

The road more travelled: how user-generated content can lead to homogenized travel journalism

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Travel journalism is one source travellers turn to in order to research a destination, alongside friends who have been there, guidebooks, websites, blogs, user review sites, and chat rooms. But the travel journalists they consult would also have consulted these sources and planned their trip based on what they find there. This paper examines whether homogeneous tourism reports maintain existing power relations, or whether travel journalists challenge this via heterogeneous, alternative reports. It questions travel journalism students about their use of and attitudes towards online travel media. Employing interviews and a survey, it finds that homogeneous travel attitudes and reports are highly influential in directing them in what to see and what to think about it, maintaining existing power relations and ideologies of tourism. Even when they actively expressed a desire for heterogeneous alternative viewpoints and agendas, Internet media directed them back towards mainstream tourist themes. The implications for more self-reflexive and varied attitudes towards tourism and tourism media are discussed.

Introduction

I think this method of searching, and the kinds of things I'm searching for, will become more commonplace in the future. There's nothing to suggest why this would not become the norm. I think the way things are going is more independent. People demand authenticity, especially the younger generation. (Participant 4)

The next generation of travel journalists will not venture blindly into the unknown. Like other travellers, they will turn to media sources, consulting guidebooks, journalism and commercial information such as advertising and public relations brochures. Increasingly, too, they will go online to blogs such as digitalnomad, online user review sites (OURS) such as TripAdvisor, and corporate and government tourism websites (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998; Casaló, Flavián, and Guinaliú 2011; Duffy 2015). They go there to be guided by other people, as media influences travel behaviour (Nielsen 2001; Santos 2004). Its influence on travel journalism¹ which influences travel remains less explored.

From a cultural studies perspective, media and tourism are both associated with power relations, which are found in all social relationships (Cohen 1976). The media is part of the production of social behaviour and identity, helping people construct their images of race and nationality, of self and of other (Kellner 1995). Journalism is based on underlying assumptions and ideologies (Fürsich and Kavoori 2001) which are involved in the construction of meaning. Tourism's links to power include the

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relationship between host and guest, how tourists engage with local people, as well as the commercial structures of the tourism industry (Macleod and Carrier 2010). Yet it has been little studied as academia has preferred to examine tourism with relation to the industry with a managerial and economic rather than an anthropological or social sciences prism (Hall 2010).

These two loci for the study of power relations meet in travel journalism, which has been criticized as a form of self-inscription onto the lives of others akin to colonization, demarcating identities and difference as a way of legitimizing their own position as travellers (Spurr 1993). The discourse created by the media is ‘enmeshed in the operation of power, and works by suggesting particular norms as standard, inviting people to see the world from particular viewpoints’ (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, 62). As a result, this paper examines how media use when researching an overseas trip can limit viewpoints, legitimize a certain relationship of power between traveller and host nation.

As Hanusch (2010) points out, most studies of media influence on travellers have focused on film, government websites and promotional material (Crouch, Rhona, and Felix 2005; Frost 2010). This paper instead looks at the influence of traditional media and online user-generated content (UGC) on the next generation of travel journalists, represented by journalism students preparing for a travel-writing practicum course. It is timely because a growing majority of travel searches now start online (Fesenmaier, Xiang, Pan, and Law 2010); and relevant because of the ‘considerable role that leisure travel writers play as intermediaries between local realities, readers, and future tourists’ (Santos 2004, 393). The journalist’s interpretation of a destination will influence travellers’ opinions, and travel decisions ‘are increasingly dependent on the opinions of travel writers’ (Williams and Shaw 1995, 18). Just as the tourism industry packages certain elements of a destination for tourists, so journalists are among the ‘professional experts who help to construct and develop our gaze as tourists’ (Urry 1990, 1). This led to a first research question:

RQ1: What travel-based websites do travel journalism students access to research a destination before going there?

The influence of the Internet on travelers has grown since Hofstaetter and Egger (2008) found that backpackers rely mainly on word-of-mouth (92%) guidebooks (88%) and traditional travel websites and portals (83%), using blogs (49%) and online communities (44%) less. UGC is influential and ‘tourists now take a much more active and prominent role as image-formation agents than before the emergence of Web 2.0 tools’ (Camprubí, Guia, and Comas 2013). One indicator of this influence is that the style used in online travel writing may affect journalists. Is the writing about the traveller him/herself, the readers for whom it is intended or the people in the country? The first two options limit understanding, as Swick (2001, 67) points out: ‘What can you know – and feel – about a place when you don’t know the people who live in it?’ As a result, this research considers how the voice used in online travel media influences the participants, specifically whether they prefer a more experiential first-person ‘I’ style of writing, or a more promotional second-person ‘you’ style or a more observational third-person ‘they’ style. This is taken as an indicator of power relations and led to a second research question:

RQ2: Which style of writing do travel journalism students appreciate most?

