

Information Phenomena in the Hobby of Travel Photography

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Abstract

Introduction – This paper contributes to the research area of information seeking within serious leisure. Research was conducted to address the research question: what are the information phenomena – information activities, information needs, and information resources, within the hobby of travel photography? Research population is travel photography hobbyists who have been taking travel photographs for at least ten years.

Method – In an exploratory research, Information Horizon Interviews were conducted with three travel photography hobbyists from Toronto, Canada. During interviews, participants drew information horizon maps to illustrate information aspects in travel photography.

Findings – Two data analysis methods were employed. First, graphical data was transferred to a matrix to discover common information resources. The second method is an iterative process of inductive thematic analysis. The central activity of travel photography unfolds in a five-step sequence. Each step intertwines various information phenomena. The prevailing information activity is information exchange among hobbyists' social network – friends and family.

Implications – The study reveals some hobbyists prefer to share photographs only with people whom they know. One application may be the development of a website or mobile application that supports this type of photo-sharing practice.

Conclusion – This study discovers the complex interplay of information phenomena in travel photography.

INTRODUCTION

Many people pursue leisure activities during their vacations or whenever they have free time. Both from the perspective of an individual who participates in leisure activities and from the social context where leisure activities exist, Stebbins (2012) defines leisure as the “uncoerced, contextually framed activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, using their abilities and resources, actually do in a satisfying or fulfilling way (or both)” (p. 4). The ‘uncoerced’ nature is an important element in selecting a leisure activity, which happens during an individual’s ‘free time’.

Travel photography is one type of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1998, p. 49-67). Hobbyists involve in the central activity of taking photographs of an area’s landscape and people while traveling. This paper explores information phenomena in the hobby of travel photography. According to Albers and James (1988), “travel photographs... not only formulate and institutionalize what tourists see and how they see it, but also how they know and understand what they see” (p. 136). Travel photograph plays an essential role of documenting the trip from the photographer’s perspective.

The central activity of travel photography unfolds in a five-step sequence: *exploring, planning, packing, shooting, sharing and reflecting*. An exploratory research was conducted to address the research question: what are the information phenomena – information activities, information needs, and information resources, within the hobby of travel photography? An information activity is “the performing of a predominantly mental process, which may include a physical process directed at manipulation of information” (Hektor, 2001, p. 311). For instance, watching a landscape photography tutorial. Information need is a hobbyist’s desire to obtain information to satisfy a particular need, for instance, seeking information about a camera before purchasing. Information resources are any digital or physical artifacts that provide information about travel photography, such as photography magazines.

An exploratory research was conducted with travel photography hobbyists who have been taking travel photographs for at least ten years. The goal is to discover various aspects of information within the serious leisure pursuit of travel photography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A discussion of information behavior in everyday life has been explored in the literature. Savolainen (1995) offers a framework for the study of everyday life information seeking in the context of way of life, which manifests the relationship between work and leisure time, models of consumption, and nature of hobbies. Hektor (2001) introduces a model of information behavior in everyday life. Information behavior manifests in eight forms of information activities, which account for all information behavior in everyday life (Hektor, 2001). These studies illustrate the complexity of the interplay of leisure, everyday life, and information behavior.

Within the literature of everyday life information seeking, there is a growing body of work on the role of information in *serious leisure*, defined by Stebbins (2009) as:

...the systematic pursuit of an... activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience. (p. 622)

This interest has been explored in the existing literature. Hartel's (2006) ethnographic study suggests that the information phenomena occur throughout a 'gourmet cooking episode' are important to the social practice of gourmet cooking. An ethnographic study conducted by Lee and Trace (2009) reveals rubber duck collectors' information needs and identifies the information flows among the participants in the hobby social world. Cox, Clough and Marlow (2008) examine the use of photo sharing practice on Flickr in the context of amateur photography as a 'serious leisure' pursuit.

