The consumer journey in the digital age: the challenges faced by destination and place marketing agencies

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Abstract: This conceptual paper evolved from an extensive literature review and a consultancy project conducted via a UK University Business School/commercial sector collaboration. The paper explores how the digital age is presenting challenges for destination and place marketing agencies. Key trends in consumer behaviour are identified and their significance is examined.

The context is largely the European tourism sector with a particular focus on the UK. The paper argues that many place and destination marketing agencies are not responding to the challenges of the digital era. With this as the backdrop, a novel conceptualisation of the customer journey model is offered which can be tested empirically. A vignette supports the model and this illustrates the complexities in consumer behaviour that are involved in a decision over where to take a city break. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for destination and place marketing agencies.

Keywords: destination marketing; place marketing; consumer journey model; consumer behaviour; digital; internet; social media.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Scott, P., Scott, T., Stokes, P., Moore, N., Smith, S.M., Rowland, C. and Ward, T. (2017) 'The consumer journey in the digital age: the challenges faced by destination and place marketing agencies', *Int. J. Digital Culture and Electronic Tourism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp.28–45.

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This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled 'Reconceptualising the consumer journey in the digital age – an exploratory study of the United Kingdom retail sector' presented at the '8th Annual Conference of the EuroMed Academy of Business', Verona, Italy, 16–18 September 2015.

1 Introduction

This paper is conceptual in nature. Fundamental changes in the business environment are occurring as a result of the rise of digital culture. Destination and place marketing agencies exist to promote destinations and places to tourists and others (e.g. prospective residents and investors). The changes in the business environment require a response from those agencies whose role it is to promote destinations and places. The purpose of the paper is to highlight changing patterns of consumer behaviour and the ways that these impact on the customer journey in travel and tourism. To assist a better understanding of the 'customer journey' a new model is proposed which can be subjected to empirical testing.

2 Place marketing, destination marketing and destination management

Before beginning to discuss the challenges that the digital era has brought to the agencies in question it is necessary to offer some definition of the terms. Quinn (2013) provides a clarification of the similar (but slightly different) meaning of place marketing and destination marketing.

> Place marketing is the business of setting a particular place apart from others; of creating an image for a place such that it appears more attractive to a wide array of inward flows of capital, revenue, skills, human capital, tourists and so on. Destination marketing has a similar meaning, except that it is more specifically oriented towards attracting tourists and developing tourism activity. (Quinn, 2013, p.85)

The agencies that engage in destination or place marketing (or management) are known as destination marketing or destination management organisations (Middleton et al., 2009; Morrison, 2013; Pike, 2012). Although it is not always clear which specific designation is being referred to, both these designations are accorded the acronym DMO. This acronym will be used throughout the rest of the paper.

3 From a lecture to a conversation

The changes that have taken place within the digital arena have had a profound effect on the practice of marketing (West et al., 2015). Technology has changed the balance of power between organisations and their consumers. In the past, marketers broadcast the promotional messages that they wanted to convey about their brands to largely passive consumers but digital channels have enabled consumers to respond and to express their opinions to a wide audience (Munro and Richards, 2011). In many cases this has led to a paradigm shift in the relationship between brands and their consumers and the marketing process has now moved away from being something that formerly resembled a broadcast lecture to a new scenario that is more akin to a conversation. Inevitably this involves some loss of control from the marketer's perspective.

4 Distinctive characteristics of the marketing of places

The radical change in the relationship between consumers and their brands is of particular significance to those marketers whose function it is to market places or destinations.

Those engaged in the marketing and branding of places have always had to confront distinct issues that do not feature in most other spheres of marketing activity. As Anholt (2009, p.4) has acutely observed, 'In place branding one is promoting something that isn't for sale'. Destination marketing organisations do not normally 'own' their product either and there are therefore distinct limits on that organisation's ability to control its product and especially the quality of its product. While this has always been the case, destination marketing organisations formerly held a much more dominant position than they do today because they had control of some of the principal sources of information about a place through printed visitor guides, brochures, tourism information centres and their own websites.

