

The curatorial turn in tourism and hospitality

Tourism and
hospitality

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Abstract

Purpose – This study, a conceptual paper, analyses the growth of curation in tourism and hospitality and the curator role in selecting and framing products and experiences. It considers the growth of expert, algorithmic, social and co-creative curation modes and their effects.

Design/methodology/approach – Narrative and integrative reviews of literature on curation and tourism and hospitality are used to develop a typology of curation and identify different curation modes.

Findings – Curatorial techniques are increasingly used to organise experience supply and distribution in mainstream fields, including media, retailing and fashion. In tourism and hospitality, curated tourism, curated hospitality brands and food offerings and place curation by destination marketing organisations are growing. Curation is undertaken by experts, algorithms and social groups and involves many of destination-related actors, producing a trend towards “hybrid curation” of places.

Research limitations/implications – Research is needed on different forms of curation, their differential effects and the power roles of different curatorial modes.

Practical implications – Curation is a widespread intermediary function in tourism and hospitality, supporting better consumer choice. New curators influence experience supply and the distribution of consumer attention, shaping markets and co-creative activities. Increased curatorial activity should stimulate aesthetic and stylistic innovation and provide the basis for storytelling and narrative in tourism and hospitality.

Originality/value – This is the first study of curatorial strategies in tourism and hospitality, providing a definition and typology of curation, and linking micro and macro levels of analysis. It suggests the growth of choice-based logic alongside service-dominant logic in tourism and hospitality.

Keywords Curation, Curatorial strategies, Curated experiences, Platform economy, Place curation, Destinationscapes, AI, Social media, Tourism, Artificial intelligence

Paper type Conceptual paper

Highlights

- Curation is defined as the meaningful and persistent selection and organisation of content and experiences to increase value by aesthetically relating production and consumption, thereby facilitating better choices.
- The curatorial turn underlines the shift from the experience economy to the aesthetic economy, with growing human and machine (AI) curation processes.



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- Curatorial power is beginning to have significant effects on tourism and hospitality experiences and places.
- Curated placemaking emphasises locations that are “hot”, “cool” and “authentic” and which have future tourism value.
- Curation represents an extension of service-dominant logic towards choice-based logic.

Introduction

Curation provides an answer to a pressing contemporary problem – how to choose among the growing abundance of goods, services and experiences (Bhaskar, 2016). Initially developed in museums and art galleries to organise collections, curation is now widely used as a value creation tool. Curation is spreading as the knowledge economy grows and symbolic distinction for products and experiences becomes more important. Trentin *et al.* (2020, p. 3) argue that today, curatorial work “pervades our whole productive life”.

This mainstreaming arguably marks a “curatorial turn” in society, with producers and consumers using curation to organise information (Bhaskar, 2016). This offers new roles for human and artificial selectors (or “curators”) in fields including art, the media and science. Curators have grown in importance as the economy shifted from goods to services and experiences, expanding consumer choice. The original role of the museum curator was to organise objects, or physical goods, which expanded with industrialisation. More recently, service industries such as tourism and hospitality generated more consumption opportunities, increasingly using information and knowledge to distinguish their offerings.

This complexity increased with the rise of the experience economy, consumer-driven S-D logic (Vargo and Lush, 2004) and digital technologies. Davis (2017) argues that in a digital age marked by growing volumes of information and content, there is a pressing need to organise and categorise through curation. In tourism and hospitality management, the rise of the internet initially stimulated dis-intermediation and boosted choice, threatening the traditional roles of travel intermediaries. Consumers turned to social media on TripAdvisor and other platforms providing curated content (Smets *et al.*, 2021) to make choices.

Curation arguably represents a move towards re-intermediation, providing new relationships with consumers (Bonini and Gandini, 2019). Curation also signals increasing concern with the identification of future value, with curators acting as “selectors” who can stimulate stylistic innovation (Tran, 2010). In addition to consumer-driven needs, curators also select and develop offerings according to their own aesthetic judgement. Curation raises important issues for tourism and hospitality markets, including how offerings are selected, the curation strategies used, the power relations arising from such strategies and the innovation role of curation. Academic interest in the discourses and practices of curation and how these reflect fundamental social and cultural changes is growing (Snyder, 2015).

This conceptual review analyses the development of curation and its role in the selection and creation of tourism and hospitality experiences. It addresses three research questions:

- RQ1. Why is curation becoming increasingly important in the development and marketing of experiences?
- RQ2. How are curatorial strategies used in tourism and hospitality?
- RQ3. What are the implications of the “curatorial turn” for tourism and hospitality?

To address these questions, recent developments in curation are interrogated through literature analysis.

This paper contributes to knowledge by providing a theoretical base for analysing curatorial strategies, developing a structured analysis of curation and considering the implications of the curatorial turn for tourism and hospitality management. The following section begins with a discussion of the evolution of the concept of curation. This is followed by an analysis of the drivers of the curatorial turn and the emergence of different types of curation.

The evolution of curation

Curation originates from the Latin “curare”, meaning to take care. This was later applied to the organisation of artefacts in museums and galleries, who employed dedicated curators. Their work became referred to as “curating” in the 20th Century (Snyder, 2015) as museums professionalised, a process that accelerated after World War 2. From the 1980s, funding pressures stimulated greater public orientation and curators acquired new skills, such as storytelling, to engage new publics.

