
TOMORROW'S TOURIST: FLUID AND SIMPLE IDENTITIES

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The globalisation of tourism and increases in real wealth have meant tourists can take a holiday anywhere in the world, whether it is the North Pole or the South Pole and everywhere in between including a day trip into outer space with Virgin Galactic. Increases in disposal income allow a real change in social order, living standards and the desire for quality of life with tourism at the heart of this change. Against this background the concept of a fluid identity emerges. This trend is about the concept of self which is fluid and malleable in which self can not be defined by boundaries, within which the choice and the desire for self and new experiences drive tourist consumption. However, as wealth decreases this identity becomes simpler, and a new thriftiness and desire for simplicity emerge. This paper examines the values, behaviours, trends and thinking of the future tourist, whether it is a fluid or simple identity.

Keywords: *tourism, tourist, attitudes, behaviours, futures.*

Introduction: Which Identity

Rising incomes and wealth accumulation distributed in new ways alter the balance of power in tourism. The tourist is the power base which has shifted from the institution of the travel agent through the opaqueness of online booking for holidays and travel to the individual. At the same time, the age is rich for new forms of connection and association, allowing a liberated pursuit of personal identity which is fluid and much less restricted by influence of background or geography. The society of networks in turn has facilitated and innovated a mass of options provided by communication channels leading to the paradox of choice. In the future market place, a tourist can holiday anywhere in the world whether it is Afghanistan or Las Vegas, to the extent the tourist can take a holiday at the North Pole or the South Pole and everywhere in between, including a day trip into outer space with *Virgin Galactic* (Yeoman 2008). If 25 million tourists took an international holiday in 1950, 903 million took a holiday in 2008 (*Ibid.*). Why? The growth in world tourism is founded on increase in real household income per head, which doubles every 25 years in OECD countries. This increase in disposal income allows a real change in social order, living standards and the desire for quality of life with tourism at the heart of that change. Effectively, consumers want an improvement year by year, as if it is a wholly natural process like ageing. That change in disposable income has meant a greater and enhanced choice for tourists.

This tourist has demanded better experiences, faster service, multiple choice, social responsibility and greater satisfaction. Against this background, as the world has moved to an experienced economy in which an endless choice through competition and accessibility because of the low cost carrier, and what has emerged is the concept of *fluid iden-*

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tity. This trend is about the concept of self which is fluid and malleable in which self can not be defined by boundaries, within which the choice and the desire for self and new experiences drive tourist consumption. The symbol of this identity is the fact that a consumer on average changes their hairstyle every 18 months according to the research by the Future Foundation (2007), from a tourist perspective it is about collecting countries, trying new things and the desire for constant change. It means the tourist is both comfortable with a hedonistic short break in Las Vegas or a six month ecotourism adventure across Africa. This fluid identity makes it difficult for destinations to segment tourists by behaviour or attitude as it is constant and fluid. However, as wealth decreases that identity becomes simpler, a new thriftiness and desire for simplicity emerge (Flatters and Wilmott 2009). This desire for simplicity is driven by inflationary pressures and falling levels of disposable incomes, squeezing the middle class consumer. As the economies of wealth slow down, whatever the reason, new patterns of tourism consumption emerge, whether it is the desire for domestic rather than international travel or what some call a *stayvacation*. A fluid identity means tourists can afford enriching new experiences and indulge themselves at premium 5 star resorts. They can afford to pay extra for socially conscious consumption, whereas a simple identity means these trends have slowed, halted or reversed. As resources become scarcer, a mind set of a whole generation of tourists change their behaviour. Between now and 2050 the world will go through a cycle of economic prosperity and decline which is the nature of the economic order. When wealth is great, a fluid identity is the naked scenario however, when a recession emerges, belts are tightened, tourists like other consumers search for a simple identity. This chapter examines the values, behaviours and thinking of the future tourist, whether it is a *Fluid* or *Simple Identity*.

