Livestreaming in tourism: What drives tourism live streamers to share their travel experiences?

Fangxuan (Sam) Li, Jianan Ma and Yun Tong

Abstract
Purpose – This study aims to explore tourism live streamers’ motivations of sharing their travel experiences based on the grounded theory.
Design/methodology/approach – The use of purposive and snowball sampling methods was used to conduct 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The manuscript was analyzed based on the grounded theory.
Findings – This study identifies five tourism live streamers’ motivations of sharing their travel experience, including information sharing, entertainment, self-presentation, monetary incentives and socialization. Information sharing and entertainment are identified as the most important motivations of travel livestreaming (TLS) among the motivations. Monetary incentive is identified as a new motivation for tourism live streamers compared to other social media users.
Research limitations/implications – This study provides valuable suggestions for livestreaming platforms and tourism product providers to attract more tourism live streamers and better serve them.
Originality/value – To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this is one of the first studies to offer empirical findings and discussions on tourism live streamers’ motivations of sharing their travel experiences.
Keywords Travel livestreaming, Live streamer, Grounded theory, Motivations, Travel experiences, Experience sharing
Paper type Research paper

Livestreaming in tourism: ¿qué conduce un transmiertor en vivo Para compartir su experiencia de viaje?

Propósito: este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar las motivaciones de los transmisores en vivo del turismo para compartir sus experiencias de viaje según la teoría fundamentada.
Diseño/metodología/enfoque: Des méthodes d’échantillonnage raisonné et boule de neige ont été utilisées pour mener 22 entrevues semi-structurées approfondies. Le manuscrit a été analysé sur la base de la théorie ancrée.
Hallazgos: este estudio identifica las motivaciones de cinco transmisores en vivo del turismo para compartir su experiencia de viaje, incluido el intercambio de información, el entretenimiento, la

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1. Introduction

Technology as an effective way to facilitate the experience value co-creation process (Zhang et al., 2018; Assiours et al., 2019) has a significant impact on the tourism industry (Qi et al., 2008). Livestreaming as a relatively new phenomenon in the tourism industry has attracted increasing attention recently. Livestreaming combines video and audio with online platforms that allow streamers to broadcast in real time, enabling synchronous interactions (videos, images or texts) between live streamers and viewers while broadcasting (Hu et al., 2017). Given the increasing importance of “nowness service” (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019), various livestreaming platforms such as Twitch and TikTok have been established over the past decade. In fact, livestreaming as an interactive form of internet-based multimedia entertainment has been well examined by recent marketing research from many perspectives, such as livestreaming usage intention (Chen and Lin, 2018), livestreaming content (Horsman, 2018), livestreaming viewer engagement (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018) and consumers’ live-stream shopping intentions (Ma, 2021). A review of existing literature indicated that most existing livestreaming studies explored livestreaming from the perspective of livestreaming viewers or customers; however, live streamers as one of the most important parts of the livestreaming industry have not received sufficient attention by researchers (Heo et al., 2020).

In the tourism field, the widespread availability of mobile Internet and mobile devices with built-in-cameras has facilitated the emergence of “travel livestreaming” (TLS). TLS refers to tourists who use livestreaming platforms to broadcast their tourism activities, capture destination landscapes and interact with others in real time (Deng et al., 2021). TLS has been identified as a new channel used not only by an increasing number of social media influencers (SMIS) and travel bloggers for creating and sharing travel experiences but also by tourism destinations and online travel agencies for destination and product marketing (Deng et al., 2021). As COVID-19 has restricted tourist activities, TLS has been seen as an effective way to save the tourism industry from the COVID-19 pandemic (Qiu et al., 2021b). TLS addresses some challenges for the tourism industry due to COVID-19; therefore, one of the most significant marketing trends is TLS after COVID-19. One of the critical motivations of TLS for tourism destinations and travel agencies is to attract visitors to the destinations (Zhang et al., 2021). For example, Ctrip Chairman (China’s most prominent tourism platform), James Liang’s live-stream attracted 1.15 million viewers and generated transactions valued at US$3.84m within an hour (Zhu, 2020). Although the motivations of TLS for tourism destinations and travel agencies have been explored, the motivations of independent tourism live streamers (not hired by tourism destinations or travel agencies) such as SMIS and travel bloggers are still under-researched. In fact, the largest source of live streamers is independent streamers which greatly contributed to the development of the tourism livestreaming industry. There is a possible guess that independent tourism streamers’ motivations of sharing travel experiences differ from streamers signed by destinations, travel agencies or platforms. To fill the research gap, this paper aims to...
explore this under-researched topic and attempts to understand tourism live streamers’ motivations of sharing their travel experiences. Practically, this study aims to provide valuable suggestions for livestreaming platforms and tourism product providers to attract more tourism live streamers and better serve them.

