part of the data source. As I “zoomed backward and forward, inward and outward” (Ellis, 2004, p. 38), the boundary between the personal and the social, between the self and the other, is mobilised (Ellis & Bochner, 2006) and I was, therefore, able to link what I was studying and who I was, two issues cannot be inherently separated from each other (see Krieger, 1996).

In every evening, based on the reflections of my first-hand travel, photography and observing experiences, fieldwork notes were taken. Moreover, during and after the trip I carried out a semi-structured photo-elicitation interview with each of the respondents, in which the interviewee and I spent about one and a half hour on talking about our individual experiences as well as discussing about six photographs taken, selected and presented by the interviewee. This respondent-led approach is favoured by many, and was considered most appropriate for this research. Talking about photographs they have taken and selected encourages respondents to be comfortable and relax. More specifically, being allowed to select which photographs and what content to talk about, the respondent is empowered and a basis of trust and confidence is established (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007). Moreover, while actively discussing the photographs, I and the respondent are not only encouraged to reflect actively upon our photographic practices, emotional feelings and related subjective meanings, but also to review our everyday situation and past experiences (Cederholm, 2012). Consequently,
insights into the performative, experiential and emotional world of tourists may be mobilised, rather than pure representations of the tourist experience and practices.

From the outset of this field study, however, I had some concerns that the respondents might be influenced by what they thought I would want to hear in interview (see Scarles, 2012, p. 84)—that is, they would say what they felt they should say, rather than being open and honest. Alternatively, I was concerned that they might deliberately take photographs which they thought would be instrumental to my research rather than taking photographs as they normally would. Nevertheless, the environment of trust and intimacy that we had established long before the field study proved to have deepened our interview conversations about our communal travel and photographic performances. Moreover, perhaps not surprisingly, these respondents were, overall, quite open and willing to reveal their personal sentiments.

4. The outcomes

4.1. Becoming postmodern tourists

This research first unpacks the fact that the younger generations of (Chinese) tourists are becoming post-modern. The concept of the “post-modern tourist” was originally proposed and developed by Maxine Feifer (1985), who suggested that this type of tourist could be defined by three principal characteristics reflecting its high level of cognitive and aesthetic reflexivity (see Lash & Urry, 1994):

First and foremost, the everyday life of the post-tourist has been penetratingly aestheticised today, with easy access to an expanding and accelerating flow of signs, images and representation (Featherstone, 2007). As a consequence, it appears not so necessary for individuals to leave home in order to see tourist sights; that is, either through watching TV (or videos) or surfing the Internet, an infinite variety of places can be gazed upon, compared, contextualised and gazed upon again. And since places can be experienced repeatedly, there is “much less the sense of the authentic, the once-in-a-lifetime gaze, and much more of the endless availability of gaze through a frame at the flick of a switch or a click” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 113).

Second, the post-tourist is aware of the changes that have occurred in tourism. Specifically, they are readily to accept the fact that multiple choices of constructing experience are possibly open to them. These choices range from pursuit of superficial “pseudo-events” (Boorstin, 1961) to quest for authenticity, which MacCannell (1999) has long defended as the grand cause for tourist travels in the contemporary society.

Moreover, post-tourists are aware that they are tourists and tourism essentially is a series of games with multiple texts rather than a single, authentic tourist experience. In other words, the post-modern tourist fully understands that the goal of knowing and appreciating the world “as much as it authentically is” is a fruitless one. However, rather than being exposed to despair and sense of loss potentially suffered by MacCannell’s (1999) tourist, the post-tourist tends to transform the world into a gigantic playground through mockery. Playing and pleasure-seeking are, to a great extent, opposite to obeying pre-established norms and rules of touristic practices, such as

| Schedule of the Tour |
|----------------------|
| Day 1  | Preston-Sandown  |
| Day 2  | Osborne House    |
| Day 3  | Rosemary Vineyard & Sharon Orchard |
| Day 4  | The Needles & Light House |
| Day 5  | Shanklin Old Village |
| Day 6  | Carisbrooke Castle |
| Day 7  | Sandown-Preston   |
photography. Thus, many norms and rules in tourism are likely to ignore or reject by the post-tourist (see Edensor, 1998).

Last but not least, as Urry and Larsen (2011) maintain, the contemporary media have ushered in a “three-minute” culture; thus, people are likely to encourage to switch from one pleasure-seeking activity to another (and perhaps also from one site to another for seeking additional pleasure). In some sense, it is almost certain that people will achieve relatively less satisfaction from continuing to do what they, or more particularly, their family have always done. Accordingly, holidays become more to do with immediate pleasure. As a consequence, people are constantly demanding new out-of-the-ordinary experience (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 115).