To complicate matters further, Fortezza and Pencarelli (2015) observe that DMOs have to address a complication that is not a factor for most other organisations in that they need to integrate their communications messages with the promotional messages that are generated by a whole host of private and public organisations who are promoting their assets within the destination. Furthermore the aggregate value of the promotional expenditure made by private sector organisations within a destination (hotels, restaurants, attractions, etc.) is likely to exceed considerably the local DMO's promotional budget (Middleton et al., 2009). The coordination of marketing messages is therefore a key aspect of the role of a DMO and if it is not achieved well-mixed and confused messages may be generated. DMOs need to operate successfully within business networks (Trequattrini et al., 2012) if they are to survive and prosper.

5 Digital advertising

DMOs exist to promote destinations and the nature of promotion is changing rapidly. Advertising is a key form of promotion and a dramatic shift in favour of digital advertising is taking place across the world. *eMarketer* (2015) forecast that in 2015 the UK would become the first country in the world where digital advertising expenditure would equate to 50% of total spending on advertising. Much of this digital advertising can be attributed to the UK's rapid adoption of mobile device (e.g. smartphones and tablets) advertising which was expected to increase by 45% in 2015 to comprise 20.1% of total media spending. Total expenditure on advertising in the UK in 2015 was forecast to exceed £16.26 billion. In second and third place digital marketing expenditure in Norway and China (excluding Hong Kong) was expected to be 45% and 43.6%, respectively, of total advertising expenditure. Comparable figures for other leading countries were Australia (43.3%), the USA (31.3%), Sweden (30.5%), Germany (24.1%), France (21.3%), Spain (20.3%) and Italy (18%). The global average figure was anticipated to be 29.6% (emarketer.com). Thus, digital advertising clearly represents the strongly emergent direction of travel for advertising and promotional activity.

6 Information sources and destination marketing

As alluded to above, one of most fundamental changes that all marketers have experienced in recent times has resulted from the growth in *digital channels*. This has had a profound effect on customer behaviour because it has generated the creation of online platforms such as social media that enable consumers to voice their opinions publicly. This has caused a large-scale change in the power relationship between brands and their consumers by enabling consumers to have much more influence over the way that the brand is presented in the media (Munro and Richards, 2011; Yeoman and

McMahon-Beattie, 2011). Indeed, the recommendations of friends are frequently cited as being the most influential determining factor in holiday decisions and online recommendations form a large part of these influences (Munro and Richards, 2011). A quarter of UK consumers (25%) are most influenced by their peers when making their holiday destination choice and this figure increases to 31% among those who take three or more holidays per year (Mintel, 2016). In the opinion of Munro and Richards (2011), User-Generated Content (UGC) has attained such importance because people trust their perceived peers considerably more than they trust corporate promotion. The influence of UGC over brands is such that it is now seen as one of the most, if not the most important influence over brand development and especially so when it is combined with social media (Melanthiou et al., 2015). It is now the expressed views of visitors, residents and investors that together shape the reputation of a place or destination and the best hope that a DMO may have is to have some influence over the conversation. In the past, prior to the growth in social media, a DMO could largely broadcast whatever messages it wished about a place although it ran the risk of disenchanting its target market if the message was inaccurate or incorrect. However, times have changed and an increasing distrust of corporate messages has now been apparent for some years (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2011). Success in building destination brands now requires a collaborative mindset which enables the collective power of UGC, the viewpoints of stakeholders and the communications efforts of associated brands to be harnessed and marshalled to produce synergistic messages that positively benefit the destination (Munro and Richards, 2011; Oliveira, 2013). In summary, Fortezza and Pencarelli (2015) note that while there is an ample and growing body of literature that describes how Web 2.0, which they describe as 'the web for sharing and conversation' (Fortezza and Pencarelli, 2015, p.563), is impacting upon marketing in general, this is a neglected area with regard to DMOs.

