



Commercial hospitality in destination experiences: McDonald's and tourists' consumption of space



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Examines the role of McDonald's in tourists' destination experiences.
- Tourists use McDonald's to negotiate the work of tourism.
- McDonald's shapes meaningful encounters with destinations and cultures.
- Tourists reflect upon their identities as they discuss consumption of McDonald's.
- Tourists use discussions of McDonald's to critique notions of authenticity.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the multiple roles that globalised, branded spaces of hospitality can play in tourists' experiences in destinations. It is argued that previous studies have not considered adequately how such commercial hospitality services and spaces interact with and influence tourists' experiences of places. Drawing on a netnographic analysis of online discussions of McDonald's, this study explores how tourists perceive these hospitality venues, and how they use them to engage with foreign destinations and negotiate the 'work of tourism'. The data show how tourists (re)construct their identities through reflections on consuming McDonald's. The data also demonstrate that tourists critically evaluate discourses of authenticity and the (in)authenticity of consuming McDonald's. The paper concludes by discussing the implications for the marketing and management of McDonald's and similar branded commercial hospitality venues, the marketing and management of destinations, and it outlines avenues for further research.

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1. Introduction

Commercial hospitality is central to tourism and more generally to destination experiences (Page, 2011). Discussions of commercial hospitality within conceptualisations of tourist experiences emphasise accommodation services and the provision of food and drinks, and more rarely acknowledge practices of hospitality among service staff and the 'host' community (Smith, 1994). Within the commercial hospitality-tourism experience nexus, hospitality is frequently considered as a supporting service to broader experiences in destinations. However, researchers have recognised that some commercial hospitality, particularly extraordinary gastronomic experiences or food-servicescapes, may be an important tourist attraction and a key aspect of the destination experience

(Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Quan & Wang, 2004; Sparks, Bowen, & Klag, 2003). Nevertheless, the more general role of 'mundane' hospitality (Lugosi, 2008) (i.e. food and drink provided to meet basic human needs) and associated foodservice spaces within destination experiences has received relatively little attention. This paper addresses this gap in knowledge by examining the multiple roles that McDonald's plays in shaping tourists' destination experiences. More specifically, the paper uses tourists' reflections of McDonald's to provide a wider set of insights into the ways in which this and other branded chains may be entangled in their experiences, while also demonstrating how such reflections provide broader insights into tourists' experiences within destinations.

This is significant for several reasons. Contemporary research has challenged simplistic, management-oriented conceptions of hospitality, and has encouraged hospitality research to consider its broader spatial and symbolic dimensions (Lynch, Germann Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi, & Lashley, 2011). Authors have also sought to

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make connections between hospitality and broader social phenomena, including tourism (Lynch et al., 2011). The current study helps to understand how consumption in ubiquitous branded hospitality and foodservice spaces shape tourists' experiences in destinations. Furthermore, it helps to understand such 'everyday', globalised forms of hospitality, not simply as supporting services, but as key parts of tourist destination experiences. Finally, examining tourists' reflections on McDonald's offers important insights into their experiences of spaces and places, in particular as these experiences relate to notions of comfort and safety, home and away, identity and authenticity.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination experiences

This paper adopts a 'spatial-performative' theoretical perspective in considering tourists' experiences in destinations (cf. Andrews, 2005; 2009; Edensor, 2000, 2001, 2007; Lugosi, 2009, 2014). This approach is built upon a fluid conception of space, which should be thought of, in Lefebvre's (1991) terms, as being produced through the ongoing mobilisation of capital and power, representations of spaces, and everyday embodied practices (See also Edensor, 2000, 2001, 2007). The importance of such an approach is that it does not seek to reduce phenomena to a series of preconceived measurable factors. Instead it embraces the complexity of human experience in examining its different dimensions (Edensor, 2001, 2007; Ek, Larsen, Hornskov, & Mansfeldt, 2008; Lugosi & Walls, 2013). Tourist experiences in destinations are thus conceived as multidimensional, involving the entanglement of people, places, organisations, actions, technologies and objects (cf. Quinlan Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Ryan, 2002; Sharpley & Stone, 2012). Experiences are multi-sensorial (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013); and they can have a multiplicity of extraordinary and mundane elements that may emerge in sequence or in parallel (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). Furthermore, there is acknowledgement that tourist experiences emerge over time, and not just during the visit, beginning with pre-travel anticipation and preparation, and extending to when people return home, as they reflect and share their experiences with others (Morgan, Lugosi, & Ritchie, 2010). Linked to this, tourists' representations of their experiences in destinations inform their pre-purchase decisions and post-trip evaluations, and those of subsequent tourists (cf. Moscardo, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Tourists' visual representation of tourist spaces and reflections on their experiences, particularly through online forums, is becoming ubiquitous cultural practice. These online representations offer valuable consumer-generated insights into the people, practices and processes that shape how tourists encounter destinations and their inhabitants (cf. Hsu, Dehuang, & Woodside, 2009; Woodside, Cruickshank, & Dehuang, 2007). Moreover, rather than viewing online platforms as one-directional representations, virtual forums may be seen as performative spaces in which consumers (re)construct their values and identities through engagement with others (Watson, Morgan, & Hemmington, 2008). The current study seeks to examine tourists' online representations in order to appreciate the multiple (hospitality-related) elements that shape their experiences of spaces and places.