Returning to the outcomes of this study, it is evident that “Ba Linghou” (八零后)—that is, people were born in the 1980s—and “Jiu Linghou” (九零后)—those born in the 1990s—really exhibit some signs of becoming post-modern. Indeed, these dichotomous generations have long been criticised as the country’s first two generations of “sedentary couch potatoes” addicted to internet-surfing, on-line gaming, American fast food, TV shows and Hollywood movies (Ong & du Cros, 2012; Rosen, 2009). The flows of images and representations have aestheticised and are aestheticising their everyday life, whilst ubiquitous use of digital technologies have made them less patient, less pleased with unique travel experience (e.g. packaged tours), but more indulged in independent mode of travel (e.g. backpacking tours) and hedonism (Shepherd, 2009). Meanwhile, as people in the dichotomous generations are growing up, they are progressively suffering massive pressure from both society at large and from their families, particularly in terms of the conflicts in fulfilling the role of breadwinner for their families, attempting to advance in their careers and achieve social goals (Zimmerman, 2010). Therefore, indulging in care-free playing could arguably help them to temporarily release. at least, some of the pressure and tension (Cohen, 1979, p. 181).

To illustrate, the Chinese respondents in this study did not fancy so much visiting the historical and cultural attractions on the Isle, such as the well-known Osborne House, where a collection of furniture, paintings, photographs and many other “small things” on exhibition unveiled authentically Queen Victoria and Prince Albert’s private life. Instead, they all preferred to roam and play on Sandown Beach. For them, the expansive beach, along with the rise and fall of tide, not only gave immediate opportunity to play either individually or collectively, but also “sheltered them from the troubles and depression emerged in the everyday life” (replied by NS29) At the same time, of course, and in sharp contrast to the cultural heritage of Osborne House, Sandown Beach was not seen to be so rich either in culture or in history and, therefore, there was no need for them to learn much. Notwithstanding, playing on the beach could not provide infinite joy and pleasure, after all. Thus, we had to turn to some other “pseudo-events” (Boorstin, 1961), such as drinking parties and photographic games for additional pleasure.

4.2. From materialising experience to pleasure-seeking
As aforementioned, photography has long been deemed as a practice of nostalgia for concretising experience for tourists, with one school of thought arguing that tourists take a relatively passive role when practicing photography, seeking out and reproducing images previously encountered in multiple visual fabrications, such as postcards, guidebooks, tourism promotional materials and so forth (Jenkins, 2003; Markwell, 1997). Whilst, influenced by the notion of tourists as performers (see Edensor, 2000), the other school considers tourist photography an embodied, reflexive and proactive practice (Edensor, 1998; Haldrup & Larsen, 2010; Scarles, 2009). That is, rather than being a passive form of consumption manifested in the capture of pre-determined, representational images of places and people, it is suggested that, for tourists, photography is increasingly becoming a performance that “lights up the tourist experience” (Scarles, 2009, p. 465), negotiates with pre-script discourses and constructs personal identity (Larsen, 2005).

In contrast, this study reveals that the (Chinese) younger generations of tourists do not necessarily conform to this cliché established since the era of Kodak analogue cameras. Precisely, it became
evident that though my respondents, during interviews, collectively claimed that they took photographs in order to “record their experience / memory”, in reality this did not appear to be the genuine motivation. To illustrate, at the beginning of our visit to Sandown Beach the majority of us did not engage in taking photographs, as we were so busy with running and playing on the sand. Rather, we handed our smartphones over to the “less active” informant ES and asked her to capture our acts of playing on smartphone cameras, thereby fulfilling the task for us. Even so, most of the time, we were not particularly concerned about posing for photographs, and nor did we particularly care whether photographs were actually taken of us or not. As VS revealed:

> As a matter of fact, most of my photos on the beach were (those) my travel companions had taken for and sent me ... My focus was very much on playing, as soon as I arrived at the beach ... (chuckling) ... Just occasionally I posed for a photograph. But most of the time, I was lost in the playing. And I did not care really whether they took photos of me.

VS’s “did not care” largely undermines the well-established motivating power of taking photographs “to refresh memory” (see Crang, 1997). Owing to this “did not care” attitude, ES took many photographs of both the “natural” and improvising performances of her fellows, without intentionally staging their experience (see Larsen, 2005; Scarles, 2009). To illustrate, Figure 3 is a photograph that ES took of another respondent. In this photograph, it seems that this respondent was devoting all her heart to playing and jumping on the seashore (or in her own words, in “splashing the water”), without paying any attention to the photographer.

