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A Little Blue Bird Told Me: Sentiment Change on Orphanage Tourism

Introduction

This study assesses online conversations related to orphanage tourism to understand changes in the public's sentiments over the past decade. Individuals who participate in short-term volunteer activities in orphanages as a part of their holidays are considered to be participants of orphanage tourism. Researchers have expressed a great concern over the increasing number of volunteer tourists at orphanages, especially those participating in short-term volunteering (Carpenter, 2015a; A. Freidus & Caro, 2018; Guiney, 2017; Lyneham & Facchini, 2019; Richter & Norman, 2010). Volunteer tourists' intentions are mostly humanitarian (Smith, 1981) and they may benefit the orphanages and themselves, especially regarding operational support and cultural exchange (Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Wearing, 2001; Wearing & Neil, 2000; Zahra & McGehee, 2013). However, even well-intended volunteers can cause harm (Bauer, 2017). Recent literature on orphanage tourism has emphasized its negative impacts on the institutionalized children (Guiney, 2017; Guiney & Mostafanezhad, 2015; Ursin & Skålevik, 2018).

Volunteer tourism at orphanages poses a concern for two reasons. First, minimal training of the volunteers can lead to the maltreatment of vulnerable children (Carpenter, 2015a). Short-term volunteer tourists—mostly seeking a transformative experience—are not properly trained nor are they accustomed to local culture prior to interacting with children (A. Freidus & Caro, 2018). They disrupt the local education and caring system (Bargeman, Richards, & Govers, 2018). Moreover, they quickly form intimate connections with children and leave after a few weeks, sometimes even after a few hours (Richter & Norman, 2010). Repeated experience of abandonment at a young age can deter children from having healthy socio-psychological development, especially for the children in residential care facilities who have already experienced neglect, abandonment, or abuse (Cheney & Rotabi, 2017; Thabet, Thabet, Hussein, & Vostanis, 2007).

Second, volunteers and their donations are problematic, as they support orphanages that deprive children of the care of their families and communities (Stark, Rubenstein, Pak, & Kosal, 2017; Ursin & Skålevik, 2018). Decades of research have reported adverse effects of raising children in residential care facilities, including susceptibility to deviant behavior, exposure to abuse, and deterred physical, psychological, and social development (Dozier et al., 2014; Dozier, Zeanah, Wallin, & Shauffer, 2012). Compared to the peers who were raised in family-care settings like foster care, children who grew up in residential care facilities were more susceptible to deviant behavior due to a lack of secure attachment with parent figures (Huefner & Ringle, 2012; Ryan, Marshall, Herz, & Hernandez, 2008). They also experienced more physical and sexual abuse (Euser, Alink, Tharner, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2013, 2014; Font, 2015), exhibited delayed physical and cognitive development, and suffered from psychosocial dysfunctions such as anxiety and depression (Çaman & Özceve, 2011; Dozier et al., 2012; Fawzy & Fouad, 2010; Sigal, Perry, Rossigol, & Ouimet, 2003; Van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Juffer, 2007).

Nations worldwide have recognized the harmful effects of orphanages on children's well-being and have strived to minimize their numbers (Petrowski, Cappa, & Gross, 2017). In contrast to such efforts, international volunteers contribute to keeping children in residential care facilities (Punaks & Feit, 2014; Reas, 2013; Richter & Norman, 2010). They are believed to create demand for

orphans and provide financial and human resources to run the institutions (Bargeman et al., 2018; Conran, 2011; Guiney, 2017, 2018; Guiney & Mostafanezhad, 2015; Proyrungroj, 2017; Richter & Norman, 2010; Ursin & Skålevik, 2018; Wearing, Young, & Everingham, 2017). Consequently, various entities have campaigned to deter orphanage tourism. ChildSafe launched the ‘Children are not Tourist Attractions’ movement in 2011, and more recently, Lumos started the #HELPINGNOTHELPING campaign in October 2019 in an effort to end orphanage tourism (ChildSafe, 2019; Lumos, 2019). Despite the decade-long effort, orphanage tourism still exists in numerous countries, including Haiti and Thailand (Bargeman et al., 2018; Conran, 2011; Guiney, 2017, 2018; Guiney & Mostafanezhad, 2015; Proyrungroj, 2017; Richter & Norman, 2010; Ursin & Skålevik, 2018).

