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CORE VALUES OF HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE THROUGH MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

Abstract. This study aims to identify the core values that mobile technology can add to hospitality experience. Ouro Preto, a historical Brazilian destination, was chosen for the development of a qualitative research design, directed by mobile ethnography literature. We collected data in two distinguished moments 1) a bar meeting, unknown to the guests and 2) a solo trip behold in three different local accommodations (Airbnb, Hostel and Lodge). We analyzed data with content analysis with thematic categorization. Results reinforce that technology enhances experiences through interactivity and social engagement, but it also sustains well-being as a central category. The guest-host hospitality experience permeates technology to create core values to the guest such as to inform, to communicate, to entertain and for their localization.

Keywords: hospitality experience; hospitality management; interpersonal relations; mobile technology; communication; information; entertainment; localization.

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ИЗУЧЕНИЕ БАЗОВЫХ ЦЕННОСТЕЙ ГОСТЕПРИИМСТВА С ПОМОЩЬЮ МОБИЛЬНЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ

Целью статьи является определение базовых ценностей индустрии гостеприимства через туристский опыт на основе данных, собранных с помощью мобильных технологий. В качестве основного метода исследования используются приёмы т.н. «мобильной этнографии», рекомендуемые для исследования динамических явлений, возникающих в многоаспектных индустриях, таких как гостеприимство и туризм. Их смысл заключается в обмене опытом между принимающим сообществом и приезжающими туристами. Для качественного анализа туристского опыта, формируемого в процессе посещения дестинации на основе сложившихся традиций гостеприимства в ней, в качестве территориального объекта исследования был выбран исторический бразильский город Ору-Прету. Основой для анализа стало изучение традиций гостеприимства в ходе посещения авторами города Ору-Прету с помощью двух приемов: 1) индивидуальная поездка с посещением нетуристических объектов (например, баров для местных); 2) посещение города в качестве индивидуального путешественника с проживанием в трех разных типах объектов размещения (квартира, заказанная через сервис Airbnb, затем хостел и лодж). В итоге авторами получен массив данных (дневники, фотографии, заметки в социальных сетях), которые были изучены с помощью контент-анализа и категоризации. Результаты исследования подтверждают первоначальную идею о том, что технологии иммерсивности и погружения в местное сообщество усиливают туристское впечатление, что в итоге положительно сказывается на принимающей дестинации в целом. Формирование туристского впечатления в дестинации должно основываться на технологии формирования ключевых ценностей гостеприимства, таких как информирование, общение, развлечения и их локализация.

Ключевые слова: туристский опыт, гостеприимство, менеджмент в гостеприимстве, межличностные отношения, мобильные технологии, коммуникация, информация, развлечение, локализация.

Introduction

Early definitions of hospitality enhanced voluntary human exchange, and the provision of food, drink, and accommodation to raise well-being (Brotherton 1999; Teng 2011). According to Telfer (2000: 39) "hospitality is associated with the meeting of needs, entertaining with the giving of pleasure".

Hospitality is a manifestation of value (Poulston 2015), being both behavior and experience (Hemmington 2007). However, the focus of hospitality experience is still on service and tangible products (Teng 2011). Academics have been ignoring some hospitality's study gaps as 1) the study of entertainment and social interactions in hospitality contexts and 2) guest-guest relations and exchanges (Lugosi 2008).

Hospitality and tourism technology studies focus mainly on the consumer-supplier interface. Previous theoretical studies reviewed hospitality technology topics (Muller & Muller 2013), the progress on information and communication technologies in hospitality and tourism journals (Law et al. 2014; Buhalis & Law 2008) and discussed the scope and challenges for future hospitality services (Kansakar et al. 2018).

Some authors have proposed models of specific themes from qualitative case-studies, such as an experience matrix for technology and co-creation (Neuhofer et al. 2014) and a process model of personalized experiences creation and smart technologies (Neuhofer et al. 2015). Meanwhile, quantitative studies measure technology adoption and the use of user-generated content (Viglia et al. 2016).

Moreover, the empirical exploration of the impact of technology on experiences remains scarce (Neuhofer et al. 2014), being the frame of this research. Hospitality enterprises which hold customers' experiences are going through a pattern of change driven by information technology (Olsen & Connolly 2000; Muller & Muller 2013; Buhalis & Foerste 2015).

