Food events and the experience economy: A netnographic examination of the case of Dîner en Blanc

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ABSTRACT

The 'experience economy' is a term that continues to be applied by tourism and hospitality researchers although it emerged over 20 years ago. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), the next level after the service economy is the experience economy; it is an upscaling of the services economy which involves the consumer in the production of goods and services. The evaluation of event experience has been investigated by various researchers adopting different frameworks. In addition, affective, cognitive and behavioural components are the ordinary measurements researchers use to evaluate an experience that is determined by psychological perceptions. Conversely, Pine and Gilmore offered the four experience realms to investigate attendees' experiences from an additional perspective: Education, Entertainment, Esthetic and Escapism. However, there is limited understanding of how the experience economy applies to the journey of an event attendee's experience of a food event and the role of the consumer as the producer of the event as well. This study sought to understand attendees as prosumers at Dîner en Blanc and explore the level of experience at each stage of the event using the four realms of the experience economy. The study employed a qualitative methodology using netnography. Data were collected from 12 bloggers who participated in Dîner en Blanc from 2015 to 2020. The use of netnography makes an additional realm of experience more discoverable. The evaluative realm emerged as an additional realm of experience in Dîner en Blanc. The combined realm of experiences, the 'sweet spot', a rare experience according to Pine and Gilmore (1998), was also discovered in the context of this study. An integrated schema of the journey of Dîner en Blanc attendees and the experience economy contributes to both event management practice and theory in appreciating the different stages of experience in designing and co-creating prior to the event, during the event and after the event, for successful event marketing and management.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: Zhuosi Liu   Date: 24/08/2020

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Although the experience economy is not a new theoretical concept, researchers have continued to apply the concept in tourism and hospitality research. The concept was mooted by Pine and Gilmore (1998), who asserted that, beyond service, suppliers should pay more attention to staged experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Pine & Korn, 2011). Pine and Gilmore offered a framework to investigate attendees' experiences using four experiential domains: education, entertainment, esthetic and escapism. Recent research by Kirillova et al. (2017b) conceptualised a third-generation experience economy that places emphasis on self-actualisation. The second-generation experience economy refers to consumers as the co-creators of experiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) asserted that experience is a solution to distinguishing products and services, which keeps the relationship with consumers closer than ever before.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) offered insights into staged experiences through a study of themed restaurants, theatres, theme parks and museums. More specific to events, Manthiou et al. (2014) also adopted four realms of experience in their analysis of festival marketing. Rivera et al. (2015) presented a music festival as an experience selling point to destination marketers. Sundbo and Darmer (2008) foresaw that the experience economy had the potential for further research. Following on from the review of the literature on the experience economy (Chapter Two), this study presents an opportunity to fill a gap in knowledge by exploring the application of the concept of the experience economy to a specific food event.

Events have been used as tools for developing experiences in diverse industries in various formats (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and for generating memorable events (Pine & Korn, 2011). The experience linked to food and beverage events is more memorable than other types of festivals (S. Chang, 2018). These food events or food festivals have seen rapid development in the tourism, leisure, recreation and hospitality sector (W. Chang, 2011; Y. H. Kim et al., 2015; Lee & Arcodia, 2011). Events and festivals related to food have rapidly become a growing phenomenon in the world, which affects the motivation, experience, satisfaction and spending of people who attend them (Getz et al., 2015) and, on top of that, their sensory experience (W. Chang, 2011; Liu et al., 2017).

Food experience is a topic worthy of further research owing to people having at least three meals a day (Jacobsen, 2008). Besides having the reputation of being a tourism attraction

(Cleave, 2016; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Tom Dieck et al., 2018), food is also known as a catalyst for tourists' destination choices (Axelsen & Swan, 2010; W. Chang, 2011; Getz et al., 2014; Hall & Sharples, 2003). Undoubtedly, food is representative of a destination's culture and identity (Getz et al., 2014; Hall & Sharples, 2008; Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Richards, 2015; Rusher, 2003). It also provides tourism destinations with a competitive edge, creating a distinction from other destinations internationally (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Richards, 2015). Importantly, food events and festivals also provide opportunities for co-creation between consumers and producers (Hall & Sharples, 2008). Dîner en Blanc is a worldwide event launched in Paris in 1988 which has grown to encompass five continents and more than 50 countries (Dîner en Blanc, n.d.). The event concept encourages attendees to bring their own picnic supplies and outdoor furniture to the event. Unlike any regular food event, this event presents many opportunities for co-creation, which this study aims to examine.

According to Getz and Page (2016), the experience economy and events are mutually interdependent. Getz and Page (2020) endorsed the view that an event is a foundation for the experience economy. Experience has a competitive advantage for diverse economies, and events are an emerging industry which is also a valuable and effective channel to gain experiences. Further, the ability to create memorable experiences tends to arise not only during the consumption but also in the production of the event, through interaction (Cleave, 2016; Hall & Sharples, 2008), and also forms the dominant motivation for attendees at food events (Getz et al., 2015). This study seeks to examine the roles of attendees as the co-producers of these experiences at specialty food events like Dîner en Blanc.

1.1 RESEARCHER BACKGROUND

The researcher has a background in event management and international tourism management, and has plenty of passion for the event and tourism industry. She has read numerous journals and articles about the event and tourism industry that opened up her views and recognition of academic knowledge. Hence, she is concerned with the issues and trends that are faced by the event and tourism industry. Furthermore, the researcher likes to experience new events, as she has previously engaged in diverse types of events in different roles, including volunteer, staff and organisation. Currently, the researcher works in the tourism industry. She is inspired to learn more about the event sector and its integral role in the tourism industry.

The researcher has searched for a lot of information about Dîner en Blanc, even making a booking and being waitlisted, and becoming a registered member. She planned to attend Dîner en Blanc in March 2020 to enhance the credibility of this study, but the schedule was postponed to November 2020 owing to covid-19.

1.2 DINER EN BLANC

Dîner en Blanc is a worldwide event, first created by Francois Pasquirer in 1988 at Paris, which has now spread over five continents to roughly 80 cities (Dîner en Blanc, n.d.). The original intention of the event was that the founder invited a group of his friends to have a picnic outside, with everyone wearing white attire so that it was easy to recognize companions. These requirements of the event have now become integral to the traditions of Dîner en Blanc. It is a mysterious and much-anticipated event owing to the device of revealing the location at the last minute. The key rules of Dîner en Blanc (n.d.), listed below, assist attendees in preparation for the event:

1. Be dressed elegantly and strictly in white.
2. Bring all the necessary dinner supplies, including table, chairs and picnic basket.
3. Follow and respect table leaders' instructions.
4. Drink in moderation and you must be of legal drinking age (18 years old). Champagne or wine only.
5. Your presence to the event is mandatory, rain or shine.
6. Clean up: take your garbage back with you.

Dîner en Blanc is a popular event that has different editions and chapters around the world, but it has not been the focus of much academic research. Donaghy (2014) used the case of Dîner en Blanc to assess personal identity in the co-creation of experience, and considered Dîner en Blanc to be a pop-up event. This perspective derived from the one-off events being held at prestigious sites around the host city, and also the location being confidential until the last minutes to induce curiosity. By contrast, Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2014) mentioned Dîner en Blanc as a luxury experience owing to the event showcasing elegance and chic. Due to the concept of the picnic, the event attendees dine together with necessary dinner supplies, such as food, cutlery, plates etc., being carried by themselves. Also, it is a unique opportunity to gather together for a dining experience in a public space. Food is one of the attributes influencing attendees' decision to attend this event. Dîner en Blanc is selected for this study as it represents a unique food event experience that requires a massive

amount of planning and preparation by the event attendees prior to the event – a role which most event producers are usually responsible for.

1.3 AIMS OF THE STUDY

Experience is a key driver within the tourism and hospitality industry, playing a significant role in providing a competitive advantage. The different types and styles of experiences have been widely researched in the tourism and hospitality industry. Publishing experiences on social media is a popular channel for people to freely express and share their experiences whenever and wherever possible. Investigating the experience of a particular event through social media is a way to recognise the comprehensive account of attendees' experiences in this rapidly changing world. Attendees' experiences are generated by multisensory stimulation such as being, feeling, touching and hearing, which are present in the affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. In order to understand these experiences from another perspective, the researcher adopted the four realms of experience as a theoretical framework to evaluate attendees' experiences of Dîner en Blanc.

The main objectives of this study are formulated as follows:
1. To understand the role of the event attendee as the prosumer of **Dîner** en Blanc.
2. To analyse the application of the experience economy in the evaluation of attendees' event experience.

This research contributes to the knowledge of event attendee behaviours. Understanding the event attendees' experiences in detail not only focuses on overall views, but also explores the minute and finer aspects and details, and this assists in forming a full account of the event in various high-level experiences.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach using netnography was applied in the study. Secondary data were collected through online social media. After comparison with diverse well-known social media, blogs were selected to be prime data resources; they are seen as electronic diaries (Ek et al., 2008), recording experiences within a narrative format. Blogs have enough text description and interpretation, and photos and videos provide extra information, which makes them highly valuable resources. Purposive sampling as a technique was used to select samples that assisted the researcher in strengthening the range of the study. Hence, hashtags were used to locate the blogs that were relevant to the study. In addition, the sample blogs

were written by people who engaged in Dîner en Blanc from 2015 to 2020 around the world, so the research is international without geographical, age or race limitations. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

1.5 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

This dissertation consists of six chapters: introduction, literature review, research methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion. Chapter One introduces the research. Chapter Two presents the literature review surrounding the experience economy, four realms of the experience economy, and the evolution of the concept of the experience economy. Chapter Three details the research paradigm of the researcher, and outlines the research methodology and the research design. Chapter Four outlines the findings, and Chapter Five discusses the results of the study based on the research objectives and the literature in Chapter Two. Chapter Six brings the dissertation to a close by providing insights into the limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiences linked to food and beverage events are more memorable than other types of festivals (S. Chang, 2018). The rapid development of food events is interrelated to the experience economy and hedonism (Getz & Robinson, 2014). According to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), hedonic consumption occurs as a customer seeks multisensory, fantasy and emotive experiences in interacting with products. It is a dominant dimension on which to evaluate attendees' experience at an event, as it affects subsequent behaviour and motivations (Grappi & Montanari, 2011), and it is therefore important to event producers. Getz (2018) noted that event participants can gain personal value, including development, hedonism, self-actualisation, and enjoyment when they engage in events.

Getz and Robinson (2014) classified food festivals by event scale and food character. For example, food events are categorised into learning and enjoyment attributes that are aimed at serious food event attendees, also known as food lovers and foodies (Getz et al., 2014; Getz et al., 2015). Typical examples of educational programmes include a wine-tasting class and a chef workshop. These kinds of activities with an educational component also help attendees gain specialised knowledge from food and beverage experts (Getz et al., 2014). A few researchers have demonstrated that wine and food festivals provide opportunities for attendees to gain knowledge (Axelsen & Swan, 2010; Liu et al., 2017). On the other hand, food festivals and farmers' markets are entertainment events that add value to the foundation of food (Getz et al., 2014; Organ et al., 2015). According to Getz et al. (2014), event attendees derive more satisfaction from an entertainment food event than from an educational food event. The terms "food festival" and "food event" are interchangeably. This dissertation appraises attendees experience before, during and after the event, by following the process of the organisation of an unconventional food event, Le Dîner en Blanc.

2.1 EXPERIENCE IN THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Experience is an important element linked to various industries and fields, particularly in tourism (Ek et al., 2008; Getz & Page, 2020; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007; Rivera et al., 2015) and that does not preclude the event sector. The term "experience" describes an individual subjective feeling and the experience of one person may differ from the experience of another in the same environment (Getz & Page, 2020; Liu et al., 2017; Ryan, 2012; Schmitt, 2011). It is the perception of self (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011), bound up with psychological benefits (Cole & Illum, 2006) and complex emotions (Carù & Cova,

2003; Liu et al., 2017). Experience can be conceptualised into three dimensions: behavioural, affective and cognitive (Getz, 2008; Liu et al., 2017; Schmitt, 1999). Other scholars have argued that experience is multisensory, and involves not just seeing, but also being, touching, smelling and hearing (Ek et al., 2008; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Manthiou et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Rivera et al., 2015; Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). Carù and Cova (2003) noted that experience could be defined by multiple perspectives, including science, philosophy, sociology and anthropology. Otherwise, relying on several reviews, experience is understood in basic terms as a verb and noun (Carù & Cova, 2003; Ek et al., 2008; Getz & Page, 2020; Rossman & Ellis, 2012; Schmitt, 2011). As a noun, experience is an effect that is created by an event; as a verb, experience is in the being of a particular situation. Getz and Page (2020) stated that event experience is influenced by surroundings, performances and people.

