

Explaining the Embodied Hospitality Experience with ZMET

Abstract

Purpose – Scholars have rarely applied an embodied perspective when studying hospitality experiences. They have given even less attention to methodological considerations. The present study introduces Zaltman's Metaphor-elicitation Technique (ZMET) to explore various domains of the embodied experience.

Design/methodology/approach – In demonstrating the applicability of the ZMET procedure to understanding embodied hospitality experiences, the researchers present a study of emotional encounters that involve the dining experiences of Chinese tourists with western cuisine. The focus of the paper is on data collection, i.e. detailing the stepwise procedures of ZMET that have received minimal scholarly attention.

Findings – Through the medium of this empirical study, the ZMET example uncovers deep metaphors and answers previously unanswered questions about embodied experiences. The detailed information and nuanced insights that are generated through this ZMET application offer the prospect of enhanced understanding of the hospitality experience.

Practical implications – Practitioners can acquire deeper insights into the embodied hospitality experience through ZMET, particularly in the case of hospitality service/product design, branding and effective marketing communications.

Originality/value – This investigation contributes an innovative research method to the embodied experience in the hospitality and tourism context.

Keywords Embodied Experience, ZMET, Hospitality Experience

Paper type General Review

1. Introduction

It has been widely noted that researchers have adopted a narrow operational focus towards understanding hospitality and associated experiences (Ji et al., 2016; Lugosi, 2014; Lynch et al., 2011). Perhaps because most hospitality publications have emerged from business and managerial related disciplines, it has been commonplace to reduce hospitality experiences to measurable constructs and scientific measurements that fit within the established domains of satisfaction, behavioral intentions and loyalty. Lynch et al. (2011) has called for more intellectual representations in hospitality research that consider ‘the most pressing social, cultural and political questions of our time’ (p. 3). Hospitality experiences should also embrace such critical insights and incorporate more and broader theoretical and politically laden questions ranging from ‘the material to the ethical to the neuroaesthetic to the imaginative’ (Lynch et al., 2011, p. 13). (Though neuroaesthetic approaches have merit for future research, discussion is presented in the latter sections of this paper since they are beyond the scope of the present investigation.) The plentiful literature on tourism image has made way for the growing interest in deeper aspects of the tourist encounter. Simplistic interpretations of the visual have been increasingly challenged by anthropological, sociological and semiotic perspectives that have informed the increasingly customized tourist experience as it has been mediated through the process of digitized co-creation. A wider range of methodological techniques is needed to elicit insights that extend beyond the superficial and which delve into the tourist’s unconscious. The present study views the hospitality experience as a sociocultural, metaphorical and economic exchange and adopts an embodied approach for purposes of conceptualization.

Already a popular concept within the geography discipline, ‘embodiment’ has been increasingly advocated as an alternative way of conceptualizing hospitality and tourism experiences (Chronis, 2012; Crouch et al., 2005; Everett, 2008). However, with the notable exceptions of Crouch (2000) and Scarles (2009, 2012a, 2012b), previous researchers have neglected methodological developments with their focus on ontological debates. Crouch (2000) presented a basic ‘mental map’ concept but did not elaborate. Scarles and Lester (2014) advocated the use of visual methods by asking interviewees to provide photographs that they took during their travel. When this medium is supplemented by interviews it is capable of inducing embodied experiences (Scarles, 2009, 2012a). It cannot however convey the complete experience, particularly if the embodied element defies description in words. The paucity of examinations of the embodied experience leaves plenty of scope to apply innovative research methods.

In addressing the prevailing methodological deficit, the present study proposes Zaltman's Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) as a suitable mechanism to investigate previously unexplored embodied experiences. Relative to the existing methods, the merits of ZMET include collecting multi-sensory experiences, image-based thoughts, metaphors and story telling that overcomes the difficulties of articulation in words. ZMET has the capacity to draw out the holistic dimensions of an experience. The authors acknowledge that tourism researchers have previously undertaken various applications of ZMET (e.g. Chen, 2016) but the present study pioneers its use in examining embodied experiences in hospitality and tourism.

The researchers adopt ZMET in the context of hospitality and tourism and focus on induced emotional encounters amongst Chinese tourists through dining experiences with western cuisine. 'Emotions' play a central role in this context and are approached from a cognitive-motivational-relational perspective. This approach includes diverse variables and processes. These can include the elicitation of environmental and internal conditions, the mediating process of appraising the relationship, the tendency towards action, the coping process, and the response itself (Lazarus, 1999). The 'encounter' is an embodied experience '... in which the subject actively plays an imaginative, reflexive role, not detached but semi-attached, socialized, crowded with context. The resulting knowledge resembles a kaleidoscope rather than a perspective with horizon, a series of mutually inflected, and fluid images...' (Crouch, 1999, p. 12). In the short term, 'emotional encounters' explore types of emotions, what produces them, the associated meaning-making, and possible action components. The existing literature has made only passing reference to issues of data collection. The current researchers have taken advantage of the theme of this special issue of *IJCHM* on methods to focus on how ZMET may be applied. The authors present the current case as a representative application of this method in hospitality and tourism research with the intention of providing a useful reference point to guide future investigations.

