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How is technology influencing the development of the hospitality industry in the current experiential tourism economy?

Case study about "Famliday"

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Abstract

New trends are shaping the current tourism industry. Tourists are increasingly looking for memorable experiences and are highly relying on the internet to book their holidays. Hospitality companies are consequently trying to adapt to the new needs and behaviours of the society and are unavoidably becoming dependent on technology. Not every business has the necessary knowledge to efficiently perform online and this led to the consecration of booking applications as well as the inauguration of many digital startups, including Famliday. Famliday is the subject of this case study and it is an under-development booking application willing to fill a gap in the market. Its goal is to centre its business on family-friendly holidays and provide parents and children with an interactive, easily-accessible booking platform thanks to which they can select a list of certified high-quality facilities. Its ambitious offer triggered by the founders' innovative managerial strategies has been noticed and approved by entrepreneurs who have either invested in the project or expressed the willingness to become clients. To meet the objective of this research, find the impact of technology and eventually assess the potential of Famliday, the researcher adopted a qualitative narrative inquiry and relied on multiple methods. Notably, 12 semi-structured interviews were paired with literature content and webinars' speeches. Famliday, the subject of this case study, appears to be able to grant social and economic benefits to users, affiliate companies and host communities thanks to its fully technological and interactive business. Findings identify a link between the current experience economy, sustainability and digital innovation. Data are indicative of new possible tourism trends and shed light on the key role of digitalization in allowing disruptive development of companies, enhancing the quality of tourism offers and granting socio-economic benefits. Recommendations for further studies have been appositively provided to counter the limitations present in this manuscript and grant a better understanding on what awaits the tourism industry.

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1. Introduction

Digital innovation has shaped the way individuals perceive, conceive and buy products and services (Xiang, 2018). Digitalization has been able to influence all the sectors of the market, including tourism (Hadjielias et al., 2021 ; Kumar & Shekhar, 2020 ; Filipiak, 2020) and internet is increasing the ease to research and directly book the preferred accommodations and travel means (Wise & Heidari, 2019): 148.3 million travel bookings are completed online every year (Condor Ferries, 2019), of which 75% to 80% are made directly by the tourists who will subsequently consume the stay (WPTravelBooking, 2020). The steep growth in the use of internet bookings has led to the proliferation of third-parties' platforms for the vacation rental management (Bertasini, 2020). Such platforms are either consolidated brands like Booking, Expedia and TripAdvisor (Prieto, 2021) or emerging firms like Famliday, also called startups as they are businesses in the first stages of operations that develop a product or service for which founders believe there is demand (Grant, 2021).

Visitors are not only changing methods with which they select and choose their journeys, but are also reconsidering their behaviour and holiday preferences. Tourists have become travel seekers willing to enrich their daily lives by experiencing new things and undertaking activities that deliver self-improvement, enjoyment and revitalisation (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019).

Companies need to adapt and engage with them in order to understand and satisfy their needs to finally boost brand performance (Harrigan et al., 2017). For this reason, exploiting the internet is playing a pivotal role in achieving business goals (Nylén & Holmström, 2015) and has the ability to "change, threaten, replace or complement existing rules of the game within organizations and fields" (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 52).

1.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse how digital innovation can be crucial to develop and promote authentic tailored experiences and enhance sustainability across the accommodation sector. To achieve this aim, the thesis will focus on a case study of an under-development digital booking application called Famliday. Famliday is a Spanish company based in Valencia and Madrid and willing to open a new innovative business. In detail, Famliday wishes to conquer the niche segment of family holidays by developing specific qualitative and tailored offers and by creating strong ties with small and medium-sized hospitality companies. Interviews with data analysts, entrepreneurs and professors, the use of academic literature as well as the extrapolation of content

taught on webinars will make it possible to reveal the synergy between technology and socio-economic sustainability in the current experience economy.

1.2 Research question

The question which addresses the need to accomplish the objectives of the study is the following:

- How is technology influencing the development of the hospitality industry in the current experiential tourism economy? - Case study about Famliday

2 Literature review:

The world is constantly evolving and tourism is not kept aside: The sector has been growing at phenomenal rates (Riasi & Pourmiri, 2016) and in 2018 the hospitality and travel industry counted for 10.4% of global GDP and more than 319 million jobs (Barkas et al., 2020). Statistics show the trend kept rising up until 2020, when respectively 76 and 79 countries relied on travel and tourism for more than 10 percent of their GDP and employment (World Bank, 2020). The increasing relevance of this industry is also represented by World Tourism Day, a 24-hour annual event centred on tourism where politicians, academics and entrepreneurs shed light on strategies and opportunities for hospitality and travel development (UNWTO, 2021). The topics of 2021 were mainly forward-looking and oriented towards digitalization, inclusiveness and sustainability (UNWTO, 2021). The literature review will analyse tourism by keeping an eye on the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The aim is to position this thesis inquiry through the themes of digitalization, sustainability and methods to adapt to customers' needs. Literature draws from multiple fields of tourism research across social science and business economics.

2.1 From Service economy to experience economy

In the past two decades, the economic offerings of businesses worldwide have become more intentionally experiential, a fundamental shift in the very fabric of the global economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2014). This shift is due to the fact that the growing commoditisation of services offered has gradually transformed competition and led companies to create and promote memorable experiences over focusing on the mere quantity of services delivered (Chang et al., 2010). The outcome is that experiences have supplanted services as the predominant economic offering in terms of US GDP, employment and actual value (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

Experiences are defined as commercial offerings that engage customers in memorable ways (Pine & Gilmore, 2014) and differ from goods and services because experiences are a mental

phenomenon which does not necessarily concern physical or material needs - that goods provide - or solving material or intellectual problems - such as services do (Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013). An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. In this context goods are tangible, services are intangible and experiences memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). It is no surprise that customer experience is seen as a key factor to maintain competitive advantage (Bascur et al., 2018) and as an indicator of success in building relationship marketing (Zaid & Patwayati, 2021). During a webinar organized by Amadeus and the Tramperry (2021), James Wallman, owner of a leading experience economy firm called WxO, describes services as “Time well saved” and relates experiences with “Time well spent”. These definitions highlight a clear qualitative boundary between services and experiences.

The preference of consuming experiences more than things is, according to Pine & Gilmore (1998), due to the fact that experiences make people feel more connected and create a sense of belonging. Experiential offerings are as real as goods and services (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and, in an economic perspective, companies who are able to deliver memorable customer experiences consistently create superior value (Voss, 2004). Voss (2004) also underlines the difficulty to reach customer satisfaction and profitability as customers have become more and more sophisticated. As a matter of fact, experience-hungry tourists are described as “travel seekers” who wish to participate in stays that can “offer new skill acquisition, have a sense of purpose and are associated with aspirational value” (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019, p. 117). New island studies strengthen the validity of the previous statement and reveal that there has been a shift of preferences towards rural tourism, remoteness, contact with nature and authenticity (Agius et al., 2021 ; Bertolucci et al., 2021).

To further divide experiences from services, Loureiro (2014) conveys that experience is something more specific than the delivery of a service; “it is about creating a memorable and unique event where the buyer is the guest and the seller is the provider” (p. 1). Further literature suggests that the customer is not only a buyer, but rather the ‘audience’, who is served by ‘actors’ – staff members, managers – in a specific ‘setting’. Customers will eventually be able to review their experience in terms of ‘performance’ at the end of the consumption of the offer (Ali et al., 2016). The choice of the term audience to define customers is not without merit since, without an audience, an event cannot be successful. In other words, Ali et al., (2016) suggest that customers are the core of the industry because, without people who buy and consume tourism offers, the industry would go bankrupt. Ali et al., (2015) add that customers are increasingly creative and

actively construct their own experiences through personalized interaction, thus actively contributing to the creation of the experience offered by the company.

In short, under the experience economy, tourists have been vested with a protagonist role (Ali et al., 2016). Increased interaction among companies and customers is leading customers to become co-creators and buyers of tourism offers at the same time (Louriero, 2014 ; Ali et al., 2015). Satisfying them becomes, however, trickier as their demands are becoming more and more complex and pretentious (Voss, 2004).

2.2 Experience economy and digitalization:

Chang et al., (2010) say that the competitive position of a firm depends to a large extent on its ability to generate impressive experiences through innovative delivery channels. Theron Skees, an experience designer cited in a webinar hosted by Amadeus and The Tramperry (2021) conveys that technology and most of all social media can help enhance physical experiences. Bertasini (2020) tells us technological development is growing due to the new needs and habits of final consumers and the desire and necessity of enterprises to gain competitive advantages or maintain their positions against competitors. The following data clearly show that internet has drastically altered tourism bookings and consumption of offers: 70% of travellers navigate on their smartphone for their holidays and 148.3 million travel bookings are completed online every year (Condor Ferries, 2019).

Digitalization is increasing the ease to research and directly book the preferred accommodations and travel means (Wise & Heidari, 2019). With e-retailing, consumers have access to buy retail products quickly and easily via the internet (Zaid & Patwayati, 2021) and the direct effect is a higher use of internet year over year, where “startups find their fecund land” (Bertasini, 2020, p.1 ; Girardi et al., 2019). World Bank’s (2020) analysis on rebuilding tourism competitiveness shows that bookings across the tourism sector are now driven by booking sites, with Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) leading the market. TripAdvisor alone is responsible for \$546 billion or 10.3% of the global tourism expenditure (Prieto, 2021). Nevertheless, Google data reveal that travel related searches including ‘tonight’ and ‘today’ have grown by more than 519% in the past five years (Condor Ferries, 2019). WPTTravelBooking (2020), which merges fresh academic material, graphs and tables coming from multiple sources shows that more and more customers are choosing to book their travel online on a mobile phone or travel app. Notably, the study reveals 57% of all hotel bookings are now made on internet and a mesmerizing 90% of travellers expect a personalized online experience when they book their journey. In an economic perspective, consumers are described as travel seekers (Yeoman

& McMahon-Beattie, 2019) and technology has enabled them to personally select destinations and commodities. As a matter of fact, WPTripBooking (2020) highlights that direct online booking has represented between 75% and 80% of all travel bookings worldwide along 2017 and 2018. Only a minor percentage prefers to rely on indirect bookings and is consisting of travellers turning to agencies and affiliates.

Data highlight that there is an undisputable internet reliance of customers in the current experience economy (Zaid & Patwayati, 2021; World Bank, 2020). The direct booking of commodities from the same individuals who will in turn consume the offer (WPTripBooking, 2020; Wise & Heidari, 2019) gives digitalization a fundamental role in today's tourism offer consumption and startups are beneficiaries of this change (Bertasini, 2020).

