

# Current Status and Typification of Online Tourism in the New Normal Era

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## Abstract

In this paper, we examined new online tourism during the Covid-19 pandemic in Japan. Online tourism includes “online events” or “online holding” and have replaced traditional face-to-face tourism. As a result, we were able to confirm four main types of online tourism by categorizing the online tourism distribution methods. They are inclusive of “Live Tour Type,” “Live Show Delivery Type,” “Online Contact Type,” and “Archive Broadcast Type.” Online tourism has two advantages, such as “it is possible to balance with economic activities” and “it is possible for viewers and performers to interact with each other.” However, there are also three disadvantages: “an increase of the number of viewers who do not go to sightseeing spots,” “technical issues,” and “copyright issues.” Finally, the novel kinds of tourism that result can provide many people with the virtual experience of sightseeing and the chance to acquire information online. It could thus be considered a “new normal” in tourism.

**Keywords:** Online Tourism, New Normal Era, COVID-19 Pandemic, Typification of Online Tourism

## 1. Introduction

The outbreak of “COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019)” that started in Wuhan, China in 2019 also began to spread in Japan in the beginning of 2020. In response to the worsening infection situation in Japan, a declaration of a state of emergency was issued nationwide starting in April. Everyone was called on to avoid the “Three Cs” consisting of “Confined spaces, Crowded places, and Close contact.” In addition, various facilities such as educational institutions (e.g., schools), sports centers, and entertainment facilities (e.g., movie theaters) were closed. Amid these social trends, people have begun to work from home, telework, and engage in distance learning. In other words, it can be said that a new lifestyle has been established with communication via the internet becoming mainstream.

Under these circumstances, the new normal era based on interaction through the screens of PCs and smartphones also brought about major changes in the tourism industry. Sightseeing originally meant that people visit a specific destination and have various experiences. Today, as one of the means to prevent people from crowding in a specific place, an environment where you can experience virtual sightseeing activities has been built online, such as communicating the current state of tourist spot online or broadcasting live performances held without spectators.

Specifically, events are held with tourists staying at home, such as online tours by government tourism bureaus and distribution of event videos via video streaming sites such as “You Tube”<sup>1)</sup>, thereby preventing large-scale cluster infections. These are called “online events” or “online holding” and have replaced traditional face-to-face tourism. As a result, “online tourism” is rapidly taking root in Japan as part of new tourism activities.

It has been pointed out that tourism is an event in which tourists jump out of their living space, head for a destination, achieve some purpose there, and then return to the living space. As shown in Fig. 1, Leiper considers tourism as the activity of going back and forth between a “tourist generating region” and a “tourist destination region,” whereby the actors here are the tourists, and the whole system is called the “tourism system.” In this system, the tourists jump out of the “tourist generating region,” which is their sphere of life, and visit the destination or “tourist destination region.” After that, the tourists will not stay, and will return to the “tourist generating region,” which is

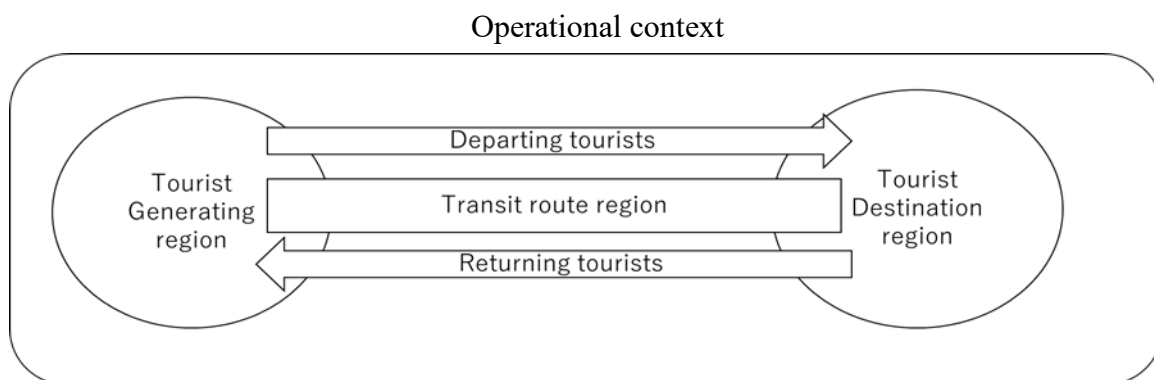
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their sphere of life. In other words, Leiper describes tourism as “a phenomenon in which people come and go somewhere.” Leiper also points out that the “tourism system” arises from economic, socio-cultural, political, technical, legal, and environmental values<sup>2)</sup>.

However, the online tourism described above is greatly different from the structure of tourism as explained by Leiper. This is because the venue for online tourism is the Internet. In other words, what is characteristic about online tourism is the virtual experience of tourism through a screen.

