Future of hospitality marketing and management research

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, research focus in hospitality marketing and management has been shifting from product development approach to understanding consumer product evaluation in the purchase decision and the factors that are likely to influence customers' decision making process. As the field experiences maturity and scientific sophistication, it is important for hospitality marketing and management researchers to fully understand the breadth and depth of existing knowledge, the stages of development the field have experienced in the past few decades and the future of hospitality marketing and management research. Therefore, this short opinion piece aims to provide a brief overview of development of the hospitality marketing and management research throughout the last few decades and then discuss some of the topics that might be examined/studied by hospitality marketing and management researchers in the near future.

1. Introduction

As the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management and an active researcher in the field, I have experienced and observed the evolution of hospitality marketing and management research closely. Especially, handling the research submissions for publication consideration as an Editor-in-Chief enabled me to observe the changes in the field at a detailed level unmatched by other venues. There is no doubt that the hospitality marketing and management research has evolved over the years. During the early years, much of the research in hospitality marketing and management research were atheoretical and very descriptive. Over the years, it has evolved into research that is based on strong theory and sound methodology with critical theoretical and practical implications.

As the field of hospitality marketing and management experiences maturity and scientific sophistication, it is important that we as hospitality marketing and management researchers fully understand the breadth and depth of existing knowledge, the stages of development we have experienced in the past few decades and the future of hospitality marketing and management research. Therefore, this short opinion piece aims to provide a brief overview of development of the hospitality marketing and management research throughout the last few decades and then discuss some of the topics that might be examined/studied by hospitality marketing and management researchers in the near future.

2. Development of hospitality marketing and management research over the years

Most of the studies that were published in academic journals between 1960ies to 1980ies were mainly focused on tourism issues such as destination feasibility, development, planning, impacts, marketing and management. Only a very small number of studies on hospitality marketing and management were available in those academic journals. However, over the past several decades, the field of hospitality marketing and management has witnessed a tremendous growth in the number of academic publications and the amount of information that has been generated in different aspects of hospitality marketing and management.

During 1980ies, hospitality scholars have started examining quality of service and quality management. In 1990ies, a knowledge based foundation in hospitality marketing and management has started to emerge even though most studies were exploratory. During this decade, hospitality researchers started focusing on variety of hospitality marketing and management issues such hospitality services management and marketing, segmentation, advertising and promotion, technology, relationship marketing, sustainable development and growth. Also, during this decade, hospitality marketing and management studies utilizing interpretive and qualitative approaches have started to emerge.

The beginning of the new millennium has brought the development of a stronger knowledge based research foundation. Research attention has started shifting from product development approach to

understanding consumer product evaluation in the purchase decision and the factors that can influence customers' decision making process. During this era, number of studies that focus on understanding customers' attitudes, and the antecedents and outcomes of those attitudes has seen a significant growth. The way researchers view hospitality products has also changed during this era; from a product oriented view to viewing it as a series of experiences, covering the entire amalgam of all aspects and components of an experience encounter, including attitudes and expectations. Since the production, delivery, consumption and evaluation of experiences differ from those of other products, researchers have started examining marketing strategies utilized by hospitality businesses to communicate with hospitality consumers and the decision making strategies used by hospitality consumers. During this era, a large portion of the studies focused on understanding hospitality customers' decision making process and on strategies that can manipulate the process. During this era, hospitality human resources issues have also started receiving an increasing attention from hospitality scholars.

Rather than focusing on what question, hospitality marketing and management researchers have started conducting studies to understand the why question in studying both customer and employee behaviors. This led to a significant increase in the number of studies that propose and test various models of consumer and employee behaviors and their influence on hospitality companies' performance and competitiveness in a very competitive marketplace. Furthermore, technology has started receiving a rapidly increasing attention in both hospitality marketing and management areas. The number of studies that examine sustainability, green consumption, local and regional hospitality marketing and management issues, relationship marketing, loyalty, satisfaction, etc. has also continue to increase. During this era, hospitality marketing and management researchers has also started utilizing more complex and specialized methodologies and research approaches. We have also started seeing an increase in the studies that utilize experimental approaches.

