

Tourists' Emotional Experiences in Global Markets*

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Abstract

Today, defining the choice trends of tourism consumption requires an in-depth analysis approach towards many features of a territory. These include its attractiveness, accommodation models, commercial network, restaurant catering system and quality of urban areas.

Likewise, a modern and effective marketing strategy must take into account all these factors and enable the relevant players to give coordinated responses so that they can optimise resources and achieve common objectives.

Keywords: District; Emotional Experience; Consumer; Tourism; Network; Global Markets

1. The Consumer/Tourist Behaviours

Today, giving a correct description of the consumer/tourist requires resorting to a series of complex and often contrasting definitions. The era of social media and always-online Internet connection has transformed and emphasised some, features as well as profoundly changed certain behaviours, whether the consumer/tourist is walking into a store, a restaurant or making a reservation for a holiday or weekend away.

Over the past ten years a sort of progressive transformation has occurred of the consumer, with the 'Web' and the economic crisis serving as catalysts, freeing people's instincts and feelings so much so that a radical change in approach by service providers and a major overhaul of the strategic management marketing models for firms in the tourism and trade sectors are required (Buhalis, 2000).

The customers/consumers today are more demanding, attentive, compulsive, critical, informed and touchy; they are always looking for higher added value and increasing satisfaction from their choices.

They do not walk into a store because they need a good, but rather to enjoy a pleasurable experience that may gratify some profound intellectual and emotional needs of them (Brondoni, 2016).

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They behave in a similar way when they look for a new holiday experience, when a taste for search and expectation for what they may find enriches the choice they make.

In all cases, they aim to “seize the prey and flaunt the trophy”, and are willing to invest resources according and in proportion not only to the quality of the prey (product purchased, holiday enjoyed), but also to the satisfaction obtained by flaunting the trophy (gratification generated by admiration for the experience made by the other members of their social group).

Given these dynamics, a complete change of attitude is required to those who offer a product or service: from aiming to sell something to someone to helping people to buy what is best and most specifically suitable for their personal needs.

All this should aim to create a memorable life experience which is worthy of being talked about and passed on (Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

An interesting recent research by the ‘Federazione Moda Italia’ on the most important shopping streets of Italy, shows that 23% of foreign (non-EU) tourists visiting Milan purchase goods outside of the ‘Quadrilatero’ high-fashion district. This also occurs in Rome (33%), Florence (39%) and Venice (24%), where tourists do not seem to be attracted by shopping in the central streets, but rather by potentially richer and more authentic experiences to be found exploring new areas away from the well-known advertised ones.

A significant attraction is also exerted by the large shopping centres which in recent years have been built just outside the cities according to precise real estate logics. The latter, however, are often merely speculative and focus on the short-term, with little consideration for the typical dynamics of the sector.

This has produced replicas of shopping centres which are monotonous and very similar to each other, while the current decrease in consumption, the parallel increase in purchases on the web and the particularly profound changes occurring in consumer trends, are marking a sharp slowdown in appreciation and attendance of these centres.

Rather, a tendency is spreading out towards the rediscovery of the values linked to the territory, local traditions, the good social relationships, i.e. to all those values that have characterised the development of the commercial system of Italy's urban areas in the 1960s and 1970s.

This demonstrates the capacity for non-flashy commercial and tourist areas to attract; they still retain traditional elements that, over time and affected by the financial crisis, have been able to innovate themselves and now are an essential element of the attractiveness of Italian cities. The small restaurant that offers truly Italian dishes, the charming hotel with only a few rooms, the boutique with unique pieces from emerging designers; these are just some of the ingredients of a successful recipe for an attractive proposal, a modern presence in the territory and for a new territorial marketing and communication model which is able to enhance the suburbs of Italian cities, smaller towns and more generally, small firms of the tourism and trade sectors.

Moreover, digital innovation and the rapid evolution of technology (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003) and the resulting change in the behaviours associated with them give small firms a unique opportunity to gain visibility, promote themselves and enter fully into a rich and growing market such as global tourism; this provided that they are able to understand the significance of the changes taking place and share

their expertise by connecting to each other in networks in order to develop and support new business strategies (Brondoni, 2009).

2. Consumer Experience and Experience District

The search for specificity and complementarity by the economic operators in the tourism and trade sector, together with the smartisation process of the territory, if properly and consciously activated, in the next few years will present new opportunities for development and work to both traditional enterprises that are in a recovery phase and innovative start-ups that offer new services.