Cox's (2013) work has been an inspiration for this paper, for the way it evaluates the idea of 'information in social practice' and how a particular practice shapes idiosyncratic information seeking activities and information needs within four forms of personal photography. These studies verify the critical role of information in serious leisure pursuits. Yet, there is little literature specifically focuses on information phenomena of travel photography. This paper contributes to this research area by exploring the complex interplay of information activities, information needs, and information resources in travel photography as a serious leisure pursuit.

RESEARCH METHODS

An exploratory information behavior study using the Information Horizon Interview (IHI) (Sonnenwald, Harmon, & Wildemuth, 2001) was conducted to explore the information phenomena in the hobby of travel photography. Sonnenwald (1999) introduces the framework for human information behavior, which serves as a

theoretical foundation for a research method for exploring research questions and topics in information studies – the creation and analysis of information horizon maps (Sonnenwald et al., 2001).

Three travel photography hobbyists from Toronto, Canada participated in the study. All participants are male, who have been taking travel photographs for at least 10 years, ranging in age from 27 to 64 years. This exploratory research does not represent gender and socio-demographic variables in the sample, the main criteria was a passion for travel photography.

The study focuses on information activities and information resources associated with taking travel photographs and hobbyists' general information needs. The information activity of *exchange* (Hektor, 2001) is explored in interviews to capture information sharing in the hobby of travel photography. To keep the study in scope, information aspects of photo management and photo editing were not explored.

A combination of verbal and graphical articulation of information horizons was employed to explore aspects of information within the context of the hobby. An interview guide (see Appendix 1) was designed for three 30-minute interviews. During interviews, participants drew information maps (Figure 1, 2 and 3) to illustrate information phenomena in travel photography. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and field notes were expanded.

The research requires integration with human subjects and it has been approved by the University of Toronto's Office of Research Ethics. Participants recruited for the study are low risk and non-vulnerable. The protocols of ethical research were followed, in which verbal consent was obtained from each participant before the interview.

FINDINGS

Two data analysis methods were employed. First, information horizon maps (Figure 1, 2, 3) were transferred to a matrix (Table 1): the rows represent the information resources used by participants, the columns represent each participant, and the cells of the matrix represent each participant's preferences among the information resources. Since participants mentioned many common information resources during the interviews, the matrix was created to discover common information resources. Then, by studying the matrix, interview transcripts and field notes, common themes and the interplay of information activities, information needs, and information resources were identified through an iterative process of inductive thematic analysis.

Central Activity in the Hobby of Travel Photography

Taking travel photographs is the central activity in the hobby of travel photography, which unfolds in a sequence

that consists of five steps: *exploring, planning, packing, shooting, sharing and reflecting*. *Exploring* involves seeking a particular destination for photo shoots. Participants usually access different information resources for decision-making. They might ask friends and family for recommendations, browse social media, or seek destinations where they would like to visit on travel photography blogs. One participant remarks, “When I browse online, say like Flickr, if something that is fun and special pops up... I will try to make a trip to go there...” Information practice entails searching on the Internet, browsing social media, and talking to other hobbyists.