2. Literature review

2.1 Social media in tourism and hospitality research

Social media has been a hot research topic in tourism and hospitality research over the past decade (Inversini and Buhalis, 2009; Nusair et al., 2019; Rasul and Hoque, 2020). A review of existing literature indicated that there are mainly two research perspectives of social media in tourism and hospitality research, including consumers’ and suppliers’ perspectives (Lu et al., 2018). From consumers’ perspective, prior studies have explored the impacts of social media on tourists’ travel experience sharing (Kang and Schuett, 2013), the impacts of social media on tourists’ decision-making process (Schroeder and Pennington-Gray, 2015; Dwityas and Briandana, 2017), motivations of sharing travel experiences on social media (Oliveira et al., 2020a, 2020b), the use of social media in travel information search (Chung and Koo, 2015) and the impacts of travel experience sharing on tourism consumption (Liu et al., 2019). From suppliers’ perspective, previous studies have examined the impact of social media on destination marketing (Hays et al., 2013; Lund et al., 2018), social media strategies for destination management (Lim et al., 2012; Munar, 2012) and the impact of social media on destination image formation (Ghazali and Cai, 2013; Kim et al., 2017). Lu et al. (2018) identified that around 65.8% of the existing tourism and hospitality research explored social media from tourists’ perspective. Among these studies, tourists’ travel experience sharing motivations and behaviors are identified as the most frequently researched topic (Oliveira et al., 2020b; Wong et al., 2020).

It was found that tourists tend to share their travel experiences through social media platforms in different ways, such as written blogs (Tse and Zhang, 2013; Ting et al., 2014), microblogs (Tse and Zhang, 2013), travel photos (Li, 2020; Taylor, 2020) and short-form travel videos (Du et al., 2020). In contrast to other visual media commonly used in tourism mentioned above, there are two distinctive characteristics of TLS, including the real-time nature (Taylor, 2018) and the feeling of “almost being there” (Mueser and Vlachos, 2018). Though the uniqueness of TLS as a new method of sharing travel experiences has been identified, few studies have been conducted to explore this new phenomenon (Zhang et al., 2021).

2.2 Travel livestreaming (TLS)

Though livestreaming has been well examined by previous marketing research, TLS has received little academic attention (Deng et al., 2019; Deng et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Compared to traditional promotion tools, one of the key features for TLS is customer engagement (Qiu et al., 2021a) which highlights the interactions between customers and tourism live streamers during TLS. Given the travel restrictions caused by COVID-19, TLS is regarded as an effective way to reduce losses in the tourism industry (Qiu et al., 2021b).

Deng et al. (2019), as the very first authors to explore TLS, proposed a blended tourism experiencescape model to address TLS from a theoretical perspective. The proposed model includes four stages, including comparative review, conceptualization, empirical exploration and consequences. Deng et al. (2021) further proposed an affordance-based conceptual framework of TLS based on summarizing existing literature that identified the key features of TLS and examined the benefits of TLS. In terms of features of TLS, they identified four TLS affordances, including temporal, spatial, interactive and media affordances. In terms of the benefits of TLS, they identified the benefits of TLS for both live streamers, viewers and sponsors. The identified benefits of TLS for tourism live streamers
include social identity, performativity and storytelling. Information seeking, social
engagement and social presence are identified as the benefits of TLS for viewers. There are
two benefits of TLS for sponsors, including place and brand identity and performance
measurement and targeting.

Both the two studies discussed above are conceptual papers (Deng et al., 2019; Deng
et al., 2021), a lack of empirical studies related to TLS is apparent. One exception is the
paper conducted by Zhang et al. (2021), who explored the impacts of TLS on travel
intention by using 614 questionnaires. The results indicated that the presence of a
destination image, the presence of an interaction and the presence of production have
significant positive influences on tourists’ trust and, in return, influence their travel intention.
A review of existing literature indicated that research related to TLS remains scarce.
Moreover, tourism live streamer as an essential part of the TLS industry remains under-
researched. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the TLS phenomenon from the
perspective of tourism live streamers.