2.3 Experience economy and sustainability:

"Sustainability as a policy concept has its origin in the Brundtland Report of 1987" (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010, p. 3436). The word has become a dominant paradigm in tourism development and in worldwide literature (Johnston et al., 2007), indeed it has been estimated that there are in excess of 5000 published works on sustainable tourism (Ruhanen et al., 2015). The meaning of sustainability has, like tourism, evolved and currently encompasses three main dimensions: social, economic and environmental (Khan et al., 2021 ; Hysa et al., 2020 ; Munasinghe, 2010). To better understand the significance of the concept, Munasinghe (2010) specifically explains the three dimensions under a 'Sustainable Development Triangle': The economic sustainability component characterises a destination from the perspective of possible growth, current efficiency and general stability meanwhile social sustainability discusses the attitudes of government, social/local empowerment, their inclusion and shared values; finally environmental sustainability focuses on biodiversity, natural resources, and pollution (Munasinghe, 2010). The three domains have become so central in literature that the recent publication of Morrison & Maxim (2021) about systematic approaches to urban tourism has exploited them under the name of 'triple bottom line'.

Many academics referring to sustainability draw upon the definition of sustainable development provided in the Brundtland Report, '*Our Common Future*' which states that sustainability is: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 40). This definition is described to be "enormously appealing because it holds the possibility of reconciling people's needs with bio-

physical environmental management goals through economic development” (Vallance et al., 2011, p. 343) thus merging social, environmental and economic dimensions into one phrase.

Organizations such as The World Wildlife Fund, UN Environment Programme, and the Nature Conservancy have so far set strategies, policies as well as programs that steer ahead of the agenda of sustainable tourism (Conserve Energy Future, 2021). This surge of sustainable consciousness and the desire for experiences has not only influenced political actors but also customers’ final decisions and attitudes: 70% of tourists declares they would be more likely to book accommodations knowing these were eco-friendly, whether they were looking for a sustainable stay or not (WPTravelbooking, 2020)

The researcher of this dissertation has so far investigated in literature centred on how tourism companies can cope with the more sophisticated customers’ preferences (Voss, 2004), exploit innovative delivery channels (Chang et al., 2010) and, as James Wallman says, design experiences that “stand out” (Amadeus and The Tramperry, 2021). Is there a way to study and understand tourists’ needs? The following section tries to find a valid answer and gives more insights about the role of technology in the current experiential tourism industry.

2.4 Experience economy, Customer Journey Map and Corporate sustainability:

Exploiting the internet has the power to “change, threaten, replace or complement existing rules of the game within organizations and fields” (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 52) and is becoming increasingly important in achieving business goals (Nylén & Holmström, 2015). Consumers interacting and making actions in the internet are now said to transform the visitor experience, from knowledge production to knowledge exchange (Wise & Heidari, 2019) and, in tourism, companies who engage with customers have been found to boost loyalty, trust and brand evaluation (Harrigan et al., 2017).

In detail, knowledge arises when consumers spontaneously make an indefinite amount of events through which they directly or indirectly interact with a service organization (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Such interactions happen physically and, now more than ever, virtually (Opresnik, 2021). Search Engine Optimization (SEO) channels such as Google (Condor Ferries, 2019) together with private e-commerce websites (Mangiaracina et al., 2009) have become inevitable interactions between users and firms (Zaid & Patwayati, 2021). The conglomerate of virtual or physical step-by-step actions individuals make is named ‘Customer Journey Map’ (hereafter: CJM) and can be tracked (Rojas et al., 2021; Rosenbaum et al., 2017 ; Moon et al., 2016 ; Mangiaracina et al., 2009 ; Bascur et al., 2018 ; Lin et al., 2020). CJM can be summarized as a purchasing process that starts from the

moment the user looks for his stay and ends after the consumption of the products, services or experiences selected (Rojas et al., 2021 ; Bascur et al., 2018). During the journey, many aspects such as attitudes and feelings of visitors are catalogued and taken into account (Moon et al., 2016 ; Lin et al., 2020). CJM is defined as a customer-oriented strategic tool useful to analyse and understand an experience from the user point of view and capable of disclosing issues and hurdles as well as opportunities for improvement and innovation (Mangiaracina et al., 2009). Moon et al. (2016) explain that CJM helps codify current trends and design a new customer experience to establish development priorities. Rosenbaum et al. (2017) outline that CJM favours companies understand customer phases, also called touch points, in a clearer way. The latter authors ascertain that the goal of these strategies is to deepen the interaction phases between service providers and customers. Understanding every touch point means learning how to attract and involve users every time they get in contact with the firm online or offline (Opresnik, 2021), hence CJM can play a key strategic role in trying to persuade and accommodate tourists' needs and wants and enhance the customer experience.

'Mews' has recently written that "Now that the digital has become such a key part of our lives, it's important that modern-day hoteliers redefine the hotel experience, shaping a customer journey that integrates digital technologies as much as possible to facilitate a streamlined 2.0 hotel stay" (Lacalle, 2021), however many small and medium corporations do not dispose of the sufficient knowledge to keep track of the rapid technological changes that influence the industry (Hadjielias et al., 2021 ; Chudnovskiy et al., 2021).

Knoepfel (2001) focuses on corporate sustainability and he also stresses the need to be innovative for companies' managerial success and sustenance. According to him, investors want to look for above-average growth on which they can rely on and sustainable companies prove to deliver more predictable results. Innovation implies investing in product and service modernisation and leads to a more efficient, effective and economic use of financial, natural and social resources over the long-term (Knoepfel, 2001). Here the author links corporate management with the three sustainability pillars mentioned in Munasinghe (2010) and Morrison & Maxim's (2021) studies. In digital companies, innovation implies gathering intelligence on digital devices in order to identify and exploit opportunities for innovation across emerging use contexts and new user behaviors (Nylen & Holmström, 2015). Chudnovskiy et al.'s (2021) study reveal how small companies struggle to be in step with the times without a digital background and highlight the need for political help. According to Knoepfel (2001), innovation is not sufficient to be successful and must be paired with corporate

governance. Corporate governance entails setting the highest standards of quality and management responsibility, organizational capability and corporate culture. Since shareholders are investors (Fox & Lorsch, 2012), accommodating their requirements increases the appeal of the brand and generates strategic partnerships which add value and power to the company (Gomes-Casseres, 2019) and increases intellectual capital (Knoepfel, 2001). For the same author, successful governance and innovation imply a competitive advantage of the company, that eventually achieves a leading position with superior performance (Knoepfel, 2001). Knoepfel (2001) concludes his reasoning by adding that a firm can secure a long term “license to operate” only by paying attention to the society, thus by encouraging long lasting social wellbeing in local and global communities, interacting with different stakeholders and responding to their specific and evolving needs.

Despite Knoepfel’s (2001) work was published at the beginning of this century and, therefore, at the earliest stage of the experience economy trend, his publication is still a state-of-the-art and becomes a perfect trait d’ union of the topics covered along this literature review.

2.5 Literature review summary

Knoepfel (2001) underlines companies investing in innovation show the willingness to efficiently manage the use of their economic, social and natural resources, which are also the three key pillars in Munasinghe’s (2010) research on sustainability. Under the current economy, people are eager to consume experiences rather than products and services (Pine & Gilmore, 2014 ; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013). Their need of undertaking activities that deliver self-improvement, enjoyment and revitalisation (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019) shows how customers are becoming more pretentious (Voss, 2004) and changing their holiday preferences (Agius et al., 2021 ; Bertolucci et al., 2021). The experience economy goes on a par with the increasing digitalization of customers (Zaid & Patwayati, 2021) but not every company is able to follow the pace of the evolution (Hadjielias et al., 2021 ; Chudnovskiy et al., 2021). As a consequence, startups found “their fecund land as ideas incubators for bigger and important companies or future new ones” (Bertasini, 2020, p.1). Successfully exploiting the internet has the power to “change, threaten, replace or complement existing rules of the game within organizations and fields” (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 52) and allows companies to be modern, in step with the times (Knoepfel, 2001).

For a sustainable development of a corporation, Knoepfel (2001) also mentions that companies need to understand the society and interact with stakeholders in order to grant a long-lasting brand lifecycle. Chang et al., (2010) highlight the importance of exploiting new delivery channels to match

customers' interests and Nylen & Holmström, (2015) suggest firms to exploit digital devices in order to identify emerging use contexts and study buyer behaviours. Statistics show that direct online bookings are on the rise (WPTravelBooking, 2020) and, when customers search for their favourite holiday, they directly or indirectly interact with a service organization (Rosenbaum et al., 2017), which can in turn extrapolate data and gather them to understand individuals' preferences (Mangiaracina et al, 2009 ; Moon et al, 2016 ; Bascur et al., 2018). Hence, digitalization becomes not only beneficial for innovation, but also necessary to interact with "different stakeholders" and cope with the society's "specific and evolving needs" (Knoepfel, 2001, p. 9). The outcome of positive digital interactions with stakeholders is shown in Zaid & Patwayati's (2021) research, which reveals e-retailing companies who deliver efficient "customer experience and customer engagement have a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty" (Zaid & Patwayati, 2021, p.990).

For what concerns 'Governance' and 'Leadership', Knoepfel (2001) stresses that a sustainable company will be profitable if it can provide long-term-high-quality management. Munasinghe (2010) highlights the importance of leading actors in order to achieve social sustainability and according to Rosenbaum et al., (2017) and Moon et al., (2016), relevant management skills are required in order to enhance the interaction with customers once these enter in contact with the service provider. Strategies like CJM track attitudes and feelings of visitors (Lin et al., 2020) and can help firms understand the society, augment the quality of interaction with stakeholders and grant disruptive opportunities for improvement and innovation (Opelnik, 2021 ; Rojas et al., 2021 ; Mangiaracina et al., 2009). Sustainable corporate efficiency and positive performance are said to, in turn, attract investors' attention (Knoepfel, 2001) and add value and power to the company (Gomes-Casseres, 2019).

2.6 Conclusion

The reviewed literature has identified a growing relevance of technological innovation and internet use in the hospitality industry. Ties between sustainability and digitalization under the experience economy have been shown and range from the focus on the society to corporate governance.

However, specific literature about digital tourism companies enhancing the sustainability of the industry has not been found yet. In order to address this gap and better identify the connection between technological development and sustainability in the current tourism industry, this dissertation will analyse Famliday, a new tourism startup willing to disruptively enter the market.

3. Methodology

The methodology section must be perceived as a temporal and empirical analysis of the publication where primary and secondary data will be explained together with the related tools that led to the completion of the work. Among all, strategies, writing techniques and data collection procedures will be carefully described.

3.1 Adaptation strategy

In the context of Master programs, Mehar Singh (2017) underlines there is a wide consensus among academics, scholars and researchers that writing is an essential component for many coursework assessments and it is critical that graduate students continuously develop their academic writing skills. Casanave (2002) states that the Master's degree is where "the transition from novice to expert begins to take place" (p. 84). The researcher comes from an economic background and was not familiar with the writing styles and guidelines enforced during the exams. According to Mehar Singh's (2017) work, the researcher adopted a "Committed adaptation" throughout his study program, which is the individual's ability to construct "knowledge by struggling to shift from a former habit of writing to the new ways expected in his discipline" (p. 636). In other words, the researcher challenged himself and, by taking into consideration supervisors and professors' suggestions (Braine, 2002), developed the writing skills necessary to complete his master degree. Such qualities were developed so much that he became an academic author. His publication entitled "Sustainable Tourism Challenges arising from Stakeholders' participation: research project in the Faroe Islands" (Bertolucci et al., 2021) can now be read in the July issue of an international journal named Journal of Responsible Tourism Management – JRTM. Even though "theses and dissertations differ from published research articles in terms of purpose, audience, scope, and evaluation" (Lee & Casal, 2014, p.39), the publishing process allowed him to acquire key writing skills that will play a pivotal role for the completion of this manuscript.

