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PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION IN VISUAL TRAVEL PROPAGANDA

Abstract:

Photography, as the most powerful means of tourist propaganda and one of the strongest stimulants for travelling, has been developing almost parallel with tourist movements, continually interlacing over the time. The rapid development of photographic and marketing technology has led to the fact that today an image of every tourist destination is easily accessible for everyone. Therefore, in modern means of communication there are a number of different visual depictions of each single photographed space. Majority of those images represent "photogenic" and groomed spaces, while undesirable sights are missing, for the sake of commercial tourist market demand.

In a form of an experimental research, photos containing slum images and other realistic representations of popular tourist destinations were selected and displayed to respondents, followed by questions related to their subjective opinions, emotions and intentions to visit or know more about.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to tourism and anthropological research by pointing out that representing a destination as a commodity may harm the overall tourist impressions, unless we consider a non-commercial photography as a potential medium to promote a tourist destination in a more realistic way, and thus inspire the desire for traveling in order to meet local culture and experience a real "spirit" of a destination.

Keywords:

tourism, non-commercial photography, slums, tourist propaganda

JEL Classification: A00

Introduction

In the 21st century, consumer relationships have started to dominate our lives to a such extent that we often become unaware of that special group of the historical and economic relationships created by humans. Like any cultural and technical development, development of photography was under influence of wider social and economic context. In the same time, photography is the cultural tool, transformed over time into commodity, and the tool which serves as a medium of communication of consumer culture, and which is realized through the advertisement and other marketing material (Wells, 2006). According to Petenji Arbutina & Kovačević Vorgučin (2013), the entire human life is turned into a game of special effects, flamboyant images, and intense feelings of pleasure.

The hyperproduction of information that is put together for its own sake and is aimed at itself creates the hyper-reality which the contemporary society considers as the only possible reality (Djordjević, 2009).

In the marketing area, photography and montage have decisive role in producing the meanings and commodification of the human relationships and experiences. People see photographs in different ways, whether they are part of commercial context or not. One single photography can have several different meanings within several different contexts. Even different styles in photography get different messages (Wells, 2006). It is particularly applied on advertising, commercial photography whose main characteristic is parasitism. Advertising photography can't set up and establish any photographic genre; it rather borrows and supports material of all existing genres of photographic and cultural practice using the forms which are popularized now (Wells, 2006). Commercial photography doesn't mean anything else but careful creation of complex, although intimate picture which invites the observer to almost imagine entire story, instead of just watch the objects of photography (Ward, 1990). By development of digital technology, it is quite understandable that technique of creation of glamorous and sweetish photographs, which compulsively impose themselves to the modern man as a stereotype due to already mentioned implosion of visual information, and all that with intention of gaining a profit.

Frequent visual deception as an integral part of the advertising campaigns, representation of unrealistic „sweetish" world, becomes also a part of everyday life and leads a man to become more and more skeptic in relation to the truthfulness of the description, when the picture is the main source of the information.

The market which is overwhelmed with a such stereotypical pictures announces the crash in the area of advertising photography which uses mentioned ways of representing reality. This also applies on the tourism industry, where photography represents the main means of communication.

Analyzing the photographs on the web-sites of the tourist agencies and the results of previous researches, one can bring the conclusion that posted photographs don't meet criteria necessary to inspire people to travel (Petenji Arbutina & Mišković, 2013).

Exactly for that reason, we consider it necessary to investigate the need for application of photography of the „common" man, tourist, in the advertising campaigns, through which we can see personal experience of certain place. It gives a real picture, considering that notation is not intended for commercial purpose, without deception and exaggeration in the photo processing. In that way, one destination is exposed to the eyes of visitors in a more sincere way. Because of mentioned implosion of the sweetish and edited pictures, modern man searches for the emotion which really is the main inspiration necessary for someone to feel a desire to travel. He identifies himself with the specific situation and visually experience that in a more realistic way and remember, which actually is the goal of the advertising campaigns.

Literature overview

Documentary and photography

In the 20th century, photography has a role of „presenting". The task of „realistic" reproduction of impression from the reality is ascribed to photography. According to German critics Kracauer and Bazin, photography has ontological status in relation to reality (Kracauer, 1960; Bazin, 1967). However, Valter Benjamin (1979) was among those critics who opposed to the efficiency of photography in this respect, claiming that reproduction of the external appearance of things apparently tells a little about the socio-political circumstances which influence the real human experience and determine his parameters.