This paper uses a cultural studies approach to explore the impact of media representations of tourist destinations on student travel journalists. Media representations have built-in relations of domination and subordination – which is particularly evident in travel and tourism media (Holland and Huggan 2000; Fürsich and Kavoori 2001). This extends to the act of making media: to photograph is to control; to write about is to demarcate. Both are a form of ownership, or trying to reduce a complex interaction with another culture or a foreign people to a convenient, pocket-sized article: ‘photographs are not objective or innocent but produced within asymmetrical power relations’ (Urry and Larsen 2011, 156). Given the implicit power relations, as well as the proliferation of (travel) media on the Internet, its effect is worthy of scrutiny and led to a third research question:

RQ3: What power relations are evident in the travel media used by journalism students when planning a trip?

The way people imagine other countries and cultures is affected by representations in the media. Orgad (2012) refers to them as ‘scripts’ which inform how people imagine other nations, and she adds that these scripts are not fixed, but constantly open to negotiation as people travel and return with their own contributions. The audience, too, interpret the global imagining of other countries, although Morley (2006) argues against the notion that an audience will freely interpret texts rather than accepting them at face value. The power of the individual to run counter to the global imagining of a place, to reject the homogenized representation, is a subject for this paper.

Theoretical background

Media and cultural studies

Cultural studies involving the media have been much concerned with the effect on people of dominant ideologies and representations. These may be challenged by the Internet offering alternative viewpoints. This lies at the heart of this paper: whether homogeneous, dominant or heterogeneous, alternative tourism themes predominate in online travel searches

Kellner (1995, 2) proposed that ‘contemporary media culture provides forms of ideological domination that help to reproduce the current relations of power’. This can be based on a uniformity of perspective in media and tourism – and in tourism media. Homogeneity of ideas was noted long ago by Adorno ([1951] 2005) who wrote of an ‘ever-changing sameness’. One phenomenon of the Internet, however, is that the powerful expert must now compete with the amateur individual. Travel bloggers have their place online as much as corporates such as the *Guardian* or Lonely Planet. The question, then, is whether the public is as open to the message of the blogger as they are to commercialized branded organizations. Holland and Huggan hold out hope for the transgressive power of travel journalism to jolt people out of complacency and see the world with new eyes (2001). Kellner, however, suggests another possibility: one effect of media culture is to encourage people to identify with dominant representations, so that they will favour the brands, the mainstream, the standard tourist behaviour.

Each new generation offers potential for change, however, hence this article looks at future travel journalists, rather than looking at current practices. The next generation may bring change as ‘media culture ... induces individuals to conform to the established organization of society, but it also provides resources that can empower individuals

against that society' (Kellner 1995, 3). It considers journalism students, as their presumed heightened media literacy and awareness offers fertile ground for counter-hegemonic activity and change for the better (Stokes 2013). Overseas education can also offer a moment for self-reflection and for students to sharpen skills in empathy along with journalism skills (Duffield 2008). Again, the question is whether the travel journalism students will be swayed by corporate web presence and the dominant ideologies of commercial websites and mainstream touristic activity, or prefer the independent voice of the blogger looking for 'something different'. This requires awareness of power relations observed in travel writing, and a consideration of who they benefit (Fürsich and Kavoori 2001; Hall 2010). These led to RQ3 and questions in the interviews that included 'Where does the power lie in this media source?' and 'Is this a mainstream or alternative representation of the country?'

The choice of writing style and perspective is also associated with the power relations of travel. The first-person 'I' privileges the experience of the traveller over that of the local people; the second-person 'you' privileges the tourists thus addressed; while the more neutral third person 's/he' or 'they' puts the focus on the inhabitants of the place – with a power dimension in how they in turn are represented. This was the basis of RQ2, about which style of writing the student journalists preferred; and for questions to that effect in the survey.

Influence of travel media

Urry and Larsen (2011) note that what travellers see is constructed in part by the media:

Gazing at particular sights is conditioned by personal experiences and memories and framed by rules and styles, as well as by circulating images and texts of this and other places. Such 'frames' are critical resources, techniques, cultural lenses that potentially enable tourists to see the physical forms and material spaces before their eyes as 'interesting, good or beautiful'

This drove RQ1 and subsequent questions for the interviews and the survey, asking which media and websites the travel journalism students accessed, and the effect it might have on them: 'How will you use the information you have found here?' and 'What does this media source tell you is desirable in travel, and do you agree with it?'