Profound changes in consumer behaviour have occurred due to the advent of what has been termed online 'participatory culture' (Ashman et al., 2015, p.127) and these changes require a commensurate response from marketers. Participatory culture has emerged as a result of the threshold to participation having been lowered so that it is now extremely easy to express a view or opinion online and to contribute knowledge across the internet generally and particular over social media. Virtually everything is available and virtually everything can be commented upon, often under a cloak of anonymity. This can be said to have led to somewhat of a democratisation of culture which has occurred organically and not as a result of public policy interventions. In tandem with this democratisation of culture, power has shifted away from organisations in favour of consumers. Faced with this dynamic, organisations (and destinations) are presented to the public across three different types of digital media. These are *owned media*, *earned media* and *bought media*. Owned media is the organisation's own website and its communication with its existing consumers. Bought media includes any type of digital media that has been purchased from others such as digital advertisement. Earned media is concerned with engagement and conversation and it relates to what people are saying online about the brand, the organisation or the destination either on the organisation's website or beyond it (Munro and Richards, 2011). UGC on social media relating to the brand, the organisation or the destination is a very important constituent of earned media.

An extensive survey of 'Preferences of Europeans Towards Tourism' was conducted by the European Commission (2014) which included over 31,000 respondents from the 28 European Union Member States plus Croatia, Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Norway, Serbia and Israel. Recommendations of friends, colleagues or relatives were found to be the most important source of information when making travel plan decisions with 56% of respondents citing this as their most important information source. In second place came internet websites at 46%. Personal experience was in third place with 33%. Travel agencies/tourism offices came next with 19%. Free catalogues and brochures were cited by 11% of respondents as being their most important source of information. Newspaper, radio or TV was cited by 8% of respondents. Paid for guidebooks and magazines were next with 7% and social media sites were cited by 7% of respondents. The results were compared with a similar previous study which had been conducted by the European Commission a year earlier in 2013 and the results were found to be very similar with no information sources recording a difference of more than one or two percentage points. However, considerable differences were reported between different countries in the survey. For instance, internet websites were recorded as the most important source of information by 59% of Swedish respondents, by 53% of Austrian respondents, 50% of Italian respondents, 49% of UK respondents but by only 34% of Portuguese respondents. Travel agencies and tourist organisations were cited by 27% of Austrian respondents, 24% of Italian respondents, 19% of Portuguese respondents, 17% of UK respondents but by only 12% of the Swedish sample. The influence of social media as a source of information to assist travel decisions was not perceived to be very high in any country but in Sweden 14% of respondents cited social media sites as being their most important information source. This was the highest reported figure for social media sites in the survey. Comparative figures for other countries were Portugal (9%), Austria (10%), the UK (9%) and Italy (5%). This survey (European Commission, 2013) was large in scale and it covered a substantial number of countries. Inevitably even though there were over 30,000 participants in the survey, the survey extended over 35 countries sample sizes in individual countries that were relatively small. Furthermore, as digital technology is advancing so quickly the relative importance of the information sources is likely to be prone to change since the survey was conducted in January 2014. According to Tesseras (2015), at the planning stage 68% of UK holidaymakers research their trips online and 65% go on to make a holiday booking online. The former is a rather higher figure than that recorded by the European Commission in 2014. The discrepancy in the figures could be due to changes over time or it might reflect methodological differences in data collection.

Internet websites were found to be the second most important source of information to inform travel decisions in the European Commission Survey (2014) and they are clearly an important element in the DMO promotional armoury. Despite this, Vanderleeuw and Sides (2014) found that most of the city websites of 345 Texan cities failed to promote any particular strategic goal and that opportunities were being missed to build the brands of the cities in question. According to Munro and Richards (2011), awareness of DMO websites and their utilisation is lower than for comparative commercial websites. This suggests that promotional opportunities may be being missed. Moreover, Jacobsen and Munar (2012) found that their sample of Scandinavian tourist visitors to Mallorca appeared to attach a low level of importance to DMO websites as providers of information about holiday destinations but this was also the case with regard to social media sites in this study. The low level of importance of social media in this study may reflect the survey date or it may reflect differences between the relative reliance on social media as an information source in Norway and Denmark when compared to Sweden. Nevertheless, according to Oliveira and Panyik (2015), Visit

