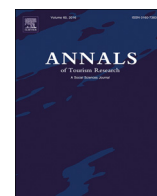


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Let's get this show on the road! Introducing the tourist celebrity gaze



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ABSTRACT

The tourist celebrity gaze is identified and outlined in this article. A netnographic study of adventure backpackers' social media, documenting their taking part in the 2019 Mongol Rally, highlights a shift from touring places to being on tour. Hereby, the tourist may go travelling not only to observe, but to be observed by others. Symptomatic of this inverted gaze, distinctions from other travellers are drawn, making the tourist stand out, and attention is solicited and reported upon whilst on the road. The tourist enters an obverse panopticon where they can perform for an audience. Certain destinations and selective use of social media support this performance. Revealed therefore, is an extension of the traditional tourist gaze building on more recently described technologically mediated gazes.

Introduction

Netnography of tourists participating in the 2019 Mongol Rally explores the shifting focus of the tourist gaze. Rally members are shown to deploy established tourist gazes before and during their travel, but take also a distinctive and heretofore undefined gazing stance. Being looked at by hosts, press, and social media networks whilst on holiday, is revealed as important to many of the tourists. Interpretation of research findings draws upon [Kozinets et al. \(2004\)](#)'s conceptualisation of an obverse panopticon to define a tourist celebrity gaze. This gazing is suggested to occur in the context of celebritized contemporary culture ([Driessens, 2013](#)), facilitated by new technologies that have permitted individual celebrification ([Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016](#)). This is not the tourist as motivated by celebrities ([van der Veen & Song, 2014](#)), or as a celebrity spotter on holiday to observe the famous and perform the tracking down of them ([Ricci, 2011](#)). Nor is this about becoming a celebrity through travel ([Duffy & Kang, 2019](#)). Instead it is the tourist gaze itself that is akin to celebrity. Turned on the self, tourists are there to be spotted, to be observed by others online and in destinations, performing as if they are themselves noteworthy. In this way tourists deploy a celebrity gaze, whereby they feel looked at by and tour before others whilst travelling.

Findings complement and extend recent work looking at how digital technologies, such as smart phones and social media, have influenced the tourist gaze (i.e. [Vannini & Stewart, 2017](#); [Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017](#)). [Wang, Park, and Fesenmaier \(2012\)](#) show for example, how the mediating role of internet-enabled smartphones has allowed tourists to become more creative and spontaneous in their gazing. [Lo and McKercher \(2015\)](#) meanwhile illustrate how social media has altered the potential framing and sharing of the gaze. As such, for [Shakeela and Weaver \(2016\)](#) a distinctive and rapidly emerging 'social-mediatized gaze' extends to ex situ settings the more conventional conceptualization of the gaze as an act directed by in situ tourists towards the host community or of local residents towards those in situ tourists.

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The social-mediatized gaze has been discussed as offering a different take on established conceptualisations of tourist gazes, such as those summarised by Larson (2014). Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) contend for example, that rather than it becoming irrelevant, the tourist gaze and its focus are shifting, with new possibilities and emphasis shaped by digital technologies and social media. They argue that this shift takes shape thusly, “as the tourist destination becomes the distant backdrop or prompt or completely disappears from the photo, the self becomes elevated as a touristic product—it is what tourists are there to consume” (p. 134). Taking Dinhopl and Gretzel's insight further, this research suggests that tourists are now there for others to consume. The tourist is the attraction, with a performance taken on the road to be gazed upon.

Thus identified and outlined in this paper is the notion of the tourist deploying a celebrity gaze. Involving a shift in emphasis from touring and observing-performing, to being on tour and observed performing, findings illustrate a distinctive contemporary construction of the tourist gaze that enriches existing discourse around one of the main concepts adopted within tourism studies. The tourist gaze is broadly speaking an idea concerned with the interactions of tourists and toured. Their mutual observations and performances are framed through the stages provided by tourism sites, experiences, accoutrements and materials. Hence, Larsen (2005: 417) suggests, “the ‘nature’ of tourist photography is a complex ‘theatrical’ one of corporeal, expressive actors; scripts and choreographies; staged and enacted ‘imaginative geographies’”. The tourist celebrity gaze complements and extends these theatrical themes. Moving the tourist from touring to being on tour, the celebrity gaze opens up interesting implications for theory and practice.

All the world is a stage

Gazing and performing

The tourist gaze is a concept that attempts to articulate the travel motivations and behaviours of tourists. For Vannini and Stewart (2017) the concept of the tourist gaze insightfully articulates how the act of gazing is powerfully socially constructed. Shaped to a certain extent by predetermined norms and collective imaginary, “the gaze is filtered through desires and expectations, conditioned by personal experiences and memories, influenced by social representations, and framed by circulating images and texts” (Shakeela & Weaver, 2016: 114). Socially and culturally organised (Chhabra, 2010), reflecting the place in which it occurs and the people who are gazed upon (Reisinger, Kozak, & Visser, 2013), the tourist gaze is described by Urry (1990, 1992, 2002) as a hermeneutic circle, whereby what is sought on holiday is a set of images already seen in media. While the tourist is away, they then track down and capture those images for themselves, before demonstrating that they really have been there by showing their version of the images that they had seen before they set off.

