

Gina Esposito

Dr. Johnson

LIT 205

9 May 2018

Bad Tourists: The Effect of Social Media

A quick Google search of "bad tourist" will produce thousands of articles featuring ignorant tourists posing atop ancient monuments, taking selfies in places of great tragedy, and filming foolish videos disrespecting the culture of a specific place. According to a study conducted by Li and Wang et al. (2011), social media allows individuals to become the media themselves with collaboration and the sharing of information, which is outlined in Park's "The Impact of Different Types of Media on Tourists' Behavioral Intentions" (Park 18). "It refers to Internet-based online media in which individuals with common interests, goals, and practices engage in social interactions constructing personal profiles and sharing information and experiences (Chiu, Hsu, and Wang et al. qtd. in Park 18) As social media becomes an ever increasing part of our lives, it will begin to produce both positive and negative effects, which we can see in the case of tourist behavior. This being said, there are many different motivators and factors that affect why and how tourists share their experiences on social media, often in bad taste.

"In tourism literature, one's participation in and contributions to online travel communities are driven mainly by social benefits and hedonic benefits", which is discussed by Wang et al. in their study titled, "A Moderated Mediation Model of Sharing Travel Experience on Social Media: Motivations and Face Orientations in Chinese Culture" (Wang et al. and Fesenmaier). However, extrinsic motivation appears to be a more prominent motivation in the sharing of tourist material on social media sites. "Prior research has proposed that tourists' motivations to share travel experiences through social media encompass various extrinsic motivators such as building a reputation, earning rewards, connect with friends and so on" (Munar and Jacobsen qtd. in Wang et al.). In today's culture, we often want to show off the exciting and exclusive things we are doing. This is heavily prevalent today among our culture of "Youtube stars," "Influencers," and "Social Media Personalities, all of whom have an impact on the average American "consumer". Thus, it is evident that social media influences and impacts tourist behavior and the motivation behind it, as will be shown in the examples of Breanna Mitchell's selfie, Logan Paul's videos, and an unidentified woman's regretful photo-op.

One widely-recognized example of inappropriate tourist behavior is the posting of the teenage girl's "selfie" in front of the Auschwitz death camp in Germany. In June of 2014, recent high school graduate, Breanna Mitchell, posted the tactless photo on Twitter with the message, "Selfie in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp", followed by a smiling "emoji". In his article, "I'm Famous Y'all': Teenager is Criticized for Smiling Selfie at Auschwitz and her Excitement at it Then Going Viral", Wills Robinson states that the tweet received substantial criticism and was retweeted over 3,000 times (Robinson). Mitchell defended her post by claiming she had

studied the Holocaust for years with her late father. "She said: 'That trip actually meant something to me and I was happy about it', she tweeted, explaining the reason behind the smiling selfie" (Mitchell qtd. in Robinson).

Of course, it is impossible to determine if Mitchell's words are true and what the true intentions of the posting of the photo was, but we can infer that it was due to the motivating force of social media. Without posting the photo to social media, there would be no concrete evidence that Mitchell ever visited Germany and the concentration camp. By posting the photo, she provided evidence of her trip, while showing off her travels to her connected others. According to the study conducted by Wang et al., Mitchell's motivation for posting the photo, based off of her response to the Twitter communities criticism, would be classified as intrinsic. She felt a sense of pleasure by sharing the photo, which caused her to remember the "happy times" she shared with her late father. However, as an outsider, one might think of Mitchell's true motivators as extrinsic. Perhaps, the actual taking of the photo could be classified as intrinsic motivation, while the posting of the photo would be more so classified as extrinsic motivation. In fact, one might think of the reason for posting the selfie to be in order to build a reputation among her peers or to connect with friends. It is possible, even likely, that she shared the photo in order to boast about her trip to Germany, which would inevitably build her reputation among her peers. To travel is quite an exciting and unique experience, often times exclusive, which is why Mitchell wanted to share the photo with the online community. In addition, it is known that Mitchell was rather pleased to see her picture "go viral". In other words, she enjoyed the extent to which her photo was retweeted and viewed by others, giving her

a moment of fame in the social media community. Again, this leads one to believe that her motivations were extrinsic rather than purely intrinsic. Another motivator for tourist activity on social media is storytelling, as outlined by Yilmaz in his study, "Storytelling on Social Media: The Motives for Telling the Tourist Experience to Connected Others". Yilmaz's research on a group of 38 people who were accustomed to sharing their travel experiences online drew a specific conclusion, which likely relates to Mitchell's sharing of her selfie. He reports that, "[n]early half of the respondents said that if they had not shared their experiences with their connected others, the people in their social networks might have thought that they were asocial and they had never gone anywhere. 16 of the respondents claimed that their travel experience seemed to lack meaning and fulfillment when not shared with others" (Yilmaz 141-142). Furthermore, storytelling through photographs, as well as the pleasure of others viewing and discussing a photograph are two a strong motivators that explain Mitchell's taking and posting of the "notorious" selfie at Auschwitz.

