Constructing a Home on the Road: Home-As-Order--An Alternative Perspective to Study Consumption of Servicescapes
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This study is a first attempt to investigate the ways that consumers’ orientations towards place influence their consumption experiences. By focusing on the concept of home, the paper introduces the perspective of home-as-order as an alternative way of looking at the relationship of consumers to place. The study provides a description of the ways that consumers practice a home-as-order concept of home. In addition, this study shows that this home concept structures the ways people consume home-related servicescapes, such as hotel services. Based on 35 semi-structured interviews with highly mobile global professionals this study identifies practices through which consumers transform a commercial environment into a home-like environment as well as practices of selecting a commercial environment because it is closer to consumers notion of home-as-order.

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Finding Home in Hotels: Home as Order—An Alternative Perspective to Study Consumption of Servicescapes

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ways that consumers’ orientations towards place, and more specifically their notions of home, influence consumption experiences and behaviors. Place is a fundamental aspect of consumers’ lifestyles that structures and organizes identities, consumer behaviors, and experiences (Cuba and Hummon 1993; Sherry 2000, 1998; Thrift 1997). However, research in one’s relationship to place and the influence of this relationship in consumer behavior has been scarce. Recent work calls for the investigation of the ways that place structures consumption, especially consumption and experience of servicescapes (Sherry 2000; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). In social sciences, the main concept used to characterize the emotional and meaningful relationship between people and places is the concept of home (Altman and Werner 1985; Gunter 2000). By focusing on one notion of home, this study presents a new perspective, that of home as order, to help understand how place influences consumption of certain servicescapes, such as hotels.

This paper investigates how one concept of home, that of home as order, helps us understand consumer behaviors within hotel rooms and the experiences that consumers try to construct in this servicescape. Home as order defines home as a physical place where we feel oriented within a spatial, temporal, and socio-cultural order we understand (Dovey 1985, p. 35). In this way, one feels at home in any environment where a certain order or patterning of the space is re-created. For example, one may experience a foreign environment as home because home-like spatial patterns are in place, such as certain physical characteristics of the dwelling, including the architectural style of the environment, the size, the age, the level of orderliness, the lighting arrangements, the level of comfort, the colors, the smells of the place, etc. (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). The home as order concept then suggests that in so far as order is the way we relate to an environment, home is not necessarily embodied in a specific house or a place. The home as order suggests a portable way to relate to the environment: it suggests a ‘portable’ notion of home (Dovey 1985; Douglas 1991).

The study was conducted through 35 semi-structured interviews with highly mobile global professionals (McC racken 1988). I selected a sample of informants who continuously dwell in commercial spaces and for whom the issue of home constitutes a concern. The global consumer segment of highly mobile global professionals characterized by cosmopolitanism and voluntary mobility was selected (Featherstone 1995; Hamnerz 1990). The sample includes people who are continuously mobile professionally, such as roving professionals, business travelers, and expatriates. The interviews were structured to get to notions of home shared among these informants and the ways that they construct a home in mobility. Interviews were conducted either at their place of residency, work or in airports and lasted between 1 to 5 hours.

Overall, I found that multiple notions of home coexist and most of the informants have more than one home they dwell in. However, the focus on this paper is only on the notions of home as order. First, I identify the ways that informants understand and practice a home as order notion of home. Informants described the experience of being at home as being welcomed, secured, comfortable, and familiar. I analyzed the data to examine what types of spaces produce this experience of being at home. The data show that home is seen as four different types of spaces: a familiar space, a space with a certain type of order, a personal space, and a domestic space. This finding indicates that highly mobile professional find home in environments where any or a combination of these four types of spaces are in place. Environments where one is spatially oriented or that one considers a personal or domestic space produces the experience of being at home.

The second part of the study examines the ways that informants dwell in certain servicescapes, such as hotels. Informants reconstruct a sense of home on the road by re-creating their “main home” in commercial hotel servicescapes in temporary destinations. Using available local and marketplace resources in place (e.g., characteristics of the place) as well as personal resources that they bring to the destination (e.g., possessions), informants recreate a sense of home as order in these environments. I find that informants recreate a “being at home” experience in commercial hotel space by re-creating a spatial order similar to the home order transforming in this way the commercial space into a home-like environment. Additionally, mobile professionals purposefully select commercial spaces with spatial, temporal or cultural place orders similar to home orders. By imitating home orders, these commercial spaces activate the home-as-order schemas and produce the experience of “being at home” in mobility.

I further find that informants recreate the four types of home spaces in the commercial servicescape of the hotel. Mobile professionals recreate a familiar space in the hotel room or try to maintain familiarity across destinations by staying in the same global hotel chain in each destination; or inhabiting the same hotel in a particular destination; or staying either the same room or a room in the same side of the horizon. These strategies enable mobile professionals to develop spatial knowledge of the place and maintain a sense of familiarity in mobility. Another way of maintaining familiarity in mobility is through selection of hotels that have a similar spatial order as back home, such as choosing to stay in hotels that have a similar architectural or decoration style as their homes. Selecting hotels with similar spatial order as their house creates a sense of home also by re-producing the certain, home order for mobile professionals. Informants recreate the certain spatial order of home by reorganizing and redecorating the room. For example, informants move furniture around to re-create a spatial pattern of the furniture similar to that in their house and request certain objects and furniture that they identify with home to be brought in the room. Additionally, informants transform the hotel rooms into personal spaces through several appropriation practices, such as removing commercial materials or hotel signs from the room; decorating the space with personal possessions; etc. A final important type of space that recreates the experience of being at home in the hotel is domestic space. A domestic space is create through the presence of social relationships, as well as the possibility of carrying out domestic functions in the hotel room, such as eating, cooking, growing plants, taking care of pets, etc.

REFERENCES


