

Gaze

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Gaze

The tourist gaze is a key concept in tourism literature. It explains a wide range of concepts including tourists' visual consumption of a destination to tourists' experience and performing at a destination. Although the tourist gaze is based on Michel Foucault's power discourse, the gaze theory is now conceptualized on fragmented concepts including sociology, anthropology, technology, gender studies, nature, and science. Due to its distinct nature, the tourist gaze could be applied in different contexts to deliver different results. Therefore, tourist gaze could vary according to different demographics including age, gender, education, and complex social factors including politics, economy, geographical boundaries. Few empirical contributions of the tourist gaze involve city planning, destination branding, and product development. Few key concepts of tourist gaze are mutual gaze, host gaze, local gaze, reverse gaze, and intra-tourist gaze.

Gaze is a complex notion to study due to its multifaceted nature. The gaze could vary according to the gazer, gazee, gender, age, context with which gaze is applied, past knowledge and experience, and complex socio-political contexts including power, religions, and politics. Gaze is based on Michel Foucault's foundational works on 'Power' discourse and society. According to Foucault, power is diffused throughout the society and exercised through multiple societal agents and institutions; it operates

"between every point of a social body, between a man a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows and everyone who does not" (Foucault, 1978: 187). Power discourse is also visible in between tourists and locals, tourists and hosts, tourists and tourism service providers, and even in between tourists and tourists.

Gaze was first used in tourism by John Urry through his renowned book "The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies" (Urry, 1990). Since then tourist gaze has been identified as an evolving concept by the tourism academia, many authors have defined, refined, and applied the concept of tourist gaze under different contexts. Further, the earliest definition of tourist gaze by Urry (1990) faced many modifications overtime during the theorization of the concept. After studying different facets of tourist gaze Samarathunga and Cheng (2020) defined tourist gaze as "Visual consumption and/or experience of a destination with a sense of authority and superiority with a certain level of involvement" (p.349). Another definition was forwarded by Lin and Fu (2020) who identified three research streams of tourist gaze: tourist initiated, host initiated, and tourist host interactions after analyzing 34 related articles. Based on their thorough investigation Lin and Fu (2020) view tourist gaze as "how tourists perceive other stakeholders' perceptions and behaviors as well as the presentation and consumption of symbols at destinations" (p.141).

Although the original conception emphasized the power of tourism actors and tourists in the construction of the gaze, more recent literature acknowledges the agency of a wider set of tourism stakeholders contributing to the gaze theory. They include locals, hosts, brokers, and tourists themselves. Different associations of these sectors have given birth to different gaze concepts while re-shaping the initial arguments of tourist gaze that include local gaze, host gaze, mutual gaze, reverse gaze, and intra-tourist gaze. The local gaze is constructed among the locals in a destination that explains and manifests the agency and power of locals in developing countries, which could penetrate others' lives. On the other hand, the host gaze can be introduced as the gaze of tourism service providers towards the tourists, which could vary drastically according to the past-experience with the tourists. The mutual gaze is formed because of meeting two gazers, i.e. tourists and locals, tourists and tourists, or tourists and brokers who encounter each other. The concept of reverse gaze emerged with the photographic behavior of the tourists. Accordingly, the reverse gaze refers to the direct gaze of locals (photographee) towards the tourists (photographers) that brings shame and discomfort to the photographer. The intra-tourist gaze can appear during the encounters between tourists on fellow tourists. During such occasions, the intra-tourist gaze is shaped through self-reflection, moral judgment, and mutability (Lin and Fu, 2020). However, fragmented