2.3 Live streamers’ motivations

Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory has been one of the most used theories to identify
individuals’ social and psychological motivations of using a particular media (Leung and
Wei, 2000). It focused on why individuals choose a particular media over other alternatives
to gratify various needs (Katz et al., 1974). U&G theory indicated that users are active in
seeking the use of media to meet their requirements (Severin and Tankard, 1997). U&G
theory has also been widely used to explore the U&Gs behind different online activities,
such as news sharing (Lee and Ma, 2012), the use of livestreaming channels (Hsu et al.,
2020), photo sharing (Malik et al., 2016), virtual goods purchase (Kaur et al., 2020) and the
use of food delivery apps (Ray et al., 2019). However, the U&G theory is established as an
audience-centered approach to study mass communication, whereas the study explores
the motivations from the perspective of the presenters (live streamers). Therefore, U&G
theory is not appropriate for this study context.

A review of existing literature indicated that existing literature has largely ignored tourism
live streamers’ motivations. However, live streamers’ motivations have been explored by
previous studies (Friedlander, 2017; Skjuve and Brandtzaeg, 2019). Five main streamer
motivations were identified by Friedlander (2017), including boredom, socializing, the need
to reach a specific group, the need to communicate and fun. Skjuve and Brandtzaeg (2019)
further found that motivations for different types of streamers are different. The three most
frequent mentioned motivations are socializing with family and friends, sharing opinions and
experiences and entertainment/fun (Skjuve and Brandtzaeg, 2019). Zhao et al. (2018)
进一步 divided live streamers’ motivations into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The
intrinsic motivations include challenge seeking, task enjoyment, desire for self-presentation,
while the extrinsic motivations include anticipated extrinsic reward, self-esteem benefits,
social benefits and feedback (Zhao et al., 2018).

3. Method

3.1 Data collection

As explained above, knowledge related to tourism live streamers is limited; therefore, this
study is exploratory in nature. As grounded theory is generally taken to be inductive in nature,
grounded theory is deemed an appropriate way to conduct this research. A grounded theory
approach is defined as a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of processes
to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Pandit, 1996). The
grounded theory approach was conducted to discover new theoretical insights and
innovations and avoids traditional logical deductive reasoning (Connell and Lowe, 1997) and
is considered to be “emergent explicit” (Martin and Woodside, 2008, p. 246). There are five
basic processes of grounded theory, including data collection, data analysis, memo-writing, theoretical sampling and saturation (Charmaz, 2006)

In-depth semi-structured interviews were normally adopted by grounded theory to collect data (Creswell, 2007) to understand this research topic from an insider’s perspective. As purposive sampling was regarded as the most appropriate method to recruit interview participants based on the principle of the grounded theory (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2016), purposive sampling was first used by the first author to recruit the interview participants. Specifically, the primary investigator first identified 98 tourism live streamers who had livestreaming experiences in Douyu, YY and TikTok, which are three popular livestreaming platforms in China. As China is the largest marketplace of livestreaming with a large number of users, Chinese live streamers are selected for this research. There were approximately 617 million livestreaming users in China, representing a penetration rate of 62.4% among internet users in 2020 (Statista, 2021a). Then, the primary investigator attempted to find out their Sina Weibo (often referred to as Chinese Twitter) accounts for inviting them to participate in this study. Sina Weibo, as China's one of the biggest social media platforms, has 481.4 million registered users (Statista, 2021b). In fact, 72 Sina Weibo accounts of the 98 tourism live streamers were identified. The investigator sent invitations to the 72 potential participants through Sina Weibo private messages. A total of 24 of them replied to the message and 15 agreed to participate in this research. This is the procedure of purposive sampling. The first author then interviewed the 15 participants. However, as data saturation was not achieved at this stage, snowball sampling was further applied to recruit more interview participants. Specifically, the author encouraged the 15 participants to recommend other tourism live streamers they knew to participate in this research after the interviewees. A further seven participants were approached by recommendation. This is the procedure of snowball sampling. Based on the grounded theory, theoretical sampling aims to generate and develop theoretical data. Qualitative research normally used data saturation to justify the sample size (Morse, 2015). As indicated by the personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), data redundancy was approximately achieved after conducting 15 interviews. For this study, redundancy in comments was noted after the 18th interview, and the last four interviews did not provide any new insights into the data. A total of 22 interviewees were conducted using WeChat, one of the most popular social networking APP in China, having more than one billion monthly active users (Yu et al., 2020). Table 1 shows the profile of the interview participants. The participants were aged between 20 and 35. There were 15 female participants and 7 male participants. Time of tourism livestreaming ranged from 4 to 20. The key themes of tourism livestreaming include tourist attractions, outdoor activities, food, leisure activities and shopping. Two criteria were used by the author to select the qualified participants. Firstly, to have a deeper understanding of tourism live streamers’ motivations, the participants who livestreamed their travel experience more than three times are seen as qualified participants. Secondly, to ensure that the tourism live streamers are still active streamers, the participants who livestreamed their travel experience at least once within six months are seen as qualified participants. The interviewees were conducted from March to April 2021.