3. Future of hospitality marketing and management research

As stated earlier, research attention has started shifting from product development approach to understanding consumer product evaluation in the purchase decision and the factors that are likely to influence customers' decision making process. Consumer decision making process and the factors that are likely to influence their decisions has been one of the most popular research topics published in the field as evidenced by the number of papers published on these topics in the Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management (i.e., Bogicevic, Bujisic, Choi, Smith, & Li, 2017; Lu & Gursoy, 2017; Shin, Im, Jung, & Severt, 2017). This is still an important research area and efforts to understand consumer decision making process and the factors that are likely to influence customers' decision making process would continue to contribute greatly. Since current and emerging technological and sociocultural trends are having significant impact on consumer decision making process, it is important for hospitality marketing and management researchers to identify current and emerging trends that are especially relevant to both hospitality consumers and managers. In the past, a large portion of hospitality researchers' efforts have focused on satisfaction, motivation and loyalty behaviors. While those are still important research topics, future research efforts should focus on identifying the impacts of emerging technological and sociocultural trends on satisfaction, motivation and loyalty behaviors, the antecedents and outcomes, and the causal relationships, probably utilizing experimental studies. Furthermore, researchers should pay more attention to innovation and niche hospitality behaviors using well established theories since the consumers markets continues to be further fragmented into smaller, more specialized segments.

The increasing use of Internet and technology among hospitality consumers and hospitality organizations has provided several research avenues for researchers and scholars as reflected by the articles published on this topic (i.e., Hahn, Sparks, Wilkins, & Jin, 2017; Israeli, Lee, & Karpinski, 2017). This trend is clearly evident in the articles that received the most citations in the Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management (i.e., Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009; O'Connor, 2010). This trend will definitely continue in the future. However, research focus is likely to shift. While current studies mainly focus on consumers' participation in social media and online communities, most of which are based in friendships or shared affinities, we will need to examine consumers' participation and utilization of peer-to-peer evaluations sites that are not based on based in friendships or shared affinities. Recent studies published in the Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management clearly support this trend (i.e., Calheiros, Moro, & Rita, 2017) Furthermore, mobile use will continue to receive more attention from researchers considering the fact that mobile devices provide fast and reliable access and the new generation of hospitality consumers tend to rely on mobile devices for their everyday activities more than other devices. With the increasing reliance on online resources and mobile devices, we are also likely to see more research on consumer data protection, privacy and trust issues because of increasingly frequent data breaches reported in the media.

We will also see more research into the "sharing economy." There is no question that sharing economy services such as Airbnb, uber, etc., have disrupted the hospitality industry by offering alternative collaborative consumption opportunities to hospitality consumers who are tired of traditional offerings of the hospitality industry. With the rapid development in mobile technology and consumers' increasing willingness to participate in collaborative consumption opportunities offered by the sharing economy, we are likely to see emergence of a wide variety of sharing economy products, which warrants more research in the area.

Since the hospitality industry is seen as an industry that offers unique fully integrated experiences that are constructed using goods and/or services as enablers of the experience (Yoon & Lee, 2017), we will definitely see more research in this area. Recent trends and changes in consumers' needs and wants from hospitality operators will lead hospitality marketing and management researchers to conduct more studies to better understand customer needs, both cognitive and affective, with respect to experiences, and use these insights to define/develop "experience specifications" for integrated hospitality experience development.

While the number of hospitality consumers who utilize online channels for purchasing hospitality products continues to increase (Park, Ha, & Park, 2017), studies that attempt to bridge the online and offline channels in marketing and distribution of hospitality products will emerge. While both researchers and industry continue to struggle with integration of online channels with traditional channels into a new integrated medium in ways that indisputably create value (Del Chiappa, Alarcón-Del-Amo, & Lorenzo-Romero, 2016), rapidly emerging trend of some consumers slowing their reliance on online channels presets new opportunities in the integration of online channels with traditional channels. Therefore, the crossover between the online and offline worlds will receive more attention from researchers. In other words, the omnichannelworlds in which consumers search for products, interact with brands, share information and experiences, and buy products are likely to be important research topics in order to understand the omnichannelworlds more thoroughly and deeply.

Sustainability and social responsibility have been receiving significant attention from hospitality marketing and management researchers as evidenced by the number of papers published on these topics (i.e., Xu, Xiao, & Gursoy, 2017). This trend will continue in the future. We will see studies that examine direct and indirect effects of hospitality experience offerings, purchase and usage of those experiential offerings with respect to environmental and social issues. In addition, we will also see more studies on waste management since the industry generates large volumes of waste, water and energy

consumption, and on preservation in hospitality operations and the impact on hospitality offerings on global warming.

