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Tourists as Meme-seekers: A Theoretical Approach

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ABSTRACT

Tourists seek a variety of experiences and they all participate in tourist mobility in their way. In this study the concept of seeking analysed in the scope of memetics. The tourist meme has identified as a meme that in a close or wide relation with tourist mobility which are carrying information about a place, an era or period of time, a culture, sub-cultures, cultural items, styles, behaviours, individuals themselves, completely imaginary things, a religion or a belief, an event, events or other memes and so on. It is accepted in meme/gene analogy when a meme spread into a brain, it associates with other memes in a kind of package or other words, in a memeplex. For this reason, tourist types accepted as tourist memeplexes and tied theoretically with the concepts of focus and goal. Kanerva's conception of focus was used to more broadly define what a meme was associated with, as Gabora does. In this statement, memes have accepted in the form of information patterns encoded within the focus indicating the scope and experiential quality of the individual's awareness. The proposed theoretical model consists of three dimensions. These are tourist memeplex, focus and goal. With this proposal, it is aimed to assess different types of tourist experiences together which were defined by different authors. On the other hand, this model gives a chance to develop a new and complex taxonomy to assess various types of tourist experiences in a single framework.

1. Introduction

The literature on tourist behaviours research reveals a basic tourist-related concept that can be termed as 'seeking'. Boorstin asserted that (1961; 1992, p. 85) 'the tourist was a pleasure-seeker'. In addition to this, MacCannell (1973, p. 597) emphasized that 'touristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences.' From this point of view, it is not ambitious to say that MacCannel speaks of a kind of authentic-seeking, when we think about his 'quest for authenticity'. At first, one may think that, these two assumptions contradict each other. And also, MacCannell's criticism on Boorstin might be counted supporting evidence to this thought. But we think that, these ideas are uniting –somehow– within a structure, as the twisted yarns of a rope. The meme analogy is chosen as the point of origin for understanding this assumed structure. This is what we are trying to make as a whole by combining the different approaches within the scope of tourist motivations from their common points.

The meme was first coined by Dawkins (1976) as a unit of cultural transmission or a unit of imitation/replication, in non-genetic means (Dawkins, 2006). The replicator is something, anything, that can either (1) make copies of itself or (2) is easily and automatically copied by the virtue of its relationship to the medium in which it is found

(Burman, 2012, p. 80). Memes are playing a transmitter role in the transmission of cultural ideas', symbols' or practices' transmission from one brain to another through writing, speaking, rituals, gestures and other imitable mimics etc. (Graham, 2002, p. 196). Tunes, ideas, catchphrases, dressing fashions, ways of making a pot or building arches can be shown as examples of memes. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation (Dawkins, 2006, p. 192). It is mentioned that memes can spread from brain to brain, from brain to book, from book to brain, from brain to computer, from computer to computer etc. It is worth listening to Dennett for well understanding about the thing that spread: "...Not stuff, not packets of material, but pure information, the information that generates the pattern of behavior that replicates... (2001, p. 136)". When memes spread into a brain, they associate with other memes in a kind of package or in other words, in a memeplex (Blackmore, 1991). As a result, this wide variety of meme mutations have to compete with each other to attract enough attention to the use of mental resources (Hofstadter, 1983, p. 18). In general terms, these interests allow memes to sustain their existence and to continue self-replication.

Gabora (1997) used Kanerva's (1988) conception of 'focus' to more broadly define what the meme was associated with. In this statement, memes are accepted in the form of 'information patterns' encoded within the 'focus' indicating the scope and 'experiential quality' of the 'individual's awareness' (Gabora, 1997, p. 6). At this point, it may be useful to explain the concepts of focus, awareness and information patterns in an example. Gabora's (1997) 'cookie jar' is an open framework for developing a case. For example, the child is hungry and this hunger situation can be described as a need. The focus of the child can be summarized as to satisfy this need. At this point, that is, to appease his hunger. Now, let's think that, Gabora's cookie jar stands on the table in the same environment with the hungry child. In order for this child to have the awareness that the cookies inside the jar can meet her/his needs, he needs to have information about reaching out to the jar, opening the lid, taking the cookie in it and eating it; or s/he needs other kinds of information that could help her/him to predict this information or simply to reach cookies in the jar (e.g. as breaking the jar). According to this approach, it can be said that, memes are information patterns coded into the focus of suppressing hunger, which is forming the idea of eating the cookies inside the jar that stands on the table.