The main interview questions include: “What drove you to livestream your travel experience?” “What was your goal or expectation of livestreaming your travel experience?” During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked to clarify questions. Each interview was conducted in Mandarin Chinese and lasted 30–45 min. 19 of the interviews were recorded with the verbal consent of participants. As three of the interviewees refused to take audio-recording, the author took notes to record the content of interviews with their oral permission.

3.2 Data analysis

In line with the grounded theory approach, data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously. All interview recordings and notes taken were transcribed into texts for data
analysis. To avoid the possibility of distorting information during the transcription and translation, Chinese manuscripts were used for data analysis. There are four procedures of data analysis. Firstly, to have an overall understanding of the manuscript, the authors attempted to be familiar with the texts by reading the manuscripts repeatedly. Second, the manuscript was divided into themes based on the meanings of codes with the help of NVivo 12. Data analysis followed the procedures of the grounded theory proposed by Charmaz (2006), including initial coding, focused coding and theory construction. Table 2 presents an example of the codebook. Codes related to information were into a theme named information sharing, such as tourism information and travel tips. Codes related to enjoyment were coded into a theme named entertainment, such as interesting and fun. Codes related to presenting their images were coded into a theme named self-presentation, such as presenting myself and obtaining attention. Coded related to money were coded into monetary incentives, such as gift-giving and making money. Codes related to communication with others were coded into a theme named socialization, such as interacting with audiences and communicating with audiences. Third, a member check was applied to ensure the reliability and validity of the data analysis. The author also followed up with five interviewees “to see if the findings represented their opinions and to capture further evidence of their thoughts which is a way to ensure theoretical sampling and saturation”

### Table 1 | Profile of interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant No.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tourist attractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tourist attractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tourist attractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tourist attractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Leisure activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Leisure activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tourist attractions</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Shopping</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2 | Example of codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes (example)</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>Tourism information; Travel information; Information sharing; Share travel experience; Travel tips</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Interesting; Fun; Enjoyment; Avoid boredom; Reduce loneliness</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-presentation</td>
<td>Build an image; Present myself; Obtain attention; Become a celebrity</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monetary incentives</td>
<td>Gift-giving; Receive gifts; Make money, Be rich, Virtual gifts</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>Interact with audiences; Communicate with audiences; Be exposed to audiences; Share emotions with audiences; Share thoughts with audiences</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Information sharing

One of the most important motivations of TLS identified by this study is information sharing. This finding is supported by previous studies, which found that sharing information drives users to use different kinds of social media platforms, such as Facebook and WeChat (Whiting and Williams, 2013; Gan and Li, 2018). Some live streamers argued that they tend to share useful or essential travel information with their audiences. Here is a typical comment:

I am a food streamer. My key task is to share my experiences about the various types of food I tried during travel with my audiences. In fact, I will recommend tasty food and good restaurants to my audiences (Participant No. 7).

In addition to food recommendations, some live streamers pointed out that they tend to share some travel tips with their audiences. One participant mentioned that “my audiences could get many travel trips from my livestreaming. For example, I will teach them how to purchase cheaper tickets and how to find best places for photo-taking” (Participant No. 9). Moreover, some streamers pointed out that they tend to share travel information with disadvantaged groups who cannot afford a trip. For example, one participant remarked, “the majority of my audiences are disadvantaged people, such as poor people and rural migrant workers. Some of them even did not travel before. They are eager to know what is happening outside their life circles. Here is a typical comment:

I would like to share travel information with my audiences to broaden their visions and enrich their life through my livestreaming” (Participant No. 6).