Mobile services for hospitality companies are a synonym of freedom and choice creation which must become values customers are willing to pay, and companies can afford (Carlson et al. 2015). In the other hand, few researchers have explored the values mobile technology provides for a host-guest relationship. Thus, this research identifies the core values that mobile technology can add to hospitality and tourism experience.

A challenge when studying hospitality experience is to explore whatever is lived rather than what the guests remember from their experience. Therefore, researchers need to use different approaches such as mobile ethnography (Muskat et al. 2018; Bosio & Prunthaller 2018) and participant observation (Marietto 2018), in order to better understand how variables interfere in the hospitality experience.

The variables that are central in this study are the interpersonal relations (which are the basis of a hospitality experience) and its technological touch points. Therefore, the paper contributes by identifying the proposed values for guests from mobile technologies through a theoretical framework proposal.

Method

This study is qualitative and took place in a historical city of Brazil, Minas Gerais State, named Ouro Preto. It is known for the gold exploration during the 18th century and hosting an important historical chapter of Brazilian independence. Ouro Preto has been designated World Heritage Site by UNESCO since 1980, due to its architecture, history, and culture, including baroque churches, bridges, cobblestone streets, fountains, and museums.

This study is a participant observation visited by one of the authors in two distinguished moments, 1) on October 6th, 2018 in a thematic bar, and 2) on January 27 until January 30, 2019. The first moment has a bar as its setting, such as Lugosi (2008), which had rock music as its inspiration and selling approach. The second moment involved a trip by one of the authors as a solo traveler in the same town. One of the premises of this experience was to stay in 3 different accommodations in order to capture distinct social relations experience. At first, an Airbnb, followed by a hostel and a lodge.

We followed the research mobile ethnography framework suggestions by Muskat et al. (2018). According to the authors, mobile ethnography is recommended to research dynamic phenomena, developed in multi-spaces such as hospitality and tourism experience. The researcher's role was to co-create data between the research and the participants. The research focus was on hospitality experiences in bars, restaurants, cafés, and accommodations.

In the first research moment, the guests are from another city and were visiting the city as excursionists. None of the four guests (L, M, S, H) have known the bar previously. 'L' and 'M' are close friends and female. 'M' and 'S' are a couple and went together to the bar with 'L' from a close city (Ouro Branco, 40-minute drive up to Ouro Preto). 'H' arrived afterward and did not know any of the other persons personally before, but had a shared friend with 'L' and has talked to her before only through an instant message app (Whatsapp).

Study participants knew this was a hospitality experience study and consent their voluntary participation, but they did not know the variable technology was a study focus. Therefore, the research participants were selected by convenience, due to the unforeseen condition of the meeting. Also, the four waiters (named G1, G2, G3, G4) and other bar's clients composed the analyzed setting of the study, which is considered relevant due to its non-standard context, highly connected to recurrent hospitality notions – novelty for the guests, providing food and drinks, entertain and meeting strangers (Telfer, 2000; Teng, 2011).

At the second moment, the researcher wanted to experience different hospitality experiences on accommodations. The private bedroom from Airbnb was booked online before the trip. The hostel was a personal recommendation of a host from a Hostel World partner whose hostel was unavailable for painting. Finally, a lodge was found with Booking.com support. The food & beverages establishments, museums, and a photo atelier also composed the research settings. The research's central variables were the same in both studies: interpersonal relations and its technological touch points.

Following Muskat et al. (2018) directions, data collection includes textual data (diaries, social media conversations, mobile notes) and visual data (photos and videos by the researcher and the participants). The main tools were mobile phones (smartphones) and its applications. The participant author collected data, who registered time, central conversations and details from both experiences in real-time through field annotations, personal reflection and photos and videos in Portuguese. The full English report version was transcripted on both occasions.

