

Facebook zeroes in on tourist photography habits

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Facebook researchers scanned 57,804 photographs of popular tourist destination spot Cuzco, Peru, that were posted on Flickr over a 15-year period and made two key observations:

- People are taking the same photos, basically, as the noted explorer Hiram Bingham more than 100 years ago.
- The more restrictions imposed by local ordinances on visitors, the less creative captured photographs were.

The Facebook team applied machine learning in examining the geotagged photos to trace patterns of [tourist](#) routes and analyze their photographic habits.

The team was able to determine the most popular and least popular attractions based on learning algorithms applied to the photos. Of particular interest to them were the ways in which [conservation measures](#) impacted the number and types of images captured.

"I was excited by our findings that the views being snapped in [tourist photos](#) were—whether consciously or unconsciously—often mimicking historical photos captured by earlier explorers of the region, like Hiram Bingham, essentially an early 'influencer' for how people would later experience the place," said Kristen Grauman, of the University of Texas at Austin and a participant in the Facebook research project.

Bingham is credited with bringing the 15th century Inca citadel, Machu Picchu, to the world's attention. It is the most well-known icon of Inca civilization. His publication "Lost City of the Incas" became a best-seller, and it is believed Bingham was the basis for the character Indiana Jones played by Harrison Ford in the popular 1981 movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark," as well as three succeeding movies.

Many of the Flickr photos were taken from the same angles and captured the same scope of imagery as Bingham's famed photos from the early 20th century. Facebook researchers say analyzing tourist movements and points of tourist interest will help host cities devise conservation strategies, such as determining the number of visitor

passes during set periods of time and setting access points around such historic sites.

Tourist photographs of the larger sites in Cuzco, which had more restrictions on visitors' access than smaller sites, tended to be static and repetitive. Where tourists were freer to navigate the terrain, images were more imaginative.

Machu Pichu is the largest tourist attraction in Peru, and as such, has been subject to increasing access and security measures over the years.

"I was intrigued by our finding that policy decisions aimed at preservation or economics could percolate down to influence the distribution of photos that get captured by tourists" Grauman said.

Facebook has no plans at the moment to monetize its findings. Says Grauman, their hope is to "predict [economic impact](#) based on tourist movement, help brainstorm marketing campaigns surrounding a heritage site as countries begin to reopen for travel, and [examine] how usage of certain areas may affect preservation plans. The learnings could also be used to adjust regulations of heritage sites."

On the subject of vacation photos, one may be reminded of a study not too long ago that uncovered a fact some of us may already know: You may love your vacation photos but your friends probably hate them.

Aviva, an insurance firm in Great Britain, found that 73 percent of 2,000 people surveyed were annoyed while viewing photos of friends' vacations posted on social media. The most irritating type of image, according to the poll, were "hot dog legs," the popular but utterly boring selfie of one's outstretched legs on a beach chair pointed towards the ocean.

A study published in *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* gave a thumbs up to the hobby of vacation photography, finding, "relative to not taking photos, photography can heighten enjoyment of positive experiences by increasing engagement."

But at least one observer abhorred the idea of photographing classical sites. Writing of a hypothetical first-time visitor to the Grand Canyon, the philosopher Walker Percy wrote in his essay "The Loss of the Creature," "Instead of looking at it, he photographs it. There is no confrontation at all. At the end of forty years of preformulation and with the Grand Canyon yawning at his feet, what does he do? He waives his right of seeing and knowing and records symbols for the next forty years."

Considering estimates that there are upwards of 2 billion digital images taken daily, that makes for an awfully large number of joyful photographers and bored friends.

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