3.2 Case study

The dissertation has been conceived from the early phases of content creation as a case study. The term case study identifies "a particular design of research, where the focus is on an in-depth study on one or a limited amount of cases... however its use is rather messier or more complex" (Tight, 2017, p. 5). For what concerns complexity, Gerring (2017) explains that case studies can, in fact, be created with the use of a wide range of approaches and Gillham (2000) underlines a case can be an individual as well as a group, a community or, like in this dissertation, an institution. The disparate

range of alternatives present in the creation of a case study could, then, alter the validity or reliability of a case study, which “is a key issue for both marketing research practitioners and academics” (Riege, 2003, p. 84). By exploiting Gerring’s (2017) list of approaches present in his book “Understanding Case Study Research: Small-scale Research with Meaning”, this dissertation makes use of:

- i. A holistic approach, defined by Gerring (2017) as “a more or less comprehensive examination of a phenomenon” (p. 17). To be more specific, this publication will examine the phenomenon of increased digital use for tourism purposes and will focus on a company called Famliday to understand how digital innovation can influence the development in the hospitality industry.
- ii. A quite small list of selected interviewees. In Gerring’s (2017) words a “qualitative research” is with “small-N” (p. 17), with N that represents the number of interviewees.
- iii. “Participant-observation” (Gerring, 2017, p. 17). This work exploits the points of view of selected interviewees – participants – who are mentioned along the text with their corresponding thoughts – observations.
- iv. “Triangulation” (Gerring, 2017, p. 17). In this case study, triangulation refers to the process of data gathering of multiple sources of evidence like observations and participant comments coming from different stakeholders (Barnum, 2011)

Case studies are said to help identify communication patterns that unite participants or beliefs on which they agree or disagree (Hutt et al., 2000). In this dissertation, triangulation will allow a careful analysis of every stakeholder interviewed and will shed light on many convergence points across different topics.

Despite case studies are complex and time consuming (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), an efficient use of it is told to have a huge validity and reliability potential and this can in turn lead to “not only confidence in the data collected but, most significantly, trust in the successful application and use of the results to managerial decision-making” (Riege, 2003, p. 84), thus influencing Famliday’s future corporate managerial decision.

3.3 Decision of the topic

The choice of the case study lies in the future Internship that the researcher will make for Famliday during 2022. A contract has been signed by both parties and by a member of Aalborg University for a job placement in management, marketing and administration. The willingness to preemptively work on the company shows the aim of the researcher to acquire knowledge in the field before entering the workforce. This dissertation has the role of helping Famliday gain insights and personal opinions from specialists, shareholders and stakeholders in order to understand its potential and, if any, its issues. Nevertheless, the work is also expected to be a solid academic contribution, giving open access to crucial knowledge about technology, digital tourism applications and their impact on the tourism industry.

The researcher, MA student of 'Sustainable Tourism Development' at Aalborg Universitet, met Javier Salvador Marín, Co-founder of the startup Famliday, during a seminar organized by the university for the members of the course 'Innovation of Tourism'. The researcher noticed the potential of the company, was intrigued by the vision and ideas of the announcer and got in touch with him by mail and through the social media LinkedIn, showing the willingness to be employed. A second chat with the employer during the early days of July granted the researcher a contract for an Internship from February to June 2022. The success in getting a job at the Spanish company led to the thought of merging the final thesis with the future work placement. Carlos Pastor Chan Santana, professor of Innovation in tourism and supervisor at Aalborg Universitet, Copenhagen campus, suggested his former student now author of this dissertation to make a thesis that suited his aspiring future career. The suggestion was highly welcomed.

The final choice with regards to the topics of the manuscript has been made during a meeting between the researcher and Javier Salvador Marín. Famlidays' founder was intrigued by the idea to contribute to the creation of a thesis made by a future Intern and related to his future job. The main themes to focus on were agreed between the two parties and the following research question was eventually created by the researcher:

- How is technology influencing the development of the hospitality industry in the current experiential tourism economy? - Case study about Famliday

3.4 Primary and Secondary data

The dissertation is modelled under an Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion (IMRD) structure (Samraj, 2008) and includes both secondary and primary data. "Secondary data analysis is analysis

of data that was collected by someone else for another primary purpose” (Johnston, 2017, p. 619) meanwhile “Primary data is facts and information collected specifically for the purpose of the investigation at hand” (Rabianski, 2003, p. 43). Ali et al., (2011) underlines that multiple methods like “literature analysis and participants’ observations” (p. 37) can augment the validity of the qualitative studies and reduce bias risks. In the case of this dissertation, virtual interviews and webinars represent the details directly obtained by the researcher for the purposes of this research. The remaining material gathered come from websites and academic publications and are classified amongst the secondary data.

3.4.1 Interviews

In order to obtain all the details necessary for the proper completion of this manuscript, the researcher organized 11 interviews with 12 participants, one of which became an open-answer questionnaire. The researcher relied on Famliday’s stakeholders, professors, managers and entrepreneurs in the fields of management and tourism to validate literature material and enrich the content. Famliday’s stakeholders were directly selected by Javier, founder of Famliday, meanwhile professors, entrepreneurs and specialists have been carefully chosen by the researcher. The selection criteria were based on the individuals’ relevance with the topics of the dissertation and, most of all, their availability. Javier’s contacts who agreed in being interviewed were forwarded to the researcher with prior details about their job and knowledge in the field. Other data included phone number of the interlocutors and the link to access the website of their company. It is important to remark that not every interviewee had a working or friendly tie with Famliday’s cofounder or with the researcher and author of this work. Some interviewees were found by the researcher thanks to the social media LinkedIn, a social media where students, professors, researchers and entrepreneurs present all their background. Once these interlocutors were selected, the researcher promptly sent them a direct message with a brief presentation of the case study and a private invitation to become an active part of it. Most of the invitations were not considered and some professors declared themselves unavailable, but the individuals who showed interest in being interviewed are now present in this publication and were able to strongly contribute to the completion of the thesis. Interviews were performed in Italian, Spanish and English on the platform Zoom and lasted between 12 and 35 minutes. All the interviews were anticipated by a request to register and save the audios for the purposes of this research. Every respondent agreed to this proposal and showed commitment to answer every question the interviewer wanted to pose.

It has been agreed in qualitative studies that rigorous data collection procedures are the main factors that influence quality and trustworthiness of a publication and critically influence results (Kallio et al., 2016). The same authors also ascertain that in qualitative studies interviews are the most common method to obtain reliable data. As a matter of fact, this dissertation highly relies on interviews. Every conversation was conducted following University of Harvard guidelines for qualitative interviews: discussions were informal and interviewees were free to tell their own story on their own terms (Harvard, n.d.). However, the researcher created a specific interview guide structure based on the respondent's job and the knowledge or passion about a topic in which he or she felt more comfortable. In other words, the verbal interchange between interviewer and interviewee was influenced by a list of predetermined questions which then "unfolded in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important" (Clifford et al., 2016, p. 143). This method is defined semi-structured interview.

The structured interview guide consisted in a sequential set of questions which were selected and, in turn, exploited once the respondent was satisfied with his argument and demonstrated to have ended his or her answer. The researcher relied on the fact that semi-structured interviews granted versatility and flexibility (Kallio et al., 2016). As a matter of fact, the guide was not privileged over the natural flow of the conversations. It is important to note that the researcher had already made semi-structured interviews during his research on sustainable tourism development in the Faroe Islands (Bertolucci et al., 2021) and decided to rely on a method which he considers familiar.

Conversations were developed as if it was an "Interpersonal Encounter" (Harvard, n.d.) with few moments of silence. The researcher used active listening techniques – i.e. "Yes!", "Okay!" or "tell me more about that" – to facilitate knowledge exchange, establish rapport (Doyle, 2020) and motivate the interlocutor (Schilling, 2012). Respondents resulted to feel relaxed before, during and after the encounter. Some interviewees thanked the researcher even after conversations took place and friendly ties were made. Straight after conversations ended, 'Manual keyword extraction' was used by the author to carefully remember the main topics and compare the contents of the interviews. Manual keyword extraction is defined as extremely difficult and time consuming (Lee & Kim, 2008 ; Sun et al., 2017). In this case, the author of the manuscript was also the interviewer and he did not have to manually extract data from books, magazines or articles as the authors cited above. The process eventually allowed the final data gathering and keywords extraction. Thematic coding was made during a complete second audio listening of the conversations with the

respondents. Keywords were eventually selected and written. By doing so, interviews were better matched between each other and this helped draft the final main topics of the analysis.

3.4.2 Interviewees

The following table was appositively created to concisely present the individuals who accepted to be part of this research and actively contributed to the creation of the publication. Thematic coding can be seen in the right-end column named “Topics of discussion”.

Table 1: List of interviewees

Interviewee	Job	Topics of discussion
Julián Cabrera (ES)	President of Asociación de Operadores de Turismo Industrial (AOTI) CEO of Inturmancha Rural Tourism Specialist	Industrial tourism Sustainability Collaboration Digitalization
Michele Sambaldi (IT)	Managing Director and Member of the Executive Board of Pellicano Hotels (Leading Hotels of the World) President of ‘Ischia is More’	Digital innovation Brand management Customer care Destination management
Carlos Pastor Chan Santana (MX)	Professor of ‘Innovation in Tourism’ & ‘Destination Analysis’ and Research	Digital innovation Digital sustainability

	Assistant at Aalborg University-Copenhagen	New tourism trends
Ali Akaak (OM)	<p>Collaborator for the Ministry of Tourism, Oman</p> <p>Lecturer of 'Business and Tourism' at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Salalah</p>	<p>Digital innovation</p> <p>Destination management</p> <p>Sustainability</p> <p>Preservation</p>
Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta (LT)	<p>Lecturer in 'Tourism and Hospitality Management' at Edith Cowan University, Australia</p> <p>Board Member of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Leisure Studies (ANZALS). He is also a member of the Council for Australasian Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE)</p> <p>Author in top-ranked international journals</p>	<p>Digital innovation</p> <p>Sustainable development</p> <p>Destination management</p> <p>New tourism trends</p> <p>Booking sites</p>

Jordi Otegui and Monica Otegui (ES)	CEOs and founders of CLUB KIDS Partners and collaborators of Famliday	“Quality over quantity” Digital innovation Sustainability Customer care
Kristian Haaber (DK)	Brand Manager at Core Hospitality Controls operations of Moxy and Best Western Plus hotels in Denmark and Norway	Innovation Digital innovation Sustainable certificates
Richard S. Aquino (NZ)	‘Tourism and Marketing’ lecturer at the University of Canterbury Author in international journals in the areas of social entrepreneurship, community development, and tourism	Digital innovation Social sustainability Destination development Platforms dependence Sustainability

Lorenzo Bortoletto (IT)	Senior Data Analyst at THRENDIS	Digital innovation Luxury companies and booking sites
Javier Salvador Marin (ES)	Founder of the startup Famliday Director and member of TheFunLab	Brand management Sustainability Digital innovation Customer care Product quality
Francesco Cortese (IT)	Director of the startup WineAround	Digital innovation Customer care Product before sale Brand management

3.4.3 Merging academia and industry

Knowledge flows between universities and firms are said to yield “both innovative and productive benefits for the firms and intellectual and economic benefits for the universities” (Fernandes et al., 2010, p. 485). The case study gives validity to the previous statement as the researcher will add

knowledge about the business of Famliday – the firm – which, thanks to an academic university work, is able to gain strategic insights about its own business. Nonetheless, the presence of the manuscript on the university's portal will allow Aalborg University gain intellectual knowledge that students, current and future professors as well as third parties will be able to read and share.

