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Structuring Place Experience Using Social Media Data

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Abstract

Under the influence of place marketing, the aim of this study is to provide a new perspective on ‘place experience’, and encourage urban designers to focus more on place experience creation. An innovative approach named ‘people-generated image study’ is adopted to examine the theoretical perspective.

Based on a combination of place marketing perspectives and urban design theory, this study considers place experience as a way of transferring specific place knowledge. As a product the place experience can be decomposed into four components containing different types of information, and as a process it can be divided into four steps where each step represents an information delivery. The four steps include defining the theme, setting the event, designing the stage and examining the emotions. Basically, the theme is presented as a story told in a variety of interrelated events on a particular stage. And following the emotion analysis, urban designers can identify the elements that should be preserved and enhanced, and the elements should be removed or replaced. In practice, place experience is obtained with different narratives in different kinds of urban space. Paths, including lanes, alleys, streets, and avenues, provide space for ‘rise’, which is comprised of a group of scenes showing an enlargement both in form and content. Portals, as the point of shift from path to place, are used to display the ‘preview’ of the places, exhibiting the most important characteristics of the ‘climax’. Places, including squares, gardens, and parks, service the ‘climax’, portraying the most dramatic moments of the whole narrative.

In order to examine the theoretical perspective with an empirical case study, this research adopts people-generated image and then develops an innovative approach

combining content analysis with image analysis to analyse the data. Instagram was selected to be the primary digital source for data collection, providing over 3.5 million pieces of data to case studies. Three advanced analytical tools are selected and employed, which include ArcGIS, IBM SPSS Modeler, and Cultural Analytics tools. The data sources involve photographic, text and geo-data. ArcGIS is used to narrow down the acquired data based on the analysis of geographic aggregation. IBM SPSS Modeler provides platform and tools to perform content analysis on textual information. Cultural Analytics tools are used to conduct a descriptive analysis on massive image data.

The multiple case study is conducted in two Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai. Four precincts are selected, including Nanluoguxiang, Tianzifang, Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi, due to their high popularity amongst Instagram users. The comparative study of Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang is designed to examine the theoretical framework for creating themed place experiences. And the analysis of Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi aims to evaluate the implementation of the framework in three kinds of urban space. A series of suggestions are ultimately proposed.

This study brings a new perspective from the discipline of marketing to urban design, persuading urban designers to refresh their understanding of place experience and their skills in creating a specific experience for people. Besides, this study also develops an innovative approach to place experience studies, which will have great potential for application in the near future. However, there are several technical limitations in this study, which concerns the quantitative analysis of people-generated data. This will be the main direction for future research.

Key words: place experience, place marketing, urban design, social media, people-generated image, content analysis, image analysis, Instagram, Beijing, Shanghai

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The term ‘place’ is used to refer to all kinds of places such as cities, city-regions, communities, states and nations (Rainisto, 2003). As local authorities market places as aggressively as companies marketing products and services within the context of place marketing, the traditional understanding of the concept of ‘place experience’ starts to change, and urban designers should become more open to exploring new ideas in promoting a positive place experience. Under these circumstances, Section 1.1 conducts background research involving the development of place marketing and its impact on rethinking the concept of ‘place experience’. Section 1.2 explains the motivations of undertaking the research, which indicate that urban design as one of the main approaches to promoting place experience should seek to offer a more flexible solution by turning its attention towards experience creation. The increasing importance of social media in this process is emphasized. Section 1.3 states the purpose of the research, which aims to help urban designers fulfill the core mission of creating place experiences. Section 1.4 describes the methodology used in the research. An innovative technique based on social media data is introduced. The last Section 1.5 outlines the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Background: Rethinking place experience from a marketing perspective

1.1.1 The place experience

Experience has always been considered as coming from interactions between humans and the physical world. Dilthey (1989) defines it as the process of carrying captured facts and objects into consciousness to be recognized, accepted, and organized, coinciding with the amalgamation of consciousness of external reality and consciousness of self. The process

consists of two steps: the outer side containing the recognition and selection of external objects, and the inner side containing the translation and interpretation of these objects in individual consciousness. The two steps constitute a circular loop between humans and the external world, from contacting with physical objects to developing abstract concepts, followed by contact with the physical world again based on the concepts developed in the earlier step.

When it comes to place experience, place becomes the external basis of experience, representing the real world. The concrete aspects of place, such as the geographical location, the space form, and the physical appearance have been discussed by many urban researchers in considering the potential impact on human experience in everyday urban life. However, they rarely discuss these aspects without connecting them to human consciousness as place can be the place only after being experienced and involved in the conscious mind. Their studies are typically conducted on perceptual experience of the physical environment and conceptual understanding of the identity of place. The research results clearly demonstrate that the human experience of place can be greatly affected by external forces but ultimately determined by internal thoughts, which differs widely among individuals and groups. Different people can therefore have different experiences even in the same place.

This argument that relies on the subjective nature of human experience has been widely presented in the urban studies literature as a flag to indicate that most research projects are aimed at examining people's responses to the physical environment with the purpose of exploring the causal link from the quality of the built environment to personal knowledge construction. The perspective, however, has been challenged in the face of the development of place marketing.

1.1.2 Rethink place experience in the context of place marketing

A competitive environment that became known as the 'market' has emerged with the advent of mass production and consumption in the early 20th century. Almost everything, even cities, on the competitive market can be reduced to a bundle of tangible and intangible traits competing with equals. The competitive pressure among cities and towns, however, has been reported to occur in the mid-19th century (Ward, 1998; Rainisto, 2003; Moilane and Rainisto, 2009; McCann et al, 2009), or earlier (Harvey, 1989; Ashworth and Voogd, 1994; Stigel and Frimann, 2006). There are a few allusions and fragmented files, including posters, advertisements and travel books, on selling specific kinds of places in North America and Europe, such as tourist resorts, railway towns, residential suburbs and the rebirth of industrial cities (Ward, 1998; Rainisto, 2003; McCann et al, 2009). From the early 1970s, when the competitive pressure among many western cities increased with the advent of triple problems of deindustrialization, falling tax base and declining public expenditure (Goodwin, 1993, cited in Kearns and Philo, 1993, 147), numbers of concepts were deemed transferable from marketing discipline to policy making to attract qualified workforces and fix flows of funding from external market. A new field named 'place marketing' emerged soon afterwards, which expanded rapidly during the 1980s.

According to Rainisto (2003) who claims that places can be seen in many aspects as businesses, the purpose of place marketing is to make the place profitable. Smyth (1993) offers a much clearer definition that the purpose of place marketing is to create effective strategies to promote places for certain activities and in some cases to sell for living, consuming and productive activities. Kotler (1993), one of the most outstanding marketing professionals who extended marketing to urban development and management, proposes a five-step plan to develop and implement strategies. This plan includes the following: first, identify and target the segments making up the market; second, position

the firm of offers so that customers have reasons to prefer; third, develop the appropriate mix of product, price, place and promotion; fourth, implement the marketing plan; fifth, evaluate and revise marketing. The first step tends to be overlooked in the current global environment in which places would serve consumers from all over the world, while the rest concerning the position, operation and evaluation is so complex that is still being investigated. Yet despite this, Kotler does freshen up the knowledge of urban development that focuses on upgrading internal facilities but ignores external competitors.

However, considering the competitive market noted above, places should be regarded in analogy with commodities that can be designed, produced and sold to potential customers. Kotler (1993) argues that these potential customers include exporters, investors, manufactures, new residents, tourists and conventioneers who have not been to the place. According to his view, the purpose of place marketing is sending relevant information to these customers for a quick introduction. The information is defined from a marketing perspective as 'product knowledge' that may influence customers' selection. Peter and Olson (2010) describe four levels of product knowledge ranging from an objective account of products to a subjective assessment of customers' responses (see Figure 1). The structure they proposed helps determine the extent of place knowledge that should be transferred in place marketing, which also affects potential customers at four levels (see Figure 2). It is quite clear from the two sets of four-level structures that the knowledge is rooted in special features that are designed by manufacturers, on the other hand, it varies depending on customer's personal background and interests. There is always a gap between the two sides, although considerable efforts have been devoted to narrowing the gap by learning the knowledge stored in customers' heads and improving the knowledge that manufacturers offered.

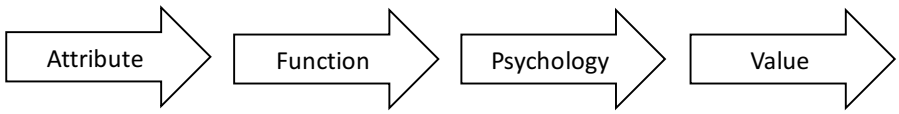


Figure 1 Four levels of product knowledge (Peter and Olson, 2010, 77)

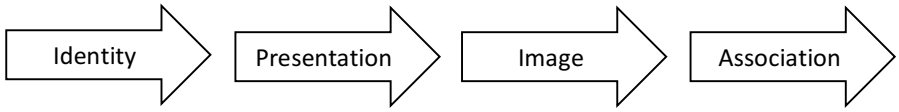


Figure 2 Four levels of place knowledge

Place branding is supposed to be the most effective way to transfer place knowledge from one side to the other. Kapferer (1997, cited in Moilanen and Rainisto, 2008) likens the brand to a catalyst that releases customer's knowledge for separating one product from others. When conducting a place marketing, place branding is often used to cover all forms of place knowledge by developing an attractive logo or a catchy slogan with the name of place, which is conducive to a widening of the knowledge spread. No matter what form it takes, however, the brand should include a summary of beliefs, ideas and impressions that customers have about the reality (Rizzi and Dioli, 2010), more accurately, about what they have experienced and the expectations of what they will come to experience in the place. Gelder (2003) argues that 'brands are created, stimulated and applied by people working in organizations seeking to create worthwhile experiences for their customers that will induce behavior beneficial to the organization' (cited in Govers and Go, 2009, 12), which means that brands are made up of consumable experiences produced for specific purposes.

From the mid 20th century, when consumerism spreads, some scholars pointed out that people need to pay for the daily supplies as well as the daily experience (Moore, 1965, cited in Zukin, 1995). As Pine II and Gilmore (1999) said in their introduction to 'the

experience economy', instead of living in the earlier agrarian economy, industrial economy and service economy, which offer functional commodities, goods and services, people in the current experience economy are provided experiences that are lacking in functionality but rich with memorable events and stimulated sensations personally created in them. Based on the view that treats experience as a commodity, many academic studies have been conducted in Disneyland in which visitors can be offered dramatizing ideals and dreams, to develop an in-depth understanding of how to create a positive experience for people.

Disneyland has a great atmosphere that is filled with accomplishments, joys and hopes. The brand has a powerful image and positive associations with people from all over the world, sending them forth as a source of courage and inspiration (Sorkin, 1992). The Disney experience is constructed in a complex process, and different studies have different perspectives on it. For example, Zukin (1995) argues that the experience is based on the ideal form of public space, which is visualized by a coherent set of tableaux. Klingmann (2010), however, believes that the Disney experience is gained through the well-defined cruise liner that comprises many different stories. In addition to these authors who focus on the theme park itself, Bryman (2004) extends his study to 'the Disneyization of society', which indicates that the Disney experience has been applied to many aspects of urban life. The nature of the Disneyization, according to Bryman (2004, 4), is 'to remove consumers' need for the prosaic fulfilling of basic needs and to entice them into consumption beyond mere necessity', in response to the world of homogeneity and sameness created by the 'McDonaldization'. Sircus (2001) has taken notice of this phenomenon prior to Bryman (2004). He extends the idea to the field of place making and develops a new concept called 'invented places'. This concept concerns the deliberate creation of unique experience with the purpose of dealing with the standardization of

places. It is consistent with the principles of experience economy that require experiences to compete on their individual uniqueness. His innovation lies in his attempt to deliver an experience directly to users. He reduces the role of the physical environment in improving people's subjective experience of living and instead focus on strategies for creating a well-conceived experience and design requirements placed on the built environment.

1.2 Motivation: New challenges for contemporary urban design

Urban design as a term was coined in the late 1950s (Carmona et al, 2003, 3), whereas as an organized design activity it can be traced back as far as the end of 19th century when Howard (1989) conceived the idea of the Garden City. He aims to relieve the overgrown and congested industrial city and social conflict by infusing many utopian ideologies such as self-sufficiency and self-governing, cooperation and equality in this concept. He proposes a set of design principles and guidelines on land use, functional division and urban administration, with the intention to use the power of machines, like trains and manufacturing facilities in factories, to solve city problems. Following Howard's vision and action, Corbusier and CIAM published *The Athens Charter* in 1933. This report is titled 'the functional city' with the aim of constructing a harmonious and cooperating utopia in which men, nature and machines could be reconciled. The work covers four aspects of urban life including living, working, recreation and circulation. These aspects have never previously been discussed in such a systematic manner as they are imposed by radical changes in social structure at that time such as the rise of the working class following the industrial revolution. Cities as the result of mass production of housings and communities in this report are constructed by assembling a collection of geometric models from building elements to traffic essentials. Although the views presented in *The*

Athens Charter do have a significant impact on modern urban design that aims to organize resources, services and activities into a rational system, they have been criticized for being inhumanistic and causing rude space and rigid organization, which may generate new city problems and social conflicts.

Instead of focusing on the power of machines manifested in the physical construction of cities, many other scholars conduct research on human responses to the built environment with the aim of making cities more livable and sustainable. For example, Lynch (1960) and Cullen (1961) examine the individual's perceptual experience in an urban environment, while Gehl (2006) analyses the behavior patterns of people in public space, and more researchers conduct studies on the collective life experience within an urban area (Jacobs, 1961, Fischer, 1976; Madanipour, 1996). No matter where these authors stand, their research studies are undertaken for citizens and local communities who perform continuously and have actual interactions with cities.

Place marketing, however, attempts to attract potential customers who may know very few about the place. Relph (1976, 52) defines these potential customers as 'vicarious insiders' who gain second-hand experience from a variety of informational media including social networks, newspapers, magazines, television and the internet, which differ from residents and local visitors who have real experience of the place. With social media now becoming the major means of daily information exchange, the content generated by ordinary people based on their own experience in various social media applications has taken the place of recommendations made by professionals such as cultural journalists and travel agents to be one of the most persuasive marketing materials, as it has been specifically tailored to individual characteristics and preferences. When potential customers start their search online, they show more concern for the

personalized content in addition to basic information, and they tend to be more interested in the content published by those who share the same beliefs and values with them.

Urban designers in this case should pay more attention to three aspects: at first, the actual experience of those who are willing to share with public; secondly, the contributions of their experience to the stories they post on social media; and thirdly, the impact of their stories on potential customers' decisions. In fact, the existential significance of creating an experience that makes people feel safe and comfortable has been widely acknowledged in urban design literature, which has been briefly discussed above. However, urban designers tend to intervene in people's experience in an indirect manner. Based on the belief that human experience is largely affected by the quality of the built environment, they make efforts to improve the perceptual quality of space and aesthetic appearance of buildings and landscapes. For example, Booth (1983) discusses different forms of enclosed space that help create a positive perceptual experience. Moughtin (1992) emphasizes the aesthetic value of focal point and the continuous surface formed by surrounding buildings. They also attempt to increase the quality of public life, to improve the social order by changing the physical environment, as Howard (1989) and Corbusier (1933) had done before.

When urban designers are dedicated to shaping a better built environment, they would express their self-consciousness that consists of attitudes and beliefs about human, society and natural aesthetics. As Moughtin (1999, 4) has defined, urban design is 'the method by which man create a built environment that fulfills his aspirations and represents his values'. However, no matter how many ideas they have brought to the place, they design for meeting the needs of people who stay and use the place. Urban designers have known that people need to build a spiritual connection to the place, so that they can feel the place belongs to them. For example, residents assign self-consciously or unselfconsciously

particular meanings to the place by participating as an integral component of it. They trigger the birth of new characters of the place and change the physical appearance that can be appreciated in other visitors' perceptual experience. Place experience can thus be regarded as a one-way communication, transferring specific messages from designers to users, or from insiders to outsiders. The effectiveness of the process may be reduced by the subjective nature of human consciousness, as Barthes (1968) said, the reader always tends to construct new text in the act of reading regardless of the meanings proposed by author. Likewise, the outside visitors may distort the messages given by designers and inside residents.

Therefore, in addition to recognizing the importance of individual experience to the success of place marketing, urban designers should put more effort into finding an effective way of passing a range of interrelated information in the form of place experience. The way can be described as a set of arrangements that enable people to perceive and understand what they should know about the place, then persuade them to share their knowledge with new visitors, and fulfill new visitors' expectations that arise from materials provided by previous visitors. This does not, however, mean that urban designers should reduce their focus on the quality of the built environment, but instead that, they should turn their attention toward the causal relationship from an experience they expect to create to the design of the built environment. To be precise, urban designers should identify and characterize the experience they intend to provide for people then combine different skills and resources to enhance it in creating the built environment, which is different from traditional practices.

1.3 Purpose: Structuring the place experience

From a marketing perspective, positive place experience increases the attractiveness and value of the place. This study, however, does not attempt to discuss the definition of 'positive', as there is no absolute positive experience that can be successfully made. It is determined by the attitudes of people who have already used the place. Urban designers in this case should be concerned with the knowledge that people acquire through their experience. This is the major factor that helps people recognize their experience as a positive or negative one.

The purpose of this study is to help urban designers convey accurate information in the form of place experience, enabling people to gain the knowledge specifically provided for them. It is primarily based on an in-depth understanding of place experiences, which focuses on means of information exchange between designers and users. A new perspective on place experience should be fostered here, which considers place experience as a way of transferring specific place knowledge. Place experience as a product can thus be decomposed into several components containing different types of information, and as a process it can be divided into multiple steps where each step represents an information delivery. This is defined as 'structuring place experience'.

What is more important to urban designers during the process, however, is figuring out how to integrate the information into their design of the build environment step by step. From an interdisciplinary perspective covering aspects of place marketing and urban design, this study proposes a strategic framework and a set of design guidelines for increasing the dissemination of information in different types of urban space. This is defined as 'constructing place experience'.

1.4 Methodology: Case research and people-generated image study

Taking a place marketing perspective, this study aims to encourage urban designers to include the place experience creation in their ongoing work rather than treat it merely as a desirable goal. It does not attempt to deny the place experience to be a subjective assessment based on the interactions people have with the physical environment, but instead conduct an analysis of this experience to test the theoretical model proposed.

Case research is adopted in this study as it is a method that is specifically designed to analyse a specific situation. It has been applied in almost all studies of place experience, although it has also been criticized as being too subjective. The case study is conducted in two Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai, for the following reasons. At first, China can be one of the most homogenous countries in the world in which the majority of residents are native Chinese speakers. It helps to ensure that participants in this case study do have something in common with each other, such as the same cultural background and aesthetic appeal. Secondly, Internet users in China are not allowed to directly access some social media services such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This simplifies data collection and analysis to some extent, which may be conducive to testing a new technique that needs further improvement. Those Internet users who can break through the restrictions are familiar with the rules of the Internet-based social environment, so they do not generate invalid data that may reduce the reliability of research results.

To reduce the subjective nature of case research, a method named people-generated image study is used. This is not a new approach as it has been adopted by Lynch (1960) who attempted to focus more attention on the actual experience of people living in cities. The term ‘image’, according to Lynch (1960), refers to mental representation of external reality obtained from personal experience. In this research project, however, the ‘image’

also refers to the visible impression obtained by the camera, which can make the personal experience visible and accessible. The advantage of this method is that it can help researchers focus on what people are really interested in by analysing their photographs taken and shared in a free state. The popularity of social media services in recent years do facilitate the implementation of this method. It enables mass photographs collection through free application programming interfaces (APIs) and promotes the application of quantitative methods in this image study, which helps to increase the objectivity and reliability of research results. However, large number of previous projects are dedicated to numerical and textual data mining, but neglecting the quantitative visual analysis of photographic data due to technical limitations. It is under such circumstance that this study attempts to improve the quality of quantitative analysis of photographic images in addition to investigate the potential use of social media data in visualising the collective place experience. The analytical technique used in this study is based on a combination of cultural analytics and content analysis, which are responsible for descriptive analysis and interpretive analysis.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is presented as follows:

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical foundation. It starts with a literature review of the concept of ‘place experience’, consisting of discussions on perceptual experience and conceptual understanding. Taking a marketing perspective, a new interpretation concerning ‘structuring place experience’ is proposed, corresponding to the stage of conceptual understanding. Place experience is considered to comprise four components, including theme, event, stage, and emotion. To put the new idea into urban design

practice, a set of detailed design guidelines are provided, concerning the construction of place experience in three different kinds of urban public space.

Chapter 3 introduces research methods. In addition to case research, this chapter concentrates on the utilization of people-generated data that are collected from social media networks. The data sources involve image, text and geo-data that have been actively uploaded onto Instagram. This is an innovative approach which combines content analysis with image analysis, supported by a variety of software programs and tools including Microsoft Excel, ArcGIS, IBM SPSS Modeler and Image J.

Chapter 4 presents four case studies in the form of two comparative analyses. Four urban precincts – Nanluoguxiang, Tianzifang, Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi, are selected from Beijing and Shanghai. The first comparative analysis of the visitor experience in Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang is designed to examine the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 2, which attempts to enhance the capacity of creating a themed place experience. The second analysis of Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi is performed to evaluate the implementation strategies which also proposed in Chapter 2. A number of improvements are given to make those strategies more effective.

Chapter 5 gives a summary of the whole study, including potentialities and limitations of the study, and expected direction of future research work.

Chapter 2. Theory

The human experience of place is generally considered as a process to acquire and develop knowledge of a specific place. According to Tuan (1977), the process involves a variety of modes, ranging from the passive senses of sight, smell, taste, and touch, to active perception and interpretation. In the field of urban design that aims to making urban environment more attractive and comfortable, most scholars believe that human experience is strongly influenced by external stimuli. Large number of research projects have therefore been dedicated to analysing the experience, in order to identify the environmental factors affecting people's attitude and behavior toward urban surroundings. During the analysis, however, researchers had to realize that human experience is driven by subjective intention, which differs widely among individuals and groups. Due to their subjective nature, different people can have different experiences even in the same place. The human experience of place can thus be defined as an inherent part of living in the real world, which can be affected by external forces but ultimately determined by internal thoughts.

In the field of place marketing, the individual subjectivity is strongly emphasized. Just like the product sold to certain customers, the goods and services that a place can offer are marketed to specific buyers and users. Kotler (1993) thought these people have decided advantages over place sellers and designers. This means that only people who actually experience a place are eligible to determine whether it is good or not. The analysis of current and potential buyers is, therefore, a key success factor in implementing urban regeneration projects. Given the target audiences proposed by Kotler (1993, 20), which are comprised of 'goods and service producers, corporate headquarters and regional offices, outside investment and export markets, tourism and hospitality business,

and new residents', what they have in common is that they are unfamiliar with a place whereas they all have certain expectations about the place arising from how it is portrayed. The human experience of place in this case is a process to explore and evaluate the possibilities to meet their expectations. According to this view, in this chapter, the 'place experience' is not just the natural process or the consequence of understanding the real world, but also an amalgamation of environment, services and goods that supports people' ideas and satisfies their requirements.

To build a bridge between the two sides and develop an in-depth understanding of place experience, Section 2.1 first defines it as a natural process consisting of two stages: the perceptual experience and the conceptual understanding. As a process place experience varies depending on the degree of familiarity with the place, whereas as the consequence place experience is always the knowledge gained to make the mental association with the place. Based on literature review, this section discusses a range of factors that affect the quality of perceptual experience and conceptual understanding. Section 2.1 reflects the intention of generating concept and separating it from physical objects and events, with increasing amount of knowledge acquired in continuous interaction with place environment, while Section 2.2 proposes a structure that aims to rethink the process in a reverse the process. Taking a marketing perspective, the concept held be people is determined by urban designers and marketers. They associate the concept with place by integrating relevant information into physical reality in a variety of ways, then people can keep reinforcing the concept with this information in their interactions with physical environment. To implement the structure in urban design projects, Section 2.3 develops a set of design guidelines on providing accurate information in different types of urban public space.

2.1 Understanding place experience: Literature review of place experience

The mainstream thinking in philosophical discussion of 'experience' is based on a premise that the experience comes from interactions between humans and the real world, coinciding with the amalgamation of self-consciousness and the consciousness of external objects. From this perspective, the experience is a real-world based experience, delivering the real world into the human mind. Dilthey (1989) described it as a process of carrying captured facts and objects to the consciousness to be recognized, accepted, and organized into the reality of what people believe.

In the definition of 'place experience', place becomes the external basis of experience, representing the real world. The concrete aspects of place, such as the geographical location, the space form, and the physical appearance are the primary source of human experience. They are environmental stimuli for sensory experience (Tuan, 1977), stimulating the senses of sight, touch and kinesthesia. With these sensory inputs, people become aware of the existence of space then start to move into it. During the process, their sensory awareness is further increased by their responses to changes in space, for example 'the changes from light to shade, from hot to cold, from noise to silence…' (Bacon, 167, 20). From psychological perspectives, the information obtained from such sensory experience provides the foundation for human perception (Bertenthal, 1996), enabling people to make decisions on assessing their surroundings.

Related research activities in the field of urban design have therefore concentrated on the environmental factors affecting human sensory and perceptual experience. Ewing and Clemente (2013) defined these factors as 'perceptual qualities', involving such as the enclosure, the complexity, the coherence, and the legibility, which may elicit different

reactions in different people. These differences can be observed and assessed objectively by trained researchers (Ewing and Clemente, 2013), as many classic works have shown (Sitte, 1889; Lynch, 1960; Cullen, 1961; Gehl, 1987; Whyte, 1988). In these academic works, the environment was decomposed into many interrelated components in terms of the space form, the landscape organization and the activity involvement. A number of design principles were proposed to improve the quality of these components and the approaches to assembling them, in order to further enhance human sensory and perceptual experience.

In the subsequent interpretation, however, the individual subjectivity becomes the predominant factor that affects the development of abstract concept in consciousness. According to Relph (1976), this refers to the conceptualization of the identity of place as well as the final production such as the image of place. He argued that the process is not a selective abstraction of objective reality but an intentional interpretation of what is or what is believed to be. This emphasizes the significance of human intention in place experience, instead of the reference to objective reality. Many academic works simplified the process to developing a sense of connection (Relph, 1976; Watson and Bentley, 2007) or a sense of belonging (Carmona et al, 2003), which means that people always tend to explore and understand the elements and attributes associated with them. Then the place experience becomes diverse and complex.

Relph (1976) tried to explain this phenomenon by assessing the degree to which people get involved in a place. He defined the people who tend to stay a part of a place as ‘insiders’. Depending on the degree of involvement and the amount of knowledge acquired, Relph (1976) divided the ‘insideness’ to ‘vicarious insideness’, ‘behavioural insideness’, ‘empathetic insideness’, and ‘existential insideness’.

The first ‘vicarious insideness’ refers to the second-hand experience gained from a broad range of cultural and informational media, like books, magazines, blogs, paintings, photographs, and films. The quality of such experience is determined by the combined effects of author’s skills of description and audience’s empathetic inclinations. In the mind of vicarious insiders, it is highly possible to create an expectation of the views and activities that are included in other descriptions. This point has been considered in developing place marketing programs, as an advertising strategy that induces people to come and satisfy their expectations. The second ‘behavioural insideness’ reflects direct and immediate mode of experience, consisting of being in a place and seeing the place as a set of sensible objects and activities. Such insideness is achieved by the sensory responses to physical presence of the place, but without any emotional involvement. This is a process to increase the sense of ‘hereness’ (Cullen, 1961, 29), mostly based on the insiders’ visual perception of the distinct patterns, structures and content of the place. The third ‘empathetic insideness’ refers to the emotional understanding of the meaning of place. On one hand, the meaning of place stems from the symbols assigned by local residents and authorities who have particular feelings and thoughts in terms of the place, yet on the other hand, the meaning needs to be received and interpreted by these insiders in their own emotions. Unlike other ‘insideness’, the last ‘existential insideness’ describes a close and unbreakable bond between the real insiders who own a place and the place in which they are fully accepted, like a family and their house, or citizens and their city. It is the insideness that people have become an inherent part of the place and the place has also become a source of them.

These four levels of ‘insideness’, apparently, are linked together in a progressive order, in which each level is strongly affected by the last level and directly affects the next level. People deepen their understanding of place in such process, from unfamiliar to familiar,

and make their thoughts and concepts much clearer. From the perspective of place marketing, most target audiences are vicarious insiders who know little about a place but still have certain expectations. They need accurate and sufficient information to help them move into the next level, and they have specific demands for satisfying their needs and desires. Either when they perceive the place or interpret it, they carry out these intentions under their own rules. The following sections discuss the issue from two aspects. At first, based on the belief that for quickly responding to an unfamiliar environment people tend to gather basic information through simple and direct ways in their perceptual experience, Section 2.1.1 selects and analyses four perceptual qualities that may have significant impact on the amount and the quality of information obtained immediately. In the next Section 2.1.2, people's subjective interpretation of place is believed to be based on the context they occur. The concrete aspects of place are signified by a series of defined or undefined signs, which have direct impact on people's understanding of place.

2.1.1 The perceptual experience of the physical environment

From the psychological perspective, sensation and perception are initial stages of interacting with physical environment, preceding the thoughts and actions (Marr, 1982; Ungerleider and Mishkin, 1982, citied in Bertenthal, 1996). Sensation refers to the process of sensing environment through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, while perception involves the organization and interpretation of these sensory inputs in an interconnected whole. Due to the ability to provide more sensory information than the other senses combined (Carmona et al, 2003), visual perception dominates the human perceptual experience. Tuan (1977, 17) has even said that 'the organization of human space is uniquely dependent on sight'. Thus, the applied research projects on perceptual experience are generally conducted in visual dimension, for characterizing the physical

environment in a number of perceptual qualities and measurable metrics (Clemente and Ewing, 2013). In considering the importance assigned to them in the literature and the potential effects on direct and immediate perception of an unfamiliar place, there are four perceptual qualities to be discussed in this section, including enclosure, convexity, focal point, and engagement.

In discussing outdoor space, Carmona et al (2003) made a clear distinction between 'positive space' and 'negative space'. They pointed out that the amount of enclosure and the degree of convexity are essential for creating a positive space (Alexander, 1977; Carmona et al, 2003). Firstly, an enclosed space with definite boundaries makes people perceive it as an entity (Spreiregen, 1965), so that the space can be separated both geographically and spiritually from the surroundings. This is conducive to assigning special meaning to the space in subsequent interactions. Basically, an ideal enclosed space is formed by lining street and plaza with unbroken building fronts (Clemente and Ewing, 2013), thus providing a sense of 'room' (Sitte, 1889) with spatial containment (Carmona et al, 2003). The people staying in the room-like space feel safe and protected (Tibbalds, 1992), as their instinctive panic for potential infinity and unpredictable chaos can be relieved by measurable space and predictable situation. Besides, the enclosed space provides people a sense of 'hereness' that refers to a relevant position of their body in a spatial context (Cullen, 1961). People begin to get involved in the spatial structure as a dynamic element rather than an outside observer with the sense of 'hereness'. This can help them understand the spatial arrangement of objects, and investigate their relationships with these objects in a specific organizational context.

The degree of convexity is a concept derived from the discussion of 'enclosure'. Taking a geometric perspective, Alexander (1977, 519) defined that 'a space is convex when a line joining any two points inside the space itself lies totally inside the space', while a space is

non-convex when ‘some lines joining two points lie at least partly outside the space’. Clearly revealed in his brief discussion, the concept is not only associated with the degree of enclosure and the shape of space, but also influence the behavior of pedestrian. While looking at the figure he proposed and considering each end point as the opening of space, the point becomes the portal of entry as well as the first vantage point for viewing the whole space. Apparently, the convex space has a strong sense of entering, forcing people to move through the space, paralleling with the line that joining two end points. And a sense of stability is also created by eliminating unseen corner with increasing degree of containment. Thus people have the courage to stay here longer. By contrast, the non-convex space has more varied and complex perimeter that may raise the possibility of passing. People who come into the space tend to keep moving around and try to explore more valuable information, in order to finally have a clearer perception of the environment. This does not mean that all non-convex spaces are negative. For example, the L-shaped space gives a strong hint for turning the corner, which is advocated by Cullen (1961). He defined it as a kind of variation on the closed vista, and believed that it may arouse the pedestrians’ expectations of finding something new and interesting. In his empirical study, such a non-convex space is able to offer dramatic moments and views for attracting visitors who are interested in them.