Another widely known case of ill-behaved tourist behavior is Logan Paul's antics during his trip to Japan. Logan Paul, a twenty-three year old American actor and Youtuber, amassed great fame on the app "Vine." Paul is frequently in the news for his controversial and disrespectful behavior, which he often displays in "vlogs" posted to his Youtube channel for his seventeen-million subscribers to watch. Paul visited Japan in late December 2017 through January of 2018 and displayed such disrespectful and crude behavior that his videos caught the attention of many and received ample backlash.. In his video titled, "Kicked Out Of Japan! (i'm sorry) JP", Paul begins by saying, "I just got to be careful to not, like, disrespect the culture

because 'Logang' Japan is all about the respect." Paul then proceeds to spend the rest of the sixteen minute video gallivanting around Japan disrespecting the culture and people in various ways. Paul and his friends continue to run through the streets of Tokyo in rice hats, which he refers to as 'cone hats,' and Japanese robes, "walking with his hands in a prayer position and demeaning Tokyo as a 'real live cartoon,'" writes Kimberly Yam in her article, "Video Proves Logan Paul Did Many More Utterly Offensive Things in Japan" (Yam). Paul goes on to exhibit crude and ill-mannered behavior at a temple such as running and shouting while waving a Japanese flag over his shoulders, and is eventually asked to leave by an official. Paul's Japanese guide apologizes to the official and claims "it's the filming." Paul reiterates his earlier statement, while brushing off his shoulder, "You know how it is in Japan, it's all about the respect" (Paul).

Another Youtuber, Yuta Aoki, comments on Paul's actions in a video titled, "Logan Paul (Don't be That Guy in Japan...or Anywhere Else)" saying, "Now it goes without saying that a temple is a religious place and it doesn't really matter which country you go. If you go to a religious place - it doesn't matter if it's a church, a mosque, a temple, or shrine - generally speaking, you need to be quiet and respectful" (Aoki). Watching Paul's video, his behavior at the temple is crude, loud and distasteful. He uses explicit language while washing his hands with holy water and runs through the crowd waving a "selfie stick." Aoki goes on to discuss Paul's behavior at Tokyo's famous fish market, which again is rude and disrespectful. Paul jumps onto the back of moving trucks and purchases fish to throw at passing cars and pedestrians. Aoki explains that the Tokyo fish market is where professionals go to buy and sell fish and that restrictions have now been put in place to prevent the type of behavior that Paul exhibits in his

video (Aoki). Another interesting point that Aoki, who was raised in Japan, touches on is how he was taught to be thankful and respectful of food because of how many people were involved in the process of producing it (Aoki). In Paul's video, he can be seen wasting such food – smashing it on windows and throwing it on the ground. He even says in the video, pointing to a piece of fish, "I want to buy this. I'm not gonna eat it though, it's just for content" (Paul). As Aoki explains, this behavior is seen as very disrespectful in the Japanese culture. Later in the video, "Paul smashes a Game Boy Color at a store and then announces to the attendant that the device is 'much-o broken-o'. He throws Poké Balls at people in Japan while screaming 'I choose you'" (Yam). Paul manages to make many objects and actions that are well-known and beloved to the Japanese culture and use them to "make light" of the country. Paul, as shown in his videos, took advantage of the Japanese people's reserved and passive nature.

Even still, these insensitive videos were posted along with, now deleted, footage posted by Paul showing the body of a suicide victim in Japan's Aokigahara forest, which is the world's second most popular suicide location. In the video, Paul and his friends film the body closely and make jokes at its expense with no regard for the victim and his family. After receiving backlash, Paul issued a statement reading,

"I didn't do it for views. I get views. I did it because I thought I could make a positive ripple on the internet, not cause a monsoon of negativity. That's never the intention. I intended to raise awareness for suicide and suicide prevention and while I do this sh*t every day. I've made a 15 minute TV show EVERY SINGLE DAY for the past 460+ days. One

may understand that it's easy to get caught up in the moment without fully weighing the possible ramifications" (Paul).

