Supporting the information transmission via social media of local sightseeing volunteer guides

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Abstract

In recent years, local tourism has been gaining traction as one of the measures for regional revitalization in Japan. One of the organizations that support these are the sightseeing volunteer guide organizations. These organizations have various kinds of information that are helpful for local tourism and active information transmission is desirable. On the other hand, many organizations face the issue of the information transmission as their aging volunteer guides find it difficult to handle information devices. This study therefore aims to provide support for continuous information transmission by local sightseeing volunteer guides via social media, and attempts to clarify the transmission of sightseeing information that matches the characteristics of social media through proof-of-concept demonstrations with the Historical "CULTURAL PATH" Guide Volunteers in Nagoya City.

Keywords

social media, local tourism, local sightseeing volunteer guides, information transmission, visual information

1. Introduction

The expansion of tourism is one of the important measures recently implemented in Japan. According to Minetoshi, both Japanese and foreign tourists have diversified needs for travel content, and they tend to seek experiences and exchanges according to the local characteristics of the tourist destinations [Minetoshi, 2017]. In addition, the intended effect of promoting the development of tourism-based communities is not just limited to an increase in the number of tourists. It also serves as an important key for regional revitalization, including the creation of local jobs and to expand the residential population [Japan Travel Bureau Foundation, 2019]. The anticipation of these two effects means that developing local tourism (such as more concerted efforts in the development of new regional tourist content outlined in the "Tourism Vision Realization Program 2019") has become more important.

Sightseeing volunteer guides are essential to revitalize local tourism [Kato et al., 2003]. In recent years, more and more in Japan are becoming aware of sightseeing volunteer guides. In view of the Olympic and Paralympic Games that is scheduled to be held in Tokyo in 2020, the local governments are recruiting city volunteers from cities around Tokyo, and actively preparing the sightseeing volunteer guides that would be on the lookout for the foreign tourists visiting Japan even in the other regions. It is imperative for local sightseeing volunteer guides—locals who are representatives of their regions/communities—to use information technology to convey the charm of local sightseeing spots in order to succeed in bringing in tourists as well as to resolve the upcoming societal issues in

Japan. However, it is not an easy task for these aging sightseeing volunteer guides to continuously transmit such information using information technology that they are not familiar with. On top of this, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic also means that many sightseeing spots are now hard-pressed to seek and implement prevention measures. This, coupled with the sharp decline in the number of tourists due to refrain from non-essential travel, has resulted in a need for more active information transmission of facilities and sightseeing spots.

The focus of this study is on information transmission utilizing social media that has global users of all different ages. This study aims to enable local sightseeing volunteer guides who find it difficult to transmit information to gradually perform long-term information transmission by providing support in the form of creating a handbook that would help them to use and operate social media, which they have found difficult thus far. This study also intends to clarify the differences in the effects of the information transmission via social media so as to shed light on the method of transmitting sightseeing information that matches the characteristics of social media by volunteer guides.

2. Local sightseeing volunteer guides and social media
2.1 Current state of local sightseeing volunteers

In recent years, there has been a growing need for community-based tourism that offers unique experiences capitalizing on the hosting of the Olympic Games and the characteristics of the local regions/communities, and the number of local sightseeing volunteers went up to a record high of 46,159 [Japan Travel Bureau Foundation, 2019]. The sightseeing volunteer guide organizations are therefore a crucial.

On the other hand, many sightseeing volunteer guide organizations face the serious issue of aging volunteer guides. According to a survey conducted by the Japan Travel and Tourism

Association in 2019, the national average age of the sightseeing volunteer guides is 66.7 years, and mainly comprises the senior generation. Noro indicated that the sightseeing volunteer guides are generally mainly composed of people who were recommended and have time to undergo the relevant training courses or workshops that would be held by each organization or municipality, and then serve as sightseeing volunteer guides on top of their working hours (such as retirees) as reasons [Noro et al., 2013]. As mentioned earlier, despite the fact that the sightseeing volunteer guides is extremely vital to local tourism, the current reality is that this is not promotion of their organization. One of the major reason is not the information transmission by the sightseeing volunteer guides due to their advanced ages.