Shirasaka (2019) considers tourism to be a vast concept that includes activities such as learning, medical treatment, and volunteering, as well as traveling for human enjoyment, excluding travel for business. On top of that, he advocates the need to consider the movement and distance traveled<sup>3)</sup>. However, the characteristics of online tourism is to virtually experience tourism through a screen. In other words, online tourism has been put into practical use as an activity to simulate tourism through a screen unlike having to go to the destination as in the past. Online tourism itself has been practiced before the spread of “COVID-19” in Japan, but it has been confirmed that the number of cases has increased since the spread of the infection. However, currently there are still few studies that have verified the actual situation of online tourism in Japan. Furthermore, along with these social trends, the method of investigating tourism phenomena has changed significantly from the conventional field survey method to an online survey conducted by accessing a website. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out the nature of the online tourism distribution method, which is a material for tourism research.



Operational context includes economic, socio-cultural, political, technological, legal and environment variables

**Fig.1 The tourism system: a spatial construct<sup>2)</sup>**

Therefore, in this study, we examined how online tourism has been provided to tourists in the rare situation of the spread of “COVID-19” infection from 2020 to 2021, and its actual status is reorganized by breaking down the distribution methods into types. Like a field survey, this is a research having in mind that the research of online tourism will one day become an established field in tourism research in Japan.

## 2. Typology of Online Tourism

We were able to confirm four main types of online tourism by categorizing the online tourism distribution methods that can be found between 2020 and 2021.

## **2-1. Live Tour Type**

This is a distribution method that allows viewers to experience the tourist spots in a simulated manner by having each government tourism bureau use its own internet site to broadcast live the tourist spots and introduce the tourist site. A typical example is the online tour “Remote Hawaii Trip”<sup>4)</sup>, which was started by the Hawaii Tourism Authority in November 2020 which allows you to experience Hawaii in Japan. Those who wish to participate can make reservations from the columns of each group on the official portal site “allhawaii”<sup>4)</sup> and participate in the online tour by live streaming. Various content is hosted including a tour to enjoy the scenery taken from each area in Waikiki, Oahu<sup>5)</sup> and a tour to learn about the history of Hawaii from cultural facilities such as the “Bishop Museum”<sup>6)</sup>.

## **2-2. Live Show Delivery Type**

This is called “live delivery” and is a method of live streaming locally hosted live performances and concerts online. These can be viewed for a fee on event video distribution sites such as “SPWN”<sup>7)</sup> and “Lawson Tickets LIVE STREAMING”<sup>8)</sup>. There are various distribution methods, but there are many cases where the event was held by such distribution methods as a substitute for the event that was canceled onsite due to the occurrence of “COVID-19.” “Kishiryu Sentai Ryusoulger Final Live Tour 2020”<sup>9)</sup> had its national performance canceled from March 20th to April 26th, 2020, and held an alternative event called “Kishiryu Sentai Ryusoulger Final Live Tour 2020 in home”<sup>10)</sup> via “Lawson Tickets LIVE STREAMING”<sup>6)</sup> on August 15, 2020.

## **2-3. Online Contact Type**

This is a distribution method that allows video calls with event performers and artists through online distribution. Many cases can be confirmed in relation to idol groups. For example, an online handshake event was held in early September 2020 for Fukuoka City’s idol group “HKT48.” This was a system<sup>11)</sup> that used the service “LINE Face2Face” that allows participants to talk one-on-one with artists and idols by utilizing the functions of the live distribution service (LINE LIVE). In addition, a similar case can be confirmed at a handshake event with a character in a costume that is difficult to communicate through conversation. Sanrio Puroland, an indoor theme park in Tama City, Tokyo, held an online greeting on June 14, 2020. This was a program that allowed 10 types of characters and viewers, including Hello Kitty, to enjoy a videophone conversation for about 2 minutes through an app called “Talkport”<sup>12)</sup>.

## **2-4. Archive Broadcast Type**

Participation in this type of event is done by providing a recorded version of the video distributed in the “Live tour type” and “Live show distribution type” described above so that those who wish to view it at a later date can enjoy them. In other words, it is characterized by showing an edited video of an already distributed event to those who cannot view it in real time for some reason. The performance of “Ultra Heroes Expo 2021 New Years Festival”<sup>13)</sup>, a live show held online on January 4, 2021, had a missed-program webcast (missed delivery) from January 8th to January 22nd<sup>14)</sup> of the same year.

## **3. Discussion**

As described above, we were able to confirm four main types of online tourism distribution methods that can be found between 2020 and 2021. However, for such online tourism to take root in the same way as traditional locally

held tourism in the future, it is necessary to consider its advantages and disadvantages.

