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VIRTUAL CONNECTIVITY IN MEDIATING MILLENNIALS DESTINATION EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Millennial is known to be the generations that strongly empowered by technologies that apparently had altered the pattern of their consumption habits to shape a new form of tourist market. The great incursion of technology on millennial does not only mediates the experience formation at destination, instead provide added value and emotional impact through its cognitive stimulation and experience co-creation possibilities. As the key instrument for experience enhancement, mobile technologies support users' needs of on-site information, virtually connect tourism providers and consumers, and unfold destination uniqueness. These in turn allow co-creation of tourist experience through satisfaction of millennial's addiction of connectivity. Virtual connectivity seems to create new form of affective attachment, through which millennial are emotionally bonded to the place due to the intensity of technological engagement. Consequently, instead of tourist-destination encounter per se, technological experience is potentially classified as the third aspects that dictate experience development, especially among millennial travellers. Existing literatures indicates that millennial strong engagement with virtual platform is capable to manipulate their on-site emotional experience, which apparently changing the conventional way of tourist experiencing the destination. Nevertheless, the significant of millennial's technological engagement towards their destination emotional experience is still open for debates. Pertaining to this situation, this conceptual paper is attempted to understand the influence of technology in the enhancement of emotional experience, specifically among millennial travellers, in better understanding the evolving demand of the new generations tourist from psychological perspective.

Key words: Virtual connection, technological engagement, emotional experience

INTRODUCTION

It is known that millennial are natively digital and demanding for constant connection with virtual media, including social media and online services. Millennial are more likely to refer

to online sources as their "addiction to connectivity" give a form of enjoyment which reflected through the constant sharing of real time experience during travel [1]. Unlike the older generations, this new breed of travellers educating themselves through online information and virtual connection, in having more control over their destination experience. Their satisfaction subjected to the possibility of sharing of real-time travel experience to friends and families as well as capturing 'instagram-worthy' photos and media to represent memorable moments during travel. Şchiopu *et al.* [2] in their study highlighted that communication and photo viewing and sharing became the main reason for millennial use of social media platform during travel. This consequently reflects the value of on-site virtual connectivity to this new generation tourist, which represents the significant of technological engagement throughout their travel process.

Thriving importance of technology on interpretation of tourism destination extending the need for development of mobile travel guide to better connect tourist with destination virtually. With strong engagement of millennial towards virtual connection, the industry sees technology-based services as giving value-added quality by offering interactivity and entertainment that suit demand of the modern creative tourist [2]. The fact that travellers are constantly in mobile and in instant need of precise information, making the use of mobile virtual platform to be more essential than ever. Looking from the perspective of geographic cognition, technological engagement significantly influence experience in two dimensions: (1) sensory, affective and social experience and (2) cognitive and bodily experience [3], which reflecting the development of emotional connection with destination through the sole use of online source.

Although the enhancement of experience and experience co-creation has been studied widely, limited research has been done to investigate technology-emotion relationship on experience development [4]. This paper therefore is constructed to conceptually discuss how technological engagement influence millennial emotional experience at destination and developing a new form of technology-enhanced experience. For this purpose, this paper reviewed the motivation and behaviour of millennial travellers to clarify the evolving emotional experience of the new generation tourist, in relation to their strong and continuous engagement of virtual media, as well as exploring its impact towards their on-site travel behaviour and satisfaction. It then presents the correlation of technology engagement and emotional experience, which conceptually generating the new dimension of experience commonly known as technology enhanced experience.
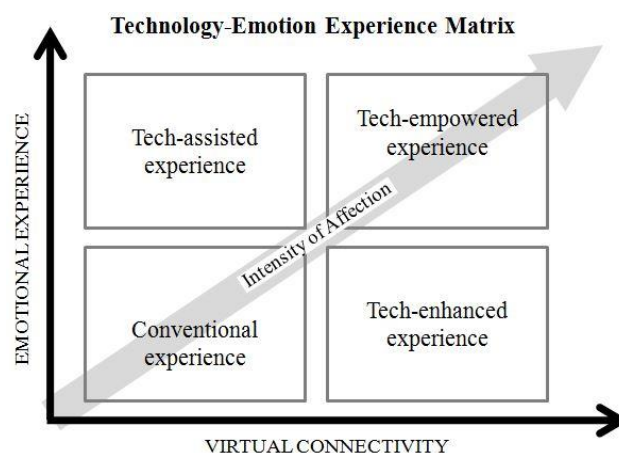
MAIN RESULTS

Figure 1. Technology-emotion experience matrix (adapted from [5] and [6]).

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided discussion on the evolution of experience development resulted from the millennial traveller's behaviour and preference. Review of existing literature suggested that on-site technological engagement develop emotional experience and improves destination interaction. As limited studies discussing the direct influence of technological usage on tourist emotion, this conceptual paper is thus directed to assess millennial constant demand of virtual connectivity on their emotional connection to destination during travel. The contribution of this paper is to clarify impact of on-site digital connection on intensity of destination affective attachment, which suggests the need to optimally utilised virtual platform to improve millennial destination engagement and positively manipulate emotional experience. It is being expected from this study to provides implication for the development and improvement of destination interpretation system, theoretically and practically.

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