Photographs in tourism research: Prejudice, power, performance and participant-generated images

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Abstract

Photography has often been considered tainted as a source of research data, even in tourism, its natural habitat. This situation is undoubtedly a legacy of the prejudice that many social scientists held toward the use of visual data when the academic study of tourism took off in the 1970s and 1980s. Tourism research has therefore persistently favoured textual data over visual data. This paper argues that the power of photography to prove and move can be harnessed to bridge this theoretical and practical cognitive gap. Issues relating to the performance of photography, including those of timing and intent, as well as the speed of information exchange, need however to be considered when designing and implementing research using photographic data. This implies a need to review the 'circle of representation' of tourism destination images, as well as to divide participant-generated image methods into two strands: found photographs and commissioned photographs.

Highlights

- Tourism researchers have been *prejudiced* against the use of photographs as data

- The *power* of photography to move and to prove can be positively harnessed

- Issues relating to the *performance* of photography, such as timing and intent, have vital methodological implications

- *Participant*-generated-image methods should be divided into two strands: found photographs and commissioned photographs

- Recent changes in photographic practices and technology require the 'circle of representation' to be revisited

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1. Introduction

Despite the ubiquitous use of photography in recording the tourist experience (Urry, 1990) and, more recently, performing it (Dinhopl and Gretzel, 2016; Tribe and Mkono, 2017), current tourism research remains predominantly textocentric (Balomenou and Garrod, 2014). As Conquergood (2002) asserts, the problem with such an approach relates not to the use of text per se but to the rigid separation between theory and performance. It has been acknowledged that the tourist experience includes elements of performance (Haldrup and Larsen, 2009; Scarles, 2011) and that valuable insights may be lost in research that only utilises canonical methods such as interviews, questionnaires and observation (Latham, 2003). A variety of ways of understanding perceptions, realities and experiences holistically, and of treating the "other" as complementary and reciprocal rather than oppositional or irrelevant (Nancy, 2000; Stoller, 2010), can be achieved by accepting other methods alongside or even instead of these canonical methods. This paper sets out the argument that photographs are legitimate agents of inquiry, not just when accompanied by text (Pink, 2013), that provide tourism researchers with a different kind of information that is able to embrace the embodiment of experiences (Emmison and Smith, 2000; Bell and Davison, 2013). Although the "felt" characteristics of embodiment (Simpson, 2011) cannot be demonstrated directly through photography, its 'descriptive and aesthetic dimensions' can be said to 'together form an equal music of rationality and emotion in their making' (Spencer, 2010, p. 202). Photographs can thus achieve a multisensory effect, conveying complex meanings and visualising perceptions. They remain, however, underused in tourism research (Grimwood et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2015; Balomenou et al., 2017). This paper will argue that, in tourism research especially, photographic data represent an important means of bridging two vital cognitive gaps: the gap that exists between words and visuals, and the gap between researchers and participants. Such discussion has been largely absent in the tourism literature to date. Making better use of photographs as data may be vital, however, if tourism research is to maximise its full potential.

The first of these two cognitive gaps has special relevance to the use of theory in tourism studies. Bell and Davison (2013), in their much-needed review of the use of visual methods in the various management sub-disciplines, argue that such methods are more beneficial in theoretical as opposed to empirical research contexts. Their review included only two tourism studies, however, and overlooked two key theoretical considerations with regard to tourism applications of visual research methods: firstly, the element of "performativity" in tourism (Larsen and Urry, 2011; Haldrup and

Larsen, 2009), and secondly, the inextricable link between tourism and photography (Chalfern, 1979; Albers and James, 1988; Caton and Santos, 2008), as embodied in the "circle of representation" and driven by the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990, 2002). Bell and Davison's thesis therefore does not do justice to the centrality of photography in the tourism experience. As this paper will demonstrate, visual tourism research has tended to place substantially more emphasis on the development of theory than its application. At the same time, it is evident that the limited number of tourism studies that have used photographs as data sources have tended to under-emphasise the role of theory, either to underpin the research design in the case of empirical studies or as the object of endeavour when grounded theory is being employed. Either way there is a gap between the theoretical and the empirical in terms of the use of visual data in tourism research. This paper aims to demonstrate the importance and consequences of this cognitive gap, with particular reference to the potential for the wider use of participant-generated image (PGI) methods in tourism research.

The second cognitive gap is between the researcher and the participant. Bell and Davison (2013, p. 174) categorise visual elicitation strategies as being empirically driven, 'because visual data are produced during the research, expressly for the purposes of research'. Such strategies employ methodologies in which data are produced by the researcher and the participant, usually alongside pre-existing data, and subsequently used as stimuli for discussion. The present paper argues that Bell and Davison's observation fails to take into account certain fundamental concerns that pertain to the timing (Stanczak, 2007; Rakić and Chambers, 2012) and intent (Lo and McKercher, 2015; Dinhopl and Gretzel, 2016; Halpern et al., 2016) of photo-taking: methodological considerations that can have important implications for the practices of data-collection, data analysis and the drawing of conclusions. Furthermore, in studies using pre-existing photographs, such photographs become data only when the research team decides to treat them as such. This includes research conducted with photographs downloaded from online platforms such as Flickr and Google Images (Hao et al., 2016; Matteucci, 2013; Straumann et al., 2014) or travel blogs (Osmond and Pearce, 2014), and those requested after a trip (Loeffler, 2004; Pan et al., 2014). These observations relate to the quadrumvirate model of 'sites and modalities of interpreting visual materials' proposed by Rose (2016, p. 25), which specifically embraces issues of intent and timing, the circulation and "audiencing" of the photographs, the time lapse between photo-capturing and photo-sharing, and the time of taking (which in the tourism context relates to the duration of the photographer's holiday).

This paper therefore seeks to address four main aims:

- To explain the persistence on textocentrism in much of current tourism research

- To explode the myths surrounding the unreliability or photographs as research data

- To advocate the greater use of photographs as data in tourism research

- To explore some of the theoretical considerations arising from the use of PGI methods in tourism research

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 argues that the limited use of photographs as data in tourism research might be attributed to the subject's traditional reliance on the social science disciplines as the source both of supporting theory and tools of inquiry, and to the prejudice that is often manifested in those disciplines with respect to the use of photographs as data. Section 3 then explores the characteristics of photography, such as its inherent subjectivity and its power to "prove" and to "move". While these are sometimes suggested to be shortcomings of photography as a research tool, they should not cause tourism researchers entirely to reject it. Section 4 examines how the prejudices developed against photography in the 1970s and 1980s have critically impacted on contemporary tourism research. The major arguments in favour of using photographs generated by participants as a research data are presented in Section 5. Here the paper will argue that the weaknesses of photography proposed in the previous section can actually be harnessed and transformed into strengths. Several proposals are then put forward to bridge the gap between theory and practice, one of which is to reconsider Jenkins' (2003) "circle of representation" of tourist destination images in the light of new digital technologies and the speed with which photographic images can nowadays be shared. Section 6 then draws together the main threads of the arguments presented and sets out the main conclusions.

2. Textocentrism and mistrust of photography in the social sciences

2.1 A short history of the use of photography in research

Writing in the early 1930s, Benjamin (1977, p. 6) described an attempt in 1838 by the physicist and politician François Arago to convince the French government to acquire the patent for the pioneering daguerreotype photographic process invented by Daguerre and Niépce:

> When inventors of a new instrument apply it to the observation of nature, the hopes that they place upon it are always insignificant compared with the number of subsequent discoveries of which the instrument was the origin.

In support of Arago's enthusiasm for photography, Benjamin noted its potential to assist all kinds of research, from astrophysics to philology, including its potential to capture a corpus of Egyptian hieroglyphics on film.

As illustrated in Figure 1, photographic practice has changed significantly over its 200-year history, from the invention in the mid-19th century of a prototype of the modern photograph, the *daguerrogram* (Benjamin, 1977), to a technology available to many but by no means all ordinary people in the mid-20th century (Bourdieu and Whiteside, 1996), to near-universal access to photography as a popular technology by the early 21st century (Moore, 2017). Access to cameras is now so ubiquitous, particularly because of commonplace smartphone ownership (Van House, 2011), that the general public is able to photograph almost anything and everything. Photography is so ingrained in everyday life that photographing even mundane aspects of daily lives, such as meals, is considered normal (Murphy, 2010). Parking bay numbers and cloakroom tickets are photographed as aide-memoires. Nokia has responded to a possible concern that some thing or event might be missed by producing the first smartphone to be able to capture images from both lenses, yielding dual images known as "bothies" (Gibbs, 2017). The seemingly limitless capturing of things of interest is also partly due to the removal of the quantity limitations imposed by the 24- or 36-exposure chemical film.
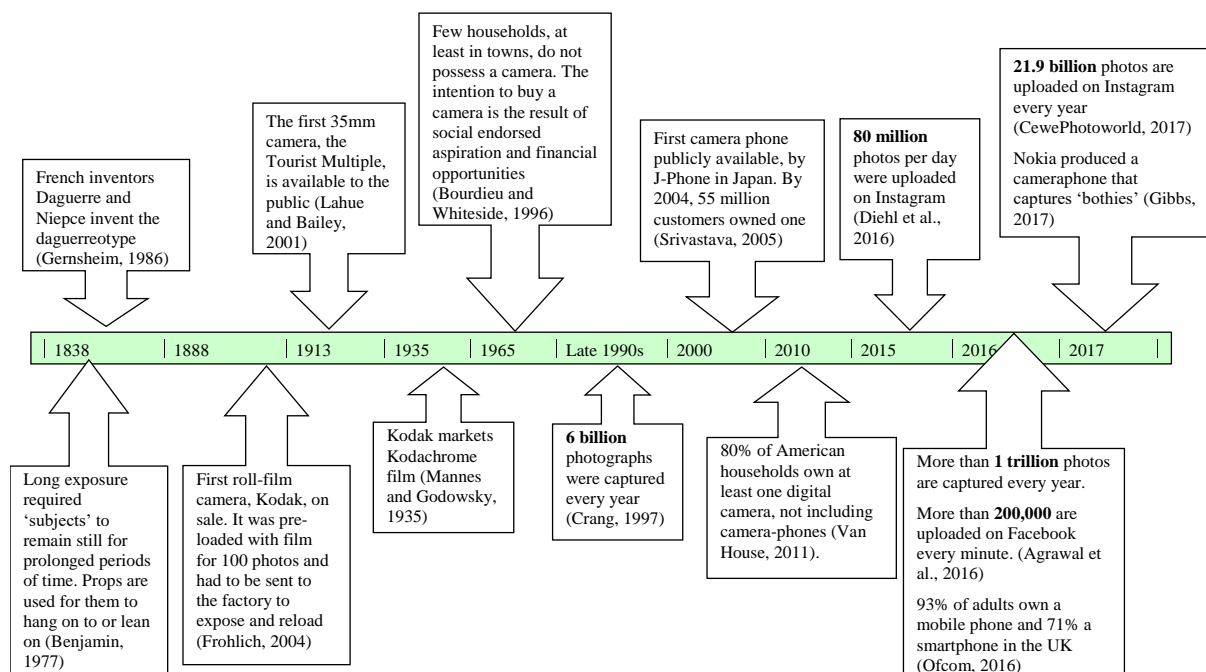