But if not for memory, what did we really take photographs for? The answer simply is “for pleasure”. Indeed, becoming post-modern, younger generations of tourists treat smartphone photography ironically as an amateur photographic practice and differentiate it from analogue-camera-based photography, which are normally considered more professional (see Mohan et al., 2017). Equally, smart photographic devices, such as smartphones evidently play a central role in technically affording them to experiment in their practices of photo-taking both playfully and creatively (Larsen, 2014). Moreover, an increasing number of social media apps, such as WeChat, Instagram and Pinterest, provide a source of additional pleasure in playing, editing and sharing photographs as soon as they are taken (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). As a consequence, taking a photograph is increasingly becoming more a quest for pleasure than a means to concretising travel experience.

Particularly for us—the young Chinese tourists—the power of pleasures seemed much more intense. Indeed, during this holiday tour we frequently took a photograph and then edited and played with it directly on site: cropping the photograph, altering its colour tone, beautifying individuals’ facial images in the photograph or sometimes adding a cartoon sticker to the picture. Even during the course of interviews, some of my respondents, such as CS became quite excited and described the interesting functions of a specific new photography app, particularly when they heard that I was eager to know how to use it. Equally I was particularly happy that I learned about an app that had been new to me.

### 4.3. A game of photo-taking and photo-sharing

With the motivation of “photographing for hedonism”, younger generations of (Chinese) tourists’ practices of photo-taking and photo-sharing have become largely diversified, and they take an increasingly central role in staging travel experience. Admittedly, respondents in the field were found to occasionally take a selfie, frame eye-pleasing views and capture images of ordinary objects (e.g. food and flowers), prior to selecting and sharing some snaps publicly over personal social media accounts (e.g. Instagram account and WeChat Moment) (see also Schroeder, 2015). In turn, the uploaded photographs potentially became “active agents”, facilitating communication with the audience at-a-distance (Molz & Paris, 2015) and enacting their personal identities (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; see also Paris & Pietschnig, 2015). However, it is also identified that, in order to obtain more pleasure, the tourist respondents were chiefly indulged in playing an interactive photo-taking and photo-sharing game, which, for one thing, enabled them to consume each other as the tourist gaze.
For another, it arguably further strengthens some defining characteristics of smartphone photography, including playfulness, immediacy, spontaneity, simultaneity, flexibility and sociality. Through actively doing, performing and playing, the tourist places might have temporarily become a playground or a “pleasure periphery”, a concept recently re-defined as the intersection of the physical places and virtual spaces being established and explored by mobile technologies and tourists respectively (see Moiz, 2012, p. 45; Turner & Ash, 1975, p. 11).

More specifically, prior to departure on the trip I had established a Group Chat on WeChat—a social networking app widely used in China today—for the purpose of discussing with and giving notices to the respondents. Importantly, the members of this Group Chat were tightly restricted to only my respondents and myself, all of whom were already familiar with each other. This meant that nobody else was technically able to either access or to post anything on this virtual space on WeChat. During our trip, this virtual space unexpectedly but automatically became an extremely effective platform for our spontaneous photo-sharing. The photo-sharing not only undoubtedly contributed much to our enjoyment of the trip but also and, perhaps, more importantly, transformed our practices of photo-taking by enticing us to shift our focus of gaze from places to each other and capture each other’s interesting and improvising behaviours. That is, while taking photographs of each other, we individually preferred to photographically capture either the “natural” or spontaneous performances...
of our fellows, the previously mentioned case of ES being a typical example. Once shared on the virtual space on WeChat in travel, these photographs of “natural” or spontaneous performances became undoubtedly socialising agents, stimulating comments, laughter and even active face-to-face idea exchanges amongst us all, generating a kind of immediate, intense and collective pleasure that, in all likelihood, would not result from sharing the photographs with distant family or friends (Rose, 2010, 2014; Van House, 2009). Also, it is true, of course, that some other photographers and their subjects might together examine a photograph on a digital camera or computer screen, resulting in face-to-face discussions and even laughter (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010; Van House, 2009). Importantly, however, the democratised ownership of a smartphone and universal usage of the same social networking mobile app enable numerous tourists to view, comment, download or upload at the same time. It is the combination of this multiplicity, togetherness, simultaneity and flexibility that makes sharing (of photographs) over the virtual space of a mobile social networking app so unique, vibrant and dynamic. Even now, I still remember clearly those vivid moments when we were sitting around, at a guesthouse, restaurant, railway station, and so on, gazing upon our phone screen, laughing, typing, chatting and joking with each other. The respondent AS also commented on these moments passionately, as follows:

AS: ... Not only did such kinds of photo-sharing help to develop friendship and communication amongst us, but also it was an extra source of pleasure, particularly when we exchanged our thoughts about photographs with each other .... I must say it would become less enjoyable and playful if we primarily concentrated upon our WeChat and Facebook profile ... Our way of photo-sharing had stimulated face-to-face communication. What’s more, we often got other people’s immediate opinions about a photo as soon as we shared it. We would not have had this if we just emailed the photos to our friends once we were back home.