Hospitality industry collects a large some of data from its consumers. Whenever consumers utilize hospitality products, they willingly provide a significant amount of personal data to hospitality service providers. In addition, a large portion of the hospitality consumers share their experiences in social media and peer-to-peer evaluations sites. Analyzing the data provided by consumers to hospitality operations, and understanding how to collect and synthesize online, user-generated information will continue receiving significant attention from hospitality researchers in the form of big data analysis. We will also start seeing studies that examine possible uses of artificial intelligence in big data management and analysis as the artificial intelligence technology continues to improve. Furthermore, exploring the effects of widespread adoption and use of social media on users' hospitality experiences in an effort to identify emerging consumer needs and wants will be critical research topics in the future.

Human resource management is a central component of any hospitality business (Boğan & Dedeoğlu, 2017). Studies in hospitality area have discussed the implications of different human resources strategies on different kinds of employees in various type of hospitality companies and geographical regions (i.e., Kim, Poulston, & Sankaran, 2017). They further examined employee skills necessary and behaviors needed to provide a satisfactory customer experience (Rahimi, 2017). Studies also examined employee satisfaction, loyalty, and turnover intentions and the factors that are likely to influence them (i.e., Kim, Knutson, & Choi, 2016). Studies also attempted to examine the link between human resources practices and performance (i.e., Kim, Gazzoli, Qu, & Kim, 2016). Although human resources practices still garner significant research attention, we will see more research on the "humans" in human resources management and how human resources practices can influence customer satisfaction, loyalty and financial performance. We need more studies on specific mediating and moderating mechanism through which human resources practices impact both employee and customer satisfaction and loyalty and therefore, company performance.

Hospitality industry is a very labor intensive industry. Labor cost constitute a large portion of operating cost for hospitality companies. In order to lower the labor cost, many hospitality companies have started exploring possibility of utilization of robotics and artificial intelligence in their operations. Hospitality industry presents significant and natural robotics and artificial intelligence opportunities due to the complexity of its operation, complexity of data and intensity of labor required to deliver a satisfactory customer experience. Hospitality researchers have already started examining the opportunity presented by robotics and artificial intelligence. We will see significantly more research focusing on both companies adoption and consumers acceptance of robotics and artificial intelligence in hospitality industry.

Over the several decades, thousands of studies on hospitality marketing and management have been published in academic journals. However, most of the studies utilized single cross-sectional data sets to test their hypothesis and proposed models. Since utilization of a single cross-sectional data does not allow for validation testing, most studies published failed to provide any validation of their results. In the future, top journals in the field are like to require researchers to utilize multiple data sets or longitudinal data in their studies in order to improve the validity and reliability of findings reported.

Furthermore, we are likely to see studies that utilize mixed and/or multiple methodological approaches. For example, an empirical analysis of a cross-sectional data set collected from real consumers might identify a particular effect of interest and establish its relevance. This might be followed by experiments that try to pinpoint causal mechanisms. Utilization of multiple types of approaches will definitely improve the validity and reliability of findings. It will also help overcome shortcomings of studies where researchers find evidence for the existence of a particular effect by analyzing empirical consumer data but may not understand why it occurs, or vice versa, that is, where

researchers may understand why a particular effect occurs through experimental studies but may not know whether it occurs in the real world. Since utilization of mixed and/or multiple methodological approaches can generate reliable and valid results that are relevant for the hospitality industry, we are likely to see more of these types of studies in the future.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this short opinion piece was to provide an insight into some of the topics that might be examined/studied by hospitality marketing and management researchers in the near future. My hope is that this opinion piece can provide guidance to PhD students and junior academics who plan to conduct research in the field of hospitality marketing and management. I hope that the key research trends in the hospitality marketing and management area identified and briefly discussed here can assist hospitality and tourism researchers' future research endeavors. Many challenges certainly lie ahead for hospitality marketing and management researchers, but the application of the wide range of theoretical frameworks and methods, collaborations with likeminded colleagues and mutually beneficial strong relationships with hospitality practitioners can help create an exciting future for the hospitality marketing and management research.

While the number of studies focusing on hospitality and marketing management published in academic journals has been increasing rapidly, hospitality scholars have been constantly criticized for lagging behind practice or addressing issues that are not of immediate relevance to practice. It is important for hospitality researchers to take active steps to work with practitioners in the areas that are important to both theory and practice. This approach may correct the asynchrony between academia and practice that has been consistently voiced by the industry.

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