In fact, a previous survey conducted by the authors of this study that targeted the various volunteer guide organizations or associations in Nagoya District under the umbrella of the "The Goodwill Guide Volunteer Program in Aichi (JAPAN)" revealed that while all the organizations performed the information transmission via websites. However, the information was not frequently updated. Only one organization did so via social media. This sole organization was also unaware of further details as they hired someone to take charge of their social media accounts and the contents of the information transmission was decided by the person in charge instead. Further, about half of these organizations faced challenges in the information transmission due to making their websites mobile compatible and their aging members.

In addition, there were also many organizations that wanted to be proactive in the information transmission. There are two reasons as follows.

- To convey the interesting titbits of history and culture to people (foreigners and young people) who were not interested in history
- To pass on the charm of Nagoya to others (including the locals) and change the perception of tourists instead of increasing the number

In order to solve these issues, the focus of this study will be on social media: it is available free of charge, has many young users, and is increasingly used as a tourism PR method.

2.2 Social media and tourism

At present, the Internet is used extremely often by users to collect information such as sightseeing. According to a White Paper on Information and Communications in Japan published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications in FY2015, the use of the Internet, regardless of age, has become extremely widespread as a means of gathering information [Economic Research Office, ICT Strategy Policy Division, Global ICT Strategy Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015]. In fact, according to a survey conducted by Stayway Inc., 26 % of the respondents who were in their twenties regarded SNS as the most important source to obtain reference information for their travel plans, and it is expected that the importance

of PR using SNS will continue to increase [Stayway, 2019].

Meanwhile, the JTB corporation indicated that values and thoughts of individuals are reflected by the using of social media, and the effect of the reflection is more strongly than ever before. Meanwhile, the impact of each individual has become stronger. They believe that this boosts a niche market in tourism and that social media is an appropriate tool for information transmission on local tourism [JTB, 2019].

In fact, sightseeing associations in various places already have many SNS accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and many sightseeing spots have become popular due to photos being posted on SNS.

While it can be said that social media is useful for the information transmission by sightseeing volunteers since it is free and open, it is difficult for the elderly who are unfamiliar with information technology to independently and continually use social media for the information transmission as mentioned earlier.

3. Utilization of social media by local sightseeing volunteer guides

3.1 The information transmission that used social media

This study attempts to verify the following two matters to resolve the aforementioned issues.

- Realization of continuous operation
  To enable them to gradually perform long-term the information transmission by providing support in the form of creating a handbook that helps them in operating SNS.
- Realization of the information transmission matched to the characteristics of social media
  To clarify the differences in the effects of the information transmission via social media that has remained unknown, and shed light on the method of transmitting sightseeing information that matches the characteristics of social media by volunteer guides.

3.2 Selection of social media

In Japan, the most popular social media are LINE, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram [Institute for Information and Communications Policy, 2018]. Even though LINE has the highest utilization rate, it is excluded in this study as it is rarely used for collecting information. YouTube, with its second highest utilization rate, has users from different age groups (especially amongst the young people), and allows viewers to deepen their understanding mainly with visual information such as photos and/or videos. In addition, a Google survey has revealed that more than 40 % of people watch travel-related videos, and that they rely on videos for everything, even from the planning stage of travel, such as selecting the destination [Google Confidential and Proprietary, 2014].

This study focuses on YouTube as well as Instagram, a SNS specialized in visual information among social media, and aims to verify the effects of utilizing visual information in the information transmission by volunteer guides (Figure 1). As these media mainly display visual information, it is also easy
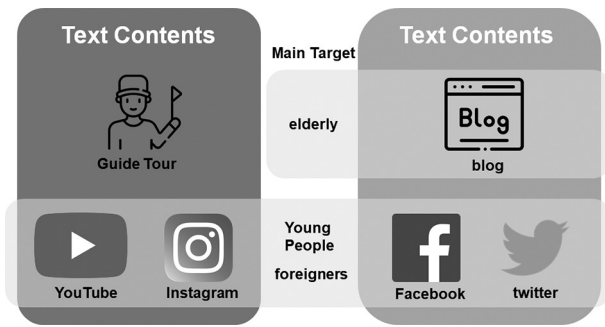
Figure 1: Activities of guides and possibility of social media

for foreigners who do not understand Japanese to access this information. These social media are believed to be highly suitable in line with our aim.