Hoffman (2013) charts an expansion of curation outside museums in the 1990s, with a shift from the figure of the curator towards the “curatorial” as a process. This period saw the rise of the curator-as-artist and biennial exhibitions that made “star curators” globally famous. The curator was recast as a mediator of relationships between objects, people and ideas, and the term “curatorial” was applied to curating goods such as automobiles and services, including restaurant menus.

Curation was also linked to the rise of the experience economy, in which distinction was created by imparting knowledge and experience to a wider audience (Hoffman, 2013). In the art world, the growing challenge of acquiring historical works increased attention for contemporary art and the avantgarde, placing a premium on knowledge of contemporary artistic collections. Star curators were hired to turn exhibitions and artworks into events and experiences. In an uncertain contemporary art market, curators provided reassurance about the value of artworks, while in other markets, curation was used to add value to a wide range of products, services and experiences (Mars *et al.*, 2023).

(De Monthoux, 2022) argues the value creation qualities of curation influence business, management and the economy, due to the abundance of goods, the experience economy and content explosion in the digital age. Curators help consumers choose between these growing options, helping them to make better choices (Bhaskar, 2016). The curator role arguably adds another layer to S-D logic, as how consumers choose (or perhaps “Choice-Based Logic” – C-B logic) becomes more important in crowded markets.

The evolution of curation also generated changing definitions. In museums, curators were the custodians of collections (Horie, 1986), whose expert knowledge underpinned their authority. The concern for curation influenced the broader art world, embracing art galleries and heritage institutions and local communities. Growing independence for curators stimulated the growth of temporary art exhibitions, biennales or triennials as the principal distribution channels for contemporary art, creating new relationships between art, institutions and publics, including tourists. Curation became a field of relational aesthetics where the meaning of art was defined the context of display as well as the content of artworks. Leading curator Hans Obrist (2014) defined curation broadly as care for the relationships among objects and the meanings generated by these relationships.

The independent curator obtained more power to define the meaning of art, by identifying the future value of artistic production (Venturi, 2022). The curatorial turn also shifted focus from the person of the curator (noun) to the act of curating (verb) and lastly, the

curatorial (adjective). Rogoff (2013) noted that curation lacks a stable body of knowledge, aiding the spread of curating to other fields. He defined curation in terms of process, including the activities of collecting, conserving, displaying, visualising, discoursing, contextualising, criticising, publicising and spectacularising knowledge and intangible culture.

Kathke *et al.* (2022) chart the expanding meaning of “curation” to embrace broader social practices of presenting objects, values and narratives to audiences as a meaningful, coherent whole. The curatorial turn licensed curators to influence the meaning of artworks by placing them in different contexts and creating new relationships to artists and publics. Trentin *et al.* (2020) argue curators produce value from assets they did not produce by organising them to raise visibility and boost reputations.

Adler (2021) argues that curators facilitate consumers’ choice by selecting among products and services. He sees curation growing in sectors where symbolic differentiation generates value, such as cultural products, finance and research. “Curating professionals” supporting C-B logic now comprise 17% of the US workforce, including curators in tourism and hospitality (Adler, 2021) music (Jansson and Hracs, 2018), retailing (Fraser, 2020) and fashion (Sebald and Jacob, 2018). Most recently curation has expanded to places, as Kappler and McKane (2019) describe in the curation and placemaking of the city-as-museum. Mars *et al.* (2023) see curation expanding into the food marketplace through “value narratives” deployed by different food-related stakeholders, or curators. In farmer’s markets curatorial actors include producers, service providers, retailers, consumers, governments and journalists.

Curation has therefore evolved from individual museum curators to wider arts and cultural markets, spreading to many areas of consumer choice and intermediation. The curator role now includes individual experts, and groups, communities and organisations. The aesthetic values attached to the art field have been incorporated into value narratives generated collaboratively through narrative creation, dissemination and implementation, also involving consumers (Mars *et al.*, 2023). Broadening collaborative curation processes add more “fuzziness” to the definition, but Jansson and Hracs (2018) argue that curation has become “too central to understanding the contemporary marketplace to dismiss” (p. 1603). Mars *et al.* (2023) see contemporary curators as involved in a process of value creation involving selection, organisation, bridging and framing activities, to which (Cook and Valdez, 2023) add; caring for and making sense of phenomena. Kim *et al.* (2017) emphasise that curation should be persistent. In the past, persistence was derived from the museum context, but increasingly, curators themselves must provide a consistent aesthetic framework.

We therefore propose a definition of curation as: “the meaningful and persistent selection and organisation of content and experiences to relate production and consumption and facilitate better choices to increase aesthetic value”. This definition encompasses the core aspects of curation described by Obrist (a relational process, bridging consumption and production), process-based (Rogoff, 2013), involving value creation through organisation and selection (Mars *et al.*, 2023) to support better choices (Bhaskar, 2016).

Curation can therefore be seen as an aesthetic form of stylistic innovation (Tran, 2010), where changes in style generate high symbolic value, which is inter-subjectively negotiated and reliant on timing to link aesthetic selectors. Stylistic innovation uses practices of creative sensing (inspiration-based), stylistic orchestrating (coherence-focused) and agile synchronisation (timing-driven). Curation as stylistic innovation therefore relies on selecting content with high aesthetic value, orchestrating this content to link producers and consumers and bring them together in the right place at the right time. The appeal to aesthetic value rather than use value or exchange value allows the curator to avoid the direct constraints of the marketplace and exhibit “art for art’s sake”.

