

Cross-cultural co-creation of a tourist site: The emic and etic makings

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Abstract

This chapter discusses how an Arctic destination, North Cape, is co-created through time and space aided by visitors' engagement. We present two cases: 1) Thai visitors of North Cape and 2) North Cape as a brand in South Korea, drawing from netnography, interviews with key informants and document analysis. We argue that cross-cultural co-creation in tourism experiences depends on the knowledge of different emic and etic perceptions of the site. These diverse emic and etic perceptions of the site, operand and operant resources of the visitors emerge in their co-creation of experiences. Implications for researchers and practitioners are provided.

Keywords: North Cape, cross-cultural co-creation, customer engagement, tourism, emic and etic perspectives

Introduction

This chapter presents aspects of customer engagement in tourism settings with two case studies, one from North Cape (NC), Arctic Norway and another from South Korea. NC is considered the Land's End of mainland Europe and this is one reason that it has for centuries been viewed as an exotic site due to the midnight sun, hence a natural highlight for tourists to visit (Herrero & Roseman, 2015; Tiffany, 1884). Tourists engagement with NC has been developing over centuries through stories of explorations and experiences from the first tourist in 1665, the Italian priest Francesco Negri, who recorded his experiences in the diary "Viaggio Settentrionale" (A journey north) (Acerbi, 1802; Magni, 2014). Several prominent visitors have climbed this path, amongst them King Chualalongkorn of Siam from Thailand.

Comparatively, the case from South Korea to NC does not have any historic or cultural association. While both Thai and South Korean visitors to NC may be viewed almost as one market from the local NC perspective, the current chapter aims to demonstrate the customer engagement aspects that give the grounds to the two markets' difference at cultural and historic level.

While there are no exact numbers for Thais and South Korean visiting NC, Statistics Norway from 2019 shows that Northern Norway experienced an increase in Thai visitors, particularly during late winter/early spring. It is difficult to make sense of these numbers, as they tell little of who is travelling, from where and why. Yet, according to information from The Royal Thai Embassy (2020), outbound Thai tourism to Norway is booming with about fifteen to twenty thousand Thais visiting Norway each year. Moreover, the number is increasing. Many of them also visit NC during their stay in Norway. Further, a need for gaining statistical information of South Korean visitors as part of the fastest-growing new market segment from Asia to Norway came to the attention of NHO Reiseliv (Norwegian Hospitality Association) recently with the association members placing their biggest future possibilities on Asian tourists (Lee 2020). While there is a lack of longitudinal statistical data on the South Korean tourists' numbers to Norway, Northern Norway Tourist Board, a destination management organisation covering the North Cape site, has been monitoring South Korean visitor market as a separate one to be monitored from an 'Other Asia' category since 2010. This monitoring is in line with the global trend as South Korean tourists are one of top 10 spenders in the world as international visitors (UNWTO, 2020).

Much of defining Arctic has been from natural sciences-based and external to Arctic itself or etic approach and these definitions include geographical location, temperature range, existing tree lines (Lee et al., 2017). Accordingly, NC as an Arctic destination, is familiarly approached from an etic perspective in the international tourism context. With the intensifying development of Arctic tourism, expedited by the fast-melting Arctic ice and the people's desire to witness part of our planet before it disappears, research to understand how tourism actors at Arctic destinations have integrated the etic perspective to co-create tourism experiences to increase customers engagement can be a worthy investment. Indeed, the attention to Arctic as a tourist destination, owing to the globe-gripping climate change, has been gathering increasing attention (Lemelin et al., 2010). Concurrently, better understanding customer engagement has been purported (Dewnarain, Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2021). This chapter serves the 2-research agenda, i.e., emerging Arctic tourism and focus on better understanding customer engagement in tourism.

This chapter studies and presents an Arctic destination of North Cape and to better understand cross-cultural co-creations of a tourist site approached from emic and etic positions. In so doing, the chapter aims to contribute towards a better understanding of customer engagement in the destination of North Cape and provide theoretical implications for other Arctic destinations for their experiences of customer engagement with visitors.

