

**#Ironbridge - The role of the Iron Bridge in the visual communication of tourist narratives on social media**

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**Abstract**

In the age of smartphones and Web 2.0 our online activities are wholly integrated into daily life through the use of social media. This is as true for time spent engaging in tourism as it is for our everyday lives. Increasingly communication on social media is characterised by its visual nature, with platforms such as Instagram and SnapChat relegating writing to the sidelines. Indeed, the use of photography online is now so widespread that it has been argued that the majority of all photographs taken are now 'social media photographs'. While tourism and photography have been interwoven for many decades the expansion in the use of social media to communicate tourist experiences invites us to ask new questions about their relationship. The Iron Bridge spanning the River Severn has been a focus for visual representations of the area since its construction in the 18th century and remains so till this day. This paper combines analysis of images of the Iron Bridge shared on Instagram with an ethnographic study of tourists as photographers around the Bridge. This provides insights into both the produced images in their role in online communication and the processes and performances through which they are created by tourists. The paper challenges the idea that tourists automatically reproduce the images used in marketing the Gorge and suggests instead that they are part of a performance of social media photography informed by and contributing to a parallel representation of Ironbridge being continuously created and recreated on social media platforms. The paper will address whether there has been a shift in the role the Bridge plays in tourist narratives when used in visual social media and what this means for the communication of the significance and values of the Bridge and Ironbridge as a whole.