

Editorial

Shareable Tourism: Tourism Marketing in the Sharing Economy¹

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Shareable Tourism: Tourism Marketing in the Sharing Economy

Driven by shared values and enabled by social network technologies, consumers around the world are increasingly participating in collaborative consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). This socioeconomic system is characterized by people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of resources among each other (Belk, 2010; 2014), creating triadic exchanges between peer consumers (e.g., tourists needing accommodation), peer providers (e.g., residents having underutilized/spare rooms), and platform providers (e.g., Airbnb) (Benoit et al., 2017). The travel and tourism industry is witnessing the disruptive force of this collaborative consumption phenomenon, with a growing number of peer-to-peer renting, swapping, and lending services facilitating local residents to serve tourists alongside the traditional players in the accommodation, transportation, and related sectors (Guttentag, 2015; Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2016; Tussyadiah, 2015; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016; Sigala, 2014). Tourism destinations and service providers are also embracing open innovation, crowdsourcing, and crowdfunding models to develop new attractions and services, allowing the process of value co-creation among locals, tourists, and other stakeholders (Egger, Gula, & Walcher, 2016; Hjalager & Nordin, 2011; Lalicic & Dickinger, 2017). Within these peer-to-peer marketplaces, local residents, tourists, traditional suppliers, platform providers and policy makers are co-creating the tourism experiences and in so doing, they transform and redefine the values, motives, reasons and ways in which people travel and experience tourism (Sigala, 2015). Consequently, the collaborative economy is transforming tourism marketing from a utilitarian and static sense representing a tool that marketers can use for understanding and targeting existing customers to a transformative conceptualization whereby tourism markets and actors (tourism providers, tourists, intermediaries, stakeholders) are both shaped and shape the technology.

The collaborative economy is characterized by an increased elasticity and dynamism that continuously form new markets, tourism structures, tourism experiences and ecosystems. Hence, as almost all tourism resources at destinations become shareable, it is important to first to understand the transformational effects of the collaborative economy on the tourism ecosystems and actors, and then, to strategize tourism marketing in terms of new development, promotion, distribution, and pricing of tourism products and services amidst peer-to-peer consumption and sharing practices. Similarly, as tourists can find and experience a shared tourism offering, research is required to investigate on the one hand, the nature and the types of values that the tourists seek, co-create and experience in the sharing tourism economy and, on the other hand, the ways in which tourism firms need to respond to such trends, redefine and transform their tourism offerings and then market them to the ‘new tourists’ (Cusumano, 2015; Guttentag, 2015).

This special issue publication presents findings of current and future challenges and opportunities created by the sharing economy for tourism destinations, conventional tourism and hospitality firms, as well as those involve in the sharing economy business model. Specifically, articles included in this special issue address important marketing implications of collaborative practices in tourism, covering various strategic marketing decisions made by different tourism stakeholders, including those by professional and amateur players in the industry, and the consequences of collaborative consumption practices on the experiences of tourists and local communities in the tourism destinations.

The article entitled “‘Give and take:’ how notions of sharing and context determine free peer-to-peer accommodation decisions” by A. Geiger, C. Horbel, and C. C. Germelmann presents how preferences for or against free accommodation sharing are shaped by obligations, expectation of reciprocity, and value-in-social-context. Applying the grounded theory approach, the authors developed a theoretical framework explaining the notion of giving and taking as a perception continuum with asset and burden on the opposite extremes. When interpreted through the lens of reciprocity, this perception manifests in preference for accommodation with the emphasis on social exchange on the one end and that on economic exchange on the other end. In other words, consumers who perceive giving and taking as asset tend to prefer free accommodation sharing, while those who perceive giving and taking as burden prefer commercial accommodation. Further, the linkage between perception of mutual giving and taking with accommodation preference is moderated by contextual characteristics, which include travel budget,

flexibility, insights on authenticity, social interaction, convenience, uncertainty, previous experience, and other personal resources. In terms of tourism marketing, this research sheds a light into not only the different segments of tourists and their preferences for accommodation choice, but also how experiences in tourism destinations (i.e., tourism products) are enriched by the co-creation of value through free accommodation sharing.