Tourism de-growth is purported as the right solution for sustainable tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019) but the COVID-19 pandemic placed a different perspective on the operation of tourism as a whole. For example, literature suggests that the re-starting and re-opening of tourism business provides an opportunity to reflect on the conventional practices, highlighting that de-growth itself may not provide an answer to a sustainable tourism (Fletcher et al., 2020). Instead, we may need to place more of our attention to proximity tourism, equitable tourism, and the like. In the Arctic tourism setting, it is reasonable to expect that the travel would continue to be more important to the global society in more than economic but socio-cultural and political aspects in post-Covid era (Lee, 2022). The expected significance of Arctic tourism further highlights the need for sustainable operations that meet the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. This is particularly so, given the significance of tourism sector in many Arctic destinations and nations, as the sector relates

deeply to environmental, economic, social, political thus the sustainability of the Arctic future.

The link between co-creation and customer engagement has been noted in service system (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014) and co-developing customer engagement behaviour (Alexander & Jaakkola, 2016). Recently, attention has been given to the existing link between co-creation and customer engagement in tourism sector (Chathoth et al., 2016). Building upon the recognized connection between co-creation of tourist experiences and customer engagement, we research an Arctic destination of North Cape taking a case study approach (i.e, Thai and South Korean cases). Accordingly, this chapter illustrates the unfolding and meaning of co-creation of North Cape as an Arctic destination in 2 cases of:

1. North Cape as a tourist site co-created by Thai visitors' engagement
2. North Cape as an outdoor fashion brand in South Korea

We argue that tourists' cultural history is important to understand why customer engage in tourist sites. We explore Thai and South Korean customers' engagement with North Cape as a physical and imaginary site, as the cultural history for their engagement is quite different and can thus shed light on the diversity of customer engagement among Asian visitors to the Arctic site. Inspired by the concept of value co-creation, we explore what their cultural history means for their engagement. Tourist sites come to matter through individuals' engagement with practices and histories that by themselves, perhaps, do not create reasons to go, but when gaining power over time, create new practices and values – and thus new reasons to go. In this chapter, we describe how the Asian tourists' 'reasons to go to North Cape' are co-created over time through multiple processes connecting to their own cultural history. We explore these relations to understand how cultural history connects to co-creation of tourist experiences through customer engagement.

Further, the notion of co-creation invites an approach focused on actors' interactions in culturally sensitive value co-creation processes (Akaka et al., 2013; Cannas et al., 2019; Edvardsson et al., 2011). The relatively limited knowledge on the dynamics of characterizing customer engagement in general, and for co-creation of customer engagement in particular, call for explorative research on what drives customer engagement, e.g., how this may influence the co-creation process what it might mean to understand from customers' perspectives (Dewnarain, Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2021). To answer our key question, how cross-cultural co-creation is driven by tourist engagement in their own cultural history and

social constructions of North Cape, we applied netnography research method, a qualitative approach that enables the study of communication mediated through digital platforms. We supplemented this with interviews with key informants and document studies.

Theoretical approach

Customer engagement (CE) is important for experiences co-creation at a site as it influences tourists' behaviours and involvement in their activities (Mathisen, 2013). Through co-creation, tourists are enabled to move towards higher levels of CE which creates superior experiences in tourism (Chathoth et al., 2016). The importance of CE for co-creation and co-creation for CE is linked to enhanced involvement, which positively influences behavioural intentions, emotional engagement, word of mouth and visit/re-visit intentions (Tu et al., 2018).