3.3 Utilization of media specialized for visual information
3.3.1 Utilization of Instagram

Users upload photos on their Instagram posts. As posting is relatively easy compared to YouTube, it is important to increase the frequency of posting, such as getting several people to post.

For these photos to be used as reference material, the volunteer guides are asked to take photos on a daily basis and actively utilize these photos. To make the best use of the characteristics of the volunteer guides, who are also local residents, they are asked to take photos regularly to capture the 'now' moment of the sightseeing spots.

3.3.2 Utilization of YouTube

Due to the characteristics of YouTube, users need to create and post videos.

As videos are very effective in conveying the atmosphere of the place and people, the videos are taken from various angles. It is also effective to take videos of the volunteer guides, as well as they guide the participants in practice, so as to create a desire in users to hire the service of volunteer guides.

The contents of introducing many of the members involved in the video production, introducing the fields that each member is good at, and introducing the overview of the area to be guided are believed to be suitable.

The sightseeing volunteer guides will first need to familiarize themselves with each social media when using them, and they need to be guided on how to search for information (such as searching for places, buildings, and hobbies that they are interested in) using social media. On top of becoming accustomed to using each media, they will be able to refer to the information posted on the places and buildings they are going to post about in future by using hashtags and taking photos and videos.

A handbook that outlines the methods of uploading posts and tips at each stage when operating each media will be created. The handbook will be created with the aim of paraphrasing the terms, increasing the font size of the text, and adding figures so that it is easy for the elderly to understand (Figure 2).

For the main text and the summary fields when postings,

Figure 2: Operating handbook

fixed phrases will be prepared for them to use. Before uploading, they are also to show the source of the photos as "Historical 'CULTURAL PATH' Guide Volunteer". Using fixed phrases will reduce the input of characters and create a sense of consistency and congruity. In addition, they will be asked to include links in the summary box for others who want to apply as sightseeing volunteer guides as well as to know other SNS and websites offering more detailed information, which will lead to other the information transmission and guides.

These operations should be divided into an administrator and posters, and performed by multiple people to distribute the workload.

4. Proof-of-concept demonstrations
4.1 Selection of field

For this study, the historical area of "Cultural Path" in the Tokugawaen area leading from Nagoya Castle in Higashi District, Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture was selected as the field, where proof-of-concept demonstrations were conducted on the Historical "CULTURAL PATH" Guide Volunteers that guide tourists on this course.

Established in 2001, the Historical "CULTURAL PATH" Guide Volunteers guide tourists along the course of the "Cultural Path" as well as the buildings on it residing in them. They boast a number of 51 members—a figure larger than the national average—but their average age is 72 years; the advanced ages of the guides is higher than the average of volunteer guides across Japan as well. The information transmission (including other activities) is performed through the website and member magazines. On top of basic information such as

application for guides, the website publishes local topics about three times a month. While their website has a fixed number of visitors, the small number of young users presents an issue. They also would like to transmit information to a wide range of people, including people in other countries.

4.2 Operating social media

4.2.1 Operating Instagram

Ever since the operation started on December 18, 2018, one to three posts have been consistently uploaded every month, and there are 49 posts to date. On the first day of operation, the posts were uploaded under the watchful supervision of the authors. The subsequent several posts were uploaded by the sightseeing volunteer guides themselves while asking the questions and receiving advice from the authors. At present, the volunteer guides are able to post on Instagram with no issues by themselves (Figure 3).
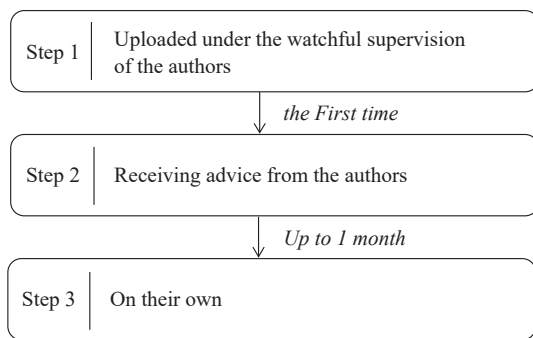

Figure 3: process to use Instagram

The posts are mainly uploaded by two people in charge, where they introduce famous places along the "Cultural Path" and announce events. As of August 2020, their Instagram account has a total of 107 followers, and each post has received 20 to 30 likes.