Figure 1: Indicative timeline of contemporary public access to photography

In spite of its universal availability and popular use, photography has had a somewhat ambivalent relationship with research methodology. Its potential for use in academic research had been documented as early as the 1830s (Wickliff, 2006). Photographs have since been routinely employed by scientific researchers, not only as a means of collecting and cataloguing data but also of furnishing proof of the findings from the analysis of such data (Harper, 1988), notably in the natural sciences (Behrend, 2003; Gelderloos, 2014). Research in fields such as astronomy, biology and physics would be unthinkable without the use of photography. Indeed, photographs of aspects of star formation or cell development in plants make the findings they illustrate less likely to be challenged because they are understood to represent proof, in some sense. Behrend (2003 p. 131) suggests that photography contributed to the development of a 'modern, positivistic culture of realism' in the natural sciences. Amirault (2013) discusses the influence of the presence of the photographer on the "objective truth" of illness with reference to a photograph of circa 1866 in which the photograph aimed to be aesthetically pleasing while objectively presenting the impact of trauma on a patient (Leger et al., 2014). O'Connor (1995) discusses anorexia, medical photography and medical positivism. Despite the debates on the role of photography in the field of medical photography, its value has never been seriously questioned.

Benjamin's view of the place of photography in research as proof of findings and the cataloguing of data was visionary for the 1930s. In the sciences in general, the role of photography is now commonplace and accepted. In the social sciences, however, it seems that its use has not advanced greatly since that time. This is despite its proven potential in the natural sciences, its growing popularity and accessibility to researchers and their research subjects, and methodological advances in the social science that are increasingly accepting of visual inputs.

2.2 Observations on the history of the use of photographs as data

The debate over the use of visuals (including photographs, video, artwork and other forms of visual representation) in the social sciences was particularly strong in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Holliday, 2000). Prosser (1998) suggests that this is because academic sociology, at least as practiced in the USA, has long been dominated by research methods that depend upon the maintenance of a suitable distance between the researcher and the subject. Traditionally, in the power relationship between researcher and subject, the researcher is the expert who observes, investigates and decides when and how to acquire information from the research subjects. A notion of mastery is thus implied. Combined with this has been a historic unwillingness to question handed-down, standardised methodological patterns. Visual methods do not sit comfortably within such patterns, yet they are capable of bringing out inherent experiential qualities than the written word alone cannot: for

example, the emotions felt – both by research subject and researcher – when discussing certain kinds of subject matter (Loeffler, 2004; Tonge et al., 2013a, 2013b). When such experiential phenomena are not anticipated and properly accommodated in the research design, they have the potential to introduce bias into the research methodology, resulting in unreliable and possibly invalid conclusions being drawn.

The tendency for social scientists to eschew the use of visual data has not gone unnoticed. Harper (1998, p.39), commenting on the almost total non-existence between the 1920s and 1960s of the sub-discipline of sociology concerned with the visual dimensions of social life, has argued that visual sociologists remain 'revolutionaries in an enormously conservative discipline'. Emmison and Smith (2000), meanwhile, suggest that visual research is sometimes perceived as an eccentric specialism, while Prosser (1998) goes as far as to suggest that visual research might not be a wise career choice for a social scientist. Wang (1998), discussing the use of photovoice as a novel qualitative research approach (which integrates photography into participatory research at the grassroots level), reports the frequent marginalisation of such methods in academic institutions, where their validity and reliability are challenged due to the fundamentally political and value-laden nature of research.

Yet the visual can be more significant in social research than the verbal: Khoo- Lattimore and Prideaux (2013) argue that no more than 30% of meaning in any social interaction is expressed in words. This argument supports the use of photography as a serious alternative to textocentric research in the social sciences, at least a complementary method. It has been argued that photographs arguably 'contain metaphors that may be visual, verbal, mathematical or even musical' (Zaltman, 1997, p. 1039). Even so, many researchers have identified an underutilisation as objects of enquiry of visuals in general (Pink, 2013) and photographs in particular (Balomenou and Garrod, 2014; Balomenou et al., 2017). Indeed, Prosser (2011) notes that the written word still dominates in research, which is described as being "textocentric" by Singhal and Rattine-Flaherty (2006). There is ample evidence that this remains true today, even if there has been something of a shift in attitudes since the 2000s. The use of visual methods in anthropology, sociology and interdisciplinary studies is becoming more mainstream. Other social science disciplines have, however, been slower to respond and change, including management studies (Bell and Davison, 2013).

The longstanding theoretical and ideological discussion of the nature of photography (see seminal works such as Sontag, 1977; Barthes, 1981, Bourdieu and Whiteside, 1996; Berger, 2008, 2013), has been both thought-provoking and central to the advancement of critical theory in visual sociology. The unfortunate legacy of the sceptical approach adopted by post-modern critics of photography is a doubtful predisposition and dismissive culture towards photography as a legitimate object of inquiry,

characterised as "jaundiced" and "damaging" by Balakian (2012) in his review of Linfield (2011). This, indeed, reflects on the intransigence and adherence to tradition in academia, as identified by Prosser (1998). Postmodern analysts of photography, such as Sontag (1977), have condemned the process of looking, whether by the naked eye or through a camera lens, as an aggressive act of acquisition and "mastery". They also warn that viewers of photographs may eventually become indolent and complacent (Sontag, 1977; Teymur, 1993), unable or unwilling to react to what they are presented with. According to Linfield (2011), this view has allowed a careless contempt and almost universal rejection of any form of "truth value", including subjective views and perceptions, to be attributable to photographs. There tends to be no objective truth attributed to photographs, be it the captured image or the emotions of the subject or photographer, no matter how subjective. The result is a contempt that seeps through to academia, the art world and the general public. Arguably, this is doing photography a great disservice. The stark view of photography expressed by authors such as Sontag, Bourdieu, Barthes and Berger is typically accepted a priori, without sufficient thought; although sometimes it is stated openly with considerable zeal.

3. The "prejudices" that taint photographs as data sources

This section sets out a case for the use of photographs as legitimate objects of research studies. It will support this by arguing that the inherent subjectivity of photography, as well as its power as a medium, can be harnessed as strengths. As Linfield (2011) suggests, photography is viewed with a combination of expectation and suspicion, particularly regarding the truth or reality that photographs do or do not present. The popular aphorism that the "camera never lies" is rooted in its usage in the period immediately following its invention. Discussion in Benjamin (1977) makes it clear that photography was not then (in the 1930s) considered as art and therefore not capable of being tainted by the photographer's subjective view of the world, as the work of a true artist would be. Sontag (1977 p.5) articulated a widely accepted presumption that photographs offer 'incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened', which was further discussed by Barthes (2000). It has been argued by Ferdous (2014), a photojournalist, and in both Wang and Burris (1994) and Wang and Pies (2004), action researchers who use photography as a research tool, that the power of photographs to visually expose the truth can set social change in motion, which has indeed resulted from the use of such participatory photography techniques as photovoice (Wang, 1999). An example is the "Napalm Girl" – a famous Pulitzer-winning photograph of a nine-year-old Vietnamese girl running naked and burnt from a Napalm bomb attack – used by Ferdous (2014) and Sontag (1977) to argue that protests against the war in Vietnam were strengthened by this "proof" of wrong-doing on the part of the US military. Indeed, the former author credits this photograph with an influential role in the eventual withdrawal

of US forces from Vietnam. An experiment of giving impoverished children cameras with to record evidence of exploitation that could be publicised (Boal, 1979), also supports the view that the voices of people who cannot otherwise be heard can be heard through photographs. However, Goldstein (2007, p. 64) has insisted 'I repeat: every photograph lies', despite being a strong advocate of the use of photographs as data rather than as proof. There are several counts on which photography can be accused of lying. The three main premises of those arguments are that it is technically impossible for photographs to reflect reality, that choice is an inherent part of the photographic process which renders it inherently subjective as a research tool, and that subjectivity in our human understanding of the world makes it impossible for photography not to lie.

The first of the above arguments is noted by Goldstein (2007) and Linfield (2011), both of whom highlight the practical impossibility of photographs making exact representations of what the human eye sees. The camera cannot mimic the automatic depth of field adjustment, the speed, the intensity of the human eye, (for much of the history of the medium) the colour richness, and so on. Although such technical details may at first sight seem banal, it is important to understand that static, two-dimensional images are alien to the way the human brain works. Photographs thus present a mere impression of reality, and the viewer is forced to make an interpretation.

