

EVENT CASE STUDY

IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTIONAL CUES THAT MATTER FOR CUSTOMERS IN SPEED DATING EVENTS

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This study has investigated intrinsic and extrinsic intersectional cues taken into consideration by consumers when evaluating a product or a service at the intersection between the hospitality industry and the dating industries. The five main contributions of this study are as follows. First, the cue theory is a valid approach to investigate industry-specific and intersectional products and services alike. Second, understanding of customer needs in the hospitality industry is partial, as existing research is based only on industry-specific examples. Third, speed dating events could potentially be a competitive advantage for bars and restaurants. Fourth, online reviews are not always the most suitable and reliable data, as consumers are sometimes adopting a protective self-presentation attitude, particularly when frustrated about something. Finally, events are characterized by the types of activities participants are involved in: their level of involvement, encounters, and emotions experienced.

Key words: Speed dating events; Interplay space; Customer-to-customer interaction; Meta-service; Protective self-presentation attitude; Hedonism

Introduction

Academic literature in management (Watling et al., 2012; Wirtz & Lwin, 2009), such as literature in hospitality management (see Song & Qu, 2017; Wan et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2013), has established how important it is for practitioners to understand the motivation and behavior of customers in order to be able to meet their needs (Watling et al., 2012). Keeping up and meeting the needs of customers

are extremely important due to both the constantly changing needs of the latter (Hossain et al., 2023) and the high level of competitiveness in the hospitality industry. Among the theories developed to explain customers' behavior and motivation could be mentioned the regulatory focus theory (RFT) (Dewett & Denisi, 2007), and the cue theory (CT) (Kim et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2019). The RFT explains the connection between the objective of a customer, and the mechanism this customer

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puts in place to achieve his/her objective, making subsequently this objective central in understanding RFT. Once the objective(s) set, the customer applies some criteria to help with the selection of products and services. These criteria are cues (Sloan et al., 2013; Zeng et al., 2019). Cues are therefore important moderating factors to consider when investigating consumer behavior and motivation (Baek et al., 2006; Botti & Peypoch, 2013).

Existing literature has looked at cues exclusively from an industry-specific perspective. Taking the example of academic research in hospitality, it has investigated cues in the context of restaurants to discuss the reaction of customers to the quality of service provided (Wan et al., 2010), such as service delay (Yang et al., 2013), food quality (Harris et al., 2016), food experience (Song & Qu, 2017), etc. Other publications have looked at how hotel brands and comments shared by customers on TripAdvisor (Giglio et al., 2020) are influencing choices of accommodation; how natural hotel settings are impacting consumption (Cozzio et al., 2020). Publications have also looked at the well-being of patients at hospitals (Altinay et al., 2023); the impact of cleanliness on the perception of hostels (Amblee, 2015); what motivates customers to stay in Airbnb (Lutz & Newlands, 2018), etc. To remain competitive, it is important for businesses in the hospitality industry to constantly innovate (Hossain et al., 2023), and therefore to further their understanding of the needs of the customers. However, the knowledge that we have regarding cues influencing the behavior of customers in the hospitality industry can no longer be considered as a competitive advantage.

To further knowledge on consumer behavior in terms of cues influencing behavior, and to provide further competitive advantages to the industry, this study is suggesting that research on cues influencing behavior should be carried out using multiple industries at the same time. Recent research conducted by Hossain et al. (2023) suggested that to further knowledge in customer behavior in the hospitality industry, and for generalization of findings, research should be done across industries. Rosetti (2024) also suggested that research on events management should look at more than one event for reliability purposes. This view is also supported by Ziakas (2019), Ziakas and Getz (2020), Ziakas and Costa (2011), and Antchak et al. (2019), who

argued that because in industry products and services development are increasingly thought in terms of portfolio, academic research should adopt the same approach. This study is subsequently positing that research on cues influencing the behavior of consumers should be done at an intersection. Intersection is to be understood as the meeting point between two or more than two entities. Intersection also implies that there are common points and synergies among these entities (Wang et al., 2004).

