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# The Production of Online Travel Photography

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## The Production of Online Travel Photography

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### ABSTRACT

*Travel photography is rarely examined despite its significance in shaping tourism experience. This study aims to fill the research gap by examining the meaning of posting and sharing travel photographs online as well as the selection process of online photo-sharing. Methods of this ethnographic study involve semi-structured interviews with the producers and visual analysis of their online travel photographs. The findings suggest different meanings of online travel posting, while producers are found to be conscious about potential impacts on their self image when they select photographs for sharing. The study reveals the complexity of tourist-produced photographs which cannot be examined with textual analysis alone. Tourists may adopt different self presentation tactics to select photographs for online sharing. Thus, the extent to which tourist-produced photographs can represent their travel experience is called into question.*

**Keywords:** *travel photography, online posting, social media, performance, self image, ethnographic visual analysis.*

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, travel photography is a form of language commonly used in the sharing of travel experience. Travel photography can be a representation of experience (Jenkins, 2003), and at the same time, a social experience itself (Larsen, 2005, 2006). As a representation of experience, travel photography is said to reveal what tourists see and experience in foreign places (Caton & Santos, 2008), their perceptions and expectations of places and culture (Yeh, 2009), as well as what they wish to remember from their travel experience (Garlick, 2002). As a social experience, travel photography can be a performance of social relationship (Larsen, 2005, 2006; Yeh, 2009), of race (Whittaker, 2009), of tourism (Yeh, 2009), of fantasy (Delfin, 2009), and of the tourist's self (Crang, 1997). Indeed, the practice of travel photography not only requires the consumption of time and money, but as Crang (1997) argues, it also involves "sacrificing the immediacy of experience and orientating activities to (future, distant) viewers". In that sense, the production of travel photography almost always involves an audience in mind, be it self or others (Larsen, 2006).

The emergence of social media has significantly changed the nature of photo-sharing (Prideaux & Coghlan, forthcoming). The rapid development of digital and web technology has transformed personal photograph from private enjoyment to a more publicly displayable social artifact (Larsen, 2008; Munir and Phillips, 2005). Social Network Site (SNS), blogs, online photo albums, and travel-themed sites provide tourists with a new channel to share their travel photographs and allow them broader distribution to a wider audience anytime, anywhere. By posting their travel photographs online, tourists can virtually and visually share their travel experience with others in various ways. At the same time, they are able to create, experiment with, and present an ideal self. The shared images can offer different experience to the audiences, who may react differently to the photographs posted (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). The producers, in return, might continue, rethink, or make changes to their existing photo-sharing strategies due to the audience's reactions. Hence, various forms of social interaction facilitated

by online photo-sharing may help constructing reality of travel and perception of place (Markwell, 1997; White, 2010). This newly-emerged phenomenon is deemed to provide new challenges as well as opportunities to the travel industry in terms of information control and distribution (Akehurst 2008; Conrady 2007).

