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Tourism context transformed by media technology
Progress of digital transformation during the outbreak of COVID-19
pandemic

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, policies such as travel bans, border closure, lockdown measure, and self-quarantine were taken in each country, resulting in severe restrictions on the movement of people. And under the circumstances where physical access to tourist spots was difficult, tour operators created various forms of "virtual tourism" content and proposed to people. And of course, nowadays, some compositions in which "an experience" are simulated and recreate in a technical context are different from the original ones. For example, the experience of playing tennis is technically recreate in the game. The experience of watching a movie or listening to a radio is recreate through a smartphone app. On the extension of the composition that can be called "technical synthesis of experience" it is possible to capture the mass production of "online ○○" "remote ○○" and "virtual ○○" in the Corona pandemic state ("virtual tourism" and "online tour" is also one of the examples).

This paper will give an overview of the rapid changes in the modern media environment that have progressed since before the COVID-19 and put online tours / virtual tourism on the argument table from the perspective of "content". And then, we will examine its role as a source of attention and interest in tourist destinations.

Keyword

1. Introduction - An online tour after the new coronavirus infection

> "We wanted to provide our products and services to customers somehow even when the movement of people is restricted. From such desire, "The Kathu online tour" was born. We pulled the internet to the village by ourselves, bought a tablet for the first time, repeated monitor tours many times, and devised and improved the appearance to deliver the charm of the village online. The online tour will finally start from April this year. In April, we will broadcast a "Course to visit the village of traditional textiles" and a "Course to experience the daily life of the Kathu tribe". Please join us from your home on the tour that you can experience different cultures![1]

This is an excerpt from an article posted on the FIDR (International Development and Relief Foundation) homepage on March 29, 2021 – "The Kathu Online Tour starts!". Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the tourism involving people mobility will be severely restricted, significantly changing the context surrounding community-based tourism. According to the article, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have forced Vietnam's minority "Kathu" to suspend "independent tourism development (= community-based tourism)" and to replace such, "online tours" were planned.

Indeed this is just one of the cases out of many. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic that started in China rapidly spread across the globe, and the number of infected and the number of deaths increased sharply. While countries have imposed policies such as travel ban, border closure, lockdown measure, and self-quarantine, Japan has enforced a state of emergency based on the Law on Special Measures for New Influenza, etc., refraining from going out and closing facilities. And the situation has also hit the tourism field directly, and the press release by JNTO on May 20, 2020[2] - the number of visitors to Japan in April of

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[1] http://www.fidr.or.jp/activity/cooperation_vietnam_004_now.html (Last browsing date: 01 may 2021)
[2] https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/news/press_releases/pdf/200520_monthly.pdf (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)

the year decreased by 99.9% from the same month of the previous year to 2900 people and the negative range expanded to a historical high – symbolically suggests that the tourism industry has been forced into a nearly dormant state for a period of time. And under such circumstances, the contents of "online tours" and "virtual tourism", that does not involve actual people movement, played an important role in forming and maintaining people's interest in tourism destinations, a "simulated experience of traveling" realized by making full use of digital technology.

Online tours, which started to appear around spring 2020, were initially predicted to decline as the movement restrictions gradually lifted. However, it has been pointed out that as the period unable to travel has become longer than expected, it is now being established as a "new form of travel." According to the article by Saya Miyazaki, a researcher at JTB Research Institute: "The way to interact with the local community through online tours with an eyeing on the resumption of travel for the post-COVID-19 pandemic"[3], "the online tour that has emerged as an alternative to real travel, but rather than just an alternative, it shows that it has established itself as a new form of travel" and points out that while referring to the impressions of the participants, "them by participating in an online tour before going on a real trip, it seems that their intention to travel in the future has enhanced. Online tours are expected to serve as a point of contact between travelers and the local area and not just as an alternative to travel". Community-based tourism can be understood as "a way in which the community is based on, with the community's independence, promote tourism autonomously" (Kobayashi + Ogawa + Yamamura + Ishimori, 2010). The online tour having such as a subject can be expected as to build and maintain a "contact point" between the community and its tourists.