Since the industry is oriented towards something functional while academia is centred in adding fundamental knowledge (Ras & Jakobsen, 2021), the researcher decided to merge the know-how of admired academics with the more practical and managerial ideas of esteemed entrepreneurs. In detail, precious opinions from university professors, data analyst specialists, corporate hospitality managers, startup directors and Famliday's stakeholders were gathered and analysed to find convergence points. Professors were necessary to find out precise and detailed knowledge about the importance of digital innovation, its impact in tourism and its potential for the wellbeing of the industry. These participants have relevant understanding of the topics of interest of this dissertation and showed commitment and willingness to share every insight they could. Their know-how ranges from hospitality marketing and management to tourism subjects more related to sustainability and innovation in tourism. Their inputs have been highly welcomed and used along the text since they mostly give validity to other interlocutors' statements, show that exploiting the internet can be a resource for tourism with a potential to enhance sustainability. On the other hand, established managers like Michele Sambaldi cover another important role as they create a boundary between luxury and small/mid-scale facilities and give clear insights about brand management. Managers are also the ones that in some ways challenge the use of booking sites and digital startups, raising awareness about overdependence issues that need to be mentioned and understood. The startup world will be represented by Francesco Cortese, Lorenzo Bortoletto and Kristian Haaber, who will give direct insights from the field or explain their brands' paths towards success. Moreover, Famliday's stakeholders like Julián Cabrera and Jordi & Monica Otegui will shed light on the potential of Famliday from an external perspective. Last but not least, Famliday's founder Javier Salvador Marin will constitute the trait d'union between all the participants. Javier was the last interviewee. This decision was made by the researcher in order to ask Famliday questions related to all the main themes found along the text. Since the dissertation is modelled under an IMRD structure (Samraj, 2008) the most compelling and useful thoughts were extrapolated from the recorded conversations, merged with literature and transcribed in the 'Findings' section to be subsequently discussed in the 'Analysis' chapter. Interviews will play the most relevant role for the completion of the text and for eventually finding an answer to the research question.

3.4.4 Webinars

During the early stages of drafting, the researcher was part of the audience in the webinar held by United Nations World Tourism Organization – UNWTO – together with Journal of Responsible Tourism Management – hereafter JRTM. He also actively participated in a webinar sponsored by Amadeus & The Tramperry.

In detail, UNWTO and JRTM were partners in a webinar about sustainable development and inclusiveness during World Tourism Day. Important worldwide lecturers and editors were part of the discussions and the researcher gained crucial overviews of the tourism economy. Similarly, Amadeus & The Tramperry organized a convention online about redefining tourism. This time the meeting was private, with a selection of companies which included Famliday and other emerging startups. The more intimate space and the lower amount of attending audience granted the researcher the chance to ask questions and get answers straightaway from the honourable guests of the event. Notably, a specific question was directly asked to the experience economy specialist and author James Wallman. The question covered the topics of sustainability in the current digital world and the development of the experience economy. Mr. Wallman gave a concise and relevant answer which has turned out to be useful for the purposes of this work. Webinars have, therefore, become a primary data asset for this publication.

3.4.5 Secondary data research

Academic papers and articles on websites were all found by using specific phrases or by exploiting cryptography. Notably, specific cryptography courses followed by the researcher during his Baccalaureate degree helped him find literature material useful for the purposes of this publication in an effective and efficient way. The cryptography technique consisted in writing keywords followed by “AND” or “OR” and by putting some of these words in brackets. This method was applied on the search engines Google Scholar and Proquest Central, both well-known by academics for the disposal of thousands of books, articles, dissertations and newspapers. The vast majority of the bibliography present on this dissertation was found thanks to the two search engines mentioned above.

4. Findings

This section is the trait d’union between the material collected from primary and secondary data and the case study analysis. Data have been hereby used to tease out specific themes and issues that the literature has identified. 10 interviews and 1 interview questionnaire made with 12

participants have been found to either validate what literature says or even add further knowledge to the field. As a matter of fact, the researcher states that participants will add prestige and, most of all, know-how to the dissertation.

Interlocutors are members of the academia and the industry. Interviewees pertaining to the hospitality sector either cover an important role in big corporations or own small and medium companies. Michele Sambaldi, the managing director of the five-star hotel chain Pellicano Hotels, and Kristian Haaber, manager at the white label Core Hospitality, were useful to understand the impact of technology in established hospitality brands. Francesco Cortese, director of a small startup called WineAround, and Lorenzo Bortoletto, Senior Data Analyst at THRENDS, shed light on how companies can take advantage of technological tools to satisfy customers and differentiate their offer. Finally, Julián Cabrera, CEO of a rural tourism company named Inturmancha and Monica & Jordi Otegui, owners of Club Kids, represent two small companies that are respectively clients and partners of Famliday. Their third party perspective of Famliday will grant insights about how small hospitality businesses could benefit from the new booking platform. Broadly speaking, interlocutors will expose the benefits of technology, but will also reveal overdependence and mismanagement issues caused by digital innovation. Since the master's thesis symbolizes the transition between novice and expert (Casanave, 2002), the author decided to diversify its portfolio of interviewees and contact academic professors and authors specialised in innovation (Carlos Pastor Chan Santana), marketing and entrepreneurship (Richard Aquino) and tourism management (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta ; Ali Akaak). Professors and authors represent the academic world and have been chosen because they made research highly inherent to the topics covered along this dissertation. They will give validity to literature contents as well as to quotes arising from the other interviewees.

Last but not least, Javier Salvador Marin, cofounder of Famliday, will describe the company from its own perspective. It is important to note that Javier was chosen to be the last participant. The strategy of the researcher was to collect data and find the most important topics related to Famliday before asking any question to Javier. The adopted technique made it possible to find how Famliday is willing to operate. The chapter, which covers the area of study of the case, will give the reader precise background knowledge on the themes covered along the literature review.

4.1 Digital innovation a lifeblood for tourism operations

Academic articles and interviewees agree on one topic: "Tourism and technology go hand-in-hand" (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021). Exploiting the internet is able to "change,

threaten, replace or complement existing rules of the game within organizations and fields” (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 52) and technology is becoming increasingly important in achieving business goals (Nylén & Holmström, 2015). As a matter of fact, Dr Aquino, author fond in tourism and marketing, explains that nowadays: “Technology is everything that mobilises the industry in one way or another” (Richard S. Aquino, interview, 22-11-2021).

To analyse the impact of technology in the hospitality industry, the researcher decided to rely on executive managers. Michele Sambaldi, the managing director of the Leading Hotels of the World group member Pellicano Hotels, stands out. He conveys positioning its well-known exclusive firm in the internet was a very strategic and profitable move:

“If we strictly talk about marketing, visibility, promotion and brand diffusion, technological development has an absolute importance... something you can no longer neglect... and it would be antithetical or not productive not to adhere to commercial opportunities online... the audience is too wide to lose this possibility” (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021)

Carlos Pastor Chan Santana, lecturer in ‘Innovation in tourism’ and ‘Destination analysis’, underlines the increasing use of the internet and agrees “that digitalization is relevant for the tourism industry as we are more globalized and inter-connected everyday” (Carlos Pastor Chan Santana, interview questionnaire, 15-11-2021). Professor of ‘Business and tourism’ Ali Akaak underlines how, due to the wide use of technology, digital promotion campaigns have lately been used by companies as well as destinations: “If you want to promote your country, you have to follow the latest methods... Technology has been widely used” (Ali Akaak, interview, 11-11-2021). To sum up, internet has the potential to grant companies as well as destinations increased visibility. Francesco Cortese, owner of a startup called WineAround, justifies the necessity to be digital:

“Amazon and Booking.com are now colossal companies which represent contemporaneity and everyday life, so smaller companies are finding the need to introduce themselves in the digital environment” (Francesco Cortese, interview, 17-11-2021)

In other words, since the digital world potentially allows any hospitality brand to be visible all around the world, many small and mid-scale companies are seeing the potential of being present online. Among them, *Club Kids* (Jordi and Monica Otegui) and *Inturmancha* (Julián Cabrera). Both are founders of small enterprises who respectively create events for children and promote rural tourism

experiences. Julián Cabrera conveys digitalization is a crucial way to engage with customers and get visibility (Julián Cabrera, interview, 20-10-2021) and Jordi Otegui states that “It is important to exploit it (internet) more because people are increasingly used to it (internet)... I am not fan of technology but I use it, because it’s easy” (Jordi Otegui, interview, 25-10-2021). Professor Ali Akaak stresses the ease with which users are now able to look and book online and analyses how technology is vital in the current economy:

“With the new era of technology, you can now book your flight meanwhile you have your coffee in your house... You can do everything... Technology helps a lot and saves a lot (of money and time)” (Ali Akaak, interview, 11-11-2021)

4.2 Technology a key tool for startups

Recent studies made by Wise & Heidari (2019) and Zaid & Patwayati (2021) strengthen the validity of Professor Akaak’s statement. They show how digital innovation is facilitating the research and direct booking of accommodations (Wise & Heidari, 2019) but also how quickly and effectively online transactions take place (Zaid & Patwayati, 2021). Literature also gives evidence that digital innovation is allowing the creation of firms which mainly or even solely rely on the internet (Bertasini, 2020). The researcher had the pleasure to interview managers pertaining to three different hospitality startups born within the last five years which found in the internet “their fecund land” (Bertasini, 2020, p.1). *Core Hospitality* (Kristian Haaber) is a white label which manages as franchising well-known hotel chains in Denmark and Norway. *THREND*S (Lorenzo Bortoletto) is a data analysis company which highly relies on the internet to extract information relevant to the tourism industry. Lastly, *WineAround* (Francesco Cortese) is an application which partners with wineries, allows wine brands to directly interact with customers and provides them with a data-plus platform to manage operations.