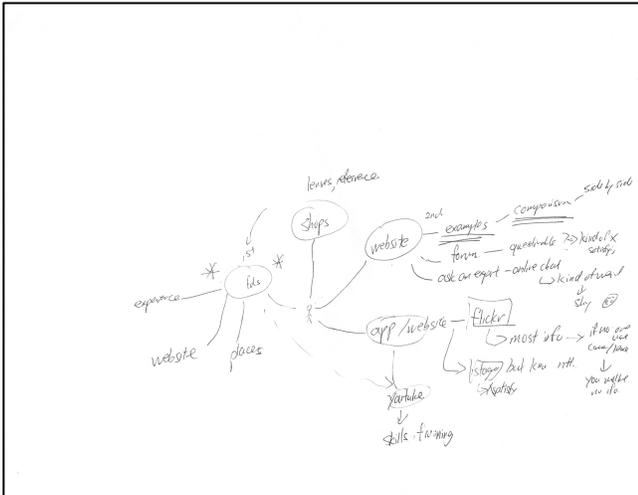


Figure 1. Participant A's information horizon map

The next step is *planning*, which involves obtaining travel information from travel websites, friends, family, and YouTube. Two travel websites – *tripadvisor.ca* and *expedia.ca* are two prevailing resources: the former one is for getting information about the destination, such as special landmarks and admission fee; participants report they use the latter one to plan the trip in terms of how to get to different locations once they arrive at the destination. Another resource is Google Maps, which provides information about the route, travel time, and travel options (e.g. train, bus). Participants' social network – friends and family, is another preferred information resource. Participants obtain information about great shooting locations and fun things to do at the destination by talking to friends and family. One participant remarks, “Personal experiences matter a lot to me. If a friend recommend a place... I think my trip would be positive.” Moreover, YouTube is another information resource for obtaining travel information. A participant in the interview says, “I found it useful to watch a YouTube video... rather than looking at a still picture.” Other resources are travel sections in some newspapers and travel photography blogs.

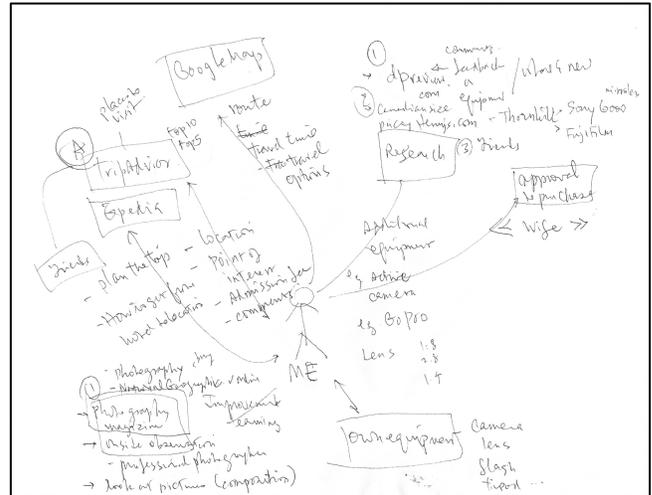


Figure 2. Participant B's information horizon map

Packing is the act of choosing appropriate equipment for photo shoots at a particular destination. Hobbyists need different lenses based on the locations of where photographs would be taken. An participant remarks, “If I'm going to take pictures inside churches, I will need to bring a lens with a minimum aperture to improve low-light capability...” Information resources include photography websites, friends and family, and travel photography blogs.

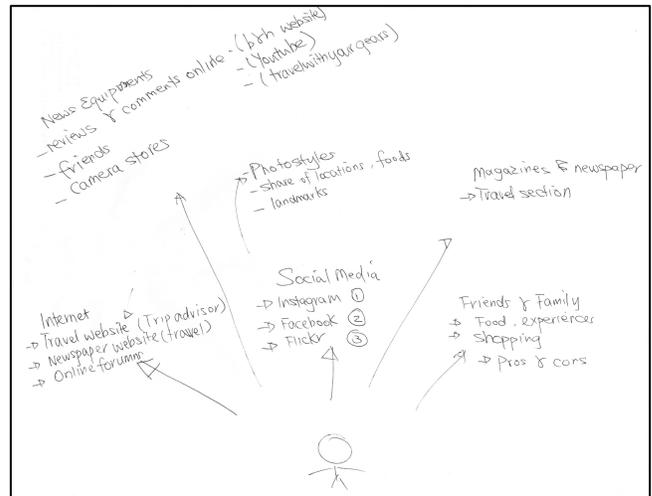


Figure 3. Participant C's information horizon map

Shooting involves taking photographs at the destination. Hobbyists often access aforementioned travel information such as Google Maps to get to different locations. Re-use is the primary information activity during *shooting*, which has been illustrated in Hartel's (2006) ethnographic study of gourmet cooking.

Finally, *Sharing and Reflecting* involves sharing photographs with others and considers ways to improve photography techniques. Two Participants mentioned they share photos on Flickr; one participant prefers sharing photos with friends and family whom they know. Sharing photographs is a way to get feedback and encourage dialogue about travel and photography experiences with other hobbyists.