Like Benjamin, Lady Eastlake (Eastlake, 1980) primarily denies photography as art, supporting it's realistic presentation of reality. She says that photography gives evidence about time flow, but it can't determine relative importance of the thing in any moment. It doesn't try to reveal what lies beneath the external, superficial appearance of the thing, but unappeasable keeps record in it's visual field. Lady Eastleake claims that photography represents democratic means of representation and consider it as „sworn witness" of the representation of things. Susan Sontag (Sontag, 2002) defined photography as a „trace" which was transferred directly from reality, a document, report or evidence of certain activities like tourism. She also specifies it's power to move us emotionally and capability to keep us on distance over aestheticism of represented events. Photographs can also empty experiences, exhausting the beauty by transforming it to a cliche. For example, she notices that sunsets now seem worn-out like all photographs with sunset. Unlike Sontag, Mary Price points out the importance of context of photography. Price considers that generally there is no just one meaning of

photography, but the meaning which is in the process of creating, and within that process the theme of picture is just one of the elements. Use and contextualization determine the meaning (Price, 1994). Kozloff (1979) specifies that photographs is considered to be the best arbitrators in relation to our visual perceptions and memories of them. High status of photographs, in this sense, doesn't provide just their obvious „objectivity", but our belief that within photographs exist stopped impressions that evade from us all the time. The presence of photographs reveals the extent in which we are limited by difficulties of our senses.

Interpretation of photography in the 21st century is close connected to the context and realization of positive goals within other specialties, where it represents one of the main means of communication in all segments. The level of media literacy and personal interests are the main condition for interpretation of photography (Petenji Arbutina & Kovačević Vorgučin, 2013).

Personal photography

From the very beginning, purpose of personal photography was to record our life. It was developed as a part of the interleaving of free time and family life, and that process flows in the same time with the history of photography itself. Personal photographs are integral part of those who possess and use them (Wells, 2006). That fact tells us about the subjective element which is always present in the photography and manifests itself with the choice of motive itself. Emotion creates the story and reading of personal photography. Users of the personal photographs have access to the world where they have meaning, while interpreters must transfer private meaning to the public domain.

As Linkman (1993) asserts, in the last twenty five years, personal photographs have become the focus of different interests, since the way of studying history changed. The interest for local and family stories, the history of everyday life, gives new meaning to the personal photographs as historical documents (Linkman, 1993). From the historical standpoint, personal photographs are extremely unreliable, but exactly in that unreliability lies their interesting side.

By reading the personal photographs, man identifies himself with the situation, recognizes his pleasures and practically investigates and reveals himself. Careful observation of personal photographs became part of the act of self-reflection (Spence & Holland, 1991).

No matter on the level of technological development of photography, personal photography has always offered direct, sincere view on life. Photography has confirmed our experience of „presence", which doesn't apply only on visit to unknown place, but permanent record of authentic experience in unusual place. Exactly that directness and a strong feeling of closeness with presented motive represents complete opposite thing to

the glamorous photography which inclines to bring reality to perfection, and in that way leaves the realm of „the real".

Photography and tourism

While a photography may be a trace of an appearance that existed in some actual time and place, it is never a neutral or "objective" representation of that appearance (Berger, 1972). Photographs are the result of an active signifying practice in which media-makers select, structure, and shape what is going to be registered on film and further alter and edit what is eventually printed (Hall, 1982).

As a term, destination image has been defined by a variety of definitions. Edwards (1996) defines it as a combination of denotative and connotative elements, where the first ones apply on the presented photography itself, and the other ones on it's metaphorical implications (Hunter, 2008).

In tourism, as in other areas of modern experience, photography is a major force in the manipulation of imagery. The importance of photography as a means of communication lies in its ability to influence without appearing to do so (Hall 1982; Woollacott, 1982).

Travel photographs that are mass produced are especially influential arbitrators of sight and knowledge. In subtle as well as obvious ways, these photographs not only formulate and institutionalize what tourists see and how they see it, but also how they know and understand what they see. Popular expressions such as "the camera does not lie" or "pretty as a postcard" signify the importance of photography as a standard of value and judgment in visual awareness (Albers & James, 1988).

People tour to escape the isolation imposed upon them by modernity and search for authentic experiences in foreign destinations. Sightseers are motivated by the desire to see life as it is really lived, even to get it in with the natives desire for authenticity has influenced tourists to the point that when they gaze on places they mentally try to separate the authentic from the inauthentic (McGregor, 2000).

Many snap-shots made by tourists complete a hermeneutic circle, which begins with the photographic appearances that advertise and anticipate a trip, moves on to a search for these pictures in the experience of travel itself, and ends up with travelers certifying and sealing the very same images in their own photographic productions. In this process, tourists reaffirm the privileged position of photography as a source of their own awareness (Albers & James, 1988).