Fluid Identity



Fig. 1. The author's fluid identity and the desire for new experiences

This tourist is both interested in a two week ecotourism vacation where s/he will undertake an authentic and sustainable experience but at the same time s/he will take a short break in Las Vegas, whether it is a retail therapy, gambling or something more erotic (see Fig. 1). Why? Tourists cannot be labelled according to their attitudes and beliefs – what they say and what they do, are two totally different things. They constantly evolve and seek something new, just like David Beckham and his hairstyles (Yeoman 2008). That is why segmenting tomorrow's tourists is becoming much more difficult. If the future is rising incomes and wealth accumulation in which individuality is central, the pursuit of personal identity becomes liberated and fluid as boundaries are broken which are not restricted by geography, culture or the past.

Fluid identity produces consumer volatility of proliferated choice and magnesium where a high entropy society exists (Future Foundation 2007). Tourists have the means for endless choice and creative disorder. They have the power to express opinion and they do so, whether through www.tripadvisor.com or www.youtube.com. In fact, they form their opinion not on trusted sources from the authority but on a peer review, hence the importance of the consumer generated content and the advocacy of local authentic information as provided, for example, by the citizens of Philadelphia at www.uwishunu.com.

They are excellent at using networking tools to get a better deal or complain about poor service. A fluid identity allows tourists to be frivolous, promiscuous and just plain awkward. A fluid identity means tourists want to sample a range of new experiences, hence the rise of the long tail (Anderson 2008) and emergence of bespoke tourism products *i.e.* special cruise markets at www.insightcruises.com.

A fluid identity emerges because society is socially less rigid, that individuals have become less class-defined and human relationships are not restricted by accident of birth, but the combination of breaking class distinction through education, income and mind expanding influence of modern travel and entertainment which broadens pre-ordained identities and choices. The emerging tourists from Brazil, Russia, India and China are the new tourists who are now not restricted to one town, one church, one marriage and one football team, especially generations Y and Z (McCrindle and Wolfinger 2010). Fluid identity results in massively propelled ad hoc communities of new friends and connections some via social media and others through shared interest activity groups. Ethan Watters (2004) calls this *Urban Tribes*, groups of like-minded people and friends doing activities together whether it is a girlie weekend of pampering or a boyish rugby game. It is the idea that an infinite number of options are available; this propels the idea of fluid identity.

Globalization shapes people's lives and the mixture of cultures produces exposure to new ideas and different identities. The tourist is the centre of the globalization of experiences, where holidays in exotic locations that are deep inside countries are becoming the norm. No longer is an international holiday confined to a resort, the tourist has become a traveller, staying longer and going deeper into the culture of destinations. Globalization is brought nearer to us all through social media and the world of personalized communications, the society that is fast, instant and networked. No longer is the internet bound to a wire or a desk but is mobile and wireless. Everyone seems to be online 24 hours a day, anywhere, as technology has become more accessible and costs of transactions are falling. The power of personal mobile technology means more features, interactivity and multi-functionality which deliver a different way in which tourist provid-

ers have to engage with future tourists. One of the challenges for tourist destinations is how they protect their brand equity when it can be quickly destroyed or poked fun at www.youtube.com or www.facebook.com. It means brands have to work harder to remain an authority, with trust as a disruptive discourse which is shaped by the word of mouth or someone being followed at www.twitter.com.

A tourist's sense of timing and patience is changing; society is now just a click away from a screen and is not the one that likes the notion of delayed satisfaction. Patience is now measured in nano-seconds driving an immediacy culture. The tourist has become programmed to be narcotic, wanting more all the time in an instance. In Tokyo 30 % of hotel reservations are on the day of arrival as smartphone augmented technology allows tourists to look at a hotel through the smartphone camera and gauge availability, then book accommodation through a related website like www.expedia.com (Hatton 2009), all driven by applications such as the Wikitude AR Travel Guide (www.wikitude.org).

