ICT and Tourism: An Approach to Enhanced Experience

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays information and communication technologies (ICT) are strongly driving tourism and transforming modern tourism experiences at every stage of tourist journey i.e. pre, during, & post travel. Technologies have huge potential to enhance the customer experience by supporting tourists throughout a range of tourism activities and also benefited tourism organizations, such as travel agencies, tour operators, hotels, etc in planning & providing better products and services. This study is aimed at knowing the enhanced experience of tourists by integrating emerging information and Communication technologies (ICT) with tourism activities and the benefits tourism organizations draw from ICT.

Keywords: ICT, Tourism activities, Enhanced experience.

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Tourism is presently one of the profligate expanding enterprises globally. It is chiefly a facility business since it is not producing properties rendering facilities to numerous lessons of individuals. It is a grouping of numerous unified businesses and profession alike food commerce, conveyance business etc. It is a complex commercial since it includes manifold socio-financial events like appealing persons to a terminus, conveying them, covering, nourishing and amusing etc. In the procedure, it transports about marvelous infrastructural developments and assistances in the growth of the area. Conceivably leisure business is unique such rare manufacturing, which makes distant conversation deprived of spreading nationwide prosperity.

Travel is the chief disruption of finances of numerous republics and in India it has arisen as a solitary major remaining stipendiary of distant conversation. Travel, like other financial happenings accompaniments finest once it hysterics hooked on the setting of overall financial strategies and programs intended for the finest development of the financial gain of the nation altogether.

The Tourism industry is presently a tremendously delicate combination business and includes separate topographies of evidence civilization. Though the essential creation in the manufacturing is a corporeal facility, which is fashioned and expanded in the corporeal biosphere, it is conquered and attained finished material facilities. The flawless incorporation of evidence and corporeal facilities is the task for the modern travel manufacturing crossways the sphere. Henceforth it is mainly a material creation. For instance, tourism stations are person's chairs the location are predictable to be solitary and different from the ordinary knowledge.

One has to portable to the home of ingesting to examination the creation or facilities and which cannot be completed in prior for an experimental. Provisionally, portable amenities are consumed the actual period they are formed; it is mainly founded communal communication amid the dealer and the customer. The excellence of the facility or creation is mostly clear by the communication. To be more intricate, a customer has admission to only a no concrete perfect of the creation at the time of executive and votive contract. Henceforth executive and ingesting are unglued in a period and interplanetary. Few of these breaches can be stunned by the statistics of the merchandise, which is obtainable in a loan to the shopper. Thus travel facilities and creation are founded on sureness, material and message. The instrument points to establishing of precise produce supply and extensive material and worth addition shackles.

ICT and Tourism

Modern civilization has prepared Tourism an extremely information-intensive manufacturing as ICT has a possible influence on travel commercialism. The function of ICT in tourism business cannot be undervalued and it is imperative lashing strength in the existing communication enthused civilization. It has delivered new apparatuses and permitted new circulation stations, thus making a new commercial ecosystem. ICT gears have eased commercial operation in the business by interacting with exchange associates, distribution of result services and providing material to customers across the sphere. On the other hand, customers are also using connected to obtain material and strategy their trip and tourism. Communication is the key component in the travel manufacturing. ICT permeates nearly all features of travel and related business.

For example, we are contingent upon it right from the scratch while identifying and developing tourism sites and destinations itself. The use of Geospatial Information Technologies in the recent years across the globe for varied purposes is popularly known and Tourism industry has not been barring in availing its compensations. Traveler specialists to define the boundaries of the recommended tourist site as well its neighboring areas and the populations existing in it can use it. It can also get material on roads involving to the places and obtain ability of other conveniences like water, power, market etc. Such machineries are also valuable for site organization and checking. The role of ICT tools in the manufacturing for advertising, process, and organization of purchaser is widely known. Advertising methods can be more groundbreaking finished ICT tools. The table underneath discloses the potential use of ICT tools in the manufacturing firms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literature Review discusses and critically analyses in-depth the three theoretical streams this study draws upon, namely 1) the theoretical framework of the tourist experience, 2) experience co-creation theory and 3) ICTs. The literature review begins by establishing the theoretical foundation of the tourist experience (section 2.1). By taking an interdisciplinary approach, the conceptual origins and the historical development of the concept are established. It then presents the subjectivity, multiphasic nature and complexity of the tourist experience. This is followed by a definitional and terminological discussion, which offers a synthesised definition of the tourist experience and the terminology adopted in this study. In the second part (section 2.2), the literature review examines the experience co-creation concept, embedded within servicedominant logic discourses and the services marketing and management domain. First, its historic development, the changing role of the consumer and the recent paradigm shift towards the S-D logic are reviewed. The notion of co-creation is then defined and differentiated, and assessed in terms of its underlying principles, elements and processes inherent, before being contextualised in tourism and the field of ICTs.