There are, of course, authors who criticize these approaches. For example, Burman (2012) treats the meme as 'an unscientific object'. In criticizing this structure, he comments on Dawkins' failure to go further after proposing the concept. He further argues that writers such as Dennett, Hofstadter and Blackmore who studied on memes, do not evaluate the meme in accordance with Dawkin's original proposition. The answer to this criticism was given by Blackmore (1999, pp. 54-56) that 'there is no right answer to' what a meme is. According to her, the four notes on a piece of music or the entire symphony can form meme, as long as it can be transferred somehow.

It can be argued that, although some of the criticisms are considered to be correct, meme analogy can still be considered as a useful framework. Because, considering the studies developed over this analogy in the last 10 years, it can be understood that this idea is valid.

Some of the studies conducted in the context of meme analogy address cultural transactions observed in animal communities. Baker and Gammon (2008) studied vocal memes of black-capped chickadees and carried on for eight seasons. They identified 95 different vocal memes belonging to three bird groups, which were distributed to three different locations and examined why some vocal memes persisted, and why others became extinct. In this study, what is defined as vocal memes is considered as the average gargle call patterns of 0.5 seconds used by birds in a singing sequence. 10 average elements called syllables were defined in each gargle call, and it was observed that 50 to 60 different syllables were found in a bird community. As a result of the study, it was observed that 59 of the 95 singing memes disappeared from the repertory of the communities in one or more seasons. Thus, 35 unsuccessful memes lost in one or two seasons and 30 core memes that managed to remain in the repertory for 7 or 8 seasons were identified. As the findings of the study it was found that; (1) core memes are more likely to be shared with other members of the community, (2) during the daily activities of a bird, the nuclear memes are more likely to be heard and (3) unsuccessful memes are generally performed more often by young members of the community. The authors think that these identified core memes are an object of the strict rules of cultural harmony that play a role in natural selection pressures. In this context, many scientists such as Lynch, Baker, Jenkins, Martens, Morton, Slater, and Mundinger conducted various researches on the subject and presented various evidence on the evolution of culture in animal communities (Lynch 1996; Lynch and Baker 1993; Baker 2006; Baker and Gammon 2006, 2007; Lynch, Plunkett, Baker and Jenkins 1989; Martens 1996; Morton 1977; Slater 1986; Mundinger 1980, 1982).

Another example is Sun and Ding's (2018) study on the identification and tracking of technological and scientific information memes in patents and publications citation networks. In this study, researchers identified information memes such as 'laser', 'quantum', 'fiber', 'composite', 'polymer' and 'memory', circulating on patent and citation networks and examined them under the dimensions of differences, similarities and development orientations. In this context, when the information memes determined in the field of graphene were taken into consideration, it was found that although there were some differences between the research subjects, the relationship between them was increasing and the boundaries were blurred. In this respect, this study became one of the most recent studies on the evolution of science and technology culture.

In the previous paragraphs, it was mentioned that a meme is a unit of cultural transmission. By considering Makhortykh's (2015, p. 64) views of memes that 'transmit and strengthen' prominent imagery of cultural memory, it can be inferred that memes also have a role in the structure of cultural memory. Based on Heller's (2001) interpretation of cultural memory embodied in objectification that conceals meaning in a concentrated way, it can be said that some sort of embodiment plays a role in meme mechanics. It has already been mentioned in the previous paragraphs that melodies, proverbs, ways of manufacturing an object, cultural practices and idols, rituals and symbols are examples of memes.