In addition, they have opened another Instagram account in English from September 2018 onwards, and have been operating this new account as well with zero support from the authors (Figure 4).

4.2.2 Operating YouTube

The operation started since November 2019, and a total of five videos being posted continually with an account change midway. Figure 5 shows the flow chart of the process to YouTube.

While the first video was mainly created by the authors in the same environment in order to show the sightseeing volunteer guides the process of making one, the subsequent videos were mainly created by the volunteer guides themselves. The volunteer guides who were in charge of taking the videos were asked to use the tablets or smartphones that they were already using to take videos of the other guides as they do a mock tour of the actual course for tourists (Figure 6).

The videos were edited in several sessions with the tablet device that was used to take the videos. Using one tablet device

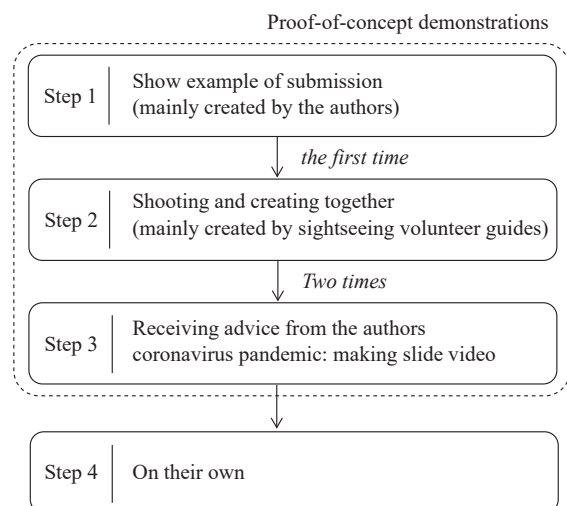Figure 4: An example of an Instagram post

Figure 5: Process to use YouTube

Figure 6: Video of a volunteer guide being taken

allowed them to discuss the contents and the next scene to be taken right on the spot.

It became hard for them to take new videos with the recent

Figure 7: An example of a YouTube post

onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic, so they ended up making three slide videos with the photos and materials that they have taken thus far. As it was difficult to meet up in person, the authors used PowerPoint (which the volunteer guides are familiar with) to guide them in making the slide videos (Figure 7).

4.3 Survey on volunteer guides

The authors conducted interviews with the volunteer guides to get their personal opinions regarding the social media posts that they have continually uploaded on YouTube and Instagram during this period. They revealed that they were glad to receive support and the handbook on using and operating Instagram and YouTube, and were "very thankful to be able to learn new things" and that "it was easy to understand". In fact, the volunteer guides are now able to post on each SNS on their own with no help and have been continually operating these accounts to date.

The volunteer guides also revealed that they had gotten a good response from the local residents who watched the YouTube videos shown in the seminar where the guides serve as a lecturer for the local residents. From this, the authors felt that the videos taken by the volunteer guides may serve more than its intended purpose of broadcasting to the public: it may also serve as offline teaching materials for tourists or visitors.

On the other hand, other issues raised included brainstorming for themes for the posts, as well as ensuring the quality of the posts/videos. It is believed that these concerns arose because the contents of the posts and videos were to be published and uploaded from official accounts, and the volunteer guides had to consult with the authors during the entire process, from taking photos and videos to discussing the next step/scene to be captured. Another big contributing factor was the coronavirus pandemic, which made shooting even harder. They had thought of making edits or compilations from photos or videos taken of nearby places or objects while guiding tourists, but the coronavirus pandemic meant that these tour guides had to be temporarily stopped. This resulted in more work when it came to shooting.

It is important for the volunteer guides to get used to posting and shooting or checking posts by other guides in order to resolve these issues. However, in light of the current situation, it may be better to make use of the materials they already have and create an environment where these volunteer guides can easily interact with each other so as to reduce their levels of anxiety.

4.4 Survey on users

To shed light on the changes in the impressions of the "Cultural Path" after seeing the YouTube and Instagram posts, a survey was conducted on 13 visitors and 41 students who toured the "Former Sasuke Toyoda Residence" where the target organizations provide a resident guide every week.