Focal point is the primary stimulus for visual perception. Cullen (1961) regarded it as the proof of being possessed, which indicates that the space has been imposed with a certain meaning. Alexander (1977, 608) argued that the focal point gives space ‘a strong and steady pulse’, drawing people into the space. Their opinions reflect the intrinsic value of focal point, namely, embodying the distinctive characteristics and inviting people to come into contact with them. There are many different forms of focal point, ranging from artifacts to natural landscapes, which serve different kinds of space. According to Sitte

(1889), the focal point in an open square is generally possessed by the exterior wall of major public building, a church or a town hall, hinting at the acceptability of large gathering in a solemn atmosphere. Spreiregen (1965, 77) decorated this paradigm with more specific details, he described that 'a long plaza can have prominent focal buildings at its ends, as well as a sculpture group in the center; …'. While in an open market in which people do mundane things of everyday life, the position is occupied by fountain (Sitte, 1889), evoking the lively atmosphere of the place that embodies the mundane character. Besides these artifacts, Dee (2001) additionally emphasized the significance of natural landscapes, involving trees, mountains, tors, craters, and waterfalls, which have strongly vertical form that contrast with the horizontal context (Cullen, 1961; Dee, 2001). He argued that such natural characters should be preserved and enhanced in creating focal point. Lynch (1960) has similar thoughts in terms of it, whereas unlike other scholars who focus on the focal points standing close to the center of square (Sitte, 1889; Spreiregen, 1965; Alexander, 1977; Moughtin, 1992) or placing along the edges (Dee, 2001), he proposed the concept of 'distant focus', referring to the great hill or a golden dome that can be seen from many angles and distances. The high degree of visibility makes it useful in assisting spatial orientation on a larger scale but also makes it possible to represent the most important factor that contributes to the expression of the spirit of place.

In addition to those stationary objects, there is another active kind of focus: the human activity in the public realm. Defined as the site of public life, the social dimension of open space has been mentioned frequently in discussions of urban design. These discussions and commentaries are based on the observation of the relationship between human activities and space, in order to make the public open space more responsive to users' needs. Whereas, for visitors, especially the first-time visitors, the observation is also an effective way to learn about how the space is actually used. The process can be

performed in sequence, from ‘passive engagement’ to ‘active engagement’ (Carmona et al, 2003, 166). Carmona et al. (2003, 166) suggested that the primary form of passive engagement is people-watching, not only for watching the buildings, the landscaping, the public facilities, the paving materials, and other physical elements, but also for watching people and their activities. As Whyte (1980, 19) has said, ‘what attracts people most, …, is other people’. Gehl (2006) has conducted investigations on the selection of watching points. He suggested that the sites adjacent to the most trafficked pedestrian routes are used most, allowing observers to watch as many people as possible. These people, for observers, is not only an appealing feature, more importantly, they provide the basic information about the place, like the major activities, the direction of the entrance, the opening times and peak periods. In order to assist observers in gathering the information, many studies were devoted to the designing of sitting space, involving the amount of seats, the type and the height of seating, the materials of benches and so on (Whyte, 1980; Marus and Francis, 1997; Gehl, 2006). However, in addition to people, Mikoleit (2011) presented another dynamic scenario that the shopping bags on pedestrians’ shoulders are observable objects as well for acquiring shopping information around the place. Based on her description, the actual observation can be made in any reasonable conditions, even in the pedestrian movement. The active engagement involves more direct contacts with space and the people within it (Carmona et al, 2003). The character of the contacts varies, depending on the context in which people occur. Gehl (2006, 15) proposed a scale of ‘contact intensity’, ranging from ‘close friendships’, ‘friends’, ‘acquaintances’, to ‘chance contacts’, and ‘passive contacts’. Each contact form corresponds to a kind of personal relationship, linking people with their partners in certain actions and events. Apparently, different contact forms have different requirements for event management and environment improvement. Thus when Gehl (2006) suggested the mixed pattern that

includes at least two contact forms, he actually agreed with the idea of mixed-use in built environment. As Tibbalds (1992, 36) has suggested, a site should be specified 'two or more uses, …', for example, a single building that combines residential, office and retail space together (Lang, 2005), or an urban quarter consisting of housing, arts, culture and entertainment areas. Many designers believe that the mixed-use development can help create a rich and diverse environment, making the place more attractive to visitors. While for the basic needs of people in perceptual experience, it provides effective ways to obtain sufficient information from more sources.

In brief, when the perceptual experience is defined as the process of collecting relevant information then providing a preliminary analysis to subsequent understanding and interpretation, the most important to new visitors is to receive clear and accurate information as much as possible. The perceptual qualities selected and discussed above have significant effects on such collection. Enclosure and convexity are the quality of a place that makes its space form recognizable and predictable, while focal point and engagement are the quality that displays the content contained in the space. They cooperate to provide essential information and guidance to first-time visitors then make an immediate impression on them, so that the visitors can conduct an initial evaluation of the physical environment.

2.1.2 The conceptual understanding of the identity of place

'Identity' is an ambiguous term as it varies in different definitions. Taking a wide range of perspectives, many research projects are conducted on such as 'gender identity', 'ethnic and national identity', 'cultural identity', 'identity politics' and so on. These issues are not isolated from a basic concept that identity is something unique that exist undisturbed over time (Tomlinson, 2003; Buckingham, 2008). Erikson (1959, cited in Relph, 1976, 45)

stated that ‘the term identity … connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself … and a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others’. Based on similar ideas, Hirsch (1982) identified two aspects of ‘identity’: sortal-coverage and continuity. By these definitions, the identity of a place, apparently, refers to the intrinsic qualities of the place and the distinct impression which allows it be differentiated from other places. It can be examined from various perspectives. While Agnew (1987, cited in Cresswell, 2004) argued that the actual location is the basis of considering the identity of place, Massey (1995) thought it involves many other singular characteristics, such as local cultures and traditions, accents and uses of language. Madanipour (2013) additionally pointed out that the identity of place consists of a large number of features developed during different historical periods. Govers and Go (2009) have a comprehensive understanding that the identity is about the characteristics caused by historical, political, religious and cultural discourses, reflecting the influence of power struggles. Based on these views, the identity of place can be regarded as a mixed product of coordinating geography-related, culture-related, society-related and history-related elements.

However, like any other concrete reality that needs to be considered in relation to human consciousness, the identity of place has been widely regarded as a sense of connection (Relph, 1976; Watson and Bentley, 2007) or a feeling of belonging (Carmona et al, 2003; Rose, 1995), emphasizing the spiritual dimension of the identity of place. Eyles (1985, cited in Rose, 1995) believed that the identity of place is rooted in people’s minds, and it must be interpreted in a certain social or cultural circumstance in which the interpreter can find himself and build a bond with the place. In this case, the natural meaning of those elements that comprise the identity of place may be obscured in people’s subjective assessment of the place, or may be replaced by new meanings that are intentionally created to develop a concept for the place. In order to explain this phenomenon, many

researchers start work on symbolism in the built environment. They regard concrete aspects of place as a number of defined or undefined signs, so that these aspects can be associated with any meaning and value for any particular interpretation. The built environment has therefore been interpreted and understood as a container of culture and ideology (Carmona et al, 2003). From the semiotic perspective, Peirce (Hoopes, 1991) proposed three kinds of signs. In the sequence from 'denotation' to 'connotation' (Eco, 1968), the first is the iconic sign that has direct similarity with an object, denoting the function or the role of the object. The second is the indexical sign that has material relationship with an object, associating the object with another object or fact. These two signs have relatively stable meanings to most people, as they cannot exist beyond the physical features of object. While the third symbolic sign that needs to be understood in certain social and cultural context often means different things to different people.

The iconic, the indexical, and the symbolic signs are inseparably interwoven in human experiences of places. The capability of recognizing these signs determines the degree of conceptual understanding of the identity of place. This can be seen clearly in some empirical studies of urban culture. For example, when Madanipour (2007, 14) discussed the supernatural character of temple in ancient cities, he revealed the three kinds of signs, 'religious and secular were intertwined in the Greek and Roman cities, where the law courts and the temples flanked the agora and the forum. … Temples were spread across the town to facilitate a close relationship between the gods and the town's everyday activities. The location of temples related to their gods' particular area of expertise, as well as their position in the hierarchy'. In this short description, the iconic sign refers to the venue for a specific type of activity, while the indexical sign is pointed to the God, and the symbolic sign means the coexistence of ritual and mundane, representing a dualism of the supernatural and the natural. Madanipour is a well-trained researcher, he is

capable of extracting accurate information from a mass of material and discovering the true identity of place. Whereas other visitors who are unfamiliar with ancient Greek and Roman cities may only recognize the iconic signs and indexical signs, based on their limited knowledge and sensory perceptions of environment and activities. They may know nothing about how the worship of God affects the construction of cities, so they can't grasp enough symbolic signs to fully understand the identity. Besides, it is important to note that new visitors may tend to recognize iconic and indexical signs as they will be easily understood. The information contained in these two kinds of signs are clear enough for new visitors to establish an initial relationship with place. Whereas these simple messages cannot satisfy the return visitors who are eager to refresh their memories then deepen their knowledge of the place. They may leave the iconic and indexical signs aside and focus on exploring the symbolic meaning for broadening the range of ideas in their minds.

In summary, when people's interpretation of place is believed to be supported by their subjective understanding of meanings associated with place and the deliberate creation of new meanings, the concrete aspects of place can be signified by a number of signs. Lane (2000, cited in Carmona et al, 2003, 93) has defined three kinds of signs, involving the iconic signs, the indexical signs and the symbolic signs. The people who are unfamiliar with place tend to recognize and assess the iconic and the indexical signs, as these signs can be easily understood based on their perceptual knowledge. While for people who have sufficient understanding of place and eager to extend their experience, the symbolic signs are more important.

2.2 Structuring place experience: A new interpretation from a marketing perspective

The existential significance of deliberately creating place experience has been widely acknowledged in urban design literature. Almost all professionals and design guidelines have stressed that the primary aim of urban design is to create an experience that makes people feel safe and comfortable and inspires them with distinctive characteristics. This point of view is based on the belief that human experience is largely affected by the quality of the built environment, and the quality is directly determined by urban designers and the people who used to live in the place. Place experience can be regarded as a one-way communication to some extent, transferring specific messages from designers to users, or from insiders to outsiders. Many researchers have seen the gap that exists between the 'intended messages' and the 'perceived messages' (Knox and Pinch, 2006, 208), so to speak, the outside visitors may distort the messages given by designers and inside residents.

Urban designers are always committed to reduce or eliminate the incompatibility, whereas, they are more likely to intervene in people's experience in an indirect manner. They concern themselves with the creation of physical environment and its potential for the development of individual and collective consciousness. For example, they conduct empirical studies from a visual-aesthetic standpoint, focusing on individual aesthetic preferences toward urban spatial forms, building shapes, and landscape features, with the aim to promote a visual appreciation of urban environment. They also think about the environmental factors that may affect the quality of public life, such as the uses and activities which open space contains. They develop a series of design guidelines and suggestions to help create an ideal environment in which people can obtain positive

experience. Then a question is raised: do urban designers come up to their expectations by applying those design principles learned from previous empirical studies? The answer is probably no.

To address this issue, this section aims to strengthen the causal relationship from designed experience to the built environment. This requires urban designers to identify and delineate the experience they tend to provide for people in details, and then think about available skills and resources of enhancing such experience in shaping the built environment. Urban designers need to get close to the real concerns of people during the process, rather than keeping focus on the aesthetic qualities of physical environment. This raises the possibility of the direct intervention in human subjective experience. The idea stems from the notion of 'experience economy' (Joseph Pine II and Gilmore, 1998) which states that experiences have replaced goods and services to become the basis of the current economy. The experience is considered similar to goods and services that can be deliberately designed and manufactured. Likewise, the place experience may be able to replace the built environment and activities to be the primary focus of attention of urban designers, for making places more responsive to visitors' specific expectations.

In fact, a few such studies have been conducted on how to enhance sense of place. According to Relph (1976), it refers to a range of awareness of a place, involving the simple recognition for orientation, the capacity to respond to the identities and develop intimate relationships with the place. He proposed a method named 'authentic place-making' for raising a full awareness of place, which actually reflects his thinking about increasing the possibility of external intervention in human subjective experience. He suggested that a place should involve a clear and complete conception of man and show the sensitivity to the significance of it in everyday life, so that the experience can be limited to a certain range. Sircus (2001) made a similar point in his discussion of

‘invented place’ with much more operational details. For the deliberate manufacturing of unique sense of place, he emphasized that the key is to create a unique ‘theme’ with a compelling ‘story’ which determine the context and the content of place respectively. Place-making in this condition becomes a paradigm for engaging people actively in an emotional storyline. His theory derived from his appreciation of theme park, and was applied to many other projects in terms of shopping malls, central entertainment districts, and tourist destinations. These projects drew considerable criticism from academics, mostly about the superficiality, the rootless, and the lack of authenticity (Carmona et al, 2003).

To improve the situation and develop a more coherent structure for place experience creation, Section 2.2.1 conducts a critical review of the relevant literature, including the marketing literature that presents the fundamental principles of creating a memorable experience, and the urban design literature that aims to promote the implementation of these principles in the field of urban design. Based on the literature review, Section 2.2.2 decompose place experience into four components, corresponding to four types of information provided by four activities. The four components include theme, events, stages, and emotions. For the process to succeed, it must be able to effectively use symbols to link the four components together.

2.2.1 Literature review of experience creation

Taking a marketing perspective, the experience is defined as a blend of physical performance and the emotions evoked (Shaw and Ivens, 2002). It emerges surrounding the purchase, use, or ownership of a good and service (Joseph Pine II and Gilmore, 1998) and ends when customer’s emotional responses are generated. During the process, people keep understanding and evaluating what they have experienced, then add value to them.

The higher the value, the stronger the impression in their mind. Then a lasting memory of the experience can be created, giving people reasons to choose related products once again. For those marketers who always aim to broaden the target audience and increase customer loyalty, it is important to impress on customers the possible value that an experience can offer them. Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1998) are two of marketing professionals who first discussed and attempted to address this issue. They believed that this can be achieved by developing a well-defined theme.

According to Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1998)'s theory, a specific theme lets people know what to expect when they step into the experience. The theme should be clear and concise without too many details, so that people's expectation can be limited to certain aspects. Based on the designated theme, all materials that are used to support the experience ought to be intentionally assembled into a unified storyline, in order to create a cohesive and realistic whole. Once people are in the experience, they can form their impressions and opinions in a sequential order. Joseph (2010) termed it as 'linear experience'. Similar to Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1998), he discouraged the involvement of various additional possibilities in defining theme, and insisted that the themed experience should be 'consistent each time' and 'entirely consistent from element to element, …' (Joseph, 2010, 17). On the other hand, the theme must also be compelling and captivating, attracting people to alter their sense of reality then create a new universe in the experience. Schmitt and Simonson (1997, cited in Joseph Pine II and Gilmore, 1998, 49) suggested nine 'domains' in which themes can be found, involving history, religion, fashion, politics, psychology, philosophy, the physical world, popular culture, and the arts, which embrace all aspects of human daily life. Apparently, the most attractive theme is contained in the domain that is closely associated with people' favourites. Once the theme is determined, Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1998) stressed that

the theme needs to be carried throughout the experience by hosting a range of memorable events. People are forced to be relevant to the chosen theme as their experiences of space, time and matter are affected in participating these events. Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1998) didn't provide explicit rationale for designing this type of event, but they defined four realms of experience corresponding to different kinds of activities: the entertainment experience which concerns to stay; the educational experience which concerns to learn; the escapist experience which concerns to do; the esthetic experience which concerns to be. They argued that an engaging experience should be able to cover more than one realm, and 'the richest experiences encompass aspects of all four realms' (Joseph Pine II and Gilmore, 1998, 39). The more activities an experience provided, the more compelling the theme is for the audience.

To an extent, the theme of experience in Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1998)'s view exhibits the same characteristic as the identity of place. They both exist as the inherent quality that continues to determine the overall external appearance, and they both need to be connected to certain groups of people. The theme has a responsibility to attract target customers, while the identity enhances the sense of belonging in residents' minds. The inherent connection between the themed experience and the built environment has therefore been detected. Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1998) didn't further discuss the issue, as they are marketing experts who attempt to develop a general framework for customer experience creation. This is done by Sircus (2001) in the discussion of 'invented place'.

According to Sircus (2001), the 'invented place' refers to a kind of 'other world' that is inspired by the world we inhabit. It concerns the deliberate creation of new and credible visions of place. Similar to Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1998), Sircus (2001) argued that the essential aspects of invented place are theme and story. The theme establishes the

context of place, assigning a consistent, clear image to the place. And the story describes the content of place that consists of a series of interrelated activities. Sircus (2001) explored possible ways in which place maker can implement theme and story in a portrayed sequence of experiences. At first, he stressed that the theme is carried out in the structure of place, including the spatial form, the functional organization, and the pedestrian flow. On one hand, the theme is composed of a variety of ideas that need to be well organized in a logical sequence. On the other hand, the structure associated with a specific theme can provide a clear spatial guidance and avoid too many choices that may confuse people and make them feel out of control and stressed. Then in considering the activities that contribute to the story, Sircus (2001) presented a number of narrative techniques that enable these activities to connect with each other and induce people's emotions, involving gradual transitions, sudden changes or new perspectives. Once the story is finished, people need to be given access to it by providing identifiable characters and useable actions. Sircus (2001) particularly emphasized the establishment of visual communication during the process, to make the story more legible and understandable. He suggested a variety of ways, involving the enhancement of visual and auditory details, the insertion of symbols in the story expression, and the utilization of emotional magnet. All these valuable suggestions, apparently, are made for improving the perceptual quality of the built environment. After all, as discussed above, people's understanding of place relies on their perception of the physical environment. Correspondingly, this concept takes insufficient account of practical implementation. Except for the mention of the Disneyland that is regarded as the quintessential invented place, Sircus (2001) didn't provide further details on how the design of buildings, spaces and landscapes will be managed in a systematic way. An additional discussion of theme park is required to confirm these details.

Lukas (2008, 8) defined theme park as a place that ‘uses the immersion of the individual inside an unfolding and evolving drama as the basis of its unique form’. His definition implies that the core of theme park is the dramatic experience developed for target groups of people. The first step to creating such experience, clearly, is to envision a theme with a concrete narrative intention, which aims to unify the spatial structure of the park with its functional organization. Clave (2007), however, pointed out that the park usually contains more than one themed area so as to increase the possibility of long-term stay. Then the defined theme has to be able to be broken down into several sub-themes, corresponding to different types of recreational events including the amusement rides, the carnival games and the regular shows, which attempt to evoke different kinds of emotions. Besides, it is important to note that the success of theme park depends on the quality of its built environment. Lukas (2008) thought the position of storyteller in a theme park is taken by the design of architecture, landscapes and even the overall image of employees, which has been characterized as ‘stage design’ Clave, 2007; Lukas, 2008). This looks similar to urban design, however, being different from urban design, the stage design concerns more about the effectiveness of theming expression rather than the functional use of space. Furthermore, Clave (2007) described a theme park as a closed space without any external influence from outside order. This means that the park needs to be separated from its surroundings by designing independent spatial structure and management system. This point of view is contrary to the principles of urban design that strongly emphasize the context in which a project is undertaken and the connection with its neighboring areas. Many postmodern architectures and urban renewal projects that share common characteristics with theme park, such as shopping malls, entertainment districts and tourist destinations, have therefore been criticized by urban design professionals, mostly

about the superficiality, the depthlessness, the rootless, and the lack of authenticity (Carmona et al, 2003).

The literature review indicates that a unique and memorable experience is created upon a clearly defined theme. Theoretically, the theme can be presented through a coherent story that consists of a sequence of events, so that people can get to explore the story then understand the theme by participating in these events. But in practical implementation, all these events need to be organized and embedded in a certain kind of space, for making up a story that is accessible to people. The process can be regarded as an analogue of urban design to some extent, and many urban renewal projects have indeed adopted this idea in enhancing the distinctiveness of place. These projects, however, were criticized for their lack of awareness of the general principles of urban design. If the marketing idea needs to be developed in the context of urban design, a lot of issues will be further considered, for bridging the gap between marketing and urban design disciplines and achieving a better balance between two distinct modes.

2.2.2 Four components of place experience

The literature review has revealed two steps of creating a place experience: design the experience and construct the experience. In the first step, a theme is selected and developed into a complete story; then in the second step, the story is narrated by a series of dramatic events on an elaborate stage. There are three activities involved in the two steps: defining theme, setting event and designing stage. These activities are not static but dynamic generations that need to be refined continuously along with the changing needs of visitors. The feelings and attitudes of people toward the themed experience as criteria for monitoring and evaluating the quality of experience are therefore worth considering in practical implementation. The creation process is extended to a three-step framework that

consists of four activities, as shown in Figure 3, including defining theme, setting event, designing stage and examining emotion.

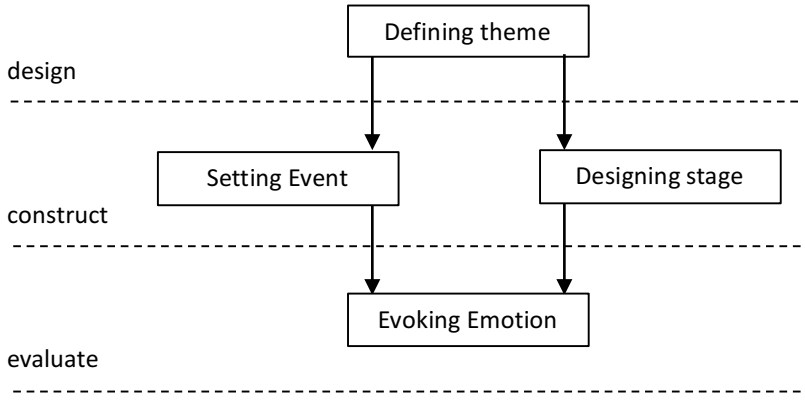


Figure 3 The theoretical framework for creating a place experience

To conduct the four activities as a clear and attractive whole, the capability to enhance the theming performance at each step is of key importance, which requires different approaches to presenting accurate information in different situations. It is necessary to revisit the gap between the 'intended messages' of insiders and the 'received messages' of outsiders (Knox and Pinch, 2006, 208), as mentioned in Section 2.3. Barthes (1968) said, the reader always tends to construct new text in the act of reading regardless of the meanings proposed by author. Accordingly, the outside visitors may distort the meanings given by the designer when they visit a place. It is inevitable due to the subjective nature of people. In the face of such issue, many designers are advised to focus on the effective use of 'signs', including the iconic sign, the indexical sign and the symbolic sign, to convey different types of information. Basically, it is expected to include as much information as possible in iconic signs and indexical signs, providing enough clues about symbolic meanings. This not only relies on the careful consideration of tangible form, involving the morphological structure, the architectural typology and configuration, and materials selection and utilization, but also on the preservation of intangible asset, for

example the historical traces and the cultural traditions that are likely to be the source of symbolic signs. A more detailed discussion is given in the following paragraphs.

Defining theme

Conceiving an appropriate theme is central to creating a place experience. An effective theme must firstly be valid and believable, which stems from the reality, the local characters, but not a distant fantasy. To some extent, it can be equated with the identity of place. On one hand, it is based on the unique characteristics of a place, for example, the physical characteristics that are made up of geographical location, natural landscape, climate, and wild life, or the human characteristics that include cultural traditions, language patterns, religion, political and economic systems. No matter how many types of characteristics a theme contains, it should be clear and concise, promoting a certain image in people's mind. In an ideal situation, the theme can be adequately described by a phrase or a short sentence, just like a place brand that covers products, services, and its reputation by a single name or a catchy slogan, highlighting the most important characteristics. People who have never been to the place can expect a certain experience as they hear the phrase or sentence. On the other hand, the content of the theme should be associated with expectations of target audiences. In the area of marketing, a method named 'marketing persona' has been designed to address similar issues. Basically, the marketing persona is a sketch of a key segment of target audience, consisting of the basic information and the specific information. For example, in a consumer research conducted by VisitScotland (2006) whose aim is get to know the tourists to Scotland, six groups of tourists were briefly studied based on their basic features, such as age, gender, professionals, and lifestyle, and the specific interests, motivations, and relationships to Scotland. This research makes it easier for VisitScotland to understand potential visitors'

motives and desires, then tailor their messages, products and services to the specific needs of different types of tourist.

Secondly, an effective theme has to be able to be presented as a story. On one hand, the story should be particular so that it can be distinguished from everyday experience. Hospers (2011, 29) has said that 'the most popular objects gazed upon are different from what people usually encounter at home or work…'. Urry and Larsen (2011, 4) expressed similar views and claimed that 'some aspects are viewed because they are taken to be in some sense out of the ordinary'. On the other hand, the story should be filled with familiar scenes of everyday life, in order to make it easier for outside visitors who know nothing about the theme to understand and access it. From a rhetorical perspective, a complete narrative can be made by answering these questions:

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Where did it take place?
- When did it take place?
- Why did it happen?
- How did it happen?

The uniqueness that makes the story stand out from the everyday routine can be established in answering at least one of these questions, creating for example unique products, services, activities and benefits to visitors. They should be stressed but cannot be separated from the narrative. No matter how people perceive and interpret them, they have to collaborate to provide a holistic image to present the whole story at this stage.

According to the literature review, two fundamental tasks need to be carried out to successfully achieve this goal. The first is to develop a relevant event that enable people to participate in the special in the experience, and the second is to design a particular stage that create an atmosphere to support the theming performance.

Setting event

The event is the crucial incentive for people to go to a place. They know they come to the place because they can participate in particular types of activities here. When engaged in an activity, visitors are able to interact with their desired objects in a specific context. For example, when people select the activity of shopping, the acts of looking and paying link people and goods together in a department store context. This reflects the functional use of place. But a place cannot be developed for a single purpose, as it may lead to tedious experience and bored visitors. People need to take several short breaks during a long day of shopping, such as having a light meal, or seeing a street performance. The variety of events engage them with different reasons and entice them to extend their stay. An integrated event system should be established, which covers a dominate event and several supporting events. When Hannigan (1998, 76) discussed consumer activity, he proposed three hybrid activity systems, including ‘shopertainment’, ‘eatertainment’ and ‘eductainment’. Each of them is dominated by a specific activity and enriched by another kind of entertainment. According to his explanation, the ‘shopertainment’ combines retail and entertainment in a new way, the ‘eatertainment’ erases the former boundaries between eating and play, and the ‘educatainment’ joins educational and cultural activities together within an entertainment world.

Designing stage

As a context in which events occur, the stage stimulates the atmosphere of authentic experience. It is created based on the physical environment that can be decomposed into two categories of components. The first category includes natural resources, such as climate, wildlife, and natural landscape. The second category comprises human achievements, like the form of architecture, street, square and urban block. Designing stage is theoretically an arrangement of these components within a themed context. To some extent, it is similar to urban design which aims to make connections between natural and built fabric, people and places with distinct characteristics and beauty. But instead of promoting social equity and economic vitality, designing stage mainly concerns the perceptual qualities of environment, for raising people's awareness of the theming performance.

At this stage, the signs that are used to convey key intended messages need to be made and managed as a whole. They can be shown as major events arranged by formal organizations, like public lectures and rallies, ceremonies, and rituals. Or they can be enhanced through informal cooperation, as described by Tuan (1977, 172), for example, 'at Christmastime, …, the display of candle lights in the homes attracts a large number of tourists'. In practice, however, these signs are attached to specific objects and facts that people have to face and accept when visiting a place. In considering the way of putting them into action, Venturi (1972)'s opinion is worth noting. He identified three ways of expressing a building's meaning, including the 'Las Vegas' way, the 'duck' way, and the 'decorated shed' way (Carmona et al, 2003, 95). In the 'Las Vegas' way, designers usually place a big sign that consist of words, pictures, and neon lights in front of building. The sign is designed like a public sculpture in daylight but become the major source of light at night, thus drawing greater attention to the messages shown in those words and pictures.

The ‘duck’ way literally means to build a duck store in the shape of a duck (Venturi, 1972, 17). As many modernist buildings have shown, the construction of buildings, involving the scale, the structure, the volume and the materials, becomes an integral part of sign, representing or symbolizing the function of building. Venturi (1972) didn’t advocate the two approaches and additionally suggested another mode, called ‘decorated shed’. This requires the sign to be independent, separating from the natural qualities of building, so that the building is still a simple enclosure without any meanings attached. Then the sign can be applied to building façade as an ornament, combining with other ornaments that represent different signs. With this method, designers can present as much information as possible on a limited scale. Carmona et al (2003) commented that Venturi’s arguments have inspired many architects to foster stylistic pluralism on the decorative façade of building, for raising the possibility of exploring the multi-ways in which people gain relevant information. Whereas in fact, these modes also reflect the latest design trends in the areas of place making, which increasingly focus on strengthening a distinct topic that derives from the inherent characteristics of place rather than merely creating a comfortable environment. In theory, the three modes are composed of different proportions of iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs. Apparently, the iconic and indexical signs are particularly highlighted in the ‘Las Vegas’ and the ‘duck’. The first-time visitors may prefer them as they will be easily understood. The information given by the sign board and the shape of duck are clear enough for them to establish an initial relationship with place. The return visitors, however, may prefer the ‘decorated shed’ that includes a broader range of ideas, so that they can explore and discover fresh meanings in place constantly.

Examining emotion

When entering into the themed story, people tend to have emotional responses, expressing their likes and dislikes, what they are doing right or where they are going wrong. These emotions are worth examining further, like conducting a customer satisfaction survey that lets marketers and designers know where attention is required. For this reason, all elements that are associated with the theme, the event and the stage need to be reclassified into positive team, arousing visitor's positive feelings, and negative team, causing visitor's negative feelings. The first group, including for example the beautiful night view, the tasty food or the warm hands of locals, is worthy to be kept and further redeveloped. The second group, which involving air pollution, traffic congestion or the thief who always hide himself in the crowd, should be eliminated.

Based on the literature review conducted in Section 2.2.1, a new structure of place experience is proposed, which requires place makers and designers to complete four activities: defining theme, setting event, designing stage and examining emotion. Defining theme is essential to create a place experience. It derives from the unique spirit of place but meanwhile has to resonate with target audiences. The theme is presented as a story, so that it can be narrated in a variety of events that occurred on a particular stage. Events entice people to go to a place, providing the context in which people interact with each other. These events are organized into an integrated system coupled with an appropriate stage. The stage stimulates the atmosphere of authentic experience. In addition to improving the quality of physical environment, the more important is to utilize signs in ways that are meaningful to message passing. Emotion analysis is equated with the customer satisfaction survey that helps designers know where attention is required in the future work. The elements arousing people's positive feelings are worthy to be kept, while the elements arousing negative reactions should be eliminated. This framework,

apparently, is based on logic thinking and analysis, which need to be further amended or supplemented by case studies.

2.3 Constructing place experience: A new practice of urban design

The new structure presented in Section 2.2 provides a means of creating a themed place experience. The key to the success of this approach lies in the intensity of theme expression. In theory, the theme has to be decomposed to several pieces of information then embodied in the story that is told in a series of events with particular stages. This is achieved by integrating the information into the event organization and stage construction. In the actual implementation, however, it is important to consider whether the information can be easily perceived and accepted by people. This issue has been discussed in Section 2.1 in which four factors have been shown to significantly influence people's perception of space and its content. These factors include enclosure, convexity, focal point, and engagement. The space, apparently, is perceived differently depending on its spatial configuration, its relationship with adjacent spaces, and its related activities. Accordingly, the experiences in different kinds of urban space should be gained through different stories, even though they share the same theme.

This section discusses and compares ways of creating a theme story in three distinct kinds of urban space: path, portal and place. They make up the majority of urban public space, and are the primary access to knowing and appreciating a place (White, 1999). They differ from each other in form and use, but they depend on and even sometimes transform into each other in the real physical space. Based on the literature review, Section 2.3.1 introduces the concepts of 'path', 'portal' and 'place' then compares their effects on human perception of urban reality. Besides, two essential qualities that contribute to effective information transfer are briefly discussed. Within a given theme, Section 2.3.2

defines and compares the content of the stories that will be told in these three types of space. Subsequently, a number of design strategies are identified to improve the narrative quality of these stories.

2.3.1 Path, portal, place

Within the urban design literature, the urban space is usually thought to be of two kinds: street and square. These two terms are replaced by ‘path’ and ‘place’ in White (1990)’s discussion of urban public space, which more accurately reflect the essential features of the two kinds of space. Paths are linear spaces accommodating the movement of pedestrians and vehicles. They usually involve lanes, alleys, roads, avenues and boulevards. They have two principle functions in an urban context. The first is improving the connectivity between different places (Moughtin, 1992), enabling people to travel easily between and within places (Dee, 2001) with the sense of origin and destination. The second is providing the access to certain buildings and spaces. Whether they are straight or curved, all paths ultimately lead to a destination. People who are walking a path to an urban place tend to raise their expectation of reaching the destination, affected by the invitational power of the place that flows out down the path (White, 1999).