Table 1. Matrix illustrating participants' preference order of information sources

Information Resource	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C
Family		1	1
Friends	1	1	1
Social Media (Flickr)	1		1
Social Media (Instagram)	2		1
Social Media (Facebook)			1
Social Media (YouTube)	1	1	1
Travel Website (TripAdvisor)		1	1
Travel Website (Expedia)		1	
Internet (Google Maps)		1	
Internet (Travel Photography Blogs)		1	1
Internet (Photography Websites)	1	1	1
Internet (Online Forums)	2		2
Internet (Kijiji)	2		
Newspapers			2
Photography Magazine		1	1
Professional Photographers		2	
Galleries		2	
Travel Books		3	
Salespersons	2	2	2

Table 2. Information activities and information resources in the five-step sequence of the central activity in the hobby of travel photography

Step	Information Activities	Information Resources
Exploring	browsing, searching, seeking, talking, reading	Flickr, Facebook, Instagram, friends and family, travel photography blogs
Planning	searching, seeking, talking, watching, reading	travel websites, friends and family, YouTube, Google Maps, newspapers, travel photography blogs
Packing	searching, seeking, reading, talking	photography websites, friends and family, travel photography blogs
Shooting	re-use	Google Maps, travel websites
Sharing & Reflecting	sharing, talking, browsing	Friends and family, Flickr, Facebook, Instagram

Various information activities, information needs, and information resources are interwoven within travel photography hobbyists' central activity. The complex interplay of information phenomena is illustrated in Table 2. Hobbyists obtain information from different information resources to satisfy their information needs. Participants reported 19 different information resources (Table 1). The prevailing and preferred information resources include friends, family, the Internet, and social media.

DISCUSSION

Within the central activity of travel photography, information sharing among friends and family is the preferred way for obtaining information to fulfilled different information needs. Information sharing is known as information exchange, which is one of the eight information activities in Hektor's (2001) model of information behavior. Information exchange occurs when communication is reciprocal and limited to a single topic (Hektor, 2001). In addition to the aforementioned information needs, hobbyists regularly seek information to improve photography techniques and learn about photography equipment (e.g. cameras, lenses, filters) before purchasing. These information needs also involve information sharing among hobbyists.

Travel photography hobbyists engage in exchange as a way to improve photography techniques. They exchange information within their social network – friends, family, and other hobbyists. The exchange occurs both in person and virtually. For example, hobbyists would share comments and feedback for a particular photograph. One participant remarks, "I would share pictures with my friends and ask for their comments." Two Participants

prefer sharing photographs on Flickr to receive comments on their photographs from people around the world. Information exchange includes different aspects of photography (e.g. tips for photographing in different weather conditions, golden ratio). Hobbyists also share websites and tutorial videos with friends to help each other to improve photography techniques. They would watch the same YouTube video, and then they would have a discussion about things they have learned from watching the video. One participant considers watching YouTube video is the most useful way to improve his photography techniques, "my friends also suggest some YouTube videos... Those videos are very useful." Moreover, hobbyists also involve in information exchange by posting comments on YouTube to engage in dialogues with other hobbyists.

In addition, hobbyists seek information regularly for purchasing photography equipment. They often exchange information with friends about features of particular gears. One participant in the interview says, "when I'm considering to purchase camera lenses, my friends would suggest a particular lens... We also learn about photography equipment on some websites and compare different models." Information exchange includes pros and cons of a camera based on experiences, discounts and pricing information. The exchange can be virtual – posting reviews online and sharing online articles about particular gears, or in person – discussing personal experiences of using a particular camera face-to-face.

