

Research on the Internet's Influence on Perceived Image of Tourism Destination: Based on University Students' Experience

Peng Ju

Abstract—Tourism image is one of the factors that affect tourists choosing destinations. Internet is becoming one of the important ways that tourists collect the tourism information and perceive the tourism image. Internet becomes more and more important as the coming of information age. Basing on the survey data, this article analyze the influence of internet in the perceiving of tourism image in college students from overall and comparing point, and analyze how tourist perceive tourism destination image through Internet, the difference in perceiving tourism destination through Internet among tourists with different characters. At last, the article summarizes the features of tourists perceiving tourism image from Internet.

Index Terms—Internet, tourism destination image, students, perception.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid social and economic development, the Internet has been playing an increasingly crucial role in our daily life, influencing all aspects of our daily life. Correspondingly, the Internet information bears a close relationship with tourism industry. In fact, tourism industry is a kind of intangible service industries, and tourism in essence is a payment for future experiences. In order to receive an expected tourism experience, tourists have to collect all kinds of information for reference, thus, the Internet comes to be an ideal tool for searching relative information.

It is inevitable for the fast development of the Internet information to profoundly affect the entire tourism industry. Judging from the angle of tourists, it is said that the Internet information will greatly change their habits and ways of searching relevant tourist information, thus affecting their perception over the tourist destination images. The present paper takes the groups of college students as targets to study the impact of the Internet on their perception over the tourist destination images.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1971, Hunt J. D. from Colorado State University, USA initially used the words of 'tourism destination images' in his Ph.D. dissertation titled as 'Image: a factor of tourism'. Since then, the concept of tourism destination images has been continuously supplemented and expanded by many related researchers. As a result, there are various opinions appearing with regard to this concept. So far, the mostly cited definition is 'Destination image is defined as an attitudinal concept

consisting of the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a tourist holds of a destination', which was put forward by Crompton in [1]. An increasing number of researchers support the view that the perception on destination image is a multidimensional construct comprising of two primary dimensions: incentive factor and personal factor. As to the impact of Internet on tourism, there are also a great many recent foreign studies. For example, through comparing and analyzing the information for describing Russian cities sourced from Russia and America, Svetlana Stepchenkova and Alastair M. Morrison [2] concluded the degree of Internet popularity of Russian cities. Besides, upon considering relevant webpage contents for describing tourism in Macau, Soojin Choi, Xinran Y. Lehto and Alastair M. Morrison studied the destination images bestowed by the Internet [3].

There are also many Chinese domestic researches on destination images. One of the most influential works is Li Leilei's [4] 'The Image Planning of Tourism Destination: Theory and Practice', which systematically elaborated on the generation of tourism destination image and procedure of planning; Wu Bihu and Song Zhiqing [5] succinctly narrated on the overall process for analyzing tourism destination images in their paper titled 'A technical procedure for analyzing regional tourism images'; Yang Ming [6] researched the handling methods and analyzing techniques of investigation data on tourism destination images, with Nijmegen of Netherlands as an example; Shi Peiji and Li Xianfeng [7] made a systematic study on the elements, media and mode of transmitting the tourism destination images.

However, it has to be admitted that there are few domestic researches of China on the tourism destination image from the view of tourists. Huang Zhenfang and Li Xiang [8] investigated the cognition of tourists over tourism destination images in the form of questionnaire and established corresponding mode of transmission.

In China, the study on the impact of Internet on tourism is still at an initial stage. Yang Jinsong [9] analyzed the impact of Internet games on tourism destination images. Jin Zhun [10] analyzed the impact of Web2.0 on the marketing of tourism destinations. These indicated that more and more Chinese researchers have paid attention to this field.

III. DATA SOURCE

A. Design of Questionnaire

The design intent of current questionnaire is to investigate how the college students obtain relevant information of tourism destinations through Internet and how their individual characteristics and Internet information influence their cognition over tourism destination images. There are 17

questions in the questionnaire focusing on three different aspects. Questions one to six are related to basic demographic data; questions seven to twelve are for the investigation on college students' Internet information searching behavior; the last five questions are for investigation on college students' attitude towards Internet influence.

B. Questionnaire Survey

Altogether, 200 copies of the questionnaire were sent to the college students from Universities in Shenzhen. Among the returned ones, 166 copies were valid, with 80 copies from female students and 89 from male ones.

Afterwards, the valid data were input and initially processed through Microsoft Excel, and then SPSS 10 software was applied for further processing.