In consequence of this, online travel photography has started to draw research attention recently. Empirical studies were conducted to understand the dissemination of travel photographs (i.e. Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, under review; Prideaux & Coghlan, forthcoming), or the types of travel photographs being posted online by tourists and the potential impact of these photographs has on the viewers (i.e. Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; White, 2010). Tourist-produced photographs posted online were also compared with promotional photographs or film photography to examine tourist imagery about a destination or the effectiveness of destination image promotion (i.e. Kim, 2010; Schmallegger, Carson, & Jacobsen, 2010). Yet, tourist's photo-sharing practice has not been examined in depth. How and why tourists select photographs for sharing remains largely unknown in tourism studies. Existing studies tend to examine online travel photography as an artifact, thus they favor using content analysis (i.e. Schmallegger et al., 2010; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009) and/or with the aid of semiotic analysis (i.e. White, 2010) to study tourist-produced photographs. Unfortunately, with textual analysis alone, researchers may risk misinterpreting the message behind the visual elements (Holm, 2008; Schmallegger et al., 2010). To fill this gap, the paper reports on an ethnographic research in progress examining the meaning of and the selection process of posting travel photographs on social media. SNS and blog are chosen as the media to be studied. Semi-structured interviews and ethnographic visual analysis are in used.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Roger Silverstone (1999) puts forward the notion of performance as one of the effective lenses to examine social experience. Drawing from Goffman's impression management and Garfinkel's concept of passing, Silverstone (1999: 68 – 77) argues that we are always in performance for ourselves and for others. Nearly all of our performances are taken for granted and reflexive in nature. We learn how to perform as much as we negotiate how to perform. We practice it so often that our actions become so reflexive, and thus we tend to draw from our commonsense knowledge to understand these reflexive actions. Most importantly, our performance "almost always involves idealization" and that "the success of a performance in everyday life as on the bounded spaces of stage and screen depends on the judgments and acceptance of an audience". Hence, travel narrative is not simply a reflection of experience but a performance of the tourist's self as well (Cary 2004; Crang, 1997; Larsen, 2006). Previous studies suggest that tourists have their own tactics of how to share and represent travel experiences to others (Desforges 2000), and that the shared experience often contains a sense of how tourist perceives oneself or the desired self that tourist wishes to achieve (McCabe and Stokoe 2004). Crang (1997) suggests that a more meaningful analysis of travel photography can be conducted when it is positioned as a performance of tourist's self in relation to a particular time and space.

Nonetheless, the why and how of photo-sharing can vary with age. Prideaux & Coghlan (forthcoming) and Lo et al. (under review) find that younger generations adopt quite different practices from their older counterparts when disseminating their travel photographs. Lo et al. (under review) suggest that online photo-sharing is particularly popular among younger tourists. Social Network Site (SNS) is currently the most popular platform for younger tourists to post and share their travel photographs. On the other hand, older tourists are less involved in online photo-sharing. Nonetheless, they tend to use online photo albums. In general, most users rely on more than one type of social media to disseminate their photos, especially among the younger generation.

One reason why online photo-sharing is more popular among younger tourists is probably because they are more frequent internet users. Another reason can be the greater tendency of treating travel as a means to project one's self image among younger tourists. Sirgy and Su (2000) suggest that younger tourists tend to be more concerned with self image when choosing

destination whereas older tourists focus more on the practical value and facilities which a destination can provide. In terms of online posting, Strano (2008) finds that younger generation are more conscious about displaying selves to their peer groups when posting photographs whereas older generation are more concerned about communicating with their children.

Different digital elements, for example one's physical body and possessions, can be used in combinations to construct and project an ideal self in an online world (Schau and Gilly, 2003). In certain context, the presentation of physical bodies is particularly important. A study of an online-dating site by Whitty (2007) reveals various ways of posting photographs online adopted by the users to enhance their physical attractiveness. For example, some intentionally post outdated or obscure photographs to enhance their looks. Some are skilful in selecting photographs to present a spontaneous and funny self. In other contexts, the presentation of the "real" and "natural" moment is highly regarded, as Cohen (2005), for example, found that photobloggers have a very different standard of evaluation in terms of photo-sharing. They are more into the mundane details of their everyday lives and consider these details as their "real-life moment", their "real" experience. Hence, they disgust poses or flash photographs.

Audience is found to be crucial in the kind of information the producers post and share on social media (Cohen 2005; Van House 2007; Whitty 2007). Comments and reactions from audience are what keep the producers going with their production of texts. The anticipations from audience can sometimes be a positive force or a negative baggage of obligations for producer to post and share information online (Cohen 2005; Van House 2007). In return, their online photographic practices can become the motivation of their offline photographic practices (Cohen 2005; Van House 2007). Van House (2007) suggests that users are more content-oriented in terms of posting when the target audiences are friends. On the contrary, they tend to display the aesthetic elements of their photographs like an online exhibition to the unknown others. Users also use different type of social media to differentiate spheres of acquaintance and adjust their online behaviors accordingly. Sometimes, presenting different selves to others can be a challenging task if they are connected to different spheres of acquaintance in the same social media account.

