

Guest Editors' Note: Being Smart beyond Tourism

The idea of smart tourism was initially inspired by the aggressive integration of information technology (IT) into the marketplace of tourism on the part of the destinations and their supply chain, as well as on the part of the tourists as consumers at various contact points with the products. As such, it is tempting to consider smart tourism as a new specialty or form of tourism. Manifested in the academic community, any inquiries into it would be incremental to the knowledge of tourism.

From a historical perspective, the concept of smart tourism is closely tied to the concept of a Smart City, as first proposed by IBM (Dirks, Keeling, & Dencik, 2009). Since then, numerous research articles have been published on this topic—a search on Google Scholar on April 20, 2016 generated 668 results. However, the studies have an apparent regional focus: almost all the studies have appeared either in Asia and the Pacific or Europe; almost none from a North America context.

A first-order search via the web and databases into “smart tourism” and “智慧旅游” (in Chinese) revealed its possible origins. The English words “smart tourism” were possibly coined by UNWTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai in an interview with the media in Berlin on March 11, 2010 (PNA, 2010). In China, the first mention of this term appeared in a local newspaper *Zhenjiang Daily* on March 12, 2010 (Zhen Jiang Ri Bao, 2010). However, the keywords “Smart Scenic Area” appeared a little earlier, in 2009 (Zhang & Deng, 2010). Since then, Asian and European countries have been providing tremendous governmental and institutional support for the initiative (Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang, & Koo, 2015). The China National Tourism Administration announced 2014 as the “Smart Tourism Year”, and 18 cities were picked as testing destinations.

However, smart tourism’s regional focus is not free from questions: is this tourism initiative or framework more in alignment with the management style and culture in the Asia Pacific and European regions? Is it merely a government slogan for promoting the integration of IT and tourism? After all, IT infrastructure serves both local residents and tourists. While, in places beyond the metropolis, the need for information might be more extensive and unique for tourists than for locals, in large cities, however, aren’t all urban dwellers somehow “tourists” outside their usual place of residence? It is not easy nor necessary to separate the IT infrastructure serving visitors from that serving local residents.

This special issue aims at providing a platform to inform the research community of the development of smart tourism in China, where the concept presumably originated and gained more momentum than anywhere else. Smart tourism in China has attracted strong government policy and funding support. Due to its unique political structure, economic development, and cultural context, the adoption of IT and smart tourism in China is different from that in other parts of the world. For example, Weibo and

WeChat are unique Chinese products, which in many respects are more sophisticated than their counterparts in the West, such as Twitter and WhatsApp. Smart tourism in China is thus unique and calls for in-depth investigations.

In total, this special issue attracted 16 abstracts, from which 11 were invited for full paper submissions. Five papers were either too technical to be considered suitable for the Journal, or too much of a policy account to be useful for a wider academic audience. After review and resubmissions, only four articles were accepted for publication in this special issue.

Nonetheless, the outcome of the editorial process is a collection of contributions that fundamentally challenge the existing literature on smart tourism. The contributions have advanced current knowledge on how information technology and all its derivatives affect what the industry players in the tourism supply chain do to accommodate the travelling consumers who are increasingly diverse and constantly changing in their expectations and demands. More importantly, they challenge researchers, managers and policymakers to redefine tourism, destinations, and tourists in an integrated yet unstable world that is constantly unraveled by the dual processes of globalization and technology. The following is a summary of the four published articles in this special issue.

The adoption of mobile devices and social media creates a large quantity of digital footprints, which can reveal tourist behavior in real time. Jia and Li used Weibo—the Chinese version of Twitter—to study tourist behavior in Xi'an. The authors downloaded a large amount of data through the Application Program Interface (API) of Weibo and analyzed and presented the data utilizing social network analysis and visualization tools. The results revealed the spatial distribution of tourist flows, concentration spots, and different travel routes. It is notable from this study that Weibo, with data captured in real time, can be a useful tool for tourist flow control and monitoring.

Online information could be an information source for strategic decision making. Ji, Li, and King adopted data from newspapers, industry magazines, and reports, and studied the impact of the establishment of Shanghai Free-Trade Zone on the competitiveness of Hong Kong as a destination. Using qualitative methods, the authors analyzed 148 news reports and concluded that the Shanghai Free-Trade Zone actually threatened the competitive advantage of Hong Kong. As a result, the authors suggest Hong Kong should diversify the activities it offers to tourists, and collaborate with Shanghai by offering its expertise in tourism development.

For smart tourism to be an effective tool for destination management and development, the voluntary contribution of content is crucial. However, the sharing behavior might be unique in different cultural contexts. Wang, Huang, Li, and Peng surveyed social media users in China and investigated how the unique value of face motivation shapes their sharing behavior. Their results confirmed face orientation is important in mediating the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to actual sharing behavior. Practically, the results are useful for social media platform designers, in terms of focusing on reputation and a reward system for their members, and protecting their “faces” by ensuring privacy and freedom from malicious comments.