Urry and Larsen (2011) also draw a distinction between tourism and work; tourism is defined as being separate from work. But what does that mean for those people for whom tourism *is* work? For people working in a hotel or attraction, it is clear that their work is other people's tourism. But what of the travel journalist? Like movie critics, restaurant reviewers and *Top Gear* presenters, they are paid to do for work things that most people would pay to do for leisure. As a result, their gaze may be more self-conscious, giving them the choice whether they reiterate existing tourist gazes, or attempt to represent a destination with a fresh eye. And this, in turn, leads to the question of how fresh such an eye can be, or if its view, too, is filtered by socially constructed ideas of what is worthy of contemplation. The student travel journalists interviewed for this study liked to think that they were blazing a trail, travelling on behalf of the reader and returning with information to help them plan future trips – but they did this based on others' ideas and opinions, reading the reports of professionals and amateurs, travel writers and bloggers, guidebook authors and UGC.

This echoes MacCannell's preoccupation with authenticity as the stamp of touristic approval (1976). Building on Goffman's (1959) distinction between front and back,

performed and hidden, he notes the merging of the two into 'staged authenticity'. But while MacCannell saw boundaries being blurred by the tourist industry, he was less clear about the consequence: traveller and travel journalist alike may want to go off the beaten track to find something not obviously delineated by the tourist gaze. Again, the question remains of whether this is possible, and whether dominant, homogeneous media representations continue to circumscribe what travellers see and how they react to it even when they consciously attempt to take the road less travelled.

Method

This study used a survey and observational interviews with 19 journalism students as they searched online for information before for a travel-writing trip to Istanbul in March 2014, to identify what they use and what influences them. This follows Santos (2004, 394) who studied how students reacted to travel articles as 'it is important that we examine college students' perception and interpretation of mass mediated leisure travel texts as they reveal how readers justify meanings assigned to destinations and the "Other"'.

Data collection took place before the trip and before attending classes that might affect responses. To avoid the western bias that has been a feature in most studies of travel writing (although Winter 2009; Kim and Prideaux 2012 are exceptions), 13 were from Asia and six from Europe. The participants were aged 19–25 with an average age of 21; and 12 were female. While participants were not practising travel journalists, they had all demonstrated commitment to journalism both by taking a degree course in the subject, and by submitting a convincing article idea in order to be selected for the trip.

Interviews were chosen as they offer 'a social interaction in which members routinely draw on their stock of knowledge to provide descriptions of events and experiences pertinent to the research topic at hand' (Roulston 2006, 518–519). Babbie (2011) mentions two forms of qualitative interview: the interviewer is either a miner digging for information or – as befits this topic – a traveller who wanders through a landscape asking questions. Despite the freedom this implies, so that the interviews could be compared, they also followed themes based on a media/cultural studies framework following Inokuchi and Nozaki (2005, 65) who suggest that discourse analysis is 'an attempt to explicate the position(s) from which the discourse speaks, the power it carries, and the ideological direction(s) it leads us into'.

As they researched online, participants were asked about the power relations implied in the sites they accessed; and whether it was a mainstream or alternative viewpoint as a marker of whether it was a homogeneous or heterogeneous representation. Participants also filled in a questionnaire which asked how much they used six forms of travel media – journalism (e.g. newspapers, magazines, TV); travel websites (e.g. National Geographic, Wikitravel); guidebooks (e.g. Lonely Planet, Rough Guide); OURS (e.g. TripAdvisor); chat rooms (e.g. Virtual Tourist, TravBuddy); and blogs – to plan their travel, and how much influence each might have on their trip (Yoo and Gretzel 2008; Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, and Buultjens 2009; Camprubi, Guia, and Comas 2013). They rated each item on a five-level Likert scale. It also asked about how they reacted to the writing style chosen by travel journalists: whether they preferred a first-, second- or third-person approach would indicate the power relations implied in the texts.