The present study embraces the call for a critical turn in hospitality research by conceptualizing the hospitality experience from an embodiment perspective. It fills the lack of insight into the embodied experience within hospitality and tourism by introducing an innovative research method. This approach offers potential to uncover unexplored aspects of the hospitality experience. The application of a new method is also intended as an inspiration for readers to explore more sophisticated and critically based research methods when they are investigating other aspects of the hospitality experience.

2. Literature review

2.1 Embodiment

The concept of embodiment provides a bridge between the composition and nature of the tourist experience and of the human body. The ‘body’ has traditionally been viewed from two contradictory perspectives. It may be considered as a physical entity or thing, an object of control/determination, a precondition or as a product of an external cultural process of construction (Ingold, 2000). However, it also represents an identity and is the bearer of lifestyle (Crouch et al., 2001). It is a cultural representation and signifier of values and norms. The second approach views the body as a medium for individuals to have a practical involvement in the world. It concerns how humans act and work, both mentally (Crouch, 2001) and through ‘the feeling of doing’ and through the senses (Harré, 2002). The body may be understood in its own right or internally, rather than from the more superficial exterior or through representation (Radley and Taylor, 2003). The body of the tourist has been viewed as a thing: a physical entity or an object of representation and control, a surface of inscription or a physical medium for the development of subjectivity (Pons, 2003). It is an unavoidable pre-condition or a product of an external, cultural process of construction (Ingold, 2000).

‘Embodiment’ emphasizes a second contrasting view of the ‘body’ and concerns the ways in which the individual ‘grasps the world around her/him and makes sense of it in ways that engage both mind and body’ (Crouch, 2000, p. 63). The role of the body in learning and creating knowledge has been acknowledged. On this basis scholars have advocated the merit of deploying embodiment as a means of conceptualizing tourist experiences as a kaleidoscope that contains the mind and the body, the subjective and objective, the interior and the exterior of the body (Pons, 2003).

In seeking to understand the body, Grosz (1999) proposed the use of ‘turning inside out and the outside in’. He advocated adopting an analysis of how the subject’s ‘exterior is physically constructed and how the process of social inscription of the body’s surface constructs a physical interior’ (Grosz, 1999, p. 104). Pons (2003) challenged the Grosz approach. In asserting that the body is active, expressive and sensual he rejected a natural-cultural division. The body should be understood as simultaneously social and natural, object and subject and active and passive.

Pons (2003) outlined a three-way understanding of the body – situated, elusive and expressive. First, the body should be understood as both situated and as a situation. It is always situated in a particular space and time, but also forms part of our lives to condition and make things possible. Second, by virtue of being ‘elusory’, the body can depart from the

objectifications that are imposed upon it, and is empowered with the capacity to open out experience (Pons, 2003). The elusiveness of the body also involves place creation through its interactions with others and with proximate people and things. Third, the body expresses the way in which we make sense of places by enacting who we are relative to others (Crouch et al., 2001). The body extends the self and connects the inner self expressively with the surrounding space.

Crouch et al. (2001) used walking to exemplify the poetic and emotional dimensions of the embodied experience. Walking is not merely a mechanical purpose that is objectivized in health, but a subtle bodily practice with both feet and the whole self through which space can be felt intimately and imaginatively. Being a tourist enables playfulness, providing an opportunity to live the world as a child (Lyon and Barbolet, 1994). 'Being there' in playful practice can override boundaries of rationality and objectivity in an embodied as opposed to a solely cerebral game, stimulating deep feelings as well as surface play (Crouch et al., 2001). Kristeva (1996) suggested that the body's existential immediacy or felt multidimensional relationship with the world can provoke imagination and its translation into different feelings and spatial intimacies.

Despite the various approaches to the complexity of embodiment, researchers have not provided a method that decodes the embodied experience. The following section reviews the existing limited methodological coverage of the embodied experience, with notable attention to the technique of photo elicitation.

2.2 Visual images and photo elicitation

Rose (2016) remarked that the visual or image is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies because of the significant meanings that are conveyed through visual imagery. Harper (1988) outlined three ways of using the visual, namely, the scientific, narrative and phenomenological modes. The scientific mode regards photography as a way of capturing an objective reality, as used in documentary studies, and hence as useful when studying changes in the material world or in the social life of a group. The narrative mode regards visuals as showing a process of social life that is comprised of social interactions and hence is useful in eliciting individuals' subjective worlds as in the case of interviews. This mode has been described as 'photo elicitation' and is regarded as one of the most promising applications of visual images. The phenomenology mode regards visuals as an expression of spiritual or psychological aspects and is a powerful tool for exploring perceptions and knowledge. It is commonly believed that photography plays a role beyond the objective,

serving as an insight into a reality of place. Photography serves as a gateway to ‘enworlded’ (Cragg, 1997) landscapes and presents a route through which worlds are created.