## METHODOLOGY

The ethnographic study involves a two phased method. The first phase involves semi-structured interviews with the producers to explore the meaning and the selection process of online photo-sharing. Semi-structured interview allows room for researcher to explore viewpoints of participants on complex and personal issues. With a set of key questions prepared in advance, researchers can probe for further explanations (Barriball & White, 1994). Before interviewing with the producers, the researcher carefully reviewed the producers' online photographs, comments from audience, and background information about the producers obtained from their blogs or SNS profiles. The interviews were audio-recorded. A laptop computer was set up during the interview to display the producer's online travel photographs. In this way, interviewees were not only encouraged to talk about their experience and recall their memories about past events, but as Holm (2008) suggests, the use of photographs could also help "to reveal participants' hidden views and values".

With ethnography, data analysis is simultaneously conducted with data collection (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: p.158-190). Data analysis continues until a final report is written up. How data and interpretation are organized and presented in the report can be a moment of discovery for the researchers (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: p.94). Therefore, the inductive analytic process is a circular process which involves every step in one's study. All in all, the analysis of the interview data of this study involves three major steps. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by listening to the audio-recorded interviews several times while viewing their travel photographs posted online at the same time. Analytical thoughts were taken note of immediately. Second, the researcher subdivided the whole interview into small audio clips which were then coded. By doing so, the researcher could easily trace back to the relevant section of the interview whenever needed. Third, the researcher compared the codes among the interviews to look for similarities and differences in which initial themes and ideas

could emerge. The researcher constantly moved back and forth with the different stages of analysis.

The second phase involves an ethnographic visual analysis of travel photographs shared online by the participants to provide more sides of the story. Unlike other textual analysis, ethnographic visual analysis focuses more on the relationship between interview data and the visual data (Holm, 2008; Pink, 2005: pp.1-175). The analysis of visual data involves five steps (adopted and modified from Collier, 2001: p. 38-59). First, the researcher has an overview of the photographs posted by the producers, including both travel and non-travel photographs. Intuitive feelings of the viewing experience and the style of photographs are noted down immediately. The researcher then takes note of several aspects of the shared travel photographs, for example, color tone, self inclusion, focus of framing, captions, title of albums, no of photos in an albums, organization of photographs, photo-editing, change of posting style. The researcher then compares the shared travel photographs and the travel experience portrayed by the producers during the interview. The researcher also compares the travel photographs with non-travel photographs to identify possible similarities and differences. Finally, the researcher writes down her overall impression about the shared photographs and the projected self image.

A purposive sample of respondents has been selected to compare photo-sharing strategies adopted by tourists on SNS and blog. Four criteria are set forth for the selection of participants: (1) a Cantonese-speaker who is a local resident in Hong Kong; (2) a social media user who posts and shares travel photographs with others on either blog and/or SNS, (3) is aged from 18 – 35, and (4) who has traveled to destinations outside Guangdong within the past two years. The participants are of different closeness to the interviewer, from close friend to complete stranger. To ensure the validity of qualitative data, triangulation was conducted among different data sources. Field notes are also written to keep record of the interviewer's feelings about the participants and the interviews. Self reflexivity of the researchers, which acknowledges personal beliefs and biases towards the phenomenon, personal experiences, and moments of breakthrough in the field, are also reported to bracket out potential biases of the study results (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section reports findings of 4 individual cases. All interviews were conducted in Cantonese by the first author. As the study is still in progress and that theoretical saturation has not been reached, the findings should not be served as confirming cases. Rather, they are to help exploring themes and issues which require further examination in the future.