Sweden and Tourism Australia are exemplars of good practice in using social media to promote tourism. Tourism Australia has been particularly successful with Facebook and Visit Sweden has enjoyed similar success with Twitter (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015). Oliveira and Panyik (2015) believe that to embrace the digital challenge DMOs should not just digitalise their existing promotional material and instead they should look towards building branding strategy through online co-creation with travellers and tourists. On a wider canvas, Roque and Raposo (2016) analysed the social media activity undertaken by 13 national tourism organisations from around the world. These were Australia, Austria, Brazil, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malaysia, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and the UK. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were the social media that these NTOs used the most to communicate with their target markets and among these Facebook had the most followers. In vindication of Oliveira and Panyik's (2015) findings the Australian NTO (Tourism Australia) was identified as being particularly successful in engaging with its publics via social media. Thus, while digital and social media is prevalent and clearly in the ascendant in many domains it is clear that the contemporary overall picture remains patchy.

Among the various digital options, Twitter is one of the most popular social networking services and Sevin (2013) analysed how Twitter was used to promote destination marketing projects associated with Illinois, San Francisco, Idaho, Texas and Milwaukee. The study examined both one-way and two-way communication. Sevin (2013) links his work to that of Kavaratzis (2004) on place image communication. Sevin (2013) found that the majority (64%) of tweets from the DMOs in his study did not attempt to engage in an online conversation; they merely broadcast information. Kavaratzis argued that there are three different forms of communication that can build the image of a place. These are *Primary*, *Secondary* and *Tertiary* communication. Primary communication is not primarily designed to communicate. Instead it relates to communication via the actions that a destination takes with respect to urban design, regeneration and public art, etc., to infrastructure development, to the effectiveness of the local municipality and to the role that the municipality adopts in encouraging cultural or sporting events. Secondary communication is the active, formal communication that the destination engages in and tertiary communication is word of mouth, i.e. communication about the destination by third parties. Twitter can embrace both secondary and tertiary communication but by their largely broadcast activity on Twitter the DMOs in question did not exploit all the opportunities that were available to them via Twitter. Sevin (2013) found that the places within his study limited themselves to the broadcast of information which constitutes secondary communication and thus they were not exploiting the wider audience that could be engaged through the online conversations that Kavaratzis (2004) terms tertiary communication. An analysis of Stockholm as a place brand was conducted using Twitter when Andéhn et al. (2014) analysed all tweets written in English and containing the word 'Stockholm' that were placed on Twitter over a three-month period in 2013. There were 33,692 tweets in the sample. It was found that events that were taking place in Stockholm such as music concerts figured very prominently in tweets but only for relatively brief periods. This was an interesting discovery because many destinations are using events to popularise and promote the destination. Although particular events in specific places may feature very prominently, if only briefly in temporal terms, in Twitter activity relating to that place, the contribution that cumulative events make to the branding of the place may have a more lasting effect on the perceptions of potential visitors. Andéhn et al. (2014) advocate that those engaged in place branding should engage with UGC in order to co-create the destination brand.

Innovation is clearly a key aspect of the digital development of information sources. A good example of innovation in the travel and tourism industry using social media is provided by Hudson and Thal (2013). The geo-location site *Foursquare* invites consumers to 'check-in' their location and when they do this they are rewarded with discounts or vouchers. The Dutch airline *KLM* used *Foursquare* to good effect in rewarding their passengers with random acts of kindness. When the passengers checked in at *KLM's Foursquare* locations the airline accessed these passengers' social media accounts (LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter) to discover details about their lifestyles. Using this information they were then able to dispatch a team of people to buy personalised gifts for the passengers which were then given to them as a surprise present to reward them for travelling with KLM. Buying presents for their passengers may have required some financial commitment from KLM but it is likely that the goodwill that they generated among their passengers would have been disseminated by those passengers to a much wider audience not least through social media and this would have resulted in invaluable free publicity for the airline. Hudson and Thal (2013) cite VisitBritain, Disney, Virgin and KLM as organisations that are using social media to good effect but they contend that the majority of tourism organisations are not engaging with their target markets effectively via social media.

