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Volume 5

Tourism Sensemaking: Strategies to Give Meaning to Experience

Arch G. Woodside
Editor

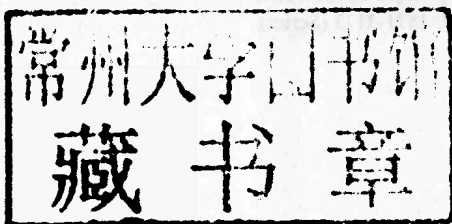
ADVANCES IN CULTURE, TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY
RESEARCH VOLUME 5

TOURISM SENSEMAKING: STRATEGIES TO GIVE MEANING TO EXPERIENCE

EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism sensemaking focuses on examining how tourists and tourism executives interpret the contexts, plans, actions, and outcomes relating to real or virtual behavior away from everyday home, work, and leisure environments. Tourism sensemaking is a configural concept covering three issues: (1) What are the interpretations of tourists and tourism executives to their own (emic) plans, actions, and outcomes involving tourism behavior? (2) Do these emic interpretations match or depart from the reality and/or myths in travel and destination brands occurring in their narratives? (3) What contributions to understanding of emic tourism experiences and strategy interpretation do researcher (etic) interpretations provide?

While sensemaking theory and research originated in organizational studies (Weick, 1993, 1995), Woodside and Martin (2008) extend the subdiscipline's application to interpretations of tourism behavior and tourism strategy. Similar to Woodside and Martin (2008) and Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005), in both contexts, "Sensemaking is about the interplay of action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice. When action is the central focus, interpretation, not choice, is the core phenomenon" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409).

While theoretically the dominant view is that sensemaking as a process that is ongoing (subject to revising), subtle (implicit rather than explicit), swift (automatic rather than planned), social (rather than formal), and easily taken for granted, both researchers and participants can focus explicitly on improving their sensemaking capabilities. Sensemaking always occurs implicitly; and, "sensemaking mindfulness" starts when a researcher or participant (e.g., traveler or tourism strategist) focuses attention explicitly on questioning the accuracy of his or her interpretations of antecedents, process, and outcomes for a given context.

Fig. 1 serves to visualize sensemaking domains as configurations of implicit-explicit thinking in individual-group contextual settings. "Mindfulness" as a concept appears on two arrows in Fig. 1 to imply that individuals and groups may attempt to transform implicit automatic sensemaking into explicit controlled sensemaking to deepen understanding and clarify thinking-in-context (cf. Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