Longevity is a key trend associated with fluid identity, as consumers live longer, with wealth they expect richer experiences and more. They visit places and do things that their parents could not afford or would not have heard of. They will search for experiences that hold back the wrinkle of old age, whether it is a spa treatment in Hungary or a medical procedure in South Africa. Health and medical tourism become more important in this scenario along with any service that rejuvenates the soul or a tired body. Longevity also changes life courses, so change becomes the norm and is unpredictable. Although tourists may have their favourite place, they like refreshment and renewal. This means, they ask themselves who they are and a multiplicity of answers suffice. Michael Wilmott (Wilmott and Nelson 2005) calls this complicated lives, in which the choice explosion of holidays and travel means tourists have brought upon themselves complexity and complications resulting in some anxiety. At one level, this means many tourists are opting out and taking career breaks and travelling the world, on another scale authenticity becomes important as tourists look for simplicity. At another level, destination brands have to find a means to ensure they can help a tourist unclutter this world through a brand search optimization, a high brand value and choice management. Although choice is regarded as a positive value within a consumption culture, choice making support is important, such as a book recommendation service at www.amazon.com.

Tourism destinations need to understand their tourists, not engaging in a relationship which is about mass selling but focusing on what tourists want at the right time and at the right place. To a certain extent, fluid identity is about wealth and a have-it-all society, these tourists can afford holidays several times a year and a multitude of short breaks. This is a tourist that can afford to be concerned about the environment so s/he does not mind paying a little bit extra. In a have-it-all society, the desire is for sociality, economic gain, family involvement, leisure and self improvement which are less lineated by stages of life or gender, all of these desires are reflected in holiday activity, whether it is an extended family holiday at Walt Disney Park or a cultural short break in Paris. The expectation amongst the tourist with a fluid identity is they want a richer and fulfilling life, but at the same time there is pressures of expectation, hence the previous mentioned link to a disruptive discourse in this identity.

Although rising wealth means more opportunities, it also means a fear of loss, in which society is portrayed in decline. Here a consumer turns to therapies and antidepressants.

sants, is anxious about the future and thinks society has lost its way. Writers, such as Frank Furedi (2006) label this 'the culture of fear'. From a tourism and media perspective there seems to be a focus on a health scare or terrorism incident which impacts upon destinations. The incident is portrayed as overtly bad news which results in countries issuing travel advisories advising us not to travel to such and such a place.

A heightened sense of personal freedom has undoubtedly increased the growth of world tourism, where identity is built on liberal attitudes reinforced through education and knowledge. The exposure of tourists to a multi cultured society allows a greater expression of individuality, whether this is sexual behaviour or unconventional lifestyles, however this degree of liberalism differs around the world. Fundamentally, as economies grow they become more liberal in outlook and seek to push out their identity. As such, they will try new things and visit new places, destinations in the far away places that seemed inaccessible to previous generations.

The manifestations of a fluid identity are wide-ranging, from overt and status-driven to the anonymous and elusive. Yet the common characteristic for the tourists is that they simply do not want to consume but experience the consumption in several ways, increasing aspirations and higher order expectations (Yeoman 2008). One noticeable trend shaping a fluid identity is the movement from conspicuous consumption to inconspicuous consumption, especially amongst tourists from advanced economies of the world who are well versed with travel. It has become the norm not to parade wealth and success in a deliberate ostentation, but to be more conservative, wiser and discreet. From a tourism perspective, inconspicuous consumption has developed as the experience economy has matured from theatre to the desire for authenticity, where tourists search for deeper and more meaningful experiences. This trend has changed the meaning of luxury in society away from materialism to more about enrichment and personal development, for a tourist it is about the point of self-actualization in Maslow hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1998). Luxury has therefore become more accessible to the growing middle classes of the world, in which they can hire a Ferrari for the weekend (www.gothamdreamcars.com) or even hire the latest designer handbags (www.bagborroworsteal.com).