Experience-seeking within tourism is frequently conceptualised as an attempt to escape the everyday practices of home (Cohen, 2010; Graburn, 1989). Tourist destinations are thus often thought of as 'liminal' spaces (Turner, 1974) where the existing norms, behaviours and values of home are more open to subversion or abandonment (See e.g. Redmon, 2003; Shields, 1991; Urry, 2002). Academics have argued that tourists may view this experienced

escape from normality as providing authentic experiences of other cultures or as opportunities for the reinvention of self (cf. Cohen, 2010; MacCannell, 1999; Meethan, 2001).

Encounters with new cultures in and through 'foreign' cultural spaces also introduce risks (Lepp & Gibson, 2003). These risks may be perceived to be part of the novelty of destination experiences, and the fundamental motive for tourist mobility. However, they may also produce anxiety, 'culture shock' or outright conflict between tourists and members of the 'host' community (cf. Furnham, 1984; Robinson & Boniface, 1999). Therefore, rather than providing opportunities for the construction of new selves, tourist experiences may reaffirm notions of cultural identity (cf. Andrews, 2005; Lugosi, 2014). In response to stresses and risks encountered in foreign destinations, tourists may seek reassurance in the familiarity provided by practices from home. This desire for familiarity may be reflected in their choice of food, drink, accommodation, activities, attractions and (dis)engagement with locals and other tourists. Importantly, service providers in destinations recognise and respond to tourists' desire for familiarity by developing products, services and spaces that offer such reassurances (cf. Andrews, 2005; Lugosi, 2014).

Recent years have seen increasing interest in tourists' destination experiences (Lugosi & Walls, 2013). Researchers have considered the motivations for engaging in specific types of experiences in destinations, the risks and challenges encountered in destinations, and the factors that influence satisfaction and behavioural intentions (cf. Chen, Lehto, & Choi, 2009; Lepp & Gibson, 2003, 2008; Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013). However, these studies have typically adopted a positivist position, measuring relationships between presupposed variables rather than examining the complex sensations and meanings entangled in destination experiences. Moreover, these studies have largely concentrated on narrow sets of hospitality-related items such as the novelty or quality of food and/or accommodation. In contrast, the current study treats hospitality as a much more complex set of socio-spatial phenomena. We interrogate the nuances surrounding hospitality within tourists' experiences of space and place. Furthermore, we draw on tourist-generated conceptions of hospitality spaces and practices. In order to do this, the next section provides further discussion of the concept of hospitality, particularly in relation to tourists' experiences in destinations.

2.2. Hospitality in destination experiences

Hospitality in destination experiences can take a variety of forms, ranging from 'mundane' practices, involving the provision of accommodation, food and drink related services and experiences as part of a commercial transaction, to the creation of extraordinary moments and shared spaces of interaction involving emotionally intense encounters between individuals and groups (See Lugosi, 2008 for a more detailed distinction between mundane and extraordinary manifestations of hospitality). The provision of 'mundane' hospitality may be thought of as functional, supporting activities, which enable travellers to engage in other tourism activities. However, hospitality can also form an extraordinary tourism experience and a fundamental reason to engage in travel, for example, to visit novel eating and drinking venues (Mykletun & Gyimóthy, 2010; Quan & Wang, 2004). As with other forms of tourist practice, mundane and extraordinary hospitality experiences may reaffirm existing cultural values and notions of identity. Venues may reproduce cultural practices usually performed in tourists' home settings, or they may support activities that subvert cultural norms and permit new cultural expressions, including those of identity (Harrison & Lugosi, 2013; Lugosi, 2014; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006).

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