On 5 July 2020 at the online symposium "research on the tourism field of post-COVID-19" sponsored by the Institute of Humanities and Sciences, Ritsumeikan University[4], when

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[3] https://www.tourism.jp/tourism-database/column/2021/04/covid19-online-tour/ (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)
[4] http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/research/ihhss/events/article.html/?id=39 (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)

online tour and virtual tourism were becoming a hot topic as a "simulated travel experiences", I the author presented its research presentation on "Travel that turns into media / Tourism that turns into content - Aspects of "virtual tourism" triggered by COVID-19" and since then have been keenly interested in the movement of "online tour" and 'virtual tourism" as well as the composition of these "contents". And important thing in studying such kind of content is that it has become technically possible on the premise of the "digital transformation" that has progressed rapidly in recent years and that it was further accelerated by the new Coronavirus infection. In this paper, after referring to the meaning of "digital transformation" in the field of tourism, online tours / virtual tourism will be included in the analysis from the viewpoint of "contents". And then, we will examine its role as a source of attention and interest in tourist destinations.

2. The digital transformation in tourism – "network capital" and "feedback loop"

Since long before the COVID-19 pandemic, the imagination of tourists was rapidly changing. And it was because of the intervention of the "digital transformation" in the tourism sector.

First of all, people's behavior in modern tourism is not only various things that appear on the route, but also smartphones as digital media, virtual things such as apps that the screen shows, and even the internet that connects such things, it will develop in a dynamic network that goes to and from between wide variety of elements. Especially, innovation in digital technology is reshaping the composition of their networks and is significantly reshaping the traditional context of travel. Indeed, "out-of-service travel area" where "no connection to band waves[5] is sometimes talked about, but that is just a trivial exception. Nowadays, "out of service area" is disappearing from the physical space due to the constant connection to the internet via portable devices. In addition, the digital universe is expanding steadily as all the human behaviors are converted into data by the execution of mobile payments or the

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[5] https://tabippo.net/only-travel/ (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)

activation of sensors such as cameras and IoT[6]. Whether we call such a situation a "second offline"[7] or "after-digital"[8], where Joshua Meyrowitz once called "situational geography" (Meyrowitz, 2003 31-32) is undergoing a major restructuring with the rise of a new form of network that underpins the context of travel.

But of course, what we call "network" in one word, can include various things in it. There will be such in "actor-network theory" or such in "network effect". From a theoretical point of view, "network" can be accompanied by various connotations, but in this article, I shall introduce the "network capital" that Anthony Elliott and John Urry presented in "Mobile Lives – "movement" changes the society"(Elliott + Urry, 2016: 14-15). The "network capital"[9] that they refer to is derived from the expansion and sophistication of the mobility domain and is said to be creating new power in a form different from cultural capital and economic capital. Network capital can be positioned as an "information-based independent and communication-driven thing without the main body to a large extent". And those who own it at a high level, while experiencing geographical mobility, on the other hand, "make

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[6] Bruce Schneier says: "The total amount of data we "emit" is enormous. As of 2010, the amount of data that mankind produces in a day exceeds the cumulative total of data that humans have produced from the beginning of history to 2003. The amount of data traversing the internet during the year 2015 is expected to exceed 76 exabytes" (Schneier, 2016: 37). Although this is a bit old information, the digital revolution that has triggered the "computerization of media" has led to the rapid expansion of "cumulative total amount of data" that mentioned above, i.e. the digital universe.

[7] According to Hidenori Tomita's commentary, "virtual information is superimposed on a real space, people are always referring to information on the Internet in their daily lives, and offline that always referring to online information is called the second offline" (Tomita, 2016: 2).

[8] According to Yasufumi Fujii and Kazuhiro Obara, "When mobile and IoT sensors are ubiquitous and there is no offline in the real world, "the real world will be included in the digital world". We call this way of thinking "after-digital" "(Fujii + Obara, 2019: 46-47).