Related to the changing nature of luxury is the importance of cultural capital, that is how tourists talk about destinations and experiences. The importance of cultural capital defines identity and status, it becomes the critical currency of conversation *i.e.* 'have you been to South Africa', 'I swam with the dolphins in New Zealand' or 'I built a bridge for a community in India'. It is the knowledge and experiences of the arts, culture and hobbies that help define who people are rather than their socio-economic grouping. Sociologists such as Rifkin (1984) and Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Nice 1987) argue that consumers are moving from the era of industrial to cultural capitalism, where cultural production is increasingly becoming the dominant form of the economic activity and securing access to many cultural resources and experiences. This means that the definition of culture changes, the tourist is both happy with a high-brow opera and low-brow comedy, hence the rise of the creative class and no-brow culture associated for example, with the success of Edinburgh's festivals which embody the diversity of cultural capital and the breath of experiences.

The emergence of a fluid identity means tourists are genetically programmed to be suspicious and rather cynical of all marketing and advertising. As if the tourist that is instinctively mobilized to mount resistance and rebuke. It also becomes increasingly

difficult to label and segment tourists by demographics, attitudes and economic wellbeing as fluidity becomes the norm in this scenario. A fluid identity represents a challenge for tourism destinations because of the constant change and resistance.

Therefore, a fluid identity is represented in the following scenario.

Michael Hay is a 28-year-old business executive from London. Michael is a seasoned traveller, who likes to take two long haul holidays a year and several short breaks. This year Michael is visiting Tokyo and wants to climb Mt Fuji and see the snow monkeys near Nagano. He chose Japan because friends had previously visited the country; they often talked about the food, people, how everyone was so helpful, how safe the country is and what a wonderful experience it was. Michael had considered China, but he had watched so many viral videos, that he was put off from visiting China at the present. Prior to visiting Japan he had read a couple of guide books which formed the basis of a vague itinerary. He looked at the destinations website for information and could vaguely recall Tourism Japan had sponsored some sort of sporting event.

His seven day vacation to Japan begins in Tokyo, he has not booked accommodation and is relying on his Nikon 300UXP contact lenses¹, such is the speed of the technology that at the flick of the eye, details of the JP five star hotel is sought using the latest augmented reality technology and its availability is confirmed and a reservation made. In addition, a five day tour to central Japan is organised by his online travel agent based upon his requisites, attraction booking, hotel accommodation and transport connections. Japan is a place known for its organisational efficiency and excellent transport infrastructure making it easy to get around. Michael is even going to road test a classic 2020 Ferrari, something that requires manual control and skill not like today's automatic personal vehicles. Each day Michael tries something new, whether it is a Japanese spa treatment, staying in a traditional Ryokan or hiking up Mt Fuji. All in all, a wonderful action packed holiday, everything from adventure to tranquillity.

This scenario is shaped by many of the trends associated with a fluid identity including, wealth, a networked society, resistance to marketing, strong brand image, culture of fear, choice management, personal recommendation, variety of experiences and its cultural capital. The importance of the scenario highlights how individuals shape their life using technologies as short-cuts and choice managers, however the biggest influence choice is personal recommendation and the ability to lead a fluid identity depends on wealth.

Simple Identity

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) plummeted the value of the High Net Worth population by US \$32.8 trillion or 19.5 % according to the World Wealth Report (2009) published by Capgemini and Merrill Lynch, so the rich are less rich. Flatters and Wilmott (2009) argue that in most developed economies pre-GFC the precession consumer behaviour was the product of 15 years of uninterrupted prosperity, driven by growth in real levels of disposal incomes, low inflation, stable employment and booming property prices. Therefore, new consumer appetites emerged in which a consumer could afford to be curious about gadgets and technology, in which tourists shelled out for enriching and fun experiences on exotic locations. The GFC changed that, propelling tourist trends into slowdown, halting or even reversing the trajectory of growth in world tourism. So, is this a sample of the future, the era of the pension crisis, scarcity of oil, inflation and falling

levels of disposal income in which tourism expenditure falls year by year? If so, what will the future tourist look like? Rather than having a fluid identity it will be more akin to simplicity.