Places are enclosed regular or irregular spaces with the sense of rest, involving plazas, courts, gardens, parks, and so on. They could be either destination or departure (White, 1990; Moughtin, 1992) in the path system. The original function of places in the urban context is providing public services. When analysing the aesthetic quality of a square, Sitte (1889) stated the traditional role of square in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, ‘here people trafficked, public celebrations took place, plays were put on, state proceedings were carried out, laws proclaimed, and so on’ (Sitte, 1889, 151). Apparently, places in an urban context provide space to crowds gathering and information

transmission. They constitute the body of urban public life, but also present the accumulated local culture that is distinct from other places. Accordingly, in most old towns and cities, the main square becomes the focal point of the whole morphological structure (Sitte, 1889; Moughtin, 1992), characterised by major public buildings such as church and town hall. The formal buildings that determine the boundaries of square are also particular embodiments of local character, delivering relevant information through their facades that need to be highly decorated and shown off. In considering the relationship between these buildings and squares from a visual perspective, many researchers such as Sitte (1889), Zuker (1959) and Moughtin (1992) have identified a number of aesthetic principles regarding the degree of enclosure, the shape of space, the control of traffic flow and the rules of exhibition.

Many scholars, however, have pointed out that paths are also a kind of ‘place’ (White, 1990). Mikoleit (2011) provided a scenario that when people who are familiar with the path space are hurrying to their destinations, others prepared to stop instead of keeping moving forward, like tourists who stand examining the maps and focusing the cameras. These people know little about the experience they will gain from this journey, so they need to constantly monitor their surrounding environment to know how the locals are using the space. In this case, the path space has to serve as a place, an urban room not just for outsiders’ observation but also for the daily interactions between insiders. As Moughtin (1992, 130) said, it is ‘an arena for social expression’. This has been widely suggested in urban design literature in which urban designers are asked to provide space and amenities to local social activities and monitoring. From the perspective of human behavior, Gehl (2006) argued that a good space for staying should be located along the edge, getting away from the traffic space. Then it will be partly hidden in half shade, enabling people to observe while remaining unobserved. He also suggested that this space

should be defined with physical supports such as bollards, columns, trees and street lamps. Besides, it can be enhanced by the buildings lining the path, sidewalk shops and cafes, street vendors and so on. In contrast to Gehl, Mikoleit (2011) argued that crossroads are natural amenity for public social life due to its high accessibility and good surveillance. The sense of concealment is eliminated while the sense of openness is further enhanced.

According to White (1999), however, such crossroads are 'portal', as the point of shift from path to path or from path to place, expressing the sense of progression as well as the sense of transition. This concept was overlooked in previous studies of urban design, however, it is considered to play an important role in improving the theming performance and strongly emphasized in this research study. The basic forms of portal include archways and gateways that frame the view to an urban place or an urban path. According to Cullen (1961, 33), this view embodies the idea of 'thereness', which automatically motivates the idea of 'hereness'. They coexist in a linear spatial sequence, implying an extension towards something different. White (1999) therefore argued that the portal space should involve the character of place and the character of path in addition to keeping the character of portal itself as an independent destination. Moughtin (1992) claimed that the portal can be designed as a kind of 'place'. He took the Piazza del Popolo as an example and thought it is the main entrance to Rome city for all visitors coming from the north. As a splendid city portal, this square gives outside visitors a powerful first impression. Tibbalds (2001) called this kind of square 'the arrival point', which is required to make the adjacent space obvious and easy to find. It must be attractive, friendly and welcoming, forming people's first impression of a place. Tibbalds (2001) suggested that this arrival point can be enhanced by locating public buildings, shops and public transportation stops.

These three kinds of space should join together as a whole in practical design, not only for higher perceptual quality but also for clearer theme expression. It is first of all determined by the way of joint in the architectural unity. Buildings should get along with each other by relating built forms and lines (Carmona et al, 2003), expressing ‘respect for one another, most particularly in respect to height and the way they look’ (Jacobs, 1993, 287). The amount of freestanding sculptural objects should be reduced so that viewers won’t be forced to turn attention away from the whole. Many scholars such as Meiss (1990) and Krier (2009) have identified basic principles of making various building elements ordered and harmonious. Paths, places and portals can be integrated to a coherent and unified whole in accordance with these principles regarding similarity, proximity, orientation and so on. Secondly, the public façade of the surrounding buildings should be tightly linked to each other in the visual dimension (Sitte, 1889). It can be achieved by consistently presenting one or more features on building facades, for example the repetitive use of certain materials, colors, architectural and landscape details. Then the space can be imaged as a concrete unity with a definite theme, and it can be easily distinguished from the surrounding area.

For an accurate theme expression, however, the degree of variability is more important than the sense of continuity. In general, it refers to how spread out a group of elements is, which is intended to reduce unbroken attention that makes people feel tired and bored. The essence of variability is the denial of similarity and consistency. It requires dramatic changes and events that may happen suddenly in a sequential experience, forming ‘a series of jerks or revelations’ (Cullen, 1961, 11). If it is considered as a form of emphasis and applied to the theme performance, then people are expected to be reminded to pay attention to the object that contains relevant key information. Contrast is the most commonly used method for emphasis. It describes at least two formal elements in the

expression of opposition (Meiss, 1990). Meiss (1990) asserted that these two elements have to be engaged into a dialogue to maintain the sense of wholeness, like positive and negative, light and dark, large and small, horizontal and vertical. In order to add more visual variety, this dialogue can be shown in a regular rhythm. It determines the proportion of two opposite elements. Kepes (1944, 54) proposed a standard rhythmical pattern that '… can be rhythm through regular alternating or orderly repeating shapes, positions, length, angles, curves, directions, intervals'.

2.3.2 Different narratives in the path, portal and place

As discussed above, path, portal and place make up the majority of urban public space, providing an access to knowing and understanding a city. Paths are dynamic space with a sense of movement, enabling people to travel between different destinations. Places are static spaces designed with the intention of facilitating social interactions and exhibiting the unique characteristics of city. Portals are transition spaces marking a shift from one confined space to another. People obtain specific information regarding the physical environment and embedded meanings from their interactions with these three types of space. This information constitutes their perceptual experience, which is varies depending on the visual and spatial quality of space. Urban designers have always been dedicated to discussing ways that improve the quality of public spaces, in order to make people's experience more vivid and memorable. Section 2.2 has suggested that a specific theme is central to a good place experience. This theme is presented as a complete story told through a range of activities on a particular stage. If path, portal and place are expected to make up the form of telling the story, then they need to be carefully designed for different narratives and content. In analogy to the plot diagram (Figure 4), places, apparently, provide service for the 'climax'; paths service the 'rising action' and the 'falling action';

and portals could be regarded as the ‘introduction’ or the ‘conclusion’. In the actual implementation, however, there is still a gap between two sets of concepts. Figure 5 (White, 1999) shows a standard pattern for the combination of path, portal and place, which looks different from the plot diagram. The dynamic perceptual experience is normally expected to start from walking in the path space, which is followed by passing through a portal space and finally end with arriving at the place space. Then the narratives in these three kinds of space could be explicitly defined as the ‘rise’, the ‘preview’ rather than the ‘introduction’, and the ‘climax’. The following paragraphs discuss the unique narrative structure in each kind of space with the consideration of their relationship in a spatial sequence.

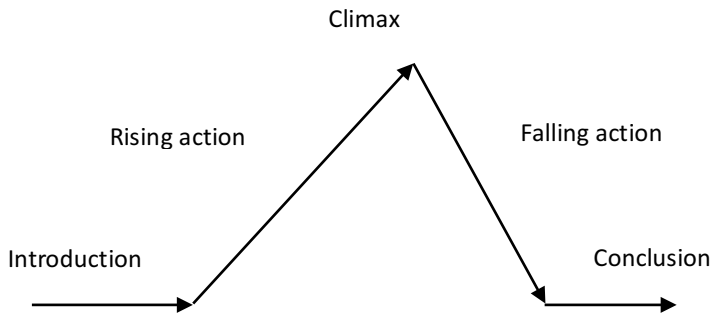


Figure 4 The plot diagram (based on Freytag’s description)

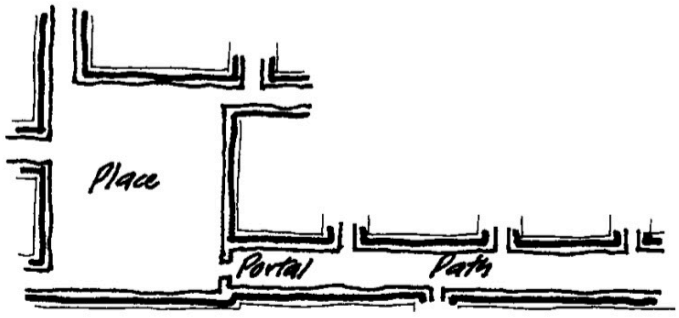


Figure 5 The relationship between place, portal, path (White, 1999, 57)

The ‘rise’ in the path

Paths in urban settings accommodate circulation between origins and destinations. In addition to basic features such as governing the movement of pedestrians and vehicles, or providing assess to specific buildings and spaces, White (1999) argued that a good path can raise pedestrian’s expectation of reaching a particular destination. It suggests a strong analogy to the ‘rise’ proposed by Freytag (1900), which is defined as essential preparation for forming the climax. As Freytag (1900,125) described, ‘the action has been started; the chief persons have shown what they are; the interest has been awakened. Mood, passion, involution have received an impulse in a given direction’. Based on this analogy, it is reasonable to say that the primary function of paths in the theme expression is to answer the following questions:

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Why did it happen?
- What will happen?

The answers to these questions provide a brief introduction to visitors. When people start getting these kinds of answers, it means they are getting to know the environment in which they occur. Then their expectation of what is coming next is raised.

As a prologue, the path space should be tightly joined to the portal and place in the visual dimension, just as stated in Section 2.3.1. But the path should not overwhelm them. If the path is just a path without any attempt to be a place, it will serve as a foil to the ultimate portal and place. Freytag (1900) asserted that the ‘rise’ is comprised of a group of scenes taking viewers to the ultimate climax step by step. These scenes combine to produce a

progressive intensity of interest, showing an enlargement in form and content. It has also appeared in Cullen's analysis of the sequence in New Delhi. He thought the regular repetition of a fixed view with slight changes is able to reinforce the image of destination. He said that 'each view enlarging the centre of the previous view and bringing us near to the terminal building' (Cullen, 1961, 20). This phenomenon is defined as 'serial vision', which is caused by dramatic contrasts of the liner path space with the terminal open square and their impacts made on pedestrians' visual perception. People's expectation is expected to be constantly reinforced in such dramatic atmosphere as they move along the path to the place.

The 'preview' in the portal

According to White (1999), portals in urban environments are about the transition from one domain to another. They are often designed as entries to the places. So it is impossible to equate portal with the 'introduction' shown in the plot diagram. It is not the beginning of the whole narrative but only the 'preview' of place, the first glimpse of the place. It is responsibility of the portal to characterize the theme story told in the place then present it in simple but powerful form. To some extent, portal also serving as a foil to the ultimate place. White (1999) described various forms of portal including archways, gates, flanking columns and pillars. No matter what form it takes, a portal will always provide a short space to pass through. The characteristics shown in the portal space should therefore be visually enhanced by creating stark contrasts. White (1999) has suggested some positive ways such as the ground level change, the material shift, the altered paving pattern or the variation in landscape. In addition to these, it is more efficient to create a dramatic focal point then strengthen it. To take an extreme example, imagine that a big signboard that consists of words, pictures and neon lights is placed on the portal façade. As Venturi (1972) said, it can be designed as a public sculpture in

daylight but become the main source of light at night, reminding people about the experience they will gain in the next place.

From a perceptual perspective, White (1999) also noted that the form, detail and surface of portal are gradually revealed as pedestrians move closer. This process does reduce stress and anxiety about the unseen world, but meanwhile it may cause a low intention to seek novelty and excitement. After arriving at a portal, people need to gain a new sense of anticipation and enthusiasm, which can be brought by undertaking particular activities. White (1999) suggested a number of ways such as opening a gate, climbing or descending steps, or shifting direction before entering the square.

The 'climax' in the place

Places in urban environments are squares, plazas, courts, gardens and parks. In many towns and cities, they are designed to be a convex space with strong sense of enclosure, as an urban room inviting people to stay or to settle in the city public life there, generation after generation. This ultimately leads to regular activities and scenarios with a distinctive style, which is defined as a part of urban culture in many urban research projects. Places have therefore served two basic functions. The first is to provide public spaces in which people make social contact with each other, and the second is to show the key characteristics of the history of site or the local cultures. These two functions indicate the nature of the theme expression in the place space - narrating compelling stories by setting specific events and designing authentic stages.

In a linear storyline, the place is regarded as the final destination, providing space for 'climax'. Freytag (1900) defined the climax as the crowning point of a dramatic story, portraying the most dramatic moments. This means that the stories told in the place space have to cover the most valuable part of the theme. Then events should be integrated into a

system with a specific intention, just as stated in Section 2.2.2. These events and the way in which they are organized determine the form and use of stages, which essentially is a set of unified design elements that provides a consistent backdrop for all events. To highlight the most important characteristics, however, it is necessary to create a focal point marking them. The focal point can be either dynamic or static, as stated in Section 2.1. It can also be embodied in various forms, ranging from artifacts to natural landscapes, and more vivid, the human activity in the place space.

2.4 Conclusion

The human experience of place is normally regarded as the natural process of knowing a particular place. It consists of two steps: the perceptual experience and the conceptual understanding. Different people have different experience due to their subjective relationship with the place. Depending on the degree to which people get involved in a place, Relph (1976) distinguished four levels of 'insideness' that are tightly linked together in a progressive order, including 'vicarious insideness', 'behavioural insideness', 'empathetic insideness', and 'existential insideness'. From the perspective of place marketing, the vicarious insiders who know little about a place but still have certain expectations are worth studying, as they are potential customers for the place.

Based on the idea that perceptual experience is the process of collecting relevant information then providing a preliminary analysis to subsequent interpretation, the most important to vicarious insiders is to receive clear and accurate information as much as possible. Four perceptual qualities that are considered to have positive effects on such process are selected. Enclosure and convexity are the quality of a place that makes its space form recognizable and predictable, while focal point and engagement are the quality that displays the content contained in the space. They cooperate to provide

essential information and guidance to new visitors then make an immediate impression on them. In the subsequent interpretation, the concrete aspects of place can be signified by a number of signs, involving the iconic signs, the indexical signs and the symbolic signs. The first two signs can be more easily understood by first-time visitors, while the symbolic signs can help them extend their current experience.

In order to create the place experience that vicarious insiders expect, four essential activities are proposed, including defining theme, setting event, designing stage and examining emotion. The experience created by these four activities is not the natural consequence of understanding the real world, but an amalgamation of environment, services and goods, which aims to meet people's expectation of a particular place. Based on a literature review of the experience creation, a set of principles and strategies are developed with the intention of promoting better practice. First of all, defining theme is central to create a place experience. It serves as a bridge that connects the true essence of the place to outside visitors. The theme is presented as a story that told in a variety of events. By getting involved in these events, people deepen their understanding of the theme and make their thoughts and concepts much clearer. Stage is where those events occur. It stimulates the atmosphere of authentic experience, which is mainly achieved by using appropriate signs and symbols in providing accurate information to viewers. The last emotion analysis helps place marketers and designers know where attention is required in the future work. The components arousing people's positive feelings should be preserved and enhanced, while the elements arousing negative feelings should be removed or replaced.

In practice, however, the place experience is embodied in a spatial narrative consisting of many plot points. These points correspond to three kinds of urban space: path, portal and place. Paths are lanes, alleys, roads, avenues and boulevards that accommodate the

majority of movement of pedestrians and vehicles. Places are plazas, courts, gardens and parks that provide space for urban social life and embodiment of local history and culture. Portals are gateways to the places, representing a shift from path to place or from place to path. These three types of space combine to create the majority of urban public spaces, giving people access to knowing and understanding a city. The plot point in the path space is called ‘rise’, then it is called ‘preview’ in the portal space and ‘climax’ in the place space. A good ‘rise’ can raise people’s expectation of reaching a particular place. It should be comprised of a group of scenes, showing an enlargement both in form and content. The ‘preview’ is not the preview of the whole narrative but the preview of the ultimate place. It should exhibit the most important characteristics then highlight it with contrast enhancement. The ‘climax’ is the core of the narrative, portraying the most dramatic moments. It is done by setting specific events and designing authentic stages.

Chapter 3. Methodology

To discuss appropriate research methods for place experiences, it is necessary to briefly recapture what place experience refers to. From a philosophical perspective, place experience is derived from interactions between humans and place environment, based on the combination of consciousness of external objects and self-consciousness (Dilthey, 1989). It is gained in the perception of external environment, which is followed by the construction of concept in the mind. The whole process and its consequences cannot be discussed without connecting them to human consciousness, as a place can be the place only after being experienced and involved in people's minds. The subjective nature of human consciousness makes place experiences difficult to study, as place experiences include a tremendous amount of empirical knowledge gained independently through observation, induction, deduction and evaluation. Making sense of the empirical knowledge in qualitative form is the main purpose of place experience studies. However, the empirical data used in these studies were normally generated by professional researchers, as untrained participants often fail to contribute their personal knowledge in an effective way.

Since the 1970s, photographic mass production promoted the participation of ordinary people in this field. In addition to conventional methods such as behavioral observations, questionnaire surveys, interviews, and case studies, there is a new method proposed and developed in many research projects on place experiences. It is named people-generated image study. The term 'image' here embraces two concepts: the mental representation of external reality, and the visible impression obtained by the camera. It is an innovative approach that makes the subjective experience of people visible and accessible. The photographs depicting scenes of everyday urban life are collected and analysed in this

approach, as the visible representation of concrete reality whilst conveying the emotions and thoughts of photographers.

Since the late 1990s, many innovative methodologies have been inspired by the growing interest in cross-disciplinary practice. One of the most important part is that the proliferation of mobile electronic devices and development of data mining techniques enable urban researchers to observe and visualize the digital traces coming from the firsthand experiences of ordinary people who live in cities. Many research experiments and projects were conducted in this field (Neuhaus, 2011; Ciuccarelli et al, 2014), which prove the significance of people-generated information in the study of place experiences and give this research so much inspiration. This is discussed further in the following sections. Section 3.1 provides a brief comparison of four basic research paradigms for place experience studies, and eventually adopts case research for this research. Section 3.2 presents a discussion of people-generated image study, focusing on the introduction to its origin, the potential impact of social media on its development, and available approaches to its implementation.

3.1 Case research: A common research paradigm for place experience studies

Place experiences, as the result of the interaction between humans and the place environment, are often studied in identifying environmental factors that affect the quality of individual and social life. Since this involves analysis of relationships among individuals, many research methods used in these place experience studies are taken from the social science disciplines. Bhattacherjee (2012) introduces four basic research paradigms in social science, which do have significant impact on the conduct of place

experience studies. The four basic research paradigms include survey research, case research, interpretive research, and experimental research.

Survey research is widely used to collect unobservable data on individual preferences, attitudes, thoughts and behaviors in descriptive, exploratory or explanatory research projects. Bhattacherjee (2012) distinguishes two basic forms of survey research, the questionnaire survey and the interview survey. The questionnaire consists of a set of structured or unstructured questions with an attempt to get responses from respondents in a standardized way. These questions can be sent to respondents via mail, email and online form, so that respondents do not have to communicate with researchers face to face. The interview must, however, be carried out through face to face, enabling interviewers to monitor and analyse respondents' own reactions. Although interviews tend to be costly and time-consuming, this method has been commonly applied to place experience studies. Lynch (1960) has arranged an in-depth interview in his research project regarding the public image of the urban environment. The interview lasts for one and a half hours, and the entire proceedings are recorded on tapes then transcribed. Lynch (1960) reveals in the appendices that the research group have been trying to evoke respondents' emotional responses during the whole process, which they believed could help them achieve better results. Despite the rapid development of technology and the widespread application of new research skills in the past few years, the interview is still considered as an efficient way to gather the data on personal experience of a place (Barrett, 2013) as researchers have full control over the whole process.

Case research is a method of empirically studying a phenomenon within its natural setting. It can be used for either theory building or theory testing with multiple modes including interviews, participant observations, secondary data analysis and so on (Bhattacherjee, 2012). A case research is usually conducted in eight steps, from defining

research questions, selecting case sites, developing instruments, making data collection, to performing within-case data analysis, performing cross-case data analysis (if necessary), building or testing hypotheses, and finally writing research report. The paradigm has been widely adopted in many research projects of place experience. These research projects, especially those focused on visual and aesthetic qualities of the built environment, tend to follow a standard format in which the proposed principles and guidelines need to be followed by one or more detailed case analyses as a source of support. And the analysis results tend to be presented in graphic form such as maps, drawings and photographs for providing a clearer visual description. Case research, as with many other research methods, has inherent weaknesses. Bhattacherjee (2012) argues that experienced researchers may identify emerging trends and patterns in case data while novice researchers may not. The findings of the case research are likely to be criticized as being subjective, although this is a common problem for most research methods.

Interpretive research, such as action research and ethnography (Bhattacherjee, 2012, 103), is typically used to construct a theory within a specific socio-historic context. Researchers in such studies believe that reality is not objective and impossible to separate from its context. They rely on qualitative data collected from such as interviews and observations, and they attempt to build an understanding of reality as well as its social context reflected in the data. Although interpretive research may be criticized as erroneous and biased due to the subjective nature, many researchers use this method to study the distinctiveness of place experiences that must be understood in its historical, social and spatial context. For example, Bell and de-Shalit (2011) shows how different cities have developed and nourish a common public ethos in their own history. They call it the spirit of cities.

The last paradigm, experimental research, is commonly used to examine cause-effect relationships in explanatory research projects. In an experimental research, there are two

groups of subjects. One group is assigned an experimental stimulus while the other group is not given such a stimulus. After running for a while, if the first group rate more responsive, then the stimulus can be argued to be more effective. The paradigm is rarely applied to place experience studies, as it tends to be conducted in a strictly controlled laboratory environment that is completely different from the real world.

Following previous research on place experience, this study uses the case research combined with the survey of individual attitudes and thoughts toward the personal place experience. To reduce the subjective nature of case research and survey research, another method named people-generated image study is proposed and implemented based on a large amount of data generated by respondents rather than researchers.

3.2 People-generated image study: A new technique using social media data

This research is conducted using image study to make a significant contribution to the understanding of place experience. The term ‘image’ here embraces two concepts: the mental representation of external reality, and the visible impression obtained by a camera. The common approaches to image study, which refers to the mental image in people's minds, are mainly based on their subjective understanding of physical reality. However, it is difficult for untrained ordinary people to contribute their knowledge in an efficient and effective way. The expert-generated image study has therefore become mainstream, by using disciplined approaches, for example, acquiring information through interview and questionnaire, or applying systems thinking in the document analysis. The subjectivity of researchers is however believed to be inevitable in this type of qualitative research, and has drawn criticism from many academics. For example, Cullen’s concept of ‘townscape’ has been criticized for its tendency to isolate and to overemphasis the visual dimension of

urban design (Carmona et al, 2003). Since the 1970s, photographic mass production promoted the participation of another kind of ‘image’ in this field. Photographs have become the primary data in many research projects on place experience, as the visible representation of concrete reality whilst conveying the emotions and thoughts of the photographer. This certainly increases the objectivity of qualitative research. At the same time, utilising low-cost, mass-market cameras, the concept of a 'people-generated image' has been proposed and developed in many research experiments, which was considered as a method that enables researchers to get close to the real experience of ordinary people. Since the early 2000s, the rapid development of mobile electronic devices and popularity of social media have further strengthened the significance of mass photography on the study of people-generated images and promoted the application of quantitative methods in this area. Large number of related research projects are dedicated to numerical and textual data mining, but neglecting the quantitative visual analysis of photographic data due to technical limitations.

In the following sections, literature is reviewed on three main issues. The first is the development of approaches to image study, from using the data generated by experts to using the data generated by people. The second is the participation of social media services in people-generated image study. The third is the discussion of quantitative methods of analysing mass photographic images.

3.2.1 From expert-generated image study to people-generated image study

Image is generally defined as a product of experience. It is built up from the integration of the perceived reality and the conceptual knowledge obtained from previous perception (Boulding, 1961). It indicates the result of immediate interaction between humans and the environment, and reflects the increased accumulation of knowledge derived from

previous experiences. Image study has therefore been identified as one of the common approaches to the understanding of place experience.

However, the images analysed in many research projects were generated by skilled and trained professionals. This expresses an elitist view that expert-generated data fits scientific research better, due to the high reliability of the data. Admittedly, these professionals have carried out related research and possess extensive knowledge in terms of philosophy, psychology, sociology, aesthetics and so on, so they are more confident in grasping crucial details from physical environment and evaluating the interrelations among them. They are also more proficient in organizing and managing research activities, particularly regarding the data collection.

For example, both Sitte (1889) and Cullen (1961) conduct studies on their own perceptual experiences by analyzing the paradigms of public space in an artistic and technical manner by discussing the 'serial vision' of walking through an old town. They intentionally interpret a 'good place' as providing an experience '…to make its people at once secure and happy' (Sitte, 1889, 141), or providing an experience that full of fun by revealing scenery 'in a series of jerks or revelations' (Cullen, 1961, 11). Then these experiences are decomposed into several perceptual processes, and a series of designing principles are proposed to each process based on their personal understandings of place environment. Unlike them, another group of experts observe experiences, by studying the patterns of human behavior within a place. For example, both Gehl (2006) and Marcus and Francis (1998) play the observer role in their analysis of outdoor activities in open spaces. They separate human activities into various categories, such as, necessary activities, optional activities, social activities (Gehl, 2006), or the activities of residents, the activities of office workers, the activities of students, the activities of children and so on (Marcus and Francis, 1998). Then they try to understand the specific requirements of

each activity, for learning the relationship between activities and spaces. In these studies, researchers have authority to represent ordinary people, depending on their strong theoretical knowledge and rational thoughts. However, a question is then raised: does expert-generated image mean the same as the image of ordinary people? The answer is probably no.

Lynch (1960) conducts a people-generated image study with an attempt to draw more attention to people who live in a place, to the actual human experience of a place. In his research study on perceptual forms of urban environment, he designs an experiment that consists of the interviews with local citizens and a careful examination of environmental images released by trained participants. Large numbers of audio records and map drawings are eventually collected, presenting the results of observations made by average people. Whereas, the purpose of the experiment is to extract a common structure from different experiences, which requires the researcher to impose strict controls over the whole process. To obtain the rough approximation to expected results, the interview is conducted with a list of well-designed questions. The real experiences of participants are inevitably distorted during the process, due to the inclination towards satisfying the questionnaire. Besides, the participants are taught to reduce their environmental images to five spatial elements, involving paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Then they are asked to geographically pictorialize these elements into an interrelated unity, for meeting the needs of research. It appears that participants in this experiment are forced to tailor their inherent images to the researcher's requirements. Lynch (1984) acknowledges the subjectivity involved in his work.

In the 1970s, a new practical research technique was developed by Cherem and Traweek (1977). They conduct a people-generated image study to measure human perception of a variety of natural landscapes. It is commonly known as 'visitor-employed photography'

or ‘volunteer-employed photography’ (Balomenou and Garrod, 2014). Basically, it is a method that gives cameras to a group of participants and asks them to take photographs to show a given theme. It reflects visitors’ direct responses to actual environment while they are experiencing it (Jacobsen, 2007). Researcher intervenes less in this method. On one hand, a photograph presents a visual expression that can be received and understood immediately. Especially for subjective feelings and emotions, which are hard to be explained by using verbal techniques, photograph is an effective way to convey these feelings to audiences. On the other hand, like Sontag (1973, 7) said, ‘photography has become one of the principal devices of experiencing something’, a photographer captures physical objects from the real world as he depicts the real life with a specific intention. Although not all of them are eligible to participate in the study, they still provide narratives that may expand the scope of research.

Over the last few decades, the visitor-employed photography has been widely used in many studies on landscape preferences, outdoor recreation experiences, and community planning (Mackay and Couldwell, 2004; Garrod, 2007), but still with limited implementation, probably due to the cost factors (Mackay and Couldwell, 2004). This also causes the limited number of samples, with a maximum of one thousand photographs most of the time. These photographs embody perceptual experience not only on the surface of description but also through mental metaphor that links visible objects and invisible concepts together. Specific messages are therefore transmitted from photographer to audiences, comprised of the encoding of the photographer’s perspective and decoding of the audience’s cognitive processes (Sontag, 1973; Burgin, 1982; Barrett, 1990; Shore, 2010). Hence, researchers need to additionally investigate the intention of the photographer through personal interview (Mackay and Couldwell, 2004; Dorwart, Moore and Leung, 2010) or questionnaire (Garrod, 2007) to get closer to the

photographer's innermost thoughts. Based on the investigation results, researchers often employ techniques of content analysis to interpret photographs. They assign a themed experience to each photograph then code them according to different themes. By counting how many times each experience was photographed, the photographers' experience in a place can then be constituted (Dorwart, Moore and Leung, 2010). The advantage of this method is that it allows researchers to increase the sample size and diversity by selecting participants from different age groups, ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds.

3.2.2 The potential of social media in people-generated image studies

Since the late 1990s, the emergence of blogging brought the concept of 'social media' into the lives of ordinary people for the first time. Then the previously 'mundane' world was constantly changed by Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Instagram, and many other new kinds of social media services. From a blog with hundreds of words to a tweet with a maximum of 140 characters, then to a picture with a short caption, or just a small video, people pass much more information more directly and immediately. Their motivations of using social media have been explained in many studies (Nardi et al, 2004; House, 2007; Nov et al, 2008), involving documenting life for self-expression, providing commentary for maintaining relationships, and expressing deeply felt emotions and thoughts for self-representation. At the same time, the digital camera became the mainstream tool for documenting everyday life, as the manufacturing of digital images on mobile devices increased the number of personal photographs at lower cost. For photography enthusiasts, a mobile camera not only captures every special or rarefied moment, but also helps to construct narratives of personal identity, thoughts and emotions that may not be easily verbalized (Suler, 2008). Sharing photographs on social media platform is no longer just a way of maintaining communication with family and friends,

but aims to fulfill the natural desires for exploring the togetherness in an unknown virtual world. In the view of Ciuccarelli et al (2014, 7), the place experience that comes from everyday urban life can therefore be 'captured, shared, and communally interpreted through these social media applications…', mixing spatial experiences with mental representations together.

For academic researchers, social media is a new data source, enabling mass data collection, including images, text and numerical data, through free application programming interfaces (APIs). Compared with the conventional methods mentioned above, this method imposes less restrictions on participant selection. Although researchers still need to identify eligible participants, it is not necessary to propose a strategy for recruiting them. They can collect data from different ages, gender and racial groups in different countries with different cultural backgrounds, just through setting criteria in a data filter, thus increasing the diversity of data collection. Furthermore, the large amount of available data promotes the application of quantitative methods in the research, thus increasing the objectivity of data analysis.

However, at the current time there are few effective options on the quantitative analysis of such data, due to technical limitations. Most researchers who have performed analysis on social media data are computer engineers. They have little interest in discovering and revealing hidden concepts and meanings from the huge amount of data, but express more concern regarding how to develop their analytical techniques. The numerical data, which mainly contains the geographic coordinates of photographs, is used most frequently in presenting the geographic spatial aggregation of perceptual experiences. For example, Kennedy et al (2007) uses the K-means clustering algorithm to find the highly-photographed places (Crandall et al, 2009) in San Francisco. Crandall et al (2009) choose

Mean-shift clustering for mapping photographs from all over the world on two scales of observations: metropolitan-area scale and individual-landmark scale.

Additionally, many researchers incorporate text data into the geo-visualization of perceptual experiences. Ahern et al (2007) employ multi-level clustering and TF-IDF-method to find the primary tags for a city, which would be an expression of given urban identity. Serdyukov et al (2009) build a model to locate photographs on world map with baseline approach, and then insert geo-tags into the model by GeoNames. Deng et al (2009) use density-based spatial clustering and Noise approach to cluster geo-tagged photographs at different distance scales. These clusters are called 'points of interests' (Choudhury et al, 2010; Van Canneyt et al, 2011; Lee et al, 2012). Other researchers have chosen different names for it, including 'hotspots' (Shirai et al, 2012), 'wormholes' (Clements et al, 2010), and 'spatial footprint' (Li and Goodchild, 2012). The text data, mainly referring to the tags of photographs, is used to understand the intentions of photographers. For example, Sigurbjörnsson et al (2008) classify tags by WordNet categories for revealing that 'locations' is tagged most frequent (28%), orderly followed by 'artifacts or objects' (16%), 'people or groups' (13%), 'actions or events' (9%) and 'time' (7%). Kennedy et al (2007) score the popularity of each cluster's tags by counting the frequency of tags and the number of users.

Finally, in terms of the quantitative analysis of image data, Ushizima et al (2012) introduce a creative method named 'cultural analytics', which is able to process large amounts of images. Hochman and Schwartz (2012) use this method to study the visual rhythm of New York and Tokyo, involving the local colour, the temporal changes of brightness and hue. Their research generates a surface description of perceptual experience on urban scale, but lacks the exploration for deeper meanings behind these images.

It is worth mentioning that there are many additional studies conducted for examining tourist experiences. They have been involved in the research of 'points of interests'. For example, Canneyt et al (2011) propose to determine and locate the tourist attractions in a city. Ardizzon et al (2012) aim to find out and reconstruct touristic routes based on the concept of 'points of interests'. What Choudhury et al (2010) have done is to construct tourist itineraries by adding temporal information into the touristic routes.