All the aforementioned companies are increasing their revenues and notoriety and found their precise position in the market helped by the web. In the name of *THREND*S, Lorenzo Bortoletto highlights the relevance of digitalization and clearly states that “Dealing with technology is our daily bread... we can provide parameters with variables if a brand (referring to every five-star Italian hotel) wants to open a new business” (Lorenzo Bortoletto, interview, 15-11-2021). Francesco Cortese highly relies on the internet too since *WineAround* is an “online application” and adds that his company has “been in the online market for three years and is doubling revenues year over year” (Francesco Cortese, interview, 17-11-2021). Lastly, Kristian Haaber underlines the rapid

development of Core Hospitality by explaining that they “were born in 2018” and “currently work with BestWesternPlus and Moxy” (Kristian Haaber, interview, 17-11-2021). Core Hospitality controls online booking systems and marketing activities of its facilities and their online and offline management seems to be paying off since they are due to be working with two other Marriott brands and a new Moxy is under construction in Tromsø (Kristian Haaber, interview, 17-11-2021).

To sum up, Interviewees demonstrate that the exploitation of the digital environment is very flexible and varies according to the operations the company is willing to undertake. For example, THRENDIS is more focused on capturing data analysis from tertiary brands and investigating in new trends by setting up statistics (Lorenzo Bortoletto, interview, 15-11-2021), meanwhile Core Hospitality exploits the internet for advertising and managing its own franchising facilities (Kristian Haaber, interview, 17-11-2021). Namely, interlocutors clarify technology plays a huge role for the launch and sustenance of companies no matter the specific segment of the industry.

4.3 Famliday

Unlike the previous startups, Famliday, the company subject of this case study, is a digital booking application willing to satisfy the needs and preferences of families (Famliday, 2021). The continuous steep rise in online bookings (Prieto, 2021 ; WPTravelbooking, 2020) and the subsequent growth of booking startups (Grant, 2021) seem not to scare the cofounder Javier Salvador Marín, who believes his company has a different and unique offer:

“We have identified a gap... there are establishments that have the (qualitative) offer but don’t know how to communicate with families because there are no platforms, no OTAs with specific offers for families. We connect the users’ need to look for specific offers and the establishments’ need to communicate what they are selling” (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021)

Hence, Famliday is an under-development booking application that wishes to conquer market share in the family segment. Its founder Javier Salvador Marín claims a similar business is still non-existent in the industry and, by offering a unique service to a niche, he believes his creation will successfully differentiate itself from other booking platforms (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). Professor Akaak explains that targeting and attracting the right type of tourists can grant “good tourism”, which in turn becomes “a good contributor” for the business (Ali Akaak, interview 11-11-2021). Similarly, Dr Pinta gives validity to the strategy Javier is planning to adopt and says “Having more bespoke experiences that cater to particular groups of people is something that you will

always win people over” (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021). Knoepfel (2001) underlines that product innovation strategies should be triggered by a professional management in order to maximise efficiency, attract investors and persist in the industry. According to Dr Gomes-Casseres, “Every business strongly depends on ecosystems of partners around them” and strategic partnerships are told to be able to empower companies (Gomes-Casseres, 2019). On this matter, Javier tells the researcher that:

“Famliday is about to end product development and we are ready to launch the startup on January 2022. Famliday is accelerated by Amadeus, a big technological company in the tourism industry that supports our project as ‘strategic project’. We are beginning with tourism accommodations; we have everything ready (to be on the market). We are finally developing the entertainment and restaurant sectors” (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021)

The partnership with Amadeus, a multinational tech company that cooperates with selected investors to rethink travel (Amadeus, 2020), suggests that the startup has the credentials to disruptively enter the market. For what concerns the management of the company, Professor Akaak says that management implies “planning, marketing, promotion, policies and competitiveness” (Ali Akaak, interview, 11-11-2021). To better understand Famliday’s competitiveness, the researcher exploited a slide showed by Javier Salvador Marín during a presentation made at Aalborg University. The slide, which can be seen below, contains a graph divided into scalability and specialization terms. Scalability is an attribute that describes the ability of an organization to grow and manage increased demand (Techopedia, 2021). Poor scalability can result in poor system performance (Bondi, 2000), meanwhile specialization is useful to provide a good service (Gibbs, 1993) and corresponds to an area of focus – in this case families – chosen by a company or individual.

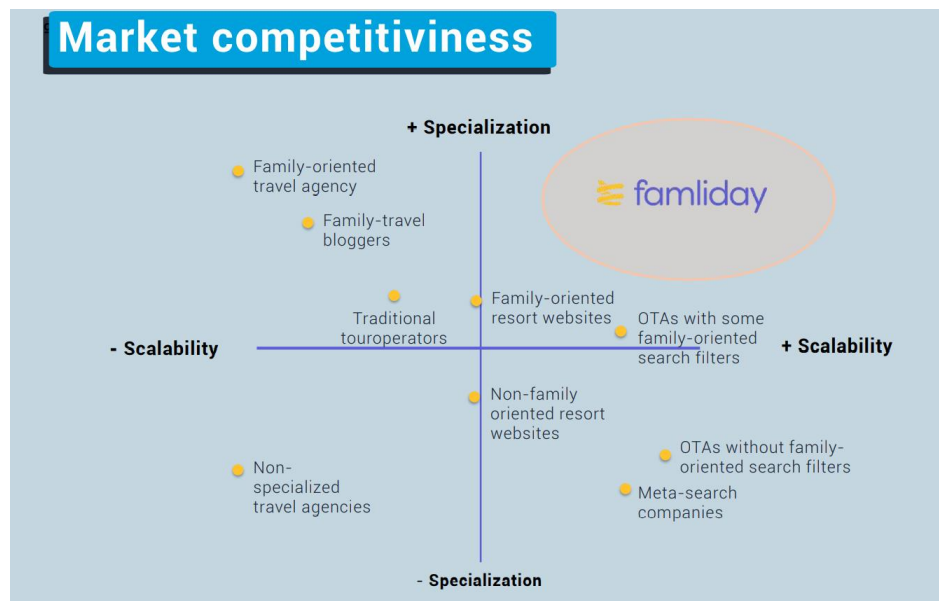


Figure 1: Famliday's market competitiveness (Marín, 2021)

Famliday has been placed in the upper right-end corner, with high scalability and specialization (Marín, 2021), since it aims to offer a wide range of options to a specific customer target. The closer the yellow dots are to Famliday, the bigger the competition. The most alarming threat seems to be represented by OTAs “like Booking.com, TripAdvisor or Expedia” (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). The second most competitive group is composed by companies who manage their bookings on their websites, with less scalability but higher specialization than OTAs. Overall, both clusters might obscure Famliday from being noticed, however the partnership with Amadeus and the unique focus on families are good signs which ascertain the booking platform has possibilities to differentiate its offer from rivals and impose itself in the industry.

4.4 Risk of overdependence

Interviews show a major implication when entrepreneurs become clients of booking platforms. Kristian Haaber, manager of Core Hospitality, conveys his company is “very dependent on OTAs” (Kristian Haaber, interview, 17-11-2021). Michele Sambaldi adds his personal opinion about dependence:

“According to me, choosing to depend too much on a channel is an admission of lacks in management and (the company) shows the willingness to delegate to a third party the replenishment of the facility... it is then with no surprise that this dynamic got the upper hand” (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021)

Dr Pinta has the same point of view shared by Michele Sambaldi and adds his personal opinion:

“I think if you are smaller, you might lose the sense of ownership, of decision-making, because you can’t really stand up to someone who is that big” (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021)

Both academia and industry agree on this topic. With direct online bookings that represent between 75% and 80% of all travel bookings (WPTTravelBooking, 2020) and OTAs that are strengthening their market capital even during the current pandemic (Prieto, 2021), it becomes hard for small realities not to be dependent on the power of such widely-used platforms. Dr Pinta highlights that the smaller the enterprise, the higher the preponderant impact of booking platforms.

“Larger chains have a bit more clientele that is returning back to them... The downside of small companies is that Booking.com and Expedia are charging a high fee... so obviously a large chunk of money is being taken away from those small hotels and is being pumped into these multinational big corporations... we know that they are expanding (their presence) into other smaller websites as well... on the other side small hotels wouldn’t survive either if they don’t receive bookings from those sites” (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021)

To be more precise about the quantity of money booking corporations ask, Lorenzo Bortoletto and Michele Sambaldi state that the fee averages 18% and tops 22% (Lorenzo Bortoletto, interview, 15-11-2021 ; Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021). Javier Salvador Marín has an idea to be less harmful to small and medium enterprises:

“If we speak about hotellerie, we want to offer a 10% fee. If we will ever plan on making a more premium offer, we might increase it” (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021)

If we compare the fee asked by Booking.com or Expedia with respect to the toll proposed by Javier, Famliday offers almost half the price of its booking rivals. Even though Dr Pinta sees the fee as a percentage of money that is extracted from establishments and does not return to the company or the destination (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021), the economic pressure Famliday requires entrepreneurs is lower. Moreover, by asking a lower fee than competitors, the price hotel entrepreneurs could offer their guests on the Famliday booking website could be decreased and, according to Javier, this could incentivize deseasonalization (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). Even though the ideas of Javier are competitive, it is worth to remind that Famliday is still

not in the market and this chapter has showed small and medium corporations are willing to be present online at all costs. On this matter, the data analyst Lorenzo Bortoletto has found that:

“Some hotels would rather prefer to focus on the presence on Booking.com and pay an 18% fee than considering strategic partnerships with established luxury companies like Marriott or Accor which ask for a lower toll of around 6 to 10% and could give the firm key managerial insights and instruments” (Lorenzo Bortoletto, interview, 15-11-2021)

In short, Lorenzo Bortoletto and the aforementioned interviewees are underlining that the high attention small and medium enterprises are paying to develop their brands online are apparently leading to overdependence problems and the necessity to be visible is allowing big corporations to strengthen their already solid position in the market (Prieto, 2021). This is implying a ripple effect which is leading to mismanagement issues (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021 ; Lorenzo Bortoletto, interview, 15-11-2021), loss of entrepreneurial decision-making and lack of the sense of ownership (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021).