With respect to the second argument, that subjectivity is an inherent part of the process of photography, it is important to recognise that the choice about what to capture within the frame (and by extension what not to capture) lies with the photographer. This seems to be problematic for some researchers because photographs represent a choice of one out of countless moments in time and space. Crang (1997), Urry and Larsen (2011), and Chalfern (1987) all agree that photographs exclude as much as they include: there is always more that is not captured beyond the frame. Moreover, the decision whether to take a picture and what to capture – be it explicit or implicit – is understood to reside with the photographer, although Goldstein (2007) does seem surprised by the general acceptance of the arbitrary 35mm still-camera frame size that was the norm before digital photography, which can serve as a barrier to the truth. Markwell (1997) discusses the notion of repackaging what is there (see also Benjamin, 1977) and selling it as something new with the help of photography (Gelderloos, 2014), arguing that the photograph can be used to present an official, choreographed version of reality. In this vein, Edwards (2001) suggests that family photos are often staged to depict happy moments; Urry (2002) comments on the use of photography to construct a promotional image – what Feighery (2009) later called an "institutionalised" image – of the English Lake District minus the tourist crowds and the traffic; Teymur (1993) notes a photographer's reluctance to capture disturbing images of underfed dogs; and Sontag (1977) discusses the standards

imposed on the subject by taking multiple shots of the same setting until a satisfactory picture is finally taken. Carefully choosing and even staging a photograph does not necessarily imply the deceitfulness of the photographer implied by Hine (1980). As Finnegan (2008, p. 94) puts it, 'of course, you and I know that this unbounded faith in the integrity of the photograph is often rudely shaken, for, while photographs may not lie, liars may photograph'. The relationship between the content of a photograph and the intent of the photographer is 'at the heart of this question of honesty' (Goldstein, 2007, p. 80) and is possibly what needs to be considered by the viewer when deciding what they see.

The third argument is that subjectivity in our human understanding of the world makes it impossible for photographs not to lie. Certain things might indeed seem on face value to be unphotographable, e.g. abstract phenomena, inaccessible entities or inappropriate subjects. It may be possible, however, for photographs to be taken that convey the essence of such subjects. What is photographable is determined through a series of social processes (Bourdieu and Whiteside, 1996), filtered through peoples' professions or livelihoods (Dandy and Van Der Wal, 2011). Bourdieu and Whiteside (1996) argue that social class deeply influences people's preferences, and hence their understanding of the world and the subjects they choose to photograph. Given the accessibility of digital cameras and smartphones to almost everyone in Western societies, removing the need for any special photographic skills to achieve at least satisfactory results, photographic representations can only ever be subjective and biased. Experiences are not lived objectively and, as Kenyon (1993) argues, they might moreover be squeezed into pre-constructed images of the experience built by expectation. Even if the camera is taken out of the equation for a moment, Goldstein (2007) suggests that people may have different opinions of the same reality and Mojtahedi et al. (2017) that they may have different recollections of the same event. The world exists on both sides of the camera: context and perception predate the medium (Gelderloos, 2014).

The inherent subjectivity of photography is therefore undeniable. This does not mean, however, that photography is rendered unusable for the purposes of social research. Researchers as Prosser (1998), Sontag (1977), Singhal and Rattine-Flaherty (2006), Balomenou and Garrod (2014), and Jokinen and Veijola (2003) have proposed that photographs present the real world in a similar way to painting or writing: they describe it as it is perceived by the researcher, the writer, the painter or the author. Rakić and Chambers (2012) suggest that the photographer should be accepted as a subjective presence, 'even while the science of his or her camera allows us to continue to test, in a qualitative way, for authenticity' (Prosser, 1998, p. 108).

3.1. The power of photography

This section identifies the characteristics of photography that researchers such as Sontag (1977) and Bourdieu and Whiteside (1996) consider to be its shortcomings. The arguments focus mainly around issues of the power of photography and in particular the ways photographs are used to "move" and to "prove". It is argued that these characteristics should not lead tourism researchers to discount photography as a research tool. Indeed, the special characteristics of photography can be harnessed to capitalise upon photographs as data, particularly in the tourism context.

3.1.1. The power to "move"

Benjamin (1977 p. 53) reproduces a poignant account of the impact of photographs, at a time when they were an alien concept, by an early photographer identified by Hannavy (2013) as one of the first known to have owned a daguerreotype:

> People were afraid at first to look for any length of time at the pictures he produced. They were embarrassed by the clarity of these figures and believed that the little, tiny faces of people in the pictures could see out at them, so amazing did the unaccustomed detail and the unaccustomed truth to nature of the first daguerreotype pictures appear to everyone.

Photographs have the power to generate immediate and strong emotions and responses (Harper, 1998; Jutla, 2000; Linfield, 2011; Tonge et al., 2013a, 2013b; Balomenou and Garrod, 2014). Immediate perception is described by Goldstein (2007) as a series of three-dimensional scenes that change continually. Photographs capture single moments in time (Rakić and Chambers, 2012), interrupting that sequence of three-dimensional scenes, freezing time and resulting in static images. According to Goldstein, these unnatural stimuli have the power to access and arouse deep emotional reactions. It has been suggested that 'the act of photography anticipates the future by ripping the appearance of a moment out of its time, creating a tangible image for the future of what will be the past' (Walker and Moulton, 1989, p. 175) and that photographers are even 'agents of Death' (Barthes, 1981, p. 92) in so far as what they capture now (click!) immediately becomes the past.

Photographs can be so powerful that they deny the viewer time to think: that process is, if only for a moment, skewed by the emotive power of the photograph, which can bring the viewer to a standstill (Benjamin, 1977). Once seen, some photographs cannot be unseen: for example, photojournalist Kevin Carter's Pulitzer prize winning "Vulture and the Little Girl", taken in 1993 in South Sudan, became emblematic of the struggle against famine and starvation, while a photograph of a toddler, drowned in an attempt to escape from Syria to Greece, lying lifeless on a Turkish beach in 2015,

achieved Turkish photographer Nilufer Demir's aim to 'express the scream of his silent body' (Griggs, 2015, p. 1) and became one of the defining images of the current refugee crisis. Ferdous (2014) argues that by giving a human face to problems that appear abstract and remote, photographs cast an uncompromising light on them: they can arouse emotions that are impossible to ignore. People are made to take responsibility for their actions – or often their inaction – which might impact on lives thousands of miles away. Photographs allow the viewers the opportunity to experience empathy (Linfield, 2011) or antipathy.

3.1.2. Manipulation and the power to "prove"

Within the literature discussing the power of photography, a significant proportion is concerned with a number of potentially negative implications, focusing in particular on the notion of aggression. Goldstein (2007) identifies several ways of manipulating meaning through photography, notes that the possibilities now offered by digital photography are endless, and concludes that consideration should also be given to the potential of the subject to manipulate the photographer and therefore the photograph and its viewers. Naturally, the impact of photography falls chiefly upon the viewer, but the subject of the photograph does have power to do harm (Barthes, 1981) because the subjects are also actors in the process, possibly acting in their own interests.

Ferdous (2014) notes that new technologies and social media have allowed photographs to be seen instantly by large numbers of people, which is considered to be an important development for documentary photography. Even so, another possibility is now open: the statement that technology allows the camera to become 'even readier to capture transitory and secret moments', a comment originally made in 1938 and repeated by Benjamin (1977, p. 50) seems still topical today. Murphy (2010), Salter (2016) and BBC News (2017) collectively observe that the camera is now at the ready to provide a real-time graphic record of a diverse range of subjects from one's own food to others' bodies at a gym. The implication of the comment by Sontag (1977, p. 22) that photographs 'furnish evidence' is that they can also 'incriminate', a consequence first noted in 1871 when the Paris police established a photographic record of membership of the Communards. New avenues for surveillance and control were thus opened, making the camera an instrument of domination. By the middle of the 19th century, photography in Europe was used to 'identify, discipline and frighten the "lower classes"' (Behrend, 2003, p. 133). In recent years, civil liberties groups objected to police plans to deploy facial recognition software at the Notting Hill carnival in London as being discriminatory (Dodd, 2017), contrary to the contention that the initiative would be to the benefit of the community and the police force. Benjamin (1973) suggests that photography contributes to the deprivation of anonymity by giving a name, and hence a meaning, to every face, and thereby contributing to the Foucauldian

"panoptic" (2012). The suggestion that photographs objectify people and allow them to be "symbolically possessed" (Sontag, 1977) is not far from giving photography such agency that it is turned into a "fetish" (see Behrend, 2003). Even the language surrounding photography can be considered aggressive, predatory and patriarchal: photographers "shoot", "take" and "capture" and, until recently, would "load" their cameras (Sontag, 1977; Markwell, 1997).

The negative associations of the power of photography should not be underestimated or dismissed. In fact, its power to make viewers aware of the smallest of details that can be observed in frozen moments captured by still images, the "optical unconscious" as Benjamin (1977) terms it, the ability to fix – on paper or on screen – what Barthes (1981) describes as "already dead", and the potential to cause damage in the process, render photography a hot topic for discussion. Despite the associated criticism and calls for awareness, the emotive power of the image remains a fact.

Such power would clearly be wasted if not harnessed for research. Data should not be rejected because of its richness; on the contrary, rich data is typically scarce and not always easily obtained. The potential for achieving this richness should not intimidate researchers, resulting in them avoiding certain data sources. This view is in line with that of Goldstein (2007), who suggests that photographs should be treated as just another type of data. Researchers typically do not, and indeed should not, assume their data is perfect: it is always assumed that there is some deviation from the truth. In the case of photography, its fitness-for-purpose, the acceptable degree of deviation and its relevance, should be decided by the viewer (Goldstein, 2007).

4. Photographs as data sources in tourism research

While the debate about the use of photographs as data sources and the theoretical objections to their use as objects of inquiry noted in the previous sections may apply within the social sciences generally, there are good reasons to argue that they are significantly less applicable in the case of tourism research specifically. Since photography has long been an inseparable part of the tourist experience, almost none of the scepticism, suspicion, snobbery or elitism directed towards photography is observable in the tourism literature.

4.1. Subjectivity and the power to "move and prove" in tourism research

Photographs have always been widely circulated in the tourism economy, not only as a means of promoting tourism destinations (Gravari-Barbas and Graburn, 2016) but also by tourists. In the earliest days, few tourists owned cameras. Consequently, tourists had to make do with holiday portraits taken by professional photographers or the purchase of picture postcards to be sent home (Yüksel and

Akgül, 2007). The circulation of these photographs assisted in the promotion of the destinations concerned; indeed, picture postcards were traditionally sent home with the message, "wish you were here!". As camera ownership became more common, photography was used by tourists as a means not only of constructing their holiday experience but also of capturing their memories, which they would later share with others (Lo and McKercher, 2015). This role for photography was again sharpened as tourism developed into a mass phenomenon during the digital revolution of the late 20th century, during which time the number of photographs and the rate of circulation increased exponentially.