3.2.3 The approaches to the quantitative analysis of photographic images

The photograph in the view of Shore (2010) has a triune nature, consisting of physical qualities, depictive qualities, and mental qualities. The physical qualities, in his explanation, contain the flatness of the paper, the edges of the print, and the colour of the picture. These qualities are rarely mentioned in related academic works about image analysis. Whereas, both depictive qualities and mental qualities are always the primary focus of the image analysis. The depictive qualities concern the arrangement of visual parameters on the scene, which imposed by photographer, while the metal qualities aim to refine and embellish audience's perception of depictive content. Barrett (2000) proposes a two-step approach to understanding and analysing photographs in accordance with the two sort of qualities. The first step is the description featuring true, accurate, factual statements in terms of the photograph's subject matter, medium, style, and form. The second step is the interpretation that attempts to explore the deeper meaning by examining the relationships among the described aspects. Barrett (2000) gives many examples about the perspectives of interpretation: comparative interpretation, archetypal interpretation, feminist interpretation, psychoanalytic interpretation, semiotic interpretation, and Marxist interpretation, which indicate different research purposes. Obviously, the description varies depending on the research purpose and the perspective

taken by the analyst. In addition to these perspectives, Rose (2012) suggests an interpretive framework in compositional context. She believes that an image should be interpreted according to the content, the colour, the spatial organization, and the light. However, Szarkowski (1966, cited in Barrett, 2000, 54) gives another different viewpoint about the texture of photograph, based on the natural structure of photography rather than the printed image. He claims that a photograph is accomplished by the association of things, details, frame, time, and vantage point, which reminds the analyst to think about the role of photographer and its impact on assessing the photographic image.

According to the two-level understanding, there are two types of analysis in processing large number of photographs: the descriptive analysis, and the interpretive analysis. As discussed above, currently, there are few analytical techniques that enable batch processing of massive images in descriptive analysis. However, technical experts have striven to develop creative approaches and skills to address this issue. Manovich (2007) led the development of a new paradigm called 'cultural analytics', which aims to enable mining and visualization of large sets of cultural images including paintings, photographs, videos, games, blogs, web pages, etc. Although he has claimed that this approach is proposed for research projects on cultural continuity and change, the primary activity that relies on computer-based feature extraction and object classification has shown the potential to facilitate the descriptive analysis. Open source software tools were recommended and implemented in cultural analytics, including ImageMeasure, ImageShapes, QTImageProcessing, and FeatureExtractor, which help to recognize image features then transform them to numerical data, and ImagePlot, ImageMontage, ImageSlice, and VisualSense, which enable researchers to create high resolution visualizations then find hidden meanings. These tools have been used successfully in many research projects. For example, Hochman and Schwartz (2012) employ

ImageMontage to visualize over 50 thousand Instagram photographs. They use the tool to re-size all the images and place them in a chronological order from morning to night. They define the visualization as the rhythm of urban brightness. In addition, they use ImageSlice to create two slice visualizations for two groups of images, representing different urban landscapes in New York and Tokyo. They illustrated different urban characters by comparing different colour performances in the two cities.

Cultural analytics, howver, is just a method that aims to handle the surface description rather than the deeper meaning of photographic image. When it comes to the interpretive analysis, many researchers have demonstrated the feasibility of content analysis in their studies about perceptual experience in natural landscapes (Mackay and Couldwell, 2004; Garrod, 2007; Dorwart, Moore and Leung, 2010). Content analysis is a method that originally developed for quantitative analysis of mass media, involving newspaper, radio, movies, and television, since the beginning of 20th century (Krippendorff, 2004). It is a good way to grab the hidden essential information on human thoughts and behaviours from the content of their communications. Basically, the method is implemented by counting the frequency of certain valuable elements in a piece of text and analysing the frequency accordingly (Krippendorff, 2004; Rose, 2012). Weber (1990) defines the valuable elements as ‘content categories’. In his view, the central idea in content analysis is made up of the division, which divides a long and complex sentence into several shorter thematic units or segments, and the classification, which classifies these units or segments into content categories. Therefore, the content categories represent the semantic elements in a sentence or a piece of text. Content analysis is just a way to transform these semantic elements to numerical values and correspondingly quantify the semantic structure of textual information. Rose (2012) suggests the application of content analysis in photograph interpretation. Her argument can be reduced to a three-step approach. The

first step is to create a coding scheme. She claims that 'the images must be reduced to a number of component parts which can be labelled in a way that has some analytical significance' (Rose, 2012, 60), which means the process of division. In the second step for classification, she emphasizes the reliability of proposed scheme as the result of the scheme should remain the same, even if conducted by different researchers. In the last step for interpretation, Rose (2012) suggests some quantitative methods in addition to frequency count, to explore the possible relationships between different content categories, for example, defining the variables and examining the associations and correlations between them.

In fact, the basic principles of content analysis have been applied in many research projects about place image and place experience, based on the utilisation of data from multiple sources. For instance, Zhu et al (2011) use this method to investigate the influences of metro station advertisements on the global image of Guangzhou city. Maiello and Pasquinelli (2015) analyse the information on official websites for evaluating the impacts of holding global sport mega-events on global image production. Saez et al (2013) aim to examine the official branding strategies for Spanish cities by applying the method to the analysis of municipal websites. Hampton et al (2014) study the patterns of social interactions in public spaces based on the content analysis of four films that created from 1979 to 2010.

3.2.4 The implementation of people-generated image study using Instagram photographs

This research relies on a methodological framework that acquires comprehensive information from heterogeneous digital sources. The information is considered as a collection of acquirable facts that are necessary for the visualization of people-generated

image. These facts have been characterized by many different attributes, including geo-locations, time, generators, propositions, and symbolic meanings, depending on different research purposes. As the idiom goes, ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’, the photograph embodies the combination of these attributes in an integrated unity, thus becoming the primary focus of this research. Although many social networking services now allow users to upload pictures and photographs for sharing with others, not all of them meet the needs of this research. Instagram was eventually selected as the primary digital source for image data collection. It does not offer the broadest range of information to this study, but it provides more precise data and stores them in a coordinate structure that makes data analysis easier.

To evaluate the implementation of people-generated image study in practice, the following sections focus on three key aspects. The first concerns the selection of a reliable data source. The second concerns the assessment of data quality. And the third is an implementation plan for quantitative analysis.

Assessing and comparing data sources

According to the statistics from Alexa Internet, Inc., the current social media era is dominated by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and all sorts of other social media application programs (Apps). They provide similar services that allow individual users to build social networks by themselves, but differ in the operational rules, the content creation, and the value expression. Therefore, it is necessary to select an appropriate site from these Apps to create an adequate data source.

The penetration rate is the first key criterion for this selection, which is measured by the website traffic statistics, and the number of active users. There are five available options

in the list of the top 100 global sites ranked by Alexa Internet, Inc.[1]: Facebook[2], Twitter[3], Weibo.com[4], Instagram[5], and Pinterest[6]. They have achieved worldwide popularity, except Weibo.com which is mainly developed for Chinese netizens. Although the international version of Weibo.com has been launched for many years, Alexa statistics still shows that over ninety-seven percent of visitors came from China. Therefore, Weibo.com needs to be removed, due to the low penetration rate in other countries. The second criterion is the user-generated content on social media. Both Facebook and Twitter allow users to generate, store, and present information in many different forms, such as, text, images, sounds, and videos. This improves the variety of data sources while also increasing the difficulty of dealing with intricate data flow. Users may also publish many fragments about their everyday lives in a haphazard manner, as the broad range of publishing tools are so convenient that they keep more focus on the instantaneity in the communications rather than the quality of content. These fragments need to be additionally assembled within a specific context, considering the actual lives of people who hold them. To reduce workload, Facebook and Twitter were excluded from further consideration.

Instagram and Pinterest are, however, photo-sharing services that permit users to convey information only through visual images, like pictures, photographs and short videos. This requires users to know that they are depicting vivid scenes from daily lives while using

[1] http://www.alexa.com/topsites/global;0

[2] https://en-gb.facebook.com/

[3] https://twitter.com/

[4] http://overseas.weibo.com/

[5] https://www.instagram.com/?hl=en

[6] https://uk.pinterest.com/

these services. They are forced to carefully think about the organization and presentation of the content that would be published and shared. Then they integrate all the relevant information into a prescribed form, by imposing a specific order onto the visual image, for example, choosing a frame, or selecting a vantage point. In addition to these, they are asked to provide literal interpretations to express the intentions of taking pictures. These interpretations, existing in the titles and captions, are conducive to the simplification of data preparation. However, it is worth noting that there is another alternative, which has been studied in many research projects: Flickr (House, 2007; Kennedy et al, 2007; Kraya et al, 2009; Clements et al, 2010; Dijck, 2010; Malinen, 2011; Schockaert et al, 2011; Alves et al, 2012; Li et al, 2012; Min et al, 2012; Shirai et al, 2012; Lee et al, 2013).

table 1 The comparison of available social media applications

Name	Mobile Application	Description	Available Data	Monthly Active Users[7]	Alexa Rankings
Facebook	IOS, Android, Windows	Social utility enabling users to keep up with friends	Status, short message, photo, video	1.55 billion	3
Twitter	IOS, Android, Windows	Microblogging services enabling users to send and receive short messages	Short message, tag, photo, video	0.3 billion	10
Weibo.com	IOS, Android, Windows	Chinese microblogging services	Short message, tag, photo, video	0.22 billion	18
Instagram	IOS, Android, Windows	Photo-sharing service available with social networking	Photo, tag, caption	0.4 billion	23
Pinterest	IOS, Android, Windows	Visual bookmarking tool	Picture, caption	0.1 billion	30
Flickr	IOS, Android, Windows	Picture galleries available with social networking	Photo, tag, caption	0.09 billion	175

Instagram, Pinterest and Flickr are totally different. Firstly, as shown on the homepage, Pinterest is a ‘visual bookmarking tool that helps you discover and save creative ideas’. It is an online storage tool not only for managing the original image files of users but also

[7] http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/

for collecting works from other photographers and designers, including photographs, video, paintings, posters, cartoons, etc. It resembles an electronic-library, providing digital access to a variety of visual materials. Flickr is an online service for storing and managing the personal photographs and videos taken by users. It creates a 'formal' atmosphere that suggests users to be a professional photographer and present high-quality photographs on it. Nevertheless, Instagram is a standard photo-sharing platform that puts more emphasis on encouraging users to take and immediately upload a photograph or a short video about their daily lives for sharing with followers. It resembles an 'informal' bulletin board, allowing users to post personal experience anytime, anywhere. Therefore, if a user uploads a photograph of birthday cake both on Flickr and Instagram, he will write two different captions: 'birthday cake' on Flickr, and 'I am very happy at my birthday party' on Instagram. This difference was also reflected by a brief comparison of the textual information on two sites. The results show that the textual information on Flickr is limited to the factual observation, including the name of place, the type of object, the identity of people, and so on, while the textual information on Instagram exposes more about subjective feelings and emotions.

This research is concerned with the personal photographs that immediately taken from everyday experience, as said by Sontag (2001, 3), 'photographs really are experience captured'. The photographic materials on Pinterest and Flickr are not appropriate to represent the daily experiences of ordinary people. As a consequence, Instagram was selected as the primary digital source for subsequent data collection.

Describing and evaluating data quality

The people-generated image studies are conducted in two major Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai, which attract visitors from all over the world. Using Instagram's public

API, there are over 1.6 million available photographs in the urban area of Beijing, and approximately 1.9 million available photographs within Shanghai. These photographs were downloaded together with the following meta data: user ID, geo-coordinates, date of creation, captions, and tags, corresponding to the image data, numerical data, and text data. Basically, the analysis of image data is the primary focus of this research, whereas was limited in practical implementation due to the technical limitation. The analysis of numerical data was performed in data management and statistics without any obstacle. The analysis of text data, which aims to provide assistance to the interpretation of image data, actually became the main body of this research.

The text data consists of the captions, and tags. Caption is a brief description or explanation of a photograph. It is usually written in a complete sentence which has semantic structure. However, a tag is commonly used to attract potential audience to this photograph. A photograph can be attached to a broad range of tags. The larger audience the photograph needs, the more tags the user adds. But for an analyst, compared with a meaningful sentence, it is hard to imagine the content of a photograph with tags: ‘china street people urban woman black cute girl beautiful beauty smile fashion hair asian glamour eyes long pretty strada gorgeous beijing young makeup tshirt ears moose lips persone occhi teen teenager sorriso Beijing hutong lovely cartoons cina ragazza capel’. There are few semantic relations existing in the tag group, so that these tags fail to clearly express the intention of photographer. Therefore, the quantitative analysis of textual information was conducted on captions rather than tags.

A brief analysis of the languages used in the captions shows that about half of the photographs were taken by Chinese people, and the rest of them were taken by people who came from English-speaking countries, Japan, Korea, Russia, and Thailand. Specifically, for the photographs of Beijing, half of them were taken by Chinese users,

over 45 percent were taken by users from English-speaking countries, and nearly 5 percent were taken by people from other four countries; for the photographs of Shanghai, about 45 percent were taken by Chinese people, and nearly 55 percent were taken by people from English-speaking countries, 5 percent were taken by people from other four countries. It is worth mentioning that in a few countries such as China, smartphone users' accessibility to Instagram is conditionally limited, otherwise there will be more available photographs taken and shared by Chinese users. China is not a multi-racial country, and the majority of residents are native Chinese speakers. Under this circumstance, it can be speculated that those people who added non-Chinese captions are short-term visitors, even first-time visitors. It should also be taken into account that first-time visitors might be more inclined to record and comment on a place and the experiences of 'return' visitors may differ. Indeed, Echtner and Ritchie (1993, cited in Govers and Go, 2009) have argued that the first-time visitors can be more concerned about the attributes, functional aspects and common features of place rather than the holistic images. Additionally, most of the Chinese users who have overcome the limited accessibility should probably be the young people who are more adept at using smartphone in the mobile network. This assumption is supported by an official report of Instagram, which claimed that there were more than 300 million active Instagrammers until October 2014[8], about 90 percent of them are younger than 35, and more specifically about 41 percent are young people between the ages of 16-24[9]. It remains a fact that this research will focus on young people's preference for novel urban experience and ignores the opinions of other age groups.

[8] https://www.instagram.com/press/?hl=en

[9] http://expandedramblings.com/index.php/important-instagram-stats/2/

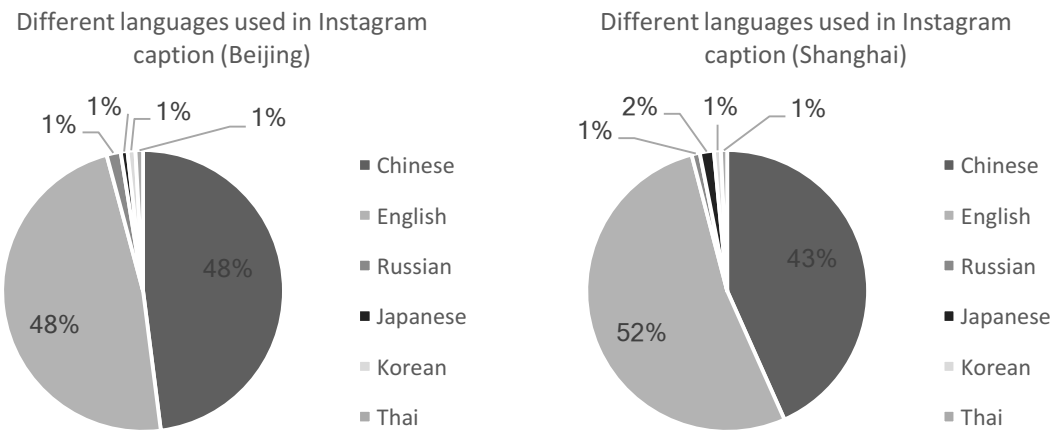


Figure 6 Different languages used in Instagram (Beijing and Shanghai)

Developing an implementation plan for quantitative data analysis

Data management is the essential prerequisite of quantitative analysis. All of the text and numerical data are stored in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with various file formats, in order to be read by different analysis software. The basic statistical tools in Excel are also valuable for simple data mining and information visualization. Subsequently, as discussed above, the quantitative analysis consists of the analysis of geographic aggregation, the analysis of textual description and interpretation, and the analysis of image presentation.

Based on the analysis of geographic aggregation, ArcGIS is first used to narrow down the acquired data in case selection and definition. For case selection, the points of interests in two cities are uncovered, by inputting all of the geographic coordinate information into ArcGIS. The varying degrees of spatial data aggregation indicate the points of interests on geographical map. Undoubtedly, the most popular places with the maximum amount of data should be considered to ensure a reasonable and comprehensive analysis. For the subsequent case definition, a presumption is proposed that while visiting a place people post the photographs only about their experience. Based on the presumption, the data

geographically locating outside the place can be considered as invalid and need to be removed.

In addition, this analysis can be used to examine the spatial relationships between different ‘content categories’ in a geographical context. For example, it is possible to prove that the ‘food’ geographically overlaps with ‘friends’, as people tend to have dinner with friends. The dinner table is no longer just a place to meet with various foods, but also a place to promote the emotional communication with friends. Thus people inevitably express ‘friends’ when they take photographs of ‘food’.

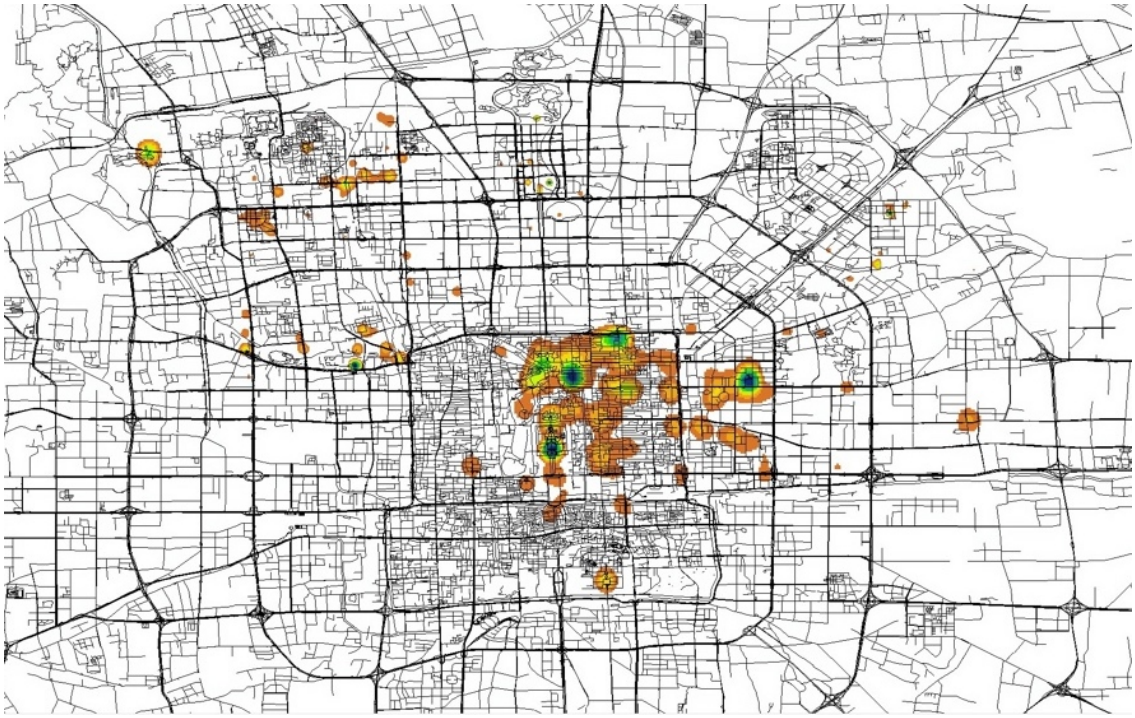


Figure 7 The aggregating density of available data in the urban area of Beijing



Figure 8 The aggregating density of the data regarding 'residence' in Beijing



Figure 9 The aggregating density of the data regarding 'entertainment' in Beijing

When analysing the textual information, the first step is to integrate all the available captions into a single unit, embodying a holistic experience. The descriptive analysis is revealing essential facts from the textual unit, while the integrative analysis is exploring the relations among these facts in a semantic context, which is similar to a kind of structural analysis on subjective experience. The whole process starts with a tentative open coding in the environment of IBM SPSS Modeler, for having a rough idea of the textual unit. The coding is based on the extraction of high-frequency words. Each word represents a 'concept', corresponding to a particular meaning. In considering the needs of subsequent analysis, such a particular meaning may be changed in the formal coding scheme. For example, the term 'palace' means a 'building' forming the official residence of a ruler in the tentative coding, while embodies the 'historic' character in the formal scheme.

The formal coding scheme is finally developed in IBM SPSS Modeler, which is made up of a set of libraries and analysing rules. Each library involves several 'content categories' that aim to define the semantic structure of textual unit. The 'content categories' are named as 'types' in the coding scheme. For example, the scheme 'Beijing (English)' involves thirteen libraries, consisting of forty-six 'types' of 'concepts'. Based on the conceptual framework of creating experience discussed in Chapter 2, these twelve libraries are developed for examining 'theme', 'event', 'stage', and 'emotion'. Some of them are fixed libraries that can be used for analysing any case, such as 'culture', 'nature', and 'opinions', while some of them are substitutable, such as 'Beijing', and 'history', which can only be used for analysing Beijing city. Based on the utilisation of the coding scheme, the single textual unit can be decomposed into many essential facts corresponding, respectively, to 'theme', 'event', 'stage', and 'emotion'. For example, the facts concerning local history are used to examine the performance of 'theme', which

consist of the names of historical and cultural sites, the names of traditional festivals, the names of historical figures and so on. If the caption of photograph contains any name of them, then the photograph can be regarded to support the ‘theme’. Likewise, the facts consisting of foods, drinks, music, and dance are used to examine the role of ‘event’ in place experience. The photograph can be considered to describe the ‘event’ if its caption contains any concept of them.

For the integrative analysis, IBM SPSS Modeler offers a tool to analyse the co-word clusters, by assessing the strength of linkage between different ‘concepts’. The basic principle behind the tool is counting the frequency of the co-occurrence of ‘concepts’ in a given text. A co-word cluster can be considered as a communal semantic context, but can also be considered as part of the subjective experience. For example, examining the semantic context of ‘Beijing’, ‘Beijing’ is linked closely with such as ‘night’, ‘weather’, and ‘China’, which indicates that in visitors’ experience they are more concerned with the nightscape, the natural environment, and the potential symbolic meanings in the national context.

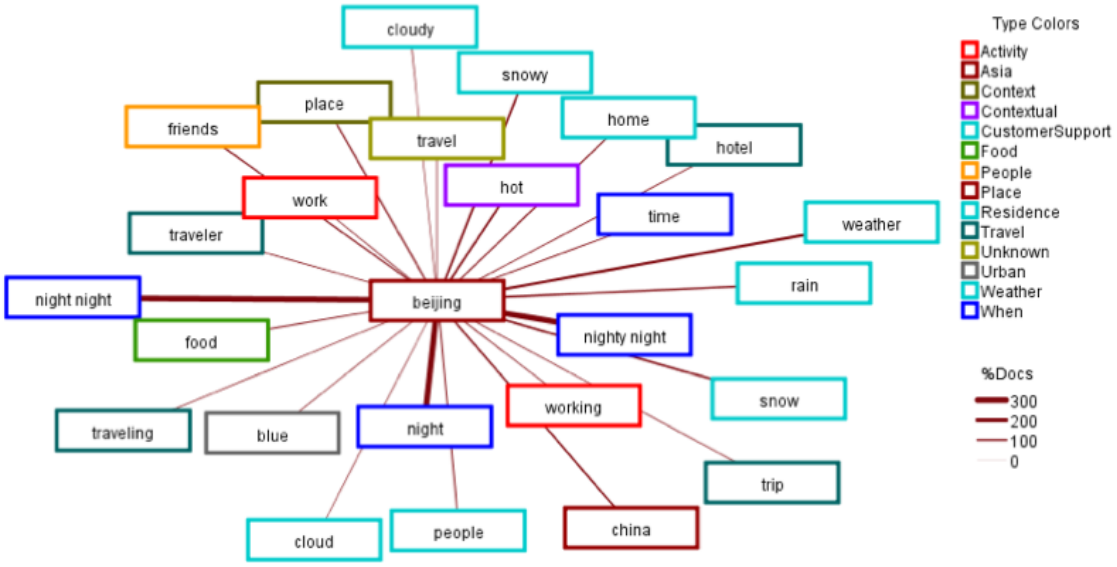


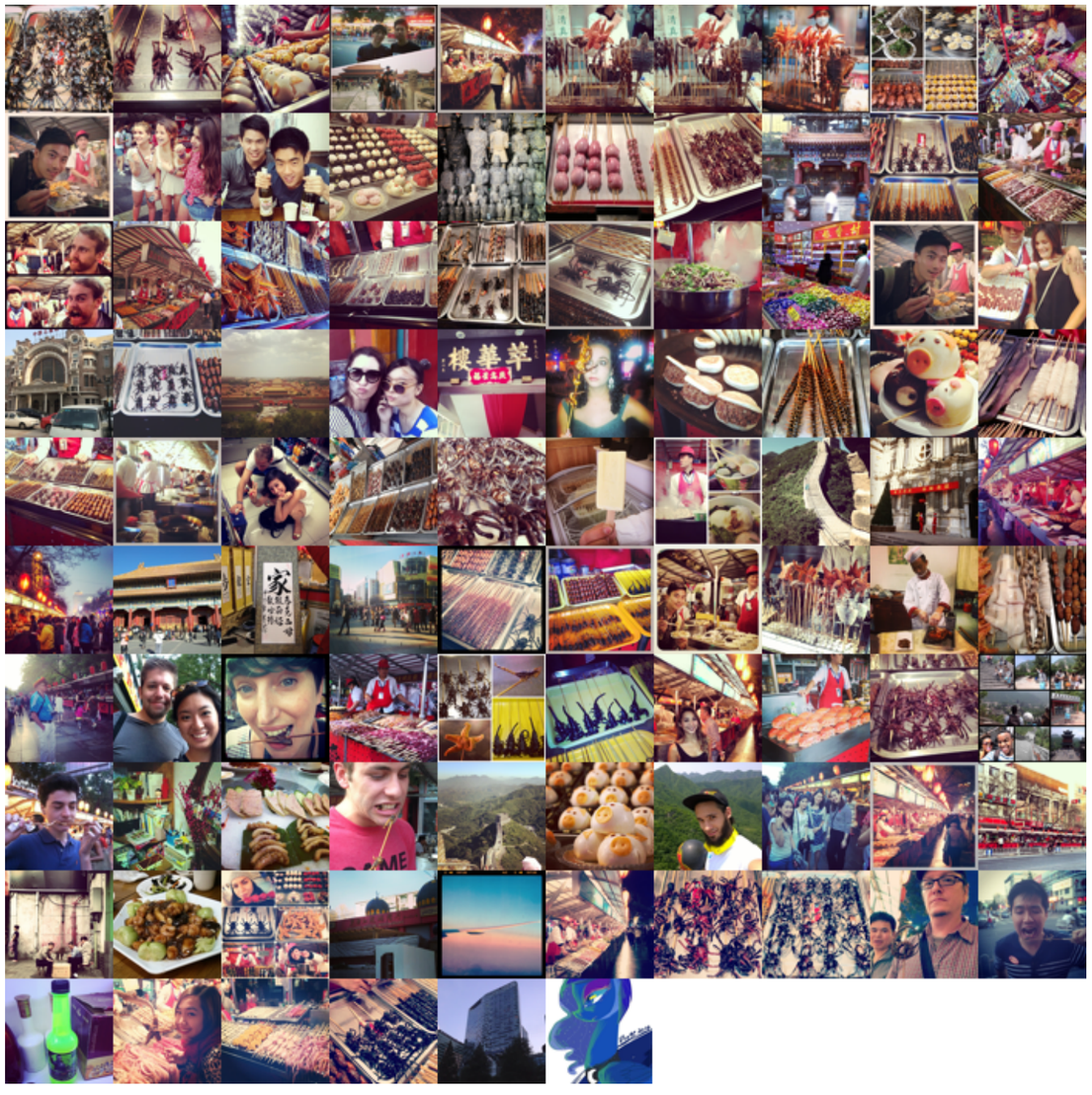
Figure 10 The semantic context of the concept 'Beijing'

The analysis of image presentation relies on the isolation of descriptive details and the interpretation of framed facts. In the first isolation, ImageMeasure and ImageShapes are used to extract the values of brightness, saturation, hue and RGB channel from each image. These values fall into two categories: mean and standard deviation, indicating the colour degrees of photographs. Specifically, a low standard deviation may indicate a single-colour scheme, and a high standard deviation many indicate a multi-colour scheme. Based on a presumption that every framed subject can be pointed to a definite colour scheme and vice versa, it is logical to conclude that a low standard deviation represents a photograph with single subject, while a high standard deviation represents a photograph with multiple subjects.

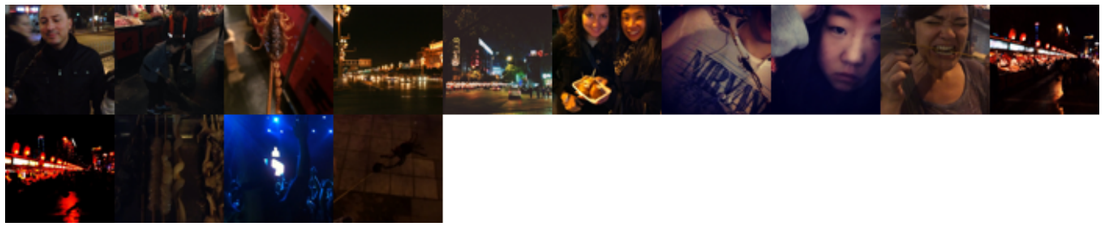
To more accurately identify the subjects of photographs, here is a proposed theory, which states that the number of eligible subjects in a certain physical environment is finite. Each subject features a colour scheme that includes a specific range of RGB values. If a photograph captures the subject, its RGB colour value will fall within this range. The clustering algorithm for range estimation was run using IBM SPSS Modeler. Photographs can thus be categorized into several clusters, and photographs in the same cluster tend to depict the same or similar subject. For example, the photographs of ‘food’ may share a multi-colour scheme involving red, orange, yellow and brown, while the photographs of ‘night’ view feature shades of black, blue and purple. ImageMontage was then used to code and display these photographs according to degrees of similarity. As shown in Figure 11, for example, over 6 hundred photographs taken from the Wangfujing street were categorized into 10 clusters that are expected to reveal 10 facts about people’s collective experience. Although the eventual result is far from being adequate and satisfactory, it seems clear that nearly 83 percent of photographs contain the image of ‘food’, and at least 26.6 percent of photographs reflect the image of ‘night’.