Swiatek (2016), in his study examining the Nobel Peace Prize with a memetic approach, argued that cultural memory is shaped by texts, monuments, festivals and celebrations that are repeated at regular intervals. In this approach, it is mentioned that the Nobel Peace Prize is not only a medal, diploma, financial income. The prize is a structure consisting of various texts, behaviours and practices embedded in cultural symbols and social frameworks, various speeches, the values of the selective committee, in other words, a mass of designed memes. According to this view, the memes are strengthened as long as they are together (Swiatek: 2016, p. 134).

The so-called memotype is the aforementioned whole set of memes or, as Dawkins (1976, p. 211) defines, a mutually harmonious set of memes. At this point, however, critics of the mem / gene analogy are rising when it comes to accepting that memes are not observable objects in any case. In this respect, Gatherer (1998, p. 4) mentions that observing meme products can be a solution because it is difficult to observe the memes directly. This approach has been seen

as a way to overcome the problem of observing memes. The things mentioned as meme products are the ideas, beliefs, behaviours, practices and objects that are accepted as the results of meme relationships. In this context, Gatherer's meme products were named as meme relationships and the whole of these relations is defined as meme mechanics.

2. Tourist Memes

Tourist memes can be identified as memes that are in a close or wide relation with tourist mobility carrying information about "a place, an era or period of time, a culture, sub-cultures, cultural items, styles, behaviours, individuals themselves, completely imaginary things, a religion or a belief, an event, events or other memes etc…" by looking at the definition of meme concept which is suggested by Dawkins (1976). These memes can be a magazine poster, part of a novel, a TV advertisement, a narrative or a story that an individual tells another person, part of a documentary or lyrics, a cartoon frame related to Giza Pyramids or the other things carrying information about "the moment" of a screaming individual over the rollercoaster in Europa-Park when upside-down or an image of an individual sitting on the rock alone and watching the sunrise over mountains. Most of the given examples are the memes that can be observed within their medium such as magazines, photographs, books etc. Another way to observe memes is to observe meme products, as it is mentioned above.

When this was exemplified via Urry (1990), it can be said that what shaped the tourist gaze was memes settled in the memeplex of a tourist. When Cohen's (1979) tourist typologies are taken into consideration, for example, it can be asserted that these typologies are the categories that have been put forward as a result of the classification of tourist memeplexes with similar characteristics. Thus, it can be concluded that the new types of tourists have emerged as a result of the ongoing evolution of social cultures in general. In particular, for tourism, post-tourists (Feifer, 1985) can be accepted as an example of this kind of evolution. The point to be reached here is related to the constant replication of the memes in the tourist mobility, the change of shape and the acquisition of new forms.

3. Tourists As Seekers

One of the earliest interpretations of seeking in tourism, travel and leisure sciences is used by H. P. Gray (1970) to define sunlust and wanderlust. In his words, 'the pleasure traveller or tourist will be forced to seek new areas further afield irrespective of whether s/he seeks wanderlust or sunlust activities' (p. 131). According to him, in sunlust, tourists seek 'domestic amenities and accommodations' and in wanderlust, they seek 'different culture, institutions and cuisine' (H. P. Gray, 1970, p. 14). Within the same period, a similar thesis with sunlust was suggested by Williams and Zelinsky (1970, p. 565) under the term 'heliotropic' and defined as a factor 'namely a strong southward surge of sun-seeking, cold-shunning tourists'. Later, Cohen (1972, p. 176) suggested on the drifters who sought for 'the excitement of complete strangeness and direct contact with new and different people.' Another concept mentioned by MacCannell (1973) as 'the search' for the authentic experience which is also mentioned in the introduction section of this study.

