The mediating effect of real life encounters in co-writing tourism books

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HIGHLIGHTS

- A book seminar enhance authors motivations to write.
- Writing includes autotelic and instrumental motivations.
- Writing may be done solitary or with others.
- Combining motivations and behaviours gives different writing categories.
- Academic institutions should provide for encounters to fulfill individual and institutional goals.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effects of meeting in a relevant empirical setting with the purpose of co-writing an academic book. A writing seminar is used to explore how such encounters impact scholars' motivations and actions regarding writing. Data were collected through participant observation, discussions, and in-depth interviews. Based on experiential and learning theories, the study led to the identification of four categories of academic co-writing, reflected through data from formal and informal meeting contexts: writing to process information; to develop knowledge; to play, socialize, and have fun; and to present oneself. The study findings suggest that academic institutions should arrange and support scholarly meetings to fulfill goals such as knowledge building, publication, and networking. At the individual level, being together and discussing and clarifying topics, constructs, and ideas motivate scholars to write and to publish.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is about enjoying and learning through meetings and interactions. Academics try to understand the dynamics of such encounters from different perspectives, utilizing well-known and accepted academic methods and designs to explore, describe, and test their ideas and research questions. Nevertheless, learning and writing about lived experiences without partaking in them are challenging. This paper addresses the imperative of being present, discussing, and learning from the actual environment when scholars aim to co-write edited books in the tourism context. In particular, we focus on authors' motivations and behaviors during such encounters.

Science has been characterized as a “big, noisy dialogue that takes place mainly through scholarly journals and books” (Nygaard, 2008). Trying to make sense of — and being heard in — this boisterous environment involves mainly the learning and communicating of new ideas and concepts, and the exploration, delineation, and testing of relationships among relevant constructs. Although writing plays a significant role in academic communication, many scholars have found — and continue to find — writing and being productive in a peer-review context to be challenging (Yuksel, 2003). Numerous volumes and research papers have been dedicated to the topic of “how to write,” with various strategies recommended (Becket, 1986; Goodson, 2013; Murray, 2013). Central concerns regarding scholarly writing are how and why academics partake in this negotiation, and whether the idea of meeting in person in empirical contexts such as tourism amplifies the motivations and actions taken to collaborate.

Traditionally, a scholar with the idea of editing an academic book approaches other scholars regarding their participation in the
co-writing of chapters and co-editing of the book. Due to the lack of resources such as time and the implications of cost and physical distance, authors often communicate by mail, particularly email, and telephone. They also utilize Skype and other communicative media, which allow them to work and interconnect from their home offices. This working structure may be effective, as we have experienced and its effectiveness is reflected in the production of high-quality books (on various scholarly topics) through the use of this structure. However, inspired by social constructivist theories of learning, which state that learners should construct their own knowledge in active learning environments, scholars have integrated small-group learning by introducing tutorials, seminars, and group practicals (Dennick, 2008). This form of collaborative learning provides scholars with opportunities to discuss and improve their knowledge regarding complex issues, learn how to solve problems, and reflect on their attitudes and feelings (Dillenbourg, 1999).

Drawing on learning theories, including Dewey’s learning process and the Lewinian experiential learning model (in Kolb, 1984), the present work aims to demonstrate that meeting and the creation of a platform for mutual understanding and having fun helps authors write creative and complementary chapters that support and develop the common ground of an academic book. We utilize the case of a writing seminar arranged as part of the process of co-writing of a scholarly book in tourism. By meeting in a touristic setting and communicating about tourism issues and the book’s main concept and chapters, the authors found common ground for discussions and thoughts about the topic of the book, namely “value creation in tourist experiences.” Although this work is set in the context of this specific research field, the findings are relevant for editors and researchers aiming to co-write books in other fields. In particular, this paper focuses on the benefits of personal interaction, which functions as a mediator in academic writing. By analyzing motivations and behaviors in this participatory setting, we address new ideas about important aspects of scholarly writing. Accordingly, the present study provides a theoretical foundation that is applicable to the development of various practices aiming to support academic writing for policy makers, academic managers, research students, and academics.