During an economic slowdown, tourists tend to travel less, stay near home (increase in domestic tourism) and seek simplicity such as www.exploreworldwide.com value based holidays focusing on basic facilities, meeting locals, lots of free time and bargains. This trend is accelerated in the scenario of falling incomes as a simple and functional product that will suffice. A simple identify means offering advice becomes extremely important, whether its website's www.farecast.com which advises travellers when the optimal time to purchase an airline ticket is or price comparison technologies which are found on many online booking services.

When simplicity is combined with thrift, tourists trade down. The Pod Hotel in Manhattan (www.thepodhotel.com), where accommodation usually costs US \$300 a night, offers single beds from US \$89 a night including bunk beds. The use of technology and social media assists tourists in the search for bargains, whether it is the use of argumented technologies in smartphones or contact lens which view availability and prices as we view them in the street or recommendations from a network of friends on social media sites. Thrift and simplicity also combine to drive the trend of Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR), as incomes fall getting back to basics and developing human relationships are very important, and the most important aspects of tourists' lives are friends and relatives.

Research by the Trajectory Group (Flatters and Wilmott 2009) highlights that affluent consumers have revealed mounting dissatisfaction with excessive consumption. Many desire a wholesome and less wasteful life. Hence there is a desire to get back to nature, something that is tranquil, basic, rooted, human and simple (Yeoman 2008). As a consequence, the desire for more authentic and simple luxury experiences accelerates. An example of simple luxury is a tree house hotel which offers a unique experience in a natural setting. A new experience is seen not as conspicuous consumption, but as overtly inconspicuous. For instance, the Costa Rica Jungle Hotel is situated in the rain-forest around Arenal Volcano, surrounded by wildlife and birds (www.treehouseshotel-costarica.com). Another example is hayvacations, where holidaymakers pay to stay and work on farms. Holidaymakers are turning to haycations to experience a world far removed from their daily life. At Stoney Creek Farm (www.stonycreekfarm.org), tourists are charged up to US \$ 300 a night to work on the farm. This is an experience where tourists pick their own food, then cook it that evening and in a location with no cell-phone reach. During the times of recession tourists are searching for a return to basic experiences that are simple, with a sense of community and authenticity. About 50 % of the tourists to Stoney Creek Farm are locals from the same county. This is a typical example of inconspicuous consumption and a desire for a simple identity.

In a simple identity, ethical consumption declines as paying a premium for a Starbucks coffee falls by the wayside, even if they use organic coffee which supports children in a third world country. From a tourism perspective, many of the ethical tourism projects in third world countries, such as Africa and India, which depend on independent travellers, will suffer.

Tourists also have become canny at searching for bargains, which economists call mercurial consumption, whether it is using price comparison software, or grabbing last

minute offers from websites such as www.grabaseat.co.nz which offer last minute air travel deals to New Zealand consumers, or www.5pm.co.uk which offers diners a chance of discounted meals after 5pm that evening. The dominance of technology and social media has changed consumers purchasing behaviour to something more mercurial in which they actively search for bargains through price comparison websites.

Attitudes to travel also change, as tourism has to compete with other forms of leisure expenditure, whether it is the latest technology gadgets or virtual holidays. There is a generation of Japan youth who prefer their X-Box to climbing Mt Fuji. The desire for new experiences is more about 'inspiration' (Trend Hunter 2008), where technology provides a better experience than the one in which consumers desire to bring top level experiences into their domestic domain.

There have been many predictions about the end of the high street travel agent in the last decade, but in fact during times of economic slowdown, when tourists are trying to unravel complexity and give up excess, they go back to travel agencies to reduce choice through an efficient filtering process and maximise time management. In addition, the desire for new experiences slows down as a number of simple repeat trips to usual places also increases (Buhalis 2009).