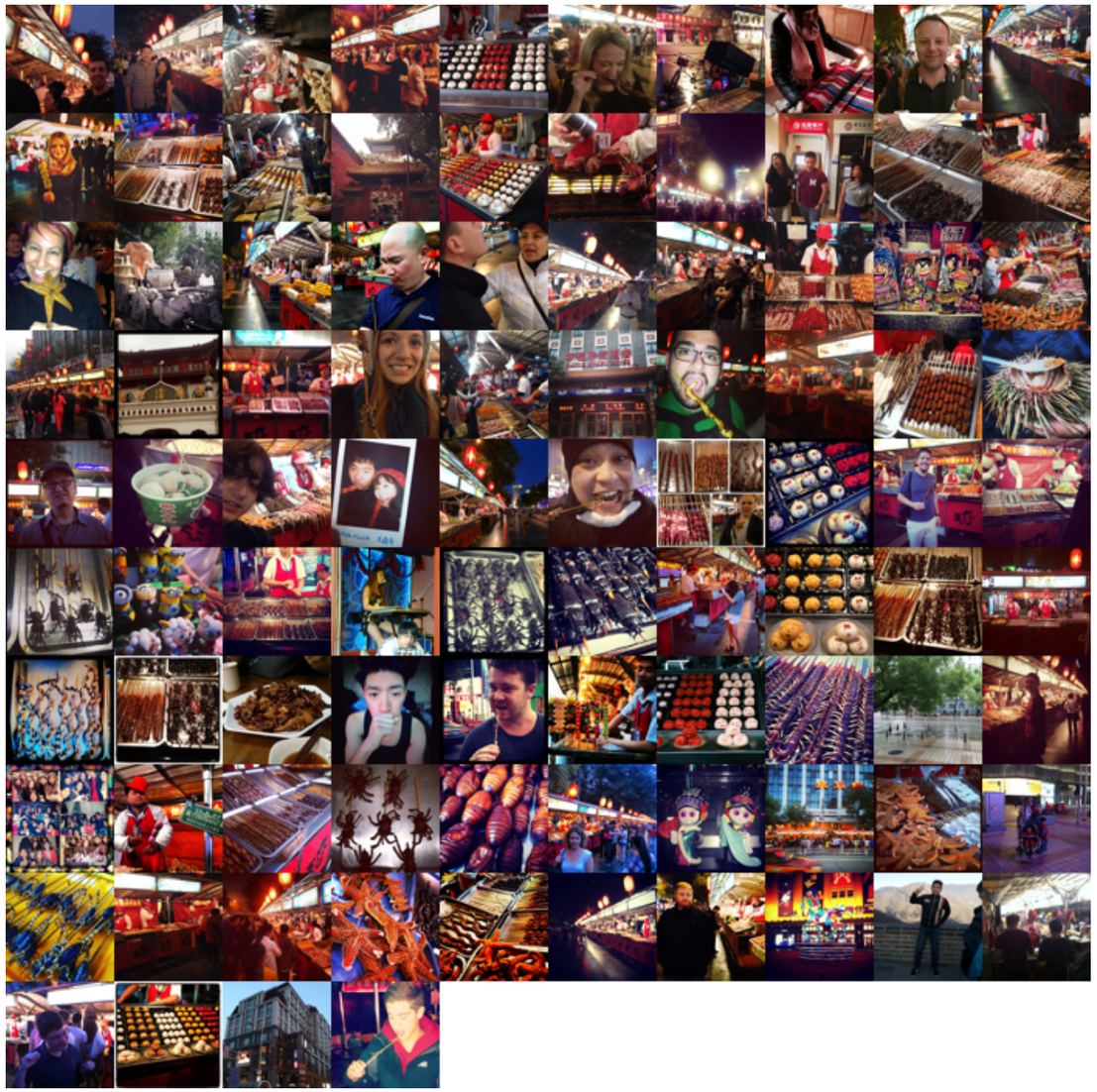
Cluster 1



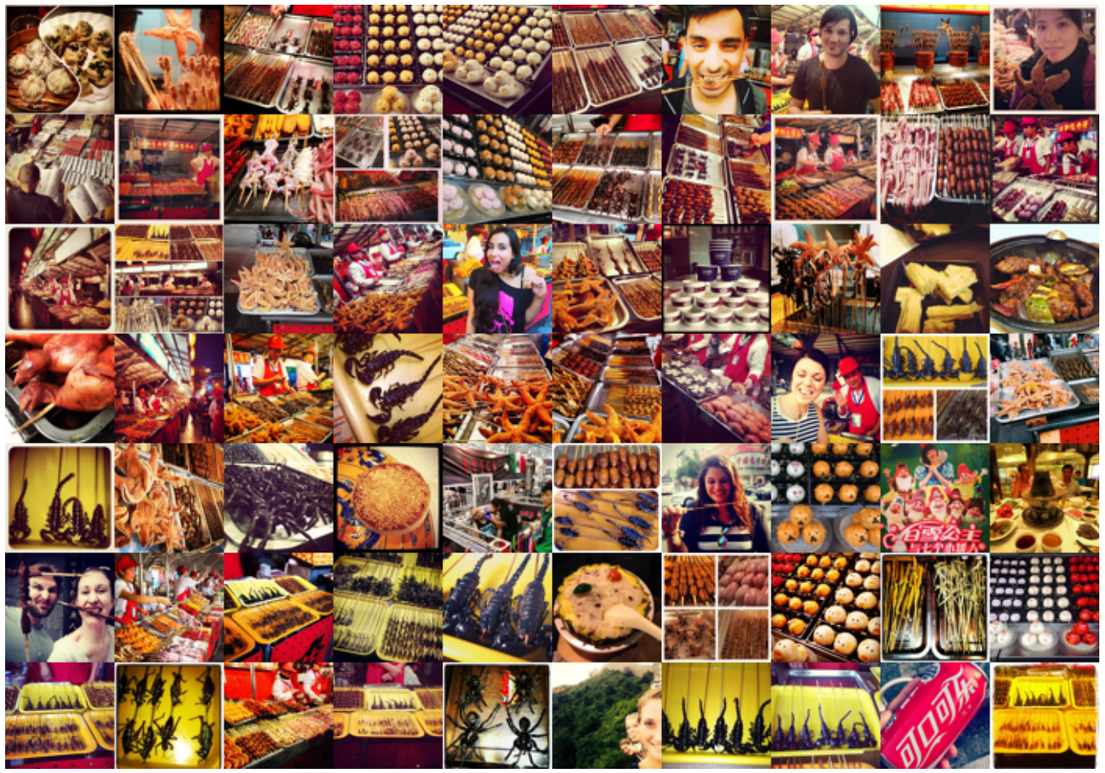
Cluster 2



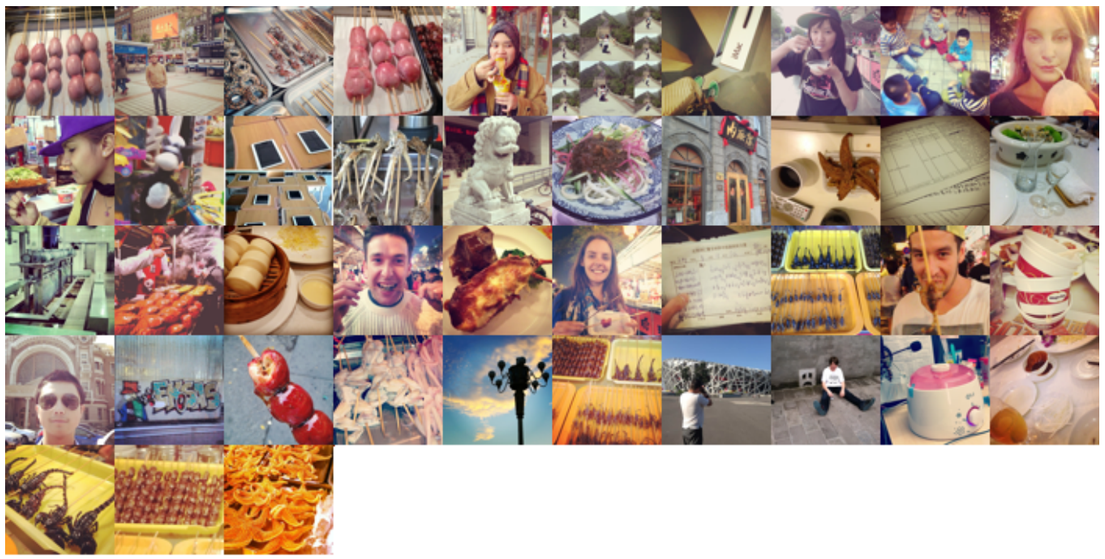
Cluster 3



Cluster 4



Cluster 5



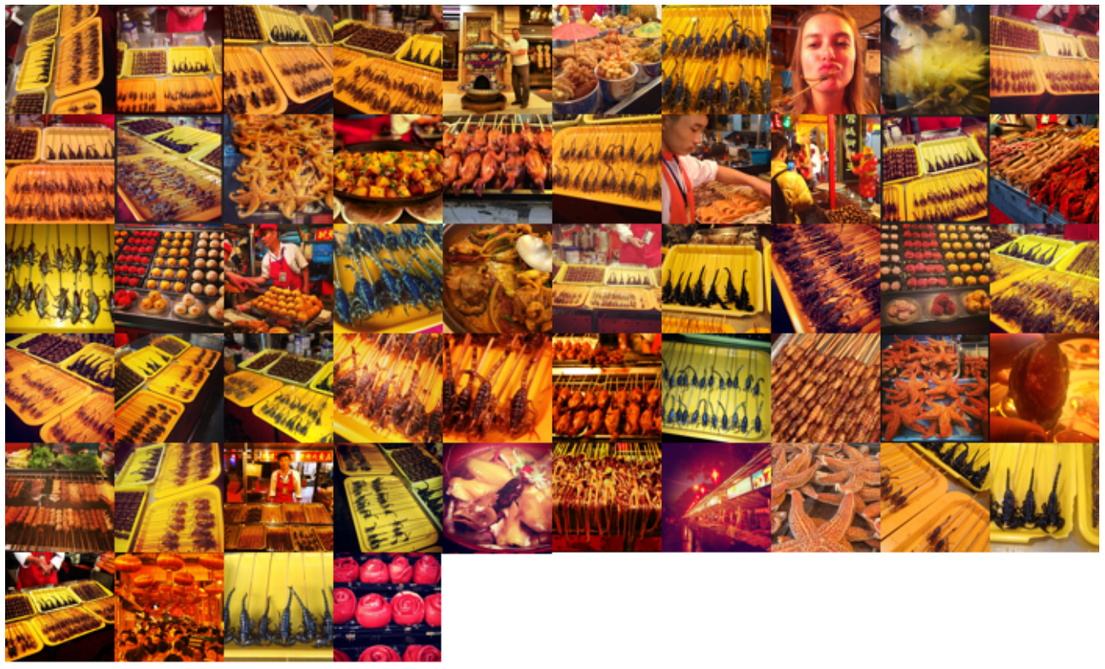
Cluster 6



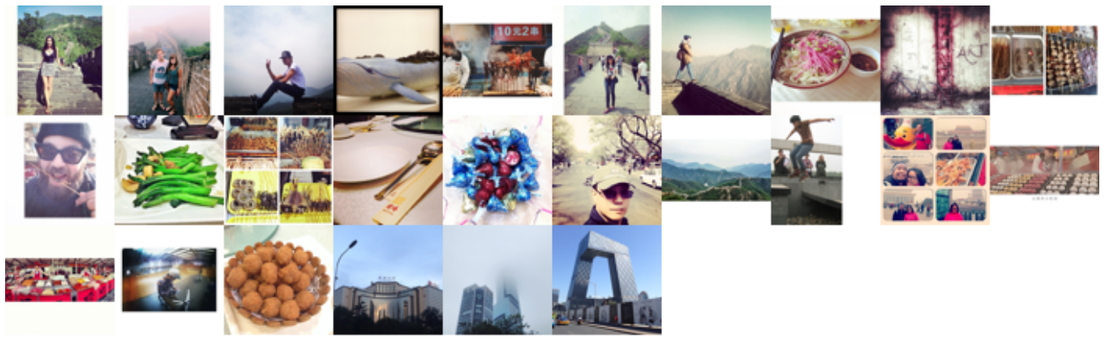
Cluster 7



Cluster 8



Cluster 9



Cluster 10

Figure 11 10 clusters of the photographs taken from Wangfujing street, Beijing, revealing 10 facts about people's collective experience of Wangfujing street

3.3 Conclusion

The research paradigm employed in this study is the case research. The whole process is carried out in the form of people-generated image study, which appears more objective than the traditional expert-generated image study. This is a method that was first used to measure human perception of a variety of natural landscapes, attempting to capture people's direct responses to actual environment while they are experiencing it. The data tend to be presented in graphic form such as photographs. In order to get as accurate information as possible, researchers often need to investigate the intention of the photographer additionally through such as personal interview or questionnaire. Based on these text messages, researchers generally employ the techniques of content analysis to interpret graphic materials. For example, they suppose that every photograph can be assigned a themed experience, then code photographs on different themes. By counting how many times each experience was photographed, researchers would define the constitution of what photographer experience in a place.

In recent years, the development of mobile network and the prevalence of social media have facilitated the work of data collection. The manufacturing of digital image on mobile device increases the amount of personal photographs. Researchers can conduct mass data collection, including image, text and geo-data, through free API of social media application at low costs. Based on advanced GPS technology, geo-data is generally used to reveal the spatial scale of perceptual experience, and geo-relationship between different perceptual elements. At present, however, there are few techniques that effectively support batch processing of mass images, except cultural analytics tools. It aims to study and interpret the visual pattern of graphic image through visualizing image sequences.

But it is a method that handles surface description rather than the deeper meaning. The corresponding captions have therefore been used as message transfer agent to support the image interpretation. Content analysis is still the most commonly used method to perform semantic analysis on text data. It is a good way to grab the hidden essential information on human thoughts and behaviours by analysing the content of their communications.

The data sources involve image, text and geo-data that people use to visualize their experience and communicate with others on Instagram. The research selects Instagram because it holds countless snapshots that immediately taken from various experience. The caption that user add could explain the context or the incentive of taking photograph. These data are created by the inspiration of visitor's true feeling for a place rather than the instruction of researcher. However, the method has obvious limitations. Firstly, the research will focus on young people's preference for novel place experience and ignores the opinions of other age groups. Secondly, the analysis results reflect more on the predilection of non-Chinese users who could be the first-time visitors and are unfamiliar with the case.

All available data are downloaded through Instagram's public API. Based on a hypothesis that while visiting a place people post the pictures only about their experience, the data geographically locating outside the place could be considered as invalid and has to be removed. The work starts with developing an analysis template in IBM SPSS Modeler, based on the techniques of content analysis. The template is made up of a set of libraries and analysing rules. Each library involves several word lists that used to define the semantic structure of text data. The word list is composed of the high frequency words filtered from captions, and each word represents a concept that supports the experience visualization. According to the natural meaning of each concept and the theoretical model proposed above, the word lists need to be reclassified and renamed as different types. The

application of the template will reveal the perceptual structure of visitor experience. The photographs are analysed by employing Cultural Analytics tools including ImageMeasure, ImageShapes and ImageMontage. The first two tools are used to measure the values of brightness, saturation, hue and RGB channels, and the last tool is used to visualize image sequence. This method aims to find out the visual focus in perceptual environment. By defining a hypothesis that a photograph with low STDEV value has a single subject with flat colour, and a photograph with high STDEV value indicates the multiple subjects with multi-colour scheme, it is reasonable to assume that each different colour scheme corresponds to a different subject and vice versa. By using K-mean clustering method, all the values are classified into several clusters, which represent different colour schemes. The photographs in one cluster tend to display the same or similar subject that stands for visual focus.

Chapter 4. Case study

When facing increasing competitive challenges on a global scale, Chinese cities begin to realize the importance of urban experience as a powerful tool to compete with cities in other countries for economic advantage. A good urban experience can attract business firms, corporate and divisional headquarters, labour, tourists, new residents and so on, all of which are expected to provide increased investment, employment, income and growth. Although local authorities and communities, urban designers, architects and other professionals have worked together to dedicate to the vivid and memorable experience, only people who actually live or travel in a city are eligible to evaluate whether it is good or not based on their own experience. Their attitudes to the quality of urban experience tend to be found in their behavior in public open space.

With the rapid rise of social networking in the past few years, however, their attitudes can be more easily found in the content they share on social media websites. For example, as one of the most popular social networks for photo sharing, Instagram holds a large number of photographs tagged with ‘China’. Most of them are snapshots reflecting the individual experience of visiting or traveling in major Chinese cities. People add a caption to each photograph, expressing their thoughts and feelings about their own experience. They also initiate dialogues with other publishers in comments posted below each photograph to understand and learn from the experience of others. Yet it is worth noting that this personal experience is different from the urban experience mentioned above. The latter is defined as an amalgamation of environment, services and goods, like the ‘place-experience’ discussed in Chapter 2, which can be deliberately created by local authorities, architects and urban designers. It is an expected outcome of implementing a specific plan. But the former, named as ‘visitor experience’ in this chapter, is the natural

process of understanding the real world. It is the practice of acquiring knowledge pertaining to the 'place-experience', whereas its consequence may vary depending on the context in which individuals occur.

Practical examples are always valuable tools for examining theoretical concepts and models. The 'visitor experience' is considered worthy of academic analysis due to its inherent nature as subjective evaluation of 'place-experience'. By studying such 'visitor experience', authorities and designers know how people obtain and understand the urban experience they have begun to offer then tailor its content to match what people actually want, thus strengthening the capability of providing better quality of urban experience.

This chapter conducts an in-depth investigation into the 'visitor experience' in two big Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai. This investigation begins with a brief introduction in Section 4.1 that compares two distinct urban characters based on their different paths of development. Following this introduction, the Instagram data associated with these two cities are analysed as a way to look for hot spots. Four precincts including Nanluoguxiang, Tianzifang, Sanlitun Village, and Xintiandi are selected due to high reputation amongst Instagram users. The comparative study of the visitor experiences in the Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang, which is presented in Section 4.2, aims to examine the structure of place experience proposed in Section 2.2. The data analysis is performed accordingly in four dimensions – 'theme', 'event', 'stage', and 'emotion', establishing a basis for additional suggestions on how to make this structure more responsive. The analysis of the Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi, which is conducted in Section 4.3, is intended to evaluate the implementation strategies presented in Section 2.3. The data analysis is focused on three kinds of urban space – 'path', 'portal', and 'place'. Then a number of improvements are proposed for making these strategies more effective.

4.1 Beijing and Shanghai: Overview and introduction

This case study is conducted in two big Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai.

Beijing is the capital of China, holding the position of the nation's political, cultural, and educational center for hundreds of years. The city inherits a vast fortune from the centuries-old imperial history dating back to the 12th century when Jurchen Jin made the city their central capital. Its traditional architectures and urban fabric, ancient treasures and unique social customs combine to create a reality mixed with fantasy, attracting large numbers of visitors who attempt to explore the grandeur of an old empire from all over the world. After 1949 when the People's Republic of China was established, the urban area of Beijing began to expand beyond the old walled city along with the development of industries. Since the early 1980s, the city has witnessed a more rapid growth of new construction. With the expansion of the urban area, the historical heart of Beijing was constantly invaded by the modern society and culture. Large number of boxy buildings were erected, replacing historic neighborhoods and bringing this old city a new sense of order. A new urban landscape filled with the mixture of both traditional Chinese style and modern international design were eventually created.

Shanghai, unlike Beijing, grew up and flourished as a center of international commerce in the 19th century. After the First Opium War, Shanghai was partly occupied by Britain, France, United States, and Japan. People from different countries and continents came to this city to work and live, bringing exotic customs and attitudes. The city has therefore become an interesting blend of eastern and western cultures. For foreign visitors, the most impressive aspect of Shanghai may be the elements that reflect the traditional Chinese culture and values; while for Chinese people, the attraction lies in those houses, churches, parks, and gardens built in classic western style. Due to the colonial history, Shanghai has

always been open-minded towards other cultures, thus making the city increasingly diverse. In the past few decades, large number of modern and post-modern buildings sprang up throughout the whole city with rapid urbanization, but meanwhile, many areas in the former foreign concessions as well as traditional Chinese buildings and gardens were well-preserved. They blended together to form unique and even bizarre urban landscapes that enrich the urban experience of Shanghai.

The two cities were selected for the following reasons. At first, Beijing is the capital of China and is the nation's political and cultural center, while Shanghai is the largest Chinese city and the nation's financial center. They have received the most attention from domestic and international visitors who might generate large amounts of data available for this case study. According to the Beijing Tourism Administration, in 2016 about 4.165 million inbound overnight travelers and 0.17 billion domestic overnight visitors visited Beijing[10]. And according to the report released by Shanghai Tourism Administration, Shanghai received 6.9 million inbound overnight travelers and 0.29 billion domestic visitors in 2016[11]. Meanwhile, both cities have had more than 21 million residents at the end of 2015, which provide large numbers of potential participants for this case study.

However, the Internet censorship in China has blocked many websites and APPs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google, Dropbox and so on. Although the list is constantly changing and Internet users are always finding new ways to gain access to these blocked sites, the amount of available data is less than expected. This will greatly simplify data collection and analysis to some extent, which may be conducive to testing a new technique that needs further improvement. Besides, the identity of potential

[10] http://www.bjta.gov.cn/xxgk/tjxx/388930.htm

[11] http://lyw.sh.gov.cn/lyj_website/HTML/DefaultSite/lyj_xxgk_lytj_2016/2017-03-07/Detail_137492.htm

participants in this case study can be determined and clearly defined. As mentioned in Section 3.2.4, about 90 percent of Instagram users are young people under the age of 35 who may be more familiar with the rules of the Internet-based social environment, so they can easily access the blocked sites and they do not generate invalid data that may reduce the reliability of research results. Besides, China, to a certain extent, is more like a mono-racial country in which the majority of residents are native Chinese speakers. It can be speculated that the participants who added Chinese captions are local residents or domestic visitors, while those who added non-Chinese captions are foreign travellers.

Thirdly, Beijing and Shanghai have different geographic settings, climate conditions and cultural histories, enabling residents and visitors gain different place experiences. But at the same time, they suffer the same problem – the demolition of old buildings and neighbourhoods and the construction of new landscapes and lifestyle. The conflicts and overlaps between two sides form the basis of people's experiences, so that these experiences can be assessed using the same criteria.

With an increasing number of people who share photographs of city life on social media, the geographic information associated with these photographs can be considered as necessary to determine and locate the attractive sites of a city. Using Instagram's public API (application program interface), there are over 1.6 million photographs appearing in the urban area of Beijing, and approximately 1.9 million photographs appearing in Shanghai. As shown in Figure 12 and Figure 13, most of them were taken in the following areas:

- The historical and cultural sites associated with the historic character and cultural development of the city, including royal palaces, temples, tombs, towers, gates and walls.

- The shopping and entertainment venues tagged with modern consumer lifestyle, such as movie theaters, retails, shopping malls and centers.
- Public cultural institutions in which young and educated people like to visit and participate in social activities. The institutions include museums, galleries, colleges and universities.
- Urban parks including municipal parks, public gardens, riverside parks, and greenways that offer recreation and green space to local families and communities.
- Major transport hubs, such as train stations, coach stations, airports and ferry slips that give the first impression of the city.

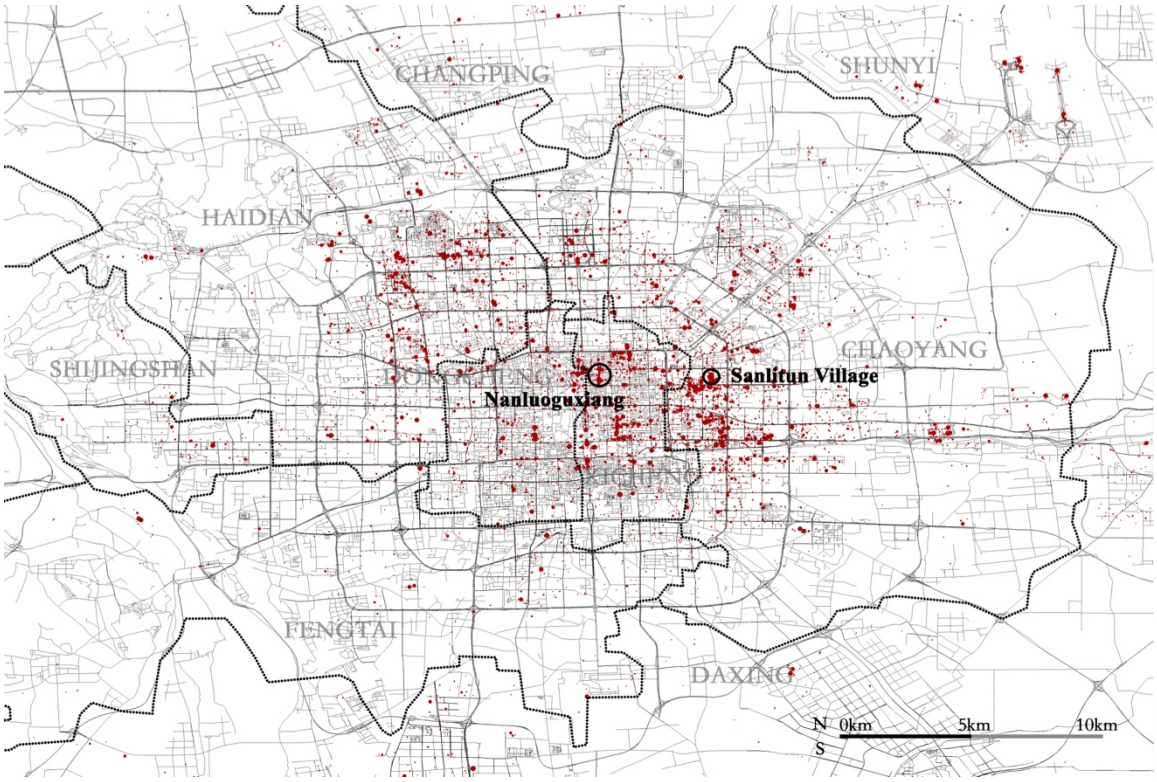


Figure 12 Data distribution in the urban area of Beijing

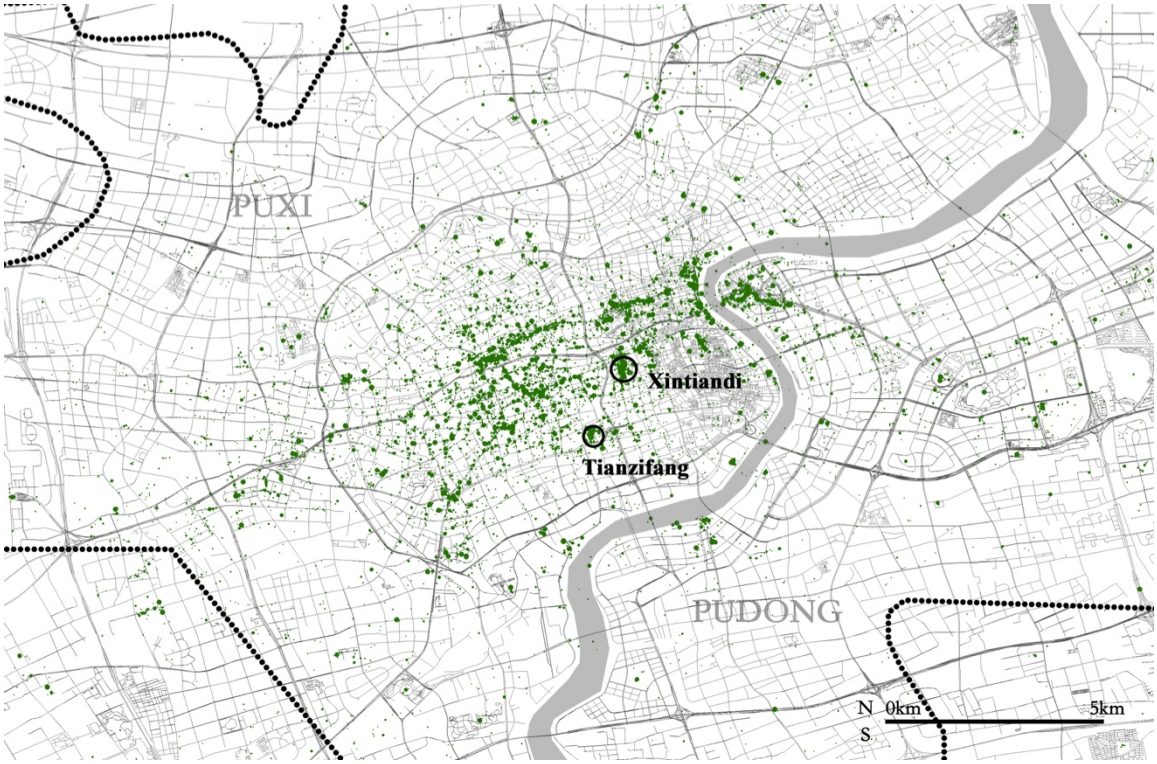


Figure 13 Data distribution in the urban area of Shanghai

The distributions are consistent with the preferences of the participants who have been labelled as ‘young’, ‘intelligent’, ‘well-educated’, ‘local residents’ or ‘domestic and foreign tourists’. Although it is difficult to distinguish these labels from each other for further investigation, the distributions provide an overview of collective experience in two cities, which is necessary for further data analysis.

Four precincts are delineated from these areas, including Nanluoguxiang, Tianzifang, Sanlitun Village, and Xintiandi, due to their high popularity amongst Instagram users. These precincts serve the function of cultural and recreational destination with art studios, galleries, live music houses, shops, restaurants, and bars. Their distinctive styles have attracted widespread public attention but also aroused much academic interest which mainly focus on their roles in promoting urban regeneration (Huang et al, 2011; Wang et al, 2012; Cao et al, 2012; Gu, 2014) and the approaches to sustainable development (He

and Wu, 2005; Wai, 2006; Yung et al, 2014; Yung et al, 2014). The research projects on visitor experience that arises from the interaction between visitors and the physical environment are rarely reported.

4.2 Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang: Visualizing the structure of place experience

Nanluoguxiang means the lane of Nanluogu, a narrow alley located in the well-preserved historical area in downtown Beijing. The broad understanding of Nanluoguxiang covers almost 16 additional streets branching off the lane of Nanluogu. It used to be a typical Chinese northern neighbourhood that boasts traditional architecture, ‘siheyuan’ courtyard and ‘hutong’ street. Some of them were associated with famous historic and literary figures. Nowadays the place still accommodates large numbers of local dwellers, offering rising number of tourists a sample of traditional Beijing life. As early as in 1990, Nanluoguxiang was recognized to be the historic and cultural conservation area in the old city of Beijing. However, the municipal government has not issued any detailed conservation plan until 2002.

Over the 12 years from 1990 to 2002, the old neighbourhood allowed many restaurants, bars and workshops to come into the place for serving nearby cultural institutions and artists. These facilities were concentrated on the lane of Nanluogu, situated in old dwelling houses. The mix-and-match appearance attracted many enthusiastic young people and entrepreneurs who loves art, music, literature, fashion and casual lifestyle. They kept bringing coffee shops, music houses and trendy shops to this place in the following years. These business activities finally clustered on two sides of the lane of Nanluogu, making the street one of the most popular cultural and recreational attractions in Beijing.

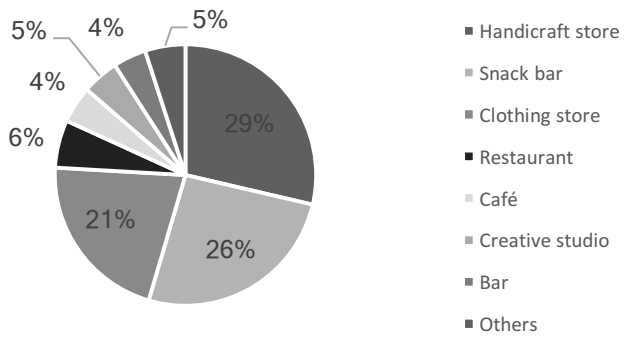


Figure 14 The proportion of different commercial services in Nanluoguxiang (data from Pan et al, 2014)

Tianzifang is an artistic quarter developed from a classical Shanghai neighbourhood. Based on the art studios, trendy shops, bars and restaurants that hidden in the preserved 'shikumen' architectures, the place has become a major tourist attraction in Shanghai. Tianzifang was originally built in the 1930s, merging factory buildings and residences together (Cheng, 2012). By the end of the 1990s, many artists moved into the place and rented those industrial plants for art studios. They brought incentives for local real estate owners to begin exploring external investment. An increasing number of artists and designers from other countries and regions including France, Denmark, Britain, and Singapore joined this group to promote the idea of Tianzifang as an international creative and artistic community. In 2008, the administrative committee was established for managing issues related to the re-zoned land use and renovation of old buildings (Shinohara, 2009). At the present time, Tianzifang not only serves the needs of artists and designers but also houses more than two hundred individual entrepreneurs and creative businesses. Meanwhile, it still maintains the integrity of the neighbourhood by reserving stable residential space for local habitants.

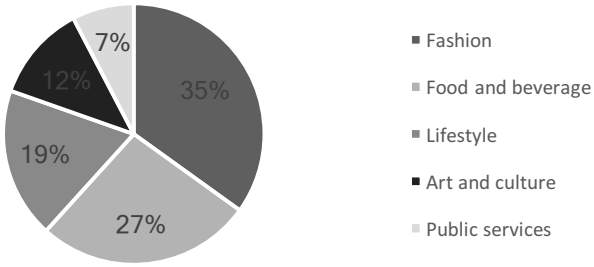


Figure 15 The proportion of different commercial services in Tianzifang (data from www.taikanglu.com)

The first similarity between these two precincts is that both of them actively evolved from the native community that filled with samples of local socio-cultural landscape. External visitors can get authentic experience in such places, not only by looking into the everyday lives of locals but also by getting involved in them through participating in various consumer activities. The second similarity is that they are great places for shopping and entertainment in people' perceived knowledge. They contain many kinds of snack bars, cafes, restaurants, bookstores, trendy shops and souvenir stores. Based on Hannigan's definition of themed consumer experience, both places embody the 'shopertainment' and 'eatertainment' that collapse the boundaries between shopping, eating and playing. The differences between these two precincts occur in the built environment, including for example the spatial structure, the architectural style and character, and the fabric of building facades that derive from distinct local history and culture. These differences stimulate varying attitudes of visitors towards their perceptual experience in two places.

4.2.1 Data description and analysis

In accordance with a rule that each set of data contains at least one valid concept, more than 20 thousand sets of data were eventually filtered, half for Nanluoguxiang, half for Tianzifang. The data represents the visitor experience that builds on the perception of

theme, event, stage and the emotion evoked; or rather, the data presents people's answers to what they have experienced, how they experienced, where they experienced, and how they feel about their experienced obtained.