Referring to tourism research, Scarles and Lester (2014) have suggested that visual materials, including photography and brochures, provide a deeper understanding of tourist experiences. Photographs become an active agent within the research as they present not only the represented objectives but also provide opportunities to explore tourists’ social and personal meanings and values based on how they respond to images. Photography is useful in exploring interviewees’ feelings and thoughts, making them visible (Radley and Taylor, 2003) and gaining access to hidden behaviours, senses and engagements (Scarles, 2009).

Tourism researchers typically use two types of photograph - those generated by interviewees (interviewee-led) and those by researchers (researcher-led) (Scarles, 2012a). Researcher-led photo elicitation focuses on introducing interviewees to photographs that researchers have pre-selected according to established criteria. The interviewee-led approach allows interviewees to produce their own images. They afford relative freedom of interviewee selectivity, of content inclusion and exclusion, composition and framing, enabling them to convey their subjective interpretations and experiences. Because these photos are produced by interviewees, they can facilitate rapport, generating comfortable spaces and establishing trust (Scarles, 2012a).

Though the study of embodied experiences is undoubtedly advanced through photo elicitation, its various limitations should be noted.

Firstly, photo elicitation relies on verbal interviewing (Lester and Scarles, 2014). In practice most thoughts and emotions occur in the form of mental images which can be difficult or impossible to express in words (Kosslyn, 1999). Thoughts and emotions can also take the form of metaphors that require the adoption of special techniques have disregarded the fact that subjective feelings are not easily articulated into words. They fail to capture either image-based thoughts or the metaphorical aspects of experience.

Secondly, the content of photos serves as a copy of the objects that have been viewed by interviewees. Scarles (2012b) acknowledged the difference between these viewed objects and the embodied experience. She has contended that an interest in photography should extend beyond the visual as objects to the embodied practices that explain the significance of the visual. Having awareness of the issues cannot, however, compensate for the minimal relationship between objects in the photos and the embodied experience, nor with the contents of the verbal expression (as in an interview). For example, an interviewee may reflect on a picture of a family picnic that appears to represent family bonding (Haldrup and Larsen, 2003).

The objects that are presented in the picture do not demonstrate the felt emotions and meanings nor refer to the intensity of such subjective feelings. This suggests that although photos are effective in eliciting or awakening previous experiences, a more matched subject-object relationship should be presented in the visuals if the embodied experience is to be disclosed.

The ZMET that is proposed in the present paper has other benefits that overcome the aforementioned shortcomings. The following section outlines the power of ZMET to understand embodied experiences and elaborates the relevant procedures.

2.3 ZMET and embodied tourist experiences

ZMET was developed by Zaltman at Harvard in the early 1990s. He has described the technique as follows: ‘A lot goes on in our minds that we’re not aware of. Most of what influences what we say and do occurs below the level of awareness. That’s why we need new techniques: to get at hidden knowledge to get at what people don’t know they know’ (Pink, 1998, p. 214).

The fundamental claim of ZMET is that humans comprehend surroundings via metaphors. Metaphors are ‘enduring ways of perceiving things, making sense of what we encounter, and guiding our subsequent actions’ and ‘the product of an ever-evolving partnership between brain, body and society’ (Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008, p. xv). Metaphors are ‘deep’ because they operate largely unconsciously (Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008). Most of the time consumers are unaware of the operation of their unconscious mind or the effects it has on their decision making and actions. However, existing research methods (notably questionnaires and focus groups) disregard this unconscious feature but demand conscious reflection by consumers on their unconscious mind. The consumers are not given a mechanism to get conscious access to those unconscious thoughts (Zaltman et al., 2015).

Metaphors manifest themselves at three levels: surface metaphors (manifest in everyday language and conversations), metaphor themes (common themes behind various different surface metaphors) and deep metaphors. According to Zaltman and Zaltman (2008), deep metaphors can be classified into seven types based on their decades of consultancy projects. The seven types are metaphor of balance, transformation, journey, container, connection, resource and the metaphor of control. Furthermore, speaking in metaphors per se is also a method to be used to overcome the literal difficulty in articulating an experience or a feeling. Metaphors are communicant medium that helps to bridge the gap between what consumers can say in ‘sensible’ language and what they really mean in their minds (Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008). The goal of ZMET is to apply its patented procedures to uncover these

deep metaphors, by exploring beyond consumers' surface thinking and behaviour into their unconscious mind, and learning from their perspective as to why and how they think and do what they do (Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008).

Photo elicitation and means-end theory are the main elements of ZMET. As discussed previously, photo elicitation refers to one of three modes that use photos to elicit subjective worlds with the aid of interviewing. Means-end theory proposes a *value chain* that links the attributes of a product with their functional and psychosocial (or emotional) consequences and/or to the establishment of personal values (Ha and Jang, 2013). Following means-end theory, ZMET postulates that product and service attributes have consequences, such as product benefits and personal values that consumers would like to fulfil through their use. Essentially, ZMET elicits, describes and connects the thoughts and feelings of consumers to product or service attributes.