Past research on orphanage tourism mostly took a qualitative approach, which provided profound knowledge but was limited to a single time and those directly involved, such as volunteers and staff (Carpenter, 2015b; Cheney & Rotabi, 2017; Guiney, 2017; Tuovinen, 2014). This study fills a gap by analyzing the sentiments and contents of online communications on Twitter between 2009 and 2019. The decade-long examination enables the authors to observe change in sentiments over time and to account for the aforementioned major campaign efforts. The findings from the study will also provide insights into the overall content and sentiment of tweets that people post and are exposed to. They can provide bases for NGOs and governments in building future campaigns and policies. The following section offers an overview of the literature on orphanage tourism.

Literature Review

Orphanage tourism refers to “a form of volunteer tourism characterized by travel to [residential care] facilities for children to engage in everyday caregiving (Richter & Norman, 2010, p. 222).” It has been criticized as altruistic exploitation, which creates demand for children that international volunteers can help (Rotabi, Roby, McCreery Bunkers, & Bunkers, 2017; Ursin & Skålevik, 2018). Many studies found the act to be a commodification of the children and the imagery of a needy, poor, third world country (A. Freidus & Caro, 2018; Guiney, 2018; Meintjes & Giese, 2006; Reas, 2013). Children are expected to be poor but happy and to engage intimately with volunteers and visitors to satisfy them and encourage donations (A. Freidus & Caro, 2018; Guiney, 2018).

Previous studies on orphanage tourism comprise of ethnography and critical discourse analysis (Bargeman et al., 2018; Carpenter, 2015b, 2015a; Cheney & Rotabi, 2017; Conran, 2011; A. Freidus & Caro, 2018; A. L. Freidus, 2017; Guiney, 2017, 2018; Guiney & Mostafanezhad, 2015; Reas, 2013; Ursin & Skålevik, 2018). The locations of studies include regions of developing economies like Cambodia, Thailand, and Malawi. Many focused on the motivations of the operators and the volunteers to explain their decision to travel and their behavior during volunteering. For operators, Punaks and Feit (2014) and Rotabi et al. (2017) argued that monetary gain is a strong motivator for operating orphanages and that children who are not orphans are recruited from their families for economic gain. Stark et al. (2017) provided partial evidence for such claims when they surveyed 1,737 children in orphanages across Cambodia. They found that of all children surveyed, 44% had both living parents, and 79% had at least one living parent. Poverty was the main reason that the children were placed in the residential care facilities. One-third of the children answered that they have been involved in fundraising for the institution. Another motivator for recruiting volunteers was to support the staff taking care of children (Rogerson & Slater, 2014).

Motivations of volunteers have been primarily identified as helping children, interacting with children, engaging with the host community, and garnering personal improvement (Bargeman et al., 2018; Conran, 2011; Guiney, 2018; Proyrungroj, 2017). Children are a strong drive for international volunteers (A. Freidus & Caro, 2018; Guiney, 2017; Proyrungroj, 2017). The possibility of engaging with children emerged as a theme when Guiney (2017) interviewed 86 key informants during her two-month fieldwork in Cambodia. Proyrungroj (2014) also found helping children as one of the five main themes of motivation based on the interviews of 24 volunteers in Phang Nga province, Thailand.

Experiencing local culture and interacting with host community members also attract international volunteers (Bargeman et al., 2018; Conran, 2011). During the eight-week period of fieldwork, Bargeman et al. (2018) interviewed six staff members who illustrated that experiencing host community culture seemed to be a strong motivator for the volunteers. The intimate encounters with host community members also came up in Conran (2011)'s nine-month multi-site ethnographic fieldwork in Chiang Mai, Thailand, that conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 international volunteers, 10 NGO coordinators, and 25 host community members.

Some studies also identified self-improvement as a motivator (A. Freidus & Caro, 2018; Proyrungroj, 2017; Tomazos & Butler, 2008). In Freidus and Caro (2018), a majority of the volunteers interviewed framed their motivation as spiritual restoration self-authenticity, which the authors remarked was inconsistent with the existing literature. However, volunteer tourism research has repeatedly found self-interest as one of the main motivators, in addition to humanitarian goals (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Personal development and growth was also one of the five motivations identified by Proyrungroj (2017).

Scholars have extensively researched the motivations and perceived outcomes of orphanage tourism volunteers. Past studies were conducted onsite and involved orphanage tourism stakeholders at the time of the research. This poses limitations in two ways. First, they fail to examine the individuals indirectly associated with orphanage tourism, such as aspiring volunteers and travel companies. Second, the one-off characteristic restricts the examination of orphanage tourism over time and across regions. Providing an overview of the phenomenon that crosses people and time can enhance our understanding of it.