Analysis: Travel media use

RQ1 asked what media are most used by the travel journalist students when planning a trip. A common search pattern was summed up by one participant:

I Googled Istanbul and I usually like to read Wiki first, so I'll go through the basic history of the country, what's its current political situation, what kind of Government it has, what's the geography of the country. Wiki summarises all that for me, so I can go into the touristy stuff, like what's there to find out about, what's there to visit. Then after that, I'll move from the standard Lonely Planet stuff into blogs. I think reading personal blogs is quite good also, because you get personal evaluations of places, which are the places that are too touristy, not worth going to and stuff. (Participant 9)

In total, participants accessed 15 websites that gave background information, 14 with alternative views of the city, and 13 that led them to the mainstream sights and attractions.

According to the survey, they were more likely to use travel websites such as National Geographic or Wikitravel and OURS such as TripAdvisor than travel journalism or blogs. While searching, all started with Google, and few went beyond the first page it returned. None mentioned that Google's algorithm would direct them to mainstream websites, and as such was a primary cause of homogeneity in content.

Homogeneity/mainstream

The first screen of results offered them Wikipedia or Wikitravel, which they often clicked on for an overview: '[Wikipedia] is at the top of the search engine. It is a good overview of the whole thing. Might not be entirely accurate, but it's convenient, so it's just for a quick read' (7). Wikipedia can be seen as delivering either a heterogeneous viewpoint on a topic created by a variety of opinions; or a homogeneous viewpoint in which the most common wisdom prevails. Either way, as it is one of the first pages to be returned in a Google search, its dominance in a web search guides towards homogeneity rather than heterogeneity.

Even when participants sought difference, it conformed to standard tourist ideology. First, 'difference' was the purpose of travel:

I just like going to restaurants, tasting different cuisines. I also like checking the nightlife of a country, and seeing how different it is from my normal nightlife. And I think it's a nice cultural change, seeing the locals there and how different they are from locals in the UK (8).

Even if a place was frequented by tourists, this was not a problem as long as it was unique to the location: 'It doesn't bother me if I go to a touristy place. It's just like seeing something different that you wouldn't normally see' (1). Second, it was common to refer to home as a reference point from which Istanbul differed:

I like to do things I wouldn't be able to do at home. I could go out and get drunk every night here, if I wanted, but I don't see the point of doing that. I like to try different things as well that I haven't tried before (1);

and 'It's just a regular market, but it's different from the way they display things in Singapore' (10).

The next port of call was usually a travel website such as Lonely Planet or an OURS such as TripAdvisor, where the brand name was a marker of value – which would also support existing tourist ideologies: ‘I assume that websites like Lonely Planet can be trusted’ (13). Yet there was awareness that they would probably show only the better-known attractions: ‘when it comes to travel research, Lonely Planet is one of those places which are always at the top of your head’ (9). OURS were valued because they reduced the research work: ‘I’d definitely go to TripAdvisor ... I’ll read the 3-day Istanbul guides. It’s as though people have already done it for you’ (18). This corresponds to object attributes of difference in travel, establishing must-see sights for ‘destination-naïve tourists’ (Snepenger, Meged, Snelling, and Worrall 1990). This may be to do with uncertainty of travel (Sharifpour, Walters, and Ritchie 2014) where travellers want to not look out of place; or be able to report back that they have seen the essential sights; or do not want to miss something unique; or want to appear well-informed; or to balance the differences which can be intimidating against more reassuring similarities with home.

Travel journalism was popular as an information source and again brand values were important: ‘It’s probably very stereotypical, but when you’re in England, you assume *Huffington Post* is like one of the more well-respected sites’ (13). The *Guardian* was the most accessed newspaper site, even among non-UK students: ‘Because it’s credible’ (R12); and ‘The *Guardian* has a city guide to Istanbul. Because, rather than go to Trip Advisor, I’d look for an article’ (14). This indicates the power of the brand in terms of trustworthiness: if an activity or sight had been reported in the media, this was considered a stamp of credibility. This again inclined participants towards homogeneity with an existing media agenda.

A Google search would often return lists of the top attractions which were considered a mixed blessing: ‘As much as I hate this, I often find that the Top 10 list is quite useful because somebody’s already done the research’ (4). However, lists inevitably drive a traveller towards the tried-and-tested and they were criticized for this: ‘Everything you can find online about travel writing is “10 things you must do”, “10 foods you must eat”. It irritates me’ (16). Only one noted that what they read online would influence what they thought:

I think the things you’re exposed to have an effect on how you feel and your opinion of it. Travel research for me is not just about finding particular things and information, it’s about getting inspired before you go. I think you do that by reading about experiences of people who have already been there, because it does transfer across (4).