Over the past decades, the meaning of experience has been broadened and extended to include customisation and personalisation (Oh et al., 2007; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), the editing of private content in a colourful manner to fulfil the expectations set in personal social media (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019), and even the display of unsatisfactory experiences from bad products and services (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

From a business perspective, numerous scholars have identified that having or providing an experience has a competitive advantage that can overcome traditional business strategies (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Gentile et al. 2007; Manthiou et al., 2014; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Rivera et al., 2015; Seo, 2013; Smit & Melissen, 2018). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) also pointed out that more and more options cannot increase customers' satisfaction, as compared to personalising it for their satisfaction. In particular, Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) asserted that experience is a solution to the problem of distinguishing products and services, while also making relationships with the consumers closer than before. Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2019) indicated that the customer is often an "experience seeker" (p. 114), which means experience is focused on a human's desire to expand their horizons. Experience is multiple-fold and cannot be singled out as with commodities and goods. Experiential marketing is a marketing approach mentioned by Schmitt (1999) that has been accepted by academics and in the field as emphasising the customer's experience rather than the product's function. In addition, this approach evidenced the significance of experience, linking it to the notion of the experience economy.

Despite the price of an experience mostly being higher than the cost of a service (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; S. Chang, 2018; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Smit & Melissen, 2018), people are still willing to pay for it. Hence, the income of the experience economy has seen a pattern of significant increase as compared to the service economy (S. Chang, 2018). Smit and Melissen (2018) debated whether the status of an experience was changed by it becoming accessible, and not a luxury. Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2014) pointed out that paying affordable price for an exclusive experience is better than owning luxury goods with an unaffordable price.

Consequently, Yeoman (2013) highlighted that experience as a trend to attract people is related to personal improvement and individual presentation. Pine and Gilmore (1999) highlighted that almost all industries aim to create unforgettable memories for their customers through events which generate the magic weapon of the experience. Several authors (Getz, 2008; Pine & Gilmore, 1999) have argued that an event is an experience, and that participants seek to generate memorable perspectives and perceptions. Manthiou et al. (2014) stressed that a "festival is an experience-oriented industry sector" (p. 24); this standpoint identified experience as a dominant factor of festivals. Oh et al. (2007) used events as a yardstick to measure destination experience. Their findings revealed that memories generated by events would influence the tourist experience of the destination, especially in the collection of negative memories.

Experience is a perishable item and an uncontrollable variable present in every event. According to the traits of events, Getz (2008) depicted an event experience as irreproducible due to changeable elements of events, and the fact that an event is delivered in real time as well. Liu et al. (2017) mentioned the generation of experience in a food and wine event in regard to various attributes, such as previous experience, motivation, environment and so forth. However, experience in diverse events is different, and is related to various factors, such as event characteristics, size, and event type (Ryan, 2012). Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) portrayed creative experience in co-creation as relying on the individual involvement, space and time that have been provided by the event. Notably, Cole and Illum (2006) indicated that event attendees engaging in a festival seek the psychological benefit of an experience they have expected, which will affect their future behaviour intentions directly. Tom Dieck et al. (2018) pointed out that the effect of the experience economy within visitor engagement, memory and satisfaction is worthy of being researched.

2.2 THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

The experience economy, which generally refers to "staging experience", is distinguished from the service economy which provides service, goods and commodities (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 98). It is a transformation from tangible resources to intangible resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Experience is reflected in unforgettable, new value, memorable, personal experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, 2020). Cole and Chancellor (2009) also echoed the view that "experiences are outcomes of staged service" (p. 324) – a new economic trend (Rossman & Ellis, 2012). For example, customers who are loyal to Starbucks for their daily coffee would not prepare their own coffee by themselves, even if they had a Starbucks brand coffee at home. While the cost of the coffee is higher at the store as compared to the coffee prepared at home, the experience is totally different, with the ambience and environment of the Starbucks outlet being significantly better than the home. That is what motivates people into making their purchase. This is a typical example that distinguishes the service and the experience economies, the consumption of experience, goods and services, all occurring at the same time. Interestingly, Pine and Gilmore (2020), using time to classify service and experience, stated that "services are about time well saved, while experiences are about time well spent" (p. xii). The experience economy is an upgraded version of the commodities, goods and service economy. It is linked to several factors, such as generational changes (Rivera et al., 2015), consumption patterns (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014), consumer demand (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Smit & Melissen, 2018; Sundbo & Darmer, 2008; Yeoman, 2013), and the desire for co-creation (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009).

Theming allows customers to closely relate to their personal interests which may then generate an unforgettable memory. Pine and Gilmore (1998) illustrated the experience economy using Disneyland. According to these authors, Disney abandoned the conventional concept of an amusement park to create a theme park with a focus on experience. Following that, the concept of the experience economy was applied in diverse fields and industries, such as science festivals (Tom Dieck et al., 2018), electronic sports (Seo, 2013), music festivals and museums (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011), and tourism (Hwang & Lee, 2019; Oh et al., 2007). For instance, Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) used the experience economy concept to investigate visitors' overall satisfaction. Furthermore, it was observed that more and more shops or businesses had been revamped or had chosen to stage their space with a particular theme, such as the Hello Kitty hotel, the board games café, the dinner in the sky, the underwater hotel, the Hard Rock Café, and more.

From an economic perspective, Pine and Gilmore (1999) claimed that an experience is needed to achieve a customer-centric outcome as goods and services are no longer enough to satisfy customers. However, the other economies cannot be completely disregarded. Seo (2013) applied the four realms of the experience economy in e-sports, and the research showed that co-creation is an important link to the experience generated. This study seeks to examine the applicability of the four realms of experience in analysing the experience that is critical to the attendees at different stages of a food event and what is means to co-create the event.

2.3 THE FOUR REALMS OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Pine and Gilmore (1998) theorised that the experience economy can be categorised into four realms of experiences (see Figure 1): education, entertainment, esthetic and escapism. These realms reflect two attributes: the vertical axis shows the scale of customer participation, while the horizontal axis depicts connection. The four Es are distinguished by two criteria: absorption versus immersion, passive participation versus active participation. If the inner world is represented by absorption, that is, the experience is absorbed in the brain, then immersion is the reverse of that – it represents the outer world, which means the body is engaged with a particular occasion. The distinction between the passive and active participant is determined by involvement (Tom Dieck et al., 2018) and the participant's effect on a festival, for example, is directly proportional to the activity of the participant, and vice versa. The distinctive features of the four realms according to this classification are explored in detail below.
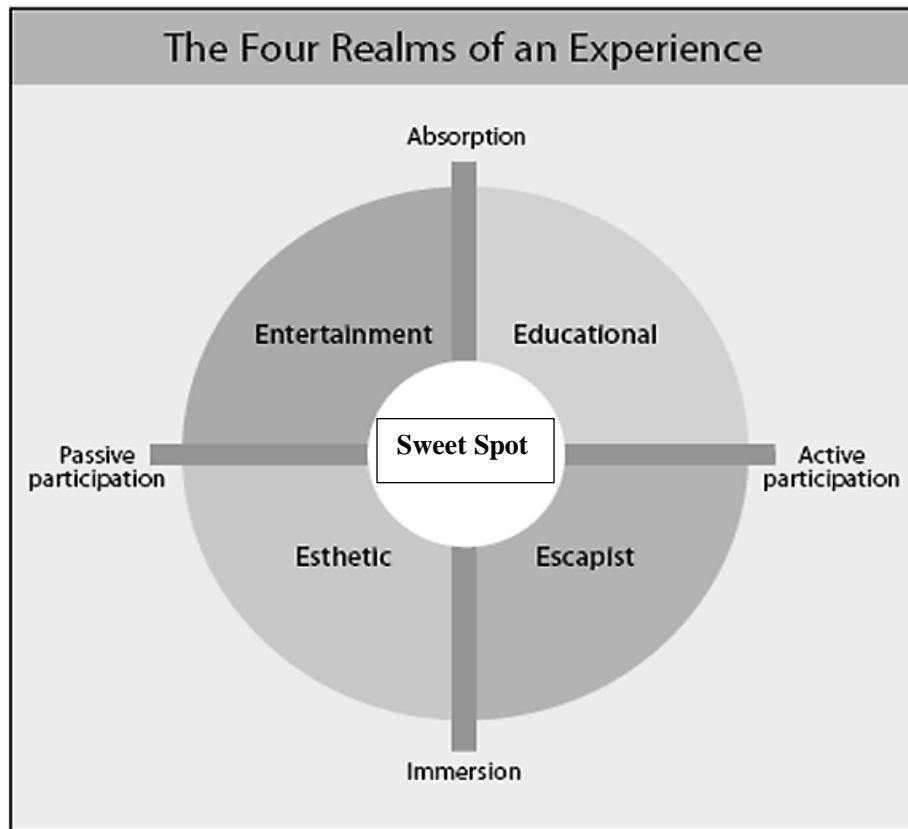
Figure 1. Four realms of experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

Education

The education realm refers to people in active pursuit of new skills and knowledge through event engagement (S. Chang, 2018; Getz & Page, 2020; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Hwang & Lyu, 2015; Manthiou et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Tom Dieck et al., 2018). Often, a volunteer has these characteristics. For example, an individual who is interested in and chooses to be a volunteer at the museum during their holiday can gain knowledge from the full-time guide and create their own narration for their guidance. A volunteer is an active participant as their behaviours are fully engaged with the occasion. More importantly, the individual absorbs knowledge into their mind such that it transforms to become their personal property.

Entertainment

Entertainment in the experience economy refers to the absorption of and passive participation in experience (S. Chang, 2018; Getz & Page, 2020; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Hwang & Lyu, 2015; Manthiou et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Tom Dieck et al., 2018). For instance, a football fan who watches the FIFA World Cup matches live in the stadium

gains an enjoyment experience that can be considered entertainment. The reason is the fan who is part of an audience does not play in the competition directly. From another perspective, footballers belong to another situation as they engage in the competition directly. In a study by Cole and Chancellor (2009), entertainment is a dominant factor for repeat participation at festivals next to programmes and amenities.

Esthetic

Esthetic refers to the immersion of and passive participation people experience psychologically and physically in a particular environment (S. Chang, 2018; Getz & Page, 2020; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Hwang & Lyu, 2015; Manthiou et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). For example, people visit art galleries and immerse themselves in the environment, but do not affect or alter any artwork. Tom Dieck et al. (2018) used the four realms to investigate visitor engagement in science festivals. As a result, they found esthetics is the primary condition that ranked ahead of the other three realms.

Escapism

People will actively immerse themselves in a situation they want to experience which is often different from their daily lives but rather something they desire or wish for. In reality, people have a strong desire to change their current situation if they could put it into action. It is commonly recognised that people are more susceptible to deeper immersive experience when engaging in community events, special events and food events. In Figure 1, escapism is located under active participation and is perceived as an immersive experience in order to gain relaxation physically (S. Chang, 2018; Getz & Page, 2020; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Hwang & Lyu, 2015; Manthiou et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Tom Dieck et al., 2018).

Sweet spot

The sweet spot, also known as the richest experience that encompasses all the other experiences, is located at the centre of the four realms of experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Despite numerous authors investigating the four realms of experience in various disciplines, the concept of the sweet spot is neglected by scholars. Oh et al. (2007) studied the bed-and-breakfast industry to examine models of experience economy concepts; the four realms of experience were evident, but they did not validate the existence of the sweet spot through the research. More recently, Thanh and Kirova (2018) demonstrated that the sweet spot does exist; however, this finding emerged from the study of various activities in wine tourism.

Several studies have drawn upon the four realms of experience economy in diverse contexts: wine tourism (Thanh & Kirova, 2018), science festivals (Tom Dieck et al., 2018), lodging and tourism (Oh et al., 2007), museums and music festivals (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). They have provided a holistic understanding of experience that extends to other attributes. Manthiou et al. (2014) examined the impact of attendees' experiences at festivals. According to the author, results demonstrated the four realms of experience reflected in future behaviour, namely vivid memory and loyalty. Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) demonstrated that the significance of the four realms is different in different contexts, and the authors found that education is a decisive factor for satisfaction in museum tourism. According to these studies, not all experiences include the four Es (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Tom Dieck et al., 2018). This is noteworthy, as Pine and Gilmore (1999) pointed out that the escapist experience encompasses the educational and entertainment realm. Finally, Thanh and Kirova (2018) mentioned that the sweet spot is a combination involving the four realms of experience, as described by Pine and Gilmore (1999), but only some events have an opportunity to engage the four dimensions of experience at the same time.

2.4 THE EVOLUTION OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

The experience economy has been undergoing some transformations owing to changes in people, such as consumer desire and pursuit of hedonism (Richards, 2015; Smit & Melissen, 2018). Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2019) revealed that experience economy is a flexible concept that is available to be transformed according to what people regard as important experiences rather than material value. This opinion that material value is no longer a prime consideration of consumers was also offered by Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2014) and Smit and Melissen (2018).

