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An Exploration of the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience

Doctoral Dissertation Summary

European Journal of Tourism Research

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PLEASE REFER TO THE PRINTED ARTICLE AND CITE IT AS FOLLOWS:

Neuhofer, B. (2016) An Exploration of the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience. Doctoral Dissertation Summary. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 12: 220-223

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Title of the dissertation

An Exploration of the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience

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Date of defence

27th January 2015

Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

To explore how tourist experiences can be enhanced by ICTs, through company-consumer experience co-creation, in the pre/during/post stages of the travel process

Objectives

1. To explore the changing nature of the tourist experience and the experience co-creation process in terms of the implementation of ICTs in the pre/during/post stages of the travel process
2. To identify the granular elements of the tourist experience
3. To explore the role of ICTs in enhancing the tourist experience and the experience co-creation process from a two-fold company-consumer perspective
4. To identify the factors that constitute a Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience
5. To develop a holistic theoretical model of the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience

Methodology

Grounded in the paradigm of pragmatism, a comprehensive qualitative mixed methods research (MMR) strategy was adopted. The MMR design, coined by Morse (2010), is a novel methodology that contributes to the broader understanding of the qualitative enquiry. For this study, a sequential three-phase design was employed, consisting of an initial Qual component, followed by two principal QUAL components. Phase 1 consisted of a content analysis of journal articles to elicit the granular elements that constitute a tourist experience. Phase 2 was conducted by means of a multiple case study approach to understand how the tourist experience and co-creation can be enhanced through ICTs, from a company perspective. In Phase 3, semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken to understand how the tourist experience and co-creation can be enhanced through ICTs, from a consumer perspective. The combination of these three qualitative methods generated answers to the five objectives and allowed developing a holistic understanding of the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience.

Results

This thesis presents the first study to explore the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience and to create a theoretical foundation of this novel concept. The most significant findings contribute to knowledge on four main levels. First, the findings reveal a comprehensive understanding of the granular elements of the tourist experience. Second, a two-fold company and consumer actor perspective on technology facilitated experience co-creation has emerged, shedding light on how actors integrate ICTs as a resource for experience creation and enhancement. Third, a detailed enhancement process of the tourist experience through ICTs was identified, depicting the process of how a tourist experience can be turned into a Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience. Finally, the findings present a holistic model that depicts the twelve distinct factors of the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience.

These findings are significant in that they make an original contribution to the services marketing and management discipline on a wider level and the three theoretical streams of a) tourist experience, b) co-creation and c) ICTs in specific. The strength of this work lies in developing several conceptualisations and graphical models that advance the service-dominant logic and provide strategic implications for service marketing and management practice. This thesis has wider implications and makes an impact on a global business, societal, technological and policy level beyond.

Theoretical conclusions

One of the core strengths of this thesis resides in its rich and manifold contributions to theory. In being the first study to explore, conceptualise and explain the concept of the *Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience*, it has developed a *holistic landscape-knowledge* of an emerging phenomenon. By amalgamating three hitherto separated concepts, this study makes a theoretical advancement of the three principal streams of the theoretical framework of the tourist experience, experience and value co-creation and the field of ICTs. In these realms, theoretical contributions are offered through new models depicting the technology-enhanced experience co-creation process, the technology enhancement process and the holistic Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience model. Beyond these areas, the work contributes to the service-dominant logic and has relevance to wider services marketing and management discourses by providing an understanding of the actors and processes, in other words '*with whom and how*' customers co-create their experiences and value through ICTs.

Practical application of the dissertation

Given the increasingly challenging conditions, in which tourism organisations operate, knowledge about the successful facilitation and enhancement of experiences through ICTs is critical (Frochot and Batat, 2013). Only by exploiting the full potential of the plethora of ICTs available, it will be possible to meet and exceed tourists' needs and expectations towards contemporary experiences creation. A re-thinking of current experience creation practices is thus paramount. This study has concluded that traditional experience economy oriented approaches of designing, planning and staging experiences 'for' consumers need to be revised towards more dynamic and customised experience facilitation and creation together 'with' consumers. Through a range of practical models, this thesis outlined how service and tourism businesses can be at the forefront of emerging technologies and take lead in facilitating more compelling experience and value propositions. Beyond the tourism sector, the findings have wider application to any service businesses concerned with facilitating more unique, memorable and technology-assisted customer experiences.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

With the prevalent paradigm shifts towards the empowerment of consumers and the proliferation of digital technologies, it has become evident that traditional roles, structures and processes of tourist experience creation have undergone a substantial change. Scholars have questioned the existing theoretical foundation of the tourist experiences and advocate the need to understand how experiences are changing in light of co-creation (Ramaswamy, 2011) and technology-mediation (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). Thereby, it is not the technological development itself, but rather the integration of technology, as a resource, into experiences, which shall be at the core of academic attention. In synthesising the current gaps in knowledge, this thesis recognises the need for re-a conceptualisation of the tourist experience construct for a better understanding of the role of ICTs in contemporary tourist experience creation, facilitation, marketing and management.