This type of behavior is not only insensitive to the culture of Japan, but to the feelings and lives of human beings in general. For Paul, his motivations in posting these videos were extrinsic. In the study conducted by Wang et al., "making social connections, receiving compliments, acquiring a reputation, and earning monetary rewards are the potential extrinsic motivators with sharing behavior" (Wang et al. 46). Paul, with over seventeen-million subscribers on Youtube, can make up to thirty-six-thousand dollars a day from monetized videos. This means that creators and youtubers have the ability to allow businesses to run ads during the course of their video for money. Another interesting point that is made by Yilmaz is that the motivations for sharing experiences through social media varies based on the level of familiarity with social media platforms, among other factors (Yilmaz 144). Paul, who first began posting daily Youtube videos in September of 2016, is highly familiar with social media platforms and, therefore, has a strong motivation to share his experiences with his followers. Thus, it is clear that the motivation for the postings of his distasteful antics throughout Japan were purely extrinsic and due to his familiarity with social media platforms.

Another instance of startling tourist behavior is tourists who climb atop statues and monuments, all for a thrilling picture to post on social media. A specific case of this occurred at Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon in Thailand when a female tourist sat in the lap of a large Buddha statue for a photo. "The woman was posing for pictures among many Buddha statues in the compound of the temple, with the ancient Chai Mongkhon Pagoda in the background," a passerby discussed

in the Bangkok Post article, “Woman Sitting in Lap of Buddha Statue Draws Ire Online” (Bangkok Post). The photos were posted on a Facebook page titled, “@queentogetheriseone” and caught the attention of several Facebook users.

"A member of this Facebook page who posted the pictures wrote 'I went to the Ayutthaya temple [on Wednesday] and saw this group of tourists. I found the behavior inappropriate'. He called on authorities to warn tourists visiting historic sites as each country had a different culture, he wrote" (Bangkok Post).

While it is unclear if it is the responsibility of the authorities to sway tourists from behaving inappropriately, the tourists, themselves, should be aware of the behavior and cautious of any actions that might be seen as disrespectful. This is especially prevalent when posing for and gathering such content for social media. It is also highly important to remember to be mindful of other cultures and what may or may not be viewed as disrespectful behavior. Perhaps, this is common sense, but with the heavy influence of social media today many have lost this discernible “moral compass.”

Another social media user, Nopporn Chompirom "asked for the photos [of the tourist] from someone to post on the Facebook page in the hopes that authorities would take action. As a native of Ayutthaya, he felt bad if people showed disrespect towards the Thai culture and Buddhism" (Bangkok Post). The female tourist was never identified and never commented on her actions, so we can only infer as to what her true motivators were in taking and posting the offensive photo. One might believe that her motivation was both intrinsic and extrinsic. It is

likely, in this case, that her actions were caused by intrinsic motivators. Again, "intrinsic motivation refers to engagement in sharing travel experiences for the sharer's own sake, out of interest, or for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from the activity itself" (Wang et al. 45). It seems as though this woman took the ill-mannered photos in the lap of Buddha for her own personal enjoyment. The woman, perhaps, had not thought about how inappropriate her actions were to Buddhism and the Thai culture and how her actions would be perceived by others. With that said, her photos only went "viral" after being posted by a Facebook account that was not her own. Therefore, while her intentions of taking the photo were for her own pleasure, they became notorious in the online community, especially among people of the Thai culture.

Furthermore, social media is such a huge part of the modern world and has become an increasing form of connections within the area of tourism. As we have seen in the last few years, social media has had a huge impact on our lives with both positive and negative effects. In the case of tourism, we have seen many negative effects in the form of tasteless tourist behavior. Behind this, there are always intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that influence how and why tourist take pictures, "perform" tactless stunts, and post content on social media during their travels.

When looking at three different cases of ignorant tourist behavior, it is evident that they were influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators - though extrinsic motivators seem to be the more prevalent. The commonality in all three of these cases is the driving force of social media and the pressure to build a reputation among their connected others and a desire to prove

one truly experienced the exciting adventure of traveling. Furthermore, social media has had a huge impact on the way tourist behave and way they are compelled to act inappropriately and post their antics on different social media platforms. As Yilmaz writes in his study, “Sharing their [tourists’] experiences with others contributes to the value of the experience and makes it more meaningful and memorable. For new tourists, storytelling plays a serious role in addition to the holiday experience itself, and sharing experiences with connected others is seen as a vital tool for a fulfilling holiday experience” (Yilmaz 136).

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