4.5 Quality of experiences before internet visibility

Professional governance and innovation are fundamental attributes a company should have in order to be profitable (Knoepfel, 2001) and the previous interviewees' quotes tell us it is not so easy to have both qualities at the same time. Michele Sambaldi has been working in the hospitality industry for more than a decade. The company he works for is Pellicano Hotels and is part of 'The Leading Hotels of the World', which incorporates the best 400 luxury hotels spread in 80 different countries (LHW, 2021). His position of managing director in such a prestigious company lets his following considerations assume relevant connotations. Mr. Sambaldi appears appalled by the development strategies adopted by some of his colleagues:

“We talk about technology before talking about the product... There is no liquidity to change beds or products but there have to be finances for developing whatever is technological (referring to small and medium hotels in Italy) ... The hotel, before providing technological offers and obtain visibility should think about the sojourn, the basic comfort of the sojourn” (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021)

Kristian Haaber and Francesco Cortese agree with Michele Sambaldi's point of view. The similarity of content is striking:

“The focus must be primarily kept on the product but we must subsequently be able to communicate it... product before product visibility!” (Francesco Cortese, interview, 17-11-2021)

“The experience we offer at the hotels is the place to start to succeed... For Core Hospitality specifically, it is most relevant to consider the development of products and services” (Kristian Haaber, interview, 17-11-2021)

Both Michele Sambaldi and Francesco Cortese focus on the word product, which is a term usually used to describe the customer purchase of a commodity or service (Sánchez et al., 2006), meanwhile Kristian Haaber specifically introduces the word experience. Experience has been a recurring theme in this dissertation as plenty of articles about experiences and experience economy have been cited in the literature review chapter (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019 ; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013 ; Loureiro 2014). An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props to engage customers in a way that creates a memorable event. In short, products are tangible, services are intangible and a high-quality of both makes experiences memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Dr Pinta clarifies that “We are definitely moving beyond selling beds and breakfast, we are selling the experience” (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021) and the experience economy specialist James Wallman explains that the new trend is leading people to look for something that “stands out” and which is not linked to “Time well saved”, but rather to “Time well spent” (Amadeus and the Tramperry, 2021). In order to provide its users with a high-quality experience, Javier Salvador Marín wants Famliday “to be competitive and add more value to the quality of the stay (at Famliday’s facilities) all over the year” (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). His strategy to accomplish this goal is to include firms that respect specific qualitative and family-friendly requirements:

“There are two combinations in our project: problem-solution and product-money. We make a selection of companies... We don’t admit every company. A mainstream hotel that has no specific offer for families cannot participate with us. We prefer to offer less products with excellent quality than having a lot of offers and be like everyone else” (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021)

Both academic and industrial participants previously conveyed that visibility and the presence on the net are something necessary to sell products and obtain revenues. In fact, “ignoring booking sites would be a mistake the industry can’t afford” (Rick, 2013). However, they explain that the

quality of the experience must be privileged over the selling phase (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021 ; Kristian Haaber, interview, 17-11-2021 ; Francesco Cortese, interview, 17-11-2021). Michele Sambaldi, the managing director of Pellicano Hotels, points out that “a qualitative storytelling is able to attract qualitative tourism” (Sambaldi, 2021) but he adds that making strong promises online might then turn against the company in a fierce way if these are not maintained:

“The digital world has so many tools to ashame you, to penalize your brand reputation that we cannot think they (the quality of the stay and technology) are not communicating vessels” (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021)

If we relate Michele Sambaldi’s quote with Famliday’s business, Famliday is aiming to merge its digital know-how with the quality of the stay offered at its selected establishments. Javier has the intention to award the facilities enlisted on Famliday’s platform by giving them a family-friendly certificate:

“We have developed the ‘Famliday guarantee’. I grant with a certificate that the firm (hotel, restaurant, resort) respects all the requirements set by Famliday. We are not looking at luxury (as a proof of quality); we are looking at redefining the qualitative criteria by using the eye of families” (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021)

In other words, “demand for innovation comes out of necessity, not luxury” (Vidal & Guzman, 2021) and Javier appears very committed to fully understand families’ needs. Monica Otegui and Julián Cabrera are owners of two family-friendly companies selected by Famliday respectively named Club Kids and Inturmancha. Both entrepreneurs show their appreciation for what Javier is creating:

“We like the fact that companies need to satisfy certain requirements... it (Famliday) is a selective booking site... Famliday has the technological part that we are missing... Having a partnership with Famliday can grant a lot of possibilities (in terms of visibility and further partnerships). We could incorporate what we do with their application... We have the quality and they make us visible” (Monica Otegui, interview, 25-11-2021)”

“Famliday can be a showcase about the experiences we offer to potential customers... We already have 5 stars in our reviews. The quality means a lot, but since we are a small enterprise, how can we reach the big public? Our dimension

is a limit... Family tourism is very important, is a niche very important for us and if tourists don't know your experience, they will never ask for it" (Julián Cabrera, interview, 20-10-2021)

The selective membership method chosen by Famliday is, therefore, appealing according to the aspiring clients. The strategy has been largely supported because the app seems to be able to deliver the visibility and technological tools small and medium companies are lacking. Hu et al., (2009) state that customer satisfaction and corporate image impact customers' loyalty and add that there is a direct relationship between service quality and perceived customer value. According to Hu et al., (2009), if Famliday's selection of facilities proves successful, the strategy can increase the reliability of the brand and the facilities in its interior and this might eventually result in customer retention, with increased volumes of loyal Famliday users.

4.5.1 Experiences enhanced by technology

Zaid & Patwayati (2021) say that "Customer experience and customer engagement have a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty" (p.990). Dr Pinta underlines that nowadays a positive experience can only be achieved "by tapping into learning more about the guest that is staying with you" and conveys that "Technology is good for enabling us to understand a tourism behaviour" (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021). According to Professor Santana, exploiting digital channels to understand customers is necessary since "In order to keep with consumer behaviours, it is relevant to use the new technologies and even develop them more for adapting them to the daily activities of customers" (Carlos Pastor Chan Santana, questionnaire, 15-11-2021). Dr Pinta adds that:

"They (companies) would be silly not to take information about you... say you celebrated your anniversary or your birthday and next time when you go there (at a hotel), they see who you are and they have the information about you (online)... If it's not done in a right way, it might sound a bit creepy, but people are more and more understanding how data might be used... that can enhance the tourism experience and companies are doing it" (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021)

In short, Dr Pinta and Professor Santana foresee enhanced quality of the offer for companies which tailor experiences by exploiting customer data. Dr Aquino agrees that technologies can improve the companies' processes (Richard S. Aquino, interview, 22-11-2021). Therefore, the researcher conveys

there is a large consensus among academic interviewees that technology enables customer data analysis and this has direct consequences on the enhancement of the quality of the offer. Literature shows that customers communicate with a service provider on several occasions and make a sequence of actions before, during and after the consumption of the experience (Rojas et al., 2021 ; Oprensik, 2021). The conglomerate of actions can be traced in what is called a 'Customer Journey Map' (CJM) (Lin et al., 2020 ; Mangiaracina et al., 2009 ; Moon et al., 2016 ; Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Rosenbaum et al. (2017) outline that CJM favours the understanding of customers' actions. This is found to have direct influence in the performance of a company with deepened business-to-customer interactions, increased user knowledge and better quality of experience (Moon et al., 2016). Francesco Cortese considers WineAround's customer data analysis the competitive advantage that granted his firm a performance none else was able to replicate in its field:

"We were able to better interpret the needs of the customers we targeted. It's not only about attention to the client, it's about interpreting and exploiting data and transporting a need on the internet" (Francesco Cortese, interview, 17-11-2021)

Javier's project resembles what WineAround did with its customers. In fact, Famliday aims to satisfy the needs of families with an application that focuses solely on them (Famliday, 2021) and that is currently missing in the market (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). In the sentences below, Javier reveals how he plans to acquire and use customer data:

"We will have many filters once the startup will open... In the short-run we won't have many specific data (Famliday is still not available for the public). In the mid-term we can learn about families and their needs. Say one kid is gluten intolerant, another one likes cars or like riding the bike... I can recommend hotels to make plans related to the tastes... if one person books with us, we can exploit the data collected for their wellbeing... We could transform the experience" (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021)

The example of Javier resembles the one explained above by Dr Pinta. Famliday plans to analyse users' preferences on the internet to enhance the quality of the stay and tailor families' experiences. The application appears to be willing to apply CJM techniques: Famliday's purpose is to interact with users on specific occasions before, during and after bookings take place. According to the cofounder Javier Salvador Marín, the application will be able to better understand customers' actions (Lin et al., 2020 ; Rosenbaum et al., 2017) and increase its customer know-how (Moon et al., 2016) thanks

to the filters proposed on the website. Once the user buys his stay, the data he chose will be saved and directly linked with him for any future booking he completes on the platform. With this strategy, Famliday will be able to see customers' travel choices with their specific needs and wants (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021). Thanks to its filters, Javier expects Famliday to be able to cope with any type of customer preference. In detail, under specific circumstances like gluten intolerant children, Javier ascertains his platform will be able to advise in due course every hospitality establishment (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021), thus increasing the probabilities of customer satisfaction thanks to the adoption of technological tools (Chang et al., 2010 ; Amadeus and The Tramperry, 2021 ; Carlos Pastor Chan Santna, questionnaire, 15-11-2021).

4.6 Local socio-economic sustainability

Now that many operational strategies that link experience economy with digital innovation have been explained, it is important to cover sustainability, the last main theme of the literature. WPTravelbooking, (2020) shows that demand for sustainable offers is increasing and Javier Salvador Marín confirms sustainability is expected to cover an important role for Famliday as more and more customers want to look for sustainable offers: "The user who is focused on sustainability can see the symbol (a green label on the Famliday platform) and tap into businesses that only dispose of the sustainable certificate" (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021).

As literature says, sustainability is divided in three spheres: environmental, social and economic (Khan et al., 2021 ; Hysa et al., 2020 ; Morrison & Maxim, 2021). If the previous quote from Javier was mainly related to environmental sustainability, with Famliday's promotion of environmentally-friendly hospitality offers through the use of a green symbol, Javier reveals the application will also focus on social sustainability: "From a social point of view, we want to provide small and medium enterprises with digital help" (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). The following quote of Julián Cabrera seems to enlarge the social but also economic sustainability potential of Famliday:

"We are a very sustainable company. Inturmancha cooperates with small local producers in the rural-mid-rural area. We contribute to make these firms visible and we advertise them in order for tourists to visit them, enjoy the experience and buy their products. We are opening small producers to new opportunities and we are increasing their sustenance. This also influences the Municipality that will receive overnight stays from tourists coming from other Spanish regions... Famliday can be a showcase about the experiences we offer to potential

customers. Our limit is the scale of our firm... If more families know our brand, more will come" (Julián Cabrera, interview, 20-10-2021)

In short, Inturmancha generates direct economic and social benefits to small producers by organizing tours at local enogastronomical and artisanal facilities (Inturmancha, 2021). However, the visibility of Inturmancha is still limited and Julián counts on Famliday and its future users to extend its clientele. On this matter, Julián adds that Famliday might entail a knock-on effect: Famliday grants high visibility to Inturmancha, which in turn offers local authentic experiences to families who finally buy local products and services (Julián Cabrera, interview, 20-10-2021). This sequence of effects extends the reach of Famliday to a wider area, where Famliday's establishments become intermediaries of other facilities in a designated destination. We know from literature that effective social sustainability implies social/local empowerment, their inclusion and shared values (Munasinghe, 2010). Michele Sambaldi shares with the researcher a very similar content. He doesn't believe that "there is another way of making business from now on with respect to being socially and civically present... it all starts from a willingness of developing relations and privileging listening and cohesion" (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021). Knoepfel (2001) stresses that encouraging long lasting social wellbeing in local communities can be obtained by maximising interactions with stakeholders. In this case, Famliday could be the strategic party able to empower locals with increased tourism flows and promote qualitative-based experiences. Local empowerment does not seem to be solely social, but also economic given that the new tourism flows in the destination would entail an increased consumption of bednight stays and augmented sales of local products and services. Even if it is true that the fee given to Famliday would imply a portion of money that does not return to the destination (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021), the facilities that are on Famliday are projected to obtain increased visibility, higher volumes of targeted customers and, consequently, increased returns. Dr Aquino, lecturer in the fields of Tourism and Marketing, found a similar scenario during one of his fieldtrip studies:

"In my research I didn't find booking systems as startups, but rather booking systems as intermediary companies between host communities and tourists. They are micro-small businesses, social enterprises and booking platforms that bridge tourists and suppliers of tourism products, and it's increasingly important for communities who don't have access to digital technologies..." (Richard S. Aquino, interview, 22-11-2021)

Dr Aquino is referring to one of his fieldworks made in a remote Philippine community without internet access. The destination worked with organizations in the capital Manila to sell the product and organize the tourism activities (Richard S. Aquino, interview, 22-11-2021). He considers this type of digital exploitation not only sustainable, but also innovative:

“For them that’s digitally innovative because it’s something non-existent beforehand, at least in the first years... they (then) learn from social enterprises and some of them have also developed their offer on Facebook” (Richard S. Aquino, interview, 22-11-2021)

Basically, Dr Aquino’s research clarifies that booking platforms can not only grant visibility to hospitality companies, but also be socially and economically beneficial for companies and even destinations. Many communities such as the one in the Philippines but also small and medium companies such as Club Kids and Inturmancha do not dispose of the necessary knowledge to properly exploit the internet (Chudnovskiy et al., 2021 ; Julián Cabrera, interview, 20-10-2021 ; Monica and Jordi Otegui, interview, 25-10-2021). Famliday is promising to fill this gap (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021).