Social media allows for the retroactive collection of messages posted by individuals that have participated in orphanage tourism, those that expressed the willingness to, institutions that have campaigned against orphanage tourism, and organizations that have promoted orphanage volunteering. Hence, the investigation of social media postings will provide further insights that will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the change in sentiment towards orphanage tourism over time. The following section details the data collected from Twitter and methods used to analyze them.

Methods

The current study selected Twitter as the platform for data collection for three reasons. First, Twitter is often used by private and public organizations to discourage and promote orphanage tourism. Second, it covers the most comprehensive data in volume and access compared to the other widely used social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. On Twitter, more than 100 thousand tweets related to orphanage volunteering can be found since early 2008 whereas search on Instagram showed less than one thousand posts about the topic. Facebook contains abundant

data similar to Twitter but it prohibits scraping posts using keywords (Marwick & Boyd, 2011) and about 50% of accounts are private (Dey, Jelveh, & Ross, 2012). On the other hand, dominant communications are public on Twitter (Marwick & Boyd, 2011) and can be searched using keywords. Third, Marwick and Boyd (2011) found that Twitter users tweet about themselves and are likely to be honest. Thus, it is feasible to use Twitter to assess the sentiment toward orphanage tourism and its change over time.

All tweets posted between 01/01/2009 and 12/31/2019 that contained a combination of the keywords {"orphan", "orphanage", "children's home", "boy's home", "girl's home"} and {"volunteer", "travel", "tourism", "mission", "missionary"} were collected. The original data contained 116,749 tweets. Each tweet included the following data: Twitter handle, posting date, number of retweets, number of favorites, text, geo-location, mentions, hashtags, unique ID for the tweet, and a permanent link to access the tweet. One percent of the data was randomly selected repeatedly to identify irrelevant tweets. Keyword-based elimination was conducted to remove unrelated content. The final dataset included 109,723 tweets posted by 35,507 unique users.

To examine the users' perceptions, the current study conducted sentiment analysis. First, data was cleaned through the following steps: 1. Encoding all of the characters to 'utf-8' to remove non-ASCII characters.; 2. Removing all hyperlinks and the Hashtags; 3. Substituting slang with formal words; 4. Converting all uppercase characters into lowercase characters. After cleaning, features were extracted from the tweets by generating a bag of words (BoW). The BoW is a set of all unique tokens in the corpus. It contains the frequency of words per document, i.e., tweet.

Second, a combination of three lexicons—AFINN, Bing, NRC—were used to examine the sentiments of the tweets. AFINN is a manually labeled dataset with 2,477 words and phrases that are assigned with a score between -5 and 5 (Nielsen, 2011). Bing contains 6,783 words labeled either positive or negative (Liu, Huang, & Fu, 2017), and NRC has 5,555 words each assigned with ten categories: positive, negative, anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, and trust. Each word was matched to the three lexicons to gauge their emotions. Along with simple lexicon matching, four supervised machine learning methods were used and 10-fold cross-validated using the manually annotated tweets for both the positive and negative classes. The methods used were Support Vector Machine (SVM), Random Forest, Naive Bayes, and Logistic regression.

The current study evaluated the performance of each method through precision, recall, and F1-score using manually coded tweets. The precision indicates the fraction of tweets correctly identified by the classifier among all tweets positively/negatively categorized by the algorithm. In contrast, recall refers to the fraction of sentiments correctly identified by the algorithm out of all the actual positive sentiments. F1-score gives the harmonic mean of precision and recall. Table 1 provides the definitions of these metrics.