The growing ubiquity of smartphone ownership and the development of the internet, bringing with it the potential to share holiday snaps to millions of people at the click of a button, has further expanded and consolidated this relationship. Urry (1990, 2002) describes this circulation of photographs as a 'circle of reproduction', in which the images used by tourism organisations are explicitly or implicitly imitated by the tourists who visit the destinations they promote. It is arguably through this self-fuelling process of reproduction that tourism has been able to grow into one of the largest and most influential sectors of the world economy. As Urry suggests, without photography there would be no tourism industry in its current form: the two are intimately intertwined.

Influenced by thinkers such as Bourdieu, Sontag and Barthes, *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry, 2002) is one of the most influential works on the power of the visual in tourism literature. Sontag (1977) in particular, has been a staunch critic of tourist photography, attributing its worst characteristics to the comparatively privileged position and background of the tourists of that time. So caustic was her criticism that Nudelman (2014) has since argued that she was actually troubled by the phenomenon of tourism itself and her critique stemmed mainly from her visits to the war zones of Hanoi and Sarajevo: it is in fact a critique of consumerism as the "source of US militarism". The deterministic view of the power of photography initially expounded in *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry, 1990) is a modification of the Foucauldian "medical gaze" (Foucault, 2012), seen through a tourism lens. That initial tourist gaze, following the tradition of Bourdieu in acknowledging the effect of gender, social class, education and so on (Urry, 1990), was described by Jenkins (2003) as a hermeneutic circle of representation in which it was passed on from the tourist to the media (Jenkins, 2003; Caton and Santos, 2008; Milman, 2012; Garrod, 2009), to the potential consumer (Tasci and Severt, 2017), thence to the destination, and finally back to the tourist. The "gaze" thereby reinforced tourists' expectations of what they will experience, resulting, in extreme cases, in phenomena such as the Jerusalem (Bar-El et al., 2000) and the Paris syndromes (Picard, 2012). In a later edition of *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry and Larsen, 2011), the phenomenon is conceived of as a performance that incorporates all stakeholders as actors (see also

Mavrič and Urry, 2012; Ponting and McDonald, 2013; Woodside, 2015). Its reciprocal and synchronous characteristics have also been recognised (Larsen and Sandbye, 2014). The institutionalisation of the "gaze" (Feighery, 2009) and the determinism of the initial concept have together been one of the longest-standing and informative debates in tourism literature (MacCannell, 1976, 2013; Garlick, 2002).

This section argues that, compared to such theoretical discussions on tourist photography, and despite its acceptance as an inherent part of tourism as a phenomenon, the use of photographs as legitimate objects of inquiry has been very limited. This deficit is rooted in the mistrust of photographs as empirical data in the disciplines tourism draws upon for both its theory and its research tools. Issues that have been controversial in the social sciences – particularly those related to subjectivity and power – can be considered less problematic in tourism research. Subjectivity has been the less controversial of the two. Tourist photography is understood to be an essentially selective activity, not only spatially (Shoval et al., 2011) but also in terms of the activities undertaken (Tan et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015), and the people included (Choo and Petrick, 2014; Chen et al., 2016). The resulting photography is therefore likewise selective and must be considered fundamentally subjective. A different articulation of this same viewpoint is the argument that images of destinations and activities undertaken therein are routinely beautified (Urry and Larsen, 2011), characterised by Ponting (2009, p. 181) as 'split-second utopia'. Just as it is difficult to find promotional photographs showing litter or unattractive landscapes, for example, tourists' own photographs containing such elements are also a rarity.

In terms of power, the ability of photographs to convey rich, complex and powerful meanings is rarely disputed in a tourism context. If anything, their ability to talk to the senses and sensations (Larsen and Sandbye, 2014), makes the case for their use as research data even stronger. Chambers (2012) offers a robust argument for the use of visuals in tourism research by demonstrating that there are no epistemological boundaries to visual research and that the foremost consideration should always be the quality of the research. The implication is that photographs can legitimately be used as data regardless of the epistemological background and research approach of a study. The most important thing is that research is well-planned and robustly executed, and that all of the choices made by the researcher in doing so are properly justified.

The relationship between power and photography has been approached in numerous contexts in the literature. These include the concepts of "mastery" and dominance over landscapes and people (Taylor, 1994; Markwell, 1997), often the notion of the "exotic" (Selwyn, 1996; Haywood, 1990; Larsen and Urry, 2011; Urry and Larsen, 2011) and the concept of "proof of presence" (Haywood, 1990;

Markwell, 1997; Urry and Larsen, 2011). The practical outcomes have ranged from thousands, if not millions, of modern Atlases apparently holding the tower of Pisa aloft, disturbing wildlife (Green, 2017) and falling off precipices in the pursuit of the perfect selfie (Flaherty and Choi, 2016; Jain and Mavani, 2017). Initially described by Sontag (1977), the power of the camera to protect against time makes it a cherished belonging (Larsen and Sandbye, 2014), as the physical extension of what is photographed (Barthes, 2000). Good times can be re-experienced via photographs (Haywood, 1990; Loeffler, 2004; Schänzel and Smith, 2011), a function of particular value to tourists from countries with a strong work ethic, whose free time is in short supply (Sontag, 1977; Urry, 2002). These are some selected topics within the discussion on tourist photography that centre on power.

4.2. Photographs as data in tourism research

Tourist photography nevertheless remains by and large an object of discussion rather than of enquiry (Linfield, 2011; Prosser, 2011; Harper, 1998). Textocentricity still emerges in tourism research when the author has to interpret the data, even in the face of widespread recognition of the inadequacy of the written word to convey tourist experiences (Rodrigues, 2016). Text cannot record an experience in a landscape, the experience of seeing it, listening to it and smelling it; photographs, on the other hand, can concurrently convey multi-layered meanings (Jokinen and Veijola, 2003; Stedman et al., 2004). Photographs are a means of allowing people to express things more easily, given that many individuals may lack the verbal skills to relate their experiences but will be able to take a picture showing the locus of the experience and then elaborate on the photograph (see Woolrych, 2004, on the use of photovoice by people with special needs; also Booth and Booth, 2003, by people with disabilities). The omnipresence of cameras and smartphones makes photo-taking in a tourism context even easier and matter-of-course. McPake et al. (2013) remark that photographic technology has become so advanced and so accessible that, in several countries, pre-school children learn to take photographs before they learn to read. Both Ross (2011) and Capistrán (2016) suggest that capturing and sharing photographs is the norm among students and "digital natives". Against this background, it will be helpful to give a brief overview of the limited use of photographs as data in tourism research.

Table 1 shows that empirical research in the field of tourism using photographs as data can be divided into two major groups according to the focus of the research and further into three subgroups according to the research methods employed. The first group comprises those studies seeking to analyse in some way the cultural, physical and natural attractions of specific destinations, including landscape perceptions and preferences (see Steen Jacobsen, 2007). This may include their relative incidence at different destinations, their condition or quality, their role in generating tourism demand, or perhaps some combination of the three.

Table 1: Examples of tourism studies applying different research approaches to photographs-as-data

	Destination image	Tourist behaviour and experience
Researcher-based content analysis of researcher-found photographs	Burns (2004) Castley, Bennett and Pickering (2012) Echtner (2002) Echtner and Prasad (2003) Feighery (2009) Garrod and Kosowska (2012) Marwick (2001) Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013)	Donaire et al. (2014) Groves and Timothy (2001) Pan et al. (2014) Pennington-Gray et al. (2015) Scarles (2010)
Photo-elicitation based on researcher-found photographs	Botterill and Crompton (1987) Fairweather and Swaffield (2002, 2003) Hunter (2012) Naoi et al. (2006) Smith and MacKay (2001) Yüksel and Akgül (2007)	Matteucci (2013) Tuohino and Pitkänen (2004)
Photo-elicitation based on participant-generated photographs	Brickell (2012) Garrod (2008) Balomenou and Garrod (2014) Jutla (2000) MacKay and Couldwell (2004) Naoi et al. (2011)	Caton and Santos (2007) Cederholm (2004) Haywood (1990) Loeffler (2004) Markwell (1997)

Within the destination image group, the first subgroup contains those in which the researchers use a sample of researcher-found photographs (for instance from company websites, holiday brochures, postcards or even photo-sharing websites) to draw conclusions about the nature or use of the destination image. This may sometimes (but is not invariably) be combined with a textual analysis (Echtner and Prasad, 2003; Garrod and Kosowska, 2012). A semiotic approach is often adopted in such studies, setting the researcher the task of "reading" the signs and symbols that are believed to be depicted in the photograph. The photographer is not consulted in this decoding or deciphering process. The second subgroup contains those using researcher-found images to elicit the opinions of tourists and other tourism stakeholders (Fairweather and Swaffield, 2002, 2003; Smith and MacKay, 2001; Naoi et al., 2006; Yüksel and Akgül, 2007; Hunter, 2012). The third comprises studies employing PGIs that are interpreted with the assistance of the research participants (MacKay and Couldwell, 2004; Garrod, 2008; Brickell, 2012; Balomenou and Garrod 2014). The research participants are typically stakeholders in the entity under investigation, who may be tourists, hosts, tourism providers

or a mixture of those. The means by which the participants may assist in the interpretation includes personal interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, photo-diaries, photo essays, captioning, or "walk-along studies".

The second main group of studies employs photographs to gain a greater understanding of tourists' in situ behaviour and experiences at a destination, including how they "co-construct" the trip and develop memorable experiences. Again, three sub-groups can be distinguished according to the methods employed. The first embraces studies that analyse found photographs without the help of the tourists who took them. An example is the study Groves and Timothy (2001), which applied an expert "Thurstonian" system of judgement to photographs taken by American students on a field trip to Québec City in Canada. In another, Scarles (2010) undertook an analysis of the tourist experience using her own holiday photographs through what might best be described as an "auto-ethnographic" approach. A second subgroup comprises studies using researcher-found photographs to elicit opinions from tourists. In one such, relating to tourist experiences, Matteucci (2013) concluded that researcher-found images tended to lack the narrative power of visual materials assembled by participants themselves. A third subgroup comprises studies that use participant-generated photographs to elicit such responses. Markwell (1997), for example, used photo-elicitation with photographs taken by students on an overseas field trip to try to understand how they constructed their experience of tourism.