Dr Aquino underlines that the tourism development of the Philippine community has not been completed with a mainstream corporation. He believes a sustainable development can only be achieved by smaller booking platforms that only select businesses which share the same vision:

“Booking.com and Expedia are too mainstream... if you develop a booking website or platform developed with a cause and you become very selective... you only tap businesses, tour operators that are on board with you, that have the same goals and aspirations... It’s niche but it’s also meaningful... proper customer target” (Richard S. Aquino, interview, 22-11-2021)

Dr Aquino’s last sentences are directly related to Famliday since the startup taps into businesses that share the care for customers and that highly focus on welcoming families to satisfy their needs. Companies like Club Kids that “Work hard for families and take care of every detail” (Jordi Otegui, interview, 25-10-2021) are on the same track with Famliday, which provides them the technological know-how that they are lacking. To sum up, Famliday promotes its members’ meaningful family-friendly experiences and allows them to get visibility, tourist arrivals and profits; at the same time, the digital application expects to gain users’ trust from beneficial experiences, acquire positive image and collect revenues from every booking that takes place on the application. If the offers

result to respect the promises made, every stakeholder would benefit from the application and this could make Famliday sustainable from a social and economic perspective.

When the researcher asked Javier Salvador Marín what he expects for the future of his company, he said “Our future goal is to amplify the business and the certificate Famliday to Municipalities, tourism destinations” (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). Given what has already been described above, one can argue that the chance to develop this feature is already there.

4.7 Chapter summary

Findings tell us that digital innovation and related technological tools assume a pivotal role for every company in the hospitality industry. Technology has taken the upper hand in any form of operation, from marketing to management, and the startups interviewed show that digital innovation is crucial for their sustenance and development. Hospitality firms that focus on qualitative offers and effectively exploit the market online have proved to be profitable and are either growing (Core Hospitality and WineAround) or consolidating (Pellicano Hotels). However, in the case of small and medium enterprises (Club Kinds and Inturmancha), managing the business online is not an easy task (Chudnovskiy et al., 2021). Indeed, interviewees reveal that many companies lack sufficient knowledge to deal with digital tools and booking apps have plunged into this gap to finally find their bloodlife by providing small and medium enterprises with high visibility in exchange for the control of their booking operations (Bertasini, 2020). This transformation of the economy led to the consecration of booking platforms (Grant, 2021) but at the same time caused small and medium enterprises to be increasingly dependent on such corporations (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021 ; Kristian Haaber, interview, 17-11-2021). Famliday, the subject of the case study, is a booking application in the last stages of development and is trying to be competitive with a differentiated offer created for the niche segment of families. Dr Pinta says that “Having more bespoke experiences that cater to particular groups of people is something that you will always win people over” (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021). On one hand, the booking application aspires to grant enterprises with tourism flows from the selected customer target, on the other it promises to provide customers with a list of certified qualitative offers. Everything can be summed up in the figure exposed below.

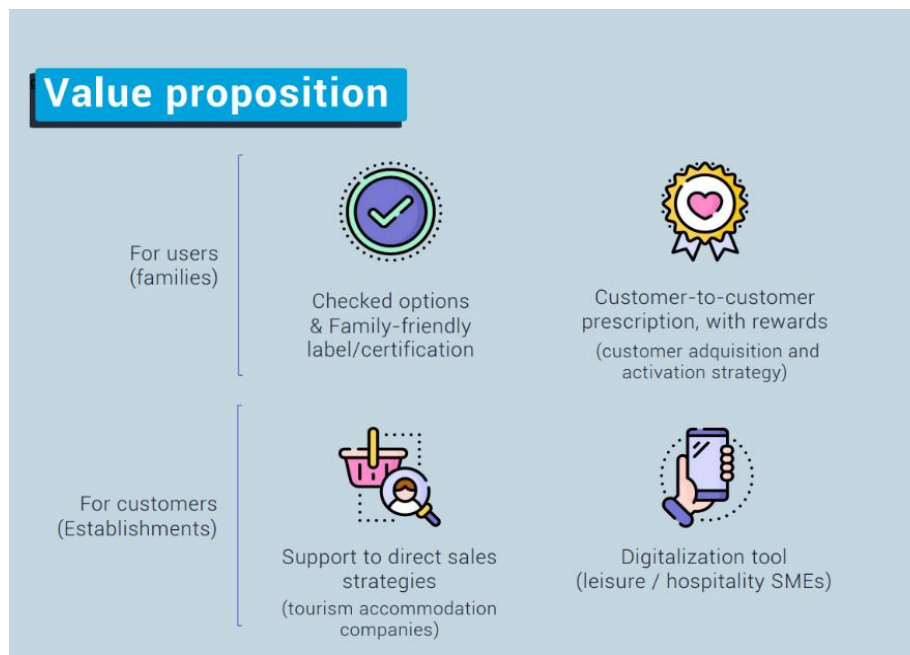


Figure 2: Value proposition of Famliday (Marín, 2021)

Companies that aim to be clients of Famliday admire the management and marketing strategies the company is willing to undertake and the presence of the startup among Amadeus' strategic partners is a sign that Famliday has the potential to disruptively enter the market from its launch-day. To better understand the significance of the findings, the case study will evolve in the following 'Analysis' chapter.

5. Analysis

The analysis is the conclusive section of the Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion (IMRD) structure (Samraj, 2008). Discussion chapters are crucial parts of master theses, in which authors provide interpretations of their studies (Loan, 2015). Paltridge, (2002) adds that the analysis "draws the findings of the study together, makes suggestions for future application of the findings, as well as discusses limitations to these findings" (p. 126). The researcher will adopt Paltridge's (2002) strategy to carefully examine Famliday in all respects and describe from his point of view its potential development and the importance of technology for the company. Once the potential of Famliday will be assessed, limitations to this study will be subsequently exposed and explained.

5.1 Famliday's competitiveness

First and foremost, interviews expose that, for any company, being out of the internet is not an option: According to Francesco Cortese, internet enterprises represent every-day life (Francesco Cortese, interview, 17-11-2021) and for Michele Sambaldi it is antithetical not to adhere to commercial opportunities on the web (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021). The Spanish

startup Famliday, subject of this case study, is striving to enter a very competitive and growing market composed of booking platforms (Prieto, 2021 ; Bertasini, 2020 ; WPTravelbooking, 2020). Dr Pinta conveys that “Having more bespoke experiences that cater to particular groups of people is something that you will always win people over” (Oscar Vorobjovas-Pinta, interview, 18-11-2021). Dr Aquino adds that “if you develop a booking website or platform developed with a cause and you become very selective...It’s niche but it’s also meaningful...proper customer target” (Richard S. Aquino, interview, 22-11-2021). Since Famliday is a startup aimed at satisfying the niche segment of families with a wide set of selected establishments, the application proves to have a unique high specialization together with a high scalability. Figure 1 in the findings shows all the competitors that Famliday is supposed to face and its position in the specialization-scalability graph (Marín, 2021) makes the researcher understand the company has clearly identified a gap in the market and wants to plunge in it as fast as it can with a competitive offer.

Another sign of the prospect of the application comes from small and medium enterprises which show their attraction to be enlisted among Famliday’s establishments. For Monica and Jordi Otegui, owners of the family-friendly brand Club Kids, being present in a “selective booking site” like Famliday represents a digital help and has the power to broaden their customer catchment area (Jordi and Monica Otegui, interview, 25-11-2021). Similarly, Julián Cabrera is confident that Famliday will bring Inturmancha more national and international clientele (Julián Cabrera, interview, 20-10-2021). Nonetheless, the tech giant Amadeus has signed a strategic partnership with Famliday (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). Knoepfel (2001) underlines meeting shareholders’ needs increases the potential of the company and Gomes-Casseres (2019) states that strategic partnerships increase the power of the brand.

Famliday was present at one of the webinars followed by the researcher and organized by Amadeus and The Trampery. During the webinar, Javier presented Famliday to the attendees who could, therefore, enter in contact with the brand. Since Club Kids and Inturmancha showed interest in being part of the platform as soon as they knew about the concept (Monica and Jordi Otegui, interview, 25-11-2021 ; Julián Cabrera, interview, 20-10-2021), the fact that Amadeus invites Famliday to its conventions favours brand recognition and brand image. This directly increases brand visibility to other stakeholders in the field who can become future clients or partners. Hence, the researcher conveys Amadeus is not only a partner, but also a promoter.

In short, Famliday's focus on families and on the quality of their members have the ability to attract companies, which consider Javier's project to be competitive and beneficial to their businesses. The increasing appeal culminated with the partnership with the tech giant Amadeus suggests that investors are willing to bet on qualitative projects that target niche customers and this might show a new emerging trend in the current experiential tourism industry.

5.2 Famliday's Value

James Wallman explains that experiences are related to "Time well spent" and are the creation of something that stands out (Amadeus and The Trampery, 2021). Being out of the ordinary, differentiating the offer and understanding the customer are fundamental attributes (Voss, 2004 ; Pine & Gilmore, 2014 ; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013). Professor Santana, Chang et al., (2010) and Nylen & Holmström (2015) invoke the analysis of customer behaviour through the exploitation of modern technologies to enhance experiences (Carlos Pastor Chan Santana, questionnaire, 15-11-2021) and Michele Sambaldi points out that being technological and providing comfort must be "communicating vessels" (Michele Sambaldi, interview, 12-11-2021). Figure 2 of the findings summarizes the double intention of Famliday: on one hand the startup wishes to increase user reliability and trustworthiness thanks to the creation of an intuitive digital booking platform paired with qualitative offers, on the other it is willing to provide private companies with digital help and increased volumes of the targeted customer (Marín, 2021). Based on the findings, the application appears to focus on both quality and technology by merging the experience customers will get at member facilities with a modern and interactive booking approach. Javier explained that no competitor currently present in the industry is solely focused on families and selects family-friendly companies based on qualitative parameters (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). Innovation has been described as a key characteristic for differentiation and success (Amadeus and The Trampery, 2021) and Hu et al.'s (2009) study shows that, if this method proves successful, Famliday will be able to increase user loyalty and brand image and this will directly impact the value and reputation of Famliday. The application proves to be on the right path towards a bright future, however some limitations to the study are present. The following section will shed light on some issues that could dwindle the validity of the dissertation.

