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MILLENNIAL TOURIST EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE IN TECHNOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT AT DESTINATION

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ABSTRACT

Millennial is known to be the generations that strongly empowered by technologies that apparently had altered the pattern of their consumption habits to shape a new form of tourist market. The great incursion of technology on Millennial does not only mediates the experience formation at destination, instead provide added value and emotional impact through its cognitive stimulation and experience co-creation possibilities. As the key instrument for experience enhancement, mobile technologies support users' needs of on-site information, virtually connect tourism providers and consumers, and unfold destination uniqueness. These in turn allow co-creation of tourist experience through satisfaction of Millennial's addiction of connectivity. Virtual connectivity seems to create new form of affective attachment, through which Millennial are emotionally bonded to the place due to the intensity of technological engagement. Consequently, instead of tourist-destination encounter per se, technological experience is potentially classified as the third aspects that dictate experience development, especially among Millennial travellers. Existing literatures indicates that Millennial strong engagement with virtual platform is capable to manipulate their on-site emotional experience, which apparently changing the conventional way of tourist experiencing the destination. Nevertheless, the significant of Millennial's technological engagement towards their destination emotional experience is still open for debates. Pertaining to this situation, this conceptual paper is attempted to understand the influence of technology in the enhancement of emotional experience, specifically among Millennial travellers, in better understanding the evolving demand of the new generations tourist from psychological perspective.

Keywords: Virtual connection, technological engagement, emotional experience

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1. Introduction

It is known that Millennial are natively digital and demanding for constant connection with virtual media, including social media and online services. Millennial are more likely to refer to online sources as their "addiction to connectivity" give a form of enjoyment which reflected through the constant sharing of real time experience during travel (Asia Travel Leaders

Summit, 2014). Unlike the older generations, this new breed of travellers educating themselves through online information and virtual connection, in having more control over their destination experience. Their satisfaction subjected to the possibility of sharing of real-time travel experience with friends and families as well as capturing 'instagram-worthy' photos and media to represent memorable moments during travel.

Şchiopu et al. (Şchiopu, Pădurean, Țală, & Nica, 2016) in their study highlighted that communication as well as photo viewing and sharing became the main reason for Millennial use of social media platform during travel. This consequently reflects the value of on-site virtual connectivity to this new generation tourist, which represents the significant of technological engagement throughout their travel process.

Thriving importance of technology on interpretation of tourism destination extending the need for development of mobile travel guide to better connect tourist with destination virtually. With strong engagement of Millennial towards virtual connection, the industry sees technology-based services as giving value-added quality by offering interactivity and entertainment that suit demand of the modern creative tourist (Şchiopu et al., 2016). The fact that travellers are constantly in mobile and in instant need of precise information, making the use of mobile virtual platform to be more essential than ever. Looking from the perspective of geographic cognition, technological engagement significantly influence experience in two dimension: (1) sensory, affective and social experience and (2) cognitive and bodily experience (Tussyadiah & Zach, 2011), which reflecting the development of emotional connection with destination through the sole use of online source.

Although the enhancement of experience and experience co-creation has been studied widely, limited research has been done to investigate technology-emotion relationship on experience development (Zhang, Gordon, Buhalis, & Ding, 2017). This paper therefore is constructed to conceptually discuss how technological engagement influence Millennial emotional experience at destination and developing a new form of technology-enhanced experience. It also presents the correlation of technology engagement and emotional experience, which conceptually generating the new dimension of experience commonly known as technology mediated experience.

2. Millennial and Technological Experience

Millennial is generally the generation born between 1980's and 2000, the era when ICT started to become

a 'thing' in the industry (Huang & Petrick, 2010; Veiga, Santos, Águas, & Santos, 2017). This generation which is the youth of nowadays dawn to be the main force of global market as they have the confidence in their power to influence the industry in meeting demand of the new consumers market (Şchiopu et al., 2016). Contrary to the other generations, Millennial out front the rest of them in technology utilisation and engagement mainly because they were born in the era when ICT was massively introduced and globalisation as the focus of economic world. They lived in close contact with global evolution of ICT, dissolving the digital technology progress and advancement in almost every aspect of their daily life, from personal use such as texting, to professional matters such as business and purchase (Veiga et al., 2017). Massive changes in the era of 1980's, including technological diffusion, globalisation, open market economy, and fertility control, making Millennial, especially Asians, to experience a wider generation gap; with the world that differ vastly from the one their parents (the previous generation) grew up in (Vrieze-McBean, 2016). This scenario justify the close contact of Millennial with technological environment, which in the end this human-technology relation dictate the cognitive process of human mental and emotional state.

