Traveling Cultural Heritage in the Age of Tiktok

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Abstract
The case of Hongyadong from China shows that TikTok as a digitally mediated form of judging, not only differentiates itself from traditional static, user-focused SNS platforms such as Instagram in terms of destination orientation but also redefines what cultural heritage is and transforms itself into a collective memory of the digital performance. Among TikTok's criteria, historical value and aesthetic value are indispensable, and the latter is the main factor that determines whether you become a popular cultural heritage tourist destination. It also establishes a new form of power, in which authorities need to make promotional materials that fit the narrative direction of TikTok users. This article attempts to propose a Chinese contextualized study to explore the following questions: How tourists' upload videos on TikTok impact the practice of defining a new type of cultural heritage in China? How do Instagram and TikTok differ in their perspectives on establishing new mediated power relations? More significantly, why and how do TikTok video rediscovery the value of cultural heritage tourism?

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Tourism, Tiktok, Collective Memory

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Introduction

The past decade has seen the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in many areas of our everyday lives. There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the character of the public administration of cultural heritage which based on rigid standards of authenticity and monumentality has changed under the influence of ICTs (Araoz, 2011). This tremendous impact was also perceived by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as it was shown in Convention for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage, "all of cultural heritage is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity" (UNESCO, 2003). This acceptance redefinition and re-creation as crucial parts of heritage significance show the possibility of new potential for ICTs as facilitators of people-centered cultural heritage (Silberman & Purser, 2012). For most people who do not have the relevant knowledge about heritage preservation and historical background, cultural heritage tourism becomes an important way to ensure people-centeredness.

It has been observed that tourism is fundamentally related to visual experiences (Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014; Urry, 1990) and it has been widely shared via the social networking service under the framework of mediatization. Whilst the notion of "mediatization", refers to a "long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media's influence" (Hjarvard, 2008. p.114), it's perfectly suited for studying how the need for more gratification on social media affects cultural heritage tourism. Social networking services (SNS), for instance, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram may be defined as the branch of new era of ICTs which is concerned with creating the social network or connection through the ICTs.

Ana Garner (2020) shows how social media like Instagram impact tourism. But these two social media preferences regarding travel destinations are different. Due to the political force of the government, China, which has 940 million Internet users, is not active in these application. With the further development of Internet technology, TikTok was born in a situation where static sharing, mainly text and images, no longer holds an advantageous position. As of April 2020, it has been downloaded by more than 2 billion people worldwide (Sensor Tower, 2020). It is not an exaggeration to describe it as a major source of information, a popular career choice for young people, and a major channel for the promotion of new products. More importantly, it is the trendiest digital version of Raphael Samuel's "theatres of memory" (Samuel, 1996). However, how TikTok influences cultural heritage tourism based on non-Western contexts like China remains unclear.

This essay, therefore, attempts to propose a Chinese contextualized study to explore the following questions: How tourists' upload videos on TikTok impact the practice of defining a new type of cultural heritage in China? How do Instagram and TikTok differ in their perspectives on establishing new mediated power relations? More significantly, why and how do TikTok video rediscovery the value of cultural heritage tourism?

Defining New-Type of Cultural Heritage in China

According to the official data of UNESCO, by 2020, the total number of world heritage sites in China reach 55, ranking first in the world together with Italy (UNESCO, 2020). The fact that the Hongyadong is not included in the list is not surprising. Before 2018, not only was its

existence unknown worldwide, but few Chinese outside of Chongqing knew exactly what it looked like. Along with the boom of TikTok in China, videos under the hashtag hongyadong have now been viewed 630 million times so far. Hongyadong has become a new cultural symbol of Chongqing, just as you will never miss the Great Wall or the Forbidden City when you visit Beijing.

Previously, as one of the eight major caves in the world, the Dazu Rock Carvings were the only UNESCO-recognized World Heritage Site in Chongqing (UNESCO, 1999). It represents the highest level of cave art in the world from the 9th to the 13th century and is the last monument in the history of human cave art. However, a search on TikTok for the video hashtag Dazu Rock Carvings only resulted in less than a third of the hits in Honggyadong.

In China's cultural heritage, as redefined by TikTok, having historical value is only an insignificant prerequisite. Hongyadong also has a long history as a military fortress, the earliest written records can be traced back to the Warring States Period. As the gate of ancient Chongqing, it is a stilted building with the characteristics of Bayu (Local Characteristics) traditional architecture. However, what makes Hongyadong so valuable is that after reconstruction, it has a high value for aesthetic photography. It is the architectural resemblance to Hayao Miyazaki's famous animated cartoon Spirited Away. TikTok saw the public interest and developed a Cyberpunk filter for Hongyadong, this action more in line with the psychological characteristics of tourists who follow the masses and catch up with fads, making Hongyadong even better known. By connecting it to a more popular and trendy aesthetic, the preciousness of Hongyadong is no longer its historical value, but it inspires the cultural aesthetics of East Asia and even the world.

Compared Tiktok Tourism vs. Instagram Tourism

It has been observed by Silberman & Purser (2012) that social networking services demonstrating the richness of a dynamic, ever-evolving, participatory heritage praxis quite distinct from the older, static conceptions of heritage as unambiguous, expert-defined and needing protection from the forces of change (p.13). As the types of SNS platforms have proliferated, the characteristics of different platforms have also evolved. Research to date has not yet differentiated between the main usage patterns of Instagram and TikTok platform users and their impact on cultural heritage tourism.