Research at the intersection of different industries is recent and very limited. Indeed, looking for instance at publications connecting hospitals (health and social care) and hospitality, they are very limited. In one of the two leading hospitality management journals (as of May 29, 2023), there are only eight papers (all published between 1990 and 2023), mostly published in the last 7 years (see Altinay et al., 2023; Amblee, 2015; Lutz & Newlands, 2018). The knowledge of customer behavior and motivation that is currently available in academic literature in hospitality is mainly industry centric. On the basis that the level of understanding of customer behavior and motivation play a role on an organization performance (Debanne et al., 2014), and therefore its competitiveness (Hossain et al., 2023), it is important to have a holistic understanding of customers, which implies going beyond the boundaries of the hospitality industry.

Research on intrinsic cues of bars and restaurants (Kim et al., 2022)—that is, the provision of food and drinks (Zeng et al., 2019)—and extrinsic cues, which are factors impacting the attitude of customers, such as quality of the service, atmospheric, etc. (Kim et al., 2022), have not focused enough on customer-to-customer interaction on the romantic front (see Hossain et al., 2023; Lugosi, 2008; Séraphin, 2024), and yet, this type of interaction not only is part of the experience of customers, but also plays an important role in both the type of products and services purchased and the image and attachment of the customer with the business (Hossain et al., 2023). The need for research on customer-to-customer interaction goes beyond the hospitality industry. Taking the example of the event industry, Rosetti (2024) argued that: ‘future studies should work on better unpacking human encounters’ (p. 1894).

This study is investigating both cues at the intersection of the hospitality industry with other

industries and customer-to-customer interaction on the romantic front. To do so, speed dating events are used as case studies to support and illustrate what the study is positing. Speed dating events are chosen because they are at the intersection between the hospitality industry and the dating industry (S raphin, 2024), and because they are directly related to customer-to-customer interaction on the romantic front (see Finkel & Eastwick, 2008; Korobov, 2011; Turowetz & Hollander, 2012). In this study, cues that matter for speed daters are refereed as intrinsic and extrinsic intersectional cues (IICs and EICs).

From a theoretical perspective, this study is contributing to knowledge by investigating an influencing factor (cue) in customer behavior that is underexplored—customer-to-customer interaction on the romantic front. The study is also contributing to theory as investigating a product and service that is at the intersection of two industries. The synergy between the dating and the hospitality industry has not been investigated previously (S raphin, 2024). On the practical front, this study highlights to hospitality providers the importance of customer-to-customer interaction on the romantic front (see Hossain et al., 2023; Lugosi, 2008; S raphin, 2024), meaning that products and service such as speed dating events should be considered seriously. Indeed, there is a societal need for human-to-human experience, and interaction to lessen isolation and improve leisure-related experiences (Leurs & Hardy, 2019).

By conducting research at an intersection, this study is innovative. Brooker and Joppe (2014) argued that innovation happens when breaking up with current and established practices. They also argued that this approach is lacking in tourism and related fields of research.

The research question (RQ) of the study is as follows: What are the IICs and EICs taken into consideration by consumers when evaluating a product or a service at the intersection between the hospitality industry and the dating industry?

To address the research question, this study is based on the analysis of reviews posted online by speed daters. So doing, a lexicometric approach, which is an approach that combines both textual and statistical analysis (Montargot et al., 2022), is used to understand how consumers are reflecting on their experience (Reinert, 1993). This exploratory

study begins with the “contextual background,” which offers a critical presentation of speed dating events (dating industry) in relation with the hospitality industry (with a focus on bars and restaurants). The second section of the study is the methodology used to address the research question. Afterwards, the results of the study are provided and discussed (theories are then built). The article concludes with the key contributions of the study to academic and industry knowledge. Information for future research is also provided.

Contextual Background

The Dating Industry: An Overview

The dating industry could be said to be physical and digital (phygital). As a concept, phygitalization appeared in 2013 (Mele & Russo-Spena, 2021) and has been associated with engagement and enhancement of customer experience (Baratta et al., 2022; Mele & Russo-Spena, 2021), alongside growth opportunities for any organization based on this model (Ballina et al., 2019; Mele & Russo-Spena, 2021). The phygitalization of the dating industry is evidenced by the fact it is operating both online with dating apps (Alexopoulos et al., 2019) and online and offline with speed dating events (Turowetz & Hollander, 2012).