[9] The important elements that make up network capital are "①a series of appropriate documents, visas, money, qualifications", "②invite, entertain, meet face to face with other people (workmates, friends, family) who are far away", "③Environment related mobility ability", "④ Location independent information and access points", "⑤Communication equipment", "⑥A place where you can meet appropriately and safely and securely including offices, social clubs, hotels, homes, public places, cafes, vacant lots, whether you are on the move or at your destination", "⑦Able to access to automobiles, road spaces, fuel, lifts, aircraft, railroads, ships, taxis, buses, streetcars, minibuses, mail accounts, the internet, telephones, etc.", "⑧It is said to be a time that is capable to manage and adjust" As a supplement, it is said that ③ include "ability to use and willingness to use mobile phones, email, internet, Skype, etc.". In addition, ④ includes address books, secretary, websites, mobile phones, etc. through which information and communication can be exchanged.

close social contact in various situation and "be relaxed as if they were at home". Our social experience (including travel) is realized through the elements such as mobile phones, emails, the internet, access points, and the dynamic networks of their collections. And as a result of such a network, a "context" is formed each time to give meaning to own/other people's experiences.

The context formed by network capital is also closely related to the contact experience with digital devices such as smartphones. William J. Mitchell, in his book "Cyborg-nizing me and the network-nizing world" described the technically generated "feedback loop" as following, -- ": When moving a cursor with the mouse, a simple action is performed manually, and the result of that action is observed directly in front the eye. We can continue to operate, and you can see what you are doing thanks to the feedback loop, and it works on a centimeter scale. When we use a TV remote control, we can send commands electronically to get visual and audio feedback. In this case, the feedback loop operates on a metric scale, depending directly on whether the image is visible and audible. [Omitted] However, the situation is different when operating video cameras, telescopes, and robots via the Internet. In this case, the feedback loop consists of a flow of bits through the network, which can be effective over thousands of kilometers" (Mitchell, 2006: 51). Today, no matter where we are, including tourist destinations, our actions will be constrained by the powerful feedback loop provided by smartphones/internet. Smartphones are operated by hand, making it easy to exchange information over distances via the internet. And that feedback loop gives us an unprecedented technical context for the thoughts and actions we engage ourselves in.

Come to think of it, it can be said that the permeation/normalization of the act of "touch screen" including the operation of smartphones, is a recent product. We are now living in a technical environment that requires continuous contact with touch-panelized screens, but until just a few decades ago, such a habit did not exist. Whatever app you launch, the user watches various symbols depicted as a GUI[10] and tactilely manipulates them in anticipation

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[10] Graphical user interface. A user interface in which the object of computer operation is graphically represented by a picture. Allow intuitive operation assuming the use of a pointing device such as a mouse.

of something. As we all know, a touch panel is an input device formed by combining an image display device such as a liquid crystal panel and a position input device such as a touchpad, and in the operation process, a visual symbol is used in conjunction with such tactile operation and is required combined with a visual symbol. And the combination of such "visual" and "tactile" intervenes as a premise for us to communicate with others, understand the world, and even perceive some reality from it. (Matsumoto, 2019a).

And that is not all. The miniaturization of devices subject to "visual cognition" and "tactile manipulation" has made it easier for us to carry them around. Meaning that, as we walk and we look down on the screen on the palm of our hand and operate –- i.e. assuming the cooperation of "feet" "eyes" and "hands" – involved with the surrounding space. Walk, stop, check the screen, and start walking again. John Urry argued on "pose-ability" in traveling (Ari, 2015: 114), but mobile media is a technical context that provides and evokes a unique rhythm in our spatial traveling. In any case, smartphones as digital media and the internet bring a powerful "feedback loop" to the users. As a result, people's actions are entwined with digital networks and live in a dual context of accessing tourist destinations and online at the same time.

3. Position of "contents" in the modern technological environment

Due to the transformation of the technical environment, as mentioned in the previous section, the distribution of the "content" related to tourism is also changing significantly compared to the past. In the following, we'll touch on the meaning of turning to the concept of "contents" and consider its behavior in the tourism domain.

Roland Barthes once wrote an article titled "From Work to Text (De l'œuvre au texte)" in 1971, but now, after half a century later, we should think "from text to contents" transition. And that is because objects that were formerly called "texts" in novels and movies are now called "contents" and tend to be socially distributed.