ZMET has been widely used in marketing research. The choice of topics has extended to brand associations and attributes (Hogan et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2018; Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2017), the role of business-consumer interactions in creating different sensemaking of social media (Rydén et al., 2015), the impacts of advertisement in shaping consumers' purchase decision (Christensen and Olson, 2002; Coulter et al., 2001; Micu and Plummer, 2010), promoting new product concepts and designs (Forr et al., 2008), product usage experiences (e.g. Christensen and Olson, 2002), and consumers' perception of contemporary issues such as climate change (Anghelcev et al., 2015).

There have, however, been few applications of ZMET in tourism and hospitality, especially in the case of hospitality research. Wang et al. (2015) studied the impacts of mass media (primarily news articles including pictures) in the development of organic destination image of Singapore by the Hong Kong Chinese tourists. Yang et al. (2014) explored the perception of Malaysian Chinese towards food and highlighted their health concerns, food neophilia tendencies and their emotional value of enjoyment and pleasure. Chen (2010) investigated gender-based differences amongst sport event tourists in relation to loyalty, socialization, self-actualisation, volunteering and equality. Chen (2016) also drew upon her experiences as a Fulbright Scholar in Denmark and Austria to study the 'western culture' alignment of her perceptions. Whilst previous studies have focused on uncovering the value aspects of user experiences, the present investigation pioneers its application to embodied hospitality and tourism experiences.

The characteristics of ZMET are particularly relevant for studying embodied tourist experiences. First, while embodied tourist experiences combine images and words, the former

have generally been overlooked. Two-thirds of all stimuli reach the brain through the visual system (Kosslyn, 1999). However little of the previous research on embodied experiences has explored image-based thoughts. When images are considered through photo-elicitation, the viewed objects are simply displayed and perform the function of recalling memories. The ZMET approach instead deploys the visual images as a projective medium that helps participants to identify and communicate their thoughts and feelings and connections.

Secondly, ZMET acknowledges the roles that metaphors play in human thought. Metaphors involve understanding, perceiving and experiencing one thing through another and individuals are incapable of knowing unless through metaphors (Lakoff, 1993). Metaphors actively create and shape thoughts by making new connections (Fernandez-Duque and Johnson, 1999). They are also effective in ‘bringing out’ the unconscious mind (Glucksberg, 1995). Metaphors are not stored verbatim in memory, but abstractly in modality-free language (Burgess and Chiarello, 1996). ZMET takes metaphors into account by asking interviewees to describe their feelings using abstract pictures and storytelling.

Third, ZMET can provide insights into the embodied experience by decoding highly abstract aspects of an experience such as emotions and imaginations. Conventional research methods have shown a bias towards reason, with little consideration being given to emotional aspects. Interviewees may display reasoning because how they are being encouraged to respond, and what can be most readily articulated. ZMET instead starts with interviewee-led storytelling and encourages free talking in the language that is preferred by interviewees. The associated feelings, emotions and unconscious thoughts can be thought through and consequently articulated.

Fourth, ZMET recognizes the relative importance of different senses in the formation of cognition. As a principle of the embodied experience, sensations model the world of thoughts (Crouch, 2000). Sensory perceptions are transformed into images which are subsequently translated into metaphors which describe them. The metaphors are then mapped onto abstract thoughts, specific concepts or both (Goldman, 1986), stored in memory. Whilst prevailing research techniques have tended to neglect the senses, ZMET collects sensory information by asking interviewees to use different senses to convey what do and do not represent the concept being explored.

2.4 ZMET steps

The applications of ZMET have been varied. Zaltman (1997) proposed the following eight steps: storytelling, missing images, sorting images, construct elicitation, metaphor

elaboration, sensory images, vignette and the digital image (or ‘montage’). Chen (2008) skipped the sorting image step while Khoo-Lattimore and Prideaux (2013) adopted nine steps. Christensen and Olson (2002) skipped vignette and digital image steps from their data analysis. Such variations might be attributable to the research questions.

The most inconsistent application is the digital image step. This step relies on software developed by and accessed from the Zaltman’s laboratory. It is inaccessible to external researchers prompting a relaxed approach to applying the digital image step or else to its abandonment. However the role of digital image can be largely fulfilled by the ‘vignette’ step (Zaltman, 1997). Consequently, skipping is neither detrimental nor does it lead to significant incompleteness in data collection. Insufficient time is another. Tourism and hospitality interviewees tend to be tourists who have limited time to devote to interviewing at a destination and their participation is rarely incentivized. Applying the digital image step on location becomes unrealistic as it is too time consuming. This is not a problem for Zaltman’s lab where interviewees receive good incentives. Given that most researchers encounter such problems, the present study excludes the digital image step and uses the procedures which are outlined in Figure 1. It contains seven steps adapted from early applications by the creators of the method: Christensen and Olson (2002), Zaltman (1997) and Coulter and Zaltman (1995).