Dating sites and/or mobile dating apps are offering new social opportunities nowadays (Blackwell et al., 2015). Since the last 20 years, these sites and apps have been very popular (Blackhart et al., 2014) with heterosexuals (Duguay, 2017) of all ages, background, gender, religion, etc. (see Finkel & Eastwick, 2008; Korobov, 2011; Turowetz & Hollander, 2012) seeking to find their romantic and/or sexual partners (Alexopoulos et al., 2019). They are meeting the needs of a significant percentage of the population who want to get on with their busy life schedule and find a romantic partner (Houser et al., 2008). Statistics show that in the early 2000s, 11% of Americans had used dating sites and/or mobile dating apps (Smith & Duggan, 2013). At the same period, in the UK, 1/4 internet users reported having used internet dating (Gunter, 2008).

From an economic point of view, the dating industry is a major industry (Business of Apps, n.d.), which was worth \$7.49 billion worldwide in 2021. As for the hospitality industry, it is also a

major industry, way bigger than the dating industry, as it is worth trillions. Indeed, in 2022, it generated \$1.06 trillion (Statista, n.d.).

*The Dating and the Hospitality Industries:
An Overview From a Practical Perspective*

This study is exclusively focusing on the offline aspect of the dating industry, namely speed dating. Having said that, since the breakout of COVID-19, speed dating events happen both online and offline, but predominantly offline (Séraphin, 2024). ‘Speed dating involves a group of singles coming together in one venue and quickly cycling through introductions during “minidates” that usually take place for 3 to 8 min per pairing. At the end of the evening, couples who mutually express interest receive contact information for each other and can take it from there (Aquino, 2018). According to the typology of events developed by Getz and Page (2020), speed dating events are both private functions and recreations events. For Séraphin (2024), speed dating events are special interest adultainment (adult entertainment) events. They are also rather inclusive events as they cater for individuals of all ages, gender, social background, religion, ethnicity, etc. (see Finkel & Eastwick, 2008; Korobov, 2011; Turowetz & Hollander, 2012).

Existing literature (academic and nonacademic) has not captured the synergy and connection existing in the interplay space created by both the hospitality and dating industries, and yet there is a strong connection between both industries (Séraphin, 2024; Séraphin & Yallop, 2023). First, speed dating events are hosted by bars and restaurants. Second, some of the speed dating events are based on hospitality-related themes such as wine tasting, cooking classes, or drunk Jenga. Third, speed dating organizations (dating industry) use the level of standards, location, facilities, etc., of venues as one of their unique selling points (USPs) to attract customers (Séraphin & Yallop, 2023). Fourth, the contribution of the dating industry to the hospitality industry is worth billions (Business of Apps, n.d.). In the UK only, it is thousands of events organized every year (Séraphin & Yallop, 2023). Some dating apps such as *Thursday* are even encouraging their users to spend less time online, and more time meeting face to face in bars or restaurants (BBC, 2002). Still

regarding the economic contribution of the dating industry to the hospitality industry, Aquino (2018) argued that:

Speed dating is one type of event that your restaurant may host that could help boost sales, increase awareness, and bring in new customers. This kind of event is fun to host, can be financially beneficial, and may help your venue become a special spot that people return to year after year.

Finally, the hospitality industry and the dating industry share some concepts and values. Among the concepts could be mentioned self-presentation (see Blackwell et al., 2015; Siegel et al., 2022), which is the impression an individual conveys to others (Toma, 2016). In terms of values, fostering exchanges among individuals through entertainment and social intercourse is central to both industries (Finkel & Eastwick, 2008; Lugosi, 2008).

Despite the synergy existing between industries, Séraphin and Yallop (2023) pointed out an asymmetric relationship between both industries with regards to relationship marketing. When promoting their events, speed dating businesses are putting forwards venues as one of their USPs. However, venues are not promoting the fact they are hosting speed dating events. For Séraphin and Yallop (2023), this situation is due to: Intersectional standard gap (ISG), which is the discrepancy between the service produced and delivered by partners and the impacts on the satisfaction of customers; intersectional delivery gap (IDG), which happens when only some aspects of the service meet the expectations of customers; and intersectional perception gap (IPG), which is the discrepancy between how partners perceive each other, and how customers perceive each of the partners separately and/or together.

The relationship between the dating industry and the hospitality industry can therefore be summarized as shown in Figure 1.

*The Dating and the Hospitality Industries:
An Overview From a Theoretical Perspective*

Speed dating events and the hospitality industry have been chosen to investigate the concept of IICs and EICs for five main reasons.