It should be noted that some studies have conducted comparative analyses drawn from two or more of the methodologies shown in Table 1. Garrod (2009), for example, compared participant-generated photographs by tourists with those found on postcards in order to test the "circle of representation" proposition in Urry's "tourist gaze". Jenkins (2003) made a similar assessment involving a semiotic analysis of photographs taken from brochures, photo-elicitation interviews using post-hoc photographs taken by tourists, and a further analysis of photos commissioned from tourists. The last of those techniques is described as an 'auto-photography' exercise. In effect, therefore, the study fits equally into all three sub-groups.

The limited use of photographs as data in tourism research might reasonably be attributed to the traditional reliance on the social science disciplines as the source of both supporting theory and tools of inquiry, and to the scepticism manifested in those disciplines with respect to the use of photos as data. Indeed, as Chambers (2012) suggests, the tourism literature tends to draw mainly on theory and practice from sociology, psychology and geography, and to a lesser extent anthropology. As discussed previously in this paper, the social sciences have been very slow to accept photographs as data (e.g. Harper, 1988, 1998; Linfield, 2011; Prosser, 2011). Hence, even though photography is understood to

be inexorably linked with tourism, and despite the flexibility and usability allowed by new photographic technologies, photographs remain underused in tourism research (Grimwood et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2015; Balomenou et al., 2017).

5. Reclaiming photographs as data through the use of participant-generated images (PGIs) in tourism research

Following the identification and examination of the perceived weaknesses of photography, this section proposes to show how these characteristics can be turned into strengths by putting research participants in the driving seat. This is realised by recognising them as experts and asking them to capture their own photographs to represent their own experiences. In this section attention is drawn to the implications for research practice of theoretical discussions relating to the timing and intent of photograph-taking, and the speed of information exchange. In particular, it is argued that under the light of new technologies and the speed they allow information to be exchanged, Jenkins' (2003) "circle of representation" of tourist destination images should be revisited and updated.

5.1. Reclaiming photographs as data in the social sciences

The power of photography to move and inherent subjectivity permits it to do much more than show one viewer the world through the eyes of another. Contrary to the thesis of Sontag (1977) and Teymur (1993) that photography renders the viewer impassive, desensitised and blasé, images can resonate with viewers to a varying degree depending on how powerful they are. As Linfield (2011 p.33) puts it, viewers may respond with 'this must not be' to the photographer's 'this is so'. The same author suggests to critics of photography that the 'enemy' should those who cause harm to others by virtue of what they do in photographs, rather than the photographs themselves, even if they do make uncomfortable viewing. Thus, instead of being treated as the Achilles' heel of photography, the ability of the visual to convey a person's point of view so powerfully should be reconsidered as its strength. Not to do so would risk wasting a tool with such potential. Gelderloos (2014) agrees with the Brechtian belief that photography cannot explain how the world works because it does not offer explanations or elucidate motives. Photographs do, however, arouse emotions and engender responses, which can be used as stimuli to help formulate explanations and investigate attendant motives further. Linfield (2011) echoes an earlier call by Goldstein (2007) for researchers to enter intentionally and in a considered manner into a discussion about photography in research, neither trustingly accepting nor contemptuously rejecting it. The research community should simply be open to examining the opportunities it may offer.

The interpretation of photographs, and even the need for it, is a contentious issue in visual sociology (see Harper, 1998, Prosser, 1998, 2011). Given the discussion in the literature of the subjective nature of photography, and various calls to embrace it, it is pertinent to acknowledge in this section the importance of interpreting photographs and the implications of doing so. As with every such decision in research, the choice sits with the researchers, encompassing their understanding of reality and their epistemological beliefs. It has been asserted by Harper (1998), named by Emmison and Smith (2000) as one of the main defenders of visual research, that the possibilities for the use of photography in the social sciences are arguably endless. In one of the four methodological frameworks Harper proposes, which he calls "reflexive", research subjects are involved in the interpretation of images and are treated as experts who possess detailed knowledge and an intimate understanding of the inherent value of the phenomenon under investigation. It is notable that the reflexive framework thus reverses ethnographic conventions that classify the researcher as the expert (Van Maanen, 2011).

The most widely used form of reflexive photographic research is 'photo-elicitation'. VEP (Volunteer-Employed Photography or Visitor-Employed Photography, depending on the author) is a category of photo-elicitation, with the reflexive component often taking the form of interviews with research subjects. In VEP, participants are requested to take photographs of their own environments and to accompany these with a word-based complementary method to ensure participants convey the meanings they wish to convey to the research team. A number of techniques consisting of the same components have been used over the years (see Balomenou and Garrod, 2016), with Visitor-Employed Photography (Traweek, 1977), Resident-Employed Photography (Stedman et al., 2004), and Host-Employed Photography (Brickell, 2012), among others. As it seems that the first of the three words in the name of the technique described above identifies a destination user group, and for the sake of common understanding and ease of literature searches, the authors of this paper prefer the umbrella term Volunteer-Employed Photography as it captures the nature of the activity, it allows for more than one volunteer groups to share the same technique, as they do the spaces they occupy, and also shares an acronym with the original VEP: Visitor-Employed Photography.

The researcher usually presents subjects with photographs of some aspect of their world and uses them to prompt further discussion. Collier (1967) provides the first record of such a photo-elicitation interview. This approach implies that a reconsideration of the relationship between researcher and subject has taken place. Banks (2001) suggests that photo elicitation allows insights and understanding that could be missed or would not even be discernible using other methods. In response to the assertion that photo-elicitation opens doors for 'creative and engaged visual ethnography [but is] yet to catch on' (Harper, 1998, p.35), one might observe that his comment is now 20 years old, and hope

that the technique is by now more widely adopted. Ever more photo-elicitation studies are indeed being published and it is probable that photo-elicitation will soon be a mainstream method. This is of interest to tourism research in particular, due to the special relationship between tourism and photography, as discussed widely in the literature.

Harper (1998, p. 35) has observed, with regard to photo-elicitation interviews:

> A shocking thing happens in this interview format; the photographer, who knows his or her photograph as its maker […] suddenly confronts the realisation that she or he knows little or nothing about the cultural information contained in the image. The individual who describes the images must be convinced that their taken-for-granted understanding of the images is not shared by the researcher, often a startling realization for the subject as well!

Photo-elicitation has some way yet to travel, however, if it is to harness the full reflexive power of photography. It has already been asserted in this paper that photographs carry aspects of the photographer's personality, views and biases, including those generated by researchers for use in photo-elicitation exercises. It should therefore be accepted as inevitable that the subject matter in researcher-taken photographs can reflect a personal point of view. Indeed, Danford and Willems (1975) went so far as to recommend that researchers using photo-elicitation should choose the images they expect to elicit the best responses. It can therefore be argued that while researcher-taken photographs might perhaps allow for richer discussion, the fact that it is the researcher who takes them militates against the objective of reflexive research: to give subjects a stronger and clearer voice. As Van Maanen (2011) suggests, this deprives photography of a tremendous strength as a research method.

The first documented use of a photo-elicitation technique in which the research subjects do the capturing of the data concerns a film documentary "Through Navajo Eyes", chronicled by Worth and Adair (1972), in which Native Americans were taught to operate a movie camera and invited to record some traditions and rituals. Prosser (1998) has noted that the outcome did not have the desired impact of bringing Navaho issues to greater public attention. A much earlier but less well-known use of cameras by subjects was the worker-photography movement in Germany and the USSR in the 1920s (see Hardt and Ohrn, 1981; Becker, 1985), during which amateur photographers documented the conditions of their own environment in a conscious use of the camera in the service of the interests of their class. Indeed, a prominent editor of the time is reported to have suggested that, when the photographer is a member of the audience, those respective interests become mutual and the camera can express a 'partisan, ideologically charged point of view' (Hardt and Ohrn, 1981, p. 76).

In the context of visual sociology, studies have long sought to address the issue of the researcher bias involved in photo-capture by means of placing cameras in the hands of research subjects, who thereby become participants. Two of these were visitor-oriented studies of landscape preferences (Cherem, 1972; Traweek, 1977), both employing what was initially called 'user-employed photography' and later 'visitor-employed photography'. At the same time, Ziller and Smith (1977) were using what they called "autophotography" to research individuals' perception of self. These studies are precedents for a still-underused means of illustrating subjects' experiences in their natural state (Loeffler, 2004; MacKay and Couldwell, 2004; Garrod, 2008; Balomenou et al., 2017). A review of peer-reviewed and "grey" literature from the 1970s to 2014 by Balomenou and Garrod (2016) identified 35 different names used for closely similar techniques in nearly 300 studies using photographs captured by participants explicitly for research purposes in the social sciences. The same authors have identified 76 studies within the tourism literature specifically between 1972 and 2016 (Balomenou and Garrod, 2018). This seems a very small number of studies in such a large field, particularly given the strong theoretical and practical bonds between tourism and photography.

Bell and Davison (2013) are critical of photo-elicitation as a research methodology, citing the lack of theoretical underpinnings and arguing that, regardless of who is driving each study, the images can only truly play a supporting role, acting as intermediaries between observation and meaning. They contend that management studies should employ only approaches with an explicit theoretical base, implicitly applying that criterion to the field of tourism studies despite having examined only two. Benjamin (1977), commenting on the celebrated German documentary photographer August Sander's (1876-1964) 'physiognomic gallery', saw it not as 'scholarly' work but rather as the result of 'bold and delicate' observation, which is in the spirit of Goethe's remark that 'there is a delicate form of the empirical which identifies itself so intimately with its object that it thereby becomes theory' (p.22). This seems prescient for VEP research. It does not imply, however, that using a theoretical framework in advance of data collection is obligatory in the VEP context, rather that the method offers the potential to understand experiences so intimately that it can also be used to generate theory. In this regard, it is important to recognise that VEP techniques are rarely used without complementary methods aimed at identifying the photographers' reasons for capturing their chosen images. This is, in effect, safeguarding the "true" or "correct" interpretation of the images (Balomenou and Garrod, 2018). Moreover, one might wonder why VEP cannot be used as a research instrument in place of, for example, a questionnaire, in the case of which the researcher decides how the instrument can be used according to their research questions, philosophy and approach. It is simply not tenable to blame an instrument for bad research; rather, it is the researchers who have the agency and can make poor choices in the selection, planning or implementation of their research techniques.