Table 1. Performance metrics

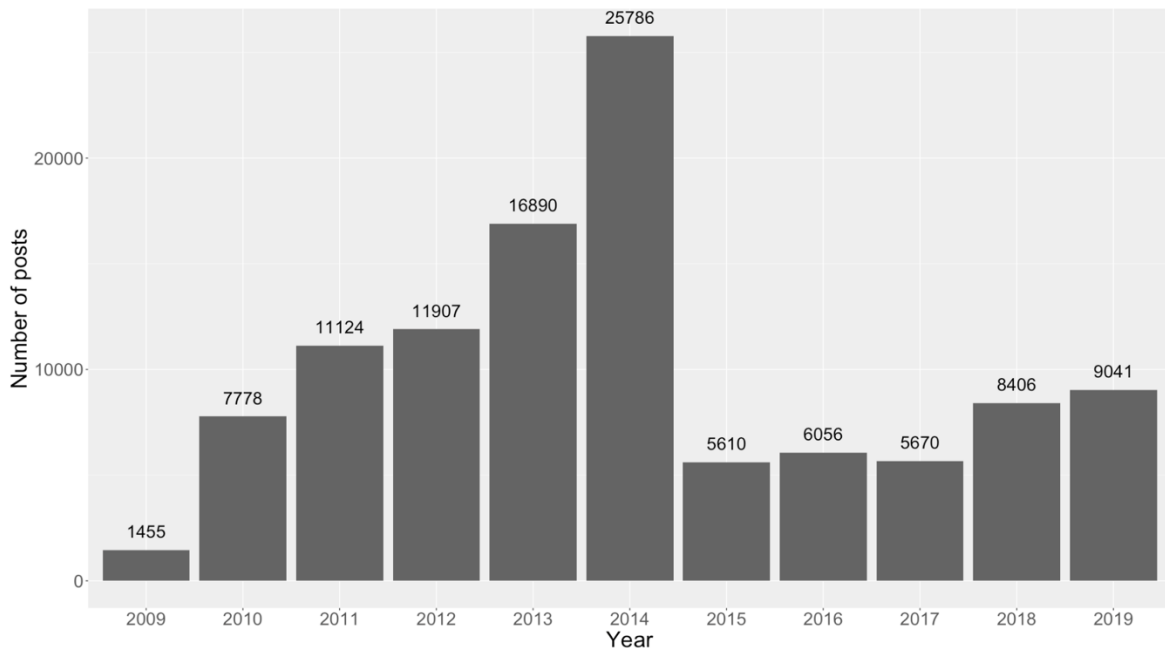
Metric	Definition
Precision	$TP/(TP + FP)$
Recall	$TP/(TP + FN)$
F1	$(2 \times Precision \times Recall)/(Precision + Recall)$

Note. *TP*, *FP*, and *FN* are true positives, false positives, and false negatives, respectively.

Results

The examination of posting pattern and content revealed that the year 2014 marked a turning point for perceptions regarding orphanage tourism. Between 2009 and 2014, the number of tweets related to orphanage tourism steadily increased from 1,510 to 26,226. However, the number dropped by 76% in 2015 and has stayed below 11,000 since (Figure 1). The most retweeted (shared), replied, and liked tweets before 2014 composed of those recruiting volunteers for orphanages and sharing orphanage tourism experiences. However, since 2014, tweets about campaigns against orphanage tourism or present negative views have emerged. Table 2 provides the most popular tweets between 2014 and 2019 based on the sum of the retweet, reply, and like counts. The tweets were mostly posted by celebrities and social influencers.

Figure 1. Number of posts over time



The word frequency analysis over the years paints a similar picture. When all years are considered, the most frequently appearing bigrams include locations for orphanage volunteering, such as Peru and Belize, and volunteer programs like teaching and medical projects. The top five bigrams were: 'Peru Cusco', 'teaching programs', 'social welfare', 'Columbia Cartagena', and 'feedback reviews'. However, the most significant bigrams in 2019 included keywords related to Lumos and Australia officially recognizing orphanage tourism as modern slavery.

