The Photography–Immersion–Value Nexus:
A Quantitative Model for Enhancing Tourist Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Tourist photography is common, yet its impact on experience remains unclear. This research explores how photography fosters immersion, enhancing enjoyment, memory, and perceived authenticity. A quantitative model tested via online survey reveals photography's positive influence on tourist value (functional, emotional, memorial, social). It recommends destination managers leverage photography while preserving attractions' natural essence and authenticity. The majority of the hypotheses grounded on the literature review were supported, and the achieved results showed that tourism photography contributes to tourists' immersion and such occurrence impacts their involvement, memorability, and authenticity of their visiting experience. Moreover, each of the experience components enhance the value perception dimensions, which are functional, emotional, memorial, and social values.

INTRODUCTION

Photography and tourism, as modern twins, quickly blended after 1840 (Larsen, 2006). With the emergence of Kodak cameras, till now, by smartphones which are accessible and used by different generations, photographing has continuously become easier than ever, and has been considered an inseparable part of every travel. The existing literature regarding tourism photography, have discussed about the early invention of photography and its relationship with tourism and the correlations of photography and contemporary mass tourism on each other, as well as the importance of tourist gaze and its pivotal role in shaping photographing rituals in every travel (Larsen, 2006; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Other existing literature is regarding the interactions and the confrontations between the tourists and visitors, and what is being captured by them through their cameras, or in other words, what they choose to focus and take pictures from, and how is their position perceived in their gaze on the objects and indigenous people (Sontag, 1977; Garlick, 2002; Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Hockert et al., 2018).

The above-mentioned existing studies are more or less dedicated to the tourism photography from the point of view of subjects or what has been observed by the tourists. This study aims to explore tourism photography by focusing on the tourists' side, to study their immersion and the dimensions of their experience, in order to understand if their photographing activity affects their value perception. There is a lack in the recent tourism value perception literature in case of the impact of photography on value perceptions (Huang et al., 2019; Deng et al., 2020), and the current study aims to apply photography to the existing value perception studies.

The main question of this research is that "Is tourism photography contributing to the value perception of the tourists?" and followed by that to know if tourism photography provides immersion, and such immersion can affect the involvement, memorability, and authenticity of their experience. To achieve this, the current study will review the existing literature on tourism photography, tourist immersion and experience, and value perception. Then, based on the suggested hypotheses, a conceptual model is created. After that, in the next chapter, the model will be examined through a quantitative research method, and the related analysis and results of the research will be presented. Then, in the next chapter, by referring to each group of prepositions, the main findings and their relevance to the existing literature will be discussed.

Finally, in the conclusion part, the theoretical and practical contributions, as well as the limitations and suggestions for future research, will be addressed. In the current study a structural equational modelling has been used to analyse the data which gathered through an internet-based questionnaire, completed by respondents from 56 different countries, and from different educational, and travelling habits' backgrounds. After evaluating the validity and reliability of the conceptual model, based on the findings of the research, the statistical analysis elaborated that out of 16 hypotheses suggested in the model, 14 of them are supported and 2 of them needed extra future research. This study applied tourism photography to tourist immersion, experience related and value perception variables and tried to make the process of value creation through tourism photography wider and clearer. It also showed that photography can lay out a more intense experience for visitors which ends in creating a higher value perception for them, so practically tourism planners are suggested to consider the importance of authentic photography opportunities for their tourists.

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