Richards (2015) realised that gastronomy experiences can be reflected in the evolution of the experience economy through two generations. Staging experiences is the first-generation experience economy in which a receiver gains an experience from an organisation's innovation and creativity. The first generation of gastronomy experiences emphasised their thematic nature, such as a tomato festival, noodle market or oyster festival. Karpov and Merzlov (2016) demonstrated that staging an experience is not enough to satisfy customers, as they are looking for creation, innovation and in-depth involvement. Hence, the second-generation experience economy emerged transformed through co-creation. Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) highlighted that the concept of co-creation is expanded in the experience

economy, as involvement, innovation and creativity are attributed to co-creation, which is closer to the potential of the second- and third-generation experience economy. The term 'co-creation' describes a joint collaboration by the customer and the company through interaction; it is consumer-oriented and promotes active participation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) pointed out that co-creation is a method for people to generate experience within personal creativity and innovation, which increases value for individuals.

Event attendees perform dual roles in the second-generation experience economy. The second-generation experience economy refers to consumers as "co-creators" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), the designers (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009) of experiences. Getz and Page (2020) indicated that event producers have become event designers and co-creators (p.39). Specifically, the term 'prosumers' was used widely by Alvin Toffler (1980); it is a term which combines both production and consumption, consumers and producers. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) highlighted that prosumption exists in both positive and negative senses, and has been rapidly developing due to the nature of Web 2.0. The authors called the prosumer a temporary employee without financial compensation. Ritzer et al. (2012) argued that people are involved in production and consumption when they produce their experience, and claimed that the concept of the prosumer is similar to value co-creation, which has been described by numerous scholars. Prosumers are usually present at food events (Getz et al., 2015; Hall & Sharples, 2008). Organ et al. (2015) stated that festivals offers a platform for consumers and producers to interact. Richards (2015) argued that consumers are the directors of the second-generation experience economy when compared with producers. In sum, the second-generation experience economy is a co-creation process generated by producer and customer, both as stakeholders of events.

The procedure of the second-generation experience economy allows the participant to add their personal value to the event through interaction in an experience that is totally unique and meaningful owing to the fact that they have jointly organised it, and this is evidenced by several scholars (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Clearly, this means that the customer and the business create customised value and experience together through interaction; they are collaborators not merely a giver and a recipient. In particular, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) advised that "Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one" (p. 28). In addition, Toffler (1980) expected that the experience created by self-producers is more valuable, which

is the same as the second-generation experience economy. In this perspective, the business is like a supplier which provides an appropriate servicescape for customers to create their experience (Carù & Cova, 2003).

There are few studies that have examined the relationship between the four realms of experience and other consequent variables, such as well-being perception (Hwang & Lee, 2019), satisfaction (Song et al., 2015) and loyalty (Ali et al., 2014; S. Kim et al., 2019; Manthiou et al., 2014). Loyalty is a long-term stable relationship between a consumer and an organisation that shows the intention to revisit (Tanford & Jung, 2017), and which is highly reliant on the quality of the experience (Cole & Illum, 2006), memorability (Cole & Chancellor, 2009) and satisfaction (Y. H. Kim et al., 2015). Scholars have employed quantitative research to indicate how the four realms of the experience economy lead to a significant impact on memory and a resultant impact on attendees' loyalty. This has been further analysed based on particular festivals and resort hotels (Ali et al., 2014; Manthiou et al., 2014). In a resort, the entertainment experience is the most important realm (Ali et al., 2014). Manthiou et al. (2014) stated that entertainment and esthetics are the dominant factors in attendees' loyalty to a music festival. In addition, Tanford and Jung (2017) claimed that loyalty is linked to satisfaction, which relies on festival attributes. Tangible and intangible attributes correspond to the resultant level of satisfaction and loyalty. In another study, Cole and Chancellor (2009) stated that programmes, amenities and entertainment are festival attributes that determine the relationship with overall experience, satisfaction and revisit intention. This research implies that different attributes do have an effect on the different behaviours, directly and indirectly.

Recent research by Kirillova et al. (2017a, 2017b) conceptualised a third-generation experience economy that places its emphasis on self-actualisation. According to the social situation, people do not need to worry unduly about survival owing to prosperity and strength (Smit & Melissen, 2018; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014). In addition, Richards (2015) and Smit and Melissen (2018) noted that the consumption of lifestyle has increased rapidly, because people have abundant money and leisure time to spend on experiences that pursue the next level of needs, shaping experience into the hierarchy of needs theorised by Maslow. Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) stated that the buying behaviour of customers is totally different when it evolves from demand to desire, while Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2014) indicated that desire involves experience and self-improvement owing to life attitudes having changed and the world becoming more wealthy, so that people want to improve their

quality of life. Combining these two theories, it is easy to understand the concept of the third-generation experience economy. As a result, the third-generation experience economy is the progress of self-actualisation based on co-creation and seems to relate somewhat to more exclusive events (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines the research design. It begins with an introduction to the research paradigm covering the philosophies and theoretical perspectives of the research. Following that, the next section introduces netnography as the research method. Finally, the chapter explains thematic analysis, which is used as the system of data analysis.

3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Getz (2018) stated that a paradigm is a director involving various dimensions that are necessary for research. A research paradigm is the worldview of the researcher, wherein the researcher's personal beliefs, values and attitudes, are reflected in their research (Crotty, 1988). Blaikie (2007) demonstrated that the research paradigm is associated with the ideas, social experience and social reality of researchers. Ontology refers to "what exists", which means a philosophical understanding of the nature of reality (Blaikie, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2018; Lapan et al., 2012). Epistemology refers to the "theory of knowledge" (Blaikie, 2007, p. 18), that is, how to absorb knowledge, and what to absorb as knowledge, in the recognised reality (Crotty, 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gray, 2018). Clearly, the term 'ontology' describes how to view the existence of the world, while 'epistemology' is concerned with how to view diverse phenomena in the world.

Social constructivism is the epistemology used in this research, which is constructivism combined with interpretivism (Creswell, 2014). Relativism is the ontology adopted in social constructionism, whose standpoint is that multiple realities exist in a kind of construction (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Blaikie (2007) believed that meaning is generated by construction. Constructionism regards "the individual and society [as] inseparable" (O'Donoghue, 2019, p. 17), which means the generation of meaning is interrelated with the surrounding society individuals are living (Lapan et al., 2012; O'Donoghue, 2019). Constructivism emphasises that knowledge emerges through the individuals' interactions within the environment in the course of experience, and meaning does not exist if it is not in touch with reality (Crotty, 1998). Creswell (2013, 2014) observed that meaning in constructivism stands on subjective perspectives that are derived from experience, and underpinned by the personal background consisting of beliefs and values. Hence, meanings are different for different people in the same situation. Constructionism holds that there is a thing without meaning until it is researched, investigated and identified (Gray, 2018).

Constructivism combines with a qualitative methodology that concentrates multiple descriptions, such as impacts, value and so on, from evaluating groups (Getz, 2018). The strength of constructivism is that it provides the researcher with the ability to recognise and understand differences within various issues. Social constructivist research uses the inductive method to generate standpoints and trends from various data concentrated on a minority of voices. Several authors (Blaikie, 2007; Gray, 2018; O'Donoghue, 2019) have claimed that interpretive studies are commonly used for the investigation of personal experiences, perceptions and meanings, which is relevant to the research topic of this dissertation. The researcher observes the changes in the society, using their own interpretation to understand a new social phenomenon.

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that using qualitative research within the social constructivist paradigm is a composite approach that meets the aim of the research, which in this study is to understand attendees' experiences of Dîner en Blanc worldwide. Gray (2018) and Yilmaz (2013) described qualitative research as a bottom-up method, which is used widely and combines diverse theories and methods to analyse a new phenomenon. Furthermore, qualitative research is an inductive process that relied on understanding through an interpretation of data to establish a theory (Creswell, 2013; Lapan et al., 2012; Yilmaz, 2013).

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A number of authors have adopted the experience economy as a framework for their study, with Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four realms of experience as variables to investigate diverse intentions through quantitative research (Ali et al., 2014; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Manthiou et al., 2014). Nonetheless, qualitative research has been used by several researchers who have observed the experience economy in various fields (Morgan, 2008; Thanh & Kirova, 2018). Morgan (2008) used a qualitative approach to investigate attendees' experiences based on the prism of event experience encompassed by internal and external elements, including design and programming, physical organisation, social interaction, personal benefits, symbolic meanings and cultural communication. The author posted a topic for attendees to publish their comments in a publicly accessible forum, collecting data through netnography. Another study conducted by Thanh and Kirova (2018) also employed netnography to collect tourists' reviews posted on a travel-related website, which utilised the experience economy concept to explore the tourist experience in wine tourism. The study of Sthapit (2018) used netnography to investigate tourists' experiences in hotels by collecting data from a particular website and focusing on a few research words. Adopting qualitative research allows attendees'

experiences to be observed from multiple perspectives, while enabling the researcher to engage with each individual's voice.

Netnography was selected as the research method to gain secondary data for this study. Otherwise known as online ethnography, digital ethnography and web ethnography before becoming widely known as 'netnography' (Blichfeldt & Marabese, 2014; Gray, 2018; Kozinets, 1998, 2002, 2010, 2015; Xu & Wu, 2018), the method allows access to vast amounts of data that are readily accessible online. Getz and Patterson (2013) stated that netnography can capture large amounts of data to conduct research, which is impossible with other methods. This is a key feature for the researcher seeking international perspectives rather than focusing on a particular location. Kozinets (2010) argued that social media and life have an inseparable relationship thus resulting in the formation of online communities which allow people to access a vast amount of experience in online resources and across their field of interest (Gray, 2018; Jong, 2019; Mkono, 2012), without the limitations of dispersed geography, nationality, race and so on. At the same time, social media has generated a new opportunity for researchers in broader and more accessible data (Bertilsson, 2014).

This research aimed to evaluate the role of attendees and their experiences of **Dîner** en Blanc, hence the data collection method needed to collect actual descriptions of the attendees' experiences without bias. Kozinets (1998) addressed the fact that netnography deals with a variety of online data formats, such as texts, photographs, videos, conversation. Netnography promotes efficiency and privacy, and it is less intensive in terms of the time and resources required during research compared with ethnography (Kozinets, 2010), and has better confidentiality when sensitive information is collected (Jong, 2019; Kozinets, 2002; Mkono, 2011, 2012; Morgan, 2008).

In this study, the researcher adopted the position of non-participant observer of textual contents. Bertilsson (2014) classified participants into active and passive participants, according to the engagement in the research. Active participants or participant-observers are researchers who become a member of an online community to investigate it, whereas passive participants are non-participants who collect data without direct contact with online communities (Mkono, 2011). Data collected through netnography in the form of non-participant observation is holistic and allows an in-depth analysis to be conducted. Comparing their various characteristics, netnography as applied in this study is better than ethnography in an online environment.

To date, netnography has been approved by numerous authors in their research in different disciplines. Tavakoli and Wijesinghe (2019) systematically reviewed the use of netnography in tourism and hospitality studies. The data showed the most frequently utilised sources were blogs – 36 out of 100 studies. It is worth noting that, in their review, only one journal article selected netnography as a research method in event management, out of 85 studies in total. This was a study by Morgan (2008), who employed netnography to investigate attendees' experiences at the 2005 Sidmouth Folk Festival, drawing on accounts which were published on a website.

According to Tan (2016), food blogs are especially popular and a valuable platform for the investigation of experiences, as they provide subjective and rich resources (Bosangit et al., 2015). Event attendees instantly share their views, thoughts and experiences through social media during events and festivals, which Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2019) considered to be a form of co-creation. The blog is the primary medium used to engage with event attendees in the study presented in this dissertation.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The data collection process follows Kozinets' (2002, 2010) six-step procedures for conducting netnography. The procedures involved: (i) planning, (ii) entree, (iii) data collection, (iv) analysis and interpretation, (v) research representation, and (vi) evaluation.

Step 1: Planning

In the first step, the researcher chose a target online community for data collection. The advantages of blogs are multiple and match this study, involving subjective personal opinions (Bosangit et al., 2015; Hookway & Snee, 2019; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008), first-hand textual information (Hookway & Snee, 2019; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008), and thicker and richer data (Bosangit et al., 2015; Chandralal et al., 2015; Hookway & Snee, 2019). Generally, blogs have sufficient textual content compared with other social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube). Blogs are seen as self-expression, in contrast to Twitter and Facebook, which are short dynamic updates (as cited in Hookway & Snee, 2019, p. 1355). In particular, blogs are individual user-generated content that is posted by bloggers on the internet. The content posted in blogs includes words, photos and video, which provides large amounts of data for analysis. Gray (2018) claimed that blogs are online communication platforms with an abundance of resources. Kozinets (2010) emphasised that text has the

dominant status in blogs rather than photos and graphics. Indeed, the blog is one of the dominant social media channels for people to share their narratives and stories online. A large number of followers and comments are bonus points for data selection, but these are not the only criteria. Most of the viewers of the blogs did not leave comments after reading. The relevance of the content in terms of abundant textual description is also paramount to the data being selected for the study.