As Figure 4 shows, I have drawn a flow chart to visualise this interactive process:

First, some scholars, such as Schechner (2006, p. 37) claims that most human performances are well-rehearsed. It means that they never occur for the first but nth time (emphasis for original). This rule is well applied in this study. Specifically, some respondents (e.g. NS, CS and ES) had ever been “secretly” photographed by their friends/families either in their previous travel or everyday life, who hopefully had happened to capture their improvising performances. When their friends showed these “secret” photographs to them, these individuals felt rather surprised, happy and joyful to look at their self through the eyes of others (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). This kind of accumulated joy and pleasure combined to motivate them to do the same to the other fellows at multiple locations in the field (e.g. in streets, on the train, at visitor attractions) (In the diagram, this process is from Circle 1 to Circle 2). Immediately before clicking the virtual button appearing on the phone screen, the photographer had to objectify their fellows’ performance and quickly judge which acts would be pleasurable to the photographed. In this process, the photographers might find pleasure simultaneously, thereby serving to further inspire their similar photographic activities in future (Circle 2 to Circle 1). The photographers then shared these photographs with the rest of us (particularly the photographed fellows) in the communal virtual space on WeChat in this research (Circle 2 to Circle 3). Immediately, a combination of the viewers’ surprise, joy and verbal comments was triggered (Circle 3 to Circle 4), which not only resulted in collective sharing of more “surprising” photographs (Circle 4 to Circle 3) but also contributed additional pleasure (Circle 4 to Circle 1) as well as provided opportunities of face-to-face communications (Circle 4 to Circle 5). As a consequence, the friendship among us developed (Circle 5 to Circle 6), which, along with the engendered joy and pleasure, inspired us to automatically take and share more photographs of each other’s performances (Circle 6 to Circle 2 and Circle 1 to Circle 2).

Significantly, although essentially transitory and asymmetrical (see Sontag, 1979), the power relationship embedded in this circular process was at the same time reciprocal, to some extent, inasmuch as both the photographer and the photographed were potentially rewarded immediate gratification and satisfaction. Moreover, as individuals’ performances are literally infinite and willful
(see Edensor, 2001), this practice might thus have reinforced the improvising, unpredictable and spontaneous nature of the tourist photography in general.

Overall, there were some human and non-human factors affording this interactive process to take place. Above all, of course, its occurrence replied heavily upon the availability of affordable/complementary internet or Wi-Fi in the toured destination. On this tour to the Isle of Wight, not only was free Wi-Fi available at the hotel where we stayed, but also the costs of accessible mobile networks were affordable. Moreover, respondent CS even took a Mobile Wi-Fi along with her, which enabled all our smart phones to be connected to the internet at the same time. Otherwise, the high charges might have deterred us from uploading and sharing photos freely (see also Larsen, 2014, pp. 16–17).

Also, besides the affordance of smartphones and social net-working apps, the tourist place equally matters materially and metaphorically (Crouch, 2002, 2005). That is to say, not exclusively did multiple places on the Isle (e.g. Sandown Beach, Shanklin Old Village and Needles) contextualise but also, more or less, metaphorically influence our spontaneous performances. Indeed, although, as aforementioned, most of us did not appreciate much the pre-figured cultural signs of many historical attractions on the Isle, the signs, together with eye-pleasing views, architecture, beach, people and plants there, provided a holiday atmosphere, in which we felt relaxed enough to move, to dream, to perform, to subvert the pre-script discourses and to engage with the destination in the child-like and poetic fashion (see also Crouch, 2005).
The last point is that the intimacy/friendship between the photographer and his or her fellow tourists, as well as their togetherness during the trip, played an essential role in shaping this type of interaction. Indeed, the whole process of taking and sharing photographs would probably not have happened if (quite evidently) we had not travelled together and particularly if the relationship between us had not been close. For one thing, this intimacy and togetherness encouraged each of us to feel in some way obliged to amuse his/her fellow tourists and to record photographically their travel experience. As ES, who took a multitude of photographs of us, explained:

... So, as long as I found their performances funny, interesting and photo-worthy, I wanted to help them to make a record, as they could not (do it) by themselves. Surely, (this time) we travelled as a group, so we should take the commitment to help each other to take a photograph and to record the trip. This kind of recording is meaningful and interesting, by the way.