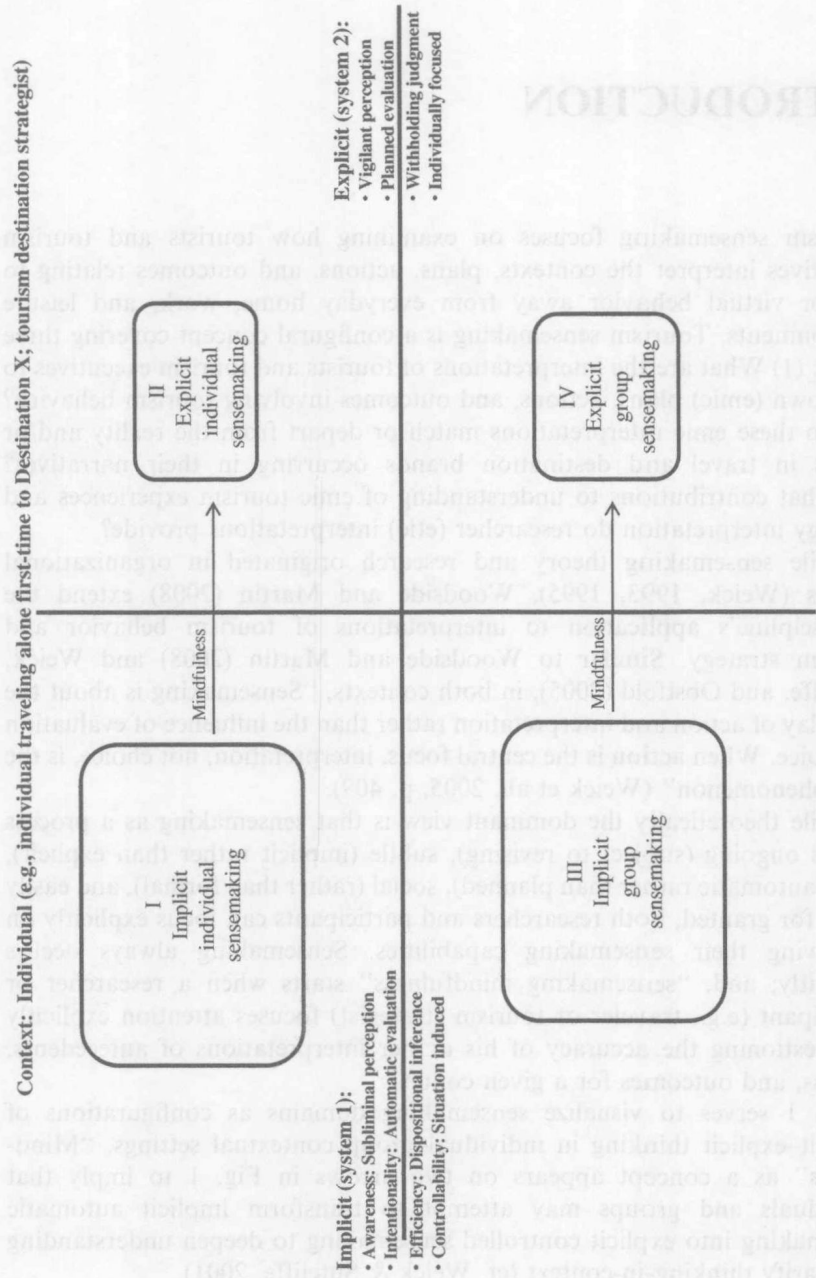


Fig. 1. Implicit and Explicit Sensemaking by Individuals and Groups.

The larger sizes of quadrants I and III versus II and IV in Fig. 1 serve to indicate that implicit thinking tends to dominate sensemaking. Explicit-mindful sensemaking, that is, thinking about thinking and how to go about creating alternative views of the same context and relevant antecedents and outcomes in this context is effortful and unnatural in comparison to implicit thinking.

The horizontal axis in Fig. 1 includes four dimensions relating to implicit-explicit thinking: awareness, intentionality, and controllability (Bargh, 1994). When considering these dimensions keep in mind Bargh's (1994, p. 3) conclusions about the high possibility of thinking which includes a configuration of low-high levels among these dimensions rather than an either-or proposition, "It has become increasingly clear that mental processes at the level of complexity studied by social psychologists are not exclusively automatic or exclusively controlled, but are in fact combinations of the features of each."

Thus, from the perspective of fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin, 2008) using three levels for each of the four dimensions (low, medium, and high), sensemaking includes 81 combinations among the four dimensions (3^4 configurations) with all combinations likely to occur though in different frequencies of occurrence. Still, most thinking occurs in cell 1 – the combination of the lowest levels of all four dimensions (e.g., standing, walking, and sitting are activities associating with low levels of thinking across all four dimensions).

EXAMPLES OF VISUALIZING IMPLICIT-EXPLICIT EMIC STORYTELLING

Figs. 2 and 3 illustrate the impact of different cues-in-contexts affecting the implicit thinking and sensemaking of the observer (e.g., researcher) to the emic story being told in the visuals. The creation of Figs. 2 and 3 rests on a theoretical platform of Carl Jung's (2009) archetypal theory and method of decoding his own dreams. Jung's (2009) paintings of his dreams to enable conscious interpretation of his conversations within the collective unconscious inform a call for creating visual narrative art to inform meanings of personal and collective unconscious relating to stories consumers tell about buying and using brands.