It is noteworthy that scholars have recently applied ZMET outside the hospitality and tourism domain. However the key variations that have been observed concern the contexts under investigation. The current authors conclude that there has been no major divergence from the procedures that were initiated in the 1990s. On this basis, it is essential to refer to classic texts to understand the original meanings of the procedure as follows.

Step 1: Storytelling Before the interview commences, researchers should ask interviewees to prepare at least eight pictures that can answer the proposed research questions and to bring them to the interview. During the interviewing, the researchers ask the interviewees to describe the contents of each of the pictures that they chose, why these pictures were chosen, the meanings of various elements included in a picture, including the colors. If the pictures are metaphors, their description should describe why and how such metaphors were related to their experiences. The researchers can use the technique of reflective interviewing to ensure an accurate understanding of the messages through methods such as restating interviewee comments and summarizing.

Step 2: Missing images In the event that the interviewees cannot find the appropriate pictures prior to interviewing, the researchers ask them to describe the images that

might be relevant to their experiences. This is important to ensure the completeness in the data collection.

Step 3: Sorting images The researchers ask the interviewees to sort their chosen pictures into meaningful groups based on their own reasoning. This facilitates the identification of major themes that are relevant to the interviewees. The number of pictures for each group is subjective to the interviewees.

Step 4: Construct elicitation This step involves a modified version of Kelly's Triadic Sorting (KTS) and laddering techniques (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). The KTS is a method for eliciting constructs behind thinking and action, whereas the laddering procedure establishes causal patterns amongst identified constructs. By adopting a combination of the two techniques, the researchers are able to locate the constructs and identify any interconnections.

Step 5: Metaphor elaboration The researchers ask the interviewees to select their two or three most representative pictures. Respondents are then asked to widen the frame of these pictures or any objects included in the pictures in any direction or dimension. By altering the images, this step encourages the interviewees to provide additional thoughts and feelings that are associated with the images. Other responses and thoughts can be stimulated through breaking the equilibrium that has been established in the pictures.

Step 6: Sensory images The researchers ask the interviewees to use five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch) to describe the qualities associated with their experiences. For example, the researchers may ask 'can you use a particular smell to describe your experience'. An answer can be 'plastic-like and not natural'. This step draws the researchers to the metaphors associated with the interviewees' experiences. Sensory images are important aspect of an experience because they evoke the mental representation of an experience hence recalling experiences (Engen, 1991). Different senses correspond to different experiences and therefore knowing different senses helps to recall various aspects of an experience (Damasio et al., 2005; Engen, 1991). Sensory images are also powerful in bringing unconscious thoughts to awareness (Lakoff, 1993).

Step 7: The vignette The researchers ask the interviewees to summarize their overall experiences with a short story in mini-movie form. This step draws upon the psychodrama concept and relates to different sections of the brain that are active when engaged in moving (rather than still) images (Hubel, 1995). It has been suggested that distinct ideas may emerge as different areas of the brain are activated (Collins, 1991).

The application of numbering through the aforementioned steps may indicate a sequencing of events. However, the authors suggest that some of the steps must go back and

forth, or repeat themselves as relevant scenarios arise. This will be presented in the next section using ZMET procedure. The adoption of sequential steps can triangulate the emergent facts from different angles, though it is acknowledged that leading edge scientific neuroscience tools can further enhance data reliability. More discussions about this dimension are included in the paper in the future research section.

3. An application of ZMET

To provide an example of the ZMET in action, the authors draw upon a study of the emotional encounters of Chinese tourists dining in Portuguese restaurants in Macau. Although the applicable samples consisted of tourists rather than of restaurant customers more generally, the tourist perspective provides valuable insights into a particular customer profile. The research setting is deliberate. Portuguese cuisine is the legacy of about 440 years of colonial influence over Macau (1557-1999). This extended colonial history might prompt one to expect that Chinese tourist encounters with Portuguese associations would be emotion-laden because of their derivation from transformed power relations (Macau is now a Special Administration Region within China) and sense of nostalgia. The authors contend that cuisine provides a representation of culture and that restaurants can represent ‘socio-cultural containers’ (Ji et al., 2016). In this context, Portuguese restaurant food has the potential to generate imaginings and understandings about ‘Portugueseness’. The Macau study provides a demonstration of the components of emotional encounters from the following perspectives: the types of prevalent emotions, what has produced them, the meanings of such encounters, and any associated actions.