Step 2: Entree
The data collection process took place from the beginning of May 2020. Sampling is a process of choosing and filtering samples that is related to data quality and quantity. Gray (2018) suggested that purposeful sampling is helpful for qualitative research, rather than random sampling. This study adopted purposeful sampling so that sufficient information related to the study could be collected. The term purposeful sampling, or purposive sampling (Lapan et al., 2012; Yin, 2016), is based on the selection of the area in which to carry out the data collection in studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Kozinets (2010) suggested focusing search engines to locate specific communities. Hence, Google and Yahoo were used in this study. Gathering data through particular search engines, the study chose certain keywords such as: "Dîner en Blanc blog", "Dîner en Blanc narrative", "Dîner en Blanc experience", "Secret posh picnic", and "Dîner en Blanc event". The sample size relies on specific approaches that have been chosen in qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

In order to collect valid data, the criteria for data selection were as set out below:
1. Blog must be written entirely in English.
2. Bloggers must be attendees of Dîner en Blanc, as new attendees, team leaders, or previous attendees.
3. Bloggers must have attended at least once between 2015 and 2020.

Clearly, English is a universal language around the world and refers to an identified language used for this data collection. Also, English is advantageous for collecting data when the research range is an international perspective, since this study aimed to observe international views without any limitation on the destination, rejecting any distinction according to age, race, nationality, gender and so on. By selecting textual contents in English, time for data transcription is saved. The study data was collected from individuals who have posted their participant experience through blogs post-event. The content and sentiments online must be provided by participants who have first-hand experience of Dîner en Blanc.

Step 3: Data collection

Data was imported to Microsoft Excel software, which was used to replace the pen and paper technique; this made capturing the data effective. The data which was gathered was linked with research questions, such as blog title, location, the frequency the blogger has been to the event, the year they participated in **Dîner** en Blanc, and attendees' narrative (see Table 1).

Table 1. Data collection template

No	Channel	Blog Title	Blog Publisher	Year Attended	City	Frequency	Revisit intention	Content		Website
								Positive	Negative	

Step 4: Data analysis

An event has three processes or stages, namely before, during and after the event (DeLisle, 2014), whereas the Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK) splits events into five different phases to understand the different event processes (Silvers et al., 2005). The EMBOK was begun in 1999 and is a model that provides a comprehensive approach for the analysis of an event in context. The latest version of EMBOK encompasses core competencies for event management, including processes, phases, core values and domains, as shown in Figure 2. This study employs the five phases of an event suggested under the EMBOK model to enable the researcher to identity, classify and analyse Dîner en Blanc event processes (see Table 5, p. 30-31). They are: initiation, planning, implementation, the event, and closure.
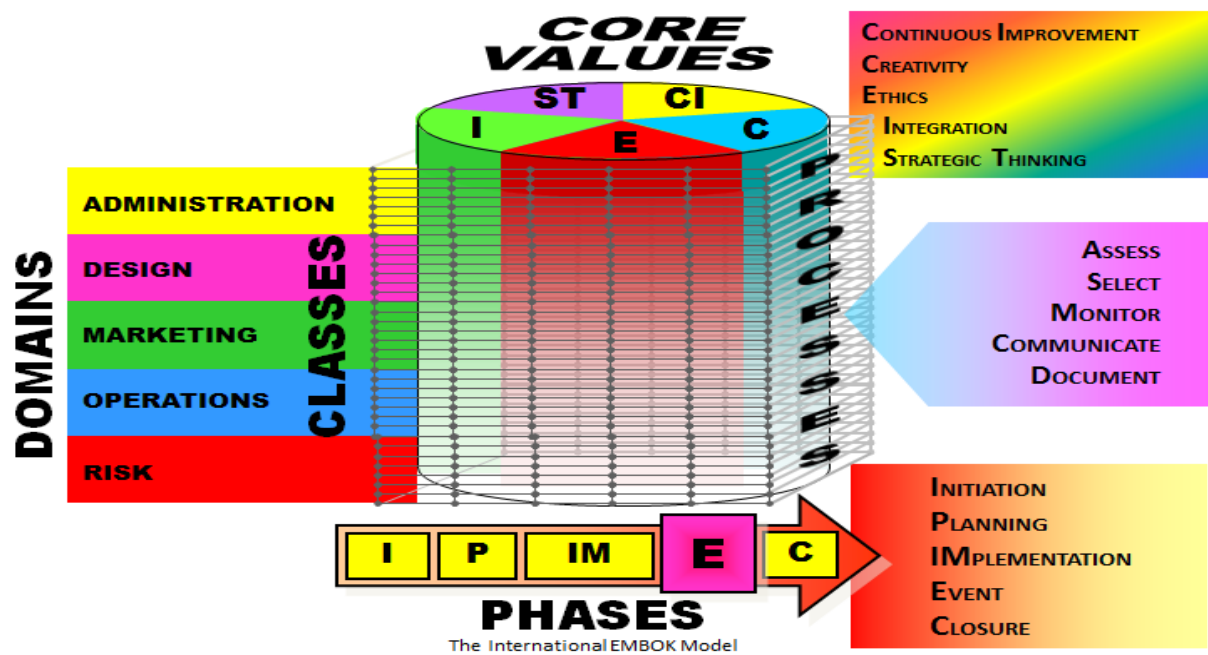
Figure 2. The EMBOK model (EMBOK model, n.d.).

The strengths of employing qualitative research approaches in this study are clear. Qualitative research is flexible in situations that do not yield standard answers; hence, such research collects respondents' perceptions openly and in depth (Johnson & Harris, 2002; Yilmaz, 2013; Yin, 2016). As Gray (2018) and Creswell (2014) indicated, qualitative research synthesises the views of individuals to emphasise the meaning of the data. Compared with quantitative research as statistical analysis, qualitative research is text and image analysis (Creswell, 2014). Importantly, Yilmaz (2013) indicated that data formats of qualitative research are diverse, and can include text, photography, video etc.

In order to analyse the collected data holistically, thematic analysis was employed as a commonly used netnographic data analysis approach in this study. Despite netnography being used commonly for data collection, the data analysis approach differs among diverse researchers due to the different objectives of their studies. The following analytical approaches have been used by several authors for netnography: grounded theory (Sthapit, 2018); thematic analysis (Mkono, 2011; Thanh & Kirova, 2018; Wu & Pearce, 2014); and content analysis (Chandralal et al., 2015; Morgan, 2008). Walters (2016) highlighted thematic analysis being effectively adopted in studying textual and visual content in social media. Braun and Clarke (2006) demonstrated that the flexibility of thematic analysis adopted in qualitative research is useful, particularly in psychological interpretation. It is worth noting that thematic analysis is a reliable method for constructionists who investigate

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meaning and experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, thematic analysis was an appropriate tool to apply to this study.

Braun and Clarke (2006) and Walters (2016) both claimed that thematic analysis is based on identified themes or patterns of data to generate the findings. Six stages of thematic analysis were observed (see Table 2). For the purpose of this study, this researcher has consolidated the steps suggested by the authors to analyse the data in this study.

Table 2. Data analysis process adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) and Walters (2016).

Step	The researcher	(Braun & Clarke, 2006)	(Walters, 2016)
1	Familiarising with data through initial reading of data	Familiarising with data	Initial reading of texts to gain familiarity
2	Repeated readings and generating codes	Generating initial codes	Repeated readings to code texts
3	Development of basic themes according to theoretical framework	Searching for themes	Development of basic themes
4	Consolidate into organising themes	Reviewing themes	Consolidate into organising themes
5	Derived key themes and networks	Defining and naming themes	Derive global themes and networks
6	Producing the report	Producing the report	Describe, explore and analyse networks

Despite the titles of each phase being different, the procedures are similar. The key word of the first step is familiarisation, which means reading data that has been collected in advance and confirming the data can be devoted to a particular study. In this case, the selected blogs are in English, which saves time in data transcription. The second step is generating initial codes after repeated readings, the researcher reading the collected data carefully, and picking up interesting features to be codes. It is a process intended to systematically sort out the entire

set of data into substantial codes, which is an accurate vocabulary for long description similar to labels. Donaghy (2014) argued that open coding should replace thematic coding as it is more flexible and relevant to the research. Step three is the development of the basic theme according to the theoretical framework. In this study, the themes have been set based on Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four realms of experience, which means the analysis is theory-driven. Braun and Clarke (2006) addressed the selection of coding derived from the characteristics of themes which focused on data or theory. The fourth phase is allocating codes into identified themes, which pairs similarities into correspondent themes. The next phase is naming new themes that are relevant to the research questions, based on the results of previous steps. The final step is to produce a report in which the results are sorted out. The next chapter outlines findings that rely on the usage of the methodology previously explained.

Step 5: Research presentation

In sum, 20 blogs have been collected, 12 blogs met the criteria shown above (see step 2, p. 21) and have been used for this study. In order to maintain true and fair data collection, eight blogs were omitted from the list for diverse reasons: lacking textual content compared with photos, being invited by the host as social media, and not giving accurate attendance year and location. Figure 3 highlights the steps of the data selection process adopted by Kozinets (2002, 2010).
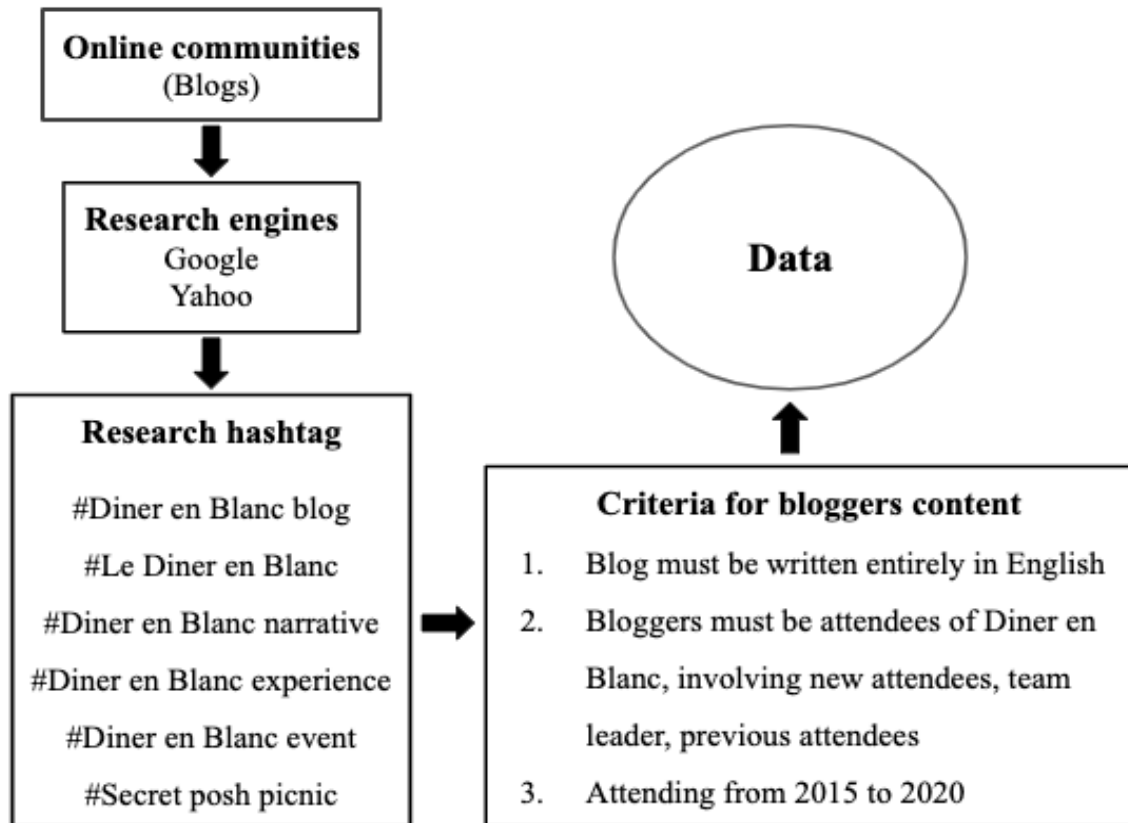
Figure 3. Data selection process

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics is a controversial topic debated by numerous authors who have used netnography (Jong, 2019; Kozinets, 1998, 2002; Morgan, 2008; Rokka, 2010). Kozinets (2002) and Jong (2019) addressed two segments that are of concern, informed consent and private/public medium, relating to data ownership and the sensitivity of the research topic (Jong, 2019; Salzmann-Erikson & Eriksson, 2012), for instance, using original published data, and avoiding sensitive and private information if it is obtained without informed consent. Kozinets (1998) claimed that the researcher must guarantee and respect the ethical considerations, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

Following the ethical considerations discussed by Kozinets (1998, 2002), using data rationally and legally is a priority in my study. All selected blogs are open access for the public without any password and registration requirements. In other words, the data used are publicly available data. Further, to protect the identity of the bloggers, information pertaining to their personal profile (for example, gender, age, name and blog title) have been removed. Instead, numbers have been used to replace the bloggers' names. The researcher did not have

direct interaction with bloggers, adopting a non-participant observation in this study. Due to photos and videos involving ethical considerations, they were not used in this analysis; the data was only collected and downloaded as textual content from the selected public blogs. Therefore, the need for ethical consent was credibly avoided.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings obtained from data collected from 12 blogs, which are post-event narratives by bloggers who had attended Dîner en Blanc from 2015 to 2020.