First, as a type of event, speed dating is in line with the ideas of intersection and portfolio approach,



Figure 1. Relationship dating industry and hospitality industry.

since the concept of speed dating is all about fostering interdisciplinarity, improving dynamic, connecting different worlds together for collaboration (Muurlink & Matas, 2011).

Second, speed dating events are at the intersection of the hospitality industry and dating industry. Indeed, speed dating events are organized by businesses belonging to the dating industry, but are held in bars and restaurants, which are part of the hospitality industry (S eraphin, 2024; S eraphin & Yallop, 2023).

Third, the hospitality industry has loads to learn from the dating industry in term of engagement and retention of customers. Indeed, as intersectional products and services, speed dating events have a strong potential in terms of triggering repeat visits and reinforcing customer loyalty (Larson & Tsitsos, 2012; Whitty & Buchanan, 2009). The hospitality industry can also learn from the dating industry in terms of communication, and more specifically in terms of the type of language to use (verbal and nonverbal) with specific types of customers, and the actions that these messages are triggering. This is extremely important as a message can influence the behavior and attitude of customers differently (Bhargava & Fisman, 2014; Houser et al., 2008),

depending on their gender, personality, education, level of intelligence, ethnicity, level of income, the relationship they are/were in, and are looking for (Asendorpf et al., 2011).

Finally, the hospitality industry can also learn from the dating industry in terms of customer understanding. To fully understand an individual (who is also a consumer), it is important to understand their life, including aspects of their romantic history (Stokoe, 2010). Research related with impression management and impression formation, principles of interactionism (Larson & Tsitsos, 2012), individual personality and impacts on their decision-making (Jauk et al., 2015), and physical appearance and individual attitude and behavior (Valentine et al., 2014) are some of the topics at the heart of research on speed dating events.

Fourth, speed dating events highlight to the hospitality industry the fact that some needs of customers, such as romantic bonding, are not fully met yet (see Chang et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2023; Turowetz & Hollander, 2012), which can represent for the hospitality industry an interesting market to conquer. Indeed, by offering opportunities to customers, it becomes easier to shape their preferences (Belot & Francesconi, 2006). Moreover, Luo and Zhang (2009) argued that speed dating events are good environments to fully understand who individuals are, because the uncontrolled environment of speed dating events enables participants to be their true self (Luo & Zhang, 2009; S eraphin et al., 2023).

Fifth, results of research conducted on speed dating events can be extended to other industries since speed dating is considered as a field of study transcending subject-specific barriers (see Finkel & Eastwick, 2008; Finkel et al., 2007; Hossain et al., 2023; Larson & Tsitsos, 2012; Muurlink & Matas, 2011; Whitty & Buchanan, 2009).

Suppositions

Existing literature related to the cue utilization theory highlights the fact that the reputation of the service/product provider is also an indicator considered by consumers in their decision-making process (Helm & Mark, 2007). This means that cues such as the quality of the food (Kim et al., 2022), the variety of food (Baek et al., 2006) in terms of option such as healthy option (Choi et al., 2010), or fine dining (Njite et al.,

2008), the menu price, the brand, the quality of the service, the hygiene of the place (Baek et al., 2006), quality of equipment, comfort, decoration, design, sitting arrangements, security, additional services, entertainment, type of customers attending the venue (Tinne, 2012), location (Tzeng et al., 2002), promotional deals (Ehsan, 2011), crowd (Ali et al., 2022), ambiance (Yi et al., 2018), atmosphere and distance (Minartinietyas & Prawira, 2019), and customer relations (Njite et al., 2008) are central in the choice of bars/restaurants. Related to speed dating events, it means that the results of the study might reveal how important the choice of venue and the quality of the service (during and prior to the event) plays in the overall experience of speed daters. Selecting the right venue is particularly important and difficult due to the fact that variables such as ethnicity (Baek et al., 2006); age, gender, income (Rahman, 2012); health condition and weight (Choi et al., 2010), and dining out frequency (Harrington et al., 2011); reviews on platforms such as TripAdvisor or eWOM; whether or not the restaurant is in a guide such as Michelin Guide (Yoo & Suh, 2022), etc., are to be taken into account, as they impact on the criteria influencing the choice of restaurants/bars. Having said that, it is important to note that these suppositions regarding speed dating events are based on research conducted in a hospitality context. Speed dating is an intersectional product/service.