There is no set definition of CE (Rather et al., 2021), and in this chapter we adhere to the definitions proposed by Brodie et al (2011, p. 258) and Hollebeek, Srivastava and Chen (2019, p. 171), who suggest CE to be a psychological state, mediated by involvement in an interactive experience where participants use both operand and operant resources (Hollebeek et al., 2019). Operand resources are those that require action taken upon to be valuable (e.g., natural resources), while operant resources are those that are capable of acting on other resources (e.g., knowledge, skills and competencies), according to Vargo et al. (2020). In the context of co-creating Arctic destination experiences, both operand and operant resources are central elements. While both are integral in the visitors' experiences co-creation, a more detailed understanding of the ways in which operand and operant resources are created, accepted and utilised would provide clearer directions for researchers and practitioners to proceed further. Related to visitors' operant resources, we view CE as comprising cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions in line with Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie (2014). These adopted definitions are based on the premise that there exists a close relationship between CE and value co-creation, as advocated in literature (Brodie et al., 2011; Hao, 2020). These theoretical foundations highlight the experiential and interactive nature of tourist experiences. Service dominant logic posit that value is co-created through cross level interactions among individuals, firms and institutions (Vargo & Lusch, 2011), which necessitate including emic and etic approaches to CE, we argue. Arctic touristic experiences co-creation, as presented in

this chapter, can aptly be claimed to be a good example of service dominant logic in experiential practice.

Methods

Through a case study design, we have done in-depth exploration, using qualitative methods to understand how cross-cultural co-creation unfolds in customer stories of the North Cape across time and space. North Cape was chosen based on the tourist site's attractiveness for customers. We conducted the investigation of cross-cultural co-creation by looking at two cases related to the tourist site: 1) Thai visitors' engagement with NC; 2) North Cape as a clothing brand in South Korea. Case 1 points to Thai's engagements in co-creating North Cape as a tourist site across time and space, while case 2 demonstrates the cultural, cognitive and physical distance between NC and South Korea.

Both cases may be interpreted as being infused with different etic perspectives that add value to visitors' experience of NC. For the current chapter, we gathered the data for Thai and South Korean cases separately. The study is in line with ethical research guidelines on data management and data protection conducted by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, which are in line with international standards for ethical research

The Thai case

The data was collected through qualitative interviews and netnography (period 2019 – September 2021). We interviewed representatives from the hotel chain managing the tourist site and the Royal Thai Embassy in Norway as they have deep knowledge of Thai's engagement with North Cape. The interviews were open-ended and conducted through conversations through phone and emails. Based on the informants' consent, we recorded and transcribed the interviews and conversations. Netnography is broadly based on the reflexive narratives that people publish online. It provides both an emic and etic point of view of CE as it enables the study of communication mediated through digital platforms (Kozinets, 2015; Mkono & Markwell, 2014; Rageh et al., 2013). We explored posts at platforms such as Facebook, TripAdvisor and travel blog sites. Using key words such as King Chulalongkorn; King Rama 5; Initial stones at NC and in Thailand. We acknowledge the limitation in utilising the English language platforms in building the Thai case due to the lack of Thai language proficiency within the author team. The data from digital platforms and interviews are anonymized.

The South Korean case

For the South Korean case, the society's 2 main search engine platforms i.e., www.naver.com ; www.daum.net were used for data gathering. Koreans use English phenetic terms for Nordic and NC. Accordingly, 노르딕 for Nordic and 노스케이프 for NC were used for the search terms. The searched and gathered websites contents were in text, images and some video clips. The data collection period ranged between March and September 2021). First author, whose mother tongue is Korean performed the data collection. Content and semiotics analyses were employed for the Korean data set's analysis.

For both Thai and Korean websites materials, informed consent was not necessary for the research. This is due to the fact that the websites visited are established as public communication fora.

Cross cultural engagement with North Cape

Case 1: North Cape as cultural heritage site for Thais

Thai engagement with NC begun 12 July 1907 when King Chulalongkorn's, hereinafter referred to as The King, reached the tourist site by boat during a visit in Europe. While in Europe, The King met with Europe's ruling elites and engaged in art, culture and leisure-oriented activities (Bui & Trupp, 2014). The King's European visit is well documented in letters (travelogue) he sent home (Chulalongkorn, 1996). Embedded in Siamese cultural and ethical values and standards, formed by both Buddhist and Confucian norms (Bao, 1995), his letters reveal his perception of and engagement with both European and Siamese society (Lasuka, 2018). When at NC, The King ceremonially engaged with the site by inscribing a stone, which was a solemnly royal custom in Thailand. The stone at NC is, however, the only stone he signed outside Thailand, which gives the site an important cultural value for Thais today. The stone was 'rediscovered' in the 1980s by a Thai TV-team that travelled in the footsteps of The King's European journey. This led to the revival of the initial stone for Thai people and prompted Thai authorities to initiate a Thai museum in the NC Hall in love and memory of the King. The Thai history at NC is thus very present at NC today. The King's engagement at NC has, therefore, a particular place in Thais' cultural heritage and hence shapes Thai perception of NC (Mathisen & Sørensen, 2021), but also, we argue, their

engagement with the tourist site. Many Thais still use the King's European travelogue as a guidance when travelling abroad; especially those who wish to re-trace his footsteps, leading some all the way to NC.