Abstract of chapter two

The notion of creating unique and memorable experiences for consumers has become of primary importance for tourism research and practice (Morgan et al., 2010). The way contemporary tourist experiences are created has however undergone a fundamental change. Experiences are transforming as consumers are increasingly empowered to co-create their own experiences (Lusch and Vargo, 2014). At the same time, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have represented a catalyst of change that has opened unprecedented possibilities for tourist experience creation and enhancement (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009, Sigala, 2012). While the literature has recognised these paradigm shifts within the service-dominant logic, a holistic understanding of this phenomenon is still missing to date. The main contribution emerging from the literature review is a conceptual framework that interlinks the three dominant literature streams of tourist experience, co-creation and ICTs into one model and provides the theoretical underpinning for this study.

Abstract of chapter three

To address the overall aim and the five research objectives of this thesis, a comprehensive qualitative mixed methods research (MMR) strategy, grounded in pragmatism as the underlying paradigm, was adopted. Following a sequential design, a content analysis, a multiple case study with tourism best practice companies and semi-structured in-depth interviews with technology-savvy consumers were conducted. In line with Miles and Huberman (1994), a qualitative template analysis was used to perform a detailed six-step detailed coding process that was assisted with the software NVivo. The combination of these three qualitative methods generated a rich dataset that generated a holistic understanding of the *Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience* from a two-fold company-consumer perspective in the pre/during/post stages of the travel process.

Abstract of chapter four

By integrating the findings from the multiple case study approach and the consumer in-depth interviews, the findings shed light on the co-creation process from a two-fold actor perspective. The findings advance the service-dominant logic and co-creation literature (Ramaswamy, 2011; Lusch and Vargo, 2014), by revealing not only the process of how tourist experiences are co-created, but by specifically explaining the 'who', namely which actors are involved, the resources (ICTs) integrated and the experience and value outcomes emerged. The findings shed light on the companies in their role as co-creation facilitators and reveal four novel types of co-creation in which consumers engage, named 'C2B co-creation', 'C2C co-creation', 'C2F co-creation' and 'C2L co-creation'.

Abstract of chapter five

The analysis of the consumer in-depth interviews reveals the factors that shape the experience enhancement process through ICTs. These include contextual and situational factors, tourist experience need situations and ICTs resource integration. The findings differentiate the enhancement process in terms of specific tourist activities and travel stages, and show the existence of different enhancement intensities and outcomes through an 'ICTs resource integration intensity' and an 'experience enhancement hierarchy' model. Finally, a 'Tourist Experience Enhancement Process Model' is presented that holistically depicts all elements constituting this process.

Abstract of chapter six

The final findings chapter first reveal the granular elements of the tourist experience, identified in the qualitative content analysis. It then discusses the change of these elements through ICTs, by revealing three levels, including enhancement, maintenance and diminishment. By understanding the most granular elements of a tourist experience and how ICTs affect these elements, the final section turns to present the twelve factors that determine the new Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience and its experience outcome factors. A twelve-factor model is presented as the core theoretical contribution of this study.

Abstract of chapter seven

By drawing upon the findings emerged through three research stages, these are integrated and conceptualised in the wider services marketing and management literature. The theoretical model of the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience adds value in that it captures a new type of tourist experience in its full complexity, depicting the embedded phases, contextual factors, ICTs integration, co-creation process, overall twelve factors as well as the outcomes. The empirical exploration of the role of ICTs within the tourist experience has confirmed the importance of a re-conceptualisation of existing tourist experience assumptions and constructs. With the

integration of ICTs in all travel stages, a fluid tourist experience was proposed, one that recognises ICTs in connecting, interlinking and breaking down the barriers between travel and everyday life.

Abstract of chapter eight

The aim of this thesis was to explore how tourist experiences can be enhanced by ICTs, through company-consumer experience co-creation, in the pre/during/post stages of the travel process. By exploring and establishing the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience, this study has made a contribution that advances the service marketing and management discipline. It contributes to service and tourism practice and management in that it provides a detailed understanding of the necessary steps and processes to take to turn ordinary experiences into Technology Enhanced Tourist Experiences. Wider implications unfold for the business, societal and policy context regarding current technology enablers and barriers and technology resource and infrastructure provision to facilitate this new type of experiences on a larger scale.

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RECEIVED: 23 November 2015