

Research Note

Asians' Perspectives in Motivation and Network Hospitality

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Abstract: The advanced technologies today have enabled the rise of network hospitality (NH) in the tourism and hospitality industry. It is an emerging trend in tourism because society today demands mobility, personalisation and is always seeking for new travel experiences. NH platforms such as Airbnb allow its users to connect with each other in an online and offline setting, sharing private and personal spaces with strangers. This trend is picking up fast in East Asia even though it was introduced in the West. To understand this phenomenon, it is important to know why people engage in this type of hospitality exchange. However, the existing literature of NH overlooked motivation especially Asians' motivation to participate in NH. By using a systematic review of literature on NH based on a five years' time interval, this paper aims to highlight the existing gaps of knowledge arriving from the notion of motivation in the context of East Asians and NH. This paper further suggests an analysis of the different components of motivation, perspectives and platforms.

Keywords: Network hospitality, sharing economy, motivation, tourist behaviour, Asian.

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Introduction

Network hospitality (NH) is defined as an online network that connects people through online and offline settings and the exchange of accommodation (Molz, 2011). It represents the contemporary social life in general because of its hybrid and "on the move" concept (Molz, 2011). Similar terms that describe this phenomenon are "sharing economy" and "collaborative consumption". The concept of sharing economy is built from the idea of "access to" instead of "ownership of" physical and human possessions such as skills and space (Botsman & Rogers, 2010).

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Collaborative consumption has a similar meaning, which is to get, to offer or to share access to goods and services by networking through an online community (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). It is expected to assist in reducing social issues such as hyper-consumption, pollution and poverty because it can lessen the cost of economic organisation within communities (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2015).

NH platforms can be divided into three types: free (Couchsurfing, BeWelcome, Global Freeloaders, and Hospitality Club), reciprocal (HomeExchange, Staydu, My Twin Place, and Home Link), and rental (Airbnb, HomeAway, and 9flats) (Voytenko, Mont, & Zvolaska, 2016). The most popular and established NH platforms are Airbnb and Couchsurfing (Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015).

Airbnb is a global online-based hospitality exchange and social networking platform where anyone can register to be a member and offer or find accommodation to rent. One can be a host or a guest. It involves monetary transactions and its prices depend on the area and type of accommodation offered. By using a systematic review of the past five years' literature on NH, this paper will highlight the gaps of knowledge of motivation in the context of East Asians. Airbnb will be used as an example of a NH platform to elaborate the phenomenon because of its success in Asia (Yeo, 2016).

Literature Review

Network Hospitality

NH is a growing phenomenon in the tourism and hospitality industry. Since NH experience is a highly individualised and personalised experience, the power lies between the host and guest to cater to their own preferences. This is an advantage of NH in the industry because it offers NH users personalisation, which means it values individuality. Not every traveller's wants and needs are the same. It is possible for this concept to be a niche in the tourism and hospitality industry (Stors & Kagermeier, 2015).

Overall, it is a fresh concept that combines two different major aspects. The synergy between tourism and technology offers a product that fits in perfectly in today's modern society. Today, people, objects and information are always "on the move" (Pellegrino, 2011). NH offers a relevant concept where tourism experience can be achieved while being always on the move. In fact, most of the NH platforms have their own versions of mobile applications. In this sense, it is a demand granted where users can easily enjoy NH experience anytime and anywhere in the world.

NH definitely challenges the way traditional tourism and hospitality works. Undoubtedly, technology impacts the way individuals travel today. The characteristics that NH possess, underline and suggest the future of the tourism and hospitality industry. Technology is heavily involved in modern society's daily life. It is almost impossible that the evolution of the tourism and hospitality industry will not depend on technology. In fact, technology is the key ingredient for this industry to advance.

By looking into the phenomenon of NH, there are many issues (motivation, trust, and impact) and aspects (host/guest perspectives and different platforms) that can be dissected to learn, to investigate, to gauge, to understand and to conclude what it takes to elevate the industry. The implication is that NH might possess the foundation to better the industry and researchers should give priority to this phenomenon.

Motivation is the core aspect to understanding human behaviour (Graham & Weiner, 1996). In this case, it is why individuals have chosen to participate in NH. Different aspects of NH such as behaviour, impact, and experience exist only because people have simply decided to engage in NH. As a matter of fact, motivation is claimed to be accountable for the reason people choose to do something, how willing and determined they are to pursue what they want (Dörnyei, 2001).

Motivation

It was suggested that the founder of Couchsurfing, Casey Fenton might have laid out the motivational factors of NH. Before Fenton travelled to Iceland, he sent emails to 1500 students, who were strangers to him to seek for accommodation. His motives were to reduce his travelling costs, especially accommodation and to try something new, particularly to travel with locals.

Stors and Kagermeier (2015) proposed that people who join the shared economy are explorer tourists seeking for authentic experiences of the unusual form of tourism. They studied motivation from guests' perspectives using Airbnb and Couchsurfing in Berlin. The main motivational factors found are: to save money, have direct contact with locals, get perspective of the inhabitants, meet new people and get insider tips from host. The guests' motivation varies from the hosts' motivation, but for both hosts and guests, the primary motivation is personal contact. Similarly, Finley (2013) found that Airbnb users are motivated by a practical theme (value for money and flexibility) and a non-practical theme (cultural experience).