5.2. Using PGIs in tourism research

Amateur Photographer reported in 1903 that '[a]t the seaside when the sun shines one person in ten carries a Kodak or some other form of hand camera … every errand boy and nursemaid carries one at the seaside' (Harding 2012, p.242). As asserted previously, the bond between tourism and photography is unarguable. An experience might even be considered valueless if not captured on camera (Lo and McKercher, 2015) and can be re-lived at home by way of holiday snaps, as advertised by Kodak in 1905: 'Bring your vacation home in a Kodak' (Strasser, 1989 p.103). It is therefore natural to find advocates of the use of photography as objects of enquiry in tourism research. Nonetheless, the bringing together of ideas that Prosser (1998) called for 20 years ago, is yet to be achieved in tourism VEP. As a result, a profusion of articles is found in a variety of journals across a wide range of disciplines, using many different names for essentially the same technique (Balomenou and Garrod, 2016). No umbrella term exists, on the basis of which a comprehensive literature review can be confidently undertaken. This strongly suggests that, once this body of knowledge is brought together and a springboard is thereby created, VEP research has the potential to flourish.

Haywood (1990 p.25) considers the use of VEP in tourism highly appropriate, as photographs 'reveal something about us – how we see and interpret the world and the people and places in it, and all the meaning and associations we conjure up'. Visual researchers in tourism, such as Matteucci (2013) and Balomenou and Garrod (2014), consider that VEP has much to offer to tourism studies. Jutla (2000) provides a description of the first use of a VEP-type approach, describing a seminal study in which Lynch (1960) asked his research participants to sketch detailed maps of the area he was examining. His paper introduced the term "legibility", which Jutla (2000, p.408) later defined as 'the ability of the physical environment to communicate a clear image of itself'. People have their individual perceptions of a place, but it is argued there is a group image on which a number will agree (Jutla, 2000). The idea of universal photographs that convey very similar meanings is advocated from the very beginning of VEP studies (Traweek, 1977; Chenoweth and Niemann, 1981; Cherem and Driver, 1983) and is still suggested as a potential solution to management issues (Barber et al., 2008). As such, it is an avenue yet to be fully explored. The majority of VEP studies in tourism use participants to capitalise on the insights of photographers as experts in their environments and experiences, be they hosts (Hueber, 2011; Brickell, 2012; Bennett and Dearden, 2013; Kikuchi et al., 2014; Wu and Pearce, 2014), guests (Ernawati and Moore, 2014; Fung and Jim, 2015; Cahyanto et al., 2016), tourism professionals (Schumann, 2015) or multiple user groups at the same destination (Balomenou and Garrod, 2014; Prestholdt and Nordbø, 2015; Hansen, 2016). The common ground is that, more often than not, these studies are conducted to gain insight into participants' own landscape preferences and experience of

participants, captured by photographic images and interpreted by an accompanying complementary method. VEP can arguably be adapted to reflect nearly any philosophy and approach (Chenoweth, 1984; Chambers, 2012). It can also be argued that, by considering the participants to be the experts with regard to their own experiences, the technique falls in line with the Brechtian paradigm of "democratisation" (Barnett, 2015; Brecht, 2015) by the passing on of the reins from the researchers, a traditionally small circle of experts, to the participants, a much wider circle of experts, with the two then acting together.

5.2.1. Theoretical considerations that impact on research design of studies that use VEP in tourism

As noted above, Bell and Davison (2013) argue that empirical approaches in the management disciplines are usually devoid of theoretical underpinnings and are therefore less significant than those considered to be built on a more solid theoretical base. Although their argument might have some validity in respect of studies in the field of tourism research, as the focus of published papers is often only to propose management solutions to problems, there are clearly strong theoretical underpinnings in tourism research in which photographs are used as data, as demonstrated in this paper. It is imperative, therefore, to make the link between theory and practice stronger. This section outlines a number of considerations that need to be addressed in such research, including issues relating to the timing of photograph-taking, complementary methods of data interpretation, and the intent with which the photographs are captured. These considerations need to be built into research designs as they can influence research projects from conception, data collection and analysis, and therefore the interpretation of results.

5.2.1.1 Intent

Be it selfies, which are argued to be, by definition, captured for sharing (Halpern et al., 2016) or other tourism-related photographs, the discussion on photography and tourism in the last decade inevitably incudes sharing, social media and online access. Despite the longstanding understanding that the photographs are often taken to prove "I was there" (Palmer, 2010, p. 166), never has a term existed before that incorporates the photographic practice and the explicit intent to share what has been captured. Selfies are, in themselves, an important new phenomenon in tourist photography (Dinhopl and Gretzel, 2016). The rise in the depiction of a perfect, albeit narcissistic self (Tribe and Mkono, 2017), and the facilitation of autonomy and self-centeredness through technology is a valid topic of debate. The most pertinent issue, however, is arguably intent. Halpern et al. (2016) suggest that selfies are captured with the explicit intention of sharing them. Goldstein (2007), who strongly advocated the

use of photographs as research data (see Section 3), added the caveat that the photographer's intent should always be taken into account during that process.

New technologies and 'smart tourism'

Larsen et al. (2007), Gretzel (2010) and Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) assert that discussion of tourist gazes leads inevitably to discussion of networked technologies. Although the proponents of networked travel (Germann Molz and Paris, 2015) are numerous, given the services that can be offered online (Buhalis and Law, 2008; Neuhofer et al., 2015), a significant number of academics suggest that, contrary to the suggested norm that dictates constant digital presence (Wang et al., 2014), tourists might want to remove themselves from that perpetual connectedness while on holiday (Duncan, 2014; Dickinson et al., 2016; Hoving, 2017; Tribe and Mkono, 2017): an assertion also supported by Kuoni's (2017) honeymoon trends. After all, in being constantly connected, one might be physically away from home but not necessarily on holiday psychologically. Under conditions of continual connectedness, the physical and mental separation (Jafari, 1987) considered conducive to a holiday-induced gain in mental welfare (Krippendorf, 2010) simply does not happen. Indeed, Tribe and Mkono (2017) suggest that staying connected might result in a tourist's alienation from his or her travel companions and host community, effectively precluding immersion in the experience in a mindful way (Duncan, 2014) and leading to a despairing attempt to project 'the perfect me in a perfect place' (Tribe and Mkono, 2017, p. 105). Although hosts might strive to create meaningful experiences and achieve the creation of value through triggering tourists' interest in the host offering (Dahl, 2014), when visitors remain in a different mental headspace, the mental separation might be hindered by connectivity. The distant others at home – now a much broader and immediate audience compared to friends and family (Lo et al., 2011) to whom tourists would have shown their photo albums only a decade or two ago – can now stay connected through their computers or mobile devices, often in real time (Larsen and Sandbye, 2014). In an earlier time, Markwell (1997) noted the phenomenon of selectivity and the will to create an official version of a prefect experience to be presented to the outside world. More recently, Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) suggested that the connectivity afforded by smartphones, as remarked upon by Larsen and Sandbye (2014), means that the tourist gaze is synchronous. Consequently, it can be, and often is, modified in situ. This might either be directly by expressing dismay, delight or even indifference at what they see, or indirectly by way of their anticipation of what their responses will be and their consequent framing of accounts of the holiday.

Impression management and anticipation of audience reaction

According to Lo and McKercher (2015), impression management significantly influences the process by which photographs are captured, considered for sharing, shared, and possibly removed from social

media. Despite the fact that tourist-photographers can only make assumptions about their audiences' reactions, those expectations drive the sharing of photographs online (Van House, 2011).

Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) pinpoint the issue of tourists being accountable to an audience on social media, as well as to themselves, by suggesting they are in a dual position: their awareness of their online presence gives them two vantage points. Similarly, Lo and McKercher (2015) argue that tourists must evaluate their own performance for the audience and their connectivity, which can pose a dilemma between thinking about their future or about their current audience. Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) suggest that both photography and, in particular, the audience for the output, are now much more fundamental to the tourist experience. They argue that the holiday destination is not the most important feature in a holidaymaker's photographs, but rather the tourist and the site, with the latter often being the backdrop to the former. Markwell (1997) asserted that the audience (today online but then less so) is told that one has been to a destination through the construction or selection of photographs shared online: the something special experienced by the tourist, a destination possibly made even more special due to their choice to visit it, is also presented (Tribe and Mkono, 2017, p. 111, offer a relevant discussion of 'infatuation with the narcissistic self'). Both Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) and Lo and McKercher (2015) argue that the way a place is represented reflects on the way the self is represented through photography: hence the tourist becomes the site. The responsibility for delivering on the expectation of the extraordinary that was once expected of the destination, therefore now falls on the visitors and the management and manipulation of the image they want to construct. This process could of course vary, depending on the receiving audience (Lo and McKercher, 2015) but, in most cases, an effort is made for the image conveyed to appear as authentic and spontaneous as possible (Dinhopl and Gretzel, 2016).

Intent: implications

In the research context, VEP is often used to access the insights of photographers as experts in their environments and experiences. The consequential problem posed is that, unless their intent in capturing the photograph is clear, the resulting photograph might not be fit for research purposes by virtue of inaccurate interpretation. If intent has a bearing on the research question, and the research design fails to consider the implications of such, the photographs that are provided might be unusable as data. Barber et al. (2008) report in the context of their research, which comprised images collected to assist with sense-making in an open-air museum, a planned approach to the photography was required. They argued that photographs can be valuable for their semantic content, rather than just as a means of capturing an aesthetic aspect of the environment. They can offer insights into the meaning of experiences as part of the lives of the participants, as those happen. A "photography-as-

science" approach (Sontag, 1977, in Barber et al., 2008) may be required in cases where there is a clear reasoning and purpose relevant to the research study behind the photo-taking. The majority of researchers using VEP in the tourism setting have aimed to achieve insights into the meaning of experiences as part of the lives of participants, as they happen. Constant connectivity and participants' online presence present a real difficulty, however, in that the experience at the destination can be significantly affected and possibly altered. Dickinson et al. (2016) suggest that limiting mobile connectivity can be considered in tourism contexts such as museums. In the same vain, connectivity in VEP does not have to be treated as an insurmountable problem, provided that the potential for such a consequence is considered in the research design. In landscape preference studies, for example, outside disruptions can be prepared for as potential limitations in that they could interrupt the experience of the landscape. To allow for that, participants might be asked to switch off their phones or go offline, or be given project-owned cameras with little room for photo modification, and so on. As Taylor et al. (1995) argued, the important thing is that researchers need to be confident that the participants are willing and able to produce photographs focused on particular research questions when they are asked to do so. On the other hand, and in line with the research question the study is looking to address, the photo-taking can be undirected (Loeffler, 2004).