The curator role should include aesthetic intent related to a specific field. This distinguishes the role of the curator from commercial marketing, because curation not only meets the needs of consumers but also develops an aesthetic that can resist market pressures (Cook and Valdez, 2023).

Having outlined the evolution of curation, the following sections describe the drivers behind the “curational turn” and develop a systematic literature review to examine the emergence of different curational strategies in tourism and hospitality.

The drivers of the curational turn

The curatorial turn is evident fields including art, anthropology (Bargna, 2019), education (Ruitenbergh, 2015) and digital marketing (Snyder, 2015). Seminal sources on curation, including Obrist (2014) and Bhaskar (2016), identify different drivers for this turn, including the shift from scarcity to abundance, firstly, in terms of goods, and subsequently, in terms of services, experiences and data. Abundant supply creates a need for selection, and consumers turn to intermediaries who help them “navigate” the marketplace, including curators (Joosse and Hrats, 2015). Curators help consumers to avoid “information overload” (Bhaskar, 2016) or the “choice overload” evident in tourism (Park and Eves, 2023).

In the experience economy, as Hauser *et al.* (2022) note, tourism experiences are increasingly based on intangible, staged experience elements, vastly increasing supply. Experiences have also grown as consumers have become prosumers or co-creators, often involving them in curatorial roles (Jansson and Hrats, 2018). With expanding experience supply, there is a growing “Fear Of Missing Out” (FOMO), increasing pressure to select the “right” experiences (Arica *et al.*, 2022). In tourism and hospitality, new technologies, including social media and user-generated content (UGC) stimulated experience expansion, generating information overload for consumers, with growing competition for consumer attention among producers.

The rise of curation is also related to the growing role of aesthetics. (Böhme, 2003) argues that in the symbolic economy, value is based on the commodity’s “form of appearance” in exchange, i.e. its aesthetic. Aesthetic production serves consumer desires by creating “staging values” instead of use values, producing an aestheticisation of reality, through which needs are intensified rather than satisfied (Böhme, 2003, p. 81). In tourism and hospitality, empirical studies have identified aesthetics as influencing visitor satisfaction with experiences (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). Aesthetic experiences have also increased as museums moved into the community, and a “hybrid museum script” has emerged, fusing museum functions with business and retailing (Noordegraaf, 2012). Curation has therefore become a coping strategy for the “cultural surplus” (Frey, 2021) of the experience economy. Davis (2017) identifies the emergence of three main curation modes:

- (1) *Expert curation* involves a single expert or small group of experts curating content for a larger audience, including the traditional museum curator, or travel blog writers.
- (2) *Social curation* engages a large group of people in the curation process to collectively find, organise and share content (e.g. Flickr, Reddit, Digg), also termed “crowdsourcing”.
- (3) *Algorithmic curation* involves computer programs selecting content for users based on coding by human programmers (Ørmen, 2018) such as Google search or Netflix. This involves algorithms ranking and personalising content, such as the “top 10” attractions or restaurants on TripAdvisor.

All three curation modes are present in tourism and hospitality management. Expert curation is provided by curated travel companies and travel bloggers, who give advice on selecting travel products. In terms of travel content, [Mirabell et al., 2013](#) liken this mode to museum curation, with a narrative explanation of selection, and content curators claiming expertise. [Van Driel and Dumitrica \(2021\)](#) also note the growing professionalisation and curatorial activity of travel bloggers. Social curation occurs in travel communities, such as TripAdvisor or Matador, or groups of airline passengers who select and share content on their flying experiences with others ([Kim and Hyun, 2019](#)). Algorithmic curation is used by travel platforms such as Airbnb and Expedia to present AI-informed choices. [Lukovic \(2023\)](#) argues algorithmic curation by Airbnb affects property ranking and visibility, maximising revenue generation for the platform. The reliance on aesthetic selection criteria means algorithmic selection is increasingly combined with human interventions ([Frey, 2021](#)). Travel company The Culture Trip combines analysis of social media data with expert-generated curated content (UNWTO, 2021). The Lonely Planet website links curated expert recommendations with advice from fellow travellers on social media. [Bhaskar \(2016\)](#) argues that human curation has attained new value as algorithms have expanded, and [Frey \(2021, p. 4\)](#) notes a backlash against algorithms, and positions human curation as a “boutique” business model, confronting the “conglomerated niche strategy”, of platforms such as Netflix.

Social curation is growing as the roles of the producer and consumer become increasingly blurred through “co-creation”, or “co-curation” of experiences. The information posted by visitors on TripAdvisor stimulates others to follow curated recommendations, such as the top ten sites in a destination ([Van der Zee et al., 2020](#)). We therefore consume content others (producers or consumers) make available, or have not filtered out. Selective “hiding” of content on platforms such as Airbnb may impact negatively by preventing consumers from making rational choices based on full information about available supply.