First, the advantage of online tourism is that “(1) it is possible to balance with economic activities.” Even in the situation where the tourist spots, live venues, and other facilities for attracting customers are closed due to the spread of “COVID-19” infection, hosting it through online distribution is effective for avoiding the Three Cs. At the same time, it can be maintained as an economic activity, including the purchase of online tickets by those who wish to participate.

Next, an advantage is that “(2) the viewer and the performer can interact with each other.” Even before the outbreak of COVID-19, it was already used to distribute promotional videos of tourist spots and event venues using YouTube and the like. On the other hand, the advantage of an event held live online is that when the event is being broadcast live, the viewer can use the comment section to directly ask the performers questions about the event. In other words, the organizer does not unilaterally disseminate information as in the conventional event video, but the viewer side can also ask for information from the organizer and can exchange information with each other.

So far, we have described the benefits of establishing online tourism. However, there are also concerns. First, there is “(i) concern that the number of viewers who do not go to sightseeing spots will increase.” In other words, it is possible that the viewer will be satisfied only by watching the video and lose the thought of going to an actual tourist destination. Specifically, there is concern that each industry involved in tourism, such as transportation infrastructure, accommodation industry, facilities, and cultural properties, will be hit. Therefore, when each tourist destination publicizes its own place online, it is necessary to clarify the merits of visiting the site instead of online by communicating the sense of presence.

The next point is that “(ii) technical problems will occur.” The video of the online event is made up of two parties, the distributor (hosts) and the viewer (guests) of the video. Therefore, if the transmission / reception environment of both parties is not appropriate, such as the occurrence of equipment trouble on the host side or the viewing environment on the guest side is not prepared, online tourism cannot be established. For example, “Healin’ Good Precure Main casts Live delivery Program”<sup>15)</sup>, which was scheduled to be delivered live at 15:00 on January 24, 2021, was suddenly canceled due to trouble with the equipment on the host side.

The last point is that “(iii) copyright issues may occur.” Since the internet is transmitted all over the world, it is possible to easily participate in online sightseeing with a PC or smartphone owned by an individual. However, on the contrary, there is a risk of copyright infringement due to personal storage, processing, editing, etc. of images and videos, and it is necessary to take measures against infringement. In addition, it is possible that the video relayed at the online event may not be available on TV due to the circumstances of the sponsor or the like, which may cause a problem for secondary use of the video.

Based on the advantages and disadvantages pointed out above, online tourism is expected to take root as a new form of tourism even after the convergence of COVID-19. In that respect, it is necessary to pay close attention to how the rise of online tourism will affect traditional locally held tourism.

#### **4. Summary and Future Prospects**

In this paper, we examined new online tourism that replaces local tourism, which has become difficult to practice due to the spread of the COVID-19 infection. A characteristic of online tourism is that the internet site functions as a tourism destination, and even in the current situation where it has become difficult to visit the actual site, viewers can easily have a virtual experience or collect tourist information at home. In addition, it has been confirmed that the

distribution methods of online tourism to viewers can be categorized into four types, “Live tour type,” “Live show delivery type,” “Online contact type,” and “Archive broadcast type.”

On top of that, online tourism has two advantages, such as “it is possible to balance with economic activities” and “it is possible for viewers and performers to interact with each other.” However, there were also three disadvantages: “increased number of viewers that do not go to sightseeing spots,” “technical issues,” and “copyright issues.”

Research into the New Normal era associated with the global pandemic of COVID-19 is still underway because it is a new phenomenon. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to investigate and analyze the current state of online tourism activities in the New Normal era. It is also necessary to promote archiving of content for the future after the convergence of COVID-19.

## Notes

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- 2) Peter Mason, *TOURISM IMPACTS, PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT THIRD EDITION*, Routledge, New York, 2016, pp. 11.
- 3) Shigeru Shirasaka et al., *Encyclopedia of Tourism*, 2019 (in Japanese)  
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- 4) allhawaii <https://www.allhawaii.jp/article/other/73/> (accessed January 28, 2021)
- 5) 【Remote Hawaii Trip: Feel Hawaii First time】Virtual walk in Waikiki (【リモートハワイ旅: Feel Hawaii 第1回】ワイキキでバーチャル散策)  
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- 6) Remote Hawaii Trip “Support Hawai‘i” Your learning leads to support for Hawaii NPOs~ Bishop Museum”~ (リモートハワイ旅「Support Hawai‘i」あなたの学びがハワイ NPO への支援につながる～ビショップ ミュージアム～)  
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- 7) SPWN <https://spwn.jp/> (accessed January 26, 2021)
- 8) Lawson Ticket LIVE STREAMING <https://l-tike.zaiko.io/> (accessed January 26, 2021)
- 9) Kishiryu Sentai Ryusoulger Final Live Tour 2020 ( 騎士竜戦隊リュウソウジャー ファイナルライブツアー 2020)  
<https://l-tike.com/event/mevent/?mid=485644> (accessed January 28, 2021)
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