Table 2. Most popular tweets between 2014 and 2019

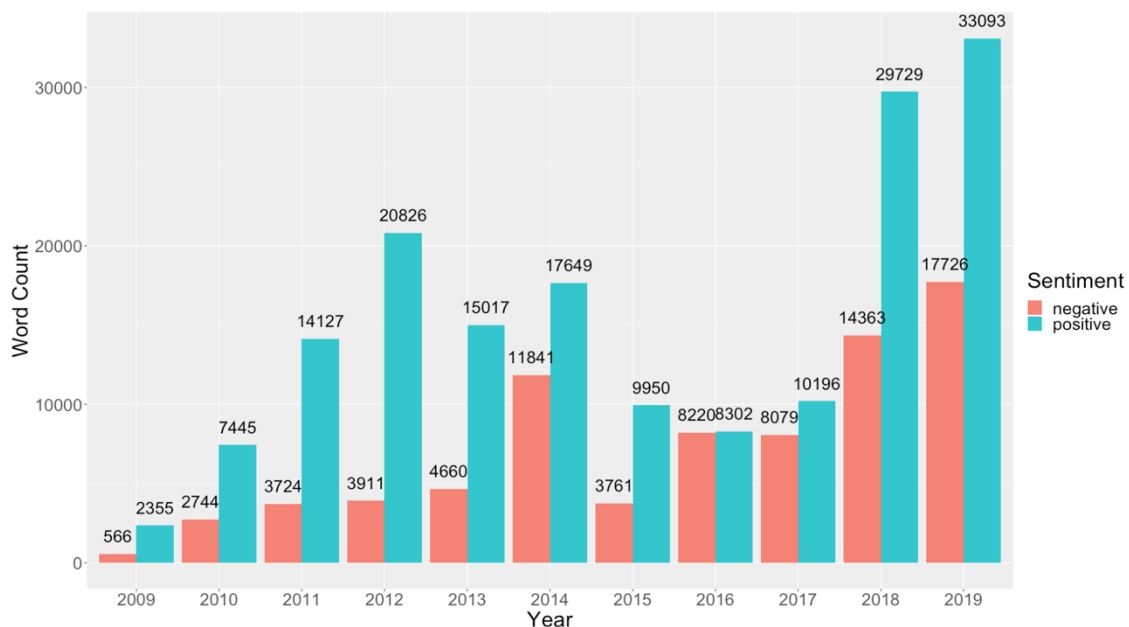
Year	Tweet	#
2014	teenage missionary accused of raping young children at orphanage in kenya h ttp://ktlane.ws/1rf2scv pic.twitter.com/jqrizuosop	628
2015	if you voted against the mission to make a little boy's home safe for him & no w make hay from his death, you're sick pic.twitter.com/bzc0hy5d2v	177
2016	...this one offering volunteer 'experiences' in an orphanage in an extremely po or country. does not support #voluntourism.	2043

2017	before you decide to volunteer in, or donate to, an orphanage abroad, please, please read this: http://bit.ly/2pqzdyd #stoporphantrips pic.twitter.com/znxfqvfebh	3445
2018	surprised at how little attention the human trafficking case by missionaries of charity have received in the msm! imagine if a hindu orphanage was found selling babies! but then again, not really surprised!	9780
2019	...was 1st volunteer. she helped build the haiti orphanage & free high school & is an invaluable part of the gish team. she's trying to win a trip to antarctica . vote for her (& her penguin)! she deserves it more than anyone: http://wshe.es/yvzz1fjj pic.twitter.com/khapwj0oks	3682

Though the most popular tweets showed a change in sentiments toward orphanage tourism from pro to against, the positive sentiment still prevailed when all tweets were considered. Figure 2 depicts the word counts of positive and negative sentiments between 2009 and 2019. The methods were 10-fold cross-validated using 1,000 manually coded data with 500 negative and 500 positive tweets. The precision, recall, and F1 were all above 90% for both sentiments. Random Forest showed the best performance among supervised learning methods.

Negative words spiked in 2014 but when Even though the number of posts related to orphanage tourism decreased since 2015, words with positive emotions have been used even more widely in the recent years. When examined carefully, many individuals post about support for themselves to volunteer at orphanages abroad, their orphanage tourism experiences, or about orphanages that are in need. A handful of religious entities and private companies that lead orphanage tourism programs were also identified.

Figure 2. Sentiment over time



Conclusion and Discussion

This study sought to investigate the sentiments regarding orphanage tourism during the past decade. The results indicate a turning point in 2014, with the change in the leading opinions, but report the majority of users utilizing words that positively depict orphanage tourism. This calls for further effort to alter people's views about the phenomena. Though there have been major campaigns by NGOs over the years, the analysis of tweets did not find them prevailing compared to the messages by news media outlets and celebrities. No changes in the number or the sentiments of posts in 2011, 2015, and 2019 when the significant campaigns took place also demonstrate the lack of influence or reach. Instead, the voices of news media and social influencers received more attention, represented by sharing, interacting, and liking. Such findings implicate the need for a multi-dimensional approach to change the perception of tourists that involves not just the official social media outlets but also celebrities and popular news media to maximize the reach and influence of the campaigns. The method employed in the study also provides an implication for future tourism research. Unlike traditional data collection methods such as survey and interview that are restricted in time and location, online data mining allows for larger retroactive data gathering of all parties involved, ranging from directly involved individuals to related institutions. Utilizing both the data mining and traditional methods can enable tourism researchers to draw a more comprehensive picture of tourism phenomena and broaden the scope of tourism research.

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