A week prior to interviewing the authors asked interviewees to prepare at least eight photos that best described ‘what they were feeling during the dining event’. The pictures could take any form, ranging from newspaper clippings, drawings, photos taken by the interviewees to images downloaded from the Internet. Interviewing took place in Macau at the end of the trip and before the interviewees’ return to China. The interviewees were telephoned a day prior to interviewing with a request to email the pictures and were also reminded to bring them along to the interview. The researcher viewed the pictures beforehand to understand the nature of the interviewees’ experiences. This enabled the researcher to draw attention to any unusual pictures and which could provide a basis for the formulation of interview questions. It was found that most of the photos could be understood as metaphors. Picture 1, for example provides an analogy for the pungent and strong spices used in the Portuguese food. Picture 2 depicts the

randomly arranged cutlery that was indicative of poor service quality. Picture 3 depicts feelings of difficulty that were encountered in the process of ordering food.

The interviews commenced with a short greeting. The interviewer then requested any other photos that the interviewees wanted to bring but could not find during their search (i.e. missing images step). The interviewees were then encouraged to tell a sequence of stories associated with the various pictures (i.e. the storytelling step). As is detailed in Appendix 2 specific questions have been tailored to the needs of each step. Reader of this paper who wish to undertake related research may use these as a basis for initiating conversations with interviewees. The proposed questions may be viewed as broad topics that represent how interviewees consider the particular domain. It has not been possible to propose follow-up questions in the relevant Appendix since each interviewee will generate different answers. Researchers should apply the laddering technique to follow up the questions. Laddering involves a tailored interview format that uses a series of direct probes, as exemplified by the question ‘Why is that important to you?’ Consistent with Means-End Theory (Gutman, 1980), it aims to understand how interviewees translate product attributes (the ‘means’) and the consequences of having the attributes for personal values (the ‘ends’). Laddering technique should be applied through the seven steps. The following example corresponds to the storytelling step.

In the case of picture 3, the interviewee described it as representing the difficulties and headaches of ordering Portuguese food. She felt that her head was three times as big. The researcher then asked ‘What gave you the headache when ordering the food?’ This aimed to identify the attributes responsible for the headache. The interviewee said she was inhibited by the Portuguese language in the menu when considering her order. She mentioned the menu structure (starter, main course and dessert) which differed from the Chinese approach, hence her challenge of what and how much to order. She also mentioned descriptions of Portuguese dishes as ingredient based rather than on the final presentation. She struggled to visualize the complete dish.

In order to understand the associated consequence the researchers then asked ‘Why was it important for you to be able to order?’. The interviewee expressed fear that her companion would not enjoy herself and that the waiter might mislead by recommending expensive dishes. As the conversation became sensitive, the researcher used negative laddering to understand the associated personal values by asking ‘Why is it important to look relaxed and at ease in ordering food?’ The interviewee responded that she did not want to look stupid before the waiters, her travel companion and other restaurant customers. This example illustrates the Means-End

Chain, ranging from Portuguese food features (attributes) to please others (consequences) to self-efficacy (personal values). Laddering technique should be applied in all questions across the seven steps. Laddering should be paired with KTS in the construct elicitation step.

Through the listening process, the interviewer took notes about any mentions of constructs that were relevant to the research questions about emotions, the reasons behind them, meanings established from the experiences and behavioural intentions. The researchers used arrows to indicate relationships between the emotions and reasons. When only emotions were mentioned and reasons were missed, the interviewer prompted the interviewee to explain his or her feelings.

A combination of KTS and Laddering techniques was used to identify constructs (construct elicitation step). KTS requires researchers to undertake a random selection of three of the interviewee's pictures and ask how any two of the images were similar but different from the third. For example, the researcher selected one picture portraying a rather muscular Portuguese man, one an elegant but pristine Portuguese woman, and one fountain illuminated in blue with a crystal phoenix revealed by the water in the center. The interviewee reported that the first two conveyed an image about Portuguese features based on the Portuguese food she was eating; the last concerned the overall mysterious feelings engendered by the experience of Portuguese culture embodied in sampling the food. Probing and laddering with regard to the former two pictures revealed that the interviewee based her image of the Portuguese man on the food portion with its predominance of meat. The image of the Portuguese lady emanated from the restaurant ambience, the dimmed light, heavy wooden furniture and female Fado singer. The last picture reveals that dining on exotic food gave her a glimpse of another culture and stimulated her curiosity and fascination.

The interviewer sought further clarifications as necessary, sometimes with the use of reflective interviewing techniques such as restating and summarizing to ensure that her correct understanding. On other occasions, interviewees were asked to provide an alternative description of their various emotions. One interviewee, for example, stated that the restaurant atmosphere made her feel 'refined, cultivated and dignified' and that this contrasted with 'the casual feeling of being at home and of avoiding extravagance'.

On completion of the storytelling about each picture, the researcher asked interviewees about whether they would like to widen any frames of the picture to enhance the expression of their emotional encounters (metaphor elaboration step). For example, one interviewee who used a panda eating bamboo (Picture 4) to analogize her experience commented jokingly that she would like to widen the panda's mouth to enhance her enjoyment of what she considered

‘delicious Portuguese food’. However, relatively few interviewees responded to the metaphor elaboration step.