2.1 Millennial Technological Engagement

Technology, mainly in this era of m-Commerce and social media, had somehow altered the conventional process of services production and consumption. The production-consumption dynamic and structure has undergone series of mutations in adapting to the changing requirement by the consumers, either at the global or destination level (Şchiopu et al., 2016). 'Prosumers', the emerging term referred to the evolving category of consumers that actively involved in the process of goods and services production, is said to be the growing new market of tourism industry (Park, Jang, Lee, & Brayley, 2010). They are technologically literate and sophisticated frequent traveller that expecting experience to be co-created base on their needs, instead of what being perceived they needed; making them to be the one have the power and in control of the market, and thus inflicting a more sophisticated and complex demand (Luiz Moutinho, Rate, & Ballantyne, 2013).

Prosumers best describes the Millennial Generation, the digital natives itself. They engage with technology actively and creatively to gain high value experience. With high level of expectation on technology related experience, it is more difficult to satisfy them emotionally with the conventional destination guiding system that is less interactive and dynamic. As ideal guiding and interpretation should consist of various different kind of media; it is important to provide variation in interpretation form to assure tourist understanding, satiation and avoid boredom (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005; Moscardo, 1998; Poria, Biran, & Reichel, 2009). Technological engagement and virtual guiding and interpretation at destination may significantly entice the visitors and lift them emotionally, as well as increase the competency of the destination interpretation service (Cheng, 2006). With the crucial need to satisfy tourist, it is important for destination to adopt virtual interpretation to effectively meet their emotional and technological experience need.

2.2 *Virtual Connectivity to Facilitate Tourism Information Delivery*

Connectivity is not a priority of travelers until in the recent era, when Information and communication technology (ICT) has taking over the industry and Millennial generation started to take control of the market. Connectivity, generally understood as the availability of connection and engagement with social and physical surrounding, has been lifted up nowadays and become vital not only for social engagement, but also to have constant connection with traveller's 'home', and for certain cases, as innovation in destination interpretation system (Verleye, 2015). For Millennials, connectivity to internet and social media at destination are among the main concern in making travel related decision, such as selecting ideal destination, not only because of their addiction to social media, but this virtual connection is a part of their life and giving them a sense of belonging (Honeyball, 2017; Jennings et al., 2010).

As discussed, in the current digital age, tourist evolved and became more independent and sophisticated as they employ various tool to facilitate their travel arrangement and activities execution (Buhalis, 1998; Buhalis, Leung, & Law, 2011). Availability of virtual

connection, at destination mainly, provides easy access of borderless and useful information, enhance tourist efficiency of time-space management, hence making them more powerful in deciding the travel experience desired. In the old days, professional travel guide and printed booklet was used as the main source of destination tourism relation information, and this reliance has slowly faded replaced by the urge for fast and effective virtual connectivity. Although the dependency on printed travel guide can still be seen, especially among senior travelers, it is still cannot be denied that in the current digital era, the use of technology in accessing travel information had aggressively replacing this conventional method (Buhalis et al., 2011). The fact that Millennials are the current new market making this generation's desire to be more relevant than the rest, and for now it is clear that their emotion is subjected to the technological engagement and virtual connectivity.

3. **Evolution of Tourist Emotional Experience**

Experience lies in tourist consumption of travel, most of it during the journey itself. Tourism consumption referring to the interaction between the tourist and the tourism system, either the physical or social aspects; with which through this interaction tourist engage with destination and experience their travel (Larsen, 2007; Mossberg, 2007). Tourist experience is formed within the individual tourist itself, a cognitive process of inner mind stimulated through the interactions and encounters made at destination, resulting in psychological reflect or affective state of experience. The affective state is corresponds to individual's initial travel expectation and on site encounter, in which the expectation itself is subjected to their individual motivation and state of mind (Larsen, 2007; Moscardo, 1998). In the other words, the complexity of experience formation is due to its psychological nature, and this entire process would influence tourist emotional state, i.e. their emotional experience. Though, the increasing dependency of people nowadays on virtual connectivity in execution of daily activities assuring that it is more than just a tool for travel, instead technological experience is seen as a relevant new perspective of tourist experience formation that obviously transforming the whole tourism industry.