The experience may actually be more enjoyable (recognizing that tourists "buy" a certain image before they arrive at the destination) if these representations are not touched, as this will allow them to realize the image they have come to see. The authenticity of that image may become largely irrelevant in terms of satisfaction. According to Hamilton and

Smith (1987), the most appropriate name for tourists who travel in order to discover "reality" of places, and a name they often give themselves, is "traveler" (Edwards, 1996).

Here we also come to the fact that mass tourists are often considered as „bad", and travelers as „good". Of course, this division on good and bad immediately came in for sharp criticism, but it can be taken into consideration in a certain measure as a starting point for analysis of different motives for travel and level of interaction with local population and way of living on the destination, where travelers have higher degree of frequency of interaction with the hosts and their life environment (Edwards, 1996). Unlike them, as Cohen (1984) claims, mass tourists are being kept in a sort of "tourist bubble", less walking of the beaten tracks, and therefore, have less chance to interact with locals and their culture.

Methodology

Starting from the previously analyzed theoretical background, the plan for adequate scientific research is designed with the purpose to determine tendencies in the habits of tourists from Serbia and region, when it comes to the interests and habits in relation to travel, getting knowledge about real face and spirit of the cities and influence of the previously seen photographs on the standpoints about destination which they have plan to visit, as well as their habits and inclinations due to their knowledge about touristic destinations and photographing.

The survey was conducted in a form of an experimental research, which started with photos containing slum images and other realistic representations of popular tourist destinations that were displayed to respondents, followed by demographic questions and questions related to their subjective opinions, emotions and intentions to visit a destination or know more about it.

The research represented in this paper consists of two parts, in the first part, non-commercial photographs of popular tourist destinations, recorded by the author of this paper, are presented to the examinees, and then, the respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire with nine questions. First four questions are of general, demographic character and refer to gender, age, work status and frequency of travel during a year. Next three questions refer to habits and level of freedom of examinee to move through the unknown tourist destinations, and the last two questions refer to standpoints about non-commercial photographs and it's use in tourist marketing.

On-line questionnaire was posted on the website Bookiraj.com which offers possibility to book the hotel accommodation in over 210.000 hotels worldwide and has the rich accompanying information content (useful information for tourists, travel records, reports,

photography of destinations etc.). Visitors of this website are mostly people from Serbia and close surroundings who travel more often than average.

An average monthly visitation of the website is between 25 000 and 30 000 visitors, so it has just proved as ideal for the placement of on-line questionnaire, with assumption that potential examinees will be more active travelers and experienced creators of non-commercial, personal photographs. Also, each examinee who filled in the questionnaire was awarded with an e-book, which was the reason why they were motivated to fill in the questionnaire gladly. Within four days, as long as the questionnaire was active, it was filled in by 304 examinees.

The photographs numbered 1-14 followed a questionnaire as examples of non-commercial, personal photographs which can be rarely found in the commercial promotional material.

Image 1 Porto, Portugal

Source: Photo by author

Image 2 Porto, Portugal

Source: Photo by author

Image 3 Burano, Italy

Source: Photo by author

Image 4 Aix en Provence, France

Source: Photo by author

Image 5 Aix en Provence, France

Source: Photo by author

Image 6 Edinburgh, Scotland

Source: Photo by author

Image 7 Rome, Italy

Source: Photo by author

Image 8 Tirana, Albania

Source: Photo by author

Image 9 Bayahibe, Dominican Republic

Source: Photo by author

Image 10 Bayahibe, Dominican Republic

Source: Photo by author

Image 11 Saona, Dominican Republic

Source: Photo by author

Image 12 La Romana, Dominican Republic

Source: Photo by author

Image 13 La Romana, Dominican Republic Republic

Source: Photo by author

**Image 14 La Romana, Dominican Republic**

Source: Photo by author

From the complete sample which consisted of 304 examinees, there majority were women (68%), and in smaller percent men (32%). Regarding the age groups, there were mostly individuals between 26 and 55 years old, and the exact structure is presented in by the Chart No. 1. The structure of answers on the question about frequency of travels during a year is presented in Table No.1, which confirms the assumption that examinees travel more often than an average citizen of Serbia.