Network connectivity and impression management during the photo-taking and data-collection process should also be considered when researcher-found photographs are used. Those found on social media offer a whole new world of data mining and research opportunities in tourism studies, where their use is picking up pace very quickly (Straumann et al., 2014a; Rodriguez and Gretzel, 2016; Kavoura and Nechita, 2017; Mak, 2017). However, account should always be taken of impression management, and the intention to capture and share photos on social media. The representational value of photographs collected from social media can be challenged if the effort to present the "meticulously curated" (Van House, 2011) perfect life, perfect holiday and perfect experience so often presented on social media is not taken into consideration. Even if users have added explanatory captions to the photos they upload, dissonance might still exist between the experience and the desired projected image, which could be offering socially dictated or accepted notions of enjoyment that the photographers choose to depict or feel obliged to. These representations may be desirable in a tourism marketing study, for example, but not appropriate for studies that aim to understand in situ experiences as perceived by tourists immersed in a nature walk, in which case data collection should ideally happen there and then with disconnected tourists, which plenty are quite willing to be (Dickinson et al., 2016). Hence, if "curation" has the potential to diminish the value of the dataset, this should at least be acknowledged and, if necessary, the dataset be discarded.

5.2.1.2 Timing

Two aspects of data-collection timing can affect the VEP research process: the timing of the photo-taking and the timing of the complementary data collection that usually accompanies photo- capturing and assists with interpretation of the photographs as data.

Timing and photo-taking

Vogt and Andereck (2003) suggest that tourists go through different stages and various emotions from booking their holiday and expecting to depart, to being at the destination at the beginning, middle and end of their holiday. Pre-travel expectations are formed in many ways, from diverse image sources and social processes (Markwell, 1997). It is argued by Vogt and Andereck (2003, p. 353) that 'affective destination perception' soars at the beginning of a trip and remains high during it. Once familiarisation with the destination has occurred, 'cognitive destination perception' steadily improves throughout the stay. Smith et al. (2015, p. 119) suggest that this might relate to the aptly named the 'puppy love' phenomenon: some time after a relationship ends, happy or sad times tend to be remembered but the emotions are more muted that immediately after the experience. Similarly, after a holiday, it can be argued that tourists' recall of their experiences may be devoid of strong emotions. If beautified and staged photographs are added to the mix, it is more likely that memories tend towards the more positive, according to Stanczak (2007).

Timing and complementary methods

Although interpretation of photographs is a contentious issue in social science research, with Prosser (2011) arguing the photographs can speak for themselves so that interpretation might not be necessary, complementary methods are usually added to VEP in tourism research to involve participants in the interpretation of photographs. By adding a verbal or written account, they partake as much as possible in the analysis of the data. These complementary methods can range from diaries and photo-logs (Williams and Best, 2013; Hansen, 2016), to walk-along interviews (Bright, 2013; Hansen, 2016), interviews after completion of the photo-taking exercise (Stedman et al., 2004; Gemini and Boccia-Artieri, 2007; Hueber, 2011) and focus groups (Xie and Garner, 2009; Chandler and Baldwin, 2010), amongst others. A study by Ribeiro et al (2015) is perhaps unique in its non-use of complementary methods to accompany the participants' photographs in their tourism-related application of VEP, and that was because the research aim in that case was to test the sufficiency of image recognition software as a means of obtaining insights about tourism destinations without human involvement. It is therefore important to decide when complementary data collection occurs

and whether the chosen methods are well fitted to the research design with regard to the time lapse between photo-capture and data analysis.

A review of the literature (Balomenou and Garrod, 2018) found major differences between details and topics discussed by participants while experiencing the activity and after the activity (Schumann, 2015). Stanczak (2007) furthermore argues that photographs can lead to a distorted recollection of reality as special moments tend to be captured the most (Rakić and Chambers, 2012). It is therefore suggested that due consideration must be given to the choice of the complementary research method employed in relation to the research aims.

Timing: implications

This paper has argued that the timing of photo-capture and complementary data collection is important in potentially having a significant impact on the type of data collected. Scott and Canter (1997) suggest that, theoretically and empirically, there is a difference between the evaluation of the experience of a place and a photograph of a place. In cases of studies aiming to produce visual narratives as close to verbatim accounts of experiences as possible, it is reasonable to suggest that participants will produce richer data if they are "in the zone" at the destination and their photo-taking and the accompanying data-collection takes place there. If either the photographs or the complementary data are collected at a later stage, then time lapse on the research process should be acknowledged.

5.2.1.3 Intent, timing and connectivity impacts on the "Circle of representation" of tourist destination images

The 'circle of representation for tourist destination images' (Jenkins, 2003, p. 308) originally derives from Hall's (1997, p. 1) 'circuit of culture', where it is suggested that the meaning of culture is created in each personal and social interaction. Jenkins applies this notion to tourist destination images and presents a self-perpetuating cycle where destination images projected and received are then reproduced by visitors, depicting essentially the same images that were projected to them before their visit (Urry, 1990; Garrod, 2008).

Månsson's (2011) research on mediatized tourism suggests that tourists nowadays hold a much more active role in the circle of representation and an active influence on destination marketing. In the context of news and exchange of information, Zeitzoff (2017) argues that social media allow the democratisation of elite-dominated media by allowing individuals to share content and to mobilise and the opportunity to enhance collective action; in effect, the 'masses' are moving beyond being passive receivers of information created by elite-dominated media and 'the advertising efforts of

multi-billion dollar' firms (Ponting, 2009, p. 183). Similarly, tourists can influence a much wider audience compared to their friends and family who could obtain access to holiday snapshots a decade ago. User-created online content can be influential due to what Sun et al. (2006, p. 1120) describe as messages that are 'perceived to have little manipulative bias'. As social media multiplies the speed and spread of information and tourists' relationship with information has become interactive, their position to influence the 'circle of representation' is much stronger. The speed and amount of information from sources other than the destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and tour operators can be of such volume that they can lead to a renewed assessment of the destination image, with effectively a new destination image being formed (Gartner, 1993). New opportunities for co-creation of the destination image can be harnessed as a direct result of the co-creation of experiences by hosts, guests and tourism intermediaries (Yüksel and Yanik, 2014); attempts might even be made to institutionalise co-creation.

This paper, putting emphasis on connectivity, as well as the intent and time element of the circle of representation, suggests that social media and the instant dissemination and receipt of information due to new technologies have effectively removed the time element from these conceptualisations, and so all the processes on the circle of representation now take place simultaneously thanks to the connectivity between the tourist and connected 'others' remote from the destination. The 'gaze' can therefore be perceived simultaneously at the destination and affected by online connectivity in situ. In the conceptualisation of the 'circuit of culture' (Hall, 1997, p. 3), special reference is made to new technologies and the speed at which these interactions happen. It is therefore suggested here that although social media and round-the-clock exchange of information and connectivity do not replace all communications, the speed at which the exchange of information happens and the speed at which an image since its capture until the time it can affect DMO marketing, for example, has changed so significantly that in order to capture it on the 'circle of representation', the split between the society and individual needs to be removed and presented as a constant feedback loop.

The issue of intent in this context is less obvious. However, one could just consider how, in cases of 'alternative facts' (Swaine, 2017) (a phrase coined by USA Counsellor Kellyanne Conway), where the aim is to mislead, images can spread quickly and affect destination image and consumer decisions. The case of a UK-based social media 'influencer' asking a hotel in Ireland for a free five-night stay in exchange for exposure in her social media accounts that went 'viral' in January 2018 (Ritschel, 2018) is indicative of the acquired importance of social media influence as well as how curated images that do not come from the typically institutionalised sources acknowledged so far (see Feighery, 2009) can impact on destinations through the 'circle of representation'. This type of "influencer" falls under Gartner's (1993, p. 201) 'autonomous image formation agents', which have a captive audience and

are perceived as independently reporting on their own 'unbiased' experience of the destination. As such they may have a strong influence in the destination image formation process. Naturally, much more naïve types of curated reality usually come from tourists sharing holiday snaps online, whom Gartner (1993, p.203) classifies as 'unsolicited organic information agents'. Nonetheless, marketers/ destinations are not the only ones in the circle of representation that can widely circulate curated images anymore, and this is indeed an important change in dynamics, which is also depicted in the new 'circle of representation of tourist destination images' by the proposed constant loop between society and individual and the removal of the time split. The individual is an inherent part of the circle and hence a connecting arrow to the image projected, although it could exist to acknowledge the individuals' more enhanced role in the image projection, it is considered superfluous as the relationship already exists. Accordingly, it can be argued that the circle of representation, as depicted by Jenkins (2003), has changed significantly from Figure 2a to Figure 2b.
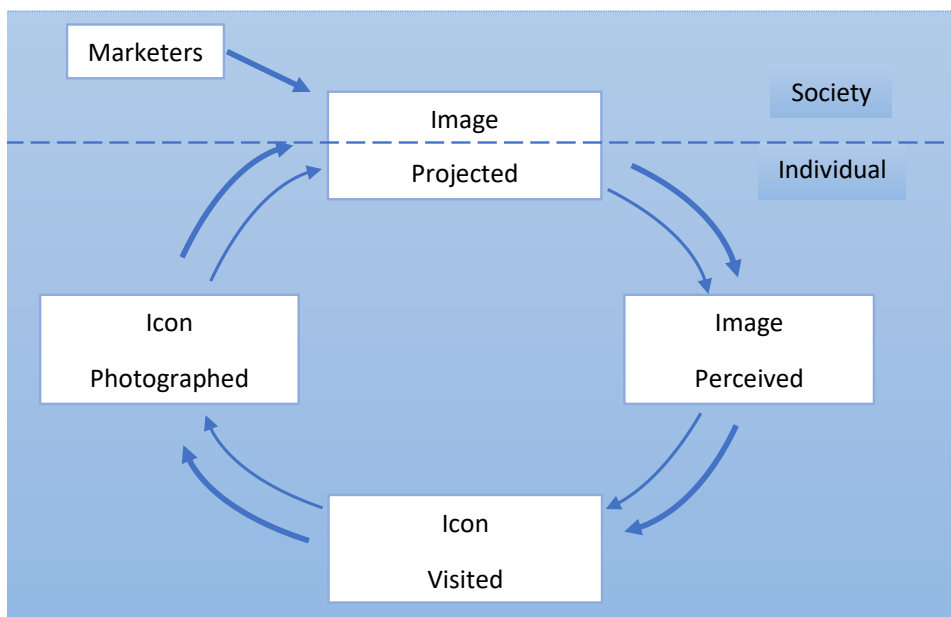