This depiction is nonetheless commented on by Larsen (2005) as overly reductive and deterministic, excluding the heterogeneity, sociability and strategic aspects of what are experimental as well as choreographed performances. Garrod (2009: 356) suggests that “the processes involved might be more subtle and complex than simply for the two protagonists in the relationship to mimic one another in every respect”. Acknowledging this weakness, gazing is presented by Larsen and Urry (2011) as not only envisioned but multi sensuous, involving all senses in performances of multiple gazes. “The embodied travelling eye cannot be separated from the body that moves and touches the ground with ‘performed’ tourist gazes involving other sensescapes” (p. 1122). Similarly, Perkins and Thorns (2001) agree with those who suggest that the gaze metaphor is too passive to encapsulate the full range of the tourist experience. They argue that “a better metaphorical approach to tourism is to talk about the tourist performance which incorporates ideas of active bodily involvement: physical, intellectual and cognitive activity *and* gazing” (p. 193). Indeed, the physical stresses and strains of tourism upon the body can be considerable (Markwell, 2001). In the embodied sense therefore, tourism is a practical way through which tourists are involved in the world, create knowledge and interact with the physical environment (Pons, 2003).

Accordingly, extending the gaze is the notion that this and associated photography is a performance of tourism (Edensor, 2000) and self (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Taking the perspective that tourism can be envisioned, embodied, and also enacted (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, & Urry, 2017), this sees tourism as more dynamic and created through fluid performances (Coleman & Crang, 2002). To illustrate, photographing is about producing rather than consuming geographies and identities argues Larsen (2005). She terms awareness of the camera and photo-taking of the self as performativity, using the example of families on holiday performing intimacy through photographs of group fun, hugging, proximity and so forth. Thus, the tourist not only looks at and is immersed within staged performances, but simultaneously also performs through tourism stages, places, objects and experiences. Lo and McKercher (2015) summarise performance in tourism as broadly unconscious and/or conscious in nature. Likewise, Edensor (2001) considers tourism to involve unreflexive, habitual and practical enactments, with a repertoire of performative options and range of stages upon which tourists may perform. Tourists watch the performance, are part of the performance, and perform.

Hence, tourism occurs through visual and practical actions where bodies corporally engage with the landscape. These engagements in the tourism setting are moreover mediated by people, technologies and objects that facilitate and interpret the tourism experience (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Consequently, the tourist gaze-performance is a process that extends beyond the self as gazer-performer to include the other as gazed upon and as gazers themselves. Where the tourist gaze may be directed towards the locals, another gaze, that of the local, is directed towards the guest simultaneously (Maoz, 2006). The local gaze expresses and manifests the agency and power of locals that like the tourist gaze penetrates others' lives (Urry, 1992). To illustrate, Gillespie (2006) investigates this reverse tourist gaze, whereby the photographer is conscious of the gaze of subjects, suggesting that the discomfort that a tourist feels when caught in the reverse gaze is a product of that tourist being positioned in the same disparaging way as that tourist usually positions other tourist photographers. Elaborating further, Maoz (2006: 222) outlines “the local gaze based on a more complex, two-sided picture, where both the tourist and local gazes exist, affecting and feeding each other, resulting in what is termed ‘the mutual gaze’”. Henceforth most gazing is a team performance where individual gazers are affected by and responsive to other

gazers (Larsen & Urry, 2011). The positions of gazer and gazed upon, performer and audience, are consequently interactive and fluid, with tourists implicated as both.

Social media mediation

Extending the mutual gaze into the boundless realm of online networks, there has been recent recognition in the literature of how digital technologies and social media are mediating and changing tourist photography and tourists' resulting gazes (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011; Urry & Larsen, 2011). It has been suggested for example, that in the age of social media tourists are gazing with their own eyes as well as the eyes of their imagined audience (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). The gaze has been shown as subject to change based on socioeconomic, demographic, historical, political, and other factors (Urry & Larsen 2011). Digital and social media developments may likewise be shaping change. Recognised for instance, are the self-consciousness and self-presentation afforded to tourists by social media (Canavan, 2017). Haldrup and Larsen (2009) argue that social media and digital photography technology allow tourists to experiment with their identities. For Lo and McKercher (2015), tourists' display a need for careful impression management on social media platforms, and consequently are driven when on holiday by what is shareable and helps them to portray desirable selves.

These themes might be encapsulated in the phenomenon of selfies. Photographs taken by the self, of the self, in the act of portrayal (Levin, 2014), selfies are elaborated by Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) as not necessarily taken by the photographed, but characterized by the desire to frame the self in a picture taken to be shared with an online audience. Henceforth, "if our photographs are reflections of the way we see the world, selfies are reflections of the way we see ourselves. Yet they are more than mere self-reflection. They are intended for wider audiences, as if they were a form of art" (Kozinets, Gretzel, & Dinhopl, 2017: 1). Internet-enabled smartphones enable tourists to upload their photos and immediately see themselves through the eyes of others (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Consciousness of self as performed before others therefore permeates selfies. Albrechtslund (2008) coins the term 'participatory surveillance' to describe the social media sphere where users are actively engaged in surveillance themselves as watchers, but they also participate voluntarily and consciously in the role of being watched.

Through conceptualising selfies in tourism, Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) introduce the 'self-directed' or 'mirror' tourist gaze. Hereby the authors theorise selfie-taking as a new way of touristic looking involving othering the self, stylized performing the self, and producing as well as consuming the self, as practices through which tourists themselves become tourist sights. Through effectively othering of the self the relationship between tourist and destination takes on a different dimension, as this allows tourists to become detached from their experience and to test out and perform different versions of themselves (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). To illustrate, "art works and museum spaces become props, background material, and stages upon which individuals act out the experiences that give their identity its uniqueness and their life its meaning" (Kozinets et al., 2017: 9). Thus, Dinhopl and Gretzel's insight is that facilitated by new technology tourists are not looking through the screen at the destination, but at the screen to see themselves as the camera takes the position of the eventual audience. "Rather than fetishizing the extraordinary at the tourist destination, tourists seek to capture the extraordinary within themselves, leading them to perform in unexpected, extraordinary ways that are afforded by social media and increasingly facilitated by the tourism industry" (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016: 135).