It is important to realise that in the past five years, there have been limited studies on the motivational aspect of NH (Pietilä, 2011; Liedtke, 2011; Liu, 2012; Finley, 2013; Hamari et al., 2015; Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015; Kim, Yoon, & Zo, 2015; Stors & Kagermeier, 2015; Zaki, 2015; Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016). These studies can be further divided into different components such as information technology (Hamari et al., 2015) and behaviour (Pietilä, 2011; Liedtke, 2011; Liu, 2012; Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Stors & Kagermeier, 2015; Zaki, 2015), different perspectives such as host (Pietilä, 2011; Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015; Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016) and guest (Stors & Kagermeier, 2015) and different platforms such as Couchsurfing (Pietilä, 2011; Liedtke, 2011; Zaki, 2015; Stors & Kagermeier, 2015) and Airbnb (Finley, 2013; Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Stors & Kagermeier, 2015; Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016).

Under closer inspection, there are actually many gaps. Instead of generalising the motivation of NH users, researchers can look into specific components of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic motivations), different perspectives (host and guest) and different type of platforms (free, reciprocal and rental). There are different types of NH platforms because some involve monetary transactions, some do not and some involve reciprocity. For instance, Airbnb involves monetary transactions but Couchsurfing does not.

Another key point is that the task to study motivation in NH is undertaken by undergraduate students (Pietilä, 2011; Liedtke, 2011; Zaki, 2015). This shows that there is an initiation to contribute knowledge back to the notion of motivation. However, these studies are only published and listed in the university's website (Pietilä, 2011; Liedtke, 2011; Zaki, 2015). It is common knowledge that researchers build their studies based on references. When these studies do not draw enough citations, they will be neglected and left unexplored (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacè-Molinero, 2015).

At the same time, most of the existing literature is based on Western experiences. The point often overlooked here is the neglect of Asians' experiences (Chen, 2011). NH platforms envision themselves as a global community with diverse culture, constantly fostering cross-cultural interactions (Chen, 2011). However, the existing literature does not reflect this aspect at all. Asians' perspectives and experiences are often neglected, which does not align with the core value of NH.

Notably, there is one motivational study of NH that is not based on a Western perspective. Yang and Ahn (2016) found out that enjoyment and reputation are the motivational factors on South Koreans' positive behaviour towards Airbnb. Contrary to the findings of Hamari et al. (2015), it was found that sustainability and economic gains were not motivational factors in South Korea. This study indicates that there are differences between what motivates Western and Asian NH users. In other words, findings in the West may not be applicable in an Asian context.

The Growth of Asians in Network Hospitality

While it is well known that NH experiences were only introduced and commonly practiced in Western countries, it is surprising to find that Asians are beginning to participate in NH. In this context, Airbnb is used as an example to indicate the growth of East Asian participation in NH. Airbnb's website covers most of the East Asian countries. The concept of NH is even more fresh and original in Asia. At the same time, the consumption of NH experiences in Asian countries is showing remarkable growth (Beaton, 2010; Yeo, 2016). In fact, the growth was so rapid that Airbnb is considered as one of the driving forces for economic growth (Lee, 2015; Yeo, 2016; Yang & Ahn, 2016), and tourism (Lee, 2015; Yeo, 2016) to the extent that it was considered a disruptive innovator of the digital age to businesses (Faris, 2016; Tan, 2016).

The number of East Asian Airbnb users is increasing especially among South Koreans, Singaporeans and Malaysians. The South Korean government recently declared sharing economy as one of the new driving factors for industrial growth (Yang & Ahn, 2016). Under the hospitality segment, Airbnb was named as one of the main examples (Yang & Ahn, 2016). Before the declaration, sharing accommodation was actually prohibited in South Korea. The rapid growth of NH phenomenon has led Yang and Ahn (2016) to undertake the study of South Koreans' motivation towards sharing economy, particularly Airbnb.

Likewise, in Singapore, Airbnb has been recognised as one of the ways to promote and support Singapore as a tourism destination and to increase economic growth (Lee, 2015; Yeo, 2016). It was remarked that Airbnb offers cheaper options in accommodation which helped to grow the economy because guests generally spend more when they stay longer. Airbnb in Singapore is the second largest source of outbound and inbound travellers in Asia; Airbnb Japan takes the lead (Lee, 2015).

In Malaysia, the growth of Airbnb is rapid and successful to the extent it was named as a disruptive innovator of digital age to the businesses in Malaysia (Faris, 2016). Airbnb was reported to be affecting the hotel industry (Tan, 2016). It was named as one of the competitors of hotels in Penang (Tan, 2016). It is of no doubt that Airbnb has grown very rapidly in East Asian countries. This also emphasises Asians in NH is increasing.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of NH in Asia definitely requires researchers' attention. First, the existing literature on overall NH is limited. This phenomenon is an emerging trend and to understand why individuals participate in NH, motivation should be emphasised. Second, motivation studies in NH are lacking. According to Pearce (1996), tourists' motivation studies play an active and important role in the overall analysis of tourism. Despite motivation being one of the most researched topics in the field of tourism (Pearce & Lee, 2005), there is still a gap in the literature with regard to motivation in the context of NH. The components of motivation can be further divided into different parts of motivation, the perspectives of host/guest and the different NH platforms.

Third, despite the facts given to prove that NH is growing in East Asian countries, Asians' perspectives are neglected. Asians make up a significant portion of the market. Notably, Yang and Ahn (2016) did a study on South Koreans' motivation to engage in NH, particularly Airbnb. Overall, NH, motivation and Asians' perspectives are very limited. This shows that there is a lot of potential in terms of contributing knowledge back to the tourism and hospitality industry.

Future Research

It is suggested that future researchers could analyse different parts of motivation in NH. Motivation could be studied from the perspectives of host or guest and even based on different platforms such as Couchsurfing or Airbnb. Moreover, researchers could also do a segmentation of NH users such as the strongly proposed Asians' perspective. The world is diverse with culture and ethnicity. It can be further divided into gender (men and women), ethnicity (Western, Asian, Middle Eastern and African), or generation (Baby Boomers, X, Y and Z). It could also be interesting if future researchers analyse the differences of the suggested components.

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