This leads over to the third stream of the literature review, namely ICTs in tourism, which are introduced in section 2.3. The section first reviews the role of technology as a driver of global change, provides a definition and classification of ICTs and establishes the progress of ICTs in the context of tourism. In examining a plethora of ICTs, the four main drivers that render ICTs a 'catalyst of change' are identified and discussed. The final section bridges the gap between the tourist experience, co-creation and ICTs, in that it conceptualises ICTs as a resource, before analysing its integration in the three stages of the tourist experience. The literature review chapter is concluded by identifying the research gaps that emerge from the literature and this study subsequently aims to address (section 2.4). The last section presents the core contribution that emerges from the literature review, which is the conceptual framework of the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience (section 2.5). It amalgamates the three theoretical streams of this study and has the purpose to provide the conceptual underpinning that centrally guides this Paper.

Theoretical Framework of the Tourist Experience

The tourist experience provides the theoretical framework to which this study makes its main contribution by developing the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience. First noted in the 1960s, the notion of experience has been widely discussed and has multiple embedded meanings (Uriely, 2005). While the tourist experience has been the focus of attention in numerous scientific disciplines, one all-encompassing 'tourist experience theory' is missing to date. "There is no single theory that defines the meaning and extent of tourist experiences, although a number of authors have made attempts to formulate models by generalizing and aggregating information" (Chhetri et al., 2004, p.34). Only a dearth of studies has attempted to conceptualise the tourist experience from a holistic perspective (Ritchie and Hudson, 2009; Cutler and Carmichael, 2010; Ryan, 2010; Kim et al., 2011). In presenting multitudinous phases, influences, outcomes, motivations, modes, types, dimensions and qualities (Cutler and Carmichael, 2010), these studies have contributed to a broad, while fragmented, understanding of the tourist experience.

Accordingly, the tourist experience needs to be understood as a broad theoretical framework, rather than a theory. It is composed of theoretical fragments that have emerged through multiple disciplines and have collectively contributed to the

development of a comprehensive framework over the past five decades. This section hence seeks to establish the theoretical foundation of the tourist experience for the purposes of this study. It sets out to explore the origins of the tourist experience, by assessing its linguistic and conceptual roots in various scientific disciplines. It then reviews its historical development and examines the extensive array of work, including the seminal theories, frameworks and constructs that have shaped the knowledge foundation to date. This is followed by a conceptualisation of the subjectivity, complexity and multi-dimensionality of the tourist experience. The final section integrates the reviewed literature and provides an analysis of the definitions as well as a terminological outline and justification of the tourist experience for this study.

Origins of the Tourist Experience

What is the Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience? To answer this central question, it is necessary to first explore and develop an understanding of the tourist experience. The English word 'experience' is a neutral, vague and highly ambiguous term, which generally describes all kinds of things that a person has ever undergone (Aho, 2001). The Germanic language is more distinctive in differentiating the two terms, 'Erlebnis', referring to an immediate, conscious participation related to a situation, and 'Erfahrung', determining the accumulation of experiences throughout a lifetime (Larsen, 2007). While the terms are not mutually exclusive, the former tends to capture something temporary of 'here and now', while the latter relates to something accrued long-term. Combined, they contribute to the meaning of the contemporary understanding of an experience (Lee et al., 1994).

From a cross-linguistic perspective, the word experience has been most commonly used to indicate an occurrence that individuals would have in everyday life. Depending on the context and scientific discipline, a wide spectrum of definitions has evolved over time (Caru and Cova, 2003). In science, a distinction between experience in general and the scientific experience is acknowledged. The former conveys specific knowledge to the individual, whereas the latter generates universally accepted knowledge to all. The dominant perspectives in philosophy conform with the scientific view of the former concept in that experience is considered as a personal trial that leads to the accumulation of experiences, and in turn knowledge. An experience can emerge when an individual consciously translates an occurrence into knowledge (Caru and Cova, 2003). From an anthropological viewpoint, experience is predominantly regarded as the way in which individuals live their indigenous culture (Bruner, 1986), while social anthropological perspectives highlight the interactive dimensions of experiences (Selstad, 2007). In this vein, Abrahams (1986) outlines that experience needs to be differentiated from an event, which happens to a society; as an experience is something that occurs within an individual human being.