The article entitled “Examining the influencing factors of intention to share accommodations in online hospitality exchange networks” by S. Kim, K. Y. Lee, C. Koo, and S.-B. Yang focuses on free accommodation sharing platform, Couchsurfing. Using the lens of social capital theory, the aim of the study was to explore what motivated hosts to accommodate strangers through the social-network-based online hospitality exchange network. Based on an online survey with Couchsurfing hosts, the authors identified motivations to provide free accommodation, which include enjoyment from helping others, shared narratives, desire to make friends, and reciprocity. An interesting finding from the study was the overshadowing effect of trust in Couchsurfing on hosts’ intention to share accommodation, in that trust has not only a direct influence, but also takes away some direct impacts of other factors on intention. Therefore, the article shows how trust in the sharing platform is an important overarching factor that influence hosts’ intention, regardless of their motivations. As a marketing implication, the authors suggested the importance of emphasizing trust and encouraging voluntary contributions to the community as the backbone of peer-to-peer exchanges.

The article entitled “Brand personality of Airbnb: application of user involvement and gender differences” by S. Lee and D.-Y. Kim delved into consumer perception regarding Airbnb as an accommodation provider, utilizing Aaker’s (1997) Brand Personality Scale. As a company that caused disruption in the accommodation sector, consumer perception of the brand is key to understanding the rapid growth of Airbnb market. The authors surveyed Airbnb consumers in the United States (US) to investigate the relationship between level of involvement (i.e., interests, concerns of decision outcomes) and evaluation of Airbnb’s brand personality, as well as the moderating effect of gender. The findings indicate that Airbnb was rated higher in Excitement and Sincerity dimensions, but lower in Ruggedness. Further, the results show how highly-involved consumers tended to evaluate Airbnb’s brand personality higher compared to those with lower level of involvement, especially in terms of Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence dimensions. Finally, the authors also found significant interaction effects, in that involvement level is higher among female travelers. As a consequence, this article demonstrates how consumers perceive Airbnb as a company, which is significantly different from the conventional accommodation providers. This study provides a basis for future branding studies, including those comparing Airbnb with hotels and other sharing economy platforms.

The article entitled “Pricing in the sharing economy: a hedonic pricing model applied to Airbnb listing” by C. Gibbs, D. Guttentag, U. Gretzel, J. Morton, and A. Goodwill illustrates how the sharing economy has allowed an important marketing decision, pricing, which is typically employed within the realm of a firm (e.g., by commercial accommodation providers) to extend into the hands of amateur individuals (i.e., Airbnb hosts). Because it is largely unknown if Airbnb hosts behave strategically when making pricing decisions, the article specifically addresses issues surrounding the link between attributes of accommodation offerings and prices, which provides an indication of some extent of deliberation in hosts’ pricing decisions. Using a total of 15,716 Airbnb listings in five large metropolitan areas in Canada, the authors applied a hedonic pricing model to estimate the impact of various accommodation and host attributes on prices. They identified the positive impacts of physical characteristics, location, and host characteristics, and the negative impact of number of reviews on prices. The article provides a comprehensive look at factors that influence prices of Airbnb listings, thus provides practical implications for non-professional hosts to make decisions on pricing. However, based in these findings, the authors also identified areas for further research, especially to delineate the differences between professional and non-professional accommodation providers in terms of making strategic marketing decisions.

The article entitled “‘Couchsurfing has made me a better person and the world a better place’: the transformative power of collaborative tourism experiences” by A. Decrop, G. Del Chiappa, J. Mallargé, and P. Zidda highlights Couchsurfing, a non-commercial accommodation sharing platform, as an

alternative form of tourism, the essence of shareable, transformative tourism. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 Couchsurfers acting as hosts and guests to identify their motivations and shared values, as well as the process of change that they underwent in the host-guest context. This research conceptualizes the transformation process underlying the Couchsurfing experience, which involves personal transformation as well as societal transformation resulting in socio-psychological and behavioral outcomes. Through the processes of socialization, acculturation, and re-enchantment that build trust between hosts and guests and meaningful connection with local communities, Couchsurfing experience influences changes in beliefs, attitude, values, and mindset, as well as generates lasting friendship between individuals involved. It also results in behavior changes that include reciprocal actions and community engagement, demonstrating that shareable tourism can be considered a form of responsible tourism. The key proposition in this research is that the positioning of tourism experience offering should consider the elements of authenticity, sociability, and sustainability that characterize free accommodation sharing.