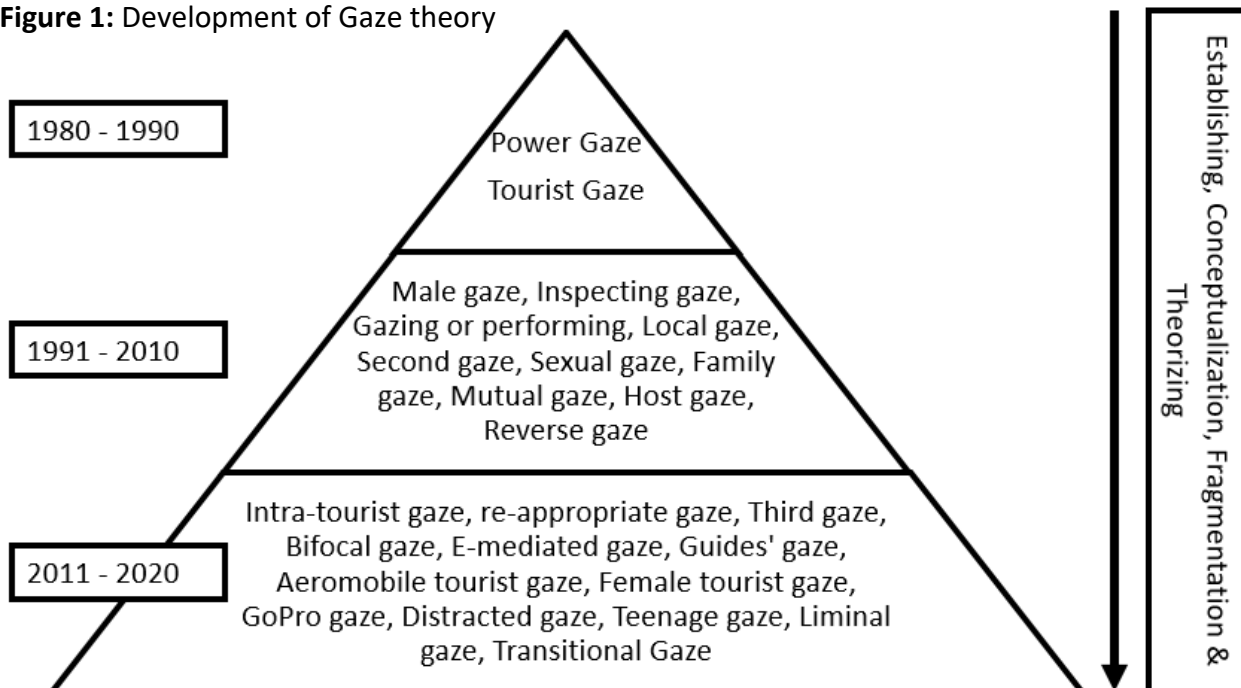
concepts in gaze are not only limited to the above facets. They vary largely according to different cultures, societies, sub-groups, activities, religions, and histories. After reviewing 109 relevant research papers Samarathunga and Cheng, (2020) list out fragmented concepts in gaze including zoological gaze, male gaze, second gaze, sexual gaze, family gaze, museum gaze, nervous gaze, re-appropriated gaze, third gaze, e-mediated gaze, bifocal gaze, refractive gaze, aeromobile tourist gaze, female tourist gaze, GoPro gaze, distracted gaze, teenage gaze, liminal gaze, and transitional tourist gaze. The development of the gaze theory since the 1980s is illustrated by Figure 01.

Although the gaze notion has significantly contributed to the development of both theory and practice, it is not without demerits. One of the earliest criticisms is establishing a tourist gaze around tourists' sight on sites whilst neglecting the wider aspects of the tourist experience (Cloke and Perkins, 1998). This is because Urry largely narrowed down the gaze conception to Western mass tourists. Therefore, Perkins and Thorns (2001), emphasized the importance of adopting a performative approach of gaze, i.e., "doing" rather than "seeing". Urry and Larsen (2011) addressed those controversial areas through their latest book 'Tourist Gaze 3.0'. In addition to that Maoz (2006) identified the absence of local agency at tourist destinations that significantly influence the tourist gaze and introduced "mutual gaze" to the gaze theory. Adding more to the critics, many

scholars have perceived that the tourist gaze also causes the commodification of the local cultural values and practices by driving the locals towards financial gains while contributing to the local economies. This occurs when the locals attempt to meet tourists' expected gaze. In addition to that, Maoz (2006) questions the sexual orientation of the gaze since Urry's conception has been centered on the male gaze. This becomes more intense since the gaze of a female tourist could vary significantly from a male tourist. Accordingly, certain areas of tourist gaze still lack sufficient academic attention. They include domestic tourist gaze, Eastern tourist gaze, transitional tourist gaze, and female tourist gaze (Samarathunga, Cheng and Weerathunga, 2020). Filling those gaps in gaze literature is imperative to establish the gaze notion even stronger.

There is ample room for the development of gaze theory in different aspects. First, the gaze should be extended to different ethnic, social, and cultural groups to understand how gaze is established under different contexts. Therefore, it is important to examine the presence of the tourist gaze under different ethnic groups, social groups, and cultural groups. Second, the scholars have to pay attention towards the geographical areas within which different tourists gazes could appear. For instance, Eastern tourist gaze is different from Western tourist gaze and the foreign tourist gaze is different from domestic tourist gaze (Samarathunga, Cheng and Weerathunga, 2020). Additionally, African gaze and other non-western gaze need pivotal attention. Lack of sufficient number of studies in those areas provide more opportunities for future scholars to contribute to the theory. Third, the researchers have to understand

Figure 1: Development of Gaze theory



individual differences when applying gaze in their research works. For instance, how tourists from different age groups gaze become either a subject or an object of gazing. Fourth, as discussed in the previous section, the female tourist gaze and the female host gaze could vastly vary from the male gaze. Therefore, more cross-sectional studies are needed to shed some light on gaze that could vary according to the gender. Fifth, the gaze theory also needs to be associated with other social and anthropological discourses to deliver more rational implications to empirical tourism glitches while contributing to the theory. Sixth, it is also important to study the temporal dimensions of the tourist gaze, including how it forms, changes, or even decays under different contexts. Seventh, influences of technology in constructing and delivering the gaze cannot be ignored since modern travel and tourism largely depends on technological innovations. Therefore, the mediating or moderating role of technology is important to explore when theorizing tourist gaze.

The true value of gaze theory is yet to be explored. If properly employed with other theories and concepts, the gaze will deliver effective results to prolong empirical tourism that are associated with tourism planning and development, host-guest relationships, destination marketing, and sustainability issues including economic, environmental, and socio-cultural concerns.

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