The analysis of UGC offers a rich resource to inform destination branding, positioning and marketing strategy. Marine-Roig and Clave (2015) have demonstrated how the big data analysis of over 100,000 travel blogs and online travel reviews written by tourists in English about Barcelona over a ten-year period can provide valuable insights into visitors' perceptions of the destination which can be used to enhance the visitor experience and to provide a platform for future strategy development. Költringer and Dickinger (2015) adopted a data mining approach to analyse three separate online information sources which related to Vienna as a city break destination. The three sources were promotional material from DMO websites, UGC and editorial content from Anglo-American news media. Költringer and Dickinger (2015) found that UGC was the most diverse and rich repository of online information about Vienna. Given the large number of individual online publishers this was not a surprising finding. There was some crossover between the dominant themes that featured across the three information sources. For instance information about sights and attractions was the most common theme across all three information sources but there were also substantial differences with regard to other aspects of the coverage between the three information sources. UGC contained more reference to transport and accommodation than the other sources; DMO content was weighted towards the City's major sites and cultural offerings and the news media sites concentrated on themes with an international appeal. The value of research such as this lies in its ability to reveal gaps between destination branding activity and the actual perceptions of visitors. If careful attention is paid to the analysis of UGC it should be possible to better target the actual needs of visitors and to develop a more informed marketing strategy. Moreover, longitudinal monitoring of changes in visitor sentiment could assist in measuring the effectiveness of destination branding activity over time.

In summary, in the light of the commentaries assembled above, it can be seen that it is very much a transition and building phase for digital media. An indication of the distance to travel is underlined by a recent report (Mintel, 2016) into the UK holiday industry which found that only 5% said that television and print advertising has the most influence over their holiday destination choice but even fewer (4%) reported that they were most influenced by social media. While this suggests that television and print advertising still has a small but influential role to play, these media are very expensive when compared to social media and return on investment can be difficult to measure with traditional media. Furthermore social media can be targeted more precisely and the results can be monitored more closely. The European Commission report (2014) suggests that social media plays a rather more important role as an information source for UK citizens when making travel plan decisions. The Mintel report into the UK holiday industry (Mintel, 2016) found that less than 3% of people booked their last holiday using a smartphone but 27% of people reported that they would be equally happy to book a holiday using a smartphone as they would be to use a desktop, laptop or tablet computer. However, around 40% of Millennials (16 to 35 year olds – the generation born in the era of the internet) would be equally prepared to use a smartphone to book a holiday. A further Mintel report on the customer journey in travel (Mintel, 2015b) found that around 80% of UK holidaymakers own a smartphone and that 93% of those whose last holiday was a short European break are smartphone owners. Despite this it appears that only around 7% of holidaymakers book their trip using a mobile phone. As mobile phones now account for half of all online commerce the travel sector is lagging behind other sectors in this respect. It may be that the relatively high price of holidays compared with other online purchases deters people from making a booking via a smartphone (Tesseras, 2015).

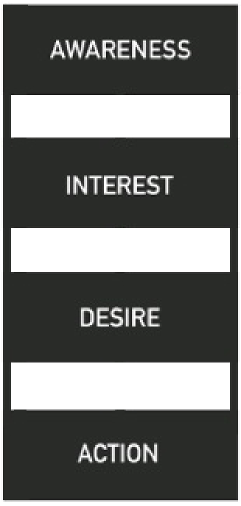
7 To place brand or not to place brand?

Several authors (e.g. Munro and Richards, 2011; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2011; Andéhn et al., 2014) have chronicled the loss of marketing control that DMOs face with the proliferation of online information sources about destinations. Could this mean that it is no longer a worthwhile activity to engage in place branding? An interesting Oxford-style debate was conducted at the American Marketing Association's Summer Marketing Educators' conference in 2014 (Medway et al., 2014). The title of the session was 'Place branding: Are we wasting our time?' and two opposing teams each with two members debated the issue. The outcome was a vote in favour of the team opposing the motion. That is the audience voted in favour of place branding. As Medway et al. (2014) point out this was not a particularly surprising result given that the audience comprised delegates at a major academic conference which was dedicated to the subject area of marketing. Although the vote went in favour of place branding, deficiencies in current practice were noted and there was apparent consensus that those engaged in place marketing should avoid imposing a brand upon a place and should instead engage more effectively with their stakeholders in order to co-create place brands (Medway et al., 2014).