The proportion of the data associated with each component varies depending on the function the place has to perform. Since Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang are shopping and entertainment precincts, the visitor experiences in two places are determined by their awareness of commercial and recreational activities. As shown in Figure 16, the 'event' accounts for the highest proportion, which is followed by the 'theme' and 'emotion'. The 'stage' that represents the physical environment gets the minimum amount of attention.

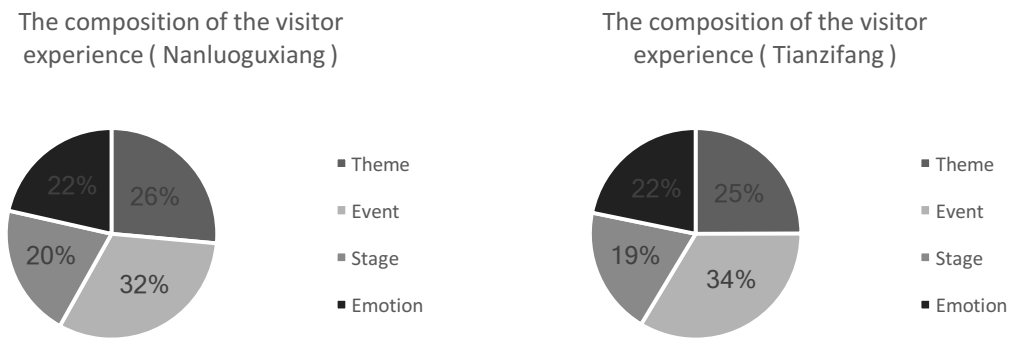


Figure 16 The composition of the visitor experience in Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang

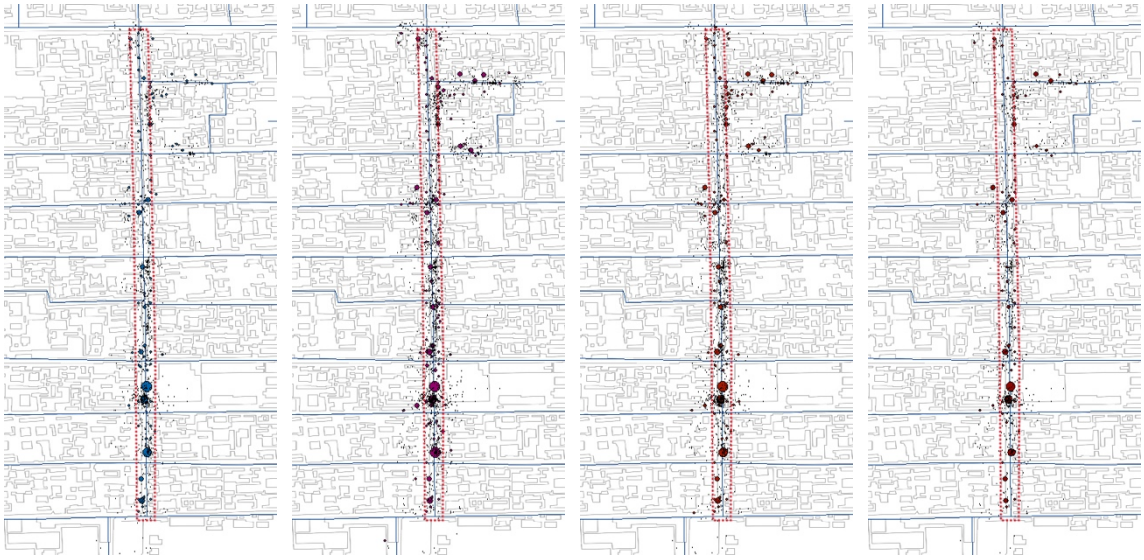


Figure 17 Geographic distribution of the data regarding 'theme', 'event', 'stage', 'emotion' in Nanluoguxiang

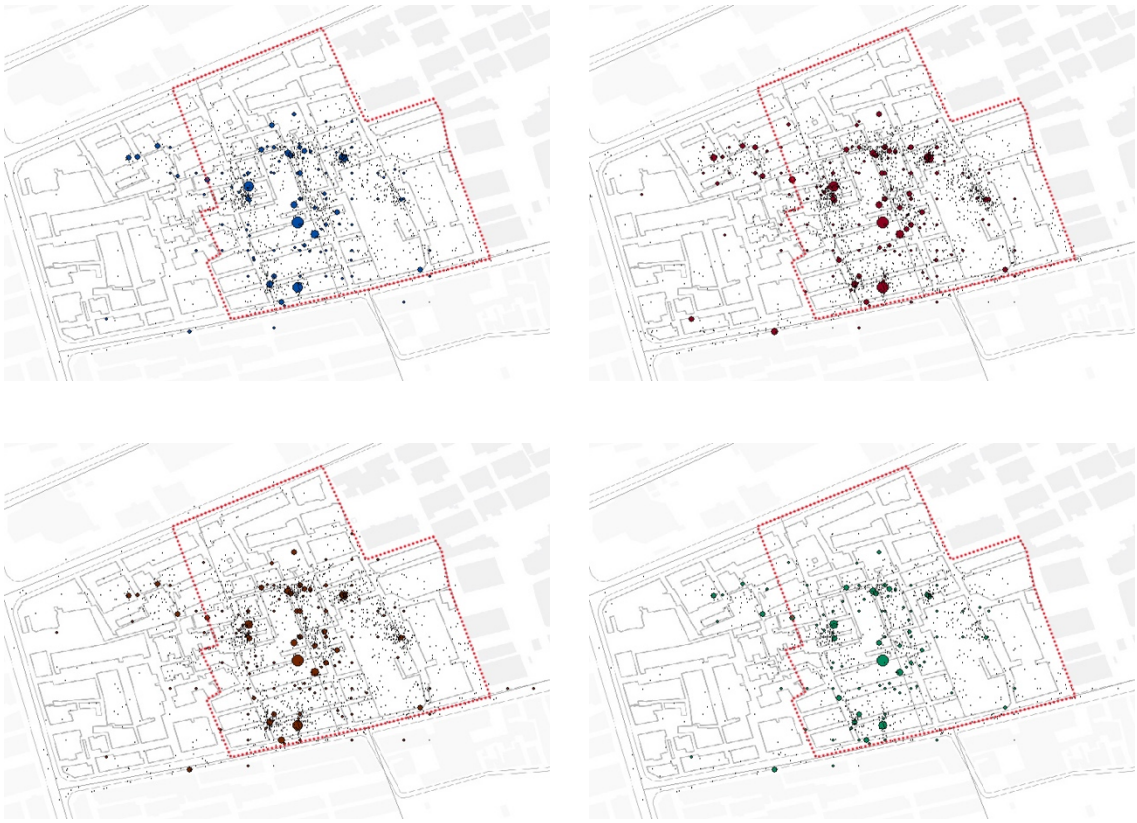


Figure 18 Geographic distribution of the data regarding 'theme', 'event', 'stage', 'emotion' in Tianzifang

Although these four components occur in different proportions, they cannot break away from each other to be alone. As illustrated in Figure 17 and Figure 18, the distributions of four components on the map present similar characteristics. It means that the four components are covered by a close partnership to form an integrated experience. For example, when people define a part of their experience with ‘Nanluoguxiang’, they are most likely referring to their connection with this place, involving events they have attended, those sights they have seen, and emotions evoked. This phenomenon can also be found in comparing the most common types of concepts. As shown in Figure 19, it seems obvious that visitors tend to find authentic scenes then tag these scenes with the name of place, for example, ‘Beijing’, ‘Nanluoguxiang’, and ‘Shanghai’, ‘Tianzifang’, which are categorized into the ‘bj_districts’ and the ‘sh_districts’. Visitors are active participants in such process, so they draw more attention to the activities they engage in, which mainly focus on the ‘action’ they take, the ‘food’ they consume, the ‘people’ they meet and the ‘time’ they visit. When carrying out these activities, they tend to express ‘positive’ emotions by using laudatory words, like ‘good’, ‘excellent’, and ‘adorable’.

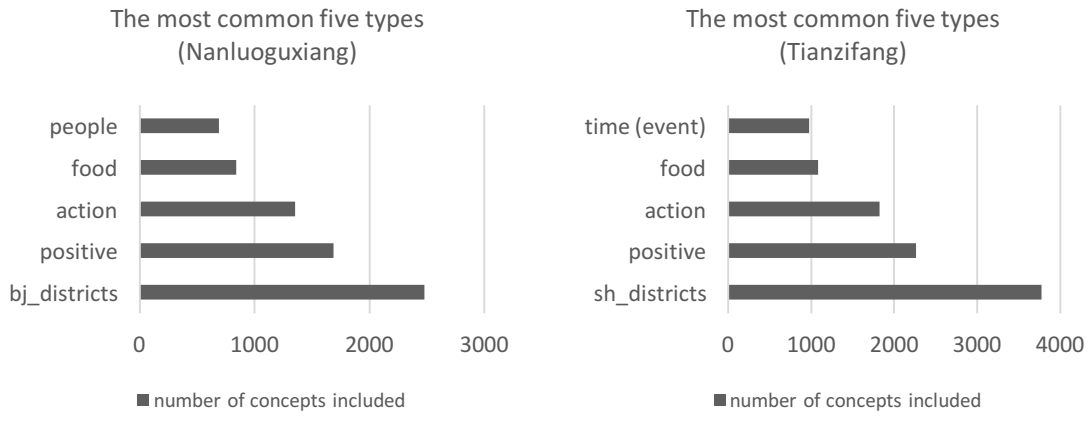
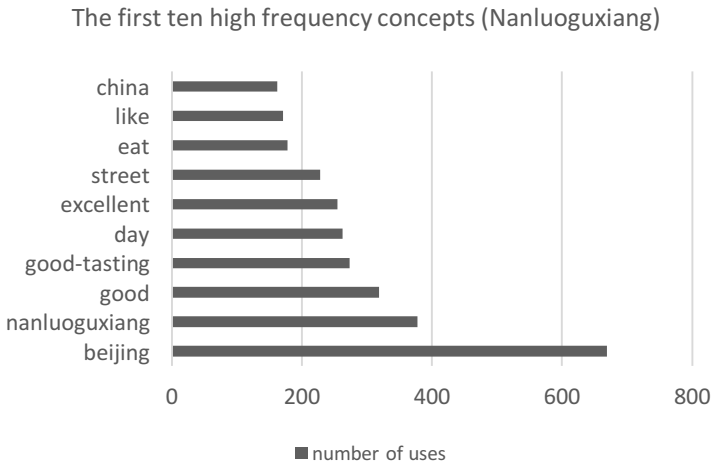


Figure 19 The most common five types of concepts used in Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang



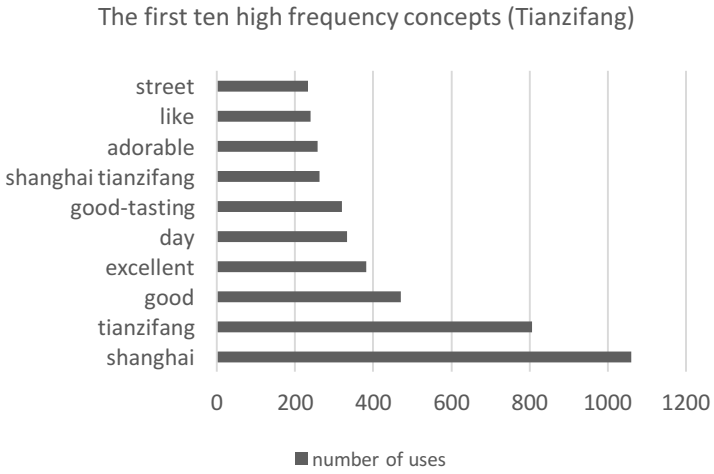


Figure 20 The first ten high frequency concepts used in Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang

This experience is further visualized by high frequency concepts. These concepts were extracted from those captions added by photographers, so they reveal the narratives of visitor experience. For example, Figure 20 shows the first ten high frequency concepts associated with the Nanluoguxiang, which could be classified into the name of place, action, emotion, time and space. By linking them together, there are many possible narratives, such as ‘eating good-tasting food on a good day at Nanluoguxiang Beijing’, or ‘like the excellent street at night’. And the first ten high frequency concepts associated with the Tianzifang can be used to construct narratives, including ‘like the good-tasting

food on the street in Tianzifang Shanghai', 'excellent day in Tianzifang' and so on. These narratives, however, are based on researcher's speculation about visitors' behavior and attitudes. The real stories they have encountered in two places are still folded in massive amounts of data. In order to address this problem, the following paragraphs analyse the visitor experience in four dimensions:

- The dimension of theme;
- The dimension of event;
- The dimension of stage;
- The dimension of emotion.

The dimension of theme

The name of destination is frequently used as the head of theme, as people use it to define their experience, and vice versa. The results of data analysis show that there are three pairs of names for two destinations:

- 'Nanluoguxiang' and 'Tianzifang';
- 'Beijing' and 'Shanghai';
- 'China' and 'China'.

These three pairs of names refer to different theme images on street scale, urban scale and national scale. The most compelling image for visitors is the image on urban scale, which is followed by street image and national image (Figure 21). It means that the dominant theme of a place is 'a place of city'. Hayllar, Griffin and Edwards (2010, 50) have already pointed it out by saying that 'tourist does not visit the city to experience the precinct but rather, that visiting the precinct is an important part of experiencing the city'.

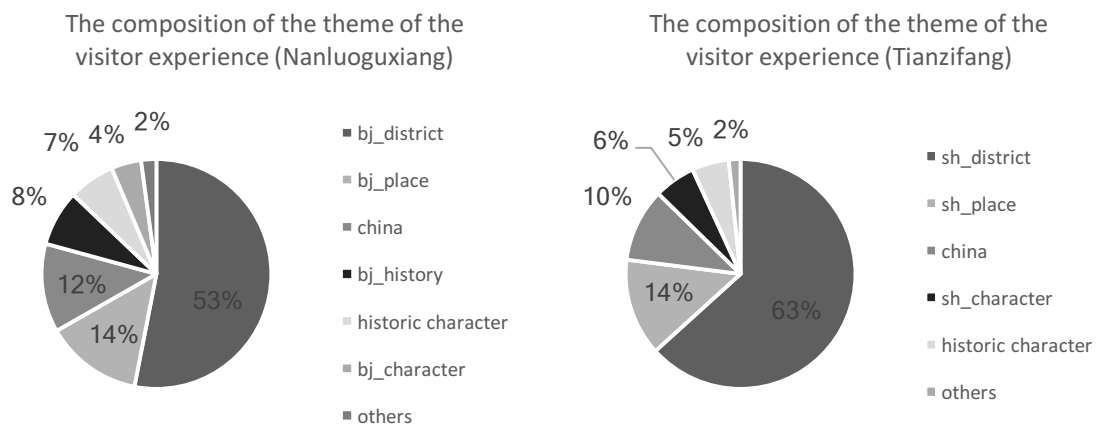


Figure 21 The composition of the theme of the visitor experience in Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang

The name of place implies the experience and associated meanings that people expect. Since more than half of Instagram users who have uploaded photographs of Beijing and Shanghai are supposed to be the first-time visitors, they tend to be attracted to novelty that embodies the distinctive characteristics associated with local history, cultural and social life. As shown in Figure 21, visitors in Nanluoguxiang use a series of historical concepts to bond ‘Nanluoguxiang’, ‘Beijing’ and ‘China’ together, since the place preserves historic character on distinct street space and traditional buildings. These concepts cooperate closely in developing at least one coherent narrative for each of ‘Beijing’ and ‘Nanluoguxiang’, which is made up of context, time, activity, space form, emotion and example (Figure 22, 23).

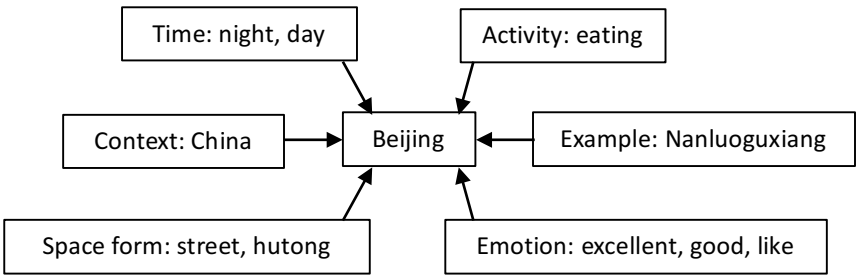


Figure 22 The narrative of 'Beijing'

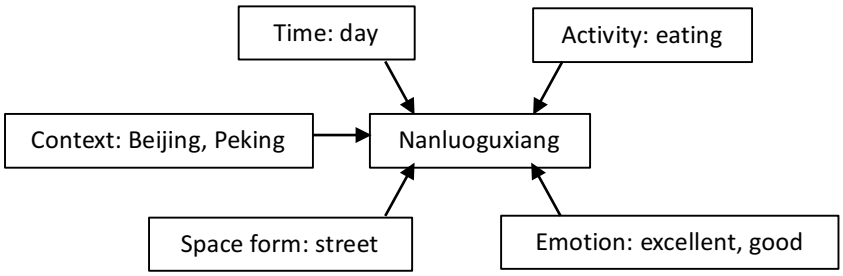


Figure 23 The narrative of 'Nanluoguxiang'

In the Tianzifang, however, each name of place is associated to a single aspect. 'Shanghai' is used to qualify the space form, 'Tianzifang' is reduced to the emotional trigger, and 'China' is considered to be a kind of lifestyle. These three aspects appear to be independent of each other in most visitors' minds, and more importantly, they have not been developed into a coherent story. This means that people do experience something memorable and meaningful in this place. And yet, despite this, the content of their experience is still vague in theme.

The dimension of event

As discussed in Chapter 2, the core of an event is the act that links people with their desired objects in a specific context. The data analysis indicates that eating and drinking are the most common acts in the visitor experience, which are followed by the acts of feeling and looking (Figure 25). These actions are usually taken at a particular location or at a particular time, connecting people to food and drinks, other people and other types of objects (Figure 24).

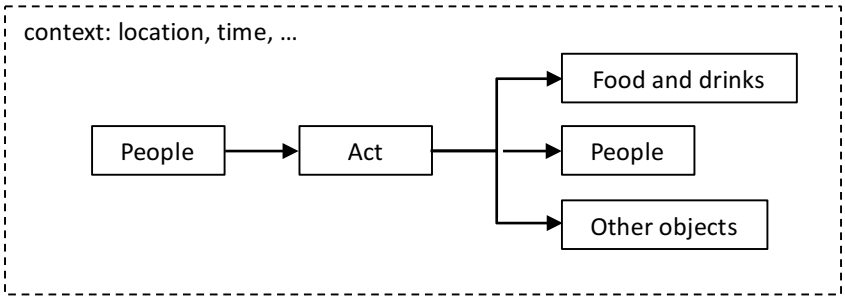


Figure 24 The theoretical model of setting events

Catering services have played an important part in the success of consumer destination for a long time. As stated above, coffee shops, bars and restaurants make up 40 percent of total services in the Nanluoguxiang, 27 percent in the Tianzifang. They provide visitors a place for taking a break, and free WI-FI for uploading photographs and comments. Those food and drinks served in the coffee shop, bar and restaurant have therefore taken the opportunity to dominate visitors' photographs. The results of image analysis show that the image of food and drinks appears most often in the photographs of 'act', 'food and drinks', 'people' and 'other objects', accounting for 27 percent, 46 percent, 20 percent, and 25 percent respectively.

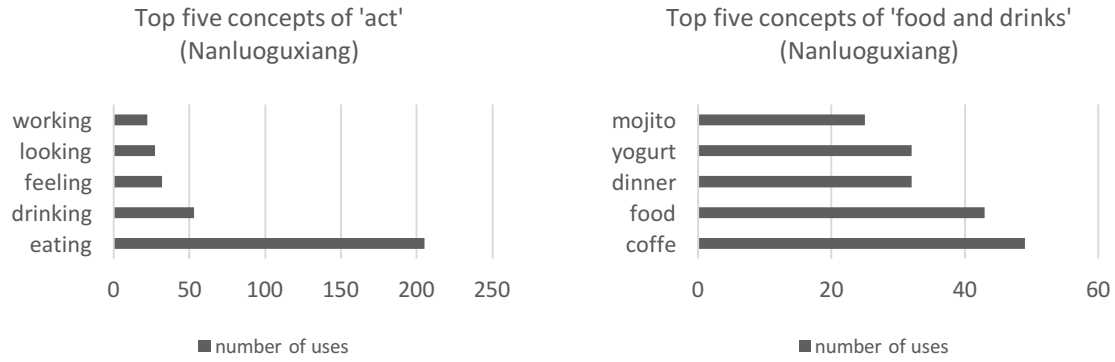


Figure 25 Top five concepts regarding 'act' and 'food and drink' in Nanluoguxiang

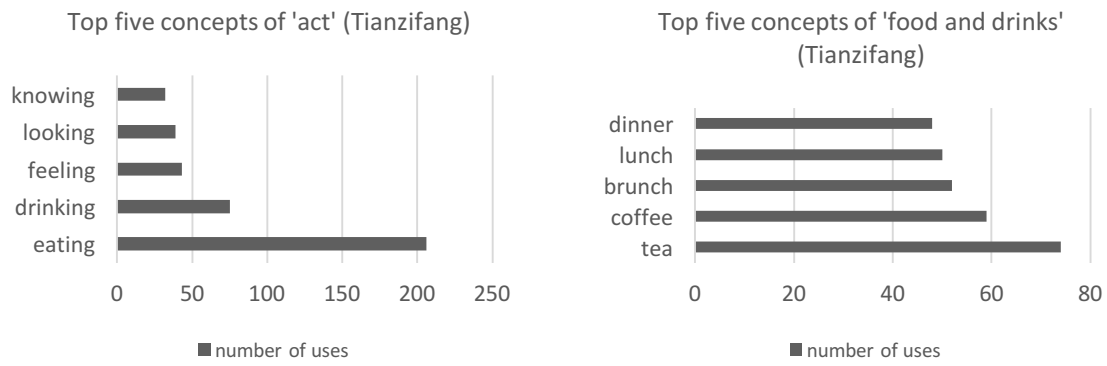


Figure 26 Top five concepts regarding 'act' and 'food and drink' in Tianzifang

It is worth noting that coffee is the most popular drink in Nanluoguxiang, however, it is consumed less than tea in Tianzifang. According to the conventional view of Chinese people, coffee represents a new and modern lifestyle, indicating their acceptance of western culture and values. While tea represents an old but familiar way of life, embodying traditional Chinese culture and customs. On the other hand, for most foreign visitors, coffee as a symbol of homeland makes the strange destination more familiar to them.

In addition to ‘food and drinks’, the analysis of ‘people’ and ‘other objects’ shows that visitors have so easily been attracted by vivid life and local character (Figure 27, 28). The highlighting of postcards indicates the tourist function of place. And it also reinforces a fact that the attentions of visitors, especially the outside visitors who are unfamiliar with the place, could be grabbed more effectively by the symbol of local uniqueness, such as postcards depicting various aspects of local life and customs, or red lanterns that are used to mark special festival events.

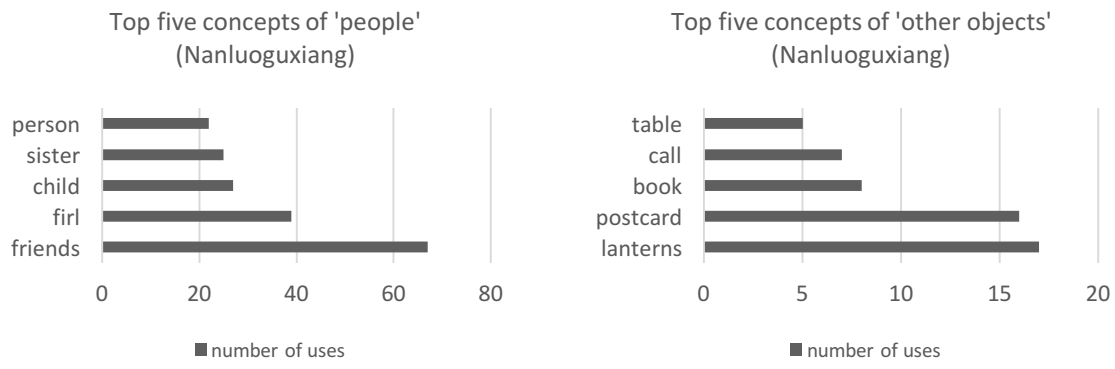


Figure 27 Top five concepts regarding 'people' and 'other objects' in Nanluoguxiang

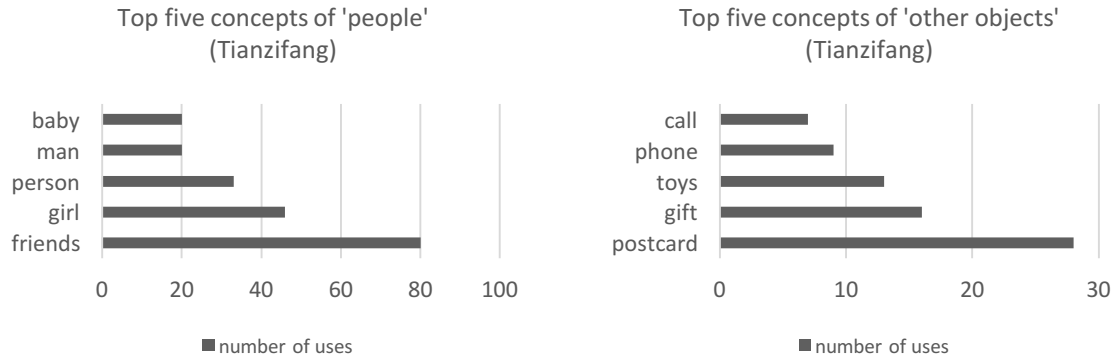


Figure 28 Top five concepts regarding 'people' and 'other objects' in Tianzifang

The dimension of stage

As defined in Chapter 2, the stage refers to the built environment that provides settings for human activity. It is created by combining natural and human elements within a themed context. In the cases of Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang, as shown in Figure 29, the natural elements are natural resources involving climate, wildlife, and various types of natural landscapes; the human elements refer to buildings and facilities serving residential and recreational needs, transportation, public health and safety. The way of integrating

these elements as a whole should be taken under the influence of local history and cultural traditions.

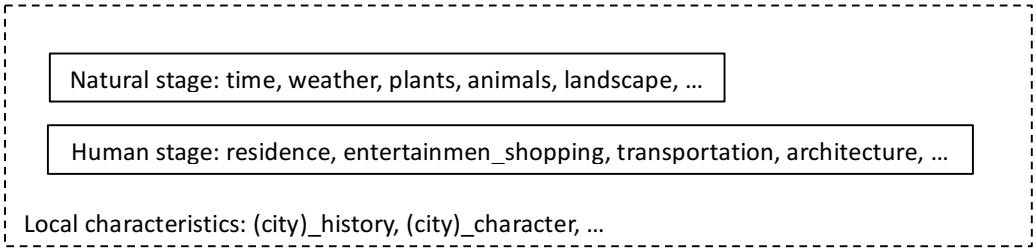


Figure 29 The theoretical model of designing stage

The stages of two places are constructed on the basis of traditional urban fabric, providing authentic local experience. So visitor's perceptual experience is more influenced by the qualities of human stage. Almost half of people in the Nanluoguxiang focus on the human stage, and nearly 15 percent of them express their concerns about 'street' that falls into the category of 'transportation' (Figure 30). The street space, which is named as 'hutong' for hundreds of years, has indeed become a must-see attraction for outside visitors. It is an important cultural element of the city of Beijing, embodying the history of Beijing and reflecting the living culture of ordinary Beijingers. The image of street appears in about 14 percent of photographs marked with 'local character'. The grid street network offers a well-oriented space. It is easier to access, easier to follow the pedestrian route, easier to find the store or restaurant they want to go, thus making people feel more comfortable and relaxed. People walk into Nanluoguxiang, not only for the boutique stores, art galleries, yummy foods, but also for the conserved traditional lifestyle.

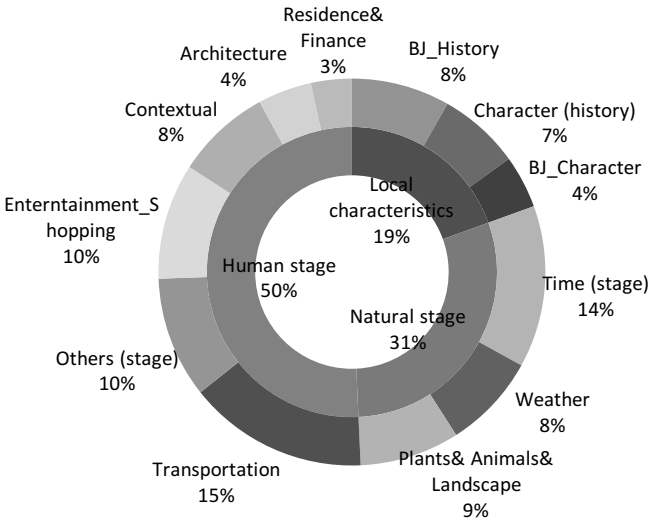


Figure 30 The composition of the visitor experience about the stage in Nanluoguxiang

People describe but cannot visualize their experience of ‘hutong’ with effective details. The image analysis indicates that the image of street appears only a few times in the photographs of ‘transport’, accounting for 17 percent. These photographs are taken from a distance, with framing almost everything on the street. It is difficult to find a photograph with single subject that points to the visual focus. On one hand, the street image should be an integrated scenario that allows visitor to get away and look back over it. But on the other hand, it is reasonable to conclude that Nanluoguxiang doesn’t provide focal point to grab the attention of visitors (Figure 32).

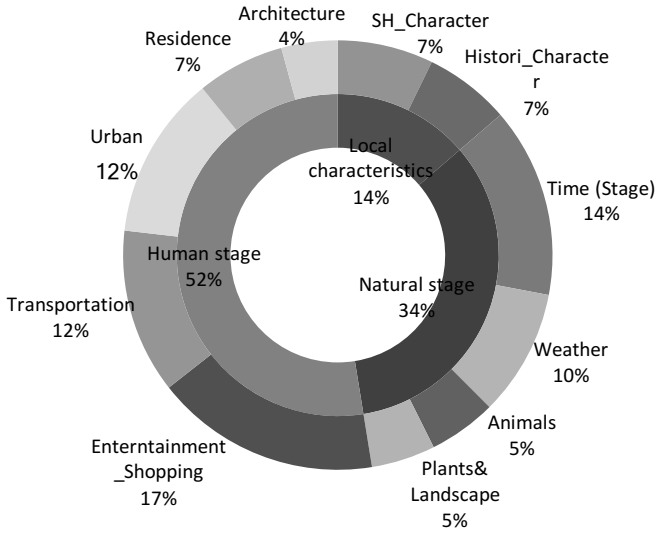


Figure 31 The composition of the visitor experience about the stage in Tianzifang

The similar condition occurs in Tianzifang where the street system is more complicated with much narrower space. As shown in Figure 31, visitors in the Tianzifang keep more focus on services and facilities for shopping, dining and entertainment, rather than the street space. The wide variety of visible details on the street frontage tend to confuse people and make them lose the orientation. They have to slow down and begin to move eyes onto street shops. However, visitor always eager to get in touch with something that maintains local uniqueness. While the red lanterns are hanging over the street of Nanluoguxiang, they record it on their photographs. And while visitors get clues about local history of Tianzifang, which are hidden in the products behind the display windows, in the paintings kept in galleries, and in the restaurant recipes, they are willing to show them, but through the performance of consumer activities rather than description of physical stage.



