

Collective Knowledge, Individual Experience, and Sharing Strangers' Homes: The Effects of Digital Technologies on Tourism Consumption

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effects of interactive digital media on the traditional tourism consumption cycle and proposes a new, original model that more accurately represents the ways in which travelers are now able to influence the diversification of tourism products.

The interactive elements of Web 2.0 technologies have enabled millennial travelers to act as co-producers of their own unique experiences rather than be limited by conventional tourism offerings. This paper traces the evolution of the shift from travelers as passive consumers to active “prosumers” of content, as well as the development of social media platforms that allowed this material to be distributed directly between peers. The paper then demonstrates the ways in which millennial travelers rely on user-generated content to aid in travel planning, and how they contribute collective travel knowledge by sharing their experiences via travel forums, social networking sites, and content communities. The degree to which these shared experiences differ from the portrayals of destination by marketers is used as a testament to the newfound power of the individual. It is proof that the conventional consumption cycle, controlled by marketers and represented by a hermeneutic circle, is outdated.

The author of this paper then proposes a new, expanded consumption model that takes into account the empowerment of travelers through interactive mobile technologies. This new relationship is represented by a spiral model that allows for the branching of experiences and the individualization of increasingly diverse tourism offerings. This model also reflects the inversion of the conventional consumer/producer power dynamic as destination marketers and managers find themselves in an increasingly responsive position. The validity of this model is demonstrated by the success of accommodation sharing, a recent phenomenon that embodies the tourism market's response to travelers' rejection of mass tourism.