Methodology

Data Collection

To explore the research questions and the interplay between the hospitality and the dating industry, the data collected are based on content of reviews posted online. There are two main reasons for this choice. First, online reviews are considered as non-elicited, spontaneous, and trustworthy (Aye et al., 2013; Kozinets, 2006). Second, online reviews are data collected during the judgment phase (i.e., after a full and uninterrupted experience has taken place) (Massa & Bédé, 2018).

The methodological approach adopted in this study is basically following the three steps of environment scanning, namely: (1) the gathering of information either through interviews or through existing publications; (2) the conduction of content

analysis for interpretation; (3) and finally, the development of strategies based on the analysis (Adema & Roehl, 2010).

This study collected and analyzed reviews posted by customers of the speed dating company DateinaDash. This London-based company was selected because it is an established company. Indeed, DateinaDash was created in 2011 and has organized over 4,000 events and has more than 70,000 members (<https://dateinadash.com/about-us/>). Additionally, DateinaDash is a well-known company in the industry, which has a good record of awards, such as the best speed dating event organiser in the UK in 2014 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_dating_awards). The data (395 online reviews) were collected manually from two major customer review sites: TripAdvisor and Trustpilot. After formatting and cleaning the data (removing emoticons, rewriting misspelled words, removing words such as “and,” “the,” “to,” etc.) 90 pages worth of information were kept for further analysis.

For step 2, the conduction of content analysis for interpretation is covered in below and in section 4. It is also to note that the study design excludes individual factors (such as gender, age, motivation to attend speed dating events, etc.) that may offer insights into customer segments, meaning that the conclusion that will be drawn, while specific to the dataset, can be generalized to the segment of the population attending speed dating events. It is also noted that most of the speed daters who shared comments about their experience are likely to be women since they tend to disclose more about themselves than men on social media (Abramova et al., 2016).

In terms of validity and reliability, Hossain et al. (2023), who also conducted research on customer-to-customer interaction in the hospitality, based his research on 585 customers. The gap (in terms of sample) between this research and the one conducted by Hossain et al. (2023) is small (190 participants). Additionally, this study has used 100% of reviews on two different sites. Hossain et al. (2023) have used a single database.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is part of step 2 of environment scanning. The data collected were analyzed using a lexicometric approach, which consists in studying

the statistical associations of lemmas, supporting a maieutic of meaning (Montargot et al., 2022). According to Mazzone and Fiates (2014), lexicometric analysis follows five main stages: (1) text segmentation and word coding in which the data is segmented into elementary units of context; (2) lemmatization: the words are reduced to their roots and classified as active forms (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) and additional forms (prepositions, pronouns, etc.); (3) definition of a contingency table of active reduced forms and elementary units of context; (4) top-down hierarchical classification analysis to identify groups of lexical words. Figure 2 presents the descending hierarchical classification conducted as part of the study. This analysis was then followed with factorial correspondence analysis (Fig. 3) to reduce even more the number of clusters and facilitate the understanding of how they position themselves in relation with each other (Reinert, 1993). For both qualitative analyses, the interface Iramuteq was used. Recent lexicometric analysis in hospitality such as the research published by Meatchi et al. (2021) used the same approach. The last stage (section 5 of this study) is all about interpretation of the findings. At the end of the analysis, the

study can identify what in the experience matters for speed daters.

As the process described in this section is a computerized textual approach, the level of bias of this study is very limited (Wolfe et al., 1993). The results obtained are reliable and valid because they are based solely on the objectivity of algorithmic treatments (Illia et al., 2014).

Findings and Discussion

Reinforcing an Existing Theory

The descending hierarchical classification (Fig. 2) has identified five clusters of words of relatively equal size.

The most prominent cluster (class 2: 22.4% of the findings), includes words such as “date,” “age,” “speed,” “woman,” “love,” etc., which are specific to the dating industry.

Clusters 2 (class 1: 21.3% of the corpus) has to do with the rationale of attending the event, and the atmosphere (“meet,” “person,” “fun,” “organize,” etc.).