In an economic slowdown, the role of authority changes as governments intervene to stabilize markets, bring assurance and confidence to markets, create jobs and increase public expenditure. Therefore, many countries have increased marketing expenditure, particularly in domestic markets to entice tourists to stay at home this year, hence the rise of the term *stayvacation*. The tourism industry in particular will turn to government to offer support and strategic leadership when the private sector is failing. Therefore, trust in authority increases and destination brands that offer value, honesty and can deliver on brand promise become more important.

New Zealand is the adventure capital of the world, whether it is a bungee jumping, jet boating, bugging or skydiving. During an economic slowdown extreme-experience seeking stalls, as they are seen as expensive, frivolous, risky and environmentally destructive. Extreme adventure is partially about how a tourist differentiates themselves. But conspicuous consumption is out of favour and the trend of simplicity and discretionary spend is in. So for destinations like New Zealand, extreme sports like bungee jumping and jet boating will be curtailed.

The GFC has focused the consumer mind on the boardroom, in particular the executive bonuses of companies such as AIG, Royal Bank of Scotland or General Motors. Excess has become a dirty word, as such travel and the meetings industry have taken a hit as too many think that this sector is about excessive and unnecessary expenditure.

If the future is a simple identity, the key words are simplicity, thrift and mercurial consumption which lead to a scenario in the following manner:

Sheena Michaels is 68, lives in London and is a part-time social worker. She is well travelled, has just completed an Open University degree in Technology and is a volunteer with a number of local community projects. Circumstances force Sheena to work part time because of her pension shortfall and she thinks that this will continue until her health dictates otherwise. Since London is recognised as a cultural centre for tourism, lack of money means Sheena has to watch how she spends it. Websites such as www.culturalprice.com tell Sheena in advance when it is the right time to book a theatre ticket and Sheena's social media network of friends advise on special deals etc. Sheena

would like to travel but nowadays tends to stay in the local region doing day trips in the surrounding hinterland. When she does go on holiday, it is staying with friends and families. This year she managed to take a short break in Barcelona, staying with friends and capturing much of the city culture, especially the galleries. Today, Sheena is travelling to the Soho Theatre Quarter in central London as it is the opening day of the Quarter's Festival and many of the acts are performing free street shows. She manages to take in several short acts including, an eight minute performance of all Will Shakespeare's plays by the Royal Company and a lunchtime comedy performance by Leo Blair on 'the exploits of a Prime Minister's Son'. Eventually, Sheena and friends find a café for a cup of tea and just watch the world go by.

This scenario is shaped by many of the trends associated with a simple identity including, a networked society, simplicity and thrift, pricing technologies, highly educated, community, use of leisure time and personal recommendation. The importance of the scenario highlights how individuals trade down and are thrifty with spending.

Conclusion

Tourism is an unpredictable industry shaped by events, world economy and the socio-political environment. Tourists are fickle and when times are good will spend large amounts of disposal income on tourism. To a certain extent tourists retrench and focus on lower order basic needs when times are hard, so tourism declines. Given the Global Financial Crisis and the forthcoming demographic and pensions time bomb we could see year by year decline in tourism expenditure with 2050 being the flip point. When tourists do have money, they possess a fluid identity of constant change in a fast moving world, in which they are easily bored, seek novelty, desire thrill, something new, aspiration and enrichment. Tourism has always been about fun, relaxation, entertainment, enrichment and enjoyment, but will it be simple or fluid, only time will tell.

NOTE

¹ A new generation of contact lenses built with very small circuits and LEDs promises bionic eyesight. The University of Washington in Seattle has engineered a lens akin to Terminator movies. Arnold Schwarzenegger's character sees the world with data superimposed on his visual field – virtual captions that enhance the cyborg's scan of a scene. In stories by the science fiction author Vernor Vinge characters rely on electronic contact lenses, rather than smartphones or brain implants, for seamless access to information that appears right before their eyes. These lenses do not give us the vision but have the potential to deliver the vision of an eagle and the benefit of running subtitles <http://www.spectrum.ieee.org/biomedical/bionics/augmented-reality-in-a-contact-lens/0>

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