3.1 *Technology Mediated Experience*

The increasing empowerment of tourist through virtual connectivity and their active involvement in experience creation had evolved the way experience formed (Gretzel & Jamal, 2009). While tour guiding and interpretation are to be innovated to improve interactions, the enhancement of experiences is now beyond fulfillment of expectation, instead constitutes the intensity of technological innovation and tourist participation, which also termed as experience co-creation [4, 17, 22–25]. Zhang et al. (Zhang et al., 2017) explained tourist on-site engagement are no more limited to destination engagement but also constitute technological platform engagement, especially in the current technological era. This means innovations of destination tourism system are to embrace technology to encourage better destination engagement, without losing its essence that is to provide enjoyment and develop place attachment. Considering this evolution, the current conventional method of travel guiding such as brochure and tour guide, might no more be significant in instilling excitement and uplifting tourist experience due to limited technological engagement. Instead, availability of online information, accessibility to social media, and engaging through virtual platform, are the aspects that can better convince Millennial generation satisfaction of travel experience.

Being a part of Millennials environment, ICT satisfy their needs towards fast and effective information access as well as decision-making. It is the platform that Millennial feel pleasant with, which add more meaning and value to their experience through different way and perspective. Similarly, Millennial tourist interact with their destination differently as they engage with technology to add distinct value to their experience. Neuhofer et al. (Neuhofer et al., 2013) elaborated that consumer progression of value is subjected to the intensity of co-creation and technological employment, hence technology enhanced tourism experience is the stage where experience co-creation is being further intensified when the potential

of technology being unfold. Technology enhanced tourism experience is thus being perceived as the most desirable level of experience that provide riche experience value (refer Figure 1). Technological engagement and virtual connectivity is thus to effectively deliver destination value and develop strong emotional attachment through unfolding the unexplored potential of technology enhanced interpretation. It is concluded as such since ICTs able to enhance experience, provide service satisfaction, and provide meaningful tourist environment interaction (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Buhalis et al., 2011; Neuhofer et al., 2014; Verleye, 2015; Zhang et al., 2017).

3.2 *Millennial Tourist Affection of Destination*

Tourism experience begins with tourist expectation development through which their cognitive process form belief and anticipation towards their future encounter of destination and events based on the psychological manipulation of marketing strategy. Regardless of the expectation, the main seduction process take place upon tourist spatial encounter at destination to which the promises given through those marketing are yet to be fulfilled to secure tourist satisfaction and trust. While tourism is more on tourist's physical and social encounter at the visiting place, these encounters would only be significant if they contribute towards tourist spatial understanding. When tourist experiencing their environment, they are constructing their own space cognitively based on their understanding of the place. This is how emotional attachment develops and it happens due to certain matter: tourist is the co-creator of the environment in forming mental experience (Gupta & Vajic, 2000; Mossberg, 2007); and foreign space is connected to the tourist when they consider it to be special (Tuan, 1977) and distinctive (Klippel, Hirtle, & Davies, 2010). Site familiarity or spatial cognition enable tourist to understand and be connected with their environment internally, which simultaneously leads toward the feeling of attachment to particular place.