It can be said that the background of the various talks on "contents" today is the transformation of the technical context surrounding its circulation. For example, in the case

of movie contents, it was traditionally inseparably linked to physical places such as movie theaters and video rental stores, or material things such as film and VHS, but in modern times they are free from physical dimension and digitized, distributed via the internet and accepted through subscription services such as Netflix and Hulu. And in there, it is not the "ownership" of how to own things, but the "access right" of how to access data will be foregrounded.

Looking back to the past, the internet and mobile phones started to spread widely in the 1990s, and smartphones and SNS started to spread into people's lives in the 2010s widely. The technological innovation of the media for communicating and sharing information has led to a major update in the scheme of "form of communication" and "circulation of contents" has largely been revised. Especially regarding the latter, I should point out that it is in the form of "UGC"[11] that the general public can be actively involved in producing content, and in the form of "UDC"[12], that people, via social media, become able to spread content. It is no exception to the content related to travel/tourism, and now the travel YouTubers and travel Instagrammers, so-called "influencers" spread their content through various media platforms and work on to the imagination of people around traveling[13].

In modern days, more people are involved in producing content via the internet and are spreading via social media. And in a society where entertainment-related contents, including those related to tourism, are excessively flooded, "communication" has also become a target

[11] Satoshi Hamano explains this concept of "UGC" (User Generated Content) in "Architectural Ecosystem: How the information environment has been Designed" as following. "It is not the media and content created by "professionals" such as newspapers, televisions, movies, and CDs, but the "general users" (amateurs) who were only consuming and using them are now sending out the content via the internet" (Hamano, 2015: 18-19).

[12] Kinkeiwa talks on the concept as following -- "In recent years, the concept of UDC has emerged. UDC stands for "User Distributed Contents" and it means "content distributed by users". As mentioned earlier, in social media, content that has attracted the attention and sympathy of other users, specifically the content that has received a lot of reactions (for example, retweets and shares) has more social influence. In other words, the context of information diffusion has become more important than the production and creation of information. It can be said that UDC is a concept that focuses on such aspects"(Fri, 2021: 37).

[13] Considering the modern contents of tourism, most of them are distributed in form of digital data via internet these days. For example, what is viewed = accepted by apps such as "Jalan", "Tabelog", and "TripAdvisor" are contents such as word-of-mouth information and photo data posted by users via internet. And the content that people easily post and distribute on internet is steadily transforming our travel and tourism imagination in the expanding digital universe.

of contentization in recent years. For example, you can recall communication with idols mediated by "handshake tickets", greetings with characters at the theme parks (so-called "Chara-Gree"), and play live games delivered via Nico Nico Douga. They can be regarded as "packaged communication" incorporated into a program as a product that "satisfies" people and is consumed as content[14].

But of course, "contentization of contents" is not a new phenomenon, and it may be understood that it has existed humbly in the tourism field. For example, communication such as "hospitality" at inns and "exchange" at a guest house is an important element consumed by tourists as an attractive element for increasing the value of accommodation facilities. And nowadays, the aspects of "hospitality" and "exchange" in travel are introduced through a wide variety of media -- not only TV programs, but also YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok -- to accompany the journey "communication" and can produce more derivative content and distributed socially. And from that point of view, the "online tours" and "virtual tourism" mentioned at the beginning of this article are also "contents" that have come to be distributed in a new technical environment (which is sometimes may be formed as a topic based on the communication between the guest and the host).

4. Examples of online tours/virtual tourism

Since the spread of the new coronavirus infection, impressive news has been reported in a wide variety of forms, which I will introduce few headlines; for example, there are various topics that suggest the transformation of media contact/contents consumption by people, such as "Netflix and Snapchat, due to "nesting demand" see higher sales and higher number of users above expectation"[15] or "the world is now looking for "Animal Crossing Forest""[16].