Cluster 1



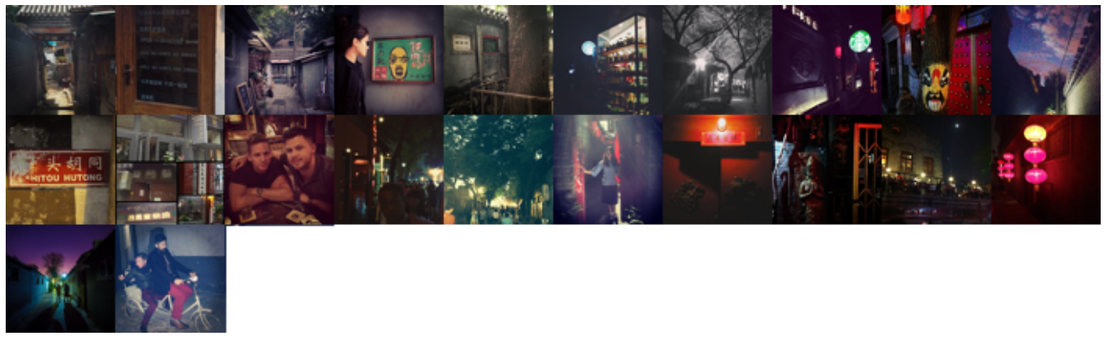
Cluster 2



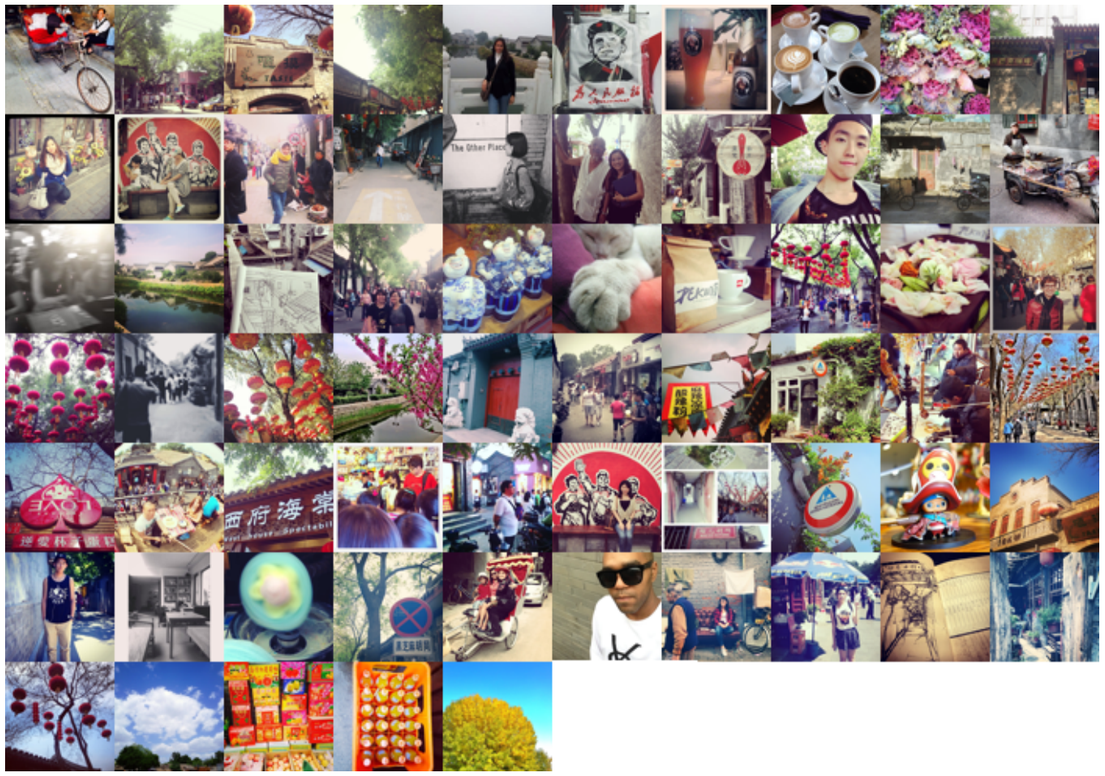
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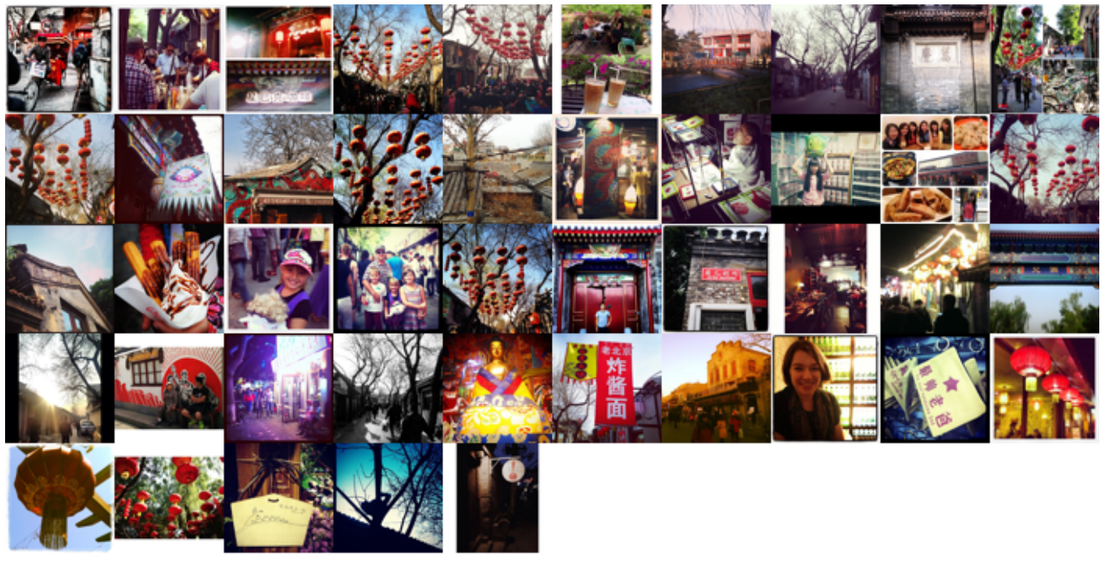
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Cluster 5



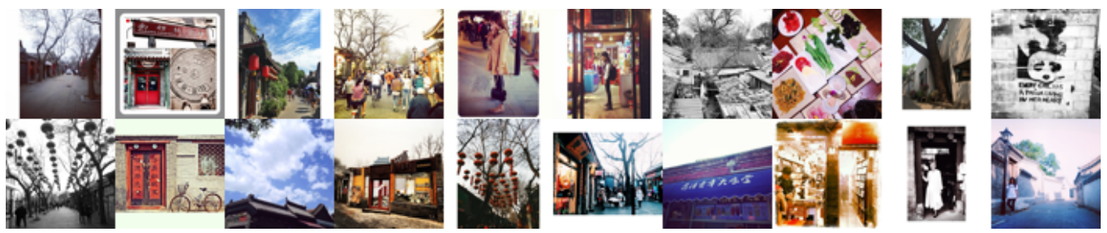
Cluster 6



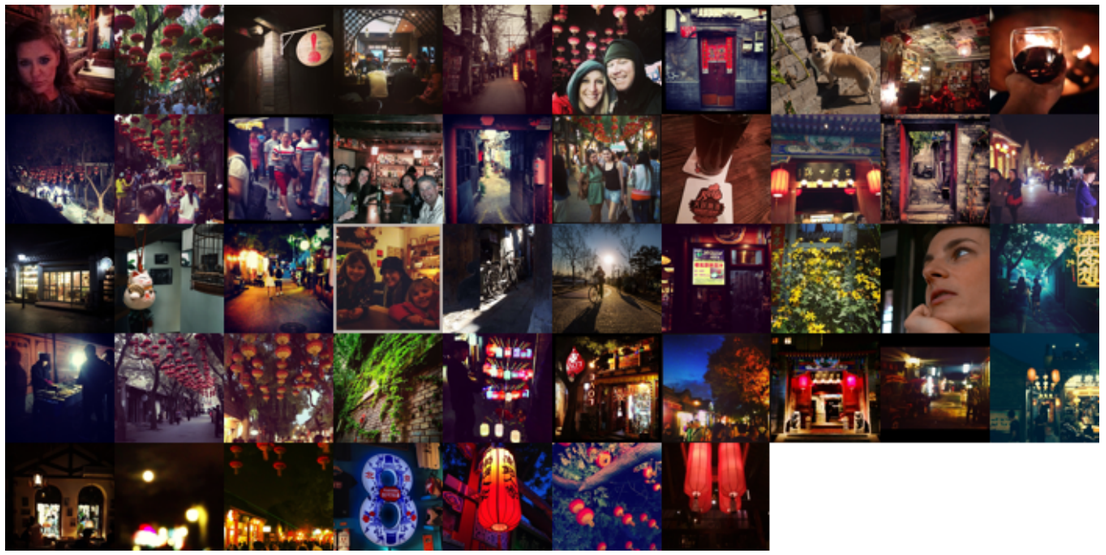
Cluster 7



Cluster 8



Cluster 9



Cluster 10

Figure 32 10 clusters of the photographs taken from Nanluoguxiang, revealing 10 facts about people's collective experience of the street of Nanluoguxiang

The dimension of emotion

When engaged into the themed narrative, people tend to have emotional responses, expressing their likes and dislikes. The analysis results suggest that visitors prefer showing positive attitudes and feelings on Instagram homepages. About 70 percent of concepts they have used to express their emotion are positive (Figure 33). These concepts have close connection with concepts about theme and event, which means that the positive emotion is mostly inspired by visitors' understanding of place identity during participating various kinds of activities. For example, when visitors think 'Beijing' and 'Nanluoguxiang' are 'good', they refer to the 'good' 'eat', the 'good' 'day', the 'good' 'friends' and so on (Figure 34). Likewise, when they think 'Shanghai' and 'Tianzifang' are 'good', they refer to the 'good' 'day', the 'good' 'place', the 'good' 'life' and the 'good' 'weather' (Figure 35). The captions that reflect their bad feelings contain positive concepts at the same time. When they communicate with each other on something 'bad', they keep thinking about something 'good'.

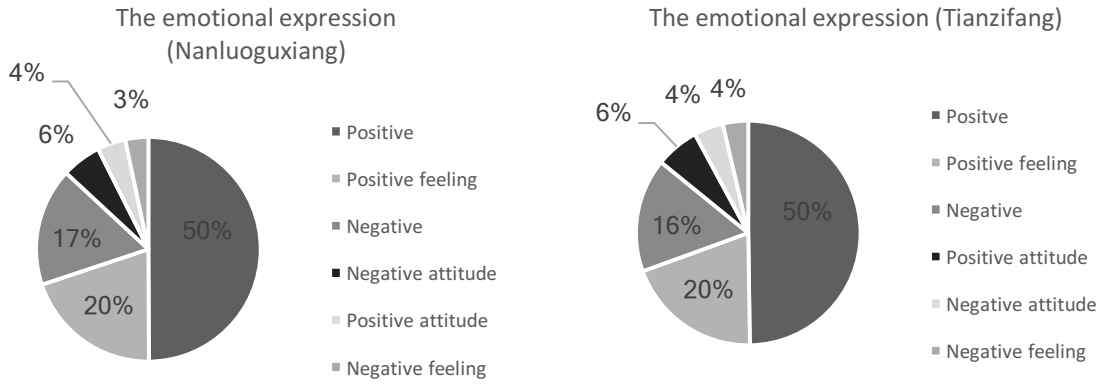


Figure 33 The emotional expression in Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang

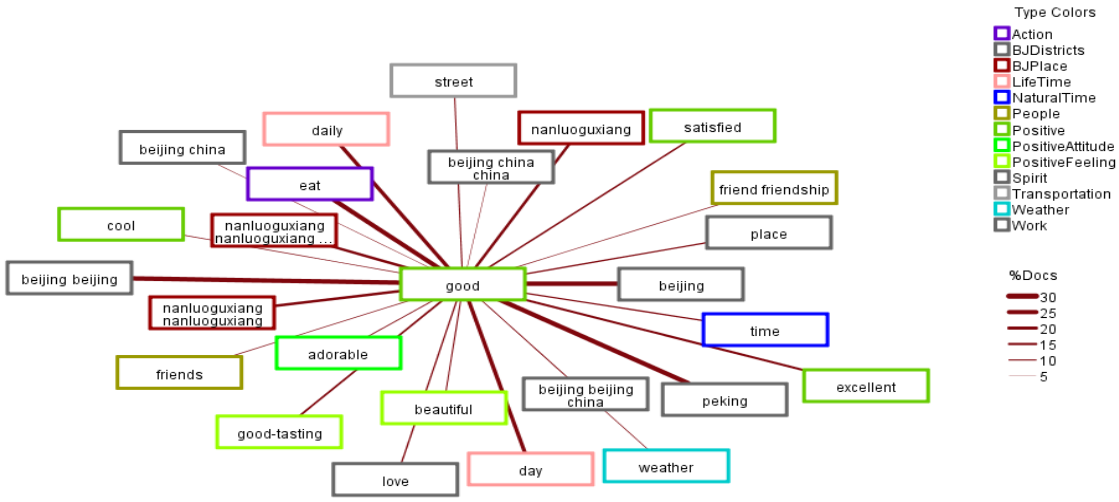


Figure 34 The semantic context of the concept 'good' in Nanluoguxiang

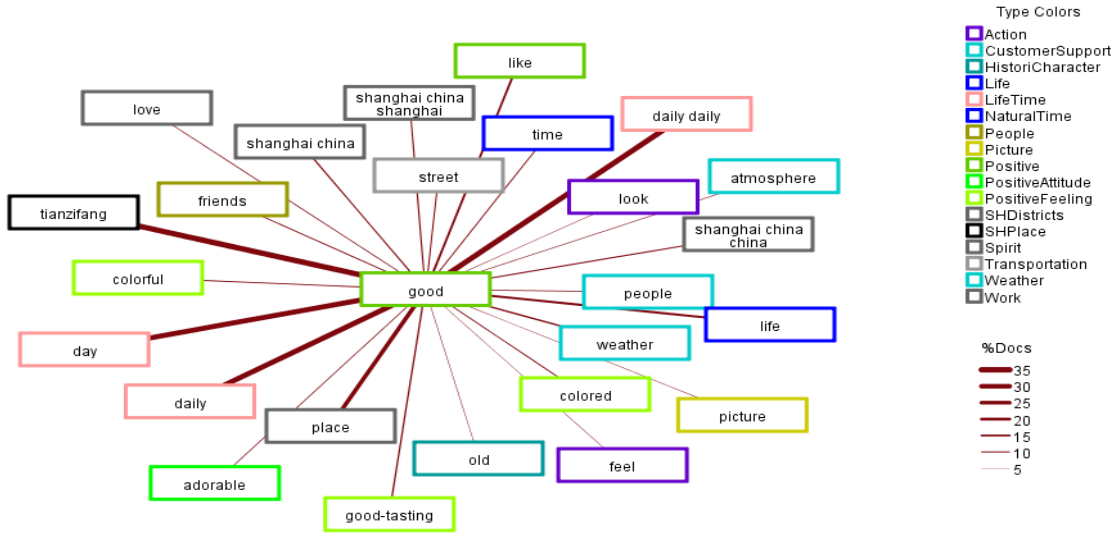


Figure 35 The semantic context of the concept 'good' in Tianzifang

4.2.2 Findings and discussions

As discussed in data analysis above, this research study finds that although theme, event, stage and emotion are interdependent components and cannot be separated from each other, the ratio among them may change with different purposes. The proportion of theme and emotion, accounting for approximately one half of experience, remains stable. But

the ratio between event and stage is determined by the relation of visitor to available activities.

According to the theory regarding experience realms proposed by Joseph Pine II and Gilmore (1999), the consumer activities in this case study require active participation and try to keep visitor immersed in them. For being a consumer destination, the outdoor space has been turned into the digital screen showing a great variety of advertisements. While the store facades are decorated in different styles and continuously strengthened, the possibility of staying outside is gradually reduced. Visitors are attracted into shops, cafes, bars and restaurants that match their personalities and interests. Their behaviors and enthusiasm encourage other visitors to engage with them. Meanwhile, they are motivated by other people's performance and attitudes toward the environment. To some extent, visitors are forced to be active participators through various signs and rules that occur in their interactions with people and objects. They are told 'what to do' and 'how to do' in such process. In this circumstance, visitors have to be more concerned with the event that binds all these things together. After all, they are encouraged to be a part of place. On the other hand, it is reasonable to suppose that these people tend to keep more focus on the stage around them in another behaviour-limited circumstance such as museum and art gallery. They are more like passive participators who place more emphasis on recognizing and understanding the implications regarding 'what not to do'.

The second finding is that the theme of place is not yet well understood. As indicated in the analysis above, visitors define most of their experience as 'experiencing Beijing', 'experiencing Shanghai', or 'experiencing China', but rarely describe the details within any context. Urry and Larsen (2011) have pointed out that people are easy to immerse themselves in familiar activities while staying in a strange environment. Those people who publish photographs on Instagram are ordinary people, not professionals. On one

hand, they may know little about the place, and they may be insensitive to immediate surroundings, so that they tend to ignore the appearance of unfamiliar features. On the other hand, they know the name of city and the name of country better. In their eyes the place is a place of city, and the themed image is not only the image of place but also an integrated part of the image of city. Urban image and national image do contribute to the theme of place-experience. And the place really should be able to keep and convey the essential identity of city besides preserving its uniqueness. It must be emphasized, however, that a place needs a strong theme to be differentiated from competitors.

The proposed approach to dealing with it is to develop various narratives to strengthen the core of theme then make direct or indirect reference to it. As presented above, the theme of Nanluoguxiang is based on the distinctive form and appearance of 'hutong'. But this concept is neither well understood nor well illustrated, due to the lack of communication and interaction with visitors. The data analysis does not capture the effect of 'hutong' on event planning. Although local travel agencies have launched many programs such as 'Hutong Half Day Tours', 'Hutong Group Day Tours' and 'Hutong Tours by Pedicab', it is difficult to track other activities in addition to sightseeing. The people who are interested to get a well-rounded understanding of 'hutong' should be provided with more interactive activities for exploring its history and evolution, its unique features and its role in the sustainable development of the whole city. Besides, this concept ought to be integrated into the stage design. The most common way to do this is to create or reinforce a focal point by using iconic and indexical visual signs like street sculptures, and neon boards. It might be criticized for being superficial and artificial, just like the 'duck' introduced by Venturi (1972). But it does make the concept clearer, then it will be easily recognized and understood by new visitors. For example, when people see

the red paper lanterns hanging over the street of Nanluoguxiang, they know the Chinese New Year is truly coming soon.

Additionally, in considering the effect of food and beverage service on visitor experience, dining tables are worth emphasizing in promotion of theme expression. For example, the data analysis shows that the most popular and desired drink in the Nanluoguxiang is coffee, while it is replaced by tea in the Tianzifang. Comparing with the former that might be the most favourite drink in the world, tea is popularized as a traditional Chinese drink, which has been deeply woven into the history and culture of China. If it is considered to be a vital support to the theme promotion, tea drinking will should be expanded to a sort of cultural exhibition that involves tea production, tea brewing, tea ceremony and tea art.

The final finding emerged from the data analysis above is that the emotional response cannot be the major indicator to measure the qualities of place environment at the present time. The first-time visitors in general avoid expressing negative emotion to their experience, in other words, they avoid posting dissatisfaction on social media. It provides designer an ambiguous condition that the boundary between positive and negative has been blurred intentionally.

4.3 Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi: Examining the construction of place experience

Sanlitun Village locates in the center of Sanlitun area, the major diplomatic district near the east of downtown Beijing. In the late 1950s, Sanlitun area was selected as the settlement for relocated foreign legations and embassies. The embassy staff and their families, the employees of related services have therefore developed a large foreign community within this site, which, however, was mixed with local communities. Since 1990s, the bar street serving foreigners and young locals began to open and gradually

fostered the bar culture of Beijing, attracting the attention of visitors from domestic and abroad. In the summer 2008, a big shopping center named Sanlitun Village opened and gave the site more boutiques, stores, restaurants, hotels and bars. This shopping center consists of two blocks: the Village South and the Village North. Each block comprises of several semi-independent buildings, with lane, courtyards and plazas. The chief architects have introduced that they applied the concepts of Open Urban Quarters and Open Architecture onto the scheme to offer people a permeable public space with 24-hours openness[12]. Their success made the Sanlitun Village an ideal entertainment destination and upgraded the whole Sanlitun area to be the major symbol of modern Beijing's leisure life.

Xintiandi locates in the center of downtown Shanghai. It is known for its transformation from a traditional Shanghai community to an entertainment destination in the early 2000s. Based on the well-preserved spatial structure, Xintiandi covers two blocks as well. The North Block is composed of old 'shikumen' buildings, a sort of traditional Shanghainese architecture that combines Chinese and Western elements together, with narrow alleys, courtyards and small squares. These old residential buildings were renovated into trendy boutiques, stylish cafes, restaurants, museum and galleries. In the South Block, a modern shopping complex is inserted at the end of street, reflecting a kind of fashionable eclectic spirit and enhancing the site as a unique entertainment destination. For most people who have interest in trendy Shanghai life, Xintiandi offers great shopping experience at the daytime and amazing nightlife on weekdays as well as weekends.

The first similarity between two cases is that they are great places for leisure activities such as shopping and dining. International brand stores, independent designer boutiques,

[12] http://www.ovalpartnership.com/sanlitun/#

stylish restaurants and cafes foster the fascinating atmosphere that attracts people who desire a fashionable lifestyle. These people consider these places as the trendy core of city and attempt to label themselves as ‘fashionistas’ by getting involved in various consumer activities there. Their behaviors also nourish the public life between buildings and strengthen the sense of place. The second similarity lies in their spatial patterns. Both Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi consist of two separate blocks. As shown in Figure 36, Sanlitun Village is comprised of the Piazza and the Deck, which are connected by two liner streets. Situated near the main road to downtown area, the Piazza becomes the front entrance of Sanlitun Village; while the Deck looks more like a quiet backyard fenced with narrower streets. Each of them has a dynamic outdoor space that is comprised of ‘path’, ‘portal’ and ‘place’. Likewise, Xintiandi is composed of the North Block and the South Block (Figure 36). The North Block is designed to be the main entrance due to its closer link to other entertainment venues. The South Block is the backyard. It is located near the up-class neighborhood in which people are offered quiet and safe environment. The sequential experience in this kind of place is supposed to start from the entrance gate to the backyard.

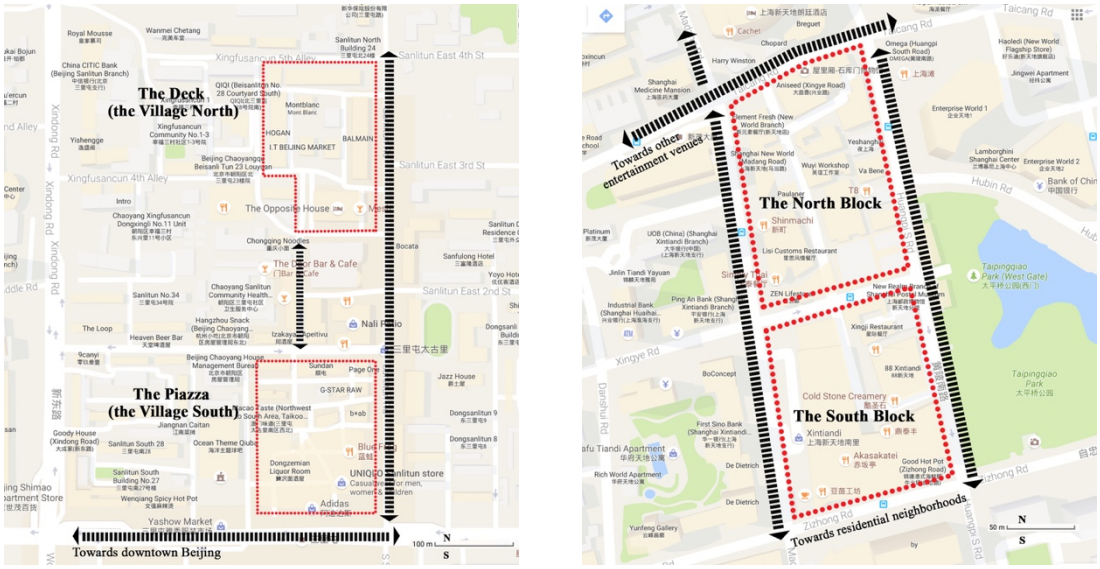


Figure 36 The location of Sanlitun Village in Beijing, and the location of Xintiandi in Shanghai

4.3.1 Data description and analysis

In this case study, nearly 53 thousand sets of data were downloaded from Instagram. Over two-thirds of them were taken for Sanlitun Village, and nearly one-third of them were taken for Xintiandi. Take full account of the geographic distribution of the data, the pedestrian routes within the site, the dominant form and use of public space, both Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi are considered to have an outdoor open space that consists of many paths, portals and places. According to the discussion in Section 2.3, the definitions of 'path', 'portal' and 'place' adopted in this case study are listed below:

- Path: the regular liner space with the lowest density of data points. The length-to-width ratio is greater than 3:1, which is designed for pedestrian movement.
- Portal: the irregular space with higher density of data points. It links paths with places, serving as the entrance of place and the exit of path.
- Place: the enclosed regular or irregular space with the highest density of data points. The length-to-width ration is usually smaller than 3:1, which is designed for promoting public social interaction.

As shown in Figure 37, Sanlitun Village comprises the Piazza (Village south) and the Deck (Village north). Each of them is built around a central open space that allows for entry from at least two main access points. The central space of the Piazza is designated SP1. The adjacent space, which is placed to the north of SP1, is designated SP2. The central space of the Deck is made up of a sunken plaza, which is numbered with SP3, and its surrounding space that is numbered with SP4. The south entrance to the Piazza is designated SP5, which is an irregular square linking the SP1 with the main road to downtown. The entrance space of the Deck is split into two small squares based on the direction of the major line of sight. The space facing the direction of the Piazza is marked

with SP6, while the space facing to the outside is marked with SP7. Besides, there are two pedestrian streets connecting the Piazza to the Deck. One of them is located inside the site, consisting of two liner spaces named SP8 and SP9 respectively. The other one is located outside, accommodating the movement of pedestrians along the eastern boulevard. It is divided into three liner spaces depending on the buildings along the street, which are respectively designated SP10, SP11 and SP12.



Figure 37 The spatial structure of Sanlitun Village, and the spatial structure of Xintiandi

Likewise, Xintiandi comprises the North Block and the South Block. Each of them is organized around a central open space, which are designated XP1 and XP2. The North

Block has two public access points along the main road to other urban entertainment venues, which are designated XP3 and XP4. These two points are connected to the XP1 by an L-shaped space named XP6. Meanwhile, the access point to the South Block, which is marked as XP5, is located on the road to the southern up-class neighborhoods. The liner space linking XP1 and XP2 is marked as XP7. The road that intersects with the XP7 is numbered XP8. And the boulevard just east of the site is added into the path system and designated XP9, due to its close connection with interior public space of Xintiandi.

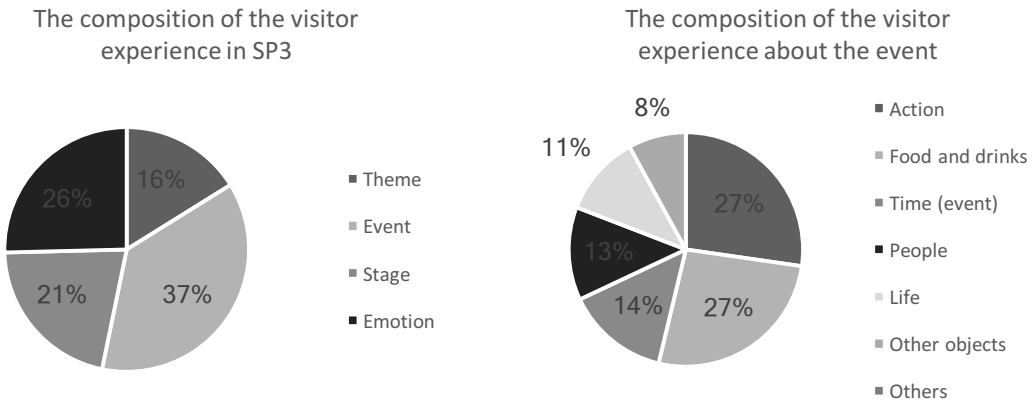
People who entered these spaces apparently gained different experiences, so they published various photographs to display different content, including the things they have seen, the activities they have undertaken, the objects they have found and the people they have touched. Their visitor experiences show the results of how they perceive a themed place environment. In order to better understand the factors that influence their own perceptions and interpretations, the subsequent data analysis is carried out on three types of visitor experience:

- the visitor experience of place;
- the visitor experience of portal;
- the visitor experience of path.

The visitor experience of place

In Section 2.3, places are required to provide support for the most dramatic moments of visitor experience. These moments are proposed to be given in a series of interrelated events within particular stages. People tend to express strong concerns about the quality of events at the consumer destination. Just as shown in Figure 38, which describes the composition of the visitor experience at SP3, the proportion of ‘event’ is far higher than

other three components. This means that people tend to consider SP3 as a space for 'doing' something, such as having a good brunch, eating an authentic American burger or an Italian pizza, or finding trendy outfits from the new arrivals of boutique clothing. The photographs taken in SP3 support this claim. The image analysis indicates that more than one-third are photographs of food and beverages, and nearly 20 percent of those photographs show people's aesthetic choices about clothes and fashion. Such experience, apparently, is determined by use and occupancy of buildings around the square. As depicted in Figure 39, SP3 is a sunken plaza surrounded by stylish restaurants, cafes and designer boutiques. It is not a nuclear square (Zucker, 1959) which can be characterized by a building or a vertical structure that can draw the attention of people in a first moment. This plaza is more like a dominated square (Zucker, 1959), created and owned by adjacent buildings as the front yard of them. The edge zones along the facades are clearly defined by irregular ground surfaces, altered paving materials, and variation in plants. According to Gehl (2006), such area is obviously designed for the users and functions of the surrounding buildings. He argued that 'it is relatively easy to move a function out of the house to the zone along the façade' (Gehl, 2006, 150).



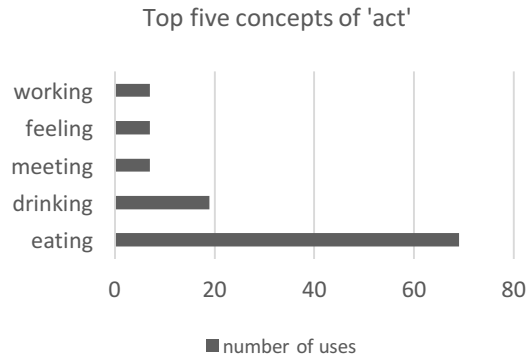


Figure 38 The analytical results for the visitor experience in SP3



Figure 39 The photograph of SP3 (from www.ovalpartnership.com)

In the SP1 in which the central space is also framed by various chain stores, restaurants and bars, however, people are more concerned with the ‘theme’ expression (Figure 40). It is an L-shaped square which is built as an outdoor theatre with more possibilities for holding independent events such as outdoor concerts, visual art exhibition and cocktail party. The performance stage, which is located on the west side of square, is occupied by

a dry deck fountain, against a large digital backdrop. The main audience area is designed as a gentle slope, located on the east side. Visitors tend to tag their experience of SP1 with ‘Beijing’ and ‘Sanlitun’ (Figure 40). But the text analysis reveals that these two names are not associated with events but are linked to many emotional concepts such as ‘good’, ‘excellent’, ‘like’, and ‘beautiful’ (Figure 42). The image analysis also indicates that over one-third of photographs reveal details regarding the stage, which are identified and labeled with such as ‘city’, ‘road’, ‘vehicle’, and ‘sky’. A similar phenomenon occurs in XP1. Although visitors have already experienced many events in the XP1, they rarely tag these events with ‘Shanghai’ or ‘Xintiandi’. The names of place are frequently associated with visitors’ emotions and those concepts about time such as ‘weekday’ and ‘day’. And the image analysis reveals that over 35 percent of their photographs depict the scenes about the stage, which consists of ‘road’, ‘night’, ‘city’, ‘performance’, ‘art’ and so on.