8 Textbook theory – *statuo quo* and transformation

Clearly, in the light of evolutions and changes outlined above, digital media is acquiring ever greater significance internationally; however, many influential marketing textbooks are not keeping pace with developments in praxis. A number of well-respected undergraduate textbooks expound a broadly similar model which is referred to variously as the 'buyer decision process', the consumer decision-making process, 'the simple buying model', the 'consumer proposition acquisition process' or the 'sales or conversion funnel model'. Examples of these constructs can be found in, for example, Bains et al.'s (2011) *Marketing*, McNeil et al.'s (2011) *Introduction to Marketing*, Kotler et al.'s (2012) *Principles of Marketing*, Fahy and Jobber's (2012) *Foundations of Marketing*, Jobber and Ellis-Chadwick's (2013) *Principles and Practice of Marketing* and Charlesworth's (2015) *Digital Marketing*. All these texts include models which have an essentially linear form but one that is sometimes presented vertically, sometimes horizontally or, on occasions, it may also be depicted as a step-by-step process (see Figure 1). The various stages in the models are described as, for example, 'need recognition', 'information search', 'evaluation of alternatives' and 'purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour'.

Figure 1 The traditional buyer decision-making model



The model is sometimes depicted as a funnel (e.g. Charlesworth, 2015) since progressively fewer consumers who are made aware of a product or service become genuinely interested in it, less desire it and even fewer make a purchase decision. In Charlesworth's (2015) view the classic sales or conversion funnel model and its variants all derive from the AIDA concept (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action). The AIDA model emerged as long ago as the 1890s but it was introduced to a wider public with the publication of Strong's book '*The Psychology of Selling*' in 1925 (Charlesworth, 2015). In the digital age it may be appropriate to query the currency of a model of such vintage (Scott et al., 2015). More profoundly, it is valuable to signal that such models are rooted in modernistic assumptions and principles. Modernism has been recognised as a dominant paradigm in 20th-century thought and philosophy which has imbued many areas of life including organisation and management (Cummings, 2002; Stokes, 2016a). Modernism reifies scientific approaches to the creation of knowledge which embrace numerical measurement, causality (i.e. cause-and-effect/input–output linear schema), representation (the breaking down of processual patterns into boxes and stages), and linearity (one step neatly follows on from the preceding one). These traits and characteristics can be readily recognised in the extant models of the buyer decision process (as illustrated in Figure 1). Modernism-informed commentaries contrast substantially with, for example, more critically informed commentaries (Alvesson et al., 2009; Stokes, 2016b). Critical approaches surface and investigate, for instance, behavioural and processual dynamics around issues of discourse, identity and power. Importantly, in relation to understandings of buyer behaviour and digital environments and interconnectivity, in contrast to modernistic renderings, critical representations point up what may be termed a more rhizomatic understanding of market environments. Rhizomes mean, and point at, the multiple complex and multifaceted neural like interconnections that exist in a digital market and context. Rather than interactions taking place in a linear manner, in the contemporary context, they are more likely to take place rhizomatically. This gives rise to phenomenon such as digital Darwinism which is now explored.