Platforms also enable users to participate in making places or destinations. [Törnberg \(2022, p.1\)](#) identifies “platform placemaking” in which users are “shaping imaginaries of urban place in their interests” (p. 2). Curation is more than a marketing technique: it also links the choices of consumers to narratives that provide meaning for others. Places are therefore being framed through processes of “curating the city”, selecting and organising urban features worthy of attention ([Trentin et al., 2020](#)).

This review of curation shows that the concept has expanded as curatorial activities have moved beyond the museum, with growing numbers of actors becoming “curators”. This has increased the “fuzziness” of the concept and produced differing definitions. However, we can still identify a range of basic curatorial processes, which together constitute a form of stylistic or aesthetic innovation. To gauge the effects of a possible “curatorial turn” in tourism and hospitality, a literature review explores curatorial applications in tourism and hospitality.

Methods

A systematic review was conducted of studies on curation in tourism and hospitality. As this is an emerging field, sources were identified from SCOPUS, listing more mainstream academic publications, and Google Scholar, which includes more sources, including grey literature.

An integrative literature review was developed to generate new knowledge about curation, according to the principles outlined by [Torraco \(2016\)](#). Integrative reviews in emerging areas of knowledge synthesise existing work to conceptualise the topic and create new perspectives. The review should explain the inclusion criteria, how the main ideas and

themes were identified and a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the literature.

The SCOPUS review was undertaken through an advanced query search within the article title, abstract and keywords for “curation” or “curator” AND “tourism” OR “hospitality” OR “food” OR “hotel” OR “restaurant”. Köseoglu and Arici (2023) underline the importance of establishing the content boundary for a review in terms of the keywords used. In the current study, the choice of keywords was based on a scan of sources in SCOPUS. The initial review yielded a total of 298 sources. The results were then screened for double entries, for relevance and format (journal articles or book chapters). Sources that only made peripheral mention of curation, or were related to museum curation only, and not the curation/tourism and hospitality interface, were removed.

SCOPUS only provides a partial view of emerging fields, concentrating on established journals. A Google Scholar search was therefore conducted to identify additional sources, using the keywords “curation” and “tourism”, sorted by relevance. As this search yielded a total of over 71,000 potential sources, the top 100 results sorted by relevance were selected. After screening, 152 results were retained in total, with 105 from SCOPUS and 47 from Google Scholar. These sources were further screened for significant content relating to tourism, hospitality and curation, yielding a final sample of 113 sources. The dates of the sources ranged from 2001 to 2023, increasing from one or two sources a year up to 2013 to a peak of 24 references in 2022. The selected sources were subject to content analysis of the title, keywords, abstract and (where available) full text to identify keywords and themes. This was used to develop the thematic analysis of tourism and hospitality curation contained in the next section.

Curation in tourism and hospitality management

The literature review revealed several themes related to the application of curation to the field. These included the curation of tourism and hospitality knowledge, curation in hospitality management, the rise of curated destinations and curated food offerings.

Curating tourism and hospitality knowledge

Early work on curation in tourism and hospitality was conducted by Tribe (2008), describing a method of “virtual curating” in which the researcher becomes a tourism art curator. He presented a series of artworks curated into themes, including the contrast between home and away, the tourist gaze and nostalgia and novelty. Tribe’s work was inspired by the convergence between tourism and art, and the rise of arts tourism. This self-styled “unconventional” paper heralded subsequent work in visual analysis of curated tourism experiences on platforms such as TikTok (e.g. Du *et al.*, 2022). Tribe (2018) later analysed the organisation of knowledge in tourism journals. He argued that tourism knowledge is “curated” by journals, with editors and referees selecting based on expert knowledge. (Schmidt and Schultz, 2023) broadened this discussion, defining the role of “researcher as curator” in leisure. They suggested researchers position themselves as “curators” while researching, using the relational aesthetics of curation to link with the generators, manipulators and users of knowledge. Richards (2014) argued curation was important in tourism because of its ability to assemble knowledge for storytelling. The curation of expert knowledge by record stores to deliver personalised experiences for tourists and locals is charted by Guerra (2022) in Lisbon. The curation of knowledge illustrates an expansion of curators, and an increasing overlap between the tourism, hospitality and curation fields.

Hospitality management

Hospitality providers increasingly use aesthetic curation, as [Ord and Behr \(2023\)](#) illustrate in the development of music experiences in Glasgow hotels, creating “a hip, contemporary, global music destination” (p. 15). Citizen M hotel, designed by Kesselskramer, a Dutch agency with strong art links, features “curated chaos”, including artworks, books, designer furniture and souvenirs, designed to push guests outside their comfort zone. The hotel curates input to guests’ “individual identity projects”, facilitating interactions through Spotify playlists, social media and apps. Curation positions the hotel as an “aesthetic asset”, leveraging the music of the destination to provide engaging experiences. Supporting the curational effort has also changed recruitment, with hotels now advertising for “curators” instead of managers ([Ord and Behr, 2023](#), p. 15). Arguably, there is a shift from “service” to “creative” roles, marking the rise of “creative tourism” and the growing integration of the tourism, hospitality and creative industries (OECD, 2014).