The psychological discipline also offers a legitimate perspective to answer questions and generate knowledge about experiences (Larsen, 2007). The psychological view, coinciding with sociology, depicts an experience as a subjective, cognitive activity that occurs to an individual human being (Larsen, 2007; Volo, 2009). Thereby, experience can be understood as the knowledge and skills acquired through the involvement in, or exposure to, a specific event and the emotions, feelings and sensations triggered during that occurrence (Ismail, 2010). In assessing the scientific roots of the term experience from a trans-disciplinary perspective, a few commonalities can be extracted to establish the definitional underpinning for the purposes of this research. Based on the literature, it appears that the key to understanding experience is the subjective individual, with inherent motivations, value systems, attitudes, personality traits and affective states of moods and emotions, who undergoes a specific occurrence, which is cognitively translated into an experience and a specific set of experience outcomes. In exploring the conceptual origins of experiences, it is evident that the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) has played a critical role in developing the groundwork of the concept (Ritchie and Hudson, 2009). As early as in the 1970s, he explored the notion of experience in the context of leisure. However, it was not until the 1990s when Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) with his seminal contribution "Flow:

The Psychology of the Optimal Experience" could attract the attention of a wider audience. His theory suggests a balance between an individual's 'perceived challenges and perceived skills' to perform a specific task allowing for the ideal level of flow and a satisfactory experience to be created (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990b). At around the same time, Gerhard Schulze's exploration of cultural behaviour in various social strata in 1992, called "Die Erlebnisgesellschaft", created a wider understanding of experiences. It highlighted people's increasing pursuit of fun, action, events and experiences within society (Darmer and Sundbo, 2008). In the marketing domain, the idea of experiences first emerged with Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) seminal work "The experiential aspects of consumption". They revolutionised the marketing literature by recognising that consumer behaviour cannot be limited to mere information processing. Instead, it involves an active engagement in an emotional consumption experience. Hedonic consumption was recognised as a key concept relating to the multi-sensory, fantasy, fun and emotional aspects of an individual's consumption experience with a product (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The sum of these concepts has provided an important theoretical foundation, which has fostered subsequent work on the subject, such as experiential marketing (O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998; Schmitt, 1999), the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), experiential consumption (Addis and Holbrook, 2001) and consumption

experiences (Caru and Cova, 2003). Experiences have been recognised as a major component in the life of the contemporary consumer.

They are sought after in a pursuit of identity, with sensations, emotional pleasures and memorable recollections at the very core of experiential consumption activities (Frochot and Batat, 2013). As such, consumption is no longer considered as the end of the economic cycle but rather a means to create experiences and construct life through experiences (Firat and Dholakia, 1998). In general, consumer experiences were understood as mundane activities that happen in everyday life, emerging when products or services are consumed (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Early literature in the field of tourism (Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987; Cohen, 1979) has however highlighted the need for differentiation when experiences occur in the particular context of travel and tourism. This need was driven by the distinctive nature of tourism services and experiences, characterised by irrational consumer behaviour, symbolic and aesthetical, emotional, hedonistic and memorable dimensions (Frochot and Batat, 2013). As a result, the next section moves its focus from understanding generic consumer experiences to analysing the tourist experience in specific.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology outlines the methodological underpinning of the research. The overall aim is 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. The chapter first sets out to provide a discussion of the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions of the study, which leads on to a debate of prevalent research paradigms. While positivist, interpretivist, social-constructionist and critical realism stances are reviewed, pragmatism is selected as the appropriate paradigmatic stance to address the overall aim and the five research objectives through the combination of mixed methods (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010). The research strategy is discussed subsequently, explaining the theory development, the use of primary and secondary data, before presenting the research approach adopted in this study. In reviewing the tourist experience, co-creation and ICTs literature streams, not only the most common methods were identified, but most importantly, the appropriate methods in relation to this research were selected.