Chart No. 2 shows the frequency of travel and Chart No.3 shows the level of interest in a local's way of life. The standpoints about the places where one can get the greatest insight into the way of life and spirit of the city is shown by Chart No. 4.
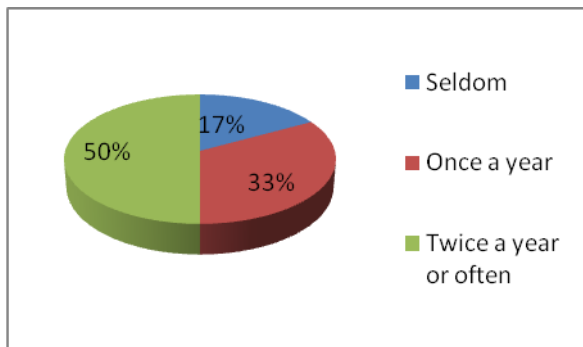
Chart 1   Gender structure of examinee
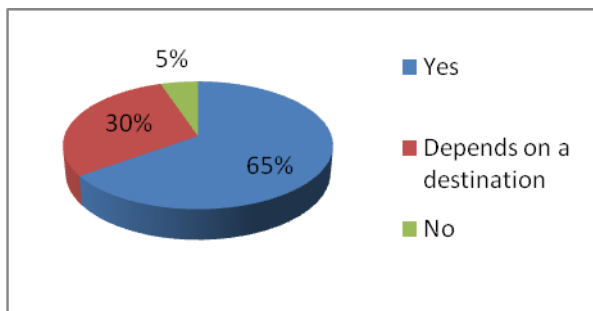
Table 1 Age of examinees
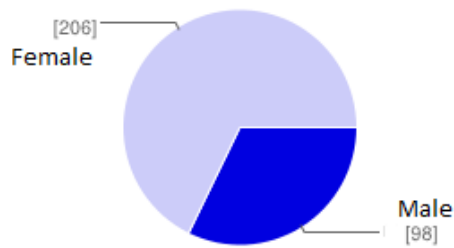
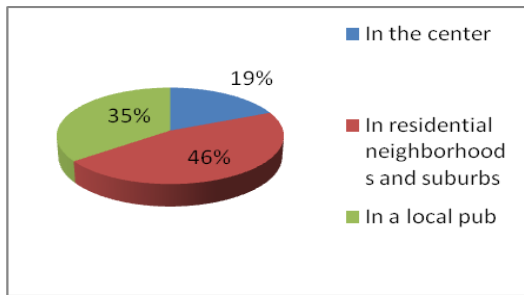|		Frequency	Percent
Valid	18-25	62	20.4
	26-35	117	38.5
	36-55	105	34.5
	less than 18	7	2.3
	more than 55	13	4.3
	Total	304	100.0

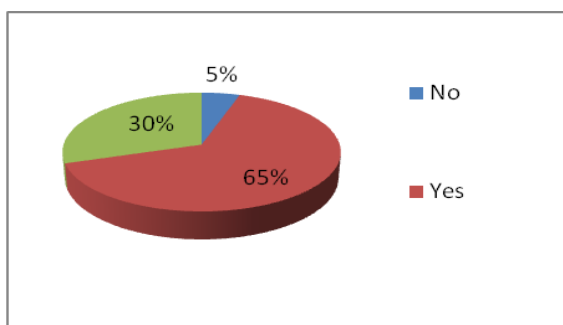**Chart 2   How often do you travel?**

Chart 3 Do you try to get deeper insight into the local's way of life and the spirit of the city?

Chart 4   According to your opinion, where can you get the greatest insight into the way of life and the spirit of the city?

Chart 5   When you visit certain city, do you also visit it's less known parts?

With the chart No.5, the structure of answers about the level of freedom of moving across the tourist destination is presented, that is to say, is there a habit or desire to get know less known parts of the city, namely, the parts that were not promoted by media in a such degree.

By the cross analysis of answers to the questions number 2 and 4 (which show frequency of travels and standpoints about the places where one can get the greatest insight into the way of life and spirit of the city), by using the Pearson's χ^2 test, it was estimated that there is considerable connection between frequency of travel and standpoints about part of the city where one can get the greatest insight into spirit of the city. So, it can be concluded that the examinees consider that they will get acquainted with the city much better in the less commercialized parts (Table No. 2). The same conclusion can be made for a correlation between a level of walking freedom and a the level of interest in a local's way of life (Table. No. 3).