### **Findings of ethnographic visual analysis (The four cases):**

Ria, connected to 287 friends on Facebook, has created 38 photo albums in total, which include 6 albums of her travel photographs to 3 different destinations: Beijing, Yunnan, and Taiwan. Yunnan trip is her most unforgettable trip so far as she enjoys traveling to areas where tourists rarely visit. Other than travel, she mostly displays photographs of her leisure activities, gatherings and parties with friends, pets, plants, testing of camera, and possessions like cameras and wild camp equipments. The number of travel photographs per trip being posted by her on Facebook keeps rising. Her earliest trip to Beijing includes 25 photographs, the following trip to Yunnan includes 78 photographs, and the latest trip to Taiwan includes 3 albums with 20 – 40 photographs each. She has even started to write captions for her trip to Taiwan. Compared to other travel destinations, her photographs of Yunnan contain fewer pictures of herself but more of locals, scenery, heritage, and ways of lives. Images of herself in Yunnan tend to be more restricted and subtle than photographs of herself during her trips to Beijing and Taiwan. Here a lot more of playful self and travel companions is shown. She mentioned that her trip to Beijing was mostly for her parents; and therefore, she visited many iconic tourist sites during her trip to Beijing with lots of planning involved. Her trip to Taiwan was well-planned by her sister who relies heavily on the travel books which Ria dislikes. She has only posted a few photographs of her Yunnan trip on blog which she opens to the public. To Ria, travel companions can make a great impact on her travel experience as she can get to see different sides of a destination with

them. She enjoys taking photographs and shares her travel photographs with others. Yet, there are times when she thinks that she should have enjoyed the moments instead of worrying about taking pictures.

Pak, connected to 189 friends on Facebook, has created 20 photo albums in total, which include 6 – 7 albums of his travel photographs to 3 different destinations: Tokyo, Taiwan, and Osaka. All of his travel photographs are titled with the name of the destination and the year of travel. His photographs, including both travel and non-travel, are all without captions. Food is what he tends to share with others. Other than travel, he also shares with others his possessions, leisure activities, gatherings, and workplace in Hong Kong. His travel photograph of his first trip to Tokyo, which is his most unforgettable travel trip, is categorized into the album “Memories”. This album mostly includes pictures of him and his friends taken in different years. Except pictures from this album, he never smiles in his photographs. He also rarely includes himself in any of his everyday life photographs other than those in this album. He includes self more often in his travel photographs, in which he is usually pictured with his girlfriend. He tends to look quite unhappy in his travel photographs in contrast to his girlfriend who always smiles in them. His travel photographs are mostly about his girlfriend, his girlfriend with him, food, buildings, local signs, sky view from the plane, temples, night view of the destination, and his post trip experience. Rarely, do his photographs involve locals, except the geisha. When he travels with his girlfriend, travel becomes more about sightseeing. Photographs are taken to satisfy her request, for he says he does not think it is important to take photographs. Yet, there are times when he has the sudden whim to take pure scenic photographs. In the interview, he told me that he felt extremely sick in his Taiwan trip but he still managed to walk around the city and took some photographs. I expressed to him that he did not look unwell in his pictures. He laughed and said, “Of course you can’t tell from the pictures.” Interestingly as well, he is selective in which trips he brings a camera. He confided to the interviewer that some of his trips are ‘secret’ trips taken with friends that few people are supposed to know about. As a rule of thumb, therefore, no one brings a camera along.

Kit, connected to 259 friends on Facebook, has created 58 photo albums in total, which include 26 – 29 albums of her travel photographs to 13 different destinations in Europe, Thailand, and China. Except for travel, her photographs are mostly about babies and kids, groups of friends, graduations and celebrations, her artwork, nature and scenery in Hong Kong and its hinterland. Mostly, her photographs are displayed to show the effect of the camera being used. She rarely includes herself in her photographs, except with her artworks, with food, and with some iconic tourist sites. When she is included in the photographs, she tends to look happy and smiley. Her travel photographs are organized into albums with the names of the destinations and the year of travel. However, some of her travel photographs are also categorized under the name of the camera being used to take photographs. These albums are usually captioned as ‘everywhere in the world’. She also posted photographs of some special print-outs of her travel photographs and asked if any of her audience wants them. If they want them, they can simply tag their names with the desired photographs and she will give them out for free. Her photographs of Europe are mostly in bright colors except Belgium which offered her extremely negative experience. However, she did not write any captions to tell her audiences about her negative experience in Belgium. She only did so when her audiences asked her questions about Belgium. Her scenic photographs in Europe are usually heritage buildings with a slice of blue sky on the side. She also dedicates one of her travel albums to the soccer fans with the album title “To all fans of Barclays Premier League”. On her blog, she has only selected her favorite travel photographs for posting. Europe is her favorite destination as she loves heritages and historic pieces. She started to fall in love with photography ever since her first trip to Italy. When she traveled around in Italy, she felt strongly that it could be a waste to only see but not to take photographs of the spectacular view. Since then, she has spent money and time to advance her photographic skill and equipments for her travel-trip-to-come. She also posts some of her favorite travel photographs on her blog. She hopes that one day she can publish a travel book to display her favorite travel photographs.