The collective unconscious contains the wisdom and experience of untold ages and thus represents an unparalleled guide for explaining the meaning of what is happening and

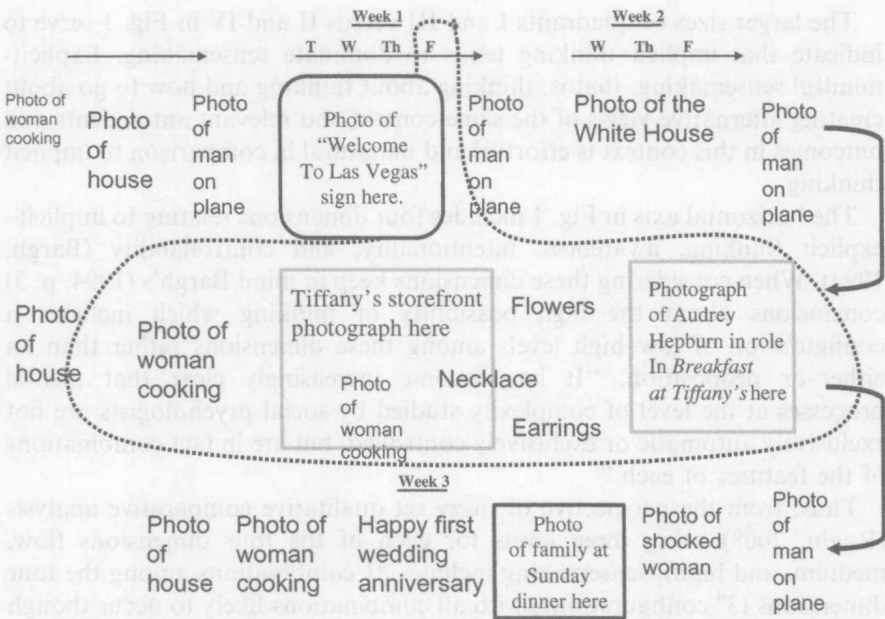


Fig. 2. Who are the People in the Story? What is Happening in the Figure? What will Happen in the Future?

what will happen. “Active imagination” and “self-experimentation” are terms Jung refers to in his use of paintings and sculpture to create dialogues between “directed thinking” (conscious thinking or what in the 21 st century is referred to as “system 2 thinking”) and fantasy thinking (personal and collective unconscious, what is similar to “system 1 thinking,” see Evans, 2003). (Woodside, Megehee, & Sood, 2011).

Before looking at Fig. 3, please prepare written answers to the following questions about Fig. 2. What is happening in Fig. 2? Who are the people in Fig. 2? What story is being told? Who is the protagonist (the star of the story) in Fig. 2? What will the future bring forth for the protagonist? Putting thoughts to paper is a critical step here. Please stop reading and take this step.

Before continuing, take a break! Have a cup of coffee or a soft drink and read a newspaper or watch television for 15 minutes to clear your mind. Only then, please read on.

... (Time passes here.)

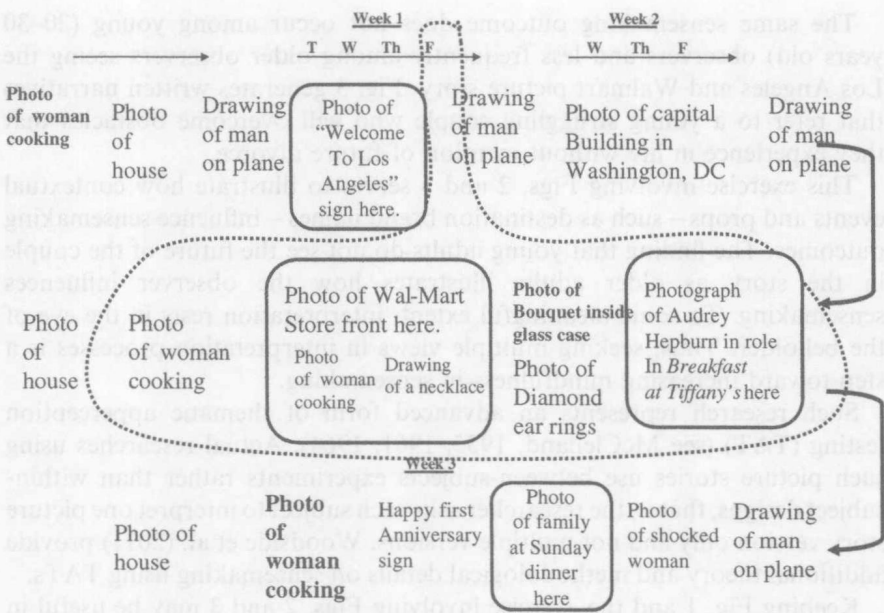


Fig. 3. Who are the People in the Story? What is Happening in the Figure? What will Happen in the Future?