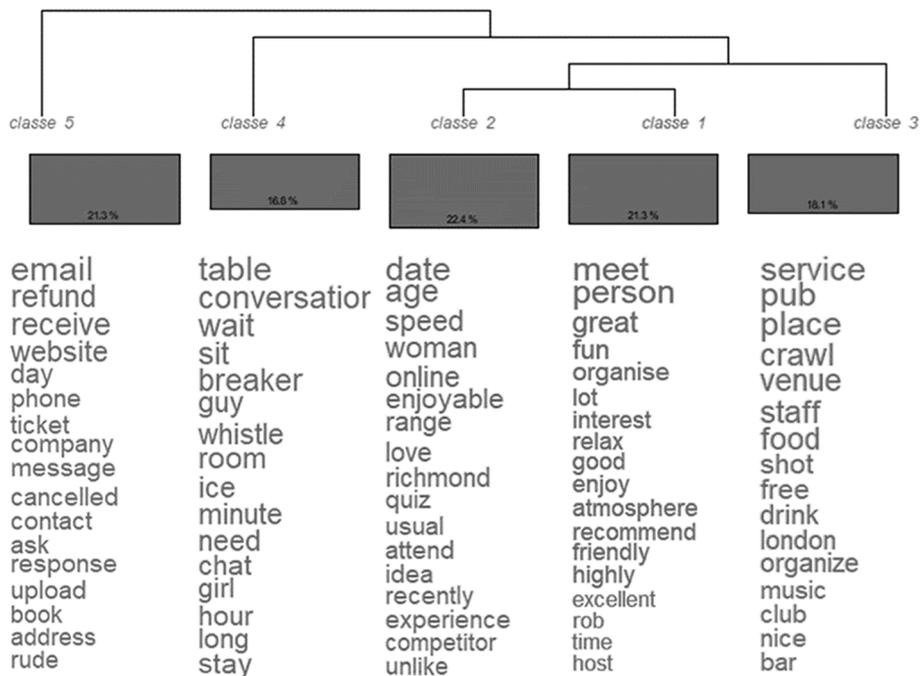


Figure 2. Cue for speed dating events.

includes cluster 3, is the most prominent one. In a nutshell, customers attending speed dating events are focusing more on cues related to the quality of the service (prior and after the event). The second cues they are looking at are related to the quality of the product and service while they are consuming it (during the event).

The results have contributed to flesh out the IICs of speed dating events, which consists of everything happening during the event, and everyone present during the event. The IECs of speed dating events are mainly related to the operational aspect of the event (before and/or after the event). It is also to note that whether a product/service is at an intersection, or is an industry-specific product/service, the intrinsic cues are directly related to the inner nature of the products/service. As for extrinsic cues, they are major influencer of the experience, therefore impacting on the intrinsic cues. Intrinsic cues (ICs) and IICs could be to independent variables. Extrinsic cues (ECs) and IECs could be assimilated to independent variables, and as such influencing ICs and IICs. This study has contributed to further knowledge related to cue theory, by adding a level of specificity with the concept of IICs and IECs.

In terms of contribution, this study is arguing that the existing cue theory can be used for specific industry products/services and intersectional products/services alike. It is also worth noting that entities (products/services) developed at an intersection are fully fledged and constructed entities (Wall, 2022), with their own identity that must be acknowledged and respected (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). The following subsections are step 3 of the environment scanning approach.

Blind Spots

S raphin (2024) and S raphin and Yallop (2023) have established the fact that speed dating events, which are special interest adult entertainment events, are part of the romantic, therefore private life of individuals. On that basis, one could have expected that the results of the lexicometric analysis would have provided specific insight into the personal and intimate interactions among participants. More specifically, it was expected that the findings would have provided an insight into what IICs and EICs are taken into consideration

by consumers when evaluating a product or a service that is part of their romantic and private life. Currently, academic literature in the hospitality industry is not addressing this aspect. The limited number of publications on the topic are looking at the romantic and sexual interaction among employees (Gilbert et al., 1998) and between employees and customers (Aslan, 2016).

It is important for academic research in hospitality to investigate the private life of internal and external stakeholders, so that they fully understand who they are (Fig. 3, left side). Indeed, Stokoe (2010) argued that one can't fully understand someone until you know about their private life history. Currently, the hospitality industry could be said to have a partial understanding of who its customers (and staff) are. Meeting people (romantically/sexually) and having fun are hidden needs of customers of the hospitality industry. "Meet," "person," and "fun" are prominent words in Figure 3. Having a full understanding of the private life history of its customers will help the hospitality industry to fully meet their needs, and subsequently get some competitive advantages (Hossain et al., 2023), which will translate into turning the venue into a spot where speed daters might come back for reasons other than speed dating events. Indeed, this type of event has the potential to increase awareness about a venue and subsequently bring new customers (Aquino, 2018).