Sandy, connected to 231 friends, has created 128 photo albums in total, which include 72 albums of her travel experience to 5 different destinations in Australia, Europe, and Thailand. Sandy mostly uses English to write captions and titles of her travel album. Occasionally, she uses traditional Chinese to write captions and respond to her audiences' comments. Most albums are about her Australia working holidays. Most of her photographs of Australia are in bright colors with lots of sunshine and blue skies although she captioned that it often rained in Australia. Her photographs of Australia are mostly filled with friends from all over the world, food, drink, gatherings and celebrations, local events, and her home-staying experience with the locals. Most of the items are photographed in pairs or groups. For example, two beers, two sets of meals, several candles on the cake, etc. When she is in photographs with others, she often leans towards them. This action creates a sense of closeness between her acquaintances and her. Her captions are filled with words like happy, happy life, dancing, drinking, lots of fun, lots of love, yummy, wonderful, and awesome, etc to describe her on-site experience. She often expresses her appreciation and love to her friends in Australia for valuing her and also how much she misses them through her album captions. When she was a kid, she always looked forward to the chance of studying abroad but she knew that her parents would not have the money to support her study. Instead, she went traveling to Australia on a working holiday visa to fulfill her childhood dream. Nonetheless, she felt lonely and bored in Australia. She was not able to make close friends while she was working in Australia. The trip has changed her significantly. She used to be a very independent person, but now she cannot stand being on her own for a long time. She used to love taking photographs of sceneries and people, but now she has lost the interested in taking photographs constantly. She thinks she has seen enough, as everywhere looks the same to her now. Although she has lost interested in photography after her trip to Australia, she has created 27 photo albums in total after she came back to Hong Kong from Australia within 4 months.

#### **Findings of semi-structured interviews:**

Most participants post their travel photographs online within a few days after they return from their travel trips. Most of them also post photographs on-site if they have access to the internet and if they have the time to do so. All of them told me that it was important to post photographs as soon as they came back from their trips while their memories were still fresh and that they were still in holiday mood. To them, posting travel photographs online can be a tedious task sometimes. They have to spend time and effort to select photographs for posting, to edit the photographs, to wait for the uploading of photographs, and to add captions to the photographs to enhance the viewing experience of the audience. It can cost them from an hour to half a day to complete publishing an album on Facebook. To them, the process of posting can be pleasurable and painful at the same time.

When participants were asked why they posted photographs online,, most stated that they wanted to update others of their most recent development through posting photographs or to share travel information about a destination with friends. All of them said that they enjoyed giving advice to their friends if they were asked to do so. Most could not provide deeper answers yet, when probed further, they also insisted that their travel photographs were largely themselves and not for others. Except Pak, all producers enjoy viewing their online travel photographs once in a while as the photographs can bring them back the excitement of travel. Especially for Kit, the review of her own travel moments can be the best remedy whenever she feels unhappy or bored at work. Unlike other producers, Pak rarely looks back at his own travel photographs. The interview was his first time to take a look at his travel photographs again. To him, his photographs can no longer bring him back the excitement of his travel moments. Nonetheless, he tends to get back to his photographs to plan for his trip if he visits the same destination again. Although he is not very much into photography, he also thinks that online photo-sharing is a good practice among his friends as online travel photography can help them to better plan for their future trips.

