Chapter 2

The Travel Machine: Combining Information Design/Visualization with Persuasion Design to Change Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Travel and tourism is a booming sector of the 21st century world economy. Despite numerous positive trends, numerous critics deplore some developments in this industry. In an era of increasing leisure tourism or “part-time leisure tourism” tacked on to business trips, coming into contact with other cultures risks fading into the background. Therefore, the Travel Machine project of 2012 researched, analyzed, designed, and evaluated effective ways to foster a shift from leisure to cultural tourism by changing people’s travel behavior in the short- and in the long-term. The main objective is to persuade and motivate people, especially travelers aged up to 50 years, those from higher to average economic and educational demographics, to open themselves up more intensely towards the local population and culture of a destination, and to make out of their trip a deeper, personally enriching, and educational experience. For this objective, a well-designed mobile phone application prototype, the Travel Machine, was conceived by the author’s firm, combining information design/visualization and persuasion design. This chapter explains the development of the Travel Machine’s user interface, information design, information visualization, and persuasion design.

INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism sector is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Numerous analysts estimate that, in the future, travel and tourism will be the most important industry in the service economy and the main job engine for many countries. Already by 2021, travel and tourism is predicted to account for 69 million more jobs, almost 80% of which will be in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa (WTTC, 2012).

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Particularly in the developed world, making trips to foreign countries has become both a luxury and a necessary good. That means that even in times of economic crisis and recession, people might travel less frequently, for shorter periods or to closer destinations, but, in general, they are very reluctant to completely renounce their holidays abroad. For this reason, despite the current economic downturn, the growth of the travel and tourism sector is supposed to continue in 2012, so that international tourist arrivals could reach the milestone of one billion later this year (UNWTO, 2012). Most notably in the developed world, an increased standard of living as well as numerous technological advancements have significantly facilitated the process of traveling and have opened the world of travel and tourism also to people with lower incomes. Especially the stunning progress in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has fundamentally changed, restructured and enriched the sector, giving rise to the vast universe of eTourism (Buhalis, 2003).

However, there is a tendency among some analysts of the history of traveling to describe a rather devolutionary trend of tourist life: from the old, golden days of the Grand Tour in the 17th and 18th century, to the pre-packaged and standardized holiday experiences of our days (Löfgren, 2002, p. 279). In fact, if we think about an Ernest Hemingway traveling on his own in the early 20th century through Paris, Rome, and Florence in order to absorb the essence of European civilization, writing down his impressions, thoughts, and cultural experiences in his legendary Moleskin, then we realize that many things have changed even since then. The classical tourist of the late 20th and current 21st century is more likely to move around within a group, to mainly follow well-beaten tracks, and to record her/his itinerary in a series of often randomly taken pictures, so that the idea of traveling as a process of intercultural learning and exchange, as a process of personal development and self-discovery, does no longer seem to be the main motivation when going abroad.

Visiting the sights and monuments of another place has sometimes become a sort of treasure hunt, a list of places and objects that have to be seen and ticked off in the “to-do-list” or “bucket list” upon arriving at a certain destination.

At the same time, the technological inventions and innovations of recent years have contributed, at least to some extent and mainly in the developed world, to a growing re-emergence of independent travelers, who benefit from the assistance and guidance provided by new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Nevertheless, this development does not necessarily mean a return to the culturally enriching and mind-broadening travel experiences of the Grand Tour. When looking for an appropriate place to have dinner, for example, it is enough for the traveler of today to “consult” the mobile app of the respective destination, which will immediately furnish the address of the closest restaurant together with some special offers and discounts from which she/he might benefit. It becomes less important, perhaps, whether this restaurant is a really local and traditional one, or whether it basically offers the same dishes the traveler could enjoy as well in her/his home town.

The primary objective of the Travel Machine is therefore to change the above-described travel behavior, to ease, enhance and enrich the experiences of a person going abroad, to foster the process of intercultural understanding and learning, and to thus contribute, at least partially, to a shift from leisure to cultural tourism.

Leveraging the increasing trend towards mobile in the field of tourism (Wang & Xiang, 2012, p. 308), the idea is to conceive and design a mobile application, the Travel Machine, which should assist and accompany a traveler in the discovery of a destination, or better yet, in the living and learning of a foreign culture. By combining information design and persuasion and motivation theory, with a particular focus on the works of Maslow (2006) and on Fogg’s captology (Fogg, 2003), the use of the Travel Machine should prompt the traveler