Existing research on speed dating does not consider the important role hospitality venues are playing in the romantic interaction between individuals (Lugosi, 2008). Only physiological factors such as hormones (Van der Meij et al., 2019), nonverbal communication (Houser et al., 2008) such as laughter (Fuchs & Rathcke, 2018), eye contacts (Croes et al., 2020), and personality (Wu & Zhao, 2022) are considered in the literature.

Suggesting an Additional Layer of Hospitality

Tasci and Semrad (2016) identified four layers of hospitality. The first layer of hospitality is based on tangible products and services, which are considered to be the primary needs of travelers. This layer includes items such as food, drink, shelter (sustenance). The second level of hospitality is designed to meet higher level needs. For example, entertainment, socializing, sport and leisure facilities,

self-actualization, etc. (entertainment). The third level is mainly orientated towards the quality of services such as check-in, the level of safety and security (service). The final level, also called hospitableness, has the capacity to make or break a customer experience. This final level must be present in all the other levels when delivering the product or service (hospitableness).

Cues that matter for daters encompass all four layers of hospitality (Figs. 2, 3, and 4). However, on the basis that the hospitality industry and academic research have so far overlooked the connection between the private life of their customers and the type and quality of products and services they are delivering to them, this study is arguing that a layer of hospitality should be added between “service” and “hospitableness,” namely “meta-service” (Fig. 4).

The “meta-service” layer of hospitality will look at meeting needs of customer that are related to societal issues, such as loneliness from a romantic perspective (Séraphin, 2024), but also from an old-age perspective (The Chatty Café Scheme, n.d.). One of the primary roles and benefits of events is the contribution of individuals and community well-being (Asan et al., 2023). The “meta-service” is also going to look at meeting needs of customers that are not explicitly requested. Indeed, the results of this study have evidenced that customers of the hospitality and dating industries are not expressing their feelings (emotions) and needs when it comes to matters related to their private life. Similarly,

literature on speed dating covered in this study has provided evidence that to fully meet the needs of customers, understanding all the layers on their life, including their private life, is important (Aslan, 2016; Stokoe, 2010). As for the term meta-service, it is in reference to Lugosi’s (2008) meta-hospitality, defined as the infrequent, existential, and emotional aspect of the hospitality industry. For Lugosi (2008) meta-hospitality is the highest level of achievement for the industry. Through speed dating events, the hospitality industry can reach this level. Indeed, speed dating events have to do with emotions, as individuals attending this type of event are looking for a romantic and/or sexual partner (Alexopoulos et al., 2019). It is worth noting that, as a transaction between individuals, the success of speed dating events is largely influenced by factors largely out of their control such as hormones (Van der Meij et al., 2019), nonverbal communication (see Croes et al., 2020; Fuchs & Rathcke, 2018; Houser et al., 2008), personality (Wu et al., 2022), standards of the venue and their atmosphere (Lugosi, 2008). Reaching the level of meta-hospitality, particularly the convivial atmosphere aspect, is important for the hospitality industry because it is an important marketing tool. However, this convivial atmosphere is a challenge, as it is difficult to facilitate, shape, trigger, and reproduce (Rokka et al., 2023). The speed dating events model might be a solution to this challenge that Rokka et al. (2023) are urging academic research to address.

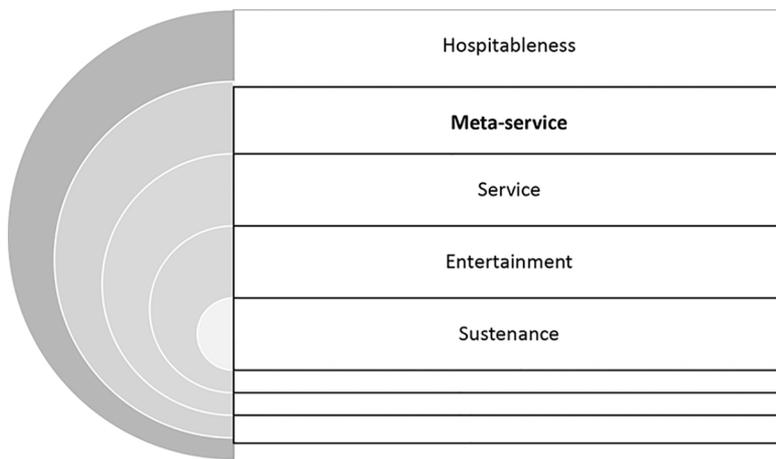


Figure 4. New layers of hospitality.