Curation is common in luxury hotels, such as the “thoughtfully-curated hospitality experience” (p. 198) at the Shinola Hotel in Detroit, featuring an art collection curated by Matt Eaton of Red Bull Arts ([Gregory, 2019](#)). The hotel website lists “specially-curated shopping options” with “A curated collection of stylish wardrobe essentials”. [Gregory \(2019\)](#) argues luxury hotel brands use curation to emphasise authenticity by linking “hustle” and “grit” to wealth and supporting the place-brand of Detroit as “hard-working, tenacious people achieving the American dream” (p. 204), linked to the hand-crafted products of watchmaker Shinola. More curated hotelscapes are reviewed by [Addis et al. \(2023\)](#), including Elizabeth Weiner’s curation of 350 artworks for the Ritz-Carlton Millenia in Singapore. They identify a hotel curation “industry” creating specialised art collections aimed at engaging guests in luxurious aesthetic experiences.

Curated hospitality is also evident in Airbnb’s accommodation categories, which use themes including Location (Coastal, Lake, National Parks, etc.); Activities (Skiing, Surfing, Golfing, etc.); Home type (Barns, Castles, Windmills, etc.) and amenity (Amazing Pools, Chef’s Kitchen, Creative Spaces, etc.). These categories are generated by human curation of listings and photos and AI curation of titles, written descriptions and guest reviews. [Airbnb \(2022\)](#) argues curation adds value for consumers and destinations: “Airbnb Categories organize homes by what makes them unique, which helps people discover places they wouldn’t have otherwise found”. Airbnb is also now employing “curators” for such jobs.

Curated hospitality is noted by [Strannegård and Strannegård \(2012\)](#) in design hotels, [Hom’s \(2019\)](#) analysis of curated casino experiences, the algorithmic curation of Airbnb ([Cesarani and Nechita, 2017](#)), restaurant-menu curation chatbot experiences ([Yoon and Yu, 2022](#)) and the Gladstone Hotel in Toronto, where curation is used to assemble distinctive experiences for guests and the local community ([Bronstein et al., 2015](#)). These examples underline the movement of curation into non-art spaces, generating “non-museum visitor” behaviour on the part of guests, and challenging hotels to manage the hotel/art binary.

Curated tourism and destinations

Curated travel companies often provide “bespoke”, “unique” experiences for upmarket travellers. UNWTO (2021) describes how UK-based company Culture Trip uses human and AI-based curation and productive and consumptive curation strategies. Its network of local writers identifies cultural supply, and big data analysis is applied to consumer demand. In London, big data indicated a growing demand for street art and a significant supply of experiences. A relative lack of supply was identified in Berlin, which has a similar market profile, identifying a market development opportunity. Culture Trip’s curational strategy aims to develop “more meaningful, real-life connections between curious travellers”, using

insider information linked to unique destination qualities. Distinctive stories include: “A Discussion With Female Directors of Arts Nonprofits” and “Meet the Detroit Artist Who’s Teaming Up with Bengali Girls and Women to Build Community”. This strategy shows a persistent aesthetic concern with issues transcending the travel sector, linked to curated experiences. McDonald (2018) analyses how keepers curate their lighthouses by creating museum-like spaces, supported by archival research, expert consultation and curating artifacts. McDonald views these activities as authentic performances of keeping, engaging tourists and enlisting support for lighthouse heritage preservation.

The growing curation of “new” and “cool” destinations is illustrated by *Time Out* magazine’s selection of the “coolest neighbourhoods in the world” based on “uniqueness, timeliness, geographic diversity, and cultural brilliance”, combining expert curation and crowdsourcing (Lai *et al.*, 2023). The *Time Out* survey of 12,000 consumers is augmented with expert curation from *Time Out* staff, who in 2023 rated the Laureles in Medellín, Colombia, as the world’s “coolest neighbourhood”. This combination of expert curation and crowdsourcing identifies neighbourhoods with future tourism value. As Gregory (2019) argues in Detroit, such previously unvisited locations are distinguished by their grittiness and local embedding. *Time Out* is also actively producing curated tourist landscapes, bringing together selected food producers in the Lisbon Time Out Market in Cais do Sodré, the world’s second coolest neighbourhood in 2022.

Kappler and McKane (2019) identify “post-conflict curating” in Belfast, involving independent artists, residential communities and more traditional place curators such as museum professionals and arts entrepreneurs. They argue the term curator is appropriate in the “open-air museum” of Belfast with its “dark” tourist appeal, and urban spaces featuring “ethnonational identity narratives” (p. 4). This is an example of an emergent co-creation perspective (Bryce *et al.*, 2017), generating terms such as “participatory curation” (Soudien, 2019).

Cities use curation to highlight particular “urban scenes” and develop “experiencescapes”, adding new meanings to places. Chan (2020, p. 152) describes “the carefully designed and curated public spaces” in Hong Kong, where the harbourfront is labelled the “New Cultural Frontier”. This coincides with curatorial efforts by the destination marketing organisation (DMO), highlighting neighbourhoods as “distinctly trendy” or offering “fascinating contrasts”. Here, the DMO becomes an expert curator, selecting and showcasing interesting aspects of the destination. Guidebooks (Mieli and Zillinger, 2020), professional bloggers (Van Driel and Dumitrica, 2021) and tour guides (Rutledge, 2023) also play similar roles. Following the principles of stylistic innovation, these curators do not produce experiences, but frame and disseminate them through creative sensing, stylistic orchestration and synchronisation of producers and consumers.