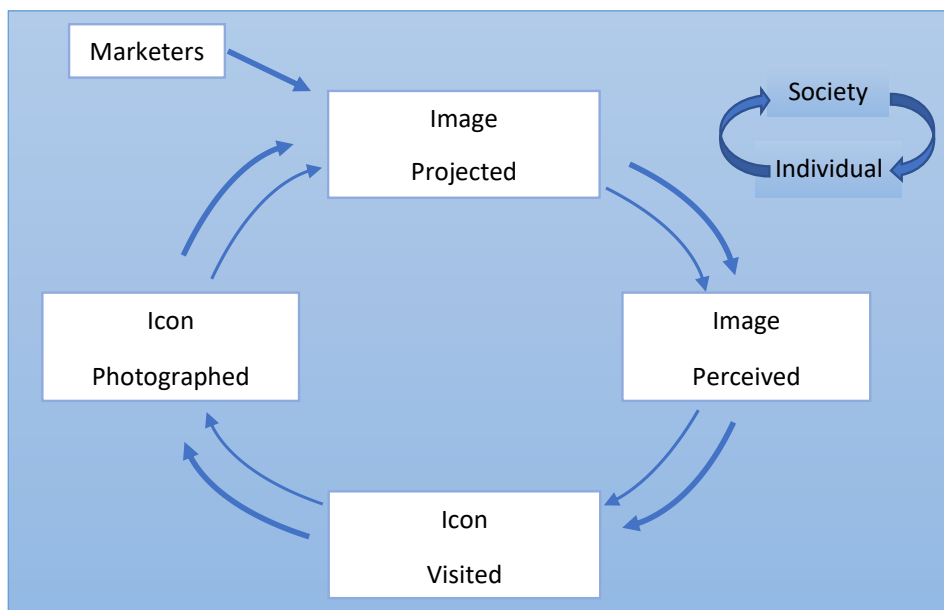Figure 2a: The circle of representation Jenkins (2003)

Figure 2b: The revised circle of representation, adapted from Jenkins (2003)

6. Conclusions

This paper has set out to address two cognitive gaps in the use of photographs as data in tourism research. In the process of explaining the nature and persistence of these gaps, this paper aims to demonstrate that – under certain conditions – photographs may not only be suitable as data in tourism research but may be superior to data generated through other research techniques. As such, the proposed "weaknesses" of using photographs as research data may actually be turned into positive advantages, which recommend the use of such research techniques rather than to limit their use to particular contexts or even to proscribe them altogether.

6.1. Theoretical considerations

The first cognitive gap, between words and pictures, relates largely to theoretical considerations relating to the use of photographs as data. This paper argues that the social sciences have traditionally adopted a textocentric research approach that favours words over pictures. Pictures, photographs included, have tended to be viewed by social scientists with suspicion at the very least. Some have argued that visual research is unreliable and is hence a theoretically flawed research approach. While the paper has traced the basis for such beliefs, it finds little firm evidence to suggest that there is a sound basis to them. This is particularly so in the case of tourism, where photography has always been an inherent feature of the tourism experience and is also becoming an ever-more important part of its performance (Internet photo-sharing and the ever-increasing popularity of the selfie being cases in

point). This paper, suggests therefore, that the theoretical objections to photography as a means of collecting social science data are not entirely insurmountable, while also demonstrating that the power of photographs to "prove" and to "move" is arguably beyond that of verbal or textual data. This power is surely something that social scientists should be seeking to harness rather than shrink away from.

6.2. Practical implications for the conduct of tourism research

The second cognitive gap identified in this paper is between the researchers and their participants. At its very core, the social science method relies on the ability of the researchers to understand what their participants mean when they respond to the research stimuli used, be that a survey questionnaire, a set of interview questions or any other prompts. The paper has identified a practical role for photographs to play in bridging that cognitive gap, although there are a number of important considerations that have not been fully addressed to date. These include considerations around intent and timing, which tend to be specific to different research purposes and contexts. They can at least partly be addressed, however, through research design, including the use of complementary methods. In tourism planning studies, for example, where photographic evidence of experience and inner fulfilment is sought, it may be suitable for participants to make an audio recording their thoughts or keep a diary as they go along. Certain destination image studies might, in contrast, lend themselves to photo-collection and interviewing after the visit. Suitability always depends on the specific research question(s) that researchers are seeking to answer on behalf of tourism managers.

The possible impact of connectivity during data collection should also be explored, so that research designs can be planned accordingly. For example, participants can be invited to immerse themselves fully in the experience by capturing photographs on their smartphones in flight mode, away from the distraction of incoming messages or downloads. This paper has demonstrated a sufficiency of theory relating both to the role of photography in tourism and the potential use of photographs as research data. What researchers should ideally now be doing is to apply the available theory appropriately, rather than resorting each time to empirical research designs that are not strongly grounded in theory. The days of collecting and downloading photographs from social media – and then ignoring the implications of timing, intent and connectivity – should now be in the past. In some cases where, for example, the timing of the photography cannot be specified, it is important to acknowledge this as a limitation. In this way, the tourism managers who use the research will be able to do so with appropriate caution.

In the light of the implications identified in this paper with respect to the intent and timing of data collection, it can be argued that for research aiming to gather data on people's experiences at the

destination during the visit or immediately after, data collection should be done explicitly for the purposes of the research so that the research questions can be answered more effectively. It is also suggested that VEP methods conducted as described here are treated as a separate strand of PGI research. This proposal is represented visually in Figure 3.
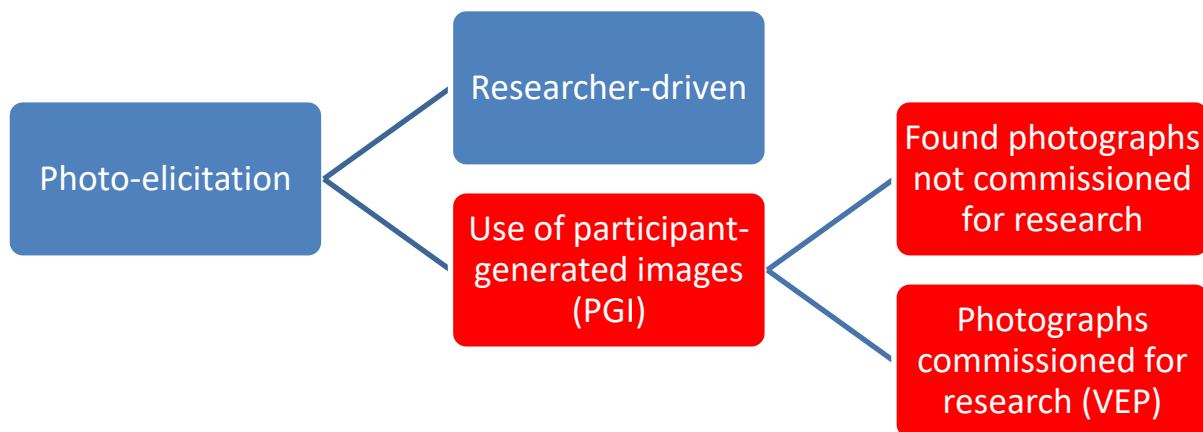
Figure 3: Strands of photo-elicitation, adapted from Balomenou and Garrod (2014)

Reorganising researchers' understanding of visual methods in tourism research into a hierarchy, as shown in Figure 3, has two major implications. The first is that VEP should only be used when the research subjects are active volunteers, so that they directly engage in capturing the photographs that are going to be used in the research. With found photographs there is no such engagement, implying it is less tenable for the researcher to correctly assess the participants' intentions in taking particular shots or capturing particular views. The second relates to issues of timing, which enter when photographs are collected after the event. For example, photographs are sometimes collected from tourists' photograph albums after they have returned from their trip. Unless the research is specifically trying to assess after-the-event rather than contemporaneous tourist evaluations, applications of VEP should ideally avoid such collection methods.

While research using photographs as visual data might still seem somewhat left-field in many of the social sciences, this paper has demonstrated that researchers really have little to fear but much to gain from its more widespread use. The key is to understand how photography operates both as a record of the tourism experience and as a means of performing tourism, and to integrate such

knowledge into the research design. Rather than representing confounding variables, considerations relating to timing, intention and connectivity can be used to harness the power of the photograph not only to prove but to move: features of social data that are surely worth capturing in order that tourism managers, the intended users of tourism research, might be able to make better use of it. With regard to the issue of intent, this paper recommends the use of PGI techniques (such as VEP), which enable intent to be controlled, or at least explored. This would be very difficult were the photographs simply downloaded from the Internet or, perhaps worse, were taken by the researcher. The issue of timing, meanwhile, can be addressed through the judicious use of complementary techniques. Real-time voice recording, for example, allows the contemporaneous capture of participants' narratives. Ex situ interviews may be more appropriate, meanwhile, in certain contexts. For example, researchers can address the possible "puppy love" phenomenon by delaying the interpretation of the participants' photographs until they have returned home. There is also much to be learned by DMOs by examining the puppy-love phenomenon itself, which could be addressed through the use of PGI techniques that embrace both in situ and ex situ complementary methods.

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