6. Limitations

6.1 A developing company

Even if the researcher has found and exposed proofs of the potential of Famliday, the company is still in the development phase. Its unavailability to the public does not allow the researcher to write solutions, but rather generate hypotheses and suggestions. This developing status of the startup represented a limitation as well as an opportunity since the company might use the findings of this work for the completion of its product. Javier is currently finalizing the requirements to ask hotels in order to be part of the company and is willing to let them be present on the startup with a very competitive fee of 10%. In spite of that, he still has to figure out a proportional toll for the selected restaurants and entertainment companies who will be part of the application (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). Club Kids and Inturmancha are the two brands interviewed which expressed their desire to be on board with Famliday but both are entertainment companies. With the startup set to be launched within January 2022, the lack of a precise fee for every establishment might imply for Monica Otegui, Jordi Otegui and Julián Cabrera extended waiting times before their brands will be available in the application. This retard might have repercussions on the growth of the startup, that will most likely start its operations with a sole selection of hotels.

The researcher revealed Javier's vision for the future of the brand, which is set to "amplify the business and the certificate Famliday to Municipalities, tourism destinations" (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). Professor Akaak explained that technology has favoured the tourism development and visibility of destinations (Ali Akaak, interview, 11-11-2021) and Dr Aquino told us digital booking sites can become "intermediary companies within host communities, where micro-small businesses and informal businesses and the tourism market are present" (Richard S. Aquino, interview, 22-11-2021). Findings give validity to the aforementioned statements and highlight how the collaboration between Inturmancha and Famliday could entail a ripple effect that influences the two companies, customers and the local community (Julián Cabrera, interview, 20-10-2021). In detail, Julián Cabrera mentioned how Famliday could positively impact its company as well as small local producers with social and economic benefits. If implemented, the ripple effect embraces Morrison & Maxim's (2021) sustainability criteria as it is expected to enhance local empowerment, stimulate shared values and community inclusion and grant economic prosperity to the destination. Yet, Famliday is thinking to extend its business to destinations in the future. Since Javier only spoke about social sustainability by expressing his will to provide technological help to its member companies, the researcher assumes Famliday is not fully aware of the social and economic potential

that could come from the partnership with Inturmancha. Famliday does not seem to fully grasp the prospect of its creation and its narrow views on social sustainability can negatively alter the in continuum development of the company. According to the researcher, this constitutes a managerial limitation the company should focus on.

To sum up, Famliday is willing to inaugurate its brand on January 2022. The brand is expected to be firstly available to the public with a list of selected hotels. Restaurants and entertainment companies will only follow in a second phase, meanwhile the inclusion of overall destinations is part of a long-term vision of the company (Javier Salvador Marín, interview, 23-11-2021). Based on the findings, one can argue that incorporating restaurants, entertainment companies as well as destinations can be an asset of Famliday from the early beginning and being deprived of these facilities can constitute a limitation for the growth of the brand. Nevertheless, interviews expose the presence of a sustainable social and economic potential unforeseen by the company. The fact that this research has identified such issues could entail Famliday, which is still in product development, to reconsider its plans and reevaluate strategies.

6.1.1 Interviewees

Since Famliday is still not available on the internet, the researcher relied on Javier Salvador Marín, the cofounder of the startup, to choose part of the stakeholders to be interviewed. The participants involved – in this case Julián Cabrera, Monica Otegui and Jordi Otegui – could have purposely delved into topics in favour of Famliday since they want to be an active part of the platform, creating a possible bias and conflict of interest. According to Mecca et al., (2014) conflicts of interest “have the potential to undermine the integrity of scientific research as well as to threaten public trust in scientific findings” (p. 843). Ali et al., (2011) explain that “objectivity, the extent to which the findings are free from bias” (p. 30) is considered by many specialists in the field as a key factor for the validity and reliability of a qualitative study. To mitigate the risk of bias, the author decided to rely on literature and other participants with experience in the sector. According to Ali et al., (2011) multiple methods like “literature analysis and participants’ observations” can be a valid strategy to mitigate bias risks if merged with a “rationale for showing that there is agreement between interpretations and the meanings held by respondents” (p. 37). By applying this technique, the researcher was able to confront the topics dealt with by the three Famliday-selected interviewees. The points of view revealed by Famliday’s stakeholders are shared by literature and the other interviewees, who agree that the quality of the offer is fundamental to satisfy customer targets and that technology is a key tool for enhancing the customer experience. When they specifically talk about Famliday, Monica

Otegui, Jordi Otegui and Julián Cabrera explain how the application could be beneficial for their business. The fact that the application is under development and that interlocutors express their uncertainty on how and when the firm plans to operate mitigates even more the risks of bias.

Keeping the focus on interview participants, the number of Famliday's stakeholders was projected to be more consistent. More participants could have helped reveal new needs Famliday can try to satisfy and interlocutors could have highlighted new benefits, outcomes or insights. The hotellerie is the segment that is ready to be added on the platform on January 2022 and the lack of Famliday's aspiring clients owning or managing a hotel is considered by the researcher to be the most relevant limitation present in this dissertation.

Lastly, the fact that Famliday is not a consolidated brand like Booking.com or Expedia constituted a limitation in the variety of topics covered with professors who made studies in the field. Dr Pinta is, for example, very familiar with AirBnB and had no clue about the coming launch of Famliday, so he could not directly provide the researcher with specific tools the company could exploit. Similarly, Professor Akaak and Dr Aquino, who have important background on technology, marketing and destination development, could not directly talk about the business of Famliday since its product is still under development. Participants' statements, however, proved to be beneficial for the completion of the text.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this research was to analyse the influence of digital innovation in the current experiential tourism economy. To accomplish this goal, a qualitative case study with semi-structured interviews was appositively created with an extensive data collection of academic articles pertaining to sustainability, experience economy and technological development. The researcher decided to rely on the digital startup Famliday as subject of the case to examine the potential of technology in the tourism industry. Famliday is an under-development booking platform. Its strategies were analysed to understand whether there is a link between digital innovation, the experience economy and sustainability in the hospitality sector. Findings show that technology has become an essential part of individuals' lives and goes hand-in-hand with tourism. Customers use booking platforms and websites to buy products, services and tourism experiences. In the hospitality industry, the internet is able to deliver companies the desired visibility online but visibility might play a double-edged sword if the digital promotion of the product is not followed by a qualitative offer. Overall, not every hospitality company is able to develop the required synergy between quality and digital use and

many small and medium enterprises are suffering from technological lack of knowledge. This situation led to the increasing relevance of booking platforms and to the subsequent boom of new digital startups, including Famliday. Famliday's management strategies are innovative and merge technological tools with a high control on the quality of the experience at the selected member facilities. The company is trying to bridge a gap in the market by offering families a list of certified family-friendly establishments on their digital booking platform. Interviewees underline how innovation, selection of specific customers and professional management can be crucial characteristics to successfully win people over. Entrepreneurs are so far approving the ideas the startup proposes. Aspiring members believe the application will allow them to be more visible online, increase family arrivals and enhance their economic wellbeing. Findings show that the aforementioned benefits could be potentially amplified to overall destinations. Famliday's long-term vision is to incorporate Municipalities in the digital agenda and literature demonstrates that including multiple firms, empowering locals and sharing qualitative values can enhance memorable experiences to families as well as increase welfare in the host communities. Julián Cabrera, owner of the rural tourism enterprise Inturmancha, says that starting a business with Famliday can grant benefits to both companies and at the same time boost the socio-economic wellbeing of the host communities he works at. The researcher suggests Javier Salvador Marín to consider making a pilot project with Inturmancha. By doing so, Famliday could have the chance to understand its potential in granting social and economic benefits to destinations and, in case of positive feedback, potentially expand its operations to overall communities.

The researcher adds that Javier is a very pragmatic owner that has earned respect and admiration from other colleagues thanks to its visionary plans. Famliday's technological and up-to-date product has high chances to leave its mark and provide memorable customer experiences. However, the firm needs to put into practice what it has promised to confirm the validity of its project and show that the application can assume a protagonist role in the current tourism industry.

7.1 Further studies

Articles and books cited in this dissertation pertaining to the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998 ; Pine & Gilmore, 2014 ; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019 ; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013), to digital innovation (Wise & Heidari, 2019 ; Zaid & Patwayati, 2021 ; Bertasini, 2020 ; Rosenbaum et al., 2017 ; Moon et al., 2016) and sustainability (Morrison & Maxim, 2021 ; Vallance et al., 2011 ; Knoepfel, 2001 ; Khan et al., 2021 ; Hysa et al., 2020) did not cover the examination of a startup with its related functions and potential, but rather explained trends comparing multiple companies or

using quantitative samples. This manuscript links experience economy, technology and social and economic sustainability by relying on multiple methods and by looking into a startup called Famliday as subject of the case study. Based on the data collection of this paper, the researcher ascertains this dissertation assumes the role of a pioneer study.

The creation of startups is booming and new prospects with disruptive offers like Famliday can emerge at any time in the forthcoming future. A poor amount of academic studies about specific firms can limit the know-how of future trends in the economy as well as the discovery of new disruptive and successful methods with which companies can distinguish themselves in the market. There is, therefore, a need for new studies to be made on this rapidly growing sector of the industry. The researcher strongly believes studying startups will be insightful from an industrial and academic perspective. Speaking about this dissertation, the content grants knowledge of the pre-launch potential of Famliday and constitutes a solid starting point for future studies about the company as well as similar enterprises. Future research on Famliday can in particular show the performance of the brand after its inauguration and confirm or deny all the assumptions made in this work. Similar analyses are advised to be repeated to other startups positively performing in the market. More startup studies can grant a better know-how about the overall functioning and development of the industry as well as provide insights to future entrepreneurs who want to disruptively enter the market. With a relevant amount of detailed research on different companies, the academic world would eventually be able to make predictions on the expected growth of firms, compare businesses and draft accurate projections about the future of the industry. Famliday might be part of a new trend, where booking platforms as well as hospitality firms focus their attention on satisfying and welcoming specific clusters of individuals. In this context, making clear and detailed analyses of specific companies is the only way to tap into the development of the tourism industry, learn how customers behave and understand which strategies pay off.

Ultimately, the researcher believes studies need to be functional for both industry and academia. Analysing the creation and development of new firms will be crucial to predict what can await the tourism industry and make a solid contribution to the literature. Startups have been built to bridge a gap in the market for which they believe there is success (Grant, 2021) and have the ability to shape the industry in a way that cannot be fully understood if investigated once such companies have achieved consolidation. For this reason, the researcher concludes this dissertation has to be part of a widened set of targeted studies that can make the difference by examining and helping companies, interpreting trends and explaining the continuously evolving tourism economy.

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