The research strategy of a three-stage qualitative mixed methods approach is presented by outlining the rationale for adopting a qualitative approach and, specifically, a qualitative mixed methods strategy. The chapter next provides an overview of the research design, before turning to explain each method of the research process in detail. The discussion of each research phase offers the reason for adoption, an outline of the overall design and a detailed description of the data collection and data analysis process. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the limitations, validity and reliability of the research, ethics, health and safety considerations and a reflexive discussion on the role of the researcher in this process.

Research Philosophy

The underlying questions regarding the choice of the research philosophy are of primary importance, as these define the fundamental belief system that governs not only the selection of the methods, but the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underline this research. Three major ways of thinking, namely ontology, epistemology and axiology (Collis and Hussey, 2003; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010) have been considered to determine the adequate paradigmatic position that underpins this study.

Ontology surrounds the assumptions about the beliefs of the nature of reality and the question of what actually constitutes reality. Epistemology, in contrast, is mainly concerned with the nature of knowledge and the way knowledge is acquired (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010). Epistemology seeks to understand the theory of knowledge with its principal interest in "the meaning of the term knowledge, the limits and scope of knowledge and what constitutes a valid claim to know something" (Tribe, 2004, p.46). The third philosophical consideration is axiology, which embeds critical beliefs about the role of values in the research process (Holden and Lynch, 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010). According to Guba (1990) assumptions in these three areas of thought shape the nature of a particular research paradigm. For the purposes of this study, it is critical to examine the prevailing research paradigms with their embedded philosophical assumptions. In social sciences there generally exist five prevalent research paradigms, which comprise positivism, interpretivism, social constructionism, realism and pragmatism (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009; Saunders et al., 2009).

While these constitute the most commonly applied paradigmatic doctrines, these are not exhaustive, but rather represent the most dominant ones in a wider spectrum of paradigms. In this vein, Jennings (2006) highlight that several paradigms, such as postpositivism, critical theory or post-modern thinking can offer valuable paradigm perspectives for a range of enquiries of research. What the entire paradigmatic spectrum has in common is the central question of whether, and to what extent, the social world can be studied following the same principles as natural sciences (Saunders et al., 2009). Within social sciences and the services marketing domain, the positivism-interpretivism dichotomy has provided the prevailing

philosophical choice (Holden and Lynch, 2004). This has produced a controversial discussion of how the social world is viewed and how knowledge can be obtained. While this study acknowledges the long-standing tradition of the positivistinterpretivist dichotomy, it coincides with numerous scholars (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004; Morgan and Watson, 2007; Lincoln, 2010; Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010) advocating the need for a more comprehensive and profound appraisal of philosophical assumptions prior to commencing research.

CONCLUSION

The creation of successful experiences is the essence of the tourism and hospitality industry. This study aimed to provide an understanding on how high-tech can be used to create high-touch personalised tourism experiences. The Hotel Lugano Dante case study offers a leading hospitality example and provides invaluable insights into facilitating high-touch experience creation. This study has contradicted the existing literature by arguing that technology must not be understood as mere technological artefact that hinders human interaction. Instead, it constitutes a key tool to facilitate more individual, one-to-one, personalised experiences. High-touch experiences are facilitated through technologies allowing for two-fold information and experience flow. Consumers are interactive, involved and share information while the company and its members of staff are interconnected and using information to facilitate co-created high touch experiences with consumers. Engagement is critical for this co-creation process. Successful organisations of the future will use innovative technology to create innovative, unique, personal high-touch experiences.

The present case study offers a number of implications for tourism theory and practice. In terms of theory, the study contributes to the current understanding of technology in the co-creation of contemporary tourism and hospitality experiences. It provides an integrated high-tech high-touch experience process model demonstrating the underlying technology-enabled processes necessary in the creation of personal experiences. In terms of practical implications this case study provides evidence that technology, instead of being regarded as a destroyer of high-touch experiences, is a key facilitator of personal experiences with a high-touch. This is particularly relevant to the tourism industry, as a sector which is dependent on creating more personal experiences by reducing interchangeability of the tourism product and creating distinct value for the consumer. As any study of an exploratory nature, a number of limitations need to be acknowledged and which could be addressed in the future. Further research is needed to build upon and extend the understanding developed in this study. The single case adopted in this study could be further strengthened by conducting a multiple case study to diversify examples and to allow for a comprehensive cross-case analysis. In addition to the company perspective, consumer studies are needed to complement these findings and lead to a holistic understanding of high-touch experiences from both a company and a consumer perspective.

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