

Marketing in Food, Hospitality, Tourism and Events

A Critical Approach

Richard Tresidder and Craig Hirst

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Consumption and the Consumer

■ Introduction

This chapter examines the notions of consumption and consumers, it is important that we understand what is meant by consumption and how we locate the consumer within the consumption process. THEF marketing utilises a complex set of codes, images and strategies to communicate a very particular product or experience, however the consumption of tourism, hospitality, events and even food differs from other products, by the fact that we are dealing with experiences rather than tangible goods such as a car. This chapter helps to locate what is consumed and how this happens. Additionally this chapter locates the consumer by examining their motivations, classification and search for experience that forms a culturally orientated definition of consumption and the consumer.

■ The process of consumption

It is generally agreed the consumption is a process that includes the actions and activities of selection, acquisition, consumption and the dispossession of products, services or experiences (Solomon 2006). It can be asserted that experiences marketing provides a platform for consumers to enter a dream world, in which they can escape the pressures of everyday lived experience, and as such we need to ask the question of when does the consumption process

actually begin or is initiated: is it at the point of arriving at a destination? Taking the first mouthful of a meal? When the first band begins to play? Or is it when we read the brochure or examine the website? It can be argued that the consumption process in experiences marketing starts at the initial research stage. Likewise we also need to question when it ends, or indeed if there is a boundary that marks out an end or closure. However, what we can agree on is that the consumer starts with a need or desire to experience something. Under most conditions it is also agreed that consumers seek to satisfy their needs and wants through consumption. As a result, consumption is often theorised as goal orientated behaviour. These four activities as identified in Figure 5.1 warrant exposition to allow marketers to have a better understanding of the way consumer acts within the market.

■ Selection

Selection refers to the means by which consumers seek out information and knowledge about the range of hospitality, tourism and events goods, services and experiences that exist in the market. Historically the information available to the consumer was greatly influenced by marketers and was generated by the organisation through marketing communication channels such as advertisements, brochures etc. Under these conditions the consumer would typically appraise competing offers in the market based upon the claims made by organisations and through other visible aspects of the marketing mix such as for example, prices, discounts and other means of incentivisation or promotion. However as information channels have fragmented over time and new media channels such as Twitter, Tripadvisor and Facebook have emerged, consumers now have many other sources and means to seek out information and to inform their choices. Indeed, whilst consumers have always communicated between themselves through traditional forms of word of mouth, debates and research are currently focusing on the changing shifts of power within market-orientated relationships due to the enabling technologies of social media and the potentials