Curated food offerings

Curatorial aesthetic innovation can also create “foodscapes” (Richards, 2021a) through selection and organisation practices, as Joosse and Hracz (2015) describe in Sweden. They see curation as an important intermediary function within the food marketplace, with curators sorting, organising, evaluating and ascribing value(s) to specific products, helping consumers choose “good food”. Food curators include TV chefs, collective buying groups, food bloggers and food “apps”. Joosse and Hracz (2015) argue curators not only select but provide inspiration, convenience, community and connection and develop experiences. They argue curation both simplifies food choices by supporting better food selection and intensifies choices by heightening consumer involvement and awareness. One might posit a developmental effect of such curation, from firstly simplifying to introduce consumers to

new food experiences, then intensifying the curatorial role to create more involvement and eventually developing “co-curation” with more knowledgeable consumers.

Concha (2019) identifies similar processes in the London street food scene, where market organisers call themselves “curators”. She describes their activities as design practice, creating places for eating and socialising and generating festive atmospheres promoting relaxation and enjoyment. Analysing Street Feast in Dalston (TripAdvisor experience #466 of 2,689 in London), she identifies productive curation (Selecting Traders, Food and Places), consumptive curation (Targeting a Market) and generating aesthetics and atmospheres to co-curate distinction. Concha (2019) views place curators as intermediaries making creative decisions about food supply, the aesthetic qualities of the marketplaces and their visitors.

These examples illustrate the widening range of tourism and hospitality “curators”. Both producers and consumers assume curatorial functions, with the decisions of market organisers magnified through consumptive curation on algorithmic platforms such as TripAdvisor, producing a “co-curated” place experience. This review indicates growing attention for curation, but weaknesses are evident in the literature. There is a lack of clear definition of curation in many sources. This can make it hard to assess whether the authors have a fundamental understanding of curation, or are simply using a “buzzword”. There is also little linkage to seminal curation studies, which could limit theoretical development.

Discussion

Growing tourism and hospitality curation reflects a growing curatorial presence and the application of different curation processes, including collecting, selecting, displaying and contextualising (Mars *et al.*, 2023). Curators inhabit many sectors of tourism and hospitality, including arts and heritage attractions, hotels, food markets and placemaking, reflecting the trend towards re-intermediation seen in other areas of tourism and hospitality (Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). The re-intermediation process brought many new “curators” into the field, including travel consultants, market organisers and bloggers.

Our first research question asked: why is curation becoming increasingly important in the development and marketing of experiences? Our review shows the curatorial turn links to the expanding knowledge economy and growing volumes of content (Bhaskar, 2016). Tourism and hospitality curation is also driven by the experience economy and experiential product offerings with high symbolic value (Hoffman, 2013). As symbolic differentiation becomes more important, curators have emerged as selectors, organisers and validators (Mars *et al.*, 2023), expanding into a wide range of productive and consumptive practices.

The second question on how curatorial strategies are used in tourism and hospitality is more challenging, given the diversity of curatorial strategies and applications. There is evidence of growing productive, consumptive and algorithmic curation as suggested by Davis (2017), as well as co-curation between producers and consumers. Human and algorithmic selection is being applied by TripAdvisor, Airbnb and Culture Trip to link producers and consumers. As Concha (2019) suggests, curators select products, experiences, consumers and audiences, reflected in the cosmopolitan travellers in Glasgow hotels (Ord and Behr, 2023). There is also growing “co-curation”, in which productive and consumptive curators combine, and what might be termed “hybrid curation”, where different curatorial modes are mixed. Hybrid forms are particularly evident in place curation, where many “curators” and curatorial modes can be involved in development and marketing processes.

The last research question relates to the potential implications of the “curatorial turn” for tourism and hospitality. Curation potentially introduces new tourism and hospitality intermediaries (Bonini and Gandini, 2019), creating the need for a consistent aesthetic to guide decision-making. The curatorial turn in tourism and hospitality seems most evident

where these converge with arts and culture (such as cultural tourism – Richards, 2021b) and where narratives, such as “music cities” are developed. In these areas, aesthetic experiences are important in creating distinction, carving out beauty from overabundant supply and adding atmosphere (Kirallova, 2023). Curated material is an important resource for storytelling and experience development and a basis for stylistic innovation, as the Culture Trip example shows.

As curation expands beyond the museum, the term has become “fuzzier”, sometimes used as a buzzword, or applied in the narrow sense of selection. This fuzziness means that not all examples of “curation” in the literature fit the definition proposed here, often because a clear “aesthetic” is lacking. This arguably divides professional curators and more amateur selectors who lack a coherent aesthetic basis for their selections. As Kim *et al.* (2017) suggest, curation involves a persistent aesthetic frame of reference, linking specific fields of production and consumption. This frame of reference distinguishes the curator from other actors, such as marketers or influencers, who tend to have a more transactional framework. The curatorial focus on future value (Venturi, 2022) also distinguishes curatorial activity from marketing, avoiding current use value to consumers in favour of staging values or atmospheres established by the curators themselves (Böhme, 2003).