4.1 ATTENDEES' BLOGS

12 blogs with stories and review of past attendees' experience at Dîner en Blanc from 2015 to 2020 were selected for this study (see Table 3).

Table 3. Bloggers' profiles

Bloggers	Attended city and country	Attended year	Frequency	Revisit
B1	Fort Lauderdale (USA)	2019	1	YES
B2	New York (USA)	2019	2	YES
B3	Atlanta (USA)	2019	1	YES
B4	Paris (France)	2019	5	YES
B5	Paris (France)	2018	1	N/A
B6	Memphis (USA)	2018	1	YES
B7	Baltimore (USA)	2017	1	YES
B8	Perth (Australia)	2017	2	YES
B9	Albuquerque (USA)	2017	3	N/A
B10	Washington DC (USA)	2017	1	YES
B11	Atlanta (USA)	2015	1	YES
B12	New York (USA)	2015	1	YES

Using a purposeful sampling technique, the search included keywords such as Dîner en Blanc which was often also displayed in the title. The intention of this research was to investigate

the attendees' experiences of Dîner en Blanc globally, as this worldwide event spans five continents and more than 80 cities. In total, there are data from 12 bloggers for this study, covering 10 host cities in three different countries, the United States of America (USA), Australia and France. Despite the keyword being dominant, the posts published by bloggers ranked highly when searching on Google and Yahoo. The time span is from 2015 to 2020.

All bloggers had been to Dîner en Blanc at least once, if not multiple times, as an attendee while others engaged with the event as volunteers. Through their blog posts, they demonstrated diverse experience at the event. In addition, due to the characteristics of **Dîner** en Blanc, some bloggers were attendees, and others voluntarily applied to be bus or table leaders. Two bloggers out of the 12 were bus leaders. For instance, one blogger said, "I wanted to enhance my experience by becoming a Table Leader". Another blogger mentioned, "this year I decided to step up and volunteer and learn something new so I would have MORE to share with you all". The frequency of attendance was one to five times, with eight bloggers stating they were first-time attendees. The level of the experiences of first-time attendees and frequent attendees are different. Among all the bloggers, 10 bloggers expressed an intention to participate in Dîner en Blanc again for next year's event. Two bloggers did not mention their revisit intention in the blog, as seen in Table 4. Despite the bloggers posting their blog after the event, the narratives about their experience were recounted from pre-event to post-event, thus narrating the whole experience of Dîner en Blanc.

Table 4. Bloggers' intentions to repeat their participation at Dîner en Blanc

Blogger number	Narrative of revisit intention

B1	I am very much looking forward to the next one in Florida, and hope to attend internationally one day!
B2	But most of us concur that we are looking forward to next year's DEB NYC festivities.
B3	I had a great time at this year's Diner en Blanc. I am looking forward to dining next year. Stay tuned for updates for the 2020 Diner en Blanc.
B4	See y'all next year!
B6	I can hardly wait for next year.
B8	I'm keen to see the third Diner en Blanc next year.
B9	But for now, know that it was awesome and I totally want to do it again.
B10	Invite me to Baltimore's next year so I can compare. Next year we are absolutely opting for less.
B11	YES!! I would travel back to Paris just for Diner en Blanc!
B12	Count me in for next year.

4.2 THE JOURNEY OF DINER EN BLANC

The programme experience of Dîner en Blanc can be split into seven stages, involving registration time, preparation time, showtime, setup time, party time, cleaning time and review time. Table 5 follows the journey of a typical Dîner en Blanc attendee. The phases explicitly state the functions of event management in the first column, according to the EMBOK process (See Figure 2, p. 23). The second column presents the actual journey the attendees experienced for Dîner en Blanc. In particular, each part of the journey includes different activities that have an impact on the event attendees' experiences, as shown in the third column.

Table 5. The journey of Dîner en Blanc compared with EMBOK phases

EMBOK Process – Event Organiser	Dîner en Blanc - Prosumer	Activities in each phase

Initiation (Research)	1.Registration time	• Registration phase 1 - Member • Registration phase 2 - Guest • Registration phase 3 - Waiting list
Planning (Requirements/Specifications, Tactics development)	2.Preparation time	• Select attire • Decide menu • Order goods • Read tradition • Research information
	3.Showtime	• Dressing up • Gathering • Transport
Implementation (Coordinating & Contracting)	4.Setup time	• Secret location • Set up table • Decorate eventspace • View and atmosphere of the event location
The Event	5.Party time	• DJ performance • Sparkle • Napkin twirl • Dance • Dinner • Social interaction
Closure (Shutdown, Feedback & Review, Evaluation, Knowledge transfer)	6.Cleaning time	• Pack down table • Pick up garbage • Clean location
	7.Review time	• Posting on social media • Sharing with friends and family

The following steps provides insights into the preparation and organisation of a Dîner en Blanc.

Step 1: Registration time

Participants have to register to attend Dîner en Blanc. The registration procedure is divided into three phases: Member registration, Guest registration and Waiting list. The registration process works well as a strategy to raise people's curiosity.

☐ Registration phase 1 - Member

Members who have participated in Dîner en Blanc in the past have priority in attending the event next year. In addition, in phase 1 attendees have the opportunity to invite anyone they want with a formal invitation that provides a sense of exclusivity.

☐ Registration phase 2 - Guest

Phase 2 involves the registration of guests who have been invited by phase 1 members.

☐ Registration phase 3 - Waiting list

Phase 3 includes a waiting list for people who were unable to get through phase 1 and phase 2 registration.

Step 2: Preparation time

This is the stage at which attendees would spend time on researching information about Dîner en Blanc, such as the history, founder and characteristics, which is a learning process regardless of whether the attendee has registered for the event or was invited to it. In particular, the attendees carefully read brochures provided by the host as an information letter, including dress code, transportation, regulations, basket items etc. At this stage, attendees also search for and prepare essential items for Dîner en Blanc following the checklist provided by the host, scanning through and surveying previous attendees' posts and comments in social media as references for potential attendees. Food and attire are the two more important items for the event, and they require a lot of time devoted to preparation. An alternative, if the attendee is not interested in preparing food and furniture, is that Dîner en Blanc has ongoing collaborations with furnishers, vintners and restaurants to provide basic items to attendees. The items must be pre-ordered and purchased before the deadline.

Step 3: Showtime

Showtime time refers to the delivery of the actual event. The locale is unknown to the attendees until it is communicated on the day of the event by way of phone text messages. Attendees meet at the gathering point and travel to the event location together.

Step 4: Setup time

Setup time is a special section of Dîner en Blanc and one of the highlights. All attendees set up their table at the assigned spot based on their preparation with "all white" as the foundation theme. Attendees have the freedom to make decisions on the look of their table, for example, decoration display, their choice of food and tableware.

Step 5: Party time

Party time is the main course of the event and the reason for people attending Dîner en Blanc. The napkin twirl, DJ performances, dinner, the sparkle, and dances are regular features at the picnic.

☐ The napkin twirl, dance and sparkle

The napkin twirl and sparkle are rituals of Dîner en Blanc that represent the signals of the start and finish of the event. Napkins are twirled as all attendees wave their white napkins at the beginning of dining. Sparkle occurs as attendees light up the darkness with sparklers at the end of dining. Additionally, attendees are entertained by live music so they are able to dance and communicate with others, whether they are friends or strangers.

☐ DJ performance

The DJ performance encompasses the event throughout the whole journey, as a live music show for attendees. This is regarded as background music by some attendees. On the other hand, some attendees dance to the music together.

☐ Dinner

Dinner is the dominant part of the event. In the surrounding environment, attendees eat and share all foods and beverages prepared by themselves. Dining outdoors with strangers or amidst familiar people at a landmark location is a truly memorable experience.

Step 6: Cleaning time

Unlike other events, attendees need to pack down after themselves at Dîner en Blanc. Cleaning the areas they had occupied and reverting the state of the event location to its original form is typically the responsibility of stakeholders, who consist of organisers, volunteers and suppliers. At Dîner en Blanc, attendees are responsible for dealing with all goods they bring and restoring the event location to its original form, regardless of whether they have the role of leaders or attendees.

Step 7: Review time
Review time is when attendees share their experiences through diverse formats, for example, chatting about their experience with their friends and family through word of mouth, or posting about it on social media.

Using attendees' perspectives and roles to reveal the complete sequence of phases of the event is a new finding. The journey of Dîner en Blanc provides a comprehensive exposure of the event. The phases have been explained in detail within corresponding activities. Undoubtedly, event attendees have the opportunity to obtain diverse experiences within their active engagement at different phases. The experience in each phase is different based on various elements, and it is interesting to evaluate this in the research data as set out in the next section, which presents the findings from non-participant observation of selected blogs.

4.3 EXPERIENCE ATTRIBUTES OF DINER EN BLANC

Tradition
The event dictates attendees must dress in white. Unlike other regular events, attendees are required to make provision of personal supplies for the event, decorate the event space and pack down the event location post-event. Clearly, bloggers enjoy dressing up within the particular theme and have clearly expended a lot of money and time on it. The comments on and summaries of these events are filled with positivity following the experiences. The stipulated rules also provide a good, uniform look and atmosphere in the event location. Similarly, the tradition requiring guests to bring personal supplies to decorate the event space for an event is a form of "Do It Yourself" (DIY) which enables the expression of creativity and innovation – offering opportunities to increase the involvement of the attendees. They said:

One of the main rules is to dress in all white (from head to toe) which is strictly enforced, and this really helps to create a beautiful atmosphere of togetherness and elegance. (B1)

The best thing about Diner en Blanc is that no matter how over-the-top or casual you want to dress, this is the event for it because the wardrobe is one of the things that makes this event so unique. I was chic and comfortable. (B3)

In addition, other attributes depend on the regulation as a foundation then expand to other attributes that show below. (B7)

However, the tradition of Dîner en Blanc also forms the majority of the negative accounts due to a significant notion about the required pre-event preparation that was rejected by bloggers. These bloggers' experiences stand on the opposing side of the ones who have sung the praises of the event due to the level of preparation coupled, potentially, with the lack of skill of the participant. It was a challenge for bloggers who were first-time Dîner en Blanc attendees and lacked the knowledge of and skill for preparation, packing and transporting. Nonetheless, it is evident that the rules and traditions make up a special element of Dîner en Blanc. The bloggers wrote:

… I left out the part in my fantasy where we would have to carry everything with us needed to create this fabulous experience. I was no longer excited, but I don't give up easily! (B2)

For Diner en Blanc, you are required to provide your food, tables, chairs, and tablecloths. This can be pretty overwhelming for one person. (B3)

The truth is, Dîner en Blanc requires a lot of pre-planning (that I didn't do). Throughout this whole process, I felt scatterbrained. (B7)

Location and atmosphere

The terms "venue" and "site" are normally used in the event industry to refer to the location for events (Van Der Wagen & White, 2018). The term "place" has the same meaning as venue and site but was adopted as one of the Ps within the marketing mix (Allen et al., 2011; Bowdin et al., 2011). It is worth noting that the location is one of the important attributes of

an event, and it has been mentioned more frequently than other attributes. The undisclosed location of Dîner en Blanc is one of the quirks of the event where attendees are not told where the event will be held, providing opportunities for the imagination of bloggers to run wild and, at the same time, heightening the expectation of the event and the venue. The destination remains a mystery and it is only revealed a few hours before, when attendees are escorted to the location from their assembly points. In this case, the secrecy of the location plays a significant role in the generation of the attendees' experiences of Dîner en Blanc, and the following descriptions interpret this phenomenon:

> *I was told via email that the location of the event would be revealed to me just a few hours before which was quite exciting. We are given strict instructions to keep the location a secret until the start of the event at 4pm. I really enjoyed the mystique, and so did the other 800 guests. (B1)*

> *This year we had a couple of places in mind where the secret location might be based on some of the clues the hosts were dropping, and while we had the general vicinity correct, we didn't have the exact location down. This year's location was completely out of the box and was pretty amazing. What's really interesting to me about this year's event was that the secret location was pretty unique and different. (B9)*

> *Diner en Blanc Atlanta 2015 took place on Peachtree Street in front of the iconic Fox Theater. (B11)*

It is interesting to note that the organisation of Dîner en Blanc differs across cities and countries, drawing similarities to the Olympic Games. The organisation of Dîner en Blanc is kept local, in an attempt to navigate the hidden gems of the host city. Hence, the selection of the event location is crucial and decided by the local organising team which knows best about the landmarks of the city that represent the city's image. Iconic landmarks of the city are usually heritage assets and iconic architecture that are an attraction for tourists, showcasing the image and history of the city. In actual fact, locals regularly avoid these locations in daily life due to the large influx of tourists passing through them. However, hosting a pop-up dinner concept at a landmark location is an opportunity for attendees to admire and recognise their city in a unique and unexpected manner, meanwhile offering extra revenue for the selected property (Allen et al., 2011). This creates a form of escapism and breaks the norm of the usual dining atmosphere, providing a memorable experience for the attendees and, at the

same time, instilling a sense of belonging from the fact that bloggers actively engaged in the Dîner en Blanc located at the hallmark location of the host city. Additionally, this generates a sense of pride in the city and event when they are one of the attendees. Some bloggers expressed this as follows:

