

» Deconstructing Gulliver

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We cannot overlook the importance of tourism in the global economy. It generates 10 percent of the world's GDP, and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) projects 1.4 billion international tourists in 2020.

Tourism is one of the industries that has most strongly felt the effect of technology on its business model and client relations. The industry's value chain has gone through a true reconfiguration; value is now created by connecting tourism and external agents in different ways. Young people, who represent 20 percent of global tourism and will account for 47 percent of the total number of travelers by 2020, are the most sensitive to this shift in dynamics.

Whether traveling for business or leisure, we don't buy trips the way they used to. Traditional travel agents are now boutique agencies creating unique and personal experiences, similar to personal shoppers. Airlines are focused on efficiency and consumer cost, and hotels have followed the same path. In every segment, testimonials and client preferences play a key role.

Figure 1. New value chain



Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2016

Disintermediation in the traveling experience—whether for business or leisure—has caused tension in some business models, which, in some cases, are doomed to disappear. More than ever, in this context in which the client—whether a corporation or a consumer—reigns, it is important to dominate discussion in areas that enhance traveler experience and in communities where our travelers share their adventures.

The Vikings explored the earth without a clear road map. Christopher Columbus found America by chance. Cortes traveled through Mexico without knowing exactly what he would find, and Shackleton's expedition to the South Pole cost him more than money... Traveling is about discovering and adventuring, but most of us prefer to limit improvisation to a minimum, though in any case we know we have plenty of options to avoid not finding a hotel on a cold European winter night.

Today's tourism industry—the development of destination brands, resorts and trips—balances between the smart traveler, who makes decisions based on a combination of cost efficiency and return on experience and whom we may find shopping at Ikea; and, on the other end, travelers who have found an affordable and democratic luxury experience without having to pay an excessive price.

Plane tickets are a commodity, and, in many cases, travelers do not favor one airline over another. Generally speaking, searches respond to a pattern based on date, schedule and price, and multiple search engines quote according to those categories. Airlines compete in efficiency; those that still believe in service and client experience are in the Middle East, although they are also able to capture a segment of the market. Perhaps the losers are the companies that have opted for remaining between both worlds. Online user community conversations revolve around how well an airline performs in terms of timing and price, with no frills. If one of the leading airlines delays boarding by two hours, it will fall prey to our frustration on Twitter, much more so than any other incident in our trip.

Accommodations still resist the disintermediation that has affected airlines, even if search applications are in strong demand and there is an increasing number of people who make their assets available online. Hotels continue to dominate as a direct option, although they base themselves on a new pillar: client experience, whether visual (through photos on Instagram and videos on Periscope) or through stories posted on TripAdvisor. These help us consider or evaluate a destination and avoid hotels with cockroaches or "souvenirs" from other travelers on their sheets. Here, conversation is King.

Countries and destinations do not form an exclusive topic of discussion. They get mixed with others, such as history, cuisine, nature, entertainment and shopping. And in fact, user communities are the ones generating preferential and preferred content around travel experiences. On the other hand, countries and destinations

are sometimes obsessed with sponsoring things that will establish an emotional link with potential visitors. Very rarely are profitability or investment return directly related to the invested amount; They are just cosmetic exercises in an era in which authenticity reigns. Thus, choosing an area, such as music, presents greater advantages inasmuch as it can better relate to experiences. Ibiza would not be Ibiza without David Guetta or Calvin Harris. It has beaches and sun, but music is an integral part of the island experience. Likewise, we cannot conceive a trip to Peru without trying its cuisine, which is emotionally attached to the country's character.

A lot of people would like to travel to Iceland this year despite its Prime Minister, who had to resign for his involvement in the Panama Papers. They are attracted not just by its volcanoes, but also by the opportunity to see, firsthand, 5 percent of its total population vibrating with their rallying cries during France's Eurocup.

Fitur, ITB and WTM are tourism industry forums where buyers and sellers interact and the industry shares impressions. But, where is the traveler? Just like banking and finances have gone through disintermediation due to Fintech, in the tourism industry travelers are demanding an urgent transformation. As mentioned earlier, young people, the emerging segment with the highest potential, are looking for unique and authentic experiences, companies that listen to their comments, learning opportunities and recommendations from their closest friends or people with whom they share common interests.

“User communities are the ones generating preferential and preferred content around travel experiences”

We used to trust National Geographic reports, and later Travel Channel and Food Network, but today we prefer YouTubers who visit interesting places and reality shows that mix cuisine and traveling, or real people who live in other countries and tell us what they are like, thus arousing our curiosity.

Buying a trip is an incidental transaction (getting there), but it is emotional and binding when it comes to the destination and the experience we are looking for. We don't want an ordinary experience—we want to feel unique and different, even in destinations with large numbers of travelers. We want to create our own experience, describe it, take pictures, share it and make it public.

Whether a country brand, a destination or any other actor in the value chain, we need to rethink our engagement strategy with our target audience according to a number of principles:

1. Be authentic and sincere in our conversations.
2. Let the client take control of storytelling and build it, always within the area we have chosen and while guiding them through the conversation.
3. Choose several areas to combine experiences.
4. Listen, listen, listen... and apologize if necessary!

Figure 2. Why tourism matters





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