Cook and Valdez (2023) argue curation also involves important questions of power – for example, who controls the algorithms guiding platform curation? The power question is also linked to how curators establish their authority (Longair, 2015), which has become debated as curation has moved out of the museum. Curatorial authority is also challenged by the shift from expert to algorithmic and social modes of curation (Kiernan, 2021). As the number of “curators” grows, it may be increasingly difficult for DMOs to curate their version of the destinationscape, for example.

Our review reveals distinct curatorial strategies used by many tourism and hospitality-related actors to generate value. These include traditional human-based expert curation, the more recent algorithmic and social curation modes as well as co-curation, as shown in the typology in Table 1. However, the existing literature provides uneven coverage of these. Studies on expert and algorithmic curation are more common than social curation and co-curation. This is probably because the latter are less well defined, and more difficult to research.

Conclusions and implications

Conclusions

Curation has expanded in tourism and hospitality, in common with other fields. More traditional expert curation is used to create distinctive products and experiences, particularly in culture-related and luxury offerings. The expansion of curation also draws in new “experts”, including bloggers and creative intermediaries to distinguish experiences. With increased use of new technologies, there is a shift from human curation towards algorithmic, social and co-curation. Platforms such as Airbnb are deploying algorithmic curatorial techniques to select content to create value for consumers and strengthen their intermediary role. TripAdvisor and Pinterest also enable social curation of travel by users, whose judgements and opinions also affect the travel decisions of others in the network.

Curation is more than simple marketing; it also links the choices of producers and consumers with narratives that give experiences meaning and increased value. Curated destinations, including *Time Out’s* “coolest neighbourhoods”, not only attract visitors but also encourage destinations to pursue “cool” or “edgy” themes appealing to different consumer groups. Curation is an important means of storytelling and narrative, contributing to placemaking strategies.

Table 1.
Modes of curation in
the curatorial turn

Curation mode	Societal examples	Tourism and hospitality examples	Main actors	Infrastructure	Relevant sources
Expert curation	Museum curator, specialist record store owner.	TravelCurated, Citizen M, DMOs	Producers	Mainstream media, internet	Miralbell <i>et al.</i> (2013), McDonald (2018), Van Driel and Dumitrica (2021), Rutledge (2023)
Algorithmic curation	professional blogger Netflix, Twitter feed, TikTok, Spotify	Booking.com, Airbnb accommodation TripAdvisor, Pinterest	Producers	Commercial platform	Du <i>et al.</i> (2022), Lukovic (2023)
Social curation	Flickr, Wikipedia		Consumers	Social media	Kim and Hyun (2019), Van der Zee <i>et al.</i> (2020), Törngren <i>et al.</i> , 2023
Co-curation	Mubi	Airbnb Categories, The Culture Trip	Co-creation between consumers and producers	Multi-modal, often mixing different media and human and algorithmic curation (hybrid curation)	Bryce <i>et al.</i> (2017), Wiltshier and Clarke, 2017, Mars <i>et al.</i> (2023)

Source: Based on our own analysis of literature sources covered in the narrative and structured literature reviews

Not all examples of “curation” in the literature meet the definition of curation developed in this paper. Although selection processes are common, a persistent aesthetic dimension to guide intermediation and develop relationships is not always evident. For example, Airbnb accommodation categories may resemble curatorial selection, but they are not persistent or linked to a long-term aesthetic orientation. This might represent a “curatorial approach”, rather than full-blown curation. The “curatorial turn” in tourism and hospitality is more often a broader approach to experience development rather than a specific curatorial role or activity.

The most effective forms of curation are those using aesthetics to provide distinction, which are future orientated and which combine human aesthetic selection with the algorithmic power of AI to link demand and supply. There is increasing integration of different curational modes, with experts helping develop effective algorithmic tools to improve decision-making and enlisting the power of social curation to attract consumer attention. This is likely to lead to a growth in hybrid curation in the future.

Theoretical implications

The main contribution of this paper lies in the identification of curation as a significant strategy affecting tourism and hospitality. We have re-conceptualised curation as a broader approach to value and meaning creation, with distinct forms embracing producers, consumers, communities and places. The typology of curational strategies developed here provides an overview of different types of curation, which are linked to specific groups of actors and infrastructures.

The reliance on persistent aesthetics or “atmospheres” (Böhme, 2017) suggests that the aesthetic dimension of experiences should be relatively more important in curated experiences, a hypothesis supported by empirical work (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011) and aligning with the increased theoretical attention for the aesthetic dimension of tourism experiences (Kirillova, 2023).

A curatorial perspective potentially provides an extension to the customer-orientated view of value posited by S-D logic (Vargo and Lush, 2004). In a curatorial context, the curator identifies potential (future) value, and then undertakes relational work to develop and achieve that value. Curation is potentially a more intermediary-orientated process of value creation, in which curators develop new experiences and support consumer choice. Rather than S-D logic, therefore, curation might be seen as C-B logic. Curation processes revolve around aesthetic choices or “staging values” (Böhme, 2017) more than consumer use value. This enables artists to concentrate on “art for art’s sake” rather than producing artifacts for the market. In tourism and hospitality, the curatorial turn may depend on actors who are attempting to “stay within the fence” or deliberately rejecting a market ethos, as suggested by Ateljevic and Doorne (2000).

We can observe that the curatorial turn reflects the shift from the prioritisation of user-need satisfaction to an economy of abundance and “cultural surplus”, meaning that a user perspective no longer tells the whole story. Curation is one of the emergent strategies for dealing with excess and the growing need to make choices, and curators now help support a C-B logic in production and consumption, which also provides a basis for stylistic innovation.