Table 2

| | According to your opinion, where can you acquire the greatest knowledge about the way of life and the spirit of the city? | | | |
	In the center	In residential neighbourhoods and suburbs	In the local pub	Total
How often do you travel? Seldom	18	27	6	51
Once a year, on average	17	46	41	104
Two times or more during a year	23	63	63	149
Total	58	136	110	304

Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.683[a]	4	.001

χ^2 (4,304) =19.683, p=0,001

Table 3 The correlation between a level of walking freedom and a the level of interest in a local's way of life

| | Do you try to get deeper insight into the way of life of a local population and the real spirit of the city you visit? | | | |
	Yes	No	Depends on a destination	Total
When you visit certain city, do you also visit it's less known parts? Yes	151	0	47	198
No	2	6	7	15
Only if someone guides me	49	4	38	91
Total	202	10	92	304

Chi-Square Tests

|	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	87.812^a	4	.000

χ^2 (4,304) =87.812, p=0,000

The final part of the survey examined attitudes about using non-commercial photography in a commercial tourist propaganda. As shown in Chart No. 6, a half of respondents stated that presented photographs reflect spirit of the city and the way of life of local population in a realistic way, and a majority of them (80%) stated that it would be useful to use this kind of images in the formal promotion of tourist destinations (Chart No.7).

Chart No. 6   Do you think that presented photographs reflect spirit of the city and the way of life of local population in a realistic way?
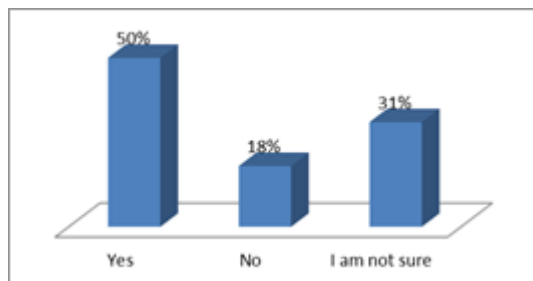
Chart No. 7   Do you think that it would be useful to use also non-commercial photographs, similar to the presented, in the promotion of tourist destination?
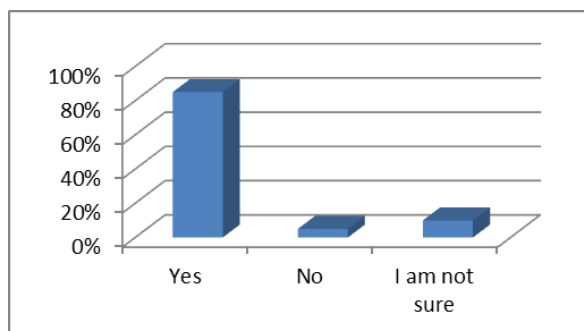
Concerning the results of a presented survey, it can be concluded that a majority of respondents consider non-commercial photography as a strong potential for a new way of advertisement directed towards younger population that enjoys discovering new urban spaces, meeting local people, their living space, streets and homes.

Conclusion

Comprehension and interpretation of photography is conditioned with social and cultural environment, tradition and visual everyday environment, as well as with the context where it is situated. Through the history, accepted as a medium for representing „unseen" and different things, photography acquired high position in public informing. At the beginning, it was acquiring of knowledge about other cultures, different people, more precisely „exotic" situations. It is understandable that it's status is changed through the history, as well as it's role and interpretation in certain period of time. However, development of the computer-based production of the image and possibility of digitalization and processing of photography, bring documentary realism more and more in question. The authority ascribed to photography is undermined (Wells, 2006). There is eternal question which emerges all the time and it is the question in relation to the truthfulness of represented scenes and objects. Change of focus has come from the need to change the style which was dominant for many years, and it is the question of aesthetically attractive photography with a dose of glamour, but without emotions. If we see tourism as a product which need to be sold, photography as itself is not satisfying medium anymore. There is a growing need for the photographs which can evoke emotions in the observer. The idea is that potential consumer gets impression that he himself is in represented place and shares experience with represented people. Aesthetically imperfect photography offers possibility of identification and emotional connection with a photographer which was present in represented place in one moment, as well as with that very situation. On the other side, avoiding stereotype and representation of the place in a „different" way from those we used to see surely evokes a feeling of curiosity, and because of that it can be memorized easily, which subconsciously can connect observer with represented destination and inspire his desire to travel.

Since there is a market saturation with stereotype „false advertisements", the need for transformation in relation to the type of photography which is used for applied, commercial purposes is quite understandable. Documentary, personal photography, by placing in completely new context, gets great role in the means of advertising in the area of tourism, as has partly been confirmed in this paper.

Directions for future research

Future research of non-commercial photo material could be based on photography in terms of *space* (physical environment represented) and *subject* (objects or individuals found in the focus of the photograph). As in total 16 types of tourism representations were found in a study conducted by William C. Hunter (2008), the correlation between an image content and a way tourists perceive destination could yield new approach for contemporary tourism marketing.

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