This understanding that tourism consumers may solicit the gaze of the other in their identity work overlaps with the notion of the 'obverse panopticon' put forward by Kozinets et al. (2004). Hereby, "an 'obverse panopticon' is a structure designed at least in part around the exhibitionistic desire of consumers, around their need for a stage on which they can participate for an eager—and captive— audience in a confined space" (p. 670). This is distinctive from Foucault (1977)'s original conceptualisation of the panopticon as a penal building of surveillance involving a watchtower that allows the observation of prisoners from a single vantage point. Without the observed knowing whether they are being observed or not, the effect of this is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977: 201). Yet relating back to the complexity of the mutual gaze, Foucault's panopticon is not unidirectional, but includes both watcher and watched as part of a wider multisensory system that is dynamic and contextual (see Caluya, 2010). In the obverse panopticon Kozinets et al. find consumers both enjoy spectating and becoming a spectacle for other consumers to watch.

Celebritization and celebrification

This becoming a spectacle overlaps with the enactment, seeking and fabrication of fame that has precedent in contemporary culture. "The ascendancy of the celebrity is one of the distinctive features of late twentieth and early 21st century western culture", argues Furedi, (2010: 493). Within this context, Driessens (2013) distinguishes the terms 'celebritization', for the societal and cultural changes implied by celebrity, and 'celebrification', comprising the changes at the individual level. Celebritization refers to changes in the cultural surroundings in which the tourist gaze is embedded. Our attention is incessantly drawn to the discourse and performances of celebrities, which makes them at least a recurring reference point for people's social practices (Couldry, 2004). Marshall (2010: 46) observes for example, how "celebrity culture articulates a way of thinking about individuality and producing the individual self through the public world". If the performance of celebrity has consequently become part of the daily practice of millions of consumers (Hackley & Hackley, 2015), then this may reasonably be expected to include tourism consumers.

Celebritized culture thus mediates the tourist gaze. In turn, highlighting how this emulation of celebrity may take place at the individual tourist level is tech enabled celebrification. "Celebrification designates the particular media logic and cultural process through which celebrity selves are constructed and communicated at any one time. Broadly speaking, celebrification encompasses the mediated interplays and negotiations between celebrities/their management and various media platforms, media institutions and

fans/followers” (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016: 251). Evans (2005) suggests that celebrities are the few known by the many and as such mediatisation is an essential element of celebrification. The celebrity myth implies that being in the media lends a person perceived importance compared with those outside the media (Driessens, 2013b).

Celebrification relates therefore to the increased abilities of individuals to enact celebrity, facilitated by digital and social media in particular. Considering self-branding online for instance, Khamis, Ang, and Welling (2017) contemplate how social media has accompanied a further extension of market logic into social life in a cultural milieu increasingly primed for self-promotion and triumphant individualism. “What we are witnessing now is the staging of the self as both character and performance in on-line settings... It is highly conscious of a potential audience as much as it is a careful preening and production of the self” (Marshall, 2010: 40).

Such consciousness may manifest in or exploit tourism as a means of staging and promoting the self. If tourism is a vehicle for claiming and transmitting identity, by undertaking a particular form of travel in a particular style (i.e. Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017), then digital technology has altered the possibilities for tourists (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016), including the possibility to fabricate celebrity. Marshall (2010: 39) explains, “self-production is the very core of celebrity activity and it now serves as a rubric and template for the organisation and production of the on-line self which has become at the very least an important component of our presentation of ourselves to the world”.

Methods

The Mongol Rally

The Mongol Rally is an event organised by the Adventurists, a travel agency who develop and market adventure tourism events. First organised in 2004, the rally runs between Europe and Ulan Ude in Russia (no longer ending in Mongolia due to changes in the law there regarding vehicle imports). The event is premised on three rules. First, participants must undertake in a ‘banger’ vehicle with an engine less than 1.2 l in size. Second, teams are entirely on their own in terms of logistics and travel. Third, teams have to raise at least £1000 for charity, including a minimum £500 donation to ‘Cool Earth’, the charity affiliated with the Adventurists. This premise and the event’s ethos are captured in the introductory description on the organiser’s website:

“This is the greatest motoring adventure on the planet. This is 10,000 miles of chaos across mountain, deserts and steppe on roads ranging from bad to not-a-road in a tiny 1000cc car you bought from a scrapyards for £4.60. There’s no backup. There’s no set route. There’s no guarantee you’ll make it to the end. It’s just you, your rolling turd and planet earth sized bucket of adventure.” (TheAdventurists.com, 2019)

Accordingly, the tone of the event is playful, ironic, and off-beat. The zaniness of the rally is much played up. Accompanying images on the Adventurists website depict previous teams conducting the rally in fancy dress and driving unusual vehicles. An original Mini with a red telephone box on the roof and driven by two young men in full suits with bowler hats for example, is an image much used in promotions. Although research was inductive, with links between findings, literature, and then theoretical development, emerging over time, and as such the Mongol Rally was not chosen because it might offer insights into the tourist gaze specifically, but rather because it offered an interesting and accessible contemporary tourism event, such details meant the rally was nevertheless a fertile case for studying tourist gazing. Incongruity and standing out are explicit in Mongol Rally promotion. Previous participants’ online highlights are shared by the event’s promoters, where recognition is of the most inappropriate and colorful contestants. Those who have completed the rally are celebrated as having done something special and distinctive from the 9–5 routines and typical vacations of most people. As such the status of former and future contestants is celebrated in the sense that these are made to stand out from the crowd.