Practical implications

Curational processes may have increasing implications for tourism and hospitality management in future. As Van der Zee *et al.* (2020) argue, algorithmic and consumer curation supported by platforms like TripAdvisor stimulate tourism flows through

“network curation”. Experiences going viral on TikTok have generated significant, short-term tourist flows (Li, 2021) rapidly shifting the distribution of attention in destinations. Rather than the “normal distributions” of analogue culture and tangible heritage, travel platforms may tend more towards the extreme distributions of digital culture. This might mean more problems of TripAdvisor- and TikTok-inspired viral tourism, with growing concentration on specific “hot spots”.

DMOs could use social curation to increase visitor engagement, harnessing their enthusiasm and aesthetic tastes to co-create new experiences. DMOs could also develop curational techniques to nudge tourists towards more sustainable behaviour. Human curation and AI can be linked in hybrid curation to influence tourist behaviour *in situ* by providing real-time cues about the supply and demand for experiences (Kwok, 2023).

Hospitality managers need to understand curational intent and aesthetic frameworks to link with place curation strategies. Being part of a “music city” involves more than simple theming. It also requires a style of consumption supported by field-specific knowledge. This has implications for staff recruitment and the organisation and use of spaces. The art hung on the walls and the music programmed in the lobby should be geared to “curious” consumers interested in curation (Kathke *et al.*, 2022). Hospitality operators can also link with other businesses supporting destination curation, such as the record shops and music venues that underpin the music city concept (Ord and Behr, 2023).

The re-intermediation of the curatorial turn may also negatively impact tourism and hospitality firms. If consumers turn more readily to curated information from intermediaries rather than information from DMOs or suppliers, this could undermine marketing efforts. One strategy to avoid this would be to harness the power of consumptive or co-creative curation to engage consumers in the curation process to feed marketing goals. This would require managers to become familiar with the skills or enthusiasms of their (potential) customers to appreciate their curational aesthetic. It may prove more effective to hire expert “curators” to do this, as many travel and hotel companies already do.

Curational development will also be affected by new technologies. Given the relatively low cost of AI, a steady growth in algorithmic curation can be expected. One might also expect social curation and particularly co-curation to increase in future as technologies to support virtual community interaction grow. Suppliers can use the “wisdom of crowds” in social curation and co-curation as a means of identifying market trends. However, as Frey (2021) pointed out, there has already been a revival of human curation on major platforms such as Netflix. One advantage of the human curator is their future orientation, compared with the analysis of past trends that supports AI. Currently, human curators are better placed to spot nascent trends, although this advantage may be eroded as AI improves. The use of “hybrid curation”, with AI and social networks being used to support human selection, should therefore become more important in future.

Limitations

This conceptual study is based on the extant literature and lacks a wider empirical basis. It therefore reflects weaknesses of the previous curation literature, including the lack of an established definition of curation and the perceived “fuzziness” in terms of definition and application. A lack of clarity is to be expected given the rapid growth of curation, and the growing number of actors now designated as “curators”. However, this often makes it difficult to establish if different studies are using the concept of curation consistently. Hopefully the definition and typology of curation provided here will help in this regard.

As this paper is based on published studies it also reflects relatively successful applications of curation. There is a need to undertake further work to establish the

effectiveness of curation versus alternative approaches. Does expert curation, for example, generate more consumer loyalty through perceived expertise and personalised advice? The relatively positive examples presented here also ignore one of the apparent paradoxes of curation. Although many commentators see curation as a means of dealing with the increasing flood of content, the shift from expert, producer-based forms of curation towards networked, consumer-based curation may generate more content. This means that curation may not provide the simple solutions to choice stress often promoted by its advocates (Bhaskar, 2016).

Suggestions for future research

As Köseoglu *et al.* (2022) suggest, most hospitality research covers either the macro or micro scale, ignoring the influence of major economic and cultural shifts on the operation of businesses. Curation is an example of a major cultural shift towards the need for choice support in an age of abundance and cultural surplus. More research is needed to examine the C-B logic being introduced by curatorial strategies in tourism and hospitality. It would be interesting to analyse purportedly curated product and experience offers against those where curatorial intent is lacking. Using the definition of curation provided here, distinctions could be made between strategies based a clearly identifiable aesthetic and which link to a coherent field, against those that use “curation” as a buzzword.

Productive, consumptive and networked curation modes should also be compared in terms of effects. Social curation and co-curation might be more effective in building engagement with consumers, but this is a hypothesis that needs testing. Expert curation might work better in luxury experiences where the personal touch is expected and the aesthetic of selectiveness is particularly powerful. Studies of algorithmic, expert and social curation might also contribute to debates about the use of AI in tourism and hospitality. Can algorithmic curation using AI effectively mimic the human curator?

Curation strategies used by DMOs also demand attention. Comparisons of different destination types and DMO structures might enable assessment of curation as a marketing and development tool. How do different curatorial strategies affect tourist experiences? Is a human curator more impactful than algorithmic or social curation? The position, power and legitimacy of curators could also be mapped through social network analysis to identify how different types of curators link to one another and to different curatorial infrastructures.

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