In this survey, respondents were required to have watched at least one video from the YouTube account of the volunteer guides organization, as well as three Instagram posts before answering. Three Instagram posts regarding the "Introduction of facilities" were selected for this survey as the theme was very similar to the YouTube video.

When asked "Which was easier for you to browse?", most indicated Instagram, and cited that "I could finish reading it fast" and "I can read at my own pace and interest" as reasons. In addition, six of the 17 respondents who chose YouTube over Instagram were in their 60s or older, and cited that "It was easy to use" and "It was difficult to read the text" as reasons (Figure 8).
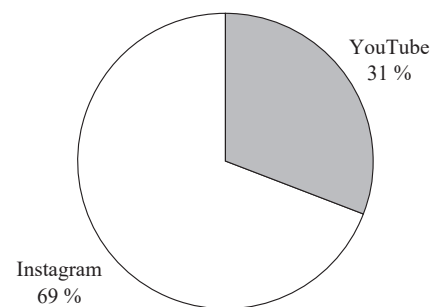

Figure 8: Ease of browsing

When asked "Which conveyed the 'Charm of Nagoya as a sightseeing spot' better?", relatively more respondents indicated YouTube, and cited that "It is easy to imagine the contents and experience of the tour through the video" and "Narration and audio provided information" as reasons. Meanwhile, most of those who chose Instagram over YouTube cited that they
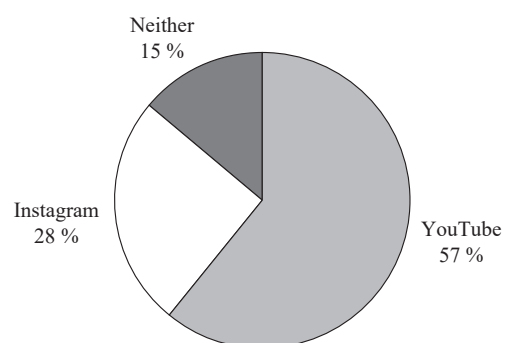

Figure 9: Charm of Nagoya

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"could finish reading the posts in a short time and the highlights were clear" (Figure 9).

When asked "Which made you want to go for a guided tour more?", 80 % of the respondents chose YouTube, and most cited that they "felt as if they were going on the same tour" as reasons (Figure 10).
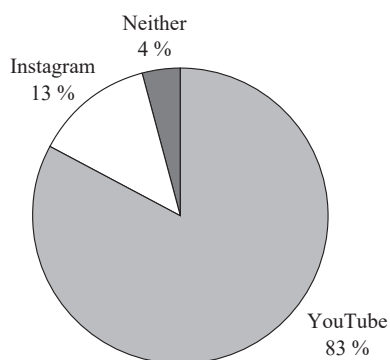

Figure 10: Desire to go on a guided tour

The results of this survey revealed that most respondents felt that Instagram was easier to browse, and that is likely due to the fact that the YouTube video is of a fixed length and they probably felt that they were obliged to finish watching the video. It is apparent that people who are not interested are unlikely to click and watch videos on YouTube.

The results allude to two possible usages: Instagram is for people who are not very interested in history and culture or Nagoya, while YouTube serves as the next platform for people who want to know more after browsing Instagram posts and to introduce local sightseeing volunteer guides to them. Therefore, there is a need to design Instagram posts such that even people with little knowledge about the history, culture, or Nagoya, can enjoy reading them. In addition, there is a need to create YouTube videos by taking into consideration the actual guided course and the various highlights (such as capturing the volunteer guides as they walk and explain) in order to capture the audience. As mentioned earlier, over 80 % of the respondents indicated that watching the YouTube video made them want to go on a guided tour more than the Instagram posts, implying that creating videos with a focus on the guided tour may increase the desire of users to participate in such tours as well.

5. Conclusion

In this study, a handbook was created to provide the necessary support to help and guide the aging volunteer guides in the continuous operation of social media as well as the information transmission by leveraging on the characteristics on social media. The results of the survey clearly illuminated the differences in the effects of the information transmission from sightseeing guides between Instagram and YouTube.

Going forward, the authors would like to continue with the information transmission utilizing Instagram and YouTube and incorporating the differences in the effects of the information

transmission that were found in this study. It would also be useful to find out how to best provide information via social media during this pandemic, and to verify the effects of attracting tourists after the pandemic is over.

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