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[14] Ken Okamoto describes the concept of "content" as "a word that basically refers to "contents" and "what is inside", and "content is also a verb. And at that time, it means "satisfies" the people. The "contents" used in this book are not just information contents but something that satisfies and entertains people"(Okamoto, 2016: 4-5).
[15] https://www.itmedia.co.jp/news/articles/2004/22/news053.html (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)
[16] https://wired.jp/2020/04/22/rave-animal-crossing-new-horizons/ (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)

In today's world where you can always connect to the internet regardless of wired/wireless, we live in a technical situation where online and offline are superimposed, but what the new coronavirus infection has brought about is simply a transformation of "online/offline ratio". People engaged in "remote work" while at home and consumed "virtual tourism" content via the internet.

In the first place, tourism can be said as to provide people with "fun", but the way to access it has changed significantly during travel restriction. Moreover, as tourism demand plummeted, businesses have decided to release "online tour" and "virtual tourism" content to the world via the internet in various ways. Anthony Elliott and Arri mentioned in the "mobilities paradigm" in "Mobile Lives" – "Mobility changes society" in which ""imaginary" journeys" and "virtual journeys" are discussed (Elliott + Ari, 2016: 21), and "virtual tourism" analyzed below can be understood in relation to such. In the following, I will show three specific examples.

The first is the contents posted on the Kinki Nippon Tourist website on 27 March 2020[17]. Hereunder the title of "[Now Only] traveling mood! Enjoy 360 °virtual sightseeing" and were several panoramic photos of famous tourist destinations such as Hawaii, Cambodia, and Vietnam. By operating the mouse, the viewer can view the landscape while freely changing the direction in the panoramic photograph. Although it is a very simple mechanism, it can certainly be regarded as "virtual tourism" as long as it technically simulates the act of looking at the landscape from a specific viewpoint. Viewers can view the scenery from the tourist destination they want to visit while staying at home.

The second example is an article dated 28 May in the electronic version of the Hokkaido Shimbun newspaper[18]. Under the title of "Hakodate trip, experience at home, guesthouse starts "online accommodation"", the efforts of a guesthouse were introduced. According to the article, the owner will explain on live the city of Hakodate with video via the online conference application "Zoom" and participants who access from different places enjoyed

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[17] https://www.knt.co.jp/tabiplanet/other/200319/ (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)
[18] https://www.hokkaido-np.co.jp/article/425053 (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)

"the real pleasure of the guesthouse" which is "talking with fellow travelers". But of course, "online accommodation" does not mean a real stay. Participants access Zoom from home, etc., and share a piece of the experience at the guesthouse in a pseudo manner.

The third case is remote tourism organized by the Faroe Islands Tourism Board. Visits from outside the island were banned due to the impact of the new coronavirus infection, but the IDEAS FOR GOOD article[19] reported that the island's tourism office started "Online tour where people can experience the charm of the islands from all over the world. The participants will be able to experience remote sightseeing when it is time for the tour to start as the islanders with cameras on their heads move around to explore various places on the island", so it explains. And what's more is that "The tour guide participates in activities such as kayaking, horseback riding, and hiking in addition to walking and running. And also, by pressing the jump button, the guide will jump on the spot as if you are in the field and it makes you feel like you are traveling the area". This also allows you to experience a simulated trip remotely via the internet. The article explains that "it is irresistible content for those people who are hungry for travel while traveling far away is restricted".

The remote activity participation mentioned here can be a game-like thing depending on the viewpoint (pressing the jump button will jump on the spot). Of course, there should be no inherent correspondence between the whole body exercise of actually jumping at a tourist spot and the movement of the fingertips of pressing the jump button. But here, it's being transformed arbitrarily, in the same way that it finds in many digital gameplays.

Game researcher Jesper Juul attempts to consider the relationship between the game player's actions and the protagonist's actions that evokes using a concept called "simplification" (Juul, 2005). For example, in the case of the character Eddy Gordo who appears in the fighting game "Tekken 3", his special skill capoeira should originally consist of innumerable physical movements, but when the player operates, it only reflects a few factors, including the simple choice of doing or not doing a handstand. Meaning that when a game player attempts to control Eddy Gordo's movements, the complexity that would

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[19] https://ideasforgood.jp/2020/05/19/digital-tourism/ (Last browsing date: 01 May 2021)

otherwise be associated with the martial arts' physical movements is abstracted, and "simplification" is applied, and the "player" is the controller. Through the simplified operation, it is possible to find a correspondence with the action of the "protagonist". Then, on the premise of such a "simplification" mechanism, the game player controls the character to be operated by the limited movement on the fingertip, which is "saving the trouble". This can be said to the scheme seen in remote tourism in the Faroe Islands. In other words, a similar composition can be confirmed between "acceptance of game contents" and "acceptance of virtual tourism content".