Then he adds that, almost everyone is 'in search of authentic experience, roots and self-awareness' (MacCannell, 1977). In addition to this, Dann (1977, p. 188) suggests 'related to anomie' that tourists seek 'to overcome the humdrum, the normlessness and meaninglessness of life with more satisfying experiences'. Then we see this again in Buck (1978) as pleasure-seekers who are 'seeking escape from egalitarian affirmative action norms'. Later, Cohen (1979) exactly defines tourists as seekers. For example, his 'experimental tourist is in search of himself'. S/he 'seeks to discover that form of life which elicits a resonance in' himself/herself. He thinks that 'such seekers… experiment the alternative lifeways'. One another interpretation is made upon 'the recreation-seeking tourist' who 'thrives on what Boorstin (1961) call pseudo-events' (Cohen, 1979, pp. 184, 189). These kinds of studies are the studies that try to understand the phenomenon from an anthropological perspective.

There are also some business-driven perspectives which are based on psychological insights such as the study of motivations. One of the earliest papers on tourist motivations has been written by Waugh (1956) in relation to tourist data use. In that paper, there are some concepts such as satisfaction, expectation, decisions, likes, dislikes used with the concept of motivation. These concepts are still used as basic concepts of tourist behaviours. In addition to this, these concepts are also used above in the section that tourist memes were defined. Another paper related to travel motivations is mainly about the transportation business. In that paper Hurst (1969) also talks about satisfaction, decision making, behaviours, attraction, perception. It is also possible to find other pioneer studies related to the study of tourist behaviours in tourism, travel and leisure sciences. For example, in a study on travel behaviour, interrelated concepts such as desire, satisfaction, motivation, decision making were used in a planning perspective (Gilbert, Peterson, & Lime, 1972). At this point, it is useful to talk about a cornerstone study written by Crompton (1979), in which 'the concepts of pull and push' is re-evaluated. He defines motives for pleasure vacations in socio-psychological terms and classifies as: escape from a perceived mundane environment; exploration and evaluation of self; relaxation; prestige; regression; enhancement of kinship relationships; and facilitation of social interaction (Crompton, 1979, p. 416). Two years later, Dann (1981) initiates to unite anthropological, socio-psychological and industry-driven perspectives in terms of tourist motivations. In that study he mentions that 'tourists seek a variety of satisfactions, each in its way contributing to the richness of the travel experience' (Dann, 1981, p. 203).

In this study, the concept of seeking is accepted as the starting point with the perspectives of tourist motivations. Tourists seek a variety of experiences and they all participate in various forms of tourist mobilities in their own way. In Urry and Sheller's (2006, p. 207) new mobilities paradigm, it is mentioned that 'asylum seekers, international students, terrorists, members of diasporas, holidaymakers, business people, sports stars, refugees, backpackers, commuters, the early retired, young mobile professionals, prostitutes, armed forces; these and many others fill the world's airports, buses, ships, and trains'. When looking at this mobility, it is really easy to say 'all the world seems to be on the move'. Reasons

for these mobilities change from one to another. When talking about tourists, it is possible to classify them under different classes. For example, Cohen's (1972) organized mass tourist, individual mass tourist, existential, drifter and explorer classification can be accepted within this type of taxonomy. These examples can be increased with various types such as adventure tourists, culture tourists, sex tourists etc…

It can be easily said in the light of the arguments made above that, tourists are in seeking for various things such as exotic tastes, quite environment, sex –legal or illegal–, drugs, history, landscapes, scene, adventure, peace, sea, sun, snow, sports and much more… And these all can be tied with different focuses such as relaxation, joy, pleasure, intellectual enrichment, satisfaction, being healthy, amusement, curiosity etc. This concept of focus is the key we use, to link seeking with memetics.

Introduction section of this study can also be accepted as an introduction to memetics. In Gabora's cookie jar example, it is mentioned that memes can be accepted in the form of information patterns encoded within the focus. This focus can be a need, a habit or something new. It can simply be defined as a part of an individual's life. When the focus is accepted as self-amusement, an individual's awareness regarding the options of amusing herself/himself becomes the main determinant of the type of experience and experiential quality. Let's think about a sex tourist. S/he seeks for self-amusement and s/he is aware of sexual intercourse as a kind of experience that s/he can amuse herself/himself. This can be summarized as the behaviour of a sex tourist. In memetics it is accepted that, this behaviour of sex tourist is determined by memeplex. And memeplex is defined as a structure consisting of various associated memes. We can call this memeplex the sex tourist as the shallowest definition.