> *Diner en Blanc wants guests to experience the beauty and value of their city's public spaces, and we absolutely did just that. (B1)*

> *Eating a deliciously prepared meal on the Hudson River with a few fantastic friends is the memory cherished as I prepare myself for next year's adventure! (B2)*

> *And despite us no longer living in Paris, we still make the (relatively short) trek down to The City of Light for what is always our favorite night of the year. (B4)*

> *Le Dîner en Blanc Memphis was situated with a view of the spectacular riverfront. I am so glad that I was able to attend this event. It was amazing! Unfortunately, I didn't take as many pictures as I wanted to because I was so busy taking it all in. I was beaming with pride when we were walking back to our vehicle afterwards, and were stopped by several people along the way, asking what the occasion was because it looked so beautiful from their street view. My city! We did it! I can hardly wait for next year. In the meantime, I can't stop talking about this year's experience. (B6)*

The unexpected view yet pleasant atmosphere of the event location is a warm-up period for the event, setting the scene and playing with the expectations and perceptions of the event as it easily blends in with the surroundings. This encourages attendees to be active participants in the event despite not knowing the location of the event beforehand. In Dîner en Blanc, the number of unknown attributes is greater than other events. Undoubtedly, the view and atmosphere of the event location exceeded the bloggers' expectations as they listed it as one of the 'wow' factors. Even so, one blogger said, "Greeted by WOW Factor Number One of the Evening for Dîner en Blanc Albuquerque" because there was no advance notice of this performance. Moreover, the attendees remembered these kinds of attributes as deep impressions that transform to positive experience directly and, as a result, they shared their experiences through the blogs. In this regard, labelling unknown attributes as wow factors is based on the secrecy and having little or no expectation of physical and psychological responses. Some bloggers wrote:

Our location was revealed to be Esplanade Park which provided a lovely waterfront setting for this fun event along Fort Lauderdale's scenic Riverwalk Park. (B1)

The city made the perfect backdrop, and the weather was beyond perfect. We walked into the lovely sounds of Orchestra Noir playing, aerial silk performers, and beautiful stilt walkers. (B3)

Yassss!! As far as the eye could see, there were people setting up their tables while all decked out in white. It was amazing. (B6)

Standing at the top of the hill was one of the "wow" factors of the evening, a drum line. Gotta tell you, I loved that. It was a brilliant entrance. (B9)

We watched an empty pier transform into a posh picnic space, a sea of white against the Tribeca skyline and the Hudson River. (B12)

Food

Despite the lack of description of the food at the event, it is also an integral element of Dîner en Blanc, which is advertised and marketed as a food event, dining experience, pop-up event and outdoor event by bloggers. Traditionally, the dining etiquette at Dîner en Blanc is in accordance with French culture, consisting of a meal of three courses. Now, however, the tradition has been changed owing to the complicated preparation required and also the local culture of the host city. The findings confirmed that attendees are allowed to bring any food they want without rigid requirements for three courses or French cuisine. Another option is for attendees who do not wish to prepare their own meal to have it provided through one of the event's designated local restaurants. Dîner en Blanc develops links between the host city and the event, which is a natural fusion of French cuisine and the local culture of the host city. Dîner en Blanc is not merely a food event for foodies, it is also a platform for attendees to embrace creative experiences through involvement and interaction, a catalyst for sharing and socialising. Food is one of the attributes that pass through the different phases of Dîner en Blanc, and it provided diverse experiences for bloggers:

Satchel and I opted to host a potluck-style dinner for our table, which proved to be a wonderful idea for the method to our madness. We were lucky to have had Chef Razia Sabour to create a great deal of the food and ensured our foodscape was A1.

Everyone loved the menu, and I can't stop raving about how awesome our menu was. Our menu included: brisket, charcuterie and cheese board, salmon and shrimp, lemonde, ceviche, fruit salad, Caesar salad, and orzo salad. When creating your menu, make sure that what you create is just as tasty chilled as it is warm, since the event is held outside, or it may take time to commute to the venue; not to mention that you then have to setup. I liked how our menu had a vast variety for the tastebuds. (B3)

As always seems to be the case, there's usually too much food. The idea is to make a dish and then share it around, which certainly happens. But our specific group of attendees (Team Food Society), are pretty food obsessed, and take pride in self catering the best plates! As well, we all collectively forget how much talking and wandering you end up doing, so you don't quite eat as much as you might elsewhere. (B4)

All the blogs I read prior to attending said to bring three courses: appetizer, entree and dessert. I brought all three, but I think I brought too much. (B10)

Socialising

Escaping from the routines of life to attend events is a means to obtain experiences through socialising. Socialising is an intangible attribute that passes through a few phases of Dîner en Blanc. People play dominant roles in socialising because the interaction forms the entire foundation for it and will affect the experience. Social interactions are naturally generated when attendees meet each other, and also naturally happen when they are surrounded by the event location and environment. Attendees feel a sense of togetherness in the event. Throughout the event, socialising takes place and diverse perceptions and experiences emerge. The surrounding environment and the atmosphere certainly have an influence as well. Bloggers had a positive experience when they had nice communication and interaction with others and vice versa. Oh et al. (2007) had a similar opinion, as they mentioned that the memory of an event will affect the attendees' experience, particularly in negative memory. Interacting with attendees strongly affected bloggers' experience in a positive and negative

manner. In addition, experiences affect future social relationships. Experience and socialising are interrelated. Some bloggers wrote:

I really loved how so many guests were brought together from diverse backgrounds by a love of good taste, beauty, and fun. (B1)

These eager participants are the key component to the most stylish event of the year: Le Diner en Blanc. (B2)

Your tribe determines your vibe. I am lucky that Satchel and I both know some very awesome humans. The energy at our table was unmatched. Everyone was kind, fun, and fabulous. Looking at our table, you would have thought that we had known each other for years instead of meeting each other five minutes before dinner. Make sure you dine with people who have a good vibe because it will either make or break your experience. (B3)

Speaking of wandering – part of the allure of the event is people watching, and just catching up with friends in other social circles that you rarely see... (B4)

Our table was made up of more foreigners than locals (one story I heard was the event really is a way to introduce new people to the city). Paris isn't a city where I find myself talking to strangers much, but I loved the event, and how we befriended everyone around us. Several people had attended the event in different cities around the world too. This night proved to be their favorite. For me it was the perfect excuse to be outside, and enjoy the company of friends, both old and new. (B5)

The energy was so high throughout the evening. After dinner, people were walking around, typically with a glass in hand, catching up with friends and meeting new people. (B6)

I was too busy looking to meet up with friends and missed the sparklers. I was sad but it was beautiful to witness. We chatted with one side of our neighbours and even shared some of our food and drink. It just made for a better evening. (B10)

We had captured the essence of summer spontaneity, sharing an adventurous experience with friends and strangers, far from a normal night in New York City. (B12)

On the downside, where the vibes were not as positive, a blogger wrote:

The days rolled on and I felt like I was in the dark because there was a lack of communication from our Table Leader which made an already elusive experience seem disorganized and disjointed. (B2)

Partnership

The partnership element is a surprise attribute mentioned by bloggers. Most bloggers lack the confidence to complete the DIY process by themselves when they realise that they need to produce the whole event experience of Dîner en Blanc. One of the traditions of Dîner en Blanc is that attendees must be in pairs. The supposed rationale behind this is that people tend to be more productive when they carry out a task with another person with a reasonable distribution and arrangement of work. The teamwork explained by the attendees in the blogs showed a strong sense of partnership, collaboration and co-creation from the attendees. Some bloggers described these elements as follows:

Teamwork definitely makes the dream work; right? This can be pretty overwhelming for one person, so this year I partnered with Satchel Jester to collaborate. (B3)

For the remaining items, we split them among the two of us. Grateful for my calm friend, Belinda, who balances me because I can be a bit high-strung when it comes to this kind of thing. I want everything to be right – not perfect – just right (ha!). We had to grab the rented table and chairs, then unpack all of our things and set the table up. It takes a minute to do all of this, but trust the process. We worked together on this, so it definitely made it easier. (B6)

My friend and I decided to split the responsibilities - she was responsible for the table and decor and I was responsible for the food. (B10)

Environmental sustainability

The findings show that attendees gain consciousness of their environment at Dîner en Blanc. It is not uncommon for the attendees to travel by public transportation or on foot to the location of the event. This measure is an effective way for the event to collectively lower the carbon footprint – to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and decrease traffic congestion. Furthermore, the attendees are aware and realise that less food is more, and they highlighted this in their blogs. Hence, an appropriate amount of food is prepared and packed in reusable tableware in an attempt to reduce the waste generated by the event. Packing down is another key rule of Dîner en Blanc, where attendees play a part in restoring the venue to its original state by taking away their own items and cleaning the areas occupied. The findings imply that attendees include a post-event solution in their preparation list, hence they try their best to reduce waste and rubbish during the preparation time. In addition, this practice does not just change attendees' short-term behaviours, it also inspires attendees to channel more thought towards long-term sustainability. This is a tiny part of the experience but is an inescapable experience in events. Achieving a zero-waste event is difficult, but Dîner en Blanc tries to reduce the waste as much as possible through its current recommendations and suggestions to attendees. It is a commendable thing that considers post-event work and is related to environmental issues. A blogger wrote:

> *I brought my portable dolly and loaded the majority of the items on it. I walked across the street to set up, which made my transport experience awesome. (B3)*
> *This is all after traveling in the metro while carrying tables and (white) chairs along with real dishes, glasses, and whatever meal you plan to eat. Traveling via metro is always entertaining, but it's fun spotting people going to the dinner. (B5)*
> *Again, I thought about the August heat in Memphis and the logistics, and determined that less is more. (B6)*

Entertainment programmes

The entertainment programme, such as the music at Dîner en Blanc, is probably the other segment of the event that was planned by the organiser of the event, after the selection of the venue. It is interesting to note that the programme seems secondary compared to all the other aspects mentioned before, such as the location, the opportunity to socialise and the element of food at the event. A few bloggers wrote:

> *And then there were sparklers, which lit up the entire esplanade in front of Invalides! It was magical. Throughout the night bands showed up, there were incredible*

costumes, and many guests had considered how they—and their tables—would light up at night. (B5)

There was a string quartet playing as guests arrived for the event. A DJ and a band kept the tunes going during dinner. After dinner, the party was in full effect. Between the DJ and the band, we were dancing the night away. (B6)

We started our meal with the napkin wave and ended it by lighting up our sparklers. The sea of sparklers looked really pretty tonight. (B8)

4.4 RESEARCHER'S REFLECTION ON DINER EN BLANC WITHIN THE FOUR REALMS OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY: A PRELUDE TO THE DISCUSSION CHAPTER

Based on the attributes of Dîner en Blanc, Table 6 shows attendees' activities at Dîner en Blanc located within the four realms of the experience economy, taking the four realms of the experience economy as the framework for understanding the attendees' experiences in an event.

Table 6. Attendees' activities within the four realms of the experience economy

Entertainment	Education
Attendees passively engaged by performances	*Attendees actively engaged to gain knowledge*
- DJ performance	- Logistic knowledge (preparation skills) - Environmental information and awareness
Esthetic	**Escapism**
Attendees passively immersing in surrounding	*Attendees actively participating in a different time or place*
- Immersing in the eventspace - Enjoying unique event view and atmosphere	- Registration - Transport - Social interaction - Dance

Source: Adapted from Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2012, p. 8).

4.5 THE FOUR REALMS OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY IN THE JOURNEY OF DINER EN BLANC

The thematic analysis adopted in this research aligns with the journey of Dîner en Blanc and the four realms of the experience economy as themes and sub-themes. Accordingly, the attributes and activities of Dîner en Blanc are categorised into corresponding themes as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7. Experience economy in the journey of Dîner en Blanc

Event process	Registration time	Preparation time	Showtime	Setup time	Party time	Cleaning time	Review time
Experience realm	Escapism	Education	Escapism Esthetic Education	Esthetic Education Escapism	Escapism Education Esthetic Entertain-ment	Education	Evaluation
Codes	-Registra-tion phase 1 -Registra-tion phase 2 -Registra-tion phase 3	-Select Attire -Decide menu -Order goods -Read tradition -Research information	-Dressing up -Gathering -Transport	-Secret location -Decorate eventspace -View and atmosphere of the event location	-DJ performance -Sparkle -Napkin twirl -Dance -Dinner -Social interaction	-Pack up garbage -Clean location	-Posting on social media -Sharing to friends and family

As noted by Pine and Gilmore (1998), the four realms of the experience economy are categorised in two dimensions, active versus passive participation, and immersion versus absorption. This categorisation distinguishes diverse experiences consisting of education, escapism, esthetics and entertainment. According to the findings presented here, Dîner en Blanc has several phases that direct attendees to complete this event and that generate experiences, therefore integrating attendees' experiences of the journey of Dîner en Blanc in the experience economy.