The histories of The King's engagement at NC in 1907, and his status today, are central to understanding what cultural historical heritage means for Thai and their contemporary engagement at NC. The King is one of Thailand's most beloved monarchs and he played a unique role in Thai history as a just and benevolent modernizer (Peleggi & Von Der Mehden, 2003). His status is intertwined with Buddhist values where deceased kings are believed to possess supernatural qualities, who make them intervene in the world of humans as spirits or 'guarding angles' (Stengs, 2009, p. 19). The King is considered to hold the Buddhistic charismatic power of 'Barami', which connects him to the 'Ten Kingly Virtues' of: charity; morality; self-sacrifice; rectitude; gentleness; self-restriction; non-anger; non-violence; forbearance and non-obstruction (Stengs, 2003, p. 2). The King's popularity during his reign, and 'Barami' elevation, have led to the prevalence of a belief that those who link to him are empowered with his virtues. Thais' present engagement with their Great Beloved King thus seems to rest on the three value-based pillars of Thai society, which is the value of the nation, the religion and the monarchy (Johnsen, 2010; Murashima, 1988; Wiktorin, 2005, p. 86). These pillars are fundamental to Thai society and the deeply set of values and faith connected to each pillar give power to the histories of The King's engagement at NC, and is a vital source of Thais' consumption and engagement at NC today (Mathisen & Søreng, 2021). At NC, Thai visitors engage with the King and show him love and respect by donating artefacts such as flowers, incense and coins at the statue of him in the museum and/ or at the initial stone. Their commitments to NC are shared at digital platforms by pictures and text honouring The King, captured the NC scenery. Through such activities, Thai customers engagement at NC are heavily influenced by their own cultural histories and in this manner, we argue, the inner landscape of visitors' experiences of NC are enacted at the tourist site (Jacobsen, 2015; Tiffany, 1884). These inner landscapes are infused with values and beliefs that give meaning to, and shape histories of the self and the Thai society.

Case 2: NC as a brand in South Korea

The case of NC as an outdoor fashion brand illustrates a contemporary cognitive connection. As the main element in forming the South Korean social construction on NC as a brand, we

adopt the definition of social psychology by Allport (1924: 12 as cited in Burr, 2015); “The science which studies the behavior of the individual in so far as his [sic] behavior stimulates other individuals or is itself a reaction to this behavior.” While adopting the traditional definition of social psychology that provided the fundamental bases for diverse definitions for social constructionism, we also acknowledge that there is no unitary social constructionist theory or perspective but should view it “as a synthesis of symbolic interactionism and structuralist/ political-economic approaches.” (Brown, 1995).

This social phenomenon to regard NC as a fashion brand is presented in three segments as a case: a) NC as an outdoor fashion brand; b) Social construction of Nordic brand and NC brand in South Korea and c) Contemporary cognitive connection.

a) *NC as an outdoor fashion brand*


It may sound rather odd to any Norwegian when they hear that for majority of South Koreans, NC means an outdoor fashion brand. This is, however, the case and that is also precisely the reason why this South Korean social construction and practice of NC is taken up to illustrate one aspect of contemporary Arctic destination of NC on the global stage.

NC is an outdoor gear and fashion brand company that originated from the UK. The outdoor gears and fashion items started trading in South Korea from 2010 and its popularity has been on the rise until its closure in 2012. During its operation, the rising popularity had been due to several socially constructed factors that associated with the brand name in its phonetic sense – its Nordic flavour. By the Nordic sounding name, the brand NC conjured up certain images and perceptions of pure nature, equal society, advanced democracy, happiness, and the like.