Yet, they remain conscious of the audience when they select what to post and what not to post. For the female producers, they all expressed repeatedly that they cared about how they looked in the photographs. Ria and Sandy even selected aesthetic travel photographs of

themselves as their profile pictures. If they look terrible in the photographs, then they simply select them out from posting although they still keep a copy in their own computers. When I asked them why they selected out those photographs, most of them responded with a surprised look and said, "It's normal! Everyone is like that, right?"

In terms of photo selection for posting, Ria and Sandy are more selective. They complain about those who simply post everything online as being inconsiderate to the audience. Thus, they concern about the viewing experience of the audience when they select photographs for posting. Yet, it is hard for them to predict what the audiences prefer. Therefore, they select photographs which appeal the most to themselves. They both select photographs which they think that are unique, aesthetics, new to the audiences, and authentic to the local ways of life at the destinations. Ria told me that she tended to post a combination of self photographs with pure scenic photographs in her travel albums as it could look odd if she posted too many photographs of herself, as she said, "haha, of course not all about myself! If I post photographs of myself only, then others may think 'what are you trying to do it in here?'"

Although Pak and Kit are less selective in terms of posting, they select out repetitive and blurry photographs as these photographs can annoy their audiences. Both dislike seeing themselves in photographs. They lack confidence in their physical appearance. Therefore, they normally do not take photographs of themselves. Kit only takes self photographs with iconic tourist sites or at some remarkable moments. She claims that she tends to look terrible when she travels since she wears no makeup with aged clothes most of the time. She said that she had to at least look like her "normal" self before posting self photographs online. Pak takes photographs of himself only when his girlfriend requests it. Although he dislikes pictures of himself, he posted them up to his Facebook profile anyway. When being asked why, he told me that others might think about him in a wrong way as it seemed like he intentionally selected out photographs of him and his girlfriend. Pak expressed to me that he did not care about other's perceptions on his travel photographs as they were taken for him but not for others. Nonetheless, he told me that he could not post some of his favorite travel photographs as they included his ex-girlfriend. He also told me that after viewing his travel photographs again during the interview, he regretted posting some of the photographs in which he looked terrible. He felt like deleting them but he could not do so as others could notice the deletions.

### **Summary and reflection:**

The combination of interview and visual analysis seem to be an effective tool to reveal more sides of the stories about the shared photographs. Ria displays a more playful self in photographs of her trips to Taiwan and Beijing which she failed to obtain a deeper experience of the destination. Pak displays photographs of self in Taiwan which showed no signals of his sickness. He was also not able to post photographs of some of his favorite trips. Kit displays both positive and negative travel experience of her Europe trip. Her positive experience is usually represented with blue skies and bright colors whilst her negative experience is represented with darker tone of the destination. Sandy smiles a lot in her photographs with her acquaintances in Australia but indeed she felt extremely lonely there. Hence, the findings confirm with the literature that travel narrative is not simply a reflection of experience. Therefore, the sole usage of textual analysis as a means to understand tourist's experience can risk misinterpreting what is presented through the photographs.

It seems that the posting of travel photographs online is for self as well as for others. Online travel photography serves two important functions to the producers in terms of memory construction. It can bring back excitement of travel to the producers and it can also help coloring up their everyday life world. At a more functional level, it can help the producers to trace back information of their travel trips which can eventually be lost in time. Posting photographs online can be a means for self and for others to better plan for their travel-trips-to-come. It can also be a tool for the producer to change others' perceptions of the world and make them a better person.