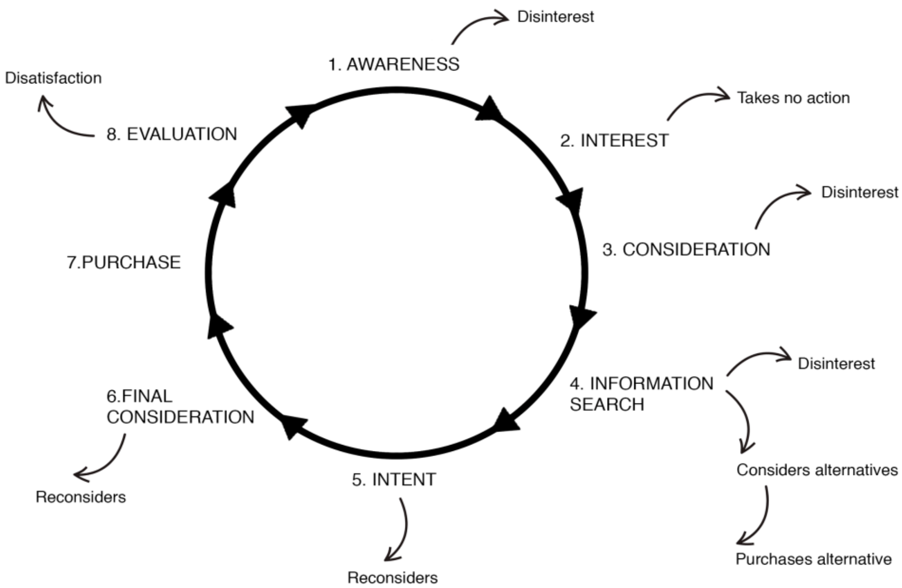
It has been said that we live in an age that is characterised by 'Digital Darwinism' – a term that appears to have first been used in a book title by Schwartz (1999). The futurist, Brian Sollis, is referring to exponential growth in technological capabilities when he describes Digital Darwinism as 'the phenomenon where technology and society evolve faster than an organization can adapt' (briansolis.com) (Sollis, 2014). In essence, the digital context evolves rhizomatically. The dramatic developments in digital technology that we are currently witnessing are challenging the ability of organisations, and in particular in the current instance, DMO organisations, to adapt to the new circumstances and they are producing concomitant shifts in consumer behaviour particularly in terms of the consumer decision-making process.

9 The customer journey

The evolved complexity of the consumer (sic: tourist) decision-making journey and the difficulty and challenges posed when marketers attempt to map it. In particular, there is a compelling need for marketers to develop improved understanding of buyer behaviour in the digital age so that meaningful interventions can be made at critical stages in the decision-making process. Many authors have highlighted the changes in consumer behaviour that have occurred in the digital age but a widely accepted model has yet to emerge, although a few valuable contributions such as, for example Edelman (2010), have been made. Importantly, Edelman proposes a new model which differs markedly from previous linear arrangements. In essence, consumers may now purchase online or offline or they *may move seamlessly between online and offline sources of information*. The different routes to information gathering and purchase behaviour are well-recognised by many of the UK's most successful retailers, e.g. *Tesco*, *John Lewis* and *Next* who have identified that a multichannel approach is most effective because it enables customers to evaluate and purchase goods either online or in-store through the use of different channels or by using a combination of channels at different points in the process (Mintel, 2015a).

The present argument responds to these issues by proposing a new Customer Journey Model (CJM), derived against the emergent digital context, which can be tested empirically in order to assess its suitability and its applicability in describing the customer behaviour in the digital age. The CJM is presented in Figure 2. This model describes a customer journey that is subject to various online and offline stimuli in a manner which better reflect the spherical, orbital and rhizomatic nature of contemporary market contexts. CJM for the digital age provides marketers with a better understanding of the business-to-consumer (B2C) customer/tourist decision-making process than traditional linear models can currently provide. If marketers are better able to understand the online behaviour of their customers, they may be able to refine and personalise their marketing to anticipate and satisfy the needs of individual consumers. This is vital for DMOs. Organisations, DMOs included, with well-developed digital expertise which can be applied at different stages of the consumer decision journey are gaining a marked advantage over their competitors (Bughin, 2015). A caveat needs to be added at this point. The CJM describes the customer journey applied to a high involvement decision process such as a holiday destination. The much less complex and therefore lower involvement decision to purchase a bottle of milk would not be expected to require such a journey. Ashman et al. (2015) have called for empirical research which considers the degree of involvement associated with the purchase and the CJM model could be tested accordingly.

Figure 2 Customer journey model for the digital age (Scott et al., 2015)



The following illustrative account (i.e. deciding where to take a city break) is apposite in this context because although it is imaginary it is illustrative of how a high-involvement decision to take an international city break might be made. The account demonstrates how an initial awareness of the possibilities develops into interest, consideration of the practicalities, information search, intent, final consideration, actual purchase and post-purchase evaluation as depicted in the CJM model (Figure 2). Throughout the process the two consumers are exposed to, or overtly seek out, a variety of online and offline information sources and at almost any point within the consumer journey a decision could have been taken to abandon or defer the project for any number of different reasons. This vignette maps out processes and dynamics which are of potential high significance for DMOs.