From Garner's (2020) research, Instagram as tourist's travel inspiration, focus on the user's pleasure and self-satisfaction by gaining other users like and comment through their selfie. The picture under the hashtag of travelgram which already has 130 million posts, the common characteristics among them are face-centered. Therefore, the places like restaurants provide more colorful and beautiful looking food, displays with giant accessories and funny furniture all serving the Instagram users get more likes (Matchar, 2017). In contrast to this, Since moving images are difficult to influence by angle and light, the topography of the location itself becomes the focus of the TikTok user's choice.

The most well-known and beautiful light in Hongyadong is not lit by tourists, but rather, it is lit automatically at night. In addition, Hongyadong provides a fixed viewing platform for tourists, so one does not need to look for additional angles. The content of the videos posted on TikTok is similar, smoothing out the variance in response caused by the individual user's photo level. More importantly, the TikTok software provides pre-set filters and background

music, so that the user's appearance does not appear in most of the videos about cultural heritage tourism.

This case perfectly fits the concept of mediated influence also known as mediatization. As Couldry & Hepp(2008) assume, it broadens traditional media studies' perspective by seeking to comprehend the "consequences of media's embedding in everyday life". Unlike traditional power relations, the up-loaders of these videos do not come from the site authorities or any other organization. Although many cultural heritage sites have official promotional accounts, people no longer trust official, commercial output. Garner (2020) has estimated that people are increasingly seeking to move from being consumers of culture to being producers of culture. In terms of reinterpreting the value of cultural heritage to cities, Chongqing has successfully updated the image of cities through the popularity of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage on TikTok. This has also changed publicity awareness and ideas of the official government. In the white paper of the 2018 short video and city image jointly issue by TikTok and City Brand Research Office of Tsinghua University (2018), many cities represented by the Chongqing city government have taken the initiative to cooperate with TikTok to promote and expand the exposure of high-quality individual users.

Rediscovery of the Value of Cultural Heritage Tourism in the Age of Tiktok

The acceptance of well-designed and authoritatively presented narratives as the normative structure for public heritage communication is a tradition that dates back centuries (Silberman 1995). People have become accustomed to trusting the version told by official sources - through national museums or textbooks - to determine what is authentic and precious. Hence, criticism of the phenomenon of TikTok's redefinition of cultural heritage becomes unsurprising. The usual criticism is that this type of cultural heritage tourism only "uses" heritage as a viewing experience, prefers scenic sites that are easier to shoot beautiful videos, and "uses" cultural heritage as a background wall for social media. It is not serious enough and does not respect the cultural heritage itself, ignoring more educational places such as museums because of the strict filming regulations for those sites.

As Suess and Budge (2018) stated that banning photography on the basis that it interferes with the visitor's experience could be seen as cultural elitism, the view that TikTok destroys the authenticity and diminishes the value of cultural heritage also indicates a cultural elitist perspective. No matter what historical meaning it bears, both tangible and intangible cultural heritage have their initially functional effect, rather than being used purely as products of worship and isolation. To make their videos different from others and get more clicks, the users on TikTok will make videos comparing the ancient and modern conditions of cultural heritage or introducing historical background. What makes anything valuable, especially in Chinese philosophy, is its interaction with human beings. Besides, since TikTok is an international application, TikTok's popularity provides a virtual interaction with a first-person perspective rather than a static image, allowing people to travel across the country and the world's cultural heritage without geographical constraints.

These socio-popular cultural phenomena, which are the result of unorganized individual behavior, are an important component of "performance memory". As Silberman & Purser (2012) concludes, this narrative construction of performance memory is not totalizing, absolute or singular (p.16).The mundane and even entertaining act of using a TikTok to document a cultural heritage tour, or planning a journey because of a video on a TikTok, shapes the collective memory of the time in which it was performed. It is an approach that connects

historical buildings and related products with real acts of time and space, and by reorganizing the related memory elements, new cultural values are created. This technique must be used with caution, however, because it is highly substitutable, and the cultural heritage that becomes popular with TikTok changes every year. How to make them cool down so that they are no longer confined to a specific time and space, but can be inherited, is a pressing problem for this augmented reality product.

Conclusion

The case of Hongyadong from China shows that TikTok as a digitally mediated form of judging, not only differentiates itself from traditional static, user-focused SNS platforms such as Instagram in terms of destination orientation but also redefines what cultural heritage is and transforms itself into a collective memory of the digital performance.

Among TikTok's criteria, historical value and aesthetic value are indispensable, and the latter is the main factor that determines whether you become a popular cultural heritage tourist destination. It also establishes a new form of power, in which authorities need to make promotional materials that fit the narrative direction of TikTok users. However, the users themselves do not have the power to make cultural heritage related videos, it is the content of the videos themselves that becomes popular, and this power is eventually co-opted by the local government.

As we have seen, digital platforms like TikTok have the capacity to shape and transform into collective performance memory. How to deal with the difference between the individual narrative value tendency and the official value tendency, and how to promote its de-entertainment without completely denying its value, is a topic that needs to be continuously explored.

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