2. Theoretical perspectives

2.1. Reasons for co-writing of a book

One obvious reason that scholars write chapters in edited books is that this practice is part of the academic profession and the scientific environment. Consequently, an academic scholar writes because he or she is expected to do so. Writing in an academic context may lead a scholar to gain new knowledge, a promotion, and, furthermore, inner growth. Although the writing process may be challenging and tedious, it can also produce pleasant experiences. In a performance situation in which the person’s skills match the challenges, feelings described as “flow” may occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) introduced the flow concept to describe an experience that is very satisfying beyond a sense of having fun. Thus, academic writing may be placed within the experiential learning outlook (Kolb, 1984), in which emotions are important work motivators (Seo, Feldmann Barret, & Barunek, 2004). Recent research has argued for the importance of work-related emotions (e.g., Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Zerbe, 2000); the writing of a book chapter in a scientific context encompasses feelings and experience value, such as having fun and a sense of flow, as much as it reflects utilitarian objectives and rational goals.

Other important aspects of writing are time, effort, and assessment of value. Along with factors such as knowledge, skills, and monetary resources, time to write is often scarce and contributing to bottleneck effects in academia. In addition, writing a chapter for other scholars to edit may be viewed as of lesser value than is writing a paper for a peer-reviewed journal. This perceived value discrepancy is due to the requirements of various accreditation systems. Despite this issue, edited books are popular in academia, calling for explorations and justifications of the underlying motivations and structures for such work to emerge.

Academics write for instrumental reasons and to move toward future goals, such as promotion, recognition or placement of themselves on the “academic scene,” the acquisition of more knowledge in a certain academic field, and even the development of relationships and networking with other scholars. Academic writing can also be performed as a form of reciprocity, i.e., in an “I write for your book, you write for mine” type of agreement. These instrumental reasons reflect structural and systemic issues in the broader higher education sector, where growing market competition has generated great interest in the search for and measurement of global academic quality (Dill & Soo, 2005). An example is the use of impact factors in academia; Hall and Page (2015) have discussed the paradox inherent in such systems, and problems that arise when they are not implemented with care.

University ranking systems have various sets of criteria, with certain similarities and differences among countries. A study comparing the rankings produced by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the Times Higher Education Supplement, World Universities by the Cybermetrics Lab at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), the Higher Education and Accreditation Council of Taiwan, and the Centre for Science and Technology Studies at Leiden University found the largest differences between the Times Higher Education Supplement and the World Universities by the Cybermetrics Lab at CSIC (Aguillo, Bar-Ilan, Levene, & Ortega, 2010). Despite these differences, research on academic quality measures has highlighted some core criteria shared among various systems; in particular, different research disciplines have adapted and responded based on the core criterion of the quality of research produced by faculty members (Aguillo et al., 2010; Buela-Casal, Gutierrez-Martinez, Paz Bermudez-Sanchez, & Vadillo-Munoz, 2007; Dill & Soo, 2005; O’Connell, 2013).

Writing may be seen as a social activity, in that people write to communicate with other people. However, writing in itself is not necessarily social. Hayes and Flower (1981; Flower & Hayes, 1981) defined two basic components of writing: 1) the social component, including the audience, the social environment, and the reading of other texts; and 2) the physical component, which is the text.

Writing skills are enhanced through the practice of writing, in addition to learning through semantic knowledge about a particular subject and experienced events. Learning may happen by practicing a skill, developing habits, sense making, classical conditioning, and perceptual representation (Maia, 2009). As various aspects of life make us remember and produce new knowledge, the recognition of various aspects of this creative process would help authors and others be open to learn not only through reading and writing, but also through the co-creation of academic experiences. Kolb (1984) suggested experiential learning, described as “a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior” (p. 21), as a supplement to behavioral and cognitive learning theories. He emphasized the fundamentality of the concrete, “here-and-now” experience for the validation and testing of abstract concepts:

“immediate personal experience [is] a focal point for learning giving life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly
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