One participant did point that this common search pattern, moving from Wiki to blogs, pre-conditioned the traveler with what is important based on what is popular: ‘when I go for the top recommended spots first and the blogs last, it’s less likely that I’ll find things that are off the beaten track. If someone has planned the structure for me already, I’ll follow it’ (18). Some of the travel journalism students tried to counter this, ironically, by using a search engine that returns the most popular sites and asking it to return unpopular sights: ‘I typed in the word “different” too ... Just to see what would come up, because I don’t want to do something that is too mainstream’ (5); and ‘I’ll Google “lost in Istanbul” or something. That would be interesting’ (10). They wanted to look for other ways of looking, but did not know what to use as a search term. They felt that what they were getting from their search was limited, so they wanted something else, but were not sure how to look for it. This indicates the power of media homogeneity, that participants found it possible to imagine alternative ways of seeing, but not to identify what they were.

Heterogeneity/alternative

A consistent statement was the desire to find something different. Seventeen of the 19 participants said they were looking for an alternative view of Istanbul: 'I'm up for exploring and going around less-known places Say I'm in India, I wouldn't take the classic shot of the Taj Mahal. I would look into different ways to look at things' (13). One searched under the term 'different' and accessed *dosomethingdifferent.com*, with the intention of elevating her role as travel journalist as adding value to what a tourist might already know.

Participants also accused journalism of reporting mainstream sights: 'The best stuff is not on the travel section of a newspaper. It's somewhere interesting, a blog or something. That's where you find the good stuff' (11). Consequently, blogs were used to counterbalance other websites with a more personal view. Blogs had to be actively sought as they were not easily returned by a Google search, and 'the problem is that you get a lot of travel sites on Google [and] it's on page two or three that you start seeing blogs' (18). Bloggers were valued when they were somewhere between an expert and an ingénue, a liminality that allowed them to see through the eyes of a newcomer but also to know what was worth seeing: 'I would think they can be trusted because two months in a place is reasonably long to know something about it ... they seem to want to experience Istanbul authentically' (12).

Bloggers were just one source, however, and it was a consistent theme that participants would turn to many sources in order to feel independent: 'As a journalism student, you want to check out different sources' (10); and 'I don't go to any particular blogger. Because if I do that, I might live in their shadow' (18). Journalism students are trained not to rely on any one source, and this training drives them towards heterogeneous viewpoints; however, they are likely to be most influenced by viewpoints that coincide with each other as these can be assembled most efficiently into a consistent story to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1954), which also leads to homogeneity.

Analysis: style of writing

RQ2 asked what kind of writing style taken by a travel writer is preferred. There was significant enthusiasm for reports written in the first person: 'First-person writing makes me feel like I could see it, makes me want to go there' (9) and 'To talk about myself would draw in the reader more, because if I am writing about my personal experience and the reader can relate to it, then it draws them in' (19). First-person writing was also seen as empowering the reader by offering choice to go along with the writer or not: 'I'd rather he just tells me, "OK, I did this and some other people chose to do that". Just recount your experiences and let me decide myself' (3). Second-person travel writing was not popular because it was associated with homogeneous experiences and information: 'It would make me feel more like it's a very touristy place, so I would lower my expectations, actually' (9). This suggests that instructive sources of information with the emphasis on 'what *you* can do' are not well received: 'I wouldn't really like it, because it's saying I should go, I should go ... Saying it's the best place to go to doesn't mean I'm going to think it is' (1). Objective, third-person reportage was also not highly rated, although one participant appreciated *Lonely Planet's* style: 'It's okay, it's a lot of adjectives that tells you what you can see, which is good, it paints a picture in my head' (15). Another was keen to see writing about local people, as this was a marker of value in authenticity of 'real lives': 'I'm hoping to see more of people. Like when you go here, you can interact with a lot of people from here, or you can see ...

I'd rather experience it exactly the way Turkish people do' (3). The power stayed with the writer, preferring the first person, with interest in the third person only insofar as interaction with local life provided fodder for a first-person anecdote.

Analysis: student articles

This was borne out by the 26 articles submitted after the trip, in which 21 involved a first-person experiential anecdote that set the scene for a third-person description of life in Istanbul. Only four made no reference to the writer at all and were resolutely third-person; and three had passing references to a second-person 'you' of the reader.