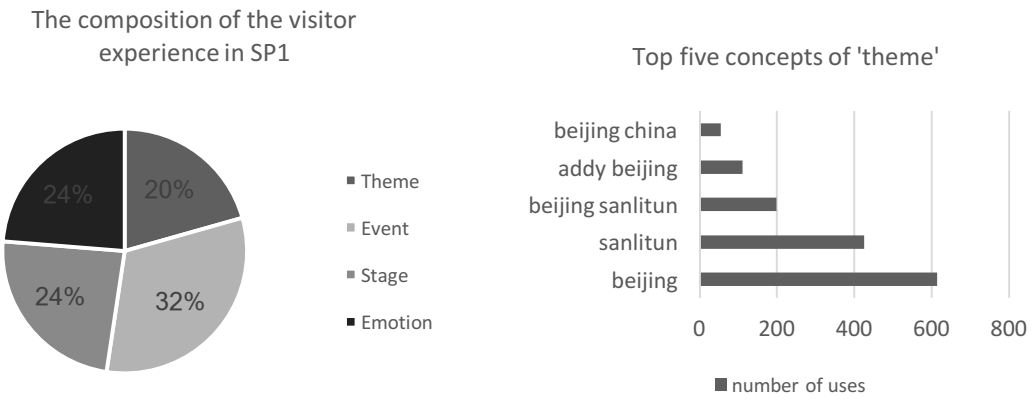
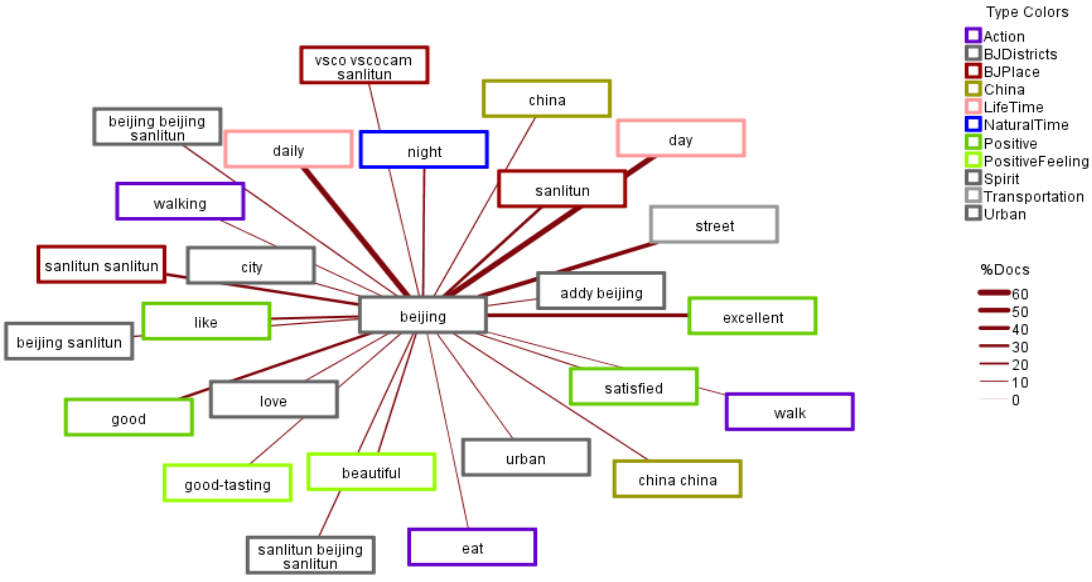


Figure 40 The analytical results for the visitor experience in SP1



Figure 41 The screenshot of the Instagram photograph of SP1



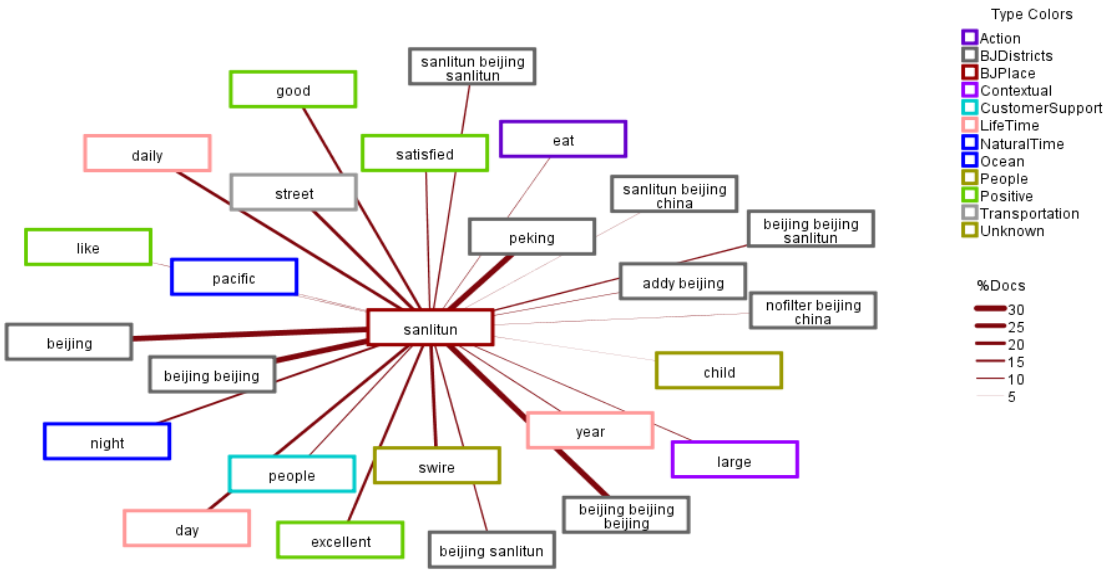


Figure 42 The semantic context of the concept 'Beijing' and the concept 'Sanlitun'

Another point worth noting is that the main pedestrian flow in Sanlitun Village is thought to start from SP1 to SP3. People may attempt to increase their own awareness of ‘where I am’ once they enter into the place, then they begin to recognize certain physical features that can help them to make a distinction. They tag the name of place in the photographs of the stage, not only for reminding themselves but also for reminding other followers. Besides, the image of ‘Beijing’ is much stronger than the image of ‘Sanlitun’ in the visitor experience of SP1, as people generate larger amounts of data tagged with ‘Beijing’ there. But when they move into the SP3, they tend to start enhancing the image of ‘Sanlitun’ by tagging more photographs with ‘Sanlitun’. This phenomenon is consistent with the idea expressed in Section 4.2.1, which argues that the place in the eyes of most people is ‘the place of city’. As they improve on their understanding of the place, they will eventually capture the uniqueness of this place.

The visitor experience of portal

White (1990) has pointed out that portals in urban settings are devoted to transitions from paths to places, but sometimes good portals are also kinds of places. According to him, Section 2.3 claims that portal is the quick preview of the place. This relationship is particularly apparent between the SP5 and the SP1. As stated above, SP5 is the main entrance to SP1. It was designed as a semi-enclosed irregular square, with a wide opening facing outward for easy viewing and access as well as a narrow doorway at the back providing a connection to SP1. A dramatic contrast is automatically set up in such spatial configuration with the view from the access point. It provides a sense of 'going forward', inviting people to walk through this space then go straight to the ultimate destination. The buildings that define the boundaries of SP5 are designed in the same style as those in SP1, establishing a close visual correlation between two spaces.

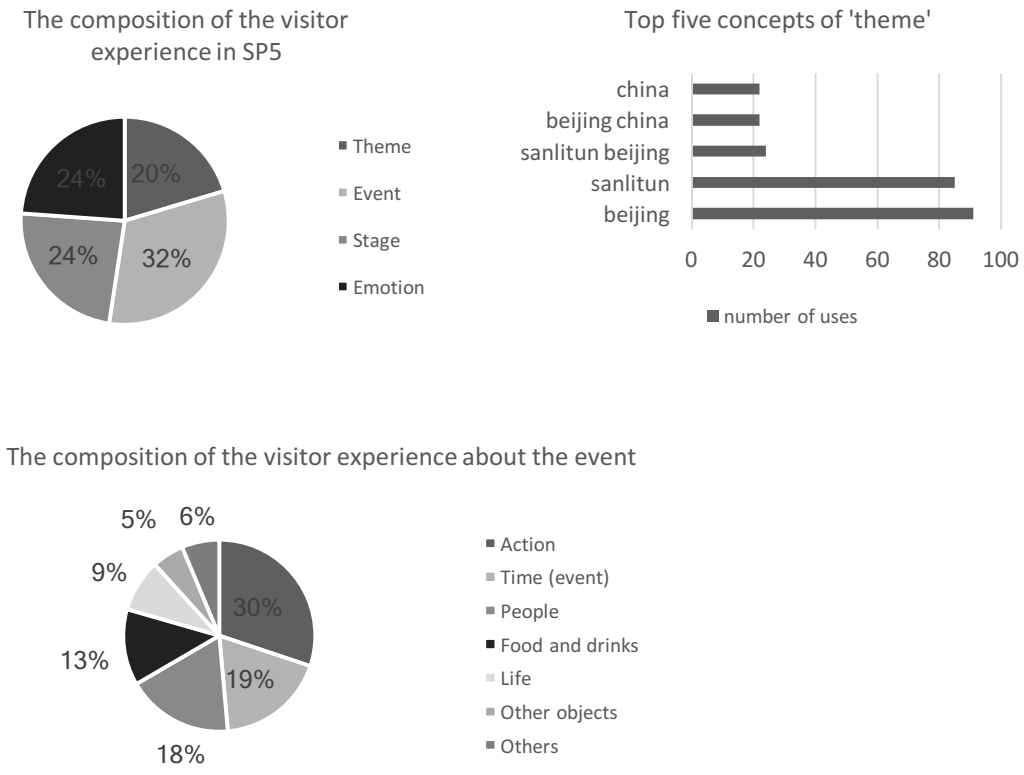


Figure 43 The analytical results for the visitor experience in SP5

When people move into the SP5, they gain the same experience as people staying in SP1 (Figure 43). They perceive SP5 as a space for ‘theme’ expression. The names of place - ‘Beijing’ and ‘Sanlitun’ - are connected to the concepts such as ‘excellent’ and ‘good’, just as happened in SP1. The events occurring in SP5 are perceived as those appearing in SP1, which consist of ‘action’, ‘time’, ‘people’, ‘food and drink’, ‘life’ and so on (Figure 43), as the surrounding buildings are already occupied by similar brand stores and restaurants. But unlike those who are in SP1, people in SP5 appear more concerned about the ‘weather’, ‘morning’ and ‘night’ which indicate the natural factors influencing quality of outdoor experience. It seems like if SP1 is considered as an interior ‘room’ of a city, then SP5 can be regarded as the ‘door’ of this ‘room’, protecting SP1 from outside influences.



Figure 44 The screenshot of the Instagram photograph of SP5

The role the XP3 play in the North Block of Xintiandi is totally different. It is designed as a real ‘place’ with a strong sense of rest. People are given opportunities and facilities such as outdoor cafes and restaurants to participate in social interactions there. Over one-third of visitor experiences in XP3 is about the events, which are described by ‘eat’, ‘drink’, ‘tea’, ‘day’, ‘week’ and so on. The image analysis also reveals that over 23 percent of the photographs taken in XP3 contain human faces, and over 25 percent of the photographs show the food and beverage that people consume. All of these photographs indicate the occurrence of events. But on the other hand, visitors regard XP3 as a space to display information about ‘theme’. The most fundamental concepts presented in XP3 are ‘Shanghai’ and ‘Xintiandi’. As shown in Figure 46 and Figure 47, visitors cooperate to submit a clear narrative for each concept and show strong correlation between the theme and the concepts in terms of stage such as ‘street’, ‘place’ and ‘night’.

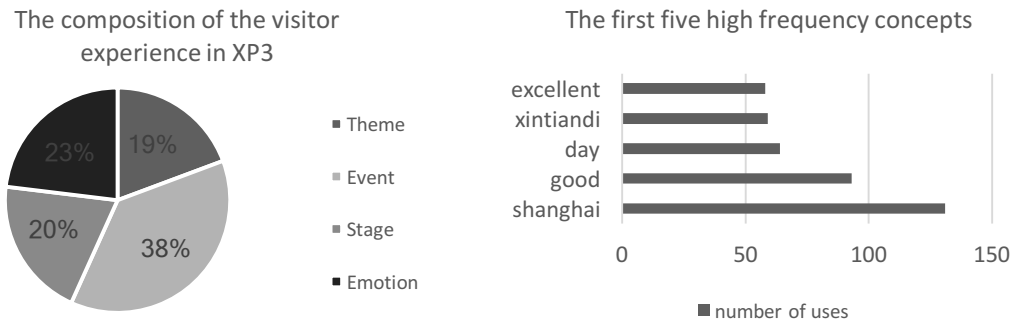


Figure 45 The analytical results for the visitor experience in XP3

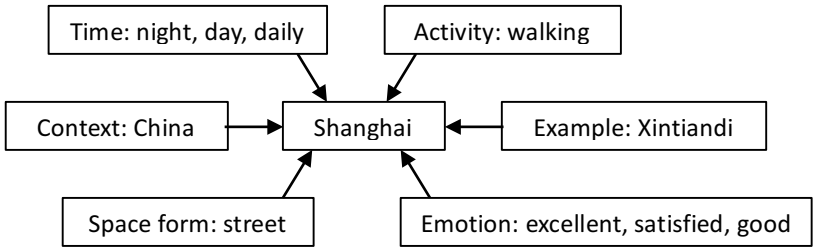


Figure 46 The narrative of 'Shanghai' in the visitor experience of XP3

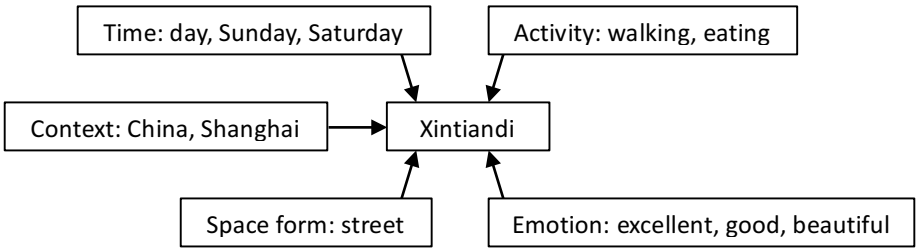


Figure 47 The narrative of 'Xintiandi' in the visitor experience of XP3



Figure 48 The screenshot of the Instagram photograph of XP3

The visitor experience of path

There are two kinds of paths contained in this case study, one located outside the unit and one located inside. The SP10, SP11, SP12 fall into the first category. They are the paths separating the Sanlitun Village from its neighbors but also linking it to them. People in

this kind of path space tend to pay more attention to the possibility to orient themselves towards the portal at the end of path. So they won't take many photographs until they get close to the portal space. It can be observed in Figure 37, SP10 holds larger number of photographs than SP11 and SP12. Besides, people who walk in SP10 tend to express the same experience as those in SP5 (Figure 49). The theme is presented as 'Beijing' and 'Sanlitun' that are filled with positive emotions such as 'excellent' and 'good'. The events are described by 'action', 'time', 'people', 'food and drink' and so on. And the stage is supported by 'morning', 'night' and 'weather'.



Figure 49 The analytical results for the visitor experience in SP10

The second category includes SP8, SP9 and XP6, XP7. These paths are located inside the unit, serving the function of giving connections and access to adjacent spaces and buildings. The proportion of 'event' in the visitor experience of such kind of path is much higher than other three components (Figure 50), due to the influence of the functions of the surrounding buildings. But there is an alternative explanation that the paths inside the precinct could be a kind of place (White, 1990), providing space and opportunities to promote social interaction there.

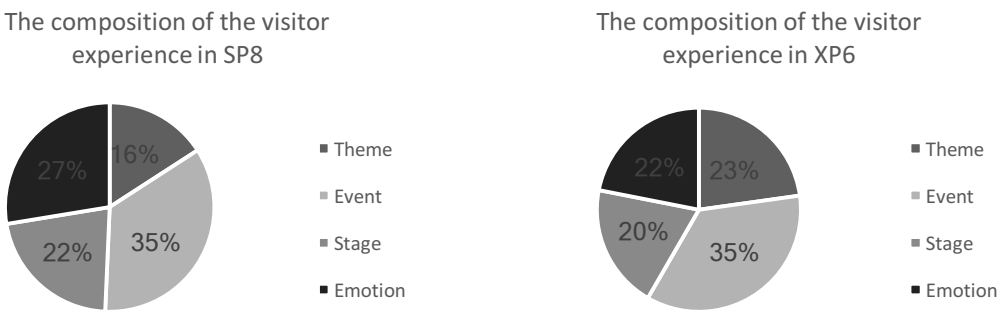


Figure 50 The composition of the visitor experience in SP8 and XP6

4.3.2 Findings and discussions

The implementation strategies for creating themed place-experience in paths, portals and places have been discussed in Section 2.3. The fundamental premise of making these strategies is that the experience in different kinds of urban space should be gained through different narratives. In analogy with the plot diagram, paths are supposed to facilitate the process of 'rise', portals equate to 'preview', and places are required to provide space for the 'climax'. No matter what these narratives reveal, the visitor experience is supposed to be based on the involvement in social activities and the perception of the physical environment. Planning special events and designing appropriate stages should therefore be the primary means of constructing theme narratives. However, the data analysis above shows that only a few people express their concerns about the theme when demonstrating their involvement in events on social media websites. Most of them tend to recognize the signs of the theme in the form of stage. This phenomenon is not only evident in the discussion of the visitor experience of place but also in discussions regarding portals and paths. It seems like the events organized in Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi make little contribution to the quality of theme expression. Those activities such as having a nice brunch, drinking a cup of coffee or buying a luxury brand dress can be done at any

consumer destination. They just appear to provide an access to a thematic environment, instead of being an integrated part of it.

The proposed method of dealing with this issue derived from a comparison of SP1 and SP3. As described in Section 4.3.1, both SP1 and SP3 are dedicated to provide extension to all adjacent buildings, serving those social, commercial and recreational needs moving out of chain brand stores, restaurants and cafes. The sunken plaza in the SP3 appears to be a quiet, semi-public space, heavily dominated by surrounding building facades. It has become the front yard of them, providing direct access to all goods and services offered in those buildings. The SP1, however, maintains its independence by creating a dramatic focal point. The digital screen has served as a backdrop for many public events such as the festival opening ceremony, the art exhibition, and live concerts. The dry deck fountain has also attracted many families who are eager to find a place to have fun with their children at the weekend. People probably won't tag 'Beijing' or 'Sanlitun' in the photographs of these events, but they definitely won't consider these experiences as the services provided by surrounding buildings.

The second point is found in the relationship between portals and places. The data analysis above defines two roles that portals play. The first role is 'the place'. White (1990) has supported this point of view by claiming that good portals are also kinds of places. Take XP3 as an example, which is designed as a preview of the whole narrative rather than any other climax moment, it aims to stimulate visitors' desire to what will be offered in subsequent experiences. Such a portal cannot be juxtaposed with the place, just as depicted in Figure 48, in order to maintain high contrast between a narrow, short and restrictive 'preview' and a large, stable and generous 'climax'. The second role of portals is being 'the door' of places. A typical example of this is SP5 in which people gain the same experience as those in the place. This kind of portal provides direct access to the

ultimate place space then attempt to convince people that ‘this is the real entrance to your destination’, like a gate that is waiting to be opened. A striking focal point should be established while maintaining visual consistency, reminding pedestrians that they are getting closer to the entry point. The third role that portals play in their relationships with places is ‘the exhibition hall’, which is not included in the data analysis above. Both SP6 and SP7 are examples of such portals, but the available data on these two spaces are not sufficient to enable an analysis. The main distinguishing characteristic of ‘the exhibition hall’ is presenting a holistic view of the place, involving for example the ground plane, the building facades and freestanding structures. People will not be expected to engage in any other kind of activity except watching.

The final point is about the narrative form of the ‘rise’ in the path space. In Section 2.3, paths are required to provide a brief introduction to the place-experience in a physical sequence. The results of data analysis indicate that this requirement applies to exterior paths that define the domain boundaries. Those interior paths that connect places and portals in a thematic area, however, should take more responsibility for the theme expression, not only on stage design but also on event planning.

4.4 Conclusion

A distinct place-experience is a major competitive advantage in attracting capital and labor. Although local authorities and communities, urban designers and architects have always been dedicated to the unique and memorable experience, only people who actually use the place are eligible to evaluate the quality. They express their feelings and attitudes through sharing their visitor experience on social media websites. By studying such visitor experience, authorities and designers are able to know how people obtain and

understand the experience they have offered then improve their method of creating a positive place-experience.

This chapter has conducted an investigation into the visitor experience in two big Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai, based on large amounts of data collected from Instagram, an instant photo-sharing application. Following the geographical analysis of the data distribution, four precincts are selected, including Nanluoguxiang, Tianzifang, Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi, due to their high popularity amongst Instagram users. The study of the visitor experiences in the Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang is designed to examine the theoretical framework proposed in Section 2.3, which describes the way to create a themed place-experience. The data analysis is performed in four dimensions – 'theme', 'event', 'stage', and 'emotion', and some suggestions are given accordingly. The analysis of the Sanlitun Village and Xintiandi attempts to evaluate the implementation of this framework in three kinds of urban space – 'path', 'portal' and 'place'. It must be admitted that the data analysis did not provide strong evidences as expected. Instagram encourages users to share their daily experience in a casual setting, but it leads to some inaccuracies especially in the data used in the second analysis. For example, some of the photographs collected for the analysis of portals and paths were actually taken in the place space. It negatively affects the stability and precision of the whole analysis. Yet, despite this, a series of valuable suggestions are proposed as follows.

Firstly, the proportions of perceptual knowledge about theme and emotion hold fairly steady. But the proportions of event and stage in the visitor experience are determined by the functional use of space, which reflects the relationship between visitors and available activities. People tend to express strong concerns about the quality of events, as they are required to be active participators at the consumer destination. Secondly, the theme of place-experience is not yet well understood, as the majority of people are insensitive to

surrounding environment. They keep more focus on the image of integrality rather than the details, and they tend to find familiar objects from environment to support the stereotype image in the mind. The proposed method of dealing with this issue is to develop various narratives to strengthen the core of theme then make reference to it. On one hand, people should be provided a variety of interactive activities to make consistent contact with the theme. On the other hand, the key information should be highlighted by integrating it into the main focal point. Another point worth noting in this case study is that the emotional response cannot be the major indicator to measure the quality of the place-experience, as visitors tend to hide the dissatisfaction in their social circles.

Fourth, although event planning and stage design have been considered to be the primary means of providing valuable information about the theme, people tend to perceive the presence of theme in the form of stage, especially in the place space. The events should be more thematic, unique and individual, persuading people to understand the links between events and the theme. Creating at least one dramatic focal point is essential to support the organization of such events. Fifth, portals are devoted to three kinds of roles in their relationship with places. The first role is ‘the place’, which means that a portal is designed as a place for providing a preview of the whole story rather than a single place. The second role is ‘the door’ of place, which means that the portal provides direct access to the place. And the last role is ‘the exhibition hall’ in which people will be given a holistic view over the place. Finally, the narrative form in the path space is divided into two types. The exterior paths can be designed according to the discussion in Section 2.3, while the interior paths should take more responsibility for theme expression.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Place experience is generally regarded as the natural process and its consequence of knowing a particular place. It derived from interactions between humans and a place environment, based on the combination of consciousness of external objects and self-consciousness. Its content varies depending on the degree to which people get involved in the place. Under the influence of place marketing, however, place experience is considered similar to goods and services that can be deliberately manufactured and sold to potential customers. According to Kotler (1993), the potential customers refer to those who know little about a place but still have certain ideas and expectations that comes from information provided by a broad range of informational media. With social media now becoming the major means of daily information exchange, potential customers have shown more concern for the personalized content generated and shared by current residents and visitors. Urban designers in this case should pay more attention to the actual experience of these insiders and how they extract valuable information from their experience and then share the information with other followers. Experience can thus be reduced to a one-way communication, transferring specific information from insiders to outsiders. The effectiveness of the process may be reduced by the subjective nature of human consciousness, or rather, the outside visitors may distort the messages given by designers and inside residents.

To address this issue, this research study aims to help urban designers find an effective way of conveying accurate information in the form of place experience. Place experience in this study becomes an amalgamation of environment, services and goods that supports people's ideas and satisfies their requirements. As a product it can be decomposed into

several components containing different types of information, and as a process it can be divided into multiple steps where each step represents an information delivery.

Taking a marketing perspective, this study proposed four components of place experience, including theme, event, stage, and emotion. Each component corresponds to a specific piece of information. Defining a theme is essential to create a place experience. It should be based on the unique characteristics of a place but also associated with the beliefs and expectations of targeted groups. The theme is presented as a story told by a series of interrelated events. Events are the crucial incentive for people to go to a place, enabling them to interact with other people and objects in a specific context. It is suggested that an integrated event system should be established, covering a dominant event and several supporting events. Stages are where events occur. It stimulates the atmosphere of authentic experience by using special symbols. There are three kinds of ways of integrating symbols into the stage design, the 'Las Vegas' way, the 'duck' way, and the 'decorated shed' way (Venturi 1972). The first two ways are proposed to be used to establish an initial relationship between first-time visitors and the place, while the last way can help them explore and constantly discover new meanings of the place. The last emotional analysis aims to help place designers to know where attention is required in future work. The components arousing people's positive feelings should be preserved and enhanced, while the elements arousing negative feelings should be removed or replaced.

To integrate the four pieces of information into the design of the built environment, this study adopts the concept of 'path, portal, place' proposed by White (1999), and explores ways of creating experience in the three kinds of urban space. Paths including lanes, alleys and avenues provide space for the sense of 'rise'. Portals such as gateways to the places are used to display the 'preview'. Places including plazas, courts and gardens mainly service the 'climax'. A good path of 'rise' can raise people's expectation of

reaching a particular place. It should be comprised of a group of scenes, showing an enlargement both in form and content. The ‘preview’ in the portal space should exhibit the most important characteristics of the climax and then highlight it with contrast enhancement. The ‘climax’ in the final place space is the core of the whole narrative, portraying the most dramatic moments. It can be done by setting specific events and designing authentic stages.

All of the above are theoretical arguments that need further examination. This research adopts an innovative method named ‘people-generated image study’ which has great potential in studies of people’s subjective experience. Meanwhile, this research conducts a multiple case study to examine the theoretical perspectives proposed, which nonetheless has some limitations. These two aspects are detailed in the following sections.

5.1 Potentialities

The purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical framework for creating a place experience with a specific theme. ‘Place experience’ is not an innovative concept in the field of urban design. Almost all professionals and design guidelines have emphasised the significance of creating a unique and memorable urban experience. To some extent, it is regarded as a part of social welfare service, giving people a sense of belonging and social inclusion, also making them feel safe and comfortable. Urban designers seem to have reached a consensus that they mainly serve citizens and local communities.

This study, however, attempts to bring a fresh perspective from marketing discipline to urban design. Place experience is considered similar to goods and services that can be produced and sold for profits. The concept of ‘target audience’ shows up in such a context. Peter and Olson (2010, 24) defined it as ‘a larger group of consumers made up of all the purchasers of a product…’. According to Kotler (1993), these group include

exporters, investors, manufactures, new residents, tourists and conventioneers. These people may have never been to the place, but they still have certain ideas and expectations that arise from how it is portrayed in various media. Exporters, investors and manufactures are not included in this study, as they are often associated with economic policy making that cannot be fully discussed in the framework of urban design. The last three target groups are embedded in the concept of 'vicarious insiders' (Relph, 1976), referring to people who tend to gain the second-hand experience from a broad range of cultural and informational media such as books, magazines, radios, films, blogs and twitters. When entering the place, vicarious insiders need to obtain accurate and sufficient information for satisfying their needs and expectations that arise from materials shared by previous visitors. But after that, they probably publish and share their experience with mass media, to motivate other vicarious insiders. This phenomenon, essentially, represents a constant flow of valuable information from designers to users, or from insiders to outsiders. This information is defined as the 'theme' in this study. And the nature of creating a place experience is a process of extracting, storing, and transforming such valuable information about the place.

Besides, this study aims to develop an innovative approach, combining content analysis with image analysis, to understanding and investigating people-generated data. The human experience of place includes a large amount of empirical knowledge gained through observation, induction, deduction and evaluation. Quantifying the empirical knowledge and then making sense of it in qualitative form are the purpose of place experience studies. For a long time, it has been difficult for untrained ordinary people to contribute their empirical knowledge in an effective way. Most of the empirical data used in place experience studies were generated by experts, in order to make the results more precise. The subjectivity of researchers is thought to be inevitable in these research

studies, which is vulnerable to criticism. To focus more attention on the people who have experienced the place and increase the objectivity of analysis, some researchers such as Lynch (1960) attempted to collect people-generated data via face-to-face interviews. Whereas, it is reasonable to believe that the real experiences of respondents were distorted, due to the inclination towards satisfying the questions of the researcher. Since the 1970s, photographic mass production promoted the effective use of people-generated data. Photographs are the primary data in many research projects on place experience, as the visible representation of concrete reality whilst conveying the real thoughts of photographers. The method, which is commonly known as 'visitor-employed photography' or 'volunteer-employed photography', has been widely used to record and evaluate visitors' direct responses to actual environment while they are experiencing it.

Content analysis is used in interpreting these people-generated photographs. It is a method that originally developed for quantitative analysis of mass media such as newspapers, radio, movies and television. It is considered to be a good way to 'grab' and understand the hidden essential information on human thoughts and behaviours by analysing the content of their communications. It has been employed in some research projects concerning 'visitor-employed photography' by supposing that each photograph can be assigned a themed experience and coded on different themes. By counting how many times each experience was photographed, researchers can define the constitution of what photographer experience in a place. Even so, the method has rarely been used in the discipline of urban design.

In recent years, the manufacturing of digital image on mobile device increases the amount of personal photographs. The prevalence of social media that enables users to instantly upload and share photographs facilitated the work of mass data collection. Many advanced techniques and tools were dedicated to numerical and textual data mining, but

neglecting the quantitative visual analysis of photographic data due to technical limitations. In addition to content analysis that is responsible for interpretive analysis of photographs, a set of Cultural Analytics tools are used in this study to conduct descriptive analysis of photographs. To identify the subjects of photographs, here is a proposed theory, which states that the number of eligible subjects in a certain physical environment is finite. Each subject features a colour scheme that includes a specific range of RGB values. If a photograph captures the subject, its RGB colour value will fall within this range. Based on the measured values of RGB channels, the photographs that appear to show the same or similar subject can be grouped into the same cluster. Although the eventual result is far from being adequate and satisfactory, it provides a new idea to the quantitative analysis of photographic images.

5.2 Limitations and directions for future research

As in any research, there are several limitations inherent in this study, concerning the selection of participants in case research. As stated in Section 4.1, the multiple case study is conducted in two Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai, due to its unique ethnic composition and Internet environment.

Instagram has been selected as the primary digital source for data collection, providing over 3.5 million pieces of data to the case study. Instagram's official report has revealed that most of the data is generated by persons under the age of 35, which means that this research will focus on young people's preference for novel place experience and ignores the opinions of other age groups. Besides, a brief language analysis shows that over half of them were generated by non-Chinese speakers. Since China is more like a mono-racial country in which the majority of residents are native Chinese speakers, it can be presumed that the analysis results reflect more on non-Chinese visitors' predilections.

These people may be the first-time visitors who are unfamiliar with the cases but have their own stereotype images in their heads. They cannot be representative of all participants, and they could even affect the precision of the whole research. As discussed in Section 4.2, people define most of their experience as ‘experiencing Beijing’, ‘experiencing Shanghai’, or ‘experiencing China’, but rarely describe the details within any context. It should be interpreted that these are ordinary members of the public not professionals. They may be insensitive and only attend to the essential, critical or familiar things in the immediate surroundings. Yet it is also possible that they are first-time visitors, so they appear to keep more focus on the image of integrality and ignore many unfamiliar but important details. In fact, at the present time, it is difficult to distinguish first-time visitors from returning visitors and residents and make accurate assessments. This could be one direction for future research.

Besides, the Internet censorship in China has blocked many websites and APPs including Instagram. Although the block list is constantly changing and Chinese Internet users are always finding out new ways of gaining access to Instagram, the amount of available data is less than expected. Theoretically, the more data it has, the less the random error and the more accurate the results. In practice, however, it is conducive to testing a new technique that needs further improvement. The Internet users who can easily access the blocked sites should be more familiar with the rules of the Internet-based social environment and do not generate invalid data that may reduce the reliability of analysis results. However, there are still a lot of redundant and inaccurate data existing in the database. For example, many photographs collected for the analysis of portals and paths were in fact taken in the place space, and some photographs cannot be downloaded due to invalid URLs. These limitations negatively affect the stability and precision of the whole quantitative analysis. This could be the other direction for future research.

6. Appendices

6.1 The coding scheme for content analysis

Here is an explanation for the coding scheme ‘Beijing (English)’.

Theme		
Library	Type	Concept
Beijing library	Bj_history	Badaling, ditan, dragon wall
	Bj_district	Beijing, dongcheng, xicheng,
	Bj_place	Dongdan, nanluoguxiang, bird nest
	Bj_culture	798, peking university
	Bj_character	Beijinger, hutong,
History library	Architecture	Castle, palace, church
	Activity	Chunjie, spring festival, incense
	People	King, khan, monk
	Character	Ancient, heritage, dynasty
Event		
Library	Type	Concept
Culture library	Art	Artist, artwork, fairy
	Dance	Ballet, dancer, manbo
	Drama_film	Actor, comedy,
	Education	Campus, classroom, exam
	Literature	Article, editor, fiction
	Music	Cello, guitar, jazz
	Painting	Cartoon, gallery,
Everyday life library	Clothes	Lace, shirt, shoes
	Drink	Alcohol, cola, juice
	Food	Almond, beef, biscuits
	Stuff	Balloon, candle, ink
	Work	Boss, career, project
Person library	Action	Access, bite, eat
	Anatomy	Ankle, blood, elbow
	People	Boy, cousin, father
	Spirit	Anxiety, brave,
Travel library	Travel	Backpack, camp, hostel
Time library	Time_life	Annul, bedtime, Friday
Stage		
Library	Type	Concept
Architecture library	Architecture	Arch, ceiling, dome,
City library	Residence	Apartment, neighbour
	Entertainment_shopping	Bar, cinema, market

	Transport	Airline, coach, street
	Finance	Bank, ATM,
	Medicine	Hospital, drug
	Industry	Factory, machine
	Other	Downtown, electric, farm,
Nature library	Weather	Air, cloud, humid
	Plants	Bamboo, cedar, flower
	Animal	Bee, cow, deer
	landscape	Canal, forest, lake
Time library	Time_nature	Autumn, dawn, morning
Emotion		
Library	Type	Concept
Opinions Library	Positive	Abundant, amusing, meaningful
	Positive_attitude	Adorable, encouraging
	Positive_feeling	Calm, dissolve, enjoyment
	Negative	Busy, confuse, delete
	Negative_attitude	Careless, fussy, lazy
	Negative_feeling	Dirty, jealous

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