Technologies not only change the way people communicate and travel, but also their self-identity. Couch-surfing as a crowdsourcing platform has gained popularity in recent years. Luo and Huang interviewed 32 couch-surfers in Guangzhou and investigated their identity construction process. They found that couch-surfing websites could be either a facilitator of identity construction, or an impediment to it if the website was not working properly.

In summary, these four articles investigated smart tourism in China from different perspectives. Their subjects ranged from patterning tourist behavior and flow after their digital footprints, comparing destination competitiveness from news sources, testing the mediating effect of cultures in contributing online contents, to exploring identity-construction in a tourist community. These articles revealed the multiple facets of smart tourism research in China and how ICTs are shaping tourist behavior and its meaning.

However, the diverse topics and perspectives in this special issue also reflect the intrinsic dilemma of smart tourism research: what is the role that researchers should, and could play in the eco-system of smart tourism? Computer scientists are working on the basic layer of cloud infrastructure and the Internet of Things, which will benefit a variety of industries, including smart tourism; in the middle layers of data interoperation and integration can be found the jobs of database and big data experts; the only roles tourism researchers could play seem to lie in the upper layer: the interpretation of the aggregated data, the connections between/amongst industries, and the outcome of data analyses. For example, the definition of tourists is still a tricky issue and the outcome of mobile data analysis might not fit the views of tourism professionals. In this regard, tourism researchers could serve as domain experts to work with IT professionals to bridge the gap.

This is only the starting point for smart tourism research, and there are many unanswered questions to be addressed. The following ideas are intended as food for thought and could be topics for future research:

- (1) The concept of smart tourism is not popular in North America. Might this be due to the loose administration of the industry in North America?
- (2) How does the combination of big data sources provide a better picture of the tourism industry?
- (3) What are the fine boundaries between anticipating tourists' needs and being creepy; when can one predict and customize tourism products more accurately?

The guest editors would like to sincerely thank all authors for their submissions, and reviewers for volunteering their time. Their diligence and commitments have been critical to the quality and timely publication of this special issue. They are hereby recognized and their names are listed alphabetically as follows:

Larry Dwyer, University of New South Wales, Australia
Ulrike Gretzel, University of Queensland, Australia
Zhuowei (Joy) Huang, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
Chulwon Kim, Kyung Hee University, South Korea
Edward C.S. Ku, National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism, Taiwan
Gang Li, University of Surrey, UK

Noam Shoval, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
 Nelson K.F. Tsang, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China
 Dan Wang, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China
 Zheng Xiang, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, USA
 Maxwell Xu, University of Wisconsin, Whitewater, USA
 Yang Yang, Temple University, USA
 Hanqin Qiu, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR China

Funding

This work was partially supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China [grant number 41428101].

References

- Dirks, S., Keeling, M., & Dencik, J. (2009). *How smart is your city?: Helping cities measure progress*. New York, NY: IBM Global Business Services.
- Gretzel, U., Sigala, M., Xiang, Z., & Koo, C. (2015). Smart tourism: Foundations and developments. *Electronic Markets*, 25(3), 179–188. doi:10.1007/s12525-015-0196-8
- PNA. (2010, March 11). UNWTO chief upbeat on prospects for new global tourism boom. *Philippines News Agency*. Retrieved from http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA221065765&v=2.1&u=cofc_main&it=r&p=STND&sw=w&asid=a5e663cac438214ec7191bbd9c33a3c1
- Zhang, X. P., & Deng, G. P. (2010) Zhi hui jing qu jian she qian tan (shang) [Smart scenic spots: An exploration into construction]. Retrieved from <http://www.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?QueryID=26&CurRec=3&recid=&filename=CLYB201001180071&dbname=CCND2010&dbcode=CCND&pr=&urlid=&yx=&v=MTc1NzhPVUtyaWZadUJ2RWlqdFVML01JRjRjSmlIU2JMRzRIOUhNm81TlpPc0lEUk5LdWhkaG5qOThUbmpxcXhkRWVN>
- Zhen Jiang Ri Bao. (2010, March 12). Jiang zhen jiang da zao wei lu you qiang shi [Building Zhen Jiang into a strong tourism destination]. *Zhen jiang ri bao*. Retrieved from http://mobile.jsw.com.cn/news/2010-03/12/content_1982181.htm

Bing Pan

*Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, School of Business at the
 College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, USA*
 bingpan@gmail.com

Junyi Li

College of Tourism and Environment at Shannxi Normal University, Xi'an, China
 lijunyi9@snnu.edu.cn

Liping Cai

*Purdue Tourism and Hospitality Research Center at Purdue University,
 West Lafayette, IN, USA*
 liping@purdue.edu

Lingyun Zhang

Institute of Tourism at Beijing Union University, Beijing, China
 13911207919@163.com