Similarly, some live streamers further pointed out that they enjoy helping others by sharing travel information. The finding was confirmed by previous studies that helping others creates happiness (Post, 2005) and enjoyment (Rosenhan et al., 1981) for themselves. For example, one participant argued that “sharing travel information with people who have never been there before is a sense of achievement for me. I enjoy helping others by sharing travel information” (Participant No. 11).

4.2 Entertainment

In line with previous studies (Ho and See-To, 2018; Liao et al., 2021), entertainment motivation was identified as a significant determinant that affects tourism live streamers’ motivations of livestreaming. Entertainment motivation refers to how social media is fun and entertaining to media users (Eighmey and McCord, 1998). Media users refer to tourism live streamers in this study. With the popularity of social media apps and smartphones, an increasing number of tourists started to livestream their travel experience. As TLS is a relatively new phenomenon, many participants pointed out that TLS is very interesting. One participant said, “I am a person who likes to try new things. TLS is very interesting for me” (Participant No. 4). Moreover, some streamers pointed out livestreaming software is entertaining to use and livestreaming provides them with lots of enjoyment. Here is a typical comment:
In order to attract streamers to use the software, Douyu platform updates the functions or features of the app all the time to make it be fresh for users. It is fun to use it. To be honest, TLS provides me with lots of enjoyment (Participant No. 16).

In addition, some participants have seen TLS as an opportunity to avoid boredom during travel. One participant argued that:

I felt a sense of loneliness sometimes when I traveled alone before. In fact, livestreaming makes me be able to talk with my audiences during the visit. The feeling is great to get positive comments from them. Livestreaming is becoming a driver for my travel now (Participant No. 19).

### 4.3 Self-presentation

In line with previous studies (Al Omoush et al., 2012; Kim and Tussyadiah, 2013; Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Huang and Liu, 2020), another critical motivation of TLS identified by this study is self-presentation. Self-presentation refers to how using TLS to build a particular self-image, thus impacting how other people perceive and treat oneself. Specifically, some participants argued that they tend to build a particular image in their audiences’ minds to obtain their attention through TLS. For example, one participant said, “in order to build a fashionable image in my audiences’ mind, I always livestream my shopping experience, especially the luxury products consumption, such as LV and Gucci. As they felt that I am an expert in the luxury product consumption area, many audiences will ask me to provide suggestions for them related to luxury product consumption” (Participant No. 18). Some participants further highlighted the role of self-presentation in becoming a celebrity. Different from other social media platforms such as blogs (Kaye, 2010), Facebook (Urista et al., 2009) and WeChat (Gan and Li, 2018), the possibility of becoming a celebrity is a new motivation identified by this study in the context of TLS. Many participants argued that with the development and popularity of mobile internet, livestreaming is becoming a method to be an online celebrity through self-presentation. The possibility of becoming an online celebrity drives many participants to livestream their travel experience. Below are a few comments shared by participants:

I was a big fan of Ziqi Li (A famous online celebrity for sharing authentic rural food and life with audiences through Vlogs). I really enjoyed watching her videos. I think that TLS is an opportunity for me to become an online celebrity. Influenced by her, I decided to do a food livestreaming during travel (Participant No. 7).

I started to do TLS after COVID-19 due to the influence of Zhen Ding (an online celebrity famous for a short video clip). He became famous because of a 30-second video clip. After being an online celebrity, he has become the representative of some tourist attractions I admired him and wanted to be him through TLS (Participant No. 17).

### 4.4 Monetary incentive

Unlike other social media platforms, gift-giving is a relatively new function for livestreaming platforms. Previous studies have explored gift-giving intentions (Li and Peng, 2021) and gift-giving behaviors (Yu et al., 2018) from viewers’ perspective. This study found that monetary incentive is becoming an essential motivation for tourism live streamers. Livestreaming platforms allow viewers to purchase virtual gifts (monetary incentive) for live streamers. Many participants have seen virtual gifts (monetary incentives) as a reward or a recognition for them. In fact, the virtual gift as a recognition demonstrates the meaning of their TLS and encourages them to share their travel experience with their audiences through livestreaming. Here is a typical comment:

Getting (virtual) gifts from audiences is a big achievement for me. Money does not tell a lie. You will never spend money on something you dislike. The gifts from my audiences encouraged me to continue the livestream (Participant No. 13).
More importantly, many famous live streamers became rich in the last several years because of obtaining monetary incentives from the audiences. These stories inspired some tourism live streamers to make money and be rich through livestreaming. Below are a few comments shared by participants:

Timo Feng (a famous online celebrity for singing) used to be a kindergarten teacher before becoming a live streamer. She got many fans from Douyu livestreaming platform for singing. Now, she is participating in many TV shows. I heard that she is very rich now and bought a big property in Shanghai now. I dreamt of being rich like her through TLS (Participant No. 14).