Reflecting on existing literature, travel photography is one type of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1998) that involves various aspects of information. The central activity of the five-step sequence can be used to further explore information activities of everyday life information seeking. Future research area may focus on information phenomena associated with photo management and photo editing, which also play important roles in the hobby of travel photography. The study reveals some hobbyists prefer to share photographs only with people whom they know. One area of application may be the development of a website or mobile application that supports this type of photo-sharing practice and maximizes the comment feature to assist hobbyists in improving photography techniques among their social network.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The IHI (Sonnenwald et al., 2001) is an effective research method for exploring the nature of information phenomena in travel photography. Participants were willing to share their experiences and no ethical issues were raised in the interviews. Participants were less anxious while they were drawing the information horizon maps; thus, they explained their information phenomena in great detail, which was helpful for data analysis. However, this is a small-scale

exploratory research, a larger sample size in future study would be needed to verify findings in the study. In the future, I will separate the interview into two parts. First, I would ask the participant to record as much information as possible (e.g. personal object and stories) on the information horizon map as he/she goes through the day. Participants might generate richer information compares to information from memory. Then, I would invite the participant to a face-to-face interview to discuss the information horizon map. By inviting the participant to record daily activities and personal objects before the interview, the participant might be more willing and ready to share his/her personal story. By understanding hobbyists' daily lives and stories, it might foster deep comprehension of the information phenomena within the context of the hobby.

CONCLUSION

The research discovers three information phenomena in travel photography. The central activity of taking travel photographs is unfolds in a five-step sequence. Each step intertwines various information activities, information needs, and information resources. Information exchange among hobbyists' social network is the prevailing information activity within the central activity, as well as for other general information needs such as improving photography techniques and obtaining information about equipment. Moreover, prevailing information resources include the Internet and social media. Participants mentioned some physical information resources, for instance, travel books and newspapers; nevertheless, these are not their preferred information resources. It is interesting to note that pervasive advertisements on the Internet does not account for hobbyists' information resources. Surprisingly, participants did not mention library as an information resource. Perhaps, participants recruited for the study involve in travel photography for pure enjoyment. Future research with professional travel photographers might reveal different preferences for information resources. I hope this study successfully illuminates information phenomena in serious leisure pursuit of travel photography, and that hobbyists will be more conscious of various information aspects of the hobby.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Betty Lu (betty.lu@mail.utoronto.ca) is a master of information candidate at the University of Toronto. She conducted a user experience research project that aims to improve wayfinding at one of the University of Toronto Libraries – Robarts Library. Her interests include user experience design, and library and information science.

APPENDIX 1

Grand Tour Question

How did you first become interested in photography?

Mini Tour Question

Please recall last time when you took travel photographs, what kind of information do you need for the photo shoot?

Information/Red Thread Questions

What kind of information do you generally need to support your travel photography hobby?

What kind of resources do you use?

How do you get the information you need?

Information Horizon/Graphical Elicitation

What I'm trying in the study is the information horizon map. What you need to do is to put yourself on this piece of paper, and then draw information resources that you typically access for supporting your travel photography hobby. And please indicate your preference among these resources, and if you can talk about it as you are drawing, it would be great!

APPENDIX 2

Interview 1

Interviewer: "What I'm trying in the study is the information horizon map. What you need to do is to put yourself on this piece of paper, and then draw information resources that you typically access for supporting your travel photography hobby. And please indicate your preference among these resources, and if you can talk about it as you are drawing, it would be great!"

Participant A: "I would ask my friends where is a good place to take pictures based on their experiences. For example, if I were going to Algonquin Provincial Park, I would want to know a few places for taking good photos; otherwise, it takes a long time for me to explore. I also share my photos with my friends on Flickr, it's a great online photo sharing application, you can learn about detailed information about the photo (e.g. which camera, lens, and settings were used to take the photo)."

Interview 2

Interviewer: "What kind of information do you generally need to support your travel photography hobby? What kind of resources do you use?"

Participant B: "I need information for getting new equipment. I would talk to friends to learn from their experiences of using different equipment. I need information about what kind of lens that I need to bring for the photo shoots. I learn this information from websites and my own experiences. I've been to many museums and I learned from that. Good information resources would be

friends who travel often, travel blogs, and some photography websites.”

Interview 3

Interviewer: “What kind of information do you generally need to support your travel photography hobby? What kind of resources do you use?”