Concluding Remarks

Like other types of events (such as festivals), individuals attending speed dating events are experiencing (Figs. 2 and 3): multisensorial activities (look, listen, talk, drink, smell, walk, etc.); different emotions (anger, enjoyment, love, fun, friendly, etc.); and multiple encounters (male and/or female from different background, ethnicity, etc.). However, as opposed to other types of events, such as festivals investigated by Rosetti (2024), attendees at speed dating events are constantly active consumers as they are the main actors of the event. This study has contributed to strengthen the fact that participants' involvement at events (either as an intersection or industry specific) can be characterized by four elements: the types of activities they are involved in; level of involvement; encounters; and emotions they are experiencing. Second, this study has contributed to establishing the fact that cue theory is a valid approach to investigate industry-specific and intersectional products and services alike. Third, this study has also established the fact that academic literature in the hospitality industry has a partial understanding of the needs of customers, since it is overlooking the private aspect of their life. Instead of overlooking this aspect of their life, the industry should focus more on hedonic products and services (related to fun, fantasy fulfillment, escapism, excitement) such as speed dating events, as this type of products and services contributes to build a positive relationship between customers and the business provider, and therefore central to competitive advantages (Hossain et al., 2023; Rokka et al., 2023). As a result, this study is arguing that "meta-service" should be an additional layer of hospitality. Fourth, this study has established that as hedonic products/services, speed dating events could potentially play a significant role in the hospitality industry, by contributing to the competitive advantages of some businesses.

Finally, the study has established the limit of online reviews as a type of data. Despite the fact online reviews are a common type of data used in hospitality research (Shin et al., 2021; Wu & Zhao, 2022) due to the fact they are natural, spontaneous, and representative of the consumer's experience (Kozinets, 2006; Massa & Bédé, 2018), in some cases consumers are reluctant to share information

related to their private life. Indeed, when it comes to speed dating events, customers are only sharing comments about venues, quality of services, etc. This attitude is part of a self-presentation and communication approach. Self-presentation is a communication management approach used by individuals to control how they are perceived by others (Hollenbaugh, 2021). As part of this communication strategy, individuals select the type of information they want to share, so that others accept the conveyed message (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). This view is further supported by research arguing that when in an unfriendly and/or not familiar environment (online platforms) individuals tend to develop a form of anxiety, and as a result, adopt a more protective self-presentation attitude (Pontari & Glenn, 2012), which is a neutral and socially conservative presentation of the self (Pontari & Glenn, 2012; Rui & Stefanone, 2013).

The lack of insight into the private life of customers of the hospitality industry provided by the results of this study is calling for alternative research methods. This lack of insight is also evidence of the limitations of both lexicometric analysis and data shared on online platforms. Research on speed dating is usually based on field research, which is always overt in its approach. Among the methods used so far could be mentioned questionnaire, focus group (Chang et al., 2016), observation (Fisman et al., 2006), etc. Future research could look at conducting research on speed dating events using a covert research approach. As opposed to overt research, in covert research the real purpose of the study is not disclosed to the respondents. Sometimes, the identity of the researcher is also hidden (Lugosi, 2006). This approach is used when overt research cannot provide any real insight (Lugosi, 2006; Séraphin et al., 2023), which is the case in this study. Mystery shopping, which is quite common in hospitality (Allison & Severt, 2011), is based on this covert approach. Allison and Severt (2011) even argued that: "Mystery shopping has become an accepted method of performance measurement in many industries" (p. 61). Covert approach could be conducted alongside an overt approach based on survey (questionnaire), which would examine the relationships between hedonic values of speed dating event, customer-to-customer interaction, and customer affection for the venue (restaurant/

bar) they attended for the speed dating event. This approach seems appropriate as Hossain et al. (2023) used a similar approach (questionnaire) to “examine the relationships between hedonic value, customer-to-customer interaction, customer demandingness, customization and customer love on customer citizenship behaviour with the moderation effect of customer involvement” (p. 65).

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