Moreover, regarding demand, social networks are changing the dynamic of people's relationship systems, causing a change in approach models of the consumer (Robson et al., 2013), who is more competent, critical and has higher expectations, but also giving renewed value and relevance to interpersonal relationships, taking on a value of greater contiguity and confidence, especially with reference to the increased use of social platforms. This new value of 'personal' relationships gives a further opportunity to the traditional operator who, if allowed to gain mastery of these tools, is able to gain recognition and strengthen customer relationships very effectively, efficiently overseeing the own target market.

There are now plenty of examples of small firms which have strengthened their ability to entertain and involve consumers through intelligent use of digital technology. This gives new meaning to the 'customer experience' by taking advantage of a growing integration between physical space and digital environment, also making the positive appreciation of the experience last over time so that the consumer/tourist feels gratified by it and with a desire to repeat it.

This process triggers to the extent the firms or the network of local firms strive to understand what the real value for the customer is and strive to produce this value using all the detailed and complex information that the network-territory system captures through all physical and digital touch points, making this information available to the community and integrating it with advanced CRM, loyalty and targeted advertising systems.

As a result, today the focus should no longer be on identifying specific areas of intervention for the tourism and trade sectors. We can no longer talk about trade districts or highly-tourism oriented areas.

In order to find the key to the emotional involvement of consumers/tourists, we should devise 'Experience Districts' that express their potential through a sort of strong and well-organised contamination among trade, tourism and local operators.

Playing a prominent role in developing interaction between these elements is possible only by involving the local Authorities with all their tools for action and new town planning models (smarter and more micro), as well as real estate owners, who have often to cope with significant changes in the value of their assets without either being able or wanting to intervene directly in the planning or implementation of urban regeneration projects.

Territorial planning should be approached in such a way that enables decision makers to use not only town planning tools, but also typically commercial tools, for a detailed planning of the impact of each single activity on the urban environment.

The quality and characteristics of even a small set of commercial and tourism activities are key in determining the attractiveness of a portion of territory and consequently the local firms' capacity of generating wealth.

An area where firms make good profit is also one that is sought-after and valuable from a real estate point of view; this generates benefits to owners and creates the necessary conditions for sighting building renovation investments both of entire neighbourhoods and of individual buildings, thus achieving, finally, a sort of virtuous circle of urban improvement and investment opportunities.

Moreover, effective reframing of traditional firms operating in the tourism and trade sectors necessarily requires due consideration of the quality of urban environments, which should be given renewed attention through works aimed at the continuous improvement of infrastructure, cleaning, security and transport logistics, with utmost attention to detail. To this end, sharing of projects and financial involvement of real estate owners are essential.

Operators should contribute with renewed consumer/tourist reception capacity, by updating their systems and procedures in accordance with the new expectations of customers, who are increasingly international and demanding, and by using sharp, effective and targeted training models aimed at achieving clearly defined results.

Consumers are becoming increasingly sensitive and demanding, which requires tourism and trade sector professionals to take on behaviours that, in spite of their being often underestimated or taken for granted, are able to create optimal relations with the customer from the very first contact. An open and sincere smile at the right time is worth more than preparation that is technically flawless but applied with little enthusiasm and no emotional involvement.

It is also important to define new metrics for assessing the effectiveness of the whole firm-territory system, based on the level of service integration and the consumer/tourist's perception of the quality of the individual services, with reference also to economic performance (Franzoni, 2015). As obvious, this process also requires due consideration of the view expressed by consumers/tourists who increasingly use the reputational rating systems that the Web offers, and want to be involved and participate by sharing their comments and recommendations.

3. Conclusions

In general, the attractiveness of a territory and the business opportunities it can offer in terms of tourism and trade depend on a number of factors that relate to firms, operators, institutions with territorial jurisdiction, and real estate owners. The specifically oriented and accurate work of each individual player on their fields, arranged as the organic sharing of a larger town planning and urban regeneration project, can kick-start a process of effective implementation of their ability to play an important role in the market of many peripheral or 'minor' areas in Italy, which, though having significant monumentality, are still marginal in terms of tourism flows.

This would, among other things, allow a significant modernisation of firms. Arranged into a network system, the players involved would start an indispensable renewal of their management, relational and marketing models, probably triggering a territorial contamination/competition effect that would only lead to benefits for the entire economic system.

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