Following discussion of all of the photos in accordance with the previously mentioned steps, the interviewees were asked to sort them into groups according to their logic (sorting image step). Some interviewees based their groupings on time sequence like prior-during-after, or types of emotion derived from the food and environment, while others used negative and positive experiences.

The interviewees were then asked to use the five senses to illustrate their emotions (sensory images step). This request generated many witty responses. For example, eating Portuguese food was described as; ‘touching a sea rock’, ‘tasting like a durian fruit’, ‘smelling like bread’ or ‘a flavour at home’ and ‘like listening to the tide’. More importantly, these sensory images corresponded to the details given in previous steps. For example, one interviewee described ‘tasting like a durian fruit’ of the food as reflective of the varied ingredients being cooked together in a single dish and leading to the ‘mushy’ texture to the food; and another ‘touching a sea rock’ corresponded to the dry texture of Portuguese cooked meat (compared with the Chinese cuisine that concentrated on a juicer and tender texture).

Following the sensory images step, interviewees were asked for any additional pictures (missing images step). Although this step was performed at the outset of the interview, the researchers viewed it as worthwhile because the interviewee might wish to take advantage of the completion of the interview to express their emotional encounters using additional pictures.

Lastly, interviewees were asked to organize their overall experiences into a logical short story (vignette step). For example, the vignette of one interviewee involved a young lady who had ended a romantic relationship and travelled abroad. She was unable to forget the relationship, despite visiting many places. One day at a Portuguese restaurant she met a boy and it was ‘love at first sight’. The girl had previously studied in Spain for some years and had experienced various romantic encounters. In her opinion the Portuguese food awakened past experiences because of its similarity to what she had eaten in Spain.

The applicable sample size for qualitative research depends on the richness of available information about the selected cases. The number will vary according to the researchers’ observational or analytical capabilities (Patton, 2005). In the present study, the information saturation point was reached after the 12th interview, with subsequent interviews being conducted to verify the identified themes. The average interview lasted 90 minutes. The present study deployed NVivo for data analysis, though other similar qualitative data analysis software can be used.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The authors have observed that ZMET offers an effective means of eliciting tourists' hidden feelings and experiences. A particularly beneficial aspect was storytelling and using metaphors and pictures. The authors were pleasantly surprised by the quantity, quality and richness of the information that was elicited. Various interviewees were positive about the innovative and informative aspects of ZMET. They also reported that they 'felt empty', almost as if they had poured out all of their thoughts by the laddering technique. One challenge of using ZMET is the uncertainty that prevails until the themes coalesce. This shows the need for patience when applying ZMET. Another challenge is that laddering technique can create silent responses. Researchers have to be sensitive and flexible with probing questions.

The current study has addressed the contemporary call for a critical turn in hospitality research. There is a pressing need to shift our understanding of concepts such as construction and production towards exploring hospitality as a metaphor for social behaviours and as a business and cultural phenomenon. The present study has conceptualized hospitality experiences as embodied and has addressed a gap in the literature by introducing ZMET for investigative purposes. As a detailed and systematic procedure which offers holistic coverage of an experience, ZMET challenges and extends the current reliance on photo elicitation and general visual materials when studying the embodied experience. By bringing to the surface various previously undocumented elements of experience - notably visual-based images, metaphors and multi-sensory experiences - ZMET may encourage readers to consider a wider range of elements to advance established hospitality and tourism research methods. The current researchers' application of the tourism geography literature to the embodied hospitality experience has also shown the insights and contributions that can be derived from diverse scholarly traditions. Drawing from a wider span of disciplines challenges the narrowness and inward looking character of prevailing hospitality research and offers the prospect of progressing towards a more holistic, sophisticated, aesthetic and human research realm.

This study revealed abstract emotions associated with tourists' dining, including their struggle to appreciate the food, their imaginations about Portuguese people, their ways of life and pursuit of an aesthetic and elegant dining experience that cannot be achieved in their everyday dining experiences. They also developed admiration and fantasies about Portuguese culture and an appreciation for Macau's Portuguese colonial legacy. The findings have several practical implications. Firstly, a deeper understanding of the dining experience can distinguish Portuguese cuisine from alternatives. Such insights can guide market segmentation and the

design of marketing communications. Secondly, practitioners can enhance their awareness of tourist associations with dining, their felt emotions and fantasies about Portuguese culture, and the challenge of handling unfamiliar dining customs. Thirdly, the aspirations that are stimulated by dining on Portuguese food can provide insights about promoting Portugal in Macau. Last and not least, it has been shown that Portuguese cuisine generates positive images about Portugal. Food offers a potentially valuable vehicle to maintain and enhance Sino-Portuguese and Sino-Lusofonia relationships in the postcolonial era.