IV. RESULTS ANALYSIS

A. Impacts of Gender Differences and Internet on Perceived Image of Tourism Destinations

Seen from the results of the returned questionnaire, college students spent two to eight hours on Internet every day. Those female students who spent such time on Internet accounted for 75%, while male students accounted for 86%. This indicated that averagely male students spent longer time than female students on Internet. While judging from the impact of Internet on tourism and its future tendency, male students are much more influenced by Internet than female students when having a journey. Upon analyzing the answers to 'how do you know about the tourism destination', those male students who obtained such information from Internet accounted for 30%, nearly twice of female students. In a word, Internet bears a relatively larger impact on male students in perceiving the tourism destination images.

There is also another difference between male and female students, the channels for obtaining Internet information. Blog and podcast are two emerging fields of Internet, receiving not less attention than traditional fields. Occasionally, college students will get necessary tourism information through blog. Seen from the results, there are more female students than male students in getting information from blog. This may be because female students pay much more attention to social celebrities and entertainment news. Among the traditional network elements, search engine and the webpage of tourism destinations have the highest frequency of utilization. There is also a difference between male and female in this regard. Those male students who obtain tourism information through search engine and those through the webpage of tourism destinations accounted for 53.5% and 55.8% respectively. However, only 17.5% female students utilized these two channels. Female students' favorite channels are forum and BBS.

Considering the impact of tourism information carrier, the differences between male and female students lie in pictures and texts. Seen from the results, the contents of pictures and texts have larger influence on male students. Among the interviewed male and female students, 39.5% male and 25% female students thought that pictures had relatively larger influence; while 16.2% male and 5% female students thought that texts had relatively larger influence. Among all the information carriers, video and picture received the most

attention, 30% female and 30.2% male students supporting for video, while 25% female and 39.5% male students supporting for picture.

When referring to the question of how to import the information of tourism destination into Internet games, it is an incidental coincidence that both male and female students believed that the best way is to assimilate the elements of tourism destinations into Internet games.

When it comes to the degree of attention to various aspects of Internet information, 45.8% of the interviewees agreed that the authority of relevant information is the undisputed crown. There is no big difference between male and female students with respect to this.

B. Impacts of Tourist Experience and Internet on Perceived Image of Tourism Destinations

Comparing the data acquired from the questionnaire, it is shown that those on frequent travels have much higher living expenses and spend much longer time on Internet than those on occasional and few travels. Among the frequent travelers, those whose monthly living expenses exceed 1000 Yuan accounted for 66.7%; while among those on occasional and few travels, this proportion dropped to 17.5% and 8.1% respectively. In addition, among the frequent travelers, those who spend eight or more hours on Internet accounted for 16.7%; while among those on occasional and few travels, this proportion dropped to 2.5% and 2.7% respectively.

The degree of attention to blog is another noticeable difference between those on frequent travels and those on occasional and few travels. According to the results, 16.7% of the former and 5% of the latter often browse blogs for destinations information. Judging from the browse rates of various channels for obtaining information, it is shown that a concentration can be found in the channels of those on frequent travels, while those on occasional and few travels use more scattered channels.

Seen from the answers to the question about the influence of Internet information on the selection of tourism destinations, 16.7% of those on frequent travels agreed that Internet information had much greater influence, but only 7.5% of those on occasional travels and 8.1% of those on few travels held such opinion.

C. Impacts of Tourist Motivation and Internet on Perceived Image of Tourism Destinations

Judging from the collected data, there are two types of motivations for college students to travel: for sightseeing and for recreation, accounting for 28.9% and 60.2% of the total interviewees respectively. Considering that there are fewer interviewees supporting for other options, only the motivations for sightseeing and for recreation were selected for comparative analysis.

According to the analysis of results, the number of those for sightseeing is larger than that for recreation, and the former covered a relatively longer distance than the latter. This indicates that those with higher living expenses are prone to sightseeing in farther destinations, and that those with fewer living expenses tend to have recreation in nearer places.

Moreover, 54% of those for recreation obtain the first information of destinations through Internet, while only 29.2% of those for sightseeing obtain such information through Internet. This may be because most college students

came to the place where their colleges are located for the first time, so they wanted to get some relevant information through Internet about the destinations surrounding the places where their colleges are located. However, those for sightseeing headed for nationwide famous destinations, so it is impossible for them to obtain information about these famous destinations for the first time through Internet, they may know these before they entered into colleges.

Judging from the channels of obtaining information, there are also differences between those for sightseeing and those for recreation. The proportion of the former is larger than the latter in obtaining information through blog, forum, chat rooms and other tourist columns on Internet; while the proportion of the former is smaller than the latter in obtaining information through search engine and the webpage of tourism destinations.