All in all, the why of posting travel photographs online was not a difficult question for the producers to answer until further explanation of their answers was requested. To the producers, posting travel photographs online seems to be a natural practice without a lot of



decision-making involved in terms of to share or not to share. Most interviewees insisted that they did not concern about others' perceptions of their travel photographs at all. Yet, they were indeed very conscious of their audiences when they decided what to post and what not to post. The least selective producers like Pak and Kit also select photographs for posting. In a way, their selection of photographs shows that they are being considerate to their audiences. In a way, their selection of photographs reveals that their posting often involves the consciousness of a "self-on-display". Nonetheless, the producers adopt different presentation strategies. Ria uses a combination of aesthetic self and scenery to avoid being perceived by others as self-obsessed. Kit uses pure scenic photographs to present her photographic skills and artistic senses. Sandy uses bright colors and positive wordings to present her capabilities in traveling on her own and making friends with people from all around the world who miss her and are being missed. Although Pak never smiles in his photographs and is less concerned about the aesthetic elements of the photographs, he more or less has constructed a carefree type of self, who cares about his girlfriend and his friends by accommodating their requests even though he dislikes photography.

Change of posting behaviors was also revealed through interviews and visual analysis. Producers either completely abandon or decrease their usages of blog, e-mail, and online photo album for photo-sharing. Facebook was found to be a convenient yet less intrusive replacement for producers to display self with less effort and thinking involved. Other changes of behaviors were also noted. Ria posts more and more travel photographs per trip. She acts differently from trips to trips. Pak smiles less but includes himself more often in his travel photographs when compared to his non-travel photographs. Kit spends more time and effort in photography both in her travel trips and her everyday life. Sandy lost interested in photography and sightseeing although she keeps posting photographs online.

During the interviews, contradictions often occurred in the interviewees' stories. It seems to me that the producers were also trying to make sense of their own practices and behaviors. Sometimes when their commonsense knowledge failed to explain their behaviors, odd moments could occur between us. Although online photo-sharing is largely a performance of self, the interview itself is also a staged performance built upon the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee. I, as the interviewer, was actively looking for contradictions within the stories told by my interviewees. In a way, such practice could effectively help me to probe for more information. Nonetheless, I also had to be very careful in terms of how to probe for further explanations and when to stop questioning to avoid giving the interviewees hard feelings. I, as the ethnographer, am already part of the phenomenon being studied. I also take photographs while traveling and post them on Facebook to share with others. Therefore, I cannot avoid referring to my own experience to understand others' posting experiences. When I reflect upon my posting experience, I strongly feel that online photo-sharing is a performance of self. Whether my travel photographs include myself in them or not, they represent my photographic skill, my artistic sense, my view of the world, my personality, and my life experience which are added up together as a partial reflection of "who I am". I hope that a more favorable and unique self is projected through my travel photographs although I do not think deeply about it when I conduct the posting and sharing.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that there are two levels of meaning involved in the posting and sharing of travel photographs online. At the surface level, online travel photography can be a tool to open up dialogues among producers and audiences about the destinations and their ways of travel. It can also be served as a socializing tool for producers to maintain or enhance social relationships. At a deeper level, online travel photography can be a performing stage for the producers to script and display their personalities, physical appearance, perceptions of the world, and their life experience. In a sense, their displayed travel moments, which mostly include their aesthetic, capable, and positive self, in turn also bring happiness to the producers when they are the audiences of their own photographs. In addition, this posting and sharing of happiness online also involves no harm. Therefore, it can be a waste if the producers do not fully utilize these resources to project their best-possible self while offering pleasurable experience to others, given

that they have already spent money and time on their trips and their photo equipments. Hence, “why not sharing?”

With limited resources (i.e. physical appearance, time, money, and skill), producers adopt different strategies to select and organize their photographs to project their best-possible self to others. These best-possible self can be projected through their travel destinations, their poses and gestures, their friends and acquaintances, their willingness or unwillingness to be in the photographs, their photographic skill, their aesthetic sense, their knowledge of the world, and the breadth and depth of their travel experience. As the study is still in progress, the discussed themes and patterns are inconclusive. Nonetheless, the study reveals the insufficiency of textual analysis and interviews in examining travel photography if they are used alone. It suggests that the combination of in-depth interview and ethnographic visual analysis can help providing more meaningful exploration into the complexity of tourist photographic practices.

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