

Marketing and Designing the Tourist Experience

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'The heart has its reasons that the reason knows not'

Blaise Pascal

Introduction

Experience is a concept that is unavoidable in contemporary marketing strategies. When selling cars or new smartphones, sellers and marketers use this concept profusely, to the point that most products are now sold as a consumption experience. An area where this notion of experience has played a significant role is in the provision of culture, art, leisure and tourism (known as hedonist consumption). Indeed the study of those areas of consumption has lead researchers to reconsider their views of traditional marketing modelling. While the first research on hedonic consumption was produced in the early 1980s, it took researchers and practitioners several decades to grasp this idea and elaborate managerial and conceptual models that could assist in its applications. It has been clearly identified that hedonic consumption relies on the creation of experiences that are highly emotional and that are valued for the memorable times that they produce. The measurement and understanding of those fuzzy concepts has necessitated the study and construction of a range of variables that are still the object of intense research interest and will remain a matter of concern for years to come. This book aims to provide an overview of those advances and current state of the knowledge produced in the area of experiential marketing, in the specific situation of tourism.

The tourism context has been chosen as a focus for the book because tourists' experiences are identified as an ideal situation to study experiential phenomenon. Indeed tourist products are sold for the sensations, feelings and psychological benefits that they procure. The outcome of tourism consumption is mostly of a psychological nature and it concentrates a variety of experiences that very few other industries can offer. The tourism industry has become a major factor in our contemporary world, and an essential component of individuals' lives. Tourism researchers have studied the details of tourism consumption for several decades and have produced a corpus of knowledge that is extremely powerful in helping to understand the tourism experience. This book uses the knowledge issued from both the mainstream marketing literature and the tourism/leisure fields. By combining both these advances in knowledge, the book provides an overall vision of what lies at the heart of the tourism experience and how marketers can develop successful experiential marketing strategies.

Though the experiential approach and tourism researchers have demonstrated the superiority of emotions in the understanding of the experiences and their conceptualisation, it cannot be ignored that tourism products remain physical entities that are designed, physically conceptualised and humanely managed. Therefore, this book aims to try to bridge the gap between utilitarian and experiential approaches: the tangible dimensions of the service delivery are seen as enhancers that will allow consumers to experience more fully the emotions and experiential benefits of the tourism product.

The book has listed various examples and small case studies that will help the reader understand how experiential tourism marketing comes to life through the conceptualisation and provision of services. New technologies have provided useful tools to enhance the experience, but other aspects pertaining to service delivery and service design, such as local inhabitants' roles or the notion of authenticity, are also elements that contribute to magnifying the experience.

The first chapter will clarify the broad framework within which the theories presented are nested. The postmodern paradigm, which emerged as a critique of modernism, will be explained. Modernism foundations will be outlined in order to explain how post-modernism emerged, and its implications in terms of the consumer experience. The links to the Consumer Culture theory will then be addressed, explaining how this approach takes into account the cultural and symbolic dimensions of consumption practices. Social representations and cultural practices will be presented to help readers make sense of the new consumption phenomenon observed in the contemporary world.

The second chapter will narrow down this framework by presenting the experiential theories. We start by addressing the limits of traditional marketing models, especially the rational side of consumers and their aim to maximise utility. From this critic can be understood the emergence of experiential theories that aimed to develop new models to explain consumption practices in specific areas such as culture, art, leisure and tourism. The principles and variables of this approach will be detailed and the evolution of this approach over the last three decades will be presented.

If experiential theories and tourism researchers have now established the dominant role of emotions in the tourism experience, it is essential to keep in mind that tourism services are also provided through a service delivery based on physical elements. Chapter 3 will explore those elements by addressing the specificities of the service delivery, the evaluation of service quality and service guarantees. While those approaches have been criticised, they remain powerful management tools to improve service delivery and the authors felt that it was important to address them. The chapter will also discuss the limits of traditional services' marketing models in a tourism context. For instance, can tourists elaborate precise evaluations of services during or following a long service encounter? Is evaluation, in a holiday context, different from other types of products and services? Finally, the notion of indirect service that characterises tourism service provision will be detailed.

Moving on from the recognition of the importance of the indirect service delivery in tourism, Chapter 4 will present more recent approaches that are extremely useful to the understanding of tourism experiences. The Service Dominant Logic and the Consumer Dominant Logic will be addressed with a focus on the recognition of consumers' roles as co-producers of the experience. The newer recognition of the independence that tourists might seek in their experience will also be addressed with the notion of auto-construction. The chapter will finish with a

presentation of a service continuum which provides a framework for understanding how services alternate between a totally serviced delivery to autonomous consumption situations.

Having presented both the utilitarian and the experiential visions of the service delivery, Chapter 5 will address how satisfaction might be evaluated in an experiential context. Evaluating satisfaction in such a situation is a thorny question that researchers have debated for several decades. The chapter will again address the role of emotions in the conception of satisfaction. The specificities of satisfaction formation in an experiential context will also be addressed by advancing the possibility that tourists might develop satisfaction strategies. In an experiential context, the inability that individuals might have in voicing specific expectations will also be raised. Finally the chapter will present the notions of flow and immersion which represent central notions for understanding the consumer experience and satisfaction elicitation.

Chapter 6 will address the fact that the physical surrounding can play a central role in the achievement of the experience. It will further detail those elements by looking at how the experiencescape and atmospherics play a major role in determining the consumers' experience. The notion of theming the servicescape, through positioning and design, will be presented. Conceptions of theming at a local (resort) and global (landscape) levels will also be addressed.

The notion of servicescape is closely connected to the concept of image, which will be the object of Chapter 7. Image is a fascinating but yet complex notion that will be defined and illustrated in the first part of the chapter. The chapter will then present how image has been defined in the tourism context and which elements play a part in its construction. Those elements will be addressed with some detail, investigating the impact of different media in its construction and the role that films also play in the production of image. The variables and models that can be used will also be extensively reviewed, as the concept of image measurement can be particularly complex.

Chapter 8 will look at the complex notion of authenticity. Authenticity is also an essential element in the construction of the experience, but its conceptualisation and meanings are complex. This chapter will first identify what authenticity means and how tourists perceive the notion of authenticity. The various conceptions of authenticity will be reviewed, especially by looking at staged and unstaged authenticity. The chapter will conclude with a detailed analysis of Las Vegas and will investigate the extent to which it can be seen as an authentic or unauthentic tourism destination.

Within the experience, another element that impacts on visitors' emotions is their connections with local amenities and inhabitants. Chapter 9 will address this aspect, which is another dimension of the authenticity as it implies direct contacts with local inhabitants. It also means that tourists are gradually seeking a more genuine and informal type of information provision. Examples of this are found in a review of accommodation service provisions such as *gîtes* and bed and

breakfasts. The role of local guides will then be reviewed. Examples of guides in local parks and of homeless guides in London will show that the notion of tourists' guiding is evolving.

The last chapter will present different forms of methodologies that can be developed to study and analyse experiences. Since quantitative methodologies have been fairly widely explored, the chapter will concentrate on qualitative methodologies. Presentation of different forms of data collection will be listed and examples will be presented including online qualitative data collection and new smartphone applications that provide very innovative tools to analyse the experience as it is taking place.

The authors of this book have combined their expertise and research experience of consumer and tourist behaviour. This book cannot be exhaustive in regard to the rich literature that contributes to the understanding of the tourism experience. Nonetheless, it provides an extensive review of existing knowledge in this field and the authors hope that it will help readers gain a better appreciation of how experience can be defined, conceptualised and measured in a tourism context.