D. Impacts of Travel Distance and Internet on Perceived Image of Tourism Destinations

According to the data collected in the questionnaire, those who traveled to tourism destinations at provincial and national levels accounted for 30.1% and 57.8% respectively. However, fewer college students had set their tourism destinations at city or international levels. Therefore, this section mainly analyzes the relationship between travels at provincial and national levels and searching information from Internet.

The results of the investigation showed that Internet information had a bigger influence on the travels at provincial level than that at national level. Among the interviewees, 8% of tourists traveling at provincial level thought that Internet had a bigger influence, and only 6.3% of tourists traveling at national level held the same opinion. The proportion of tourists traveling at provincial level thought that Internet had big influence is larger than that at national level.

Judging from the channels for obtaining information, the biggest difference between those at provincial level and those at national level lies in obtaining information through forum. Among the interviewees, 35.4% of tourists traveling at national level frequently obtained information through forum, while this proportion dropped to less than 4% for tourists traveling at provincial level. Similarly, tourists traveling at national level more frequently use other channels of Internet than those at provincial level. This may because there are greater risks appearing in national travels, tourists have to make a full knowledge before starting off.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In view of the aforementioned data analysis, it is clearly shown that Internet plays an essential role in college students' obtaining information about tourism destinations and perceiving destination images. Meanwhile, the degrees of influences by Internet are varied with different individual characteristics, tourist motivation and traveling distance as well.

First, there are gender differences for college students to perceive tourism destinations through Internet information. On the one hand, female students have obtained information through more channels and means than male students have. On the other hand, female students pay much more attention

to emotional and picturesque information, for example, individual opinion, video and pictures. However, male students spend much longer time in Internet and are under greater influence of Internet information.

Second, differences in tourist motivations lead to diverse degrees of attention to Internet information. According to the investigation results, those traveling for recreation are fond of information of entertainment and shopping, while those traveling for sightseeing pay much more attention to the scenical information of the destinations and surrounding areas. Upon how to know about the tourism destinations, those traveling for recreation keep a much closer relationship with Internet than those for sightseeing.

Finally, traveling distance affects the information searching and perceiving through Internet. The longer distance tourists travel, the more positive they will search information about destinations through various channels and means from Internet. What's more, they will apply more and more information carriers and approaches for searching relevant information of tourism destinations.

With further advancement in Internet, Internet information has a more and more crucial influence on tourism destination images. Only by making full use of Internet can tourism destinations gain more and more market shares. The present paper took college students as targets to study the influences of Internet on tourism destination images, thus it is helpful for tourism destinations to conduct information transmission and image marketing through Internet. However, it should be admitted that the study range and targets of the present are confined to a relatively smaller scale owing to the limited time and fund. Further investigation shall involve netizens and social personage more extensively.

REFERENCES

- [1] C. Rosemary, *Class and stratification, an introduction to current debates*, Polity Press, 1996, pp. 50.
- [2] S. Svetlana and M. M. Alastair, "The destination image of Russia: From the online induced perspective," *Tourism Management*, vol. 27, pp. 943-956, 2006.
- [3] C. Soojin, Y. Xinran, Lehto, and M. M. Alastair, "Destination Image Representation on the Web: Content Analysis of Macau Travel Related Websites," *Tourism Management*, vol. 28, pp. 118-129, 2007.
- [4] L. L. li, "A Discussion on Spatial Rules of Tourist Destination s Image Perception," *Scientia Geographica Sinica*, 2000, vol. 1, pp. 563-568.
- [5] B. H. Wu and Z. Q. Song, "A New Framework for Analysis of Regional Tourism Destination Image," *Economic Geography*, 2000, vol. 7, pp. 496-500.
- [6] M. Yang, "A Data Analysis of Tourism Research-A Case Study of Tourism Image of Nijmegen in the Netherlands," *Tourism Tribune*, vol. 1, pp. 84-89, 2005.
- [7] P. J. Shi and X. F. Li, "Research on the broadcast of tourism image," *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Science)*, 2006, vol. 8, pp. 212-214.
- [8] Z. F. Huang and X. Li, "On the Image Perception and Promotion Pattern of Tourist Destination," *Tourism Tribune*, vol. 3, pp. 65-70, 2002.
- [9] J. S. Yang, "Online Game: A New Choice for Promotion on Tourism Destination," *Tourism Tribune*, vol. 7, pp. 10-11, 2006.
- [10] Z. Jin, "Web 2.0 and Eco-system of Promotion on Tourism Destination," *Tourism Tribune*, vol. 7, pp. 11, 2006.



Peng Ju is an associate professor of Tourism Management Department of Shenzhen Tourism College of Jinan University, Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China. His email address is jupeng@sz.jnu.edu.cn.