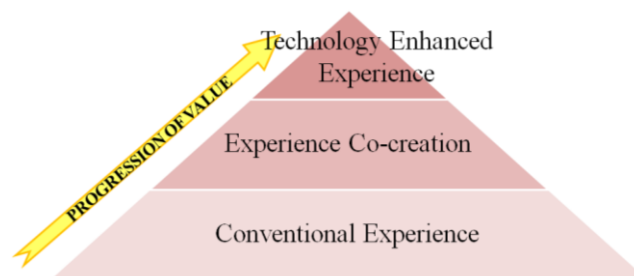


Figure 1 Evolution of experience and progression of value

Emotional bond to specific places commonly developed after visit(s) through relationship over time with the place (Brocato, 2006; Moore & Graefe, 1994). However attachment to place may also possible for first-time visitors, mainly due to strong motivation and positive feelings towards the destination (Changuklee, 1999; Halpenny, 2006), provided that the value of experience gained at destination is distinct and salient enough to be a memory. Looking from destination management perspective, the existence of place attachment is important to evoke tourist experience satisfaction psychologically (Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010). Place attachment is a concept of tourist valuing their surroundings to which they feel personally bonded to the place based on what they experiencing in the destination. Attachment to a place visualised the strong psychological attachment presence that binding tourist with their 'space', which developing the sense of loyalty (Budruk & Stanis, 2013; Yuksel et al., 2010). With these positive psychological state tourists have a higher likelihood to revisit the place and stronger loyalty to destination (Chi, 2012), which would benefits destination economically.

The development of place attachment is a part of experience formation, which is the affective responds base on the accumulation of experiences at destination. As Millennial's emotion strongly connected to technological engagement, both of these aspects are possible to be use as the parameter in measuring their destination attachment. The uniqueness and distinction of experience obtained from tech-engagement alter the current structure of experience and constructing new form of technology mediated experience (Neuhofer et

al., 2013, 2014; Wang et al., 2012), that visualising the feasible progression of intensity of destination affection constitute of technology-emotion relation. The experience continuum of technology mediated experience portraying the positive relation between the level of technological engagement and intensity of emotional experience and the hierarchy constitute of the following:

- 1) Conventional experience;
- 2) Technology-assisted experience;
- 3) Technology-enhanced experience; and
- 4) Technology-empowered experience (Neuhofer et al., 2014) (refer to Figure 2)

By demonstrating the experience continuum of technology mediated experience - in particular to destination emotional attachment - on the overall place attachment which depends on development of emotional experience, this research suggests that technology mediated experience differs according to individual tourist intensity of technological engagement and value-added quality gained from the virtual connection. Technological engagement, for instance, satisfy dynamic information and entertainment needs that suit demand of the modern creative tourist. But this tech-mediated experience might only affects the overall cognitive and affective experience of age specific tourist cluster. This demonstrates tourist heterogeneity of expected destination emotional experience need to be considered by destination management organisation in developing experience co-creation environment within the destination, as discussed by Bohlin and Brandt (Bohlin & Brandt, 2014).

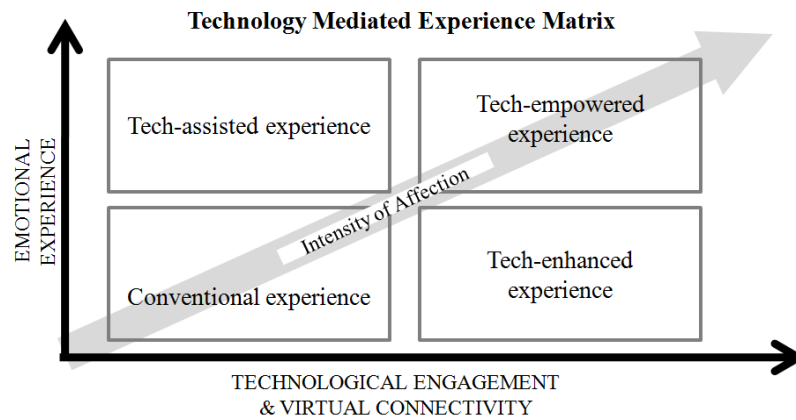


Figure 2 Technology mediated experience matrix (Neuhofer et al., 2013; 2014)

4. Conclusion

Rapid progression of ICT in tourism industry had leads to the evolution of experience development resulted from the changes of behaviour and preference the new tourist market, i.e. the Millennial travellers. Review of existing literature suggested that on-site technological engagement develop emotional experience and improves destination interaction. As limited studies discussing the direct influence of technological usage on tourist emotion, this conceptual paper is thus directed to assess Millennial constant demand of virtual connectivity on their emotional connection to destination during travel. The contribution of this paper is to clarify impact of on-site digital connection on intensity of destination affective attachment, which suggests the need to optimally utilised virtual platform to improve Millennial destination engagement and positively manipulate emotional experience. It is being expected from this study to provide general implication for the development and improvement of destination tourism guiding system, theoretically and practically.

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