It is time to illustrate this approach through a widely accepted concept. Cohen's (1979, p. 184) 'recreation-seeking tourist' is a tourist looking for 'the pleasure of entertainment'. Now we can add another concept termed as a goal. Now the goal of the tourist becomes the pleasure -or 'the pleasure of entertainment' in Cohen's words-. Her/his focus can be identified as entertaining oneself. We accept that s/he is aware that recreational activities are entertaining and also, we accept that her/his level of awareness or her/his framework of awareness is the main determiner of the type of tourist experience and experiential quality.

In another example, for authentic seekers, self-enhancement, relaxation, entertainment can be defined as the goals. It is possible to multiply these kinds of examples but it is not found useful in this study since the main objective of this study is to develop a memetic model to understand complex tourist experiences rather than to develop a taxonomy. The crucial point in this framework is the focus, and her/his awareness of the experience which s/he focuses
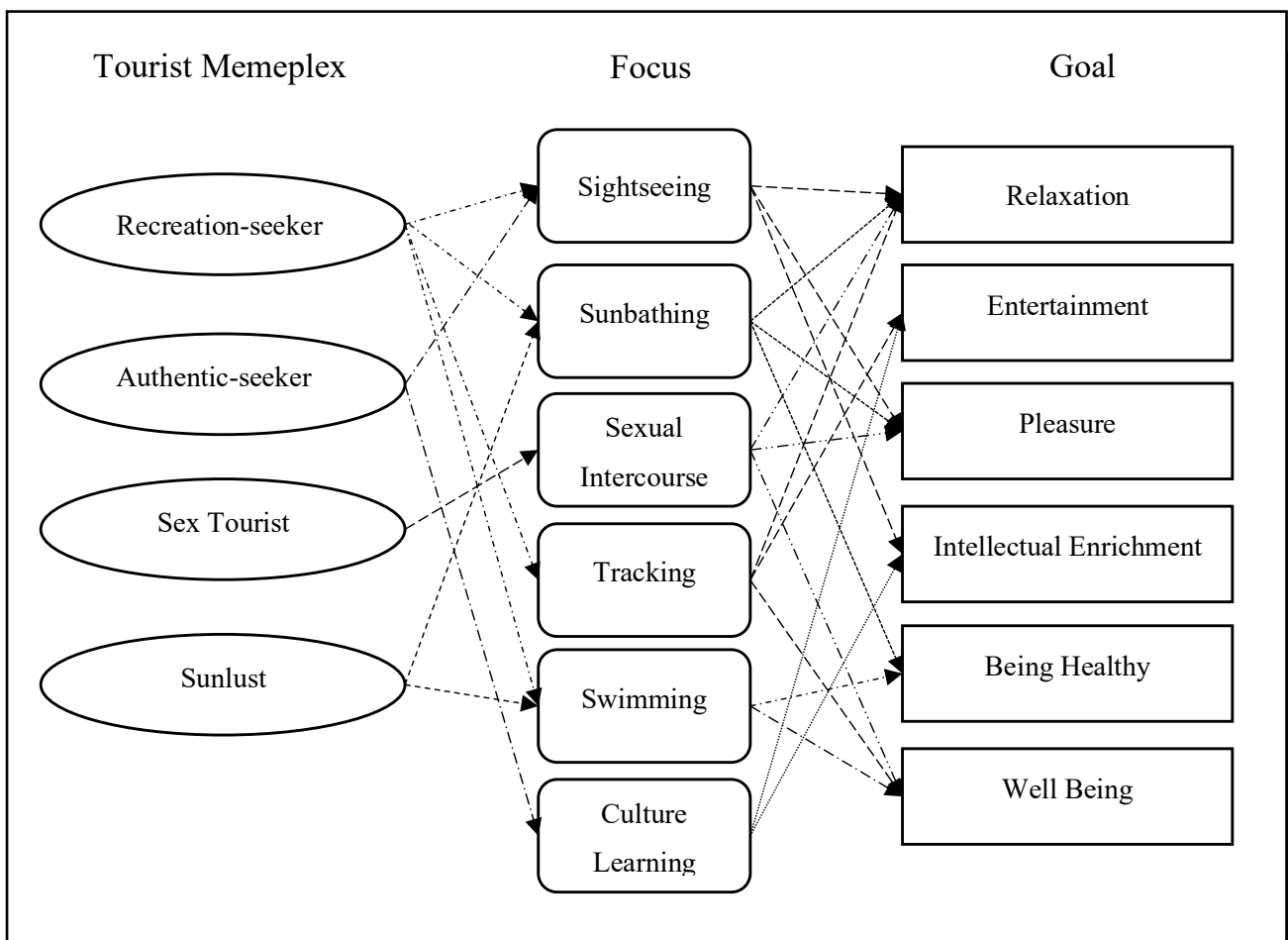