In practical terms, the costs of taking part in the Mongol Rally are significant. Participants pay around (the precise figure is difficult to ascertain) £700 as an entry fee allowing them to officially take part. This cost covers launch and finish line parties provided by the Adventurists, allows participants to use official merchandise on their vehicles, and to be included on official social media channels. All of the additional costs of taking part, such as visas, accommodation, food, fuel and vehicle, have to be covered by individuals. The costs of these vary widely depending on time and route taken. Teams are also advised to budget around £1000 for the cost of shipping their car back from the finish line. Cost breakdowns by previous participants shared online describe around £2000–£4000 per person all inclusive.

Involving substantial challenge in terms of planning and logistics, the Mongol Rally shares traits of backpacker tourism in that the travelling itself, the being on the road for extensive periods of time, is emphasised. This may be a backpacking subculture, nonetheless rooted in common understanding of backpacker culture in its more traditional sense (Paris, 2012). Accommodation tends to be ad-hoc and low budget, with an emphasis on hostels and camping. These traits complement identification of backpackers as a group of travellers who are more likely to stay in budget accommodation, have an emphasis on meeting other travellers, as independent with a flexible travel schedule, and who stay for a longer rather than a brief holiday (Hampton, 1998). Backpackers have been much studied in relation to their tourist gazing (i.e. Maoz, 2006; Ong & du Cros, 2012). Linking with a celebrity desire for standing out from the ordinary, backpackers have long been found wanting to emphasise their distinctiveness from other tourists via a search for the exotic (Edensor, 2001). Through the framing of foreign places and otherness, tourists can exhibit both their worldviews and a romanticized version of their self to their audiences (Yeh, 2008), or as may be the case, a celebrated one, claiming and promoting celebrity. Sørensen (2003) points out for example, that where road status is a key issue in backpackers’ identity, to obtain a higher road status manipulating information, such as the deliberate scuffing of equipment, can be found in the interactions of

backpackers.

Netnography

Research adopted a netnographic approach to data collection and an emergent interpretive stance towards data analysis. Netnography, which uses the information that is publicly available in online forums to identify and understand relevant online consumer groups, is a novel adaptation of traditional ethnography for the internet as a virtual fieldwork site (Kozinets, 2002). An innovative approach to social inquiry, netnography is used by researchers working in specialised areas, to investigate specific types of behaviour and particular kinds of phenomena (Kozinets, Scaraboto, & Parmentier, 2018). Zhang and Hitchcock (2017) highlight the importance of netnography as an approach that can shed light on contemporary human behaviour. Noted is the candour and richness of online communities where there is potentially a dynamic repository of individuals' unprompted experiences and reflections individuals consider important (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). Examining backpackers' travel blogs for example, Bosangit, Hibbert, and McCabe (2015) argue that such accounts offer access to experiences originating with consumers, in contrast to the more common researcher-led approaches. Stressing its pragmatic advantages meanwhile, Wu and Pearce (2014) argue that netnography can be used to explore newly emerging phenomena, where relatively little is known about the market and the tourists' experiences. They advocate that as a first step netnography can provide richly informative breadth and depth of materials.

Netnography undertaken in this instance was undercover, taking a passive and covert approach in order to avoid interference with online presentations (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). Kozinets (2002) is critical of the passive approach, which raises issues of not being able to verify data or interrogate in further depth and also has potential ethical drawbacks. Wu and Pearce (2014: 465) nonetheless suggest that "when a publically accessible online community is being considered, these guidelines are, arguably, too rigorous and also endanger the unobtrusiveness of online communication studies". Pseudonyms were adopted and personal or identifiable details removed in order to preserve the anonymity of participants.

Thus, Mongol Rally participants were accessed using the Adventurists homepage, where 288 teams and 756 individual participants were listed for the 2019 event. Teams were then looked up through a search engine. Only teams with an online presence that was publicly accessible and written in English were studied, resulting in a sample of 86 teams with roughly 250 individuals (exact composition of teams was in some cases vague and a number have members join or depart at different points in the event). These were observed throughout July–September 2019 as they undertook the rally. Data collection involved following teams across a combination of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the three platforms most widely adopted in various combinations thereof, as well as blog and vlog pages, charity fundraising pages, and in a number of cases, dedicated websites. Social media presence of teams varied widely between less than 10 posts to over 500 relating to the rally. During this period all written posts were copied into Microsoft word where they could then be thematically coded at the analysis stage using traditional colour coding and copy-paste techniques. Over 5000 separate posts were collected adding up to over 30,000 words of text. Visual data was not collected due to the large size of such files and because of privacy and copyright issues. Researcher notes were kept, recording the broad themes of tourist photographs and noting where these specifically related to written content. Hence data collection and analysis relied primarily upon textual data, with visual data used to help interpret this.

The data analysis itself was an interpretive process whereby themes were allowed to emerge from the data collected in an ongoing basis and related back to the extant literature. Corley and Gioia (2004)'s data structure framework for analysing qualitative research was loosely used to guide. Accordingly, text collected was collated into emergent first order concepts by iterating between the contents of these and themes within the extant literature. Thus, first order initial concepts emerged from a back-and-forth inductive approach to collected data and researcher reflections on these. Abductive analysis of second order themes then explored relationships between and amongst these categories, collating into broader groups. Lastly, overarching aggregate dimensions cycled between these themes and the relevant literature to determine findings, precedents and novelty. The first of these related to descriptions of the rally itself. Second, grouped together were descriptions relating to established understandings of the tourist gaze as involving the traveller looking at and immersing within toured stages. Finally, distinctive descriptions of being on tour were noted and developed into a third theme extending the tourist gaze. These three themes are reviewed in the following.