We analyzed data through content analysis (Bardin 2008) and categorized it into thematic categorization defined and cross-checked *a posteriori.* After reading the field annotations, the researches discussed the main findings of the text and made efforts to synthesize it into categories. The main category of this paper, technology, was divided on entertainment, communication, localization, and information and exposed in a proposed model (Fig. 1).
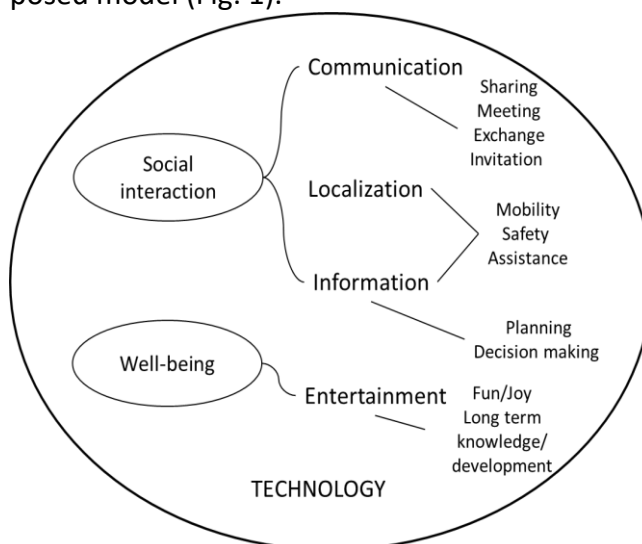
Fig. 1 – Core values of mobile technology in hospitality and tourism (Source: The authors)

Results & discussion

Customer hospitality experiences are part of management differentiation strategies, enhancing customer perceived value and loyalty (Lashley, 2008; Teng, 2011). Verma, Stock, & McCarthy (2012), explored the customer

preferences for mobile apps related to hospitality. These authors state that location, communication, and service-based innovations are mobile device innovations which customers want to see. Our findings help on identifying and explaining the core values that mobile technology provides for hospitality guests during their entire experience such as demonstrated in Fig. 1.

Previous literature connect technology to personalization and co-creation processes (Neuhofer et al. 2015; Buhalis & Foerste 2015), but we argue, that through hospitality lenses the central values technology can provide for guests and hosts is social engagement and well-being. As technology supports decision-making, localization, communications, and entertainment, what stands out is the possibility of experiencing novelty either to reinforce personal ties (those who have either lived the experience with you or you will share it virtually) or to build new ones (strangers, hosts).

A variable which has not gained enough attention in tourism and hospitality technology studies is well-being. Conway (2013) relates well-being in the tourism experience context to contemplation and self-satisfaction. Authors distinct two dimensions of well-being, namely hedonia and eudaimonia, "hedonia is about feeling good while engaging in an activity" (Knobloch et al. 2017: 3) and eudaimonia indicates long term positive effects such as reaching a goal, increasing a skill level, and personal growth. Memorable tourism experiences result in personal transformations such as learning, abilities development and behavior changes (Coelho 2017). In the tourism context, eudaimonic experiences give evidence of inner nature reflections, a sense of meaning in life, pleasure and arousal (Matteucci & Filep 2015).

In this sense, technology can enhance entertainment moments evoking fun and hedonism (hedonia) and provide long term personal development and self-reflection (eudaimonia) mainly through entertainment. Thus, this study reinforces the importance of the entertainment as a core value technology provides for guests, as "leisure travelers are more influenced by 'fun' features of the mobile technology" (Zhang, Seo, & Ahn, 2018: 1).

Finally, technology can enhance guest-host connections through social media, as new friendships. However, these connections have to be sense-making, otherwise, the link might not be strong enough to behold a social engagement (even if only virtual).

Final considerations

This study contributes by giving insights on how technology permeates hospitality experience and highlights both guest-guest and guest-host interactions. The results point out that technology enhances hospitality and tourism experiences through interactivity and social engagement, but it also sustains well-being as a mean to exalt pleasure, emotions, personal development, and self-reflection.

The guest-host hospitality experience permeates technology to create core values to the guest such as to inform, to communicate, to entertain and for localization. The results also indicate that although technology is important to support decision making and connect guests, most of the hospitality experience is created to provide social engagement, either virtually or in real time.

Study limitations evoke a limited setting and context, which cannot be generalized. Besides, technology use is always in progress so that future studies might find different conclusions (Zhang et al. 2018).

Future studies should be taken in other contexts and with different methods procedures in order to explore further lenses and variables in hospitality experience. Once the experience is considered meaningful by the guest, a behavior change or action can occur right away (playing a new set list on Spotify, for instance, or sharing videos and photos on Instagram). Further research could investigate behavior change from the guest-host relationship. The hosts' perspective could also enrich this discussion.