To be honest, (virtual) gift is my main income now. In other words, I made a living for livestream. Livestream created many online celebrities in the last several years. They became rich due to livestream. I wanted to be the same as them (Participant No. 18).

4.5 Socializing

Similar to previous studies (Smock et al., 2011; Bautista and Lin, 2017; Ho and See-To, 2018), socializing motivation is another crucial motivation of tourism streamers identified by this study. Many participants believed that TLS is an effective way to interact and communicate with their audiences. Specifically, some participants pointed out that their audiences communicate with them using bullet-screen comments during TLS. Many audiences like to interact with them by requesting them to complete things during the travel. Some participants regarded the audiences as their fans. Therefore, TLS is becoming an important way for many participants to interact with their fans. For example, one participant argued that:

[... in order to attract more audiences to watch my livestream, I tried different types of livestreaming, such as singing, dancing, gaming, and travel. I found that many fans like to watch my travel livestream, especially shopping behaviors. To interact with my fans, I will ask them what to buy and they will provide suggestions for me through bullet-screen comments (Participant 15).

Some participants further pointed out that TLS enables them to stay in touch with their audiences. TLS is seen as a good way to be exposed to their audiences. One participant said:

[... the frequency of being exposed to audiences was a concern for me. I was afraid that my audiences will be tired of me if I livestream every day. However, I was also afraid that my audiences will leave me if I reduce the times of my livestreaming. After a careful consideration, I decided to do food livestream during travel. I found that almost people at all ages love food. I can livestream different types of food experiences with audiences and I do not need to worry about being tired of my audiences (Participant No. 14).

In addition, some participants pointed out that TLS provides an opportunity for them to share their feelings or thoughts with their audiences. Below are a few comments shared by participants:

I am new to TLS. Though only a small number of audiences watched my livestreaming, I still like to share my feelings with them. You know. Sometimes, it is hard to share your personal feelings with people in front of you. However, as I cannot see and touch my audiences, it is easier for me to share my feelings with them. Sharing feelings with my audiences really releases my life pressure (Participant No. 1).

Travel is a relaxing thing for me. I always generated new ideas and thoughts about the world during my visit. TLS makes me be able to share my thoughts immediately with my audiences (Participant No. 2).

5. Discussion and conclusions

Using semi-structured interviews, this study examines the motives that drive tourism live streamers to share their travel experiences based on the grounded theory. Compared to
other social media, TLS is a unique phenomenon that needs further investigation due to “nowness service” (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019) and interaction between live streamers and viewers while TLS (Hu et al., 2017). Figure 1 is the framework of tourism live streamers’ motivations behind travel experience sharing. This study identified five motivations for TLS, including information sharing, entertainment, self-presentation, monetary incentives and socialization. This is the very first empirical study to explore the TLS phenomenon from the perspective of tourism live streamers. Exploring tourism live streamers’ motivations of sharing their travel experiences make a good contribution to existing TLS literature. Below is an explanation of the framework proposed by this study. First, it was found that tourists tend to share useful or important travel information with their audiences through TLS. Some tourists regard TLS as a good opportunity for sharing useful travel tips with their audiences. Some even enjoyed helping others by sharing travel information with audiences who have never visited the places. Second, an interesting/fun experience of using livestreaming platforms, perceived enjoyment of using livestreaming platforms, and avoiding boredom during travel made entertainment be an important motivation that affects tourism live streamers’ motivations of livestreaming. Third, another important motivation of TLS is self-presentation. TLS was seen as an effective method to build a personal image, obtain attention and become a celebrity in terms of self-presentation. Moreover, the monetary incentive was regarded as one of the most important motivations for TLS. To a large extent, money incentive is regarded as recognizing of tourism streamers’ value of livestreaming. Some tourism live streamers even attempted to make a living through TLS. Finally, some tourism live streamers pointed out that the value of socialization drives them to livestream their travel experience with their audiences, including interacting with their audiences, communicating with their audiences, being exposed to their audiences, sharing emotions with their audiences and sharing thoughts with their audiences.
The current study’s findings show both similarities and differences from those identified in prior studies. First, some motivations identified by this study were supported by previous studies which explore individuals’ motivations of using other social media, such as information sharing (Li, 2020; Thompson et al., 2020), entertainment (Erawan, 2016; Plume and Slade, 2018), self-presentation (Huang and Liu, 2020; Taylor, 2020) and socialization (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014; Meng and Leung, 2021). Specifically, information sharing was identified as one of the most important motivations for individuals to share news on social media (Thompson et al., 2020). In the context of tourism, tourists tend to share travel information with others through sharing travel photos on social media (Li, 2020). It was found that entertainment drive individuals to share the content of sponsored advertisements on social media (Plume and Slade, 2018). Specifically, four aspects of entertainment were further identified, including an enjoyable experience (Baek et al., 2011), an entertaining experience (Balakrishnan and Shamim, 2013), an opportunity to relax (Baek et al., 2011) and an opportunity to pass the time (Balakrishnan and Shamim, 2013). This opinion was supported Huang et al. (2010), who found that recreation motive tourists to share travel knowledge on social network sites in the context of tourism. Huang and Liu (2020) found that individuals prefer to present an ideal self on social media; therefore, self-presentation is an important motivation for social media users. The finding was supported by Taylor (2020), who found that self-presentation and self-promotion drive tourists to share travel photos on social media. Meng and Leung’s (2021) study found that socialization is an important factor influencing users’ social media engagement behaviors. This finding was confirmed by Munar and Jacobsen (2014) who found that socialization is an important motivation for tourists to share tourism experiences through social media. In line with previous livestreaming studies (Friedlander, 2017; Skjuve and Brandtzaeg, 2019), information sharing and entertainment were also identified as the most frequently mentioned motivations for tourism live streamers.