Although ZMET has the power to uncover unconscious thoughts and the various steps provide triangulation, ZMET relies fundamentally on inferences when exploring the minds of consumers. For this reason, it is difficult to eliminate the critique that there is minimal physical evidence to support its conclusions. Neuroscience techniques are suggested here as a potential means of tracing and providing such evidence. It is increasingly accepted by researchers that stimuli prompt diverse responses from different areas of the brain. It is now feasible to assess the effects of such stimuli by correlating the level of exposure with images of simultaneous brain activity (Zurawicki, 2010). It has, for example been found that the anterior insula is active when customers perceive unfairness (Fugate, 2007). The basic set of techniques that may be used to generate neurological images consists of: electroencephalography, magneto encephalography, positron emission tomography and functional magnetic resonance imaging. In hospitality and tourism research, Pan et al. (2013), Wang and Sparks (2014) and Li et al. (2016) applied eye-tracking. Kim and Fesenmaier (2014) used electrodermal activity. Though it has been beyond the scope of the present study, it is suggested that neuroscience techniques may be used as a supplement to ZMET, consistent with a blending of social and natural science approaches.

While the present study has explored embodied dining experiences, hotels are an obvious component of the hospitality sector that may benefit from embodied considerations. Hotels represent a transient environment that contrasts with everyday living spaces. Whether visitors are accommodated in a luxury hotel or in an economy Airbnb establishment, their unconscious socio-cultural identities are different and imbue their experiences with imaginings of themselves, of those around them and of the culture that extends beyond the accommodation establishment. Previous hotel studies have tended to focus on the tangible elements of such experiences and to assume these are the cause of satisfaction and of intentions to revisit. Without discounting such elements, the current authors view customer subjectivities and imaginings as important elements of the experience. The application of ZMET provides a medium to elicit the imaginative experience and bring it to the surface. Such information can

be a helpful input when designing hotel rooms, supplementing services and communicating indirectly with consumers about brand value.

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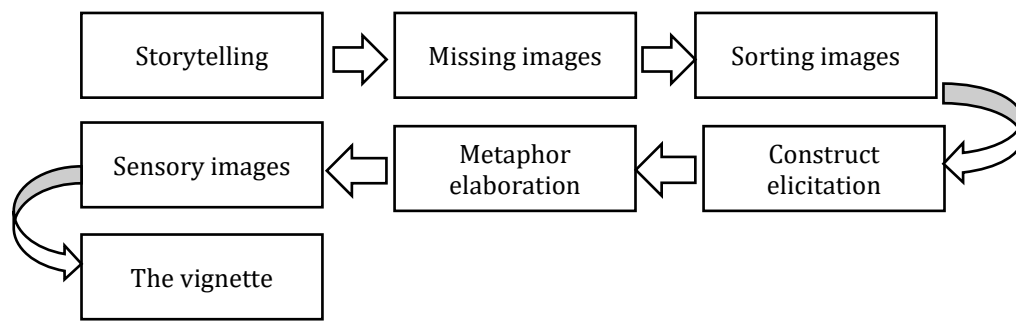


Figure 1 ZMET steps

Appendix 1. Pictures provided by the interviewees

Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Appendix 2. Interview questions

Interview Procedure	Interview Questions
Demographic information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inquire on participants' age, country of origin, short-haul/long-haul tourists, and types of travel. 2. Why did you choose to eat Portuguese food, rather than other types of food in Macau?
Step 1: Story telling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Can you tell me your feelings and experience in Portuguese restaurants with each picture? (How would you like to describe your food experience in Portuguese restaurant?) 4. Why do you have such feelings/experiences? 5. What made you have such feelings?
Step 2: Missing image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. In addition to the selected pictures, what other feelings can you think of at this moment from your experience?
Step 3: Sorting images	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Can you sort the pictures into different piles based on similar feelings or experiences? 8. Can you name a theme/description for each pile of pictures? 9. How do you differentiate your experience/feelings in this picture with that picture? 10. What images convey the opposite of your experience? 11. What is the most representative of your feelings?
Step 4: Construct elicitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Why do you have such feelings/experiences? 13. What made you have such feelings? 14. What does the food mean to you? 15. Why is such a feeling/experience important to you? 16. Do you feel emotion changes before, during and after your experience in Portuguese restaurant? And how? 17. From patronizing the Portuguese restaurant, how do you understand the mixed culture in Macau? 18. Why such attributes of food/resultants make you understand more about Portuguese culture? 19. How do you feel about the Portuguese culture in Macau? To what extent do you have positive feelings towards it? 20. How do you feel about Portuguese food being promoted in Macau
Step 5: Metaphor elaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. If you were to widen or enlarge the frame of this (selected) picture in any direction or dimension, what would be included that would reinforce your intended meanings?
Step 6: Sensory image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 22. How do your senses describe your feelings about your Portuguese dining experience in a contrasting manner? Such as 'The smell is like plastic not natural'. 23. If a particular sense is missed, research will remind the interviewee to describe.
Step 7: The vignette	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 24. Can you summarize your experience in a short story imagine it as a movie?