Registration time as an escapism experience
The decision to register for Dîner en Blanc is the participant's first step into the escapism realm. It is the starting point from which experiences are obtained. As mentioned above, registration time is a unique aspect of Dîner en Blanc that embraces a mysterious atmosphere for this event to be seen as exclusive. The registration phases of Dîner en Blanc are complicated with various details. Thus, exploring the overall experience of registration time shows that, although Dîner en Blanc is open to the masses, attendees must have abundant passion and motivation to complete the official procedures. These are usually individuals intending to escape their daily life and seek out new things. Attendees have completed the procedures and obtained information about Dîner en Blanc at registration time, as an escapism experience (see Table 6, p. 44). Bloggers made the following comments:

> *Through the lens of social media, I learned of Le Diner en Blanc NYC about five years ago and it instantly became added to my to-do-list. Based on the pictures and YouTube videos, I just knew that this event was fabulous; everyone looked fabulous, the location looked fabulous, and the images screamed fabulous too. Even though these exclusive events accommodate thousands of individuals annually, participants make the list by invite only. From the little information I had gathered, it seemed to hit all the areas about me that I enjoy using to create unique and EXTRAordinary experiences- a dash of mystery, creativity, good vibes, style, and an opportunity to relish in small details that make a memorable impact. (1st year). (B2)*

> *I first heard about DEB years ago when I saw a Youtube video of Le Diner en Blanc in Paris. It looked absolutely magical! I found out that they had these dinners in the U.S. but unfortunately my city of Atlanta was not listed until 2014. I made every attempt to attend it this year and it was worth it! (B11)*

Preparation time as an education experience

From Pine and Gilmore's (1999) standpoint, an education experience is active and absorbing, which means people are actively participating to gain new knowledge. Attendees must obey Dîner en Blanc's tradition as a premise to the next phase, therefore attendees contribute a lot of time in preparation for the event. Certainly, preparation time is time needed to understand the tradition and follow it to complete this event smoothly, which is an education experience. Firstly, attendees need to read the basic information brochures about Dîner en Blanc provided by the producer. Attendees are actively researching extra information for Dîner en Blanc through social media, and preparing essential items, such as attire, decoration and tableware. They do not just collect knowledge, they also extract useful information which then becomes their own knowledge as they absorb it. After that, they use their own knowledge in the current and following phases. Pre-event impressions are gained through the information they have been researching from diverse channels, particularly from previous attendees' blogs. Bloggers had expectations and good impressions of Dîner en Blanc when they were researching it during their preparation time. In particular, they gain an understanding of their tasks in regard to the event before they attend. According to phases of preparation, gaining new information and knowledge is identified by bloggers who actively contributed plenty of time for understanding, obedience and preparation, which can be associated with an education experience. For example, a blogger wrote:

> *After signing up, I started doing my research. Yeah, fine time to start researching (ha!). I soon learned that this all-white picnic was a huge deal. There was still table decor to figure out. While researching, I started to get overwhelmed. I went down the Pinterest "rabbit hole" and that was all she wrote. Some of the setups are so elaborate. Again, I thought about the August heat in Memphis and the logistics, and determined that less is more. In addition to figuring out how many flowers, candles, and string lights we wanted on the table, we also had to think about our place settings. I couldn't imagine dragging a table and chairs in the August heat, so we opted to rent ours. Hey, I pay for convenience. We also opted to order food ahead to pick up at the venue when we arrived. Another good decision for a first time attendee. (B6)*

Showtime & set-up time as escapism and esthetic experience

After obtaining escapism and education experiences, showtime is a return to an escapism experience. In particular, its escapism experience is a little bit different to registration time.

Showtime actively applies that mental state in action which actually moves the attendees away from the familiar environment they are usually in, which is an escapism experience. Arriving at the gathering location, attendees are immersed in a distinctive scene that is produced by other attendees, who dress up in an all-white attire; this is an esthetic experience. Indeed, this scene attracts attention from the pedestrians who are passing through the location. A blogger wrote:

> *The adventure had begun, and we continued following a series of additional instructions, all the while attracting lots of attention, no doubt, due to our matching white outfits, tables, and chairs. (B12)*

Despite a few of the bloggers having negative impressions about the DIY nature of the engagement at the beginning, the experience was changed at setup time when they participated in the production. The findings confirmed that attendees easily obtained esthetic experience at setup time when they enjoyed the exotic environment. In addition, attendees arriving at the event location and setting up tables and decorations are channelling their creative thoughts, which translates into an escapism experience. A blogger wrote:

> *I witnessed levels of creativity that leave very little left to the imagination in the most fabulous ways! (B2)*

Party time as a sweet spot

Due to party time consisting of multiple attributes, the attendees' experiences are consistently generated through these different attributes in the same phase. At Dîner en Blanc, party time includes activities, performances and dinner that form the highlight of the event. During DJ performances, the attendees are the spectators and audience who listen to the music performed, which is passive participation and immersion. As the findings of this study showed, the DJ performance match with the interpretation of an entertainment experience. In this case, passive participation in performance is the same as being an outsider. In addition, attendees gain experiences, such as recognising diverse backgrounds and expanding their the network, when they are socially interacting with other attendees (see section 4.3, "Socialising," p. 39). The esthetic experience occurs when the attendees are immersed in the environment that offers a captivating visual feast. During the dance segment, attendees are observed to be active participants and immersing themselves in the atmosphere, which is an aspect of an escapism experience. Attendees socialise with other attendees subconsciously as

part of the natural flow of events. In fact, attendees can become an audience by feasting visually on the scene and the activities that are conducted by fellow attendees. Undoubtedly, packaging all experiences during the party time involves the four realms of experience, activating the sweet spot (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), which is an extensive experience. A blogger wrote of her magical experience:

> *DJ played a good mix of ratchet and pop music. Words can't really describe how magical the night is (despite the work involved). (B7)*

Cleaning time as an education experience?

Cleaning time is similar to the preparation time, where the attendees are active participants. Normally, the post-event clean-up and pack-down is conducted by the main stakeholders of the event. In this case, the attendees are required to be responsible for their own clean up, such as taking away the garbage, tableware, table etc. This is an opportunity for attendees to learn about the process of event establishment, and the surrounding stages, setting up as well as packing down for an event. Attendees are able to increase their environmental awareness as well. Hence, attendees are active participants ready to absorb new information and experiences. Two bloggers wrote:

> *No bags of garbage nor random bits of baguette. It should be a clean slate, save perhaps a few melting ice cubes. The event has a reputation for ensuring the venue is left nicer than it was upon arrival. (B4)*

> *Armed with better knowledge of what to bring and how to pack. (B8)*

Review time as an evaluation experience

Although attendees did not specifically mention review time, their stories about Dîner en Blanc being spread by word of mouth, or as written accounts or photos, is a kind of review. Allen et al. (2011) stated that event evaluation is central to measuring the outcomes of events, and therefore an important step to identifying diverse functions and subsequent influences. Bloggers post their stories of Dîner en Blanc and these narratives provide a kind of event evaluation; in other words, an evaluative experience. All the blogs that have been collected are evidence to prove the existence of an evaluative stage and experience.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a discussion associated with the literature review and the findings set out in previous chapters. This study aimed to evaluate the experience economy as a theoretical framework used in the event industry, to explore the attendees' roles in and their experiences of Dîner en Blanc. The two research objectives established at the beginning are:

1. To understand the role of the event attendee as the prosumer of Dîner en Blanc.
2. To analyse the application of the experience economy in the evaluation of attendees' event experience.

5.1 ATTENDEES AS PROSUMERS OF DINER EN BLANC?

Attendees are people who go to events and they make up a prime component of events which, from a business perspective, means they are consumers. It is commonly known that successful events that have been put on by stakeholders involve collaboration, which means a clear division of labour and performance of duties on a professional basis. For instance, event producers plan and conduct events, event attendees then show up and engage themselves in the events provided by event producers. Thus, event producers can be labelled as the organisation, hosts, givers and exporters. On the other hand, event attendees are participants, customers, takers and importers. Each role is responsible for its own scope of official duty (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). More recently, the format of events has changed due to numerous people now preferring to plan and create their event themselves, especially for smaller-sized events, such as birthday parties and weddings.

From passive participant to active participant

According to the findings on Dîner en Blanc, attendees are passive participants who transform to active participants when they begin to engage in the event as prosumers. The term 'attendees' fails to adequately interpret the attendees' roles in Dîner en Blanc. Therefore, using the term 'prosumer' to further describe the attendees is more appropriate in this case. It is a term which refers to individuals who consume and produce at the same time, where consumers add the producers' role and responsibility to take action (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Toffler, 1980). Firstly, attendees complete plenty of work before, during and after the event, as attendees actively participate in the whole journey of Dîner en Blanc. Normally, attendees engage in two phases of events: they attend events and provide feedback at the end of events if producers need it. Producers are the people needed to run the whole sequence of events. As discussed in Chapter Four, the researcher interprets the attendees' task

and journey in Dîner en Blanc (from initiation to closure phase), for instance, preparing for the picnic, decorating the event venue, for the event and tidying up after the event. The findings show that attendees of Dîner en Blanc need to engage in the event from the very beginning, with event preparation, through to the end, with packing up the event venue. During the event, attendees decorate the venue by bringing their own supplies and ideas while the producers provide a location for attendees to generate their experience (Carù & Cova, 2003). With to the sharing of resources by the producer as a foundation needed to successfully produce Dîner en Blanc, prosumers are a partnership between producers and consumers owing to resource sharing (Richards, 2015). Attendees display a sense of pride when the event successfully relies on their contribution and production of the whole journey showcased in Dîner en Blanc.

Prosumers a common phenomenon at food events
Findings from this study show that Dîner en Blanc is a new-style food event that encourages attendees' own preparation of food for themselves. This is in line with the previous studies that have reported that prosumers are commonly found at food events (Getz et al., 2015; Hall & Sharples, 2008). Typically, food events aim to celebrate a seasonal good harvest, promote local foods and share culinary skills, which creates a platform for stakeholders to make a connection through embracing food. Dîner en Blanc is based on the concept of food and its role in developing multiple experiences for attendees. Importantly, the dining experience is a dominant factor attracting people to this event, which is derived from food, agreeing with Yeoman et al.'s (2019) conclusion that food is a catalyst that gathers people for the same occasion. The attendee-prosumer is given the opportunity to co-create, giving rise to the second-generation experience economy (Binkborst & Dekker, 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003).

Positive experience through co-creation
Traditionally, the relationship between attendees and producers is sensitive, due to demand and supply, because the distance between producers and attendees is insurmountable and also because of the vast difference in roles and responsibilities. From an event perspective, Dîner en Blanc itself is a product of co-creation owing to the desire for a different experience, which assists in achieving a competitive advantage in the market. In the journey of Dîner en Blanc, attendees have numerous opportunities to play a creative role, involving attire, food preparation and table decoration. For example, while an all-white dress code from head to foot is a hard-and-fast rule for attendees' attire, attendees are given the creative liberty to

indicate a theme for the dress code. Dîner en Blanc provides a place for attendees to make their creative ideas a reality, where creativity is seen throughout the whole journey of Dîner en Blanc. For example, some attendees use ingenious ways, such as a laundry basket instead of a trolley, to transport supplies. In addition, co-creation is consumer-dominant mode that adds to the consumer's value in the product although the producer controls the general direction. As Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) asserted, creativity and innovation are significant factors in co-creation; and this is evident in Dîner en Blanc.

Prosumer as the virtual marketer, publicist, and brand ambassador
Furthermore, the findings indicate that prosumers of Dîner en Blanc tend to share their experiences through social media. Blogs provide an appropriate channel with a wide platform for event attendees to document and openly share the journey of Dîner en Blanc. Consumers share their experiences online which is also a co-creation channel for new trends (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019). More commonly, first-time attendees base their expectations and ideas of the event on the blogs of previous attendees' who have shared their experiences. The blogs consist of a history of Dîner en Blanc, registration phases, bloggers' preparation processes and experiences, etc. The findings indicate that people know Dîner en Blanc is associated with certain characteristics which shape its mysterious brand image. The brand image pushes attendees to engage with Dîner en Blanc across different cities and countries, accumulating a reputation all over the world from previous attendees and potential attendees. As a result, Dîner en Blanc is not just an event but also a brand with a high and well-established reputation. Accordingly, attendees' experience becomes brand experience, particularly in a worldwide event, offering multiple options for attendees create a broad experience. In addition, the findings show that the attendees intend to revisit Dîner en Blanc again, suggesting that the attendees have high loyalty to this event. As mentioned, loyalty is connected with diverse festival attributes (Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Tanford & Jung, 2017). Attendees gain a diversity of experiences that do not exist in other events. Dîner en Blanc is a feast of creativity and traditionally enhanced not just by the producers but also the attendees, indicating that attendees passionately engage throughout the whole journey of the event. This also reflects that the event engenders a strong sense of involvement through effective co-creation.