Second, the monetary incentive is a new motivation identified by this study. Different from other forms of social media platforms, livestreaming enables viewers to send virtual gifts to streamers during the process of livestreaming (Yu et al., 2018; Li and Peng, 2021). Therefore, the intention to make money through TLS played an important role in attracting tourism live streamers to share travel experiences with their audiences. Though users’ motivations of using social media have been well examined by prior studies, tourism live streamers’ motivations of TLS remain under-researched. Therefore, the motivations of TLS identified by this study not only extend the motivation theory in the context of livestreaming, but also contribute to existing literature related to the use of social media in tourism research.

In addition to the theoretical contribution, this study also generates several practical implications for livestreaming platforms and tourism product providers to attract more tourism live streamers and better serve them. First, given the motivation of information sharing, tourism product providers can design some unique products such as Internet celebrity attractions and food for attracting tourism live-streamers to share their travel experience. Second, as entertainment is an important motivation of livestreaming travel experience, livestreaming platforms should update some features to increase tourism live streamers’ perceived enjoyment of using livestreaming platforms. Thirdly, as monetary incentives drive some tourism live streamers to share their travel experience, livestreaming platforms can allocate more percentages of money from virtual gifts to live streamers to attract more live streamers to use their livestreaming platforms. Finally, COVID-19 has restricted individuals’ physical travel activities, TLS has recently become an important alternative form of tourism. Therefore, tourism product providers need to attract more influential tourism live streamers to promote their products by satisfying their motivations of TLS, such as providing entertainment facilities for the tourism live streamers and promoting them on their official websites and providing monetary incentives for them.
Though this study contributes to existing literature and practical implications for livestreaming platforms and tourism product providers, there are still some limitations of this research. The identified limitations of the research also indicate the potential directions of future research. First, this study only focused on Chinese tourism live streamers and did not compare tourism live streamers from other countries or cultures. As cultural difference was identified as an important factor influencing individuals’ motivations of using social media (Karimi et al., 2014), western tourism live streamers’ motivations of TLS may be different from Chinese tourism live streamers. Therefore, future research can recruit tourism live streamers from Western countries to explore the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western tourism live streamers. Second, given the limitation of a qualitative approach, the findings of this study may not be generalized. Even though, the findings of this study still lay a solid foundation for future research to draw potential research items from this research to design a questionnaire for developing a scale for measuring motivations of TLS. Third, though the demographic variables such as age and difference were identified as factors influencing users’ motivations of using social media (Dhir and Torsheim, 2016), the impacts of demographic variables on tourism live streamers’ motivations of sharing travel experience are overlooked by this study. This research question can be explored by future studies.

References


Further reading

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