Findings

The rally

Findings highlight that involvement in the rally is varied. Contestants take different routes, teams range in numbers from solo travellers to a dozen in multiple vehicles, and the duration of the trip differs from around a month to three or longer. Participants are a range of ages, from university students to retirees. A number of bios jokingly describe mid-life crisis. Twenty and thirty somethings predominate however. No children feature. A wide range of nationalities are likewise involved. The UK, Australia and New Zealand are particularly common originating countries, with Europe and North America also well represented. Nevertheless, commonalities arise in terms of preparation for and conduct during the event. Participant's descriptions of the Mongol Rally made prior to departure emphasise this as something ambitious and unusual. Much is made of its extreme nature: "This is an intrepid journey not for the faint hearted, involving 10,000 miles of blood boiling, adrenaline fuelled pure fucking adventure" (Team Purple). Meanwhile, frequent comments assert that this is not a holiday, or a regular road trip, but something more: "The Mongol Rally is a bucket list item. It's not a 'summer backpacking across Europe' kind of trip. It will be messy, dirty, frustrating, and entirely gratifying to get to the finish line" (Team Pink). The numbers of countries being visited, kilometres driven, nights spent, are repeatedly set out to back up the dramatization of the event as

distinct and difficult. So too is the unusual nature of the locations to be traversed. Likewise, the charitable aspect of the rally is a feature much emphasised in pre-trip social media. One team explain on their homepage: *"This intercontinental roadtrip isn't 100% for the selfish purpose of 'fun,' we're also raising money for charity!"* (Team Lemon). Oft-repeated sentiment is that this scale, charity and offbeat character distinguishes contestants from other tourists: *"In short, we're four friends (as of now, at least) that share an affinity for risky adventures and going places that the average person has and will probably never see"* (Team Navy).

Once underway, travel experiences have commonalities in terms of contestants spending significant time on the road, with sightseeing stops broken up with rests, border waits and breakdowns. One comment summarises a typical day on the road: *"In an uneventful driving day filled with podcasts, audiobooks, and desert, we made a quick pit stop at Lake Tuz"* (Team White). This team later describes the tempo of their trip as either dealing with sudden problems, such as breakdowns, or monotonously driving long distances to make up lost time: *"Well it's been quite a while since the last update, and to be quite frank the days have either been pretty damn intense or dead boring with really not much in between"*. There is moreover a lot of similarity between teams across travel itineraries and tourist activities. Almost all teams drive Romania's Transfagarasan highway, made famous in a 2009 episode of the British television program Top Gear, and acknowledged as such in posts. *"We ventured through the Transfargasan in our very own little episode of top gear"* (Team Lime), one group caption their photographs. Many teams make the significant detour to visit Cappadocia in Turkey in order to watch the attraction that is hot air balloons launched at sunrise.

Often teams enjoy grouping together with others from the same country online and on the road. These frequently spend significant parts of the journey together. The Darvaza gas crater in Turkmenistan for example, is attended by large groups who hold evening parties together, in one case with a hired local band driven out as entertainment. Grouping together here has not only social but practical advantages in difficult terrain: *"Pretty crazy trip into the crater with locals trying to lure cars the wrong way into sand dunes so they could then demand money for helping them get out... We ended up in a convoy of 11 rally cars, which made for great fun and team bonding getting cars unstuck from the sand"* (Team Lemon). Traversing Iran, the Pamir Highway, taking the Caspian ferry and crossing borders, are similarly often done in assemblages. Coordinating this, technology can be seen to keep travellers connected while spread out on the road. Descriptions are of calls for help made online and answered by teams in the vicinity. *"A huge shout out goes out to team X who stopped in darkness to pass over their industrial tow rope when we were down to just tatters"* (Team Silver).

At the same time, there is some ambivalence at uniqueness being undermined by the numbers involved. *"There are at least six teams from New Zealand taking part, but as far as we know we are the only team from the northern tip of the South Island taking part"* (Team Navy), one group outline on their social media bio for example, in an attempt to distinguish themselves from the multiple similar tourists involved. Implying the importance of differentiation, most teams choose comedic names for themselves and their vehicles, which they often then use across social media page titles and hashtags as branding: *"Make sure to search and follow #TeamX across all social media. Like and follow our page for regular crazy updates"* (Team Pink). Having a gimmick, such as wearing all yellow to match a car's colour, is frequently the case. They decorate their vehicles with official rally merchandise, and in some cases produce elaborate designs or paint jobs. Some dress to impress. One team conducts the rally dressed as penguins, another chickens, one wear only speedos. As such rally participants make efforts to stand out online and on the road.

Touring

If initial signs were of what would emerge as a celebrity gaze in their attempts to distinguish themselves from other tourists, and, at times, each other, rally contestants displayed accompanying and complementary established gazes also. Extensive descriptions in written posts are of the tourist landscapes viewed from the road and attractions visited. Familiar tourism accounts of eating, playing and sightseeing accompany teams throughout. *"The last day in Tbilisi was great. Visited the dry bridge market, went to a castle, had sulphur bath, went to a museum of illusions and of course had some local wine"* (Team Lime), one team summarise their time in Georgia for example. Many captions and accompanying photographs are of particular buildings, places and attractions, taken, interpreted and shared as evidence of visitation: *"Is that the Starship Enterprise?! Nah, just a massive monument to commemorate socialist communism erected at the peak of Soviet influence. It's situated in the Bulgarian mountains with an incredible view (see our previous post for the beautiful sunset!)"* (Team Violet). Indeed, participants often go into a lot of detail regarding the sites encountered, sharing histories and facts associated with, and passing on their own assessments.