You're back! Okay. Now look at Fig. 3. Answer the same questions. What is happening in Fig. 3? Who are the people in Fig. 3? What story is being told? Who is the protagonist (the star of the story) in Fig. 3? What will the future bring forth for the protagonist? Putting thoughts to paper is a critical step here.

Now compare the contents of your two stories. Do they differ? If yes, in what ways? Actual between-subjects experiments of these two and additional picture stories indicate that the presence of Las Vegas versus Los Angeles and Tiffany's versus Walmart influence observers' sensemaking of what is happening in the stories and what will happen in the future. Also, observers' stories vary consistently by age – many observers 40+ in age conclude that the couple in the Las Vegas and Tiffany's story are heading toward divorce [the wife is buying expensive jewelry by herself in celebration of their first wedding anniversary while the husband is traveling ostensibly for business purposes to Las Vegas ("Sin City"). The jewelry buying serves as acts of retribution for being left alone and seemingly being forced to purchase her own wedding anniversary gifts while the husband romps in Sin City!

The same sensemaking outcome does not occur among young (20–30 years old) observers and less frequently among older observers seeing the Los Angeles and Walmart picture story. Fig. 3 generates written narratives that refer to a young struggling couple who will overcome obstacles that they experience in life without mention of future divorce.

This exercise involving Figs. 2 and 3 serves to illustrate how contextual events and props – such as destination brand names – influence sensemaking outcomes. The finding that young adults do not see the future of the couple in the story as older adults illustrates how the observer influences sensemaking. To some meaningful extent, interpretation rests in the eye of the beholder. Thus, seeking multiple views in interpretation processes is a step toward increasing mindfulness in sensemaking.

Such research represents an advanced form of thematic apperception testing (TAT) (see McClelland, 1955, 1961, 1964). Actual researches using such picture stories use between-subjects experiments rather than within-subject designs, that is, the researcher asks each subject to interpret one picture story version only and not multiple versions. Woodside et al. (2011) provide additional theory and methodological details on sensemaking using TATs.

Keeping Fig. 1 and the exercise involving Figs. 2 and 3 may be useful in making sense of the contribution of each chapter in this volume. The remaining sections of this preface provide brief perspectives on each chapter in *Volume 5*. The perspectives may serve to whet your appetite for deepening skills in sensemaking.

The nine chapters in *Advances in Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research Volume 5* all address one or more of these three issues in tourism sensemaking: emic interpretation, etic interpretation, and the accuracy of sensemaking interpretations. Recognizing and distinguishing multiple dimensionalities of sensemaking theory serve to advance theory and practice of understanding sensemaking processes. Implicit (social, subtle, swift) sensemaking frequently does not include questioning the accuracy of resulting interpretation, whereas explicit (formal, slow, seeking alternative views) sensemaking does.

BLOG ANALYSES OF INTERNATIONAL VISITORS' INTERPRETATIONS OF SIGHTS AND OWN EXPERIENCES IN VISITING THREE SOUTH AMERICAN CITIES

The first chapter centers on emic sensemaking: how do visitors interpret and report the sights, sounds, smells, and events (i.e., their lived experiences) that

occur during their visits to major destinations away from home? Using website blog reports, Laura Colt provides (im)balance maps inspired by the work of Heider (1958) and Woodside, Sood, and Miller (2008) of the stories different visitors tell and show via pictures during their visits to three South American cities: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Santiago, Chile.

Colt concludes that tourism marketing strategy is all about knowing one's audience, and blogs are a simple way to begin that process. A blogger condenses her or his trip into a relatively short written story, so what she or he chooses to include can give insight to marketers as to what is truly memorable to tourists. A telling point in this chapter is the interplay between emic and etic interpreting of lived experiences in multiple contexts and how these interpretations result in overall evaluation glosses of each place brand (Rio, Buenos Aires, and Santiago).