What is the common element of "virtual tourism" or "online tour" made into content in the above form? Perhaps it can be said that it is recognized as a mechanism to cut out (somewhat arbitrarily) the "fragment of the experience" in the trip and technically recreate. The action of "looking at the scenery" "talking with each other" and "participating in activities" included in the above three cases are technically formed through media such as panoramic photography, Zoom, and the internet, respectively. Of course, the content of virtual tourism, which is oriented toward "technical synthesis of experience" is different from the actual experience that serves as a model and cannot recreate the whole picture of the experience. However, the content of virtual tourism can still easily be accepted by people through some sort of "imitation action".

Of course, as mentioned earlier, the new coronavirus infection has rearranged the "online/offline ratio" and promoted mass production of "virtual tourism". However, one thing to note, if any, is that the orientation towards the "technical synthesis of experience" existed even before the new coronavirus infection [20]. In fact, in modern times, "an

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[20] In my article titled "The Present of Imagination on Travel – "A Journey by Imagination" simulated by TripAdvisor described two functions implemented in TripAdvisor, i.e. the "Travel Timeline" and "360-degree panoramic photograph", put them on the table of analysis (Matsumoto, 2019). According to such, these features on TripAdvisor provided in different forms of simulation of the experience of the journey, are rather than just a symbolic "representation of the journey" but can be said that it is something that presents "experience simulation". Of these, the former, with the simulation of routes by the travel timeline, allows us to recall the experience of travel in the past in more details (when and where and took which route and saw what and etc.). And the latter, a simulation of a visual experience using 360-degree panoramic photographs, allows more detailed image of the travel experience in the future (what kind of experience can be obtained by staying at which hotel, etc.). Meaning that

experience" is often simulated and recreated in a technical context other than its original idea. For example, the experience of playing tennis is technically recreated in "Wii Sports". The experience of watching movies or playing DJ is recreated via "djay2" app on smartphones. Or the horror experience of the characters in the movie "Jaws" is recreated through the attraction at USJ. These compositions, which can be called "technical synthesis of experiences", are events that are scattered and can be spotted throughout modern times. And it was technically recreated in the form of "online ○○", "remote ○○", "virtual ○○" in COVID world and "virtual tourism" can also be included in that context.

Another important point is that viewing virtual tourism content itself cannot be the "purpose". In any of the cases mentioned above, the content is not intended to be seen by people but to arouse imagination and desire to travel. In other words, in relation to Richard Lanham's view of "economics of attention[21]", it can be positioned as an important "means" in the attention economy era to attract people's awareness and attention.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, after mentioning the meaning of "Digital Transformation" in the tourism sector, online tours / virtual tourism is included in the consideration from the viewpoint of contents. As is clear from the above argument, what is important in considering this type of content is that it has become technically possible on the premise of the "Digital Transformation" that has progressed rapidly in recent years, and that what was even more important was the new coronavirus infection that accelerated its spread.

It can be said that online tours / virtual tourism is aimed at "technical synthesis of experiences" in tourist destinations and builds people's attention and interest in tourist destinations. Now that the "online/offline ratio" in social life is undergoing major changes

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the image data of digital photographs are not just a "symbol = representation" as a substitute for the subject, but that enables "simulation of the experience" by those users.

[21] To quote Lanham's words, "There is a part of our current life that, in its purest state, constitutes "economics of attention". Whether you call it a cyberspace, or call it an virtuality, or call it a computer-mediated communication, or call it more simply a net, attention is everything. [omit] All types of businesses, whether public or private, are immersed in and being checked for this new economics" (Lanham, 2007: 233).

due to the effects of the new coronavirus infection, the development of such content that crosses the border between real and virtual may become increasingly important in community-based tourism in the future.

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