Yet, despite participants' oft-stated desire to take an alternative route – to be a traveler rather than a tourist – they consistently found themselves drawn to mainstream tourist activities. This in turn impacted on what they wrote about. Of 26 articles, 17 were concerned with activities and sights that appeared in tourists' Top 10 lists online such as Turkish baths, shopping, hot-air ballooning, the Grand Bazaar, Turkish delight, and Hagia Sophia. It can be argued that these are what tourists go to Istanbul to see; but what is distinctive was participants' spoken desire to report unusual sights, which contrasted with what they were observed to both research and write about, which tended towards homogenized tourist fare. This dominates but does not overwhelm, however, and nine articles were about off-the-beaten-track sights and activities such as the fish market, rock climbing, street cats, shoeshine boys and protests. Few involved interaction with local people and seeing Turkey from their perspective; the tourist gaze was overwhelmingly preferred over a more anthropological, social, cultural or political-economic viewpoint. Students were instructed to produce travel journalism, and the underlying assumption was evidently that anthropology, social-cultural or political-economic issues had no place in tourism, and as a result no place in such writing.

Conclusion

As more travel content is produced, both amateur and professional, in traditional media and online, it becomes important to see what effect it has on these opinion formers because 'the media, as one of the most important information sources for tourists ... can affect people's cognitive and affective responses and influence their behavioural intentions' (Hsu and Song 2013, 254). This study has implications for *all* travelers who research a destination online and find they are guided towards the standard tourist fare. To return to Urry and Larsen (2011), 'to consider how social groups construct their tourist gaze is a good way of getting at just what is happening in the "normal society": if the tourist gaze is constructed by lists of top 10 places to visit, and a predominance of first-person reports on experience, what does that reflect on 'normal society'? Is the homogenized worldview of travel found online being replicated in other fields?

Participants' ideas about travel journalists' style of writing raises further issues, as first-person anecdotal reports were overwhelmingly favoured. The assumption is that of personal experience as central to travel, rather than life in the destination. Scholars have argued for travel journalism that is concerned with a fair representation of local life rather than Urry's tourist gaze (Holland and Huggan 2000; Fürsich and Kavoori 2001). Based on this small sample, such an approach has little traction with the next generation of practitioners. Quite the opposite. On one hand, this could be because authenticity of personal experience is valued, in which case the objectivity that has long been at the heart of reporting diminishes in importance (Zelizer 2004). On the other hand,

first-person travel journalism can also be more concerned with a personal reaction to a destination, over and above what is *occurring* in that destination. The agenda becomes not ‘what I saw there’ but rather ‘what I *felt about* what I saw there’. This would imply that the preferred form of travel is through a self-regarding prism, a destination is of interest only insofar as it provides a personal anecdote. This merits further study, to see if readers prefer anecdotal, ‘personal experience’ first-person travel writing; or self-regarding and introspective ‘personal reaction’ journalism.

The small sample size is an obvious limitation for this study, and any conclusions cannot be extended to a wider population. As the subjects represent the next generation of travel writers, this study gives an insight into attitudes and practices of future travel writers, and the implications for how people’s ideas of foreign countries are constructed. Even so, it is necessary to stress that their attitudes may not be consistent with what is current practice within the industry. The intention of this article is instead to explore a possible future reorientation of this form of journalism influenced by UGC. Web 2.0 is already changing mainstream news reporting, challenging traditional news values (Hermida and Thurman 2008; Singer 2010). It is likely to change other forms of journalism, too.

This change is not necessarily positive. Power is implicit in journalism that seeks to inscribe as it describes something (Chang and Holt 1991), and in tourism that places developing nations in a cultural and transactional web created by and for the developed countries of the Global North (Britton 1982). The danger is that – in extreme cases – these combine in ‘subjugating the “native” by colonizing him/her discursively’ (Shome 1996, 42); hence the importance of the Internet to deliver heterogeneous viewpoints.

The next generation might also offer hope for a new approach, based on the stated desire to act as a non-tourist and engage more with local life. An awareness of power, domination and subordination, in travel journalism’s representations of foreign countries was not apparent from participants’ responses, however, and despite being more media literate than most, none recognized that both tourism and travel writing can maintain or challenge existing relations of power between host nation and traveller (Macleod and Carrier 2010). Holland and Huggan (2000) offer hope that travel writing need not be an agent of western cultural domination, but can be a transgressive, self-critiquing tool. This seems unlikely, however: far from opening up a world of information, the Internet appears to offer a homogenized worldview that creates an occlusion of alternative travel behaviours and a hegemonic dominance of the tourist.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Note

1. Travel journalism is a contested term (Hanusch 2010) and here we use it to mean primarily factual writing about leisure travel, appearing on a credible gatekept platform, written for a specific audience, and designed to entertain and guide travellers. This affords it a multiplier effect that makes practitioners opinion formers.

Notes on contributor

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