Table 1 – Guest's Mobile Technology Core Values from Hospitality Experience (Source: The Authors)

Guest's mobile technology core values	Values
Communication 10:22 –WhatsApp's group L. to friendship group: "M.! What are you up to today? We could seat in a nice place to chat. I even consider going to Ouro Preto (OP). Too much?" M was going to OB by car with S, her husband. M to S: L is asking if we want to go to Ouro Preto today? S to M: At night? Could be. 10:26 WhatsApp group M to L: At night? Silvio is up to it too. L to M: Could be at night, in the evening. I'm free. Uhuuu 15:48 Personal WhatsApp L to M: Girl!! Are you still up to OP? If yes, when? M to S: What time do you want to go to OP? S: Asks L. M: You know her. She wants to see the sunset. Is 20 ok? S: For me it's fine. 16:56: M to L: Yes. 20 o clock? 16:07: Yay! ☺ 16:28: We get you there (at home).	Invitation Meeting
On the next day, (Sunday) a video of me was on L's stories on Instagram. And she also posted one of our photos together. G2 brings paper and asks me to evaluate the bar. It has a line "share your experience with the world"	Sharing
A photographer I interviewed in his atelier offers to take a picture of me. It's an antique photo machine device and his camera. He sends it to me by WhatsApp.	Exchange
Localization 21:22 We get next to the bar. S turns on his mobile and opens Waze. He puts the bar's name to check where the bar is. We follow the app straight ahead and turn right. He sees the bar and says it's here. He stops the car and says we can drop off while he parks the car.	Mobility
I turn Google Maps on to find the way. (…) I feel safe in the city center, but the last 300 m seem too dark. I turn my flashlight on.	Safety
Information S to G2: I called here today to book a table. I talked to William. G2: It's me. Nice to meet you. (He stands his hands for S, and they shake hands). S says everything went right. (The table he booked was the one we seat down. L and M didn't know he booked a table.)	Planning
I just can't find the wifi password. But, it was so cheap. Was it included? I check the reservation e-mail and find the password.	Assistance
I check Hostelworld to book a Hostel. The best evaluation is for one specific hostel. I might go there tomorrow.	Decision Making

Guest's mobile technology core values	Values
Entertainment L likes the music that's on. She turns the Shazam app on to find out the music's name. G2: this playlist's name is 'Querida Jacinta', a bar in Belo Horizonte city. L tries to find the playlist at Spotify on her mobile. But she can't find it. G2 goes to the cashier and finds out the correct name is Radio Jacinta. S turns on Spotify in his car and turns the "Radio Jacinta" on.	Fun/Joy Hedonism
S. takes a picture and sends it to two WhatsApp family groups. I ask why he doesn't share it publically. He says sometimes he would like to post it, but he thinks on how this act would benefit him. People knowing his habits and life pattern.	Long term knowledge/ personal development

Many researchers reinforce that the experience is personal and not transferable (Tung & Ritchie 2011; Pine & Gilmore 1998). Participant observation, mobile ethnography and autoethnography should be used more often in hospitality studies, due to the difficulties to analyze the hospitality experience while they occur.

Meanwhile, this study suggests there might be differences among how man and women deal with technology during hospitality experiences, such as taking photos and how they use their own apps to share and communicate their experiences, which can be explored in further mobile ethnography research.

The study implications demonstrate how hosts are already inserted in this technology context and need not only to serve but to attend to guest's requests such as taking pictures, responding about music selection and also try to connect with them and evoke positive emotions in order to help to deliver core values for their experience. It reinforces that managers need to use technology to facilitate strategic and operational functions (Buhalis & Main 1998). Hosts can simulate the promotion of their establishment and brands by at least three possible actions:

1) prove novelty for the guests;

2) arouse sensorial stimuli and entertainment to the guests;

3) afford proper engagement connections.

An online reservation service is not offered by the bar. This is a manager's point of attention once Kwon, Bae, & Blum (2013) stated that information content (phone numbers, operating hours, location) and transaction contents (making or canceling a reservation) had significant relationships with the intention to download hospitality companies' mobile applications. Meanwhile, promotion content (receive special offers, exclusive promotions, and coupons) were not related to customer's intention to download it. This study also sheds light on Know et al. (2013) results, once promotion content does not seem to permeate the hospitality experience. Therefore, promotional offers could be provided on site, while the experience occurs as a mean to create a bond among guest-hosts; in other words, enhance social engagement.

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