As such, a traditional conceptualisation of the tourist gaze, in the sense of tourists looking at the exotic other anticipated in advance and then recorded as evidence of this, is demonstrated by the tourists observed. Urry's hermeneutic circle is confirmed in that tourists state their intentions to see something, such as the Cappadocia hot air balloons, go to see it, and document that they have seen it. In this respect, important for a number of participants is the exclusivity of such gazing, whereby few travellers have had the same opportunity to look upon certain sites. Describing the expensive entry to Turkmenistan for instance, one post evaluates: *"Well it took 100 hours to get in, but it is worth it to see a place less than 5000 foreigners (700 of them Mongol ralers) get to see each year"* (Team Red). Many enthusiastic reports are that Turkmenistan lives up to its notoriety, providing the unique observational and embodied experience expected: *"Turkmenistan what a country. Absolutely crazy. No people, marble buildings the size of football stadiums, curfews, strict laws! But what a beautiful place!"* (Team Silver). Here, the extensive anticipation in advance of adventurous experiences associated with difficult and inaccessible terrain, is channelled into and validated by visiting a well-known example of such.

Also shared are more involved multisensory experiences gained on the road and at specific destinations. This is a challenging tourism activity, as exemplified through posts documenting the breakdowns, delays, difficult and expensive border crossings, paying off of corrupt officials, as well as general fatigue and discomfort. One team summarises a few days since their last post for instance, *"Highlights include the broken shocks, second round of broken shocks, fucked fuel gauge, bent rims, popped tyres, broken boot and the many Hotel Micra sleeps we've had along the way"* (Team Olive). Undoubtedly this is a testing physical and mental experience for many

participants much of the time. Yet as highlighted in social media profiles and pre-trip coverage, such challenging experiences are sought out. A section of road in Turkey nicknamed the 'death highway', is for example driven by a large number of teams who then document this dangerous experience online in a way that accentuates their adventurousness: *"Death Road! Known as one of the most challenging roads in the world. It's definitely not for anyone suffering from vertigo or a fear of landslides. Only the suicidal, the insane, or the paid-to-do-this should ever drive down. This road has humbled many egos. One mistake and it's a free fall to your death. It has a length of 106 km and includes 29 steep hairpins. The road is in dreadful condition and requires strong nerves to negotiate it"* (Team Pink).

A hermeneutic circle of embodied as well as observed tourism thus characterises participants' social media, with extremes of both of these being sought out and claimed. Yet evidence is additionally of Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016)'s cropping away and pushing into the background of toured objects and surroundings, as tourists turn their gaze onto themselves and each other. Many photographs are taken inside, looking into or out of their tiny cars. It is this confined space that is often the centre of attention. The mirror gaze is often hidden behind sophisticated online presentations. One typical caption to a group selfie for example, displays the self-deprecating humour often accompanying: *"Team X coping some rays on a pit stop to Lake Bled. There's some cool shit behind us but we're the real view"* (Team Indigo). Nevertheless, it is the individual or team tourist in their surroundings which is the focus of much social media reportage. Sites, landscapes and hosts are stimulating backdrops for written elaboration on personal and collective feelings, emotions and experiences. Moreover, teams typically provide descriptions of themselves and each other, often in the third person, recounting their travel histories, friendships and motivations: *"I heard about the Mongol rally briefly some years ago. I was like, I NEED TO DO THIS. It was not even a question and the only person I could see myself doing it with was X. The only person dumb enough to say YES"* (Team Lime). A foregrounding of tourists individually and collectively, using travel to assist this, is clear.

On tour

Accompanying these established gazes, findings were of participants assuming, valuing, highly aware of and seeking out the gaze of others upon themselves. Research revealed Mongol Rally contestants are conscious of the mutual gaze of the other on the road and online. They then assume, solicit and fabricate this in a number of ways. Thus, participants highlight the media attention they have received in local press and radio prior to departure: *"Today saw us manically packing the car and worrying about how much gear we have tried to squeeze in, followed by a photo op with (local newspaper) and an interview for X and X with (local radio station)"* (Team Purple). Several teams were found to have press releases available on their websites in apparent anticipation of such interest. A number of others held launch parties with supporters and press: *"Great send off today with (local radio station) and (local newspaper). Catch our interview on the breakfast show and on the link below"* (Team Beige). Further media exposure gained en-route is shared likewise: *"Team X hit the news again online and on the back page of tomorrow's (local newspaper). Fame already! Link to article in bio"* (Team Orange). Finally, the backing of social media followers, who can also donate, and sponsors, who help to fundraise in exchange for advertising space of rally cars, is both solicited and acknowledged at the pre-trip stage. *"We wouldn't have been able to get where we have without all the support we have received. To all the local businesses who have helped us along the way, we can't thank you enough (Team Purple),"* one team reflect for instance in the lead up to departure.

On the road meanwhile, many teams report on the attention they generate. *"The constant looks we get!"* (Team Purple), one tourist captions a photograph of waving locals by the side of the road. *"Sheila has been getting great looks from all the locals who are all very interested and amazed by our adventure!"* (Team Orange), another annotates an uploaded photo of turned heads in a traffic jam. Some teams re-share posts received on social media: *"Turkey, getting messages through Facebook welcoming us to turkey from people who have seen us in traffic"* (Team Olive). Likewise, they re-share posts that tag them: *"SPOTTED somewhere in Germany by Monika, who said "Colorful is not a color, it's a spirit of life!"* (Team Purple). And they upload selfies requested by locals: *"Selfies with Turkish men: too many to count. Waves from other cars: too many to count"* (Team Pink). The attention generated on the road in its various forms is henceforth much appreciated and reported on. It also appears to be actively solicited by participants who decorate themselves and their vehicles elaborately: *"We've knocked off 15 countries so far and roughly 8000 kms. We get lots of honks, waves and photos sent to us showing how ridiculous we look"* (Team Brown).