Participant C: “Most of the time, I see photos from Instagram, because I check out different people’s accounts. People post different pictures online, I think is a great resource to learn from other people. YouTube is also a very good resource, as many professional photographers talk about their opinions about taking photographs using different equipment and their experiences of travelling to different places around the world.”

APPENDIX 3

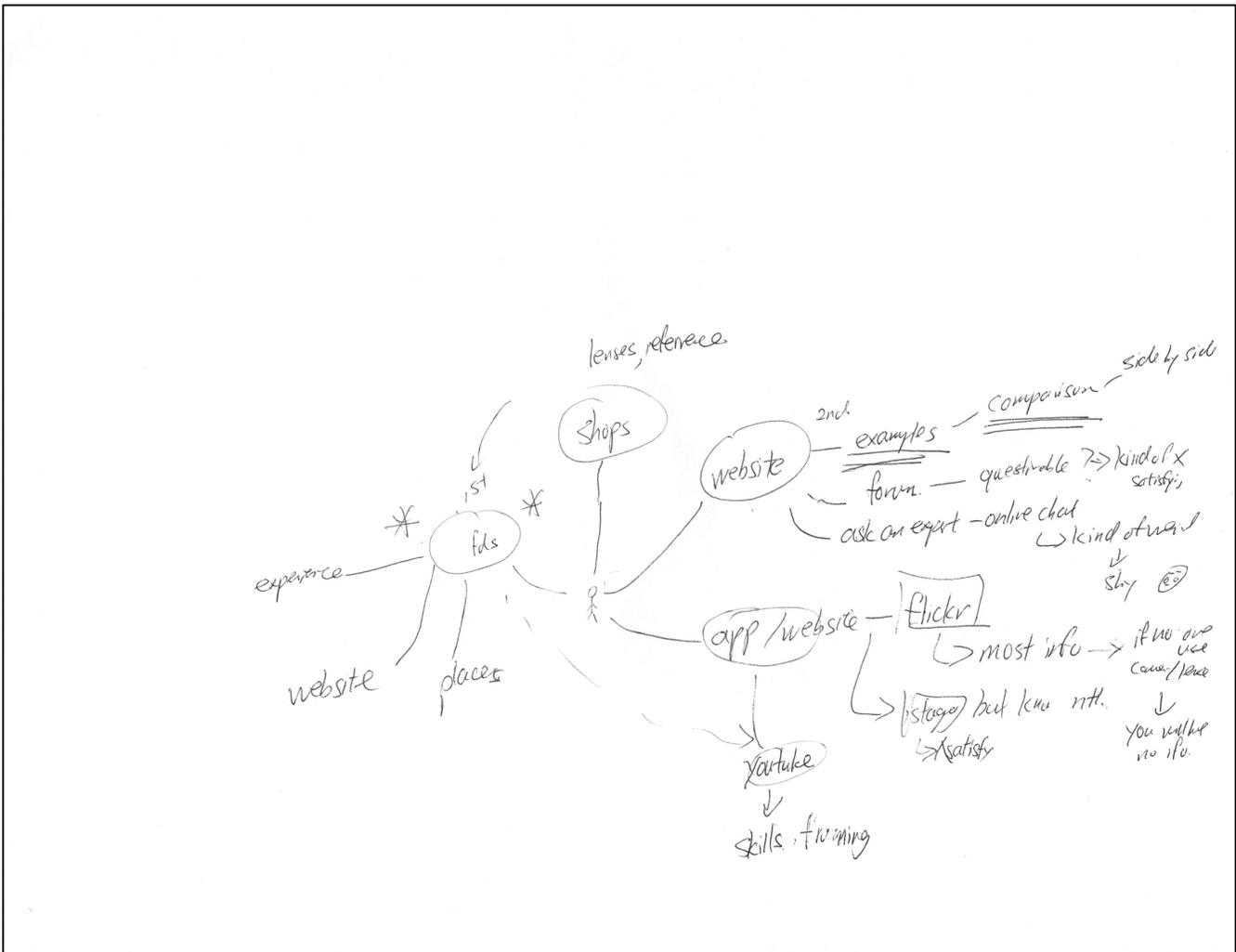