For another thing, this intimacy and togetherness might be thought of as combining to temporarily transform the communal virtual space into a collective “back region” (Goffman, 1959, pp. 114–115; see also MacCannell, 1999) for us, a “back region” in which we felt sufficiently secure and relaxed to upload those photographs that were considered “private” and unsuitable for sharing publicly, to express our true feelings, to make comments and to joke with each other. Otherwise, these “private” photographs were unlikely to be disseminated within the communal space and merely sent /emailed right to the person whose images appeared in the photographs (Van House, 2009). Indeed, when we returned home and the intimacy and togetherness evaporated, almost no photographs were shared between us as there might be no further photograph worthy of sharing. As the respondent VS remarks:

Ah, I hardly ever share. I only share with friends when I travel with them, like this time. If they would like to download the photos I shared, they can go ahead. That is no problem for me at all... But I really do not want to share (them) on their social media personal accounts, as I am not willingly to cause problems or show off.

4.4. Digital travel photographs: artifacts for instantaneous consumption

Referring to digital travel photographs, their essence and life-span are evidently altered. Some other researchers, such as Van House (2009, 2011) and Rose (2010, 2014) lament that the life-span of digital snapshots is relatively much shorter than that of photo-prints, as they realise that the respondents mostly prefer to store digital photographs on personal mobile devices, without either deliberately printing them off or backing them up onto a separate storage apparatus. It means that photographs would be hopefully deleted, if the devices were replaced, damaged or destroyed. In the same vein, the life-span of voluminous photographs online are also subject to destruction of the websites/social media platforms, where the photographs are uploaded, let alone the social and cultural meaning carried by them might, more or less, be changed over time (Van House, 2011). Thus, it might be very hard for digital photographs to go through the prolonged process of sedimentation (Ingold, 2000) and eventually become an integral part of the files of representation useful to stage myths for tourist places (Rajek, 1997).

Therefore, analogous to fast food, digital travel photographs now become the artifacts more suitable for instantaneous consumption both by the tourist photographer and by the audience. Particularly for those “surprising” snaps taken in this study, the consumption was completed even more instantly and the life-span much shorter, as some respondents revealed, the photographs were neither stored elaborately nor shared extensively, but expired virtually with replacement of smartphones in a few months after the trip.

5. Conclusions and future directions

To sum up, this study sheds light on how and why the younger generations of (Chinese) tourists use smartphone photography to engage with the destination in the playful and child-like fashion. More precisely, it reveals that the younger generations of Chinese tourists, that is, those who were born
either in 1980s or 1990s, are indeed progressively becoming post-modern. For them, tourist photography has become more a strategy of seeking for pleasure than concretising personal experience. The research shows that, by employing a smartphone, individuals are able to generate additional fun and perpetrate photo-games, such as capturing images of their fellow tourists’ interesting and improvising performances when travelling collectively as a group. Once these “surprising” photographs are instantly shared with the rest of the group over a communal social media platform, such as the Group Chat on WeChat in this field study, immense collective pleasure and supplementary chance for sociability are stimulated instantly within the travel group. To a great extent, not only will these pleasure and sociality further develop the relationship between the younger Chinese tourists but also motivate them to take and share more photographs of similar kind in the future. This circular and reciprocal process are sketched in Figure 4, as aforementioned.

Besides, this study alsounpacks that, due to the effects of digitalisation, the essence and life-span of photographs have been transformed. Specifically, the life-span for smartphone-based digital snapshots become much shorter, and smartphone-based digital snapshots become a kind of artifacts more suitable for instantaneous consumption than a part and parcel of files of representations useful to stage myths for tourist places.

Overall, this study is significant, inasmuch as it addresses the insufficiencies in the extant literature in tourist photography, attempting to shift the mainstream interest from researching selfie-taking to exploring many other photographic practices, which could possibly re-situate the tourists’ relationship with the toured destination. Nevertheless, this research still has some limitations. Particularly, contribution would be made, if successive studies were undertaken to scrutinise photographic performances of younger tourists, who are from another country and have a rather different cultural background. Also, as millennials (indicating people born since the year 2000) are growing up and becoming the mainstream source of tourists in future, it would be rather rewarding to explore how and why they photographically engage with a destination.

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Source: Provided by the respondent and use with permission.

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