Subsequently, the attentiveness of locals is a much-discussed theme within rally participant's social media. The tourists often need assistance with vehicle maintenance, border crossings, food and accommodation. But beyond practical support, much relied upon and appreciated by teams throughout their holiday, positive attention in terms of being welcomed and helped is highly valued and much commented upon. This is particularly the case in Iran, where various teams talk about their warm reception and the generous attention received. *"How can Iran have such a scary reputation when it's literally the MOST welcoming and awesome place on earth? It can't be explained in one Instagram post, so go listen to the radio interview I did with the ABC about the wonders of Iran (link in bio on our Instagram)"* (Team Black). Evaluations of tourism are thus frequently couched in terms of the response gained on the road: *"Iran has to be up there in terms of natural beauty but it is the people who have made our time in this country so special...from the friendly smiles and cries of 'welcome' as we drive past to the overwhelming hospitality we have received; we are counting down the days until we can visit again"* (Team Purple). Feelings of being a quasi-celebrity are recounted approvingly: *"Iranians are the most welcoming hosts I've ever met! People in other cars smile and wave to you. People stopped in the street to offer us help buying things and getting directions and welcome us. A child even wanted a selfie with us. Awesome country (Team Yellow)."*

Conversely, absence of hospitality was noted by several teams. Recorded are difficulties with obtaining official documents: *"Dubrovnik, Croatia. Your beauty is mind blowing, but your democracy is a shit show"* (Team Pink). One team comment on being robbed: *"We love Budapest... Jokes just got robbed"* (Team Grey), as they go on to explain being intimidated by unfriendly locals: *"Low lights of Romania include getting chased by rabid dogs (literally) and (in a separate event) drunk locals trying to pick a fight."* This undesirable attention, a downside of the otherwise much sought standing out from other tourists and being feted on the road, sours the impression

of some tourists towards particular places. More generally fame can be fatiguing. A number of descriptions hint at how being regularly stopped by local inhabitants, particularly the police, who want to be introduced and take photographs, can become tedious. One team for instance reflects on a day negotiating a break down: “*We were pretty much a visiting circus for the residents*” (Team Gold). Albeit such harassment is not necessarily a negative, but part of the overall adventure. Tales of challenging encounters, such as brushes with traffic police, are recounted online with a sense of humour to further dramatize: “*Still managed to squeeze in a couple of Police stops and cross the Georgian border at sun set before pitching the tent up in the hills*” (Team Navy). Negative attention is moreover still attention: “*Groups of guys kept walking up to us, turns out they were undercover cops and we got frisked and searched multiple times*” (Team Pink).

Discussion

The tourist celebrity gaze

Findings from this study of participants in the 2019 Mongol Rally reiterate much that is already familiar about the tourist gaze. Just as Zhang and Hitchcock (2017)'s results reinforce Urry's general hypothesis that the tourist gaze is a culturally learned way of behaving reflecting what the tourist expects to see, this research supports the continued value of the hermeneutic circle in tourism studies. Preparing for, being at and recording being at tourism sites and landscapes, is important to tourists undertaking the Mongol Rally. Places such as Transfagarasan or Cappadocia are anticipated and captured by tourists in very routine ways, with similar descriptions and depictions on social media recording visits. Interestingly, this traditional gazing is given a contemporary twist in that some of the most anticipated sites and activities are niche, difficult and even dangerous ones, for these complement the participants' sought adventure credentials and exclusivity. Participants are also conscious of hosts' gaze and this can be enjoyable, as when being warmly welcomed, or at times inhibiting, as when being harassed.

Signs are moreover of the social-mediated or mirror gaze, whereby the tourist rather than the toured becomes the focus of the gaze-performance. Dinhopf and Gretzel (2016: 131) summarise this as, “rather than the camera extending outward to capture a destination, the camera is now not only more often pointed at the self than before, but often pointed at the self by the self”. Indeed, this is regularly the case, with those taking part in the Mongol Rally devoting much of their online coverage to intra and inter group depictions. Many photographs and captions highlight team members in their cars, campsites or in the field, with wider surroundings cropped away. Descriptions and celebrations are of each other, with teams outlining in-group dynamics along the journey and relaying encounters with other teams. This gaze might be best encapsulated by the use of drones to capture expansive footage of dramatic scenic surroundings, yet where the start or end point is typically the team(s) themselves within this landscape. For all the appreciation of toured surroundings in such videos, emphasis is on the tourist in those surroundings. These are there to serve a tourist purpose, such as to illustrate the adventurousness of travel.

Alongside corroborating existing discourses around the tourist gaze, findings from this study extend these by suggesting an iteration of the tourist gaze that may occur additionally and simultaneously. Highlighting the breadth of tourist potential and range of associated gazes, Wearing and Wearing (1996) distinguished the flaneur, a gazing disassociated wanderer, and the chorister, a person who practices place in a more creative, interactive and multisensory role. Adding to these, both observed here, is the celebrity, a person who practices place as part of a feeling famous role. Findings from this study propose that as well as going to look at others, or to be present before others, tourists may also be travelling to be looked at by others. Indeed, attention positive and negative was actively solicited and enthusiastically documented by the tourists followed in this study throughout their travel. This is the tourist not just touring, but on tour.