Figure 1. A Memetic Model on Tourist Experiences

$$\text{meme pool} \supset \text{tourist memes} \rightarrow \text{mediums} \rightarrow \text{individual/tourist} \rightarrow \text{tourist mobility}$$

Figure 2. Fictional Model of Bayraktaroğlu (2016)

on, will get her/him to her/his goal. This perspective gives a chance to model complex tourist experiences in a single framework (Figure 1).

This model provides the opportunity to understand various kinds of tourist experiences in a single framework. In Figure 1, we assess Cohen's (1979) recreation-seeker, MacCannell's (1973) authentic-seeker, Gray's (1970) sunlust and an unspecified concept of sex tourist together. Through this model, it is possible to assess different types of tourist experiences together which were defined by different authors. On the other hand, this model gives a chance to develop a new and complex taxonomy to assess various types of tourist experiences in a single framework.

In this study the proposed model is accepted as one side of the coin. The other side is related to the awareness concept mentioned in the previous paragraphs. In the introduction it is said that, when memes spread into a brain, they associate with other memes in a kind of package or in other words, in a memeplex. Bayraktaroğlu (2016) illustrates this with a fictional model tying this meme interaction with tourist motivations (Figure 2).

This fictional pre-model, based on Dawkins' memetics, basically suggests that: memes related to tourist mobility (in other words tourist memes) spread through mediums into human brains and they interact with settled memes (or memeplex); and as a result of this process, motivations determined for embodiment of these memes at the source (for resolving meme mechanic). Presumption of this fictional model is; the process of meme imitation (spread of tourism meme to brain through mediums and interaction with settled memes) awakens the motivation of individuals for experiencing and/or embodying the source of information that the meme carrying –and perhaps imitate the other memes in relation–. At this point, the mentioned mediums can be the elements that can carry these kinds of information such as photographs, written documents, verbalized or tacit narratives, printed or visual media, computers, magazines or people themselves etc. Also it wouldn't be wrong to say that imitation of other memes would continue in tourism mobility. In this mobility people will be under the attack of memes through the activities that they participated in and/ or other people, societies or things they interacted.

From this point of view, it is not hard to say that, tourist stereotypes are also related to memeplexes. McKercher (2008) asserts it is possible to trace 'American tourist to the 1950s' and 'Japanese tourist to the 1980s'. He asserts that 'social transformation invariably follows quickly on the heals of economic transformation, as the emergence of a large, affluent middle class induces a number of changes in attitudes towards conspicuous consumption, leisure habits and family values'. It is possible to assess social transformation with the evolution of culture in a way. But mostly, impacts of economy on societies is the first cause coming in one's mind, as in McKercher's paper. On the other hand, Pizam and Sussmann (1995) ask a question: 'Does nationality affect tourist behaviour?' They gave examples of tourist stereotypes defined by local residents of different destinations. And also, they surveyed on behavioural characteristics of tourist from different nationalities and found evidence regards to differences. With the help of this work, one can say that tourist behaviour differs by nationality. But it is really bold to say that nationality affects tourist behaviour. In memetics, it is answered through the term of imitation. In this perspective, memes can pass supposedly vertically from parent to child via imitation: for example, in the religious practice of circumcision. Memes can also copy themselves horizontally from person to person -between peers or from leaders to followers- (Atran, 2001, p. 354). This means some kind of community effect rather than nationality.