The article entitled “Understanding repurchase intention of Airbnb consumers: perceived authenticity, electronic word-of-mouth, and price sensitivity” by L. J. Liang, H. S. C. Choi, and M. Joppe addresses an important issue of perceived value, perceived risk, and continued use of peer-to-peer accommodation, reflected in repurchase intention. Based on a survey with 395 Airbnb users in Canada and the US, the authors examined how perceived risk and perceived value contribute to repurchase intention and how factors characterizing the sharing economy, such as perceived authenticity, peer reviews, and price sensitivity, affect perceived risk and perceived value. As hypothesized, perceived authenticity and electronic word-of-mouth were found to positively affect perceived value and negatively affect perceived risk. However, price sensitivity was found to improve perceived value and lead to repurchase intention. Therefore, from a marketing point of view, this research confirms the importance of communicating information about price and authenticity in peer-to-peer accommodation experience to consumers. That is, lower prices alone may not relieve consumers from perceiving risk associated with future stays in peer-to-peer accommodation, but a combination of lower prices and authenticity will increase perceived value of an Airbnb stay.

Despite the positive effects of peer-to-peer accommodation experience, especially those associated with free exchanges between hosts and guests, residents of tourism destinations also perceive some negative impacts, as highlighted in the final article entitled “An in-depth exploration of residents’ perceived impacts of transient vacation rentals (TVRs)” by E. J. Jordan and J. Moore. Based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with residents in Hawaii, the US, the authors identified that residents perceived both positive and negative impacts of transient accommodation. In terms of economic impacts, the authors found contradictory results to previous studies as residents perceive that transient accommodation helps spread economic benefits to the region, but the net economic gain might be less due to those staying in transient accommodation having different spending patterns. Residents also suggested positive impacts from personal benefits to hosts as well as having more conscientious travelers to the island. In terms of perceived negative impacts, residents identified changes in the sense of community as a consequence of inviting ‘strangers’ into the neighborhood, an increase in property values and decrease in housing availability, as well as traffic and crowding. As an implication, the article suggests a more prominent role of destination management organizations to enforce sensible regulation that can guide sustainable peer-to-peer accommodation services. Additionally, intelligent marketing strategies to highlight peer-to-peer accommodation as an integral part of the destination experience, not only as accommodation supply, will ensure tourists and hosts to behave more responsibly.

Overall, this special issue publication contributes to a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying the transformation in tourism marketing as a consequence of the sharing economy. Together, the articles provide an extensive coverage of both market-mediated and non-market-mediated peer-to-peer systems as emerging areas of research in travel and tourism. They provide important insights into marketing strategies in the sharing economy and their consequences, including aspects of pricing, branding, positioning, and the development of products/offers that form the concept of shareable tourism. Further, the articles provide knowledge regarding the transformation in consumer behavior

brought by the participation in the sharing economy, including factors influencing host decisions to share accommodation and consumer decisions with regards to the use of sharing platforms: repurchase intention, preferences for paid or free accommodation, etc. Finally, the special issue also discusses the impacts of the sharing economy, both positive and negative, from different perspectives: the tourists, the hosts, local communities, and the society in general. While previous publications have concentrated on the impacts of the sharing economy on traveler behavior (Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016) and on hotels (Guttentag & Smith, 2017; Mody, Suess, & Lehto, 2017; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017), empirical evidence presented in this special issue publication offers new perspectives on the personal and societal transformations resulting from host-guest interactions in authentic tourism settings. As more and more studies provide evidence that the host-guest interactions moderate the impacts of the sharing economy, research in various cultural, national and religion settings should be undertaken in order to investigate the various forms and ways in which these interactions take place, are facilitated and/or are constrained, as well as the subsequent impacts that they have on tourism actors and societies. All articles in this issue are in the context of peer-to-peer accommodation. While accommodation is arguably one of the most important sectors in the travel and tourism industry, further research covering the sharing economy in other sectors, such as peer-to-peer transportation (ride sharing), peer-to-peer tour guiding, and peer-to-peer dining, will provide a better picture of shareable tourism.

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