Table 1 presents NC brand in South Korea.

Table1. Overview of NC as an outdoor fashion brand in South Korea

Introduction	Inspired from Nord Kapp in Norway, known as the land of purity, North Cape is the original Northern Europe style outdoor clothing which connotes the frontier and adventurous spirit. North Cape has presented high quality fabric and design at an affordable price based on the extensive outsourcing infra of enterprise.
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Logo	
Launching date	August 2010
Concept	Original Northern Europe style outdoor look
Distribution	Roadside stores and Department stores
Product category	Peary, Nord Kapp, Voyage line

(Source: <http://www.hyungji.co.kr/eng/business/outdoor/northcape.asp>)

It is notable that there was no mention about NC company originating from the UK in the information on the brand's concept and introduction. Because NC in South Korea as a company has no longer publicly accessible information on its history since its closure, we have not been able to gain a more in-depth knowledge on the discrepancy between the parent company being British and its concept having been inspired by Nord Kapp in Norway.

b) Social construction of Nordic brand and NC as a brand in South Korea

The South Korean society's overall perception of Nordic played a significant role in understanding NC as a fashion brand in the country. Indeed, when blog sites are searched with words such as Nordic, Norway, NC in South Korea's 2 main search engines (i.e., Naver.com and Daum.net), the societal perception of Nordic and NC of Norway became apparent. Nordic as a brand image has connotations of novelty, fascinating nature, advanced democracy, equal opportunities, and quality education. The popularity in Nordic taste could be observed in recent trends in various areas such as design, travel, society, education, culture, and food. Using the Korean search term **노르딕** for Nordic, about 92000 sites were counted across the 2 search engines. Main themes covered included Nordic walking, design, education and travel and culture.

c) Contemporary cognitive connection

From the sites that contained the word 노스케이프 for NC, which were about 3280 after overlapping sites and irrelevant sites were removed, the meaning of NC was investigated; a) NC as a fashion brand and b) NC as a destination in Norway. As Table 2 presents, a significant majority of the sites regarded NC as an outdoor fashion brand, claiming to have been inspired by NC in Norway while the company was originated in the UK.

Table 2. North Cape as a fashion brand vs a destination in Norway

	Naver.com	Daum.net
Approximate number of blog writings that contained the word North Cape (노스케이프)	2800	480
Approximate number of blog writings that regarded North Cape as a fashion brand and its related theme	2000+	300+
Approximate number of blog writings that regarded North Cape as a tourist destination and its related theme	5	2

Search word: North Cape (노스케이프)

Note: in addition to the reported counts in the table other themes included a) the celebrities who promoted the brand; b) other businesses or products sharing the same name but not about NC as a brand nor a destination.

Discussions

An emic approach to co-creation: The Thai case

Our study suggests that for Thais, their engagement at the tourist site is anchored in both personal and cultural values representing and connecting their past and present societies together. Further, the Thai engagement with NC is co-created by Thai using operand and operant resources (Hollebeek et al., 2019; Vargo et al., 2020). The Thai case show that that cliff NC (the physical place) can be viewed as an operand resource, which trough weaving stories of the King’s visit becomes an operant resource for Thais. However, the Kings engagement with NC comes from an etic understanding of the site, which was influenced from a contemporary, at that time, engagement with NC as an exotic and challenging place to visit. His engagement at NC resulted in new operand resources: the initial stone and the King himself. Today the King’s elevated status in Thai society has resulted him being an operant resource in co-creating NC for Thais. Further, our findings show that this emic approach

encapsulates Thais' physical, emotional and cognitive connection to the site, which, we posit, can be viewed as operant resources (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Thais visitors' emotional and cognitive connections to NC as an operant resource has been constructed in various cross-cultural relations; the site is not only a geographical location, is also a constellation of multiple relations – a 'thrown togetherness' – where the fluid trajectories of individuals are in movement together (Massey, 2005), contributing to (re-)shape NC uniqueness for Thais.