Memetics, mainly, deals with the ability of ideas and practices to replicate throughout and between different cultural entities (Blackmore, 1991). The definition of such a field of research resembles, in one aspect, propaganda. This aspect is related to shape, at least to manipulate, people's thoughts. Propaganda can be understood in such terms, with the dissemination of ideas and actions throughout culture unifying theme within many disparate approaches to the topic (Sparkes-Vian, 2018, p. 395). On the other hand, in contemporary business research, these kinds of attempts to persuade individuals to buy certain goods or services were called marketing. O'Shaughnessy (1996) asserts that 'even in the sophisticated discourse, the words propaganda and marketing are used almost interchangeably.' Resolving this conceptual dilemma is not the aim of this study since a definition could be useful. Ellul (1973, p. 61) defines propaganda as 'a set of methods employed by an organised group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organisation'. In Sparkes-Vian's study (2014), propaganda and marketing concepts were assessed under memetic framework and some arguments made about it. It is also possible to examine 'post-truth' with these concepts. But as it was mentioned in the previous paragraphs, this study is aiming to clarify how this approach can be used in tourism research rather than resolving conceptual difficulties.

In memetics, it is mostly argued that, memes 'seek (in a purely metaphorical sense) to propagate themselves from human mind to human mind and that all communications media such as cave paintings to Twitter have evolved to facilitate this process' (Sparkes-Vian, 2014, p. 41). In Dennett's words, it is a non-controllable process "design out of chaos without the aid of mind" (Dennett, 1995, p. 50). In theory, 'memes are, in a purely metaphorical sense, selfish beings; they 'seek' only to maximise their own replication. As long as they replicate as a unit, when people cease to replicate them, they die - although fragments of them may survive alone or when amalgamated with other memes. The techniques discussed in the previous section represent a small number of ways in which memes, either as actions, ideas or texts can be made more likely to replicate successfully and therefore to survive in a given environment' (Sparkes-Vian,

2014, p. 49). This heavy philosophical inquiry makes it hard to understand how one uses memetics in applied sciences. There is some structure, thing, stuff which is called meme. It is really hard to observe it –perhaps impossible– and it is acting on its own. And this stuff is the key concept of all cultural evolution. It sounds like Higgs particle. No one sees it but everyone in the community believes it exists. This situation also brings to mind something else which is literary out of this studies' research interests.

4. Conclusion

Memetics is accepted as a steppingstone to understanding tourist behaviours in a single complex structure. With this study, it has been tried to present an approach that will make these initiatives meaningful by forming the basis of the attempts made to explain tourist mobilities and the reasons underlying the tourist motives.

MacCannell's staged authenticity, Cohen's types of tourist experiences, Urry's often mentioned post-modern tourists and Adler's analogy of travel as a performed art, have failed to explain the whole tourism movement and have been critically criticized but they provided very valuable information about the nature of the tourist mobility. Numerous theoretical approaches such as destination attractiveness and destination competitiveness have risen on the legacy of these first initiatives. In this study, it is aimed to take this knowledge to the next stage and to fill some remaining gaps and to make a contribution of some new insights on tourist behaviours research.

Through the proposed model, it is possible to create complex structures related to different types of tourist experiences together. On the other hand, this model gives a chance to develop a new and complex taxonomy to assess various types of tourist experiences in a single framework.

By its nature, the memetic approach has the potential to provide a new perspective on many issues such as tourist motivations, tourism marketing, tourism sociology, tourist-local relations, and the socio-cultural effects of tourism. It is another important aspect that it claims to make explanations about the nature of tourism by bridging it with the nature of humankind. In this respect, the use of the concept of meme to understand the nature of tourism does not only provide a chance to explain tourist motives, but also opens up new research areas for tourism marketing and tourist behaviours research.

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