Figure 1. Participant A's information horizon map

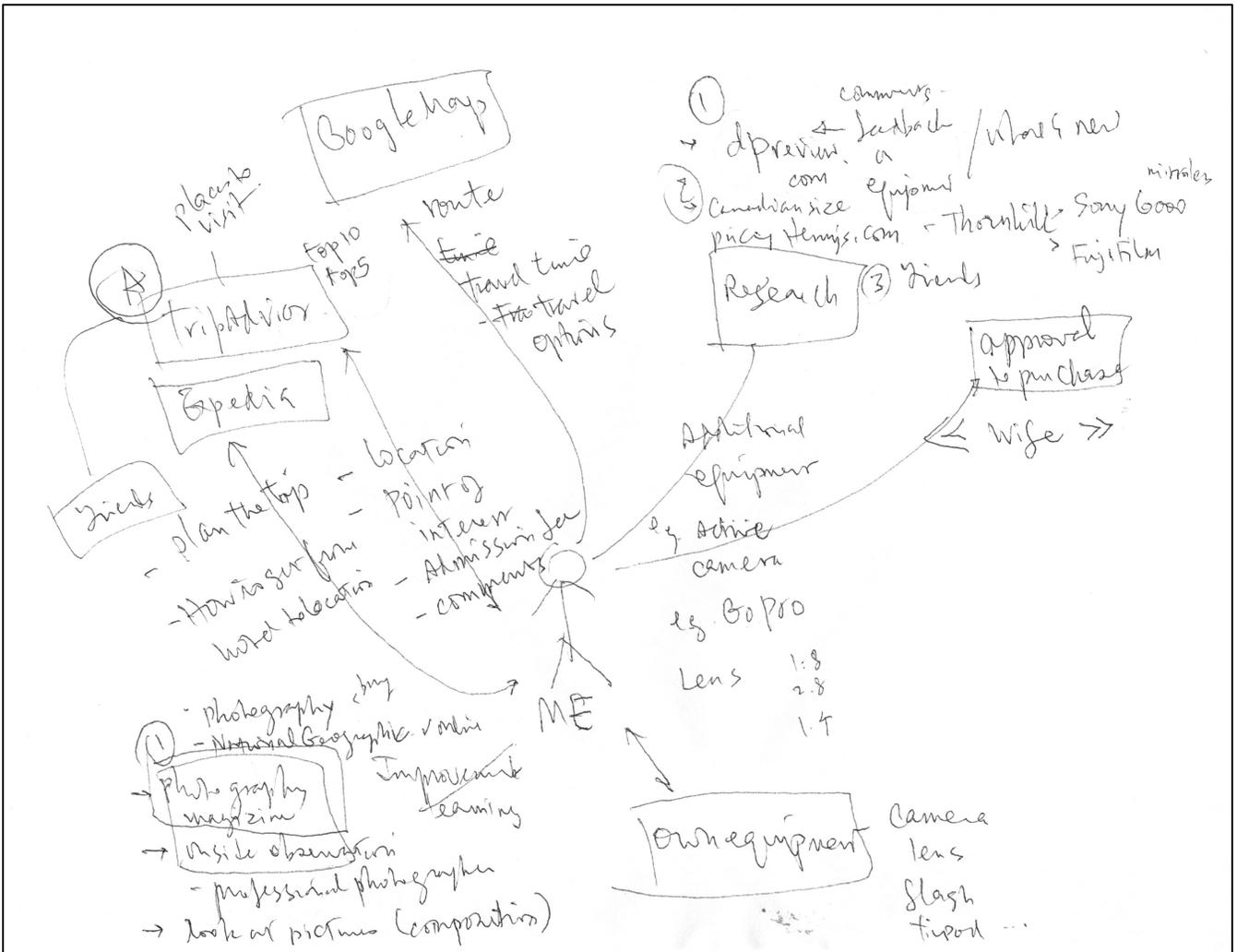


Figure 2. Participant B's information horizon map

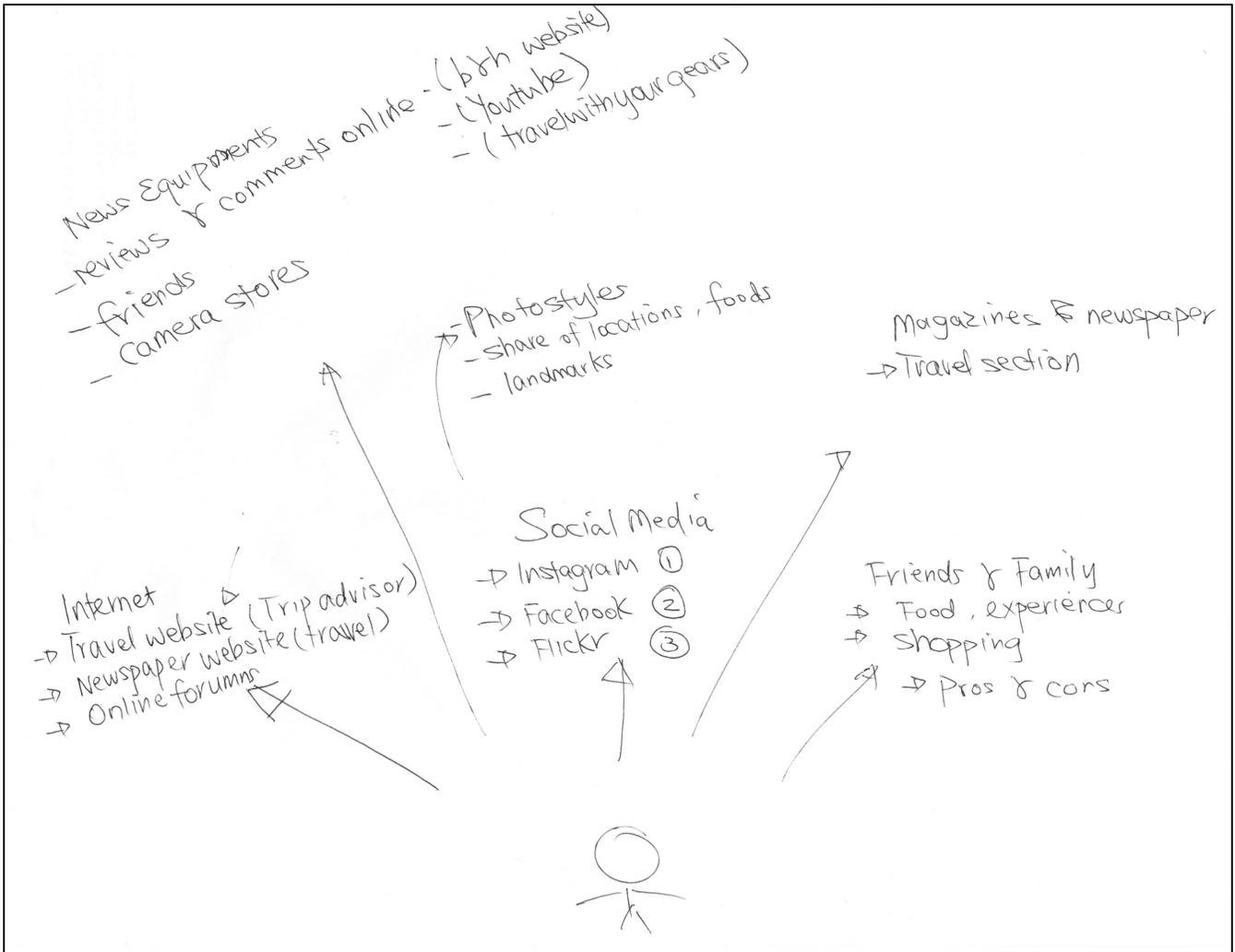


Figure 3. Participant C's information horizon map