Prosumer constraints
Prosumers are not the "real McCoy" like the producer who owns the event, and therefore they lack decision-making power beyond the experience economy. As Binkhorst and Dekker

(2009) asserted, consumers have more power and control in the experience economy. In particular, however, the power of decision-making is held in the hands of the producer who can formulate traditions with regard to the attire, entertainment, types of food. Attendees of Dîner en Blanc must execute the traditions set up by the producer that are a requirement for attending, such as all-white attire and decoration, and tables and chairs of a specific size.

Indeed, the findings indicate that the relationship between prosumer and producer is unequal for a variety of reasons. From a micro view, the event run sheet, timetable and location are arranged by the producer and, from a macro perspective, prosumers do not participate in event location selection. In the event analysed in this study, a producer is similar to a primary director who leads consumers to accomplish their ideas according to instructions with a rational layout, and who has the right to control the whole journey. Prosumers can then be considered to be secondary directors produced in a circle, drawn by the producer, and within which they are able to achieve their limited production. Despite prosumers co-creating with producers at Dîner en Blanc, there is a hierarchy between producer and prosumer in terms of control and power over the event.

5.2 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF EVENT ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS OF AN EXPERIENTIAL EVENT

Numerous authors have adopted Pine and Gilmore's (1999) four realms of the experience economy as a measurement scale to evaluate attendees' experience and investigate revisit intention using quantitative research. This study, in contrast, uses qualitative research to evaluate attendees' experience in the event processes. The traditional experience economy framework includes 4Es and 1S (education, entertainment, escapism, esthetics and sweet spot). The four realms of the experience economy are a suitable framework to address attendees' experiences in the event industry, although the four realms classification may not cover all the different kinds of experiences found in the study of Dîner en Blanc.

As in Getz and Page (2016), event attendees can have a diversity of experiences. It is clear that attendees' experiences are influenced by many attributes, such as tradition, event location and atmosphere, and socialising.

This study revealed seven attributes existing in Dîner en Blanc that play a significant role in affecting attendees' experiences: tradition, location and atmosphere, entertainment programmes, food, socialising, partnership and environmental sustainability – these are attributes that have been mentioned frequently by the bloggers. These seven attributes are

shared across seven distinctly different phases unique to Dîner en Blanc. The seven phases are: registration time, preparation time, showtime, setup time, party time, cleaning time and review time.

The conceptual framework of Dîner en Blanc attendee experience presented in Figure 4 explores attendees' experiences of Dîner en Blanc at each phase of the event. The findings indicate that escapism experience is the first realm that allows the attendees to take action to experience the event. Accordingly, attendees pick up more and more experiences by acquiring more knowledge. The sweet spot was activated at the peak of the event during party time, after the other peaks under show time and set-up time that observed at least three realms of experience.
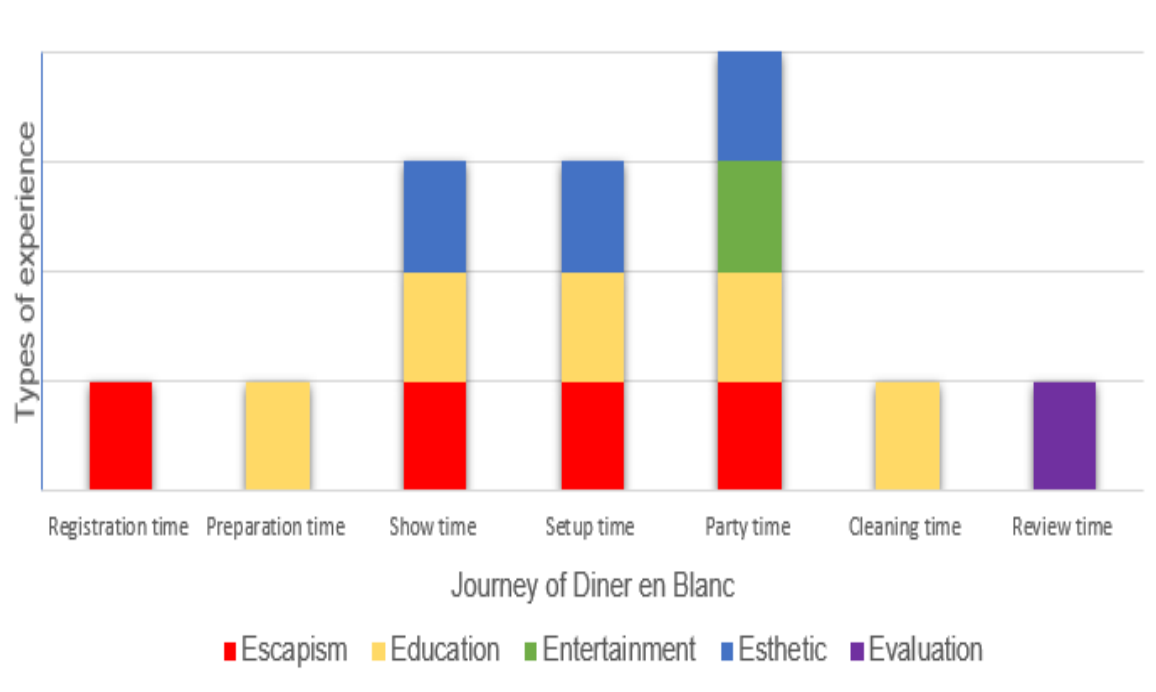

Figure 4. Integrating Dîner en Blanc attendees' journey with the experience economy

From first impression, Dîner en Blanc is not regarded as an educational event; rather, it is seen as one that is more entertaining in nature. Surprisingly, the findings indicate that education experience ranks as the top experience in the whole journey because event attendees gain plenty of knowledge in the process of planning for the event. For instance, attendees increase their environmental awareness when they pack down the event. Escapism experience is just as significant as educational experience, as both appear frequently across the different phases of the event. As seen in the framework, escapism experience passes through registration time, showtime and party time. In regard to the entertainment experience,

this only emerged from the activities in party time. Showtime and setup time are esthetic experiences when attendees are immersed in the surrounding environment and atmosphere.

Perhaps due to the research approach for this study, the findings show that review time should also be added to Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience realm, creating an evaluation experience for the attendees. As mentioned previously by Bosangit et al. (2015), blogs are a powerful channel for tourists to narrate their experiences after travel. The findings derived from blogs can be seen as a narrative of the attendees' experiences of Dîner en Blanc. Review time is a final phase of the event processes when attendees review their experience and when they record their story in social media after the event.

It is important to note that every event is unique. This study shows that diverse experience can be classified into various phases that are unique to an event, to focus event managers in their marketing efforts and the design of event experiences for a specific event.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Event and experience have an inseparable relationship, such that "experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way", as stated by Pine and Gilmore (1999, p. 12). Events play a significant role in generating experiences to create a competitive advantage for the event organiser or host and, consequently, have been adopted in multiple disciplines. This study demonstrates that the understanding of event attendees' experiences is critical to the successful design and planning of an event. The two research objectives, designed to develop an understanding of the role of the event participant in Dîner en Blanc as a prosumer, and to analyse the applicability of the experience economy in the same event, have been achieved. In order to address the aims of this study, a qualitative approach using netnography was employed. This study used blogs to examine event attendees' experiences at Dîner en Blanc, and revealed that bloggers tended to express their experiences associated with what they have gained through their own previous engagement rather than experiences shared by other attendees through word of mouth and social media. In particular, the experience is different for different individuals.

In this study, the attributes of Dîner en Blanc have been explored in depth to show that it is a not typical food event because it is co-created by the consumer-cum-producer (also known as the prosumer). The findings indicate that attendees at Dîner en Blanc actively engaged in the whole journey of the event, taking on producers' tasks naturally. The role of the prosumer is an alternative format that pushes consumers to engage in active participation. Moreover, most attendees are interested in experiencing the producers' role as it enables them to gain more experience. Hence, attendees can be labelled as prosumers of Dîner en Blanc within the range of their contributions. Attendees have a strong intention to revisit owing to their role and involvement. Additionally, the experience of active participants is more memorable than for passive participants, owing to passive attendees needing assistance from the diverse reports of the active participants to evoke memories, such as photos and videos, and reviews on blogs. On the other hand, for active participants, experience is a dynamic memory that stays alive in their brains. Active participation involves physical, emotional, and mental engagement. Dîner en Blanc offers attendees the space to be actively involved and immersed in the event, to co-create their own experience (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009).

The findings of this study indicate that attendees who become prosumers have positive experiences of moving toward self-sufficiency, due to consumers adding their personal

contribution to their experience (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). It is a strategy to promote attendees obtaining multiple experiences, particularly involving knowledge increase and creativity through involvement. Co-creation occurs with the active involvement of the prosumers. This enables prosumers to take the opportunity to experience working behind the scene of an event producer and can lead to multiple experiences. In addition, increasing mutual understanding arises from a consideration of this transposition. For instance, attendees gain more knowledge about the hard work of producers when they take a prosumer perspective. Producers can understand the experiences that attendees seek when attending an event.

Despite the four realms of the experience economy being used to investigate the overall experience of attendees at Dîner en Blanc, it seems that no previous studies have evaluated the multiple experiences in different phases of events. Indeed, adopting the four realms of experience to analyse the journey of Dîner en Blanc is a first. This study proposed a conceptual framework which future researchers can use to explore attendees' experiences in different phases of an event and or to make comparisons with. Furthermore, the research found that the four realms of the experience economy adapted to the event process provide a new insight into the event industry. Escapism, education, esthetic and entertainment experiences are distributed across seven phases of Dîner en Blanc, and the evaluation experience is an additional realm of experience that emerges during the review stage. Accordingly, the methodology used in this study has discovered review time as potentially existing for attendees to share their experience post-event. Thus, determining evaluative experience is additional experience realm that is showcased in review time. Experiences are subjective and intangible, and distinguishing experiences by the realms of experience and the accompanying event attributes makes experience visible and tangible, allowing organisations to understand attendees' experiences more clearly.

Furthermore, this study found that the four realms of the experience economy adapted to the event process provide new insights into Dîner en Blanc. It was observed that bloggers followed the phases of Dîner en Blanc in narrating their experiences at the event. Escapism, education, esthetic and entertainment experiences are distributed across seven phases of Dîner en Blanc, and the evaluation experience is an additional realm of experience that emerges during the review phase. Attendees share their experiences through social media and word of mouth, and these are regarded as reviews. It is notable that party time is the only phase in which the four realms of experience merge together to form a sweet spot. In sum,

Dîner en Blanc offers an opportunity for attendees to gain a wide range of experiences in different phases, involving escapism, education, esthetic, and entertainment experiences, and evaluation experience as an extra experience as well.

6.1 LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATION

There are some limitations to this study derived from the methodology. The first limitation is the sample size of this study. Since the purposeful sampling technique was used in this study, 12 blogs selected as targets across three countries to represent international perspectives may not be fully representative. Despite blogs being a well-known channel with abundant textual data, the trend is transforming to users posting their experiences through photos and videos. Blogs are the only channel selected for the collection of data in this study, and it would be inappropriate to claim it represents an entire set of data. Further researchers should adopt multiple channels for data collection. As Johnson and Harris (2002) asserted, data generalisation is relatively difficult in qualitative research.

Secondly, the researcher acknowledges that although Dîner en Blanc is a worldwide event with key traditions, still there are tiny differences in the different host locations. The differences may affect attendees' experiences as well. This study did not focus on the regional differences.

Future study could classify the identity of attendees more clearly to differentiate the general attendees and team leaders – both attendees at Dîner en Blanc – as the different roles they perform may result in differences in their event experience. In particular, general attendees are almost all first-time attendees, team leaders are frequent attendees who have engaged in Dîner en Blanc over a period of time. The experiences could be different for first-time and frequent attendees. Thus, future research must refine the analysis of these event attendees.

Finally, age and demographic factors cannot be distinguished among attendees owing to the unobtrusive nature of the methodology and bloggers not mentioning these factors in their blogs for privacy reasons.

While this study provides an understanding of attendees' experiences, according to the limitations discussed above, recommendations for future research are proposed below.

1. If investigating for an international perspective, future research should expand the sample size and increase channels for data collection at various sites across the world. Large sample sizes mean an increasing number of target attendees and regions. In addition, other valuable social media should be used to get a detailed understanding of attendees' experience. Otherwise, research should focus on a particular host location to account for regional and cultural bias.

2. Working with quantitative research in mixed methods to complete similar research in the future will improve the reliability and validity of the research. Relying on the attributes that have been found in this study, employing quantitative research to follow up qualitative research would make it possible to identify significant generalisations.

3. Despite attendees' experiences being on the positive side, existing negative experiences of Dîner en Blanc would be interesting to investigate in future research. In particular, adopting different methodologies such as interviews may be able to obtain further results related to attendees' experiences.

This dissertation contributes to the study of a new generation of food events that encourage attendees to be actively and creatively involved in the co-creation of the event. It blurs the traditional distinction between attendees and event organisers, and the study also contributes to the theory of the experience economy by adding an additional realm of experience. Future research could be undertaken to explore other new-generation events to discover a wider range of experiences and help in the development and design of more experiential events.

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