Labelled here as the tourist celebrity gaze, this way of gazing involves celebrification; making the individual stand out and thus subject to attention. In the way that celebrities as both ordinary and extraordinary are nonetheless still distanced from the ordinary (Driessens, 2013), so too the tourists in this case distance themselves from other tourists, and where necessary because of the growing scale of the event, each other. Celebrification observed in this study involved Mongol Rally participants claiming and assembling distinguishing features around themes of adventure, charity and quirkiness. If the transformation from ordinary person to celebrity can be seen as a media ritual that both confirms their separation from ordinary and legitimates the myth of the extraordinary (Couldry, 2003), then rally participants similarly distance themselves from ordinary tourists and seek attention using the event and their depictions of it shared online. Accordingly, social media is used to define and assert claims to distinctiveness, as through the repeated self-descriptions and collective reinforcements observed. Akin to this, Rojek (2001: 7) argues that celebrity is “the consequence of the attribution of qualities to a particular individual through the mass media”. Social media additionally supports claims of standing out by capturing and sharing evidence of attention received before and whilst travelling, from host, press and sponsor audiences. On the road, over the top vehicles and outfits would appear to be a deliberate attempt to distinguish and direct the gaze of the other at oneself. Travelling through some of the most tourism underdeveloped parts of the world, likewise has an effect of making tourists highly visible. It is perhaps unsurprising that people inhabiting geographically isolated areas might react to outsiders. When they do, this is shared through social media, backing up the tourist celebrity gaze as a performance being paid attention to. Similarly, the seeking out of destinations that are politically closed appears to be a further means of gaining attention, real or imagined. Complex border crossings, the attention of corrupt officials, being monitored, all add to the sought sense of drama, adventure, distinction and being the centre of attention, which the tourist celebrity gaze deploys. This travelling to be looked at, the being on tour rather than or as well as touring, is the tourist celebrity gaze.

Table 1
Tourist gazes summary.

Theory development	Nature of the gaze	Literature examples
Tourist Gaze (Traditional theorisation)	Tourists travel to gaze at people/place performances	Urry, 1991; Urry, 1992
Tourist Gaze (Theoretical extension)	Tourist travel to multisensory gaze at, and are gazed at, by people/places in interactive mutual performances	Larsen & Urry, 2011; Maoz, 2006
Tourist Social-Mediated/Mirror Gaze (Theoretical renewal)	Tourists travel to gaze at themselves performing before people/places	Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Shakeela & Weaver, 2016
Tourist Celebrity Gaze (Renewed theory extension)	Tourists travel to be gazed at whilst performing, by people/places	2019 Mongol Rally

Conclusion

Extending discussions of how social mediatization has opened up new possibilities for the tourist gaze (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016), this study elaborates one such possibility. Hereby, the celebrification potential of social media as a means to claim noteworthiness and solicit attention that confirms this, enables a tourist celebrity gaze. Netnography of tourists undertaking the 2019 Mongol Rally found that at least in some cases some of the time these go beyond looking at performances of, mutually performing with, or performing before others. Participants moved towards being looked at performing by others, with social media having an important role in both soliciting and recording attention. The tourist celebrity gaze therefore potentially accompanies, complements and extends existing theoretical developments in the area (see Table 1). Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) have previously illustrated technologies influencing the shifting tourist gaze in the cropping away of physical surroundings. They note that where tourists once went on holiday to see the other, they now go to see themselves in front of the other. Extending this insight further, this study describes the celebrity tourist gaze as involving going on holiday to be seen by the other.

As such, something of an obverse panopticon may be sought out by the tourist celebrity gaze. Kozinets et al. (2004: 671) describe how “the obverse panopticon provides consumers with temporary ways of touching greatness that momentarily, and for an affordable price, offer the perception of fame and success”. The Mongol Rally allows participants the opportunity to play such a role by providing access to destinations where one is likely to stand out and materials for social media where one can claim similarly. Here, the sharing of press coverage, being spotted on the road, fussed over by local inhabitants and officials, the odds of which happening are increased by consciously idiosyncratic appearances and eccentric behaviours, can all be curated and promoted online. This may be an example of how new technology coupled with selective travel itineraries, enable consumers to enter the obverse panopticon, “to breach fantasy and reality, to transcend physical limitations, and to conjure the iconic spirits of the celebrity pantheon” (Kozinets et al., 2004: 668).

The Mongol Rally, in that it provides an experience conducive to celebrification through facilitating claims of distinction and the soliciting of outside attention, offers a particularly fertile setting for the tourist celebrity gaze to be deployed. Its exclusivity enables claims of distinctiveness prior to departure. So too the charitable requirements of the rally help to set contestants apart as magnanimous. Meanwhile its routing through tourism underdeveloped parts of the world and encouragement of heavy-handed eccentricity facilitates sensations, real or perceived, of being observed by others when on the road. Tourists gazing in this way may dedicate significant resources towards doing so, going as in this case to quite extreme lengths in their soliciting of and reporting back upon attention gained on the road. This raises interesting prospects for tourism industry professionals. Kozinets et al. (2017) in their investigation of museum selfie taking, find reflections of consumer culture, the ways it is changing, and the ways that it destabilizes patrons, museums and art. The celebrity gaze may similarly extend ways of thinking about tourist and tourism management.

It is however uncertain whether the tourist celebrity gaze, itself a tentative concept here put forward for the first time, is something of note in tourism more generally. Celebritized contemporary cultures suggest that it might be, albeit research beyond the limited single case study and netnographic method of this paper is required to ascertain significance or generalisability. Similarly, it would be interesting to consider whether minded tourists are attracted to the Mongol Rally to celebrity gaze, and if so what comparable tourism they may be involved with, or whether it is the nature of the rally which draws out such gazing. Each tourist is unique, there is no universal tourist gaze, and the same landscape or object is gazed upon and interpreted differently by each tourist (Reisinger et al., 2013). Likewise, in this case each individual tourist will be gazed upon and interpret this differently. Discussion is therefore not intending to narrowly define or assert the tourist celebrity gaze, rather to introduce this as a concept that might help others to consider the ways in which the tourist gaze may be changing, may be doing so in line with contemporary celebritized culture, and facilitated by the individual celebrification possibilities of new technologies.

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