The Thai case illustrates a "culturally rich" co-creation process, where operand and operant resources are integrated over time (Gnoth, 2017; Mathisen & Sørensen, 2021). This, we argue, is an example of how an emic approach to design of tourism experiences can facilitate cross-cultural customer co-creation. Further, it also illustrates the difficulties to separate emic and etic understanding of a tourist site, as they are intertwined and embedded in already integrated operand and operant resources. An implication for service dominant logic is that tourist actors need special cultural knowledge and skills, anchored in Thais' (emic) engagement with the tourist site over time.

An etic approach to co-creation: The South Korean case

Although South Korean visitor to NC might be viewed with little difference from Thai visitors from NC locals and experience providers, as illustrated in the cases, the socially constructed cultural meanings of NC can be said in no way the same. When we can aptly describe the Thais' meaning making of NC is made up of emic-based operand and operant resources, one can hardly avoid calling South Korean meaning making to be etic, i.e., the outsider position and has little or no connection in history and culture.

When we examine the social conditions that made NC as a fashion brand in South Korea, a modern culture to view Nordic as something natural and balanced life, which generally considered insufficient in South Korean society by its members. This Korean phenomenon to regard NC mostly as a brand provides yet another comparative facet in terms of some recent research outputs on Nordic branding from the largely Nordic perspectives (Andersen et al., 2019; Andersen et al., 2021; Cassinger et al., 2021).

Comparative to the Thai case, overall, the South Korean etic-based meanings of NC demarcate operand and operant resources rather distinctively. Whereas the boundaries between the two

resources were difficult to be drawn clearly due to longstanding cultural and historic integrations in the Thai case, NC's physical location, its cultural and historic importance in the Arctic history, can be neatly categorised as part of operand resources for the South Koreans on NC. The visiting South Koreans' personal level connection, knowledge and skills would clearly be assembled as their operant resources.

Co-creating tourism experiences

The cases in this chapter provide a good ground for both academic and practical advancement in our understanding of Arctic tourism experiences, tourists' co-creation of experiences, emic and etic positions of tourists, the creations and the usage of operand and operant resources by tourists and operational need for a deeper understanding of visitors' emic and etic positionality for a sustainable experience industry.

We argue that the co-creation of a tourist site is an ongoing and perhaps a slow process, connecting past and present, and diverse actors from different cultures across time and space. Slow co-creation implies active involvement through physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Hollebeek et al., 2019). Further, engagement is co-created when tourists and tourism actors integrate operand and operant resources. Moreover, this highlights that knowledge sharing in tourism, i.e., co-creation must be viewed through cross-cultural lenses with particular attention to tourists' emic and etic positionalities to the place that they visit.

As witnessed in the one case, perceptions of NC are shaped by Thais' emic and etic positions, originating from the Thai king's visit in 1907 and continuing to create cultural and historic meanings to today's Thai people. As another Asian visitor group, South Koreans appear to have very little emic position towards NC, if at all. Indeed, to the South Koreans NC was seemingly no more meaningful than a fashion brand that purports outdoor nature and adventure from novel Nordic part of the world.

We thus further argue that it is of significance for tourism experiences practitioners to gain knowledge of such complex co-creating processes as they contribute to tourist engagement and connection to tourist sites. With a deeper understanding on the visitors' emic and etic

positions, leading to relevant operand and operant resources, would contribute to a sustainable experience creation and co-creation.

Closing comments

This chapter began with an acknowledgement on the rising attention to Arctic tourism due to the globe-gripping climate change. With such unprecedented attention to Arctic as a tourist destination, we turned our focus onto the NC, northern most point of Europe with a rich historic and cultural significance. The attention was in tandem with the growing connection between Arctic and Asia where Asia is the potentially the biggest tourist generating place.

By studying cases of Thais connection to NC as well as the meaning of NC in South Korea, we highlight the quintessential importance to understand emic and etic positions of tourists because they play the role of creating operand and operant resources when they visit the site. We have found that emic is not exclusively pertinent to the residents of a destination only as we witnessed in the Thai case. We suggest that understanding on the deeply connected links among co-creation and tourist engagement can be achieved when we better understand the emic and etic positions of the tourist.

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