Deciding where to take a city break

Emma and Jade are both account executives who work for a London-based advertising company. Over after-work drinks one night they decide they'd like to go on a short break together to get away from London for a few days. They both want to relax and 'let their hair down' but initially they aren't sure exactly where they'd like to go. As educated young professionals, they want to explore the culture of the place, but choosing a destination that will look good on their Instagram photos is also an important consideration for them.

The girls earn above average incomes in relation to their peer group and they subscribe to the 'work hard, play hard' mentality, but thanks to the cost of living in London they also exhibit a degree of price sensitivity.

Emma recalls a blog post she read discussing Paris' recently fashionable Canal St Martin, where young 'Bobo' (yuppie-like stylish 'Bourgeois bohemian') Parisians spend their Friday evenings gathering around the banks of the canal to enjoy aperitifs, and she suggests Paris to Jade. Emma, who is more price conscious than Jade, also remembers that she has a Eurostar (a high speed railway service connecting London with Paris and other cities) discount voucher and this attracts her to the idea of Paris further still. Jade is less keen and points out that due to recent events she would rather avoid Paris for safety and security reasons.

On the long commute to work, Jade spots a poster in a London Underground (railway system) station for *Sónar Festival* in Barcelona; she recalls some photographs she saw of the festival on a friend's Facebook page and she begins to romanticise about a hot Spanish summer listening to cool tracks and sipping sangria on the beach. Emma has been to Spain numerous times and has a different taste in music to Jade although she doesn't dismiss the idea entirely. They discuss options over WhatsApp, and are influenced by face-to-face conversations with a mutual friend about his recent trip to Berlin. He has been talking for a couple of weeks now about the great time he had there. Emma and Jade have found his enthusiasm to be persuasive and despite neither of them having been there they unanimously agree that a trip to Berlin would be 'cool'.

At this point, Emma and Jade have tentatively decided on Berlin, though they could still be influenced to go elsewhere. They begin searching *Airbnb* to check prices. Initially, they are keen to rent an apartment in Berlin's Kreuzberg District because they have heard about the flea markets and rave reviews of the nearby restaurants from their friend. A website that Emma looked at also mentioned that Kreuzberg is fashionable at the moment and after looking at some photos on *Google* they agree with this verdict.

However, after checking *Airbnb* they discover that there isn't much availability in Kreuzberg and they begin to research further online by reading some fashion, travel and music blogs. They also check out *Yelp* to find reviews of local venues. Through this process they discover that the Friedrichshain neighbourhood hosts some great nightclubs and knowing that Berlin is renowned as being a party city, they decide that this is a higher priority to them than the restaurants and bistros over in Kreuzberg that their friend recommended.

There are various budget airlines flying directly from London to Berlin on a regular basis. They check a few websites and after discovering that the tickets don't vary greatly in price between the airlines, they reject the cheapest in favour of the airline that offers the highest baggage allowance and make their bookings online.

The above vignette which includes a number of different online and offline influences on buyer behaviour illustrates the complexities faced by those organisations whose function it is to promote the destinations in question: Paris, Barcelona and Berlin. It is evident that the buyer decision process is far from linear and, in fact, displays more circular and rhizomatic trends and patterns. The CJM model is better positioned to represent the ‘coming and going’ the to-ing and fro-ing of options, events, sense-making and decision-making by the consumers that the traditional linear AIDA type models.

10 Conclusion

Faced with the challenges inherent in the digital age DMOs need to be more agile and flexible in adapting to the new order if they are going to have continued relevance in future. They need to engage with their consumers and stakeholders in much more meaningful ways if they are not going to be left behind by alternative information sources and transforming processes. DMOs should not use social media to merely broadcast information; they should instead engage in online conversations with individuals and respond to posts. Mobile-friendly websites need to be seen as a minimum requirement. All DMOs now need digital marketing to be at the forefront of their strategy.

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