CROSS-CULTURAL HETEROGENEITY IN TOURIST DECISION MAKING

In the second chapter, Correia, Kozak, and Ferradeira support the view that national cultures inherently influence visitors' interpretations of their judgments about tourism destinations. These authors describe how nuances within cultural values influence emic interpretations of travelers' own judgments. For example, they report, "In general, Americans relate to brand destinations with confusion. In Nordic countries, cultural orientations that influence tourist decision making are individualism and power distance. Power distance explains a decision based on a hierarchy of quality whereas individualism in the American culture explains brand decisions."

NEW THIRD PLACES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Third places are settings away from home or work in which individuals and groups call their own; psychological and social processes transform upon entering third places. These transformations occur automatically usually – system 1 thinking dominates sensemaking in third places. In the third chapter, Anne Crick advances theory in explicitly interpreting the meanings

of third places. She presents a nuanced view of the multiple locations and meanings that relate to third places.

Crick's perspective includes the possibility of virtual as well as physical third place locations. Her treatise includes a useful review of the relevant literature on the dimensions and meanings of third places.

INFORMATION USEFULNESS OF TOURISM DESTINATION WEBSITES: CALIFORNIA, FLORIDA, AND NEW YORK

In the fourth chapter, Maria Knoerr and Carol M. Megehee offer an external observer's assessment of the usefulness of tourism website information. Does the quality and quantity of information in the California, Florida, and New York tourism websites differ substantially? If yes, which website is best? Which is worse? A clear winner does emerge in their report.

The protocol instrument that Knoerr and Megehee develop may be useful as a tool in marketing management audits of implemented strategies by destination marketing offices. This study illustrates explicit sensemaking by a two-person group (quadrant IV in Fig. 1).

CULTURAL HERITAGE FASHION BRANDING IN ASIA

In the fifth chapter, Eunju Ko and Seulgi Lee profile cultural heritage fashion brands based on three Asian countries: Japan, China, and Korea. Their study identifies components of cultural heritage fashion branding by comparative analysis and identifies characteristics in brand management strategy from the brands. Finally, their study offers managerial implications for upcoming cultural heritage fashion brands.

Thus, Ko and Lee offer an etic sensemaking report on emic implicit sensemaking via cultural heritage foundations of fashion brands. Their study makes explicit how we come to enact processes inherent within our culture. The study's comparative analysis of three unique Asian cultures makes a unique and valuable contribution to sensemaking in tourism and consumer research.

EMIC INTERPRETATIONS OF GLOBAL GAMING DESTINATIONS

In the sixth chapter, Danyang Lu provides both emic and etic interpretations via travel blog stories about experiencing Macau, Las Vegas, and Monaco. Lu's report provides a unique report on three world-renowned gambling capitals. The findings support the conclusion that one of three cities associates gambling with sin; a second associates gambling for the serious hobbyist; and third associates gambling with status. Match each city with the glosses of sin, gravity, status and check your choices by reading the Lu chapter.

Lu provides insightful theoretical conclusions through their application of Heider's (1958) balance theory and Woodside and Chebat's (2001) advances to the theory. They conclude, "Travelers experience psychological imbalance when visiting a culturally distant county. Unexpected surprises create a lot of tension with travelers. In some cases, travelers try fully or partially restoring their psychological balance by digging out something pleasant or finding some excuses for the poor situation they encountered. If nothing good enough for the restoration can be found, they choose to blame the problem on the host country."

VISITORS TO MAURITIUS: USING IPA TO DISCERN CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN IMAGE PERCEPTIONS

In the seventh chapter, Girish Prayag offers a mixed methods etic-emic sensemaking interpretation of international visitors' image perceptions for the island of Mauritius. Prayag's use of importance-performance analysis (IPA) is illustrative of contributing to folk theory of mind (Malle, 2003, 2004).

Whether or not IPA relates to actual importance of dimensions a researcher presents to visitors for evaluation of a destination choice is not the issue in folk theory of mind. The real benefit of IPA likely is in illuminating meanings that persons assign to symbols that attach to a place and enactments involving this place. In folk theory of mind, when people explain their own behavior or the behavior of others, they are using the explanation to manage a social interaction – by offering clarification, trying to save face, or casting blame. Malle's (2004) account makes clear why these