Mobile tour guiding and tourist experience

An analysis of reviews for Rick Steves' Audio Europe App

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Master Thesis Tourism and Culture, Radboud Universiteit
August 2018

Abstract:

Motivated by our growing connections to our phones and the unique media that populates them, this thesis is an investigation into the relationship between app use and tourist experience in Europe. This study investigates tourist experience regarding the use of a mobile tour guiding app, focused on the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app as a case study.

Utilizing app reviews as a primary source, quantitative and qualitative methods will combine, aided by the qualitative analysis program Atlas.ti, to develop an understanding of experience based on users own words. Star ratings will briefly be discussed before the bulk of the research delves into the written reviews collected from the Google Play and Apple iTunes stores. Employing a grounded content analysis, codes will be extracted from the data and compared to isolate patterns and commonalities in the reviews. Finally, a handful of reviews will be evaluated using a discursive and deconstructive method to both showcase and analyze reviews in their entirety.

This thesis will be presented in a straightforward format, beginning with a brief introduction before the first chapter, Status Quaestionis, delves into the scholarly literature on the various subjects that influence this investigation. After establishing a base with a literature review, the methodology and frameworks employed will be detailed in the second chapter before an in depth analysis of the reviews is conducted through varied research techniques. Findings revealed in the research will be detailed, concentrating on the main and sub- questions of this study in the fourth chapter, before a conclusion offering a summary of the project.

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Introduction

Technology is a driving force in our world and has become fully integrated into our lives. More and more of us are walking around with a smartphone in our hand or our pocket, constantly taking pictures, seeking information and recommendations, or entertaining ourselves. Tourism, an extension of, rather than escape from our day-to-day lives, is also changing as the result of the forward motion of technology. Understanding the varied experiences of different groups of tourists, particularly those embracing technology, grants valuable insight into tourist experience, the future of tourism and even potential avenues for sustainable industry development.

The needs initially fulfilled by guidebooks and tour guides are now being fulfilled by smartphone applications - digital guide books, audio guides, and walking tour apps are liberating tourists to explore cities, like Amsterdam, Rome, and Paris, more of their own volition. Tour guides can play a particularly valuable part in the experience of a city, but walking tour apps eliminate the human guide and crowd of a tour, leaving the tourist to explore more independently with only a digital mediator. As tourists take guiding into their own hands with the aid of a digital companion, it is important to question and understand how they experience the city. How does the lack of a knowledgeable, in-person guide influence tourists level of engagement with and berth of exploration of the cities they visit?

While the body of scholarly research on tourist experience, app use in tourism, and pedestrian behavior in urban environments continues to grow, it struggles to keep pace with the changes in the industry. The influence of our sharing and experience culture grows with the technology that makes these opportunities readily available, yet academic research on these developments is lacking. Travel related apps are a popular section of both the Google Play and Apple iTunes stores and offer a myriad of functions -including but not limited to flight tracking, accommodation booking apps, digital tour guiding, site and restaurant reviews, and maps.

Previously conducted studies have analyzed apps as a whole, the likelihood of adoption of a mobile tour guide, and the role of connectivity in tourist experience.

This thesis will focus on the role an audio guide plays for tourists, specifically the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app, an audio guiding app for cities and museums throughout Europe in order to understand the experience of tourists who have used it. This app was selected in order to provide a glimpse into a somewhat new arena of tourism - self/digital guiding with the aid of a smartphone application. Rick Steves' Audio Europe app provides users with an experience - simply "popping in" one's headphones allows for well-known American travel host Rick Steves to guide users through foreign cities and museums.

In order to understand the changes occurring in the field an understanding of the current research into the overlapping fields that drive this topic must first be established. The main themes of walking, tour guiding, digital mediation, and smartphone/app use by tourists all combine to inform this research. Extensive research covers theories on walking the city and guided tours. From Baudelaire's *flaneur,* to the *derives* of the Situationist Internationals and to the co-production of guided tours by tour operators and the patrons, walking urban environments and being guided through foreign destinations are thoroughly researched topics. The outdated and male ideas of the *flaneur* have evolved to reflect a more gender neutral, active role in the *choraster*, proposed by Stephen L. Wearing and Carmel Foley in their article *Understanding the Tourist Experience of Cities*. Tourists are recognized to engage with their surroundings in a more complex way than the simplicity of John Urry's passive *tourist gaze.*In taking a more active role in their experience, app users shed the obvious tour group for a private, somewhat self-guided destination interaction.

Social media influence, user generated content and even the effects of connectivity as the result of communicative technology have all been studied as pertaining to tourism. Scholars in the field recognize the changes occurring as the result of technology, constant communication, and the maintained online social presence even while away, but the effects of self-guiding technologies are under-researched. Current writings do not cover the tourist experience with regards to digital mediators in the form of audio guides.

The purpose of this thesis is to gain insight into tourist experience as it pertains to the use of an audio guide. While this focus is quite narrow, a thorough understanding of experience with relation to this app can provide an example of the many ways that technology continues to alter the industry with emphasis on the impacts on tourists. The insights gained in this paper aim to provide illumination into the industry developments and evolving needs of tourists.

Rick Steves' is a popular American television and radio host, travel guide author/publisher, and travel expert. The Rick Steves' Audio Europe app is available on iOS and Android devices free of charge and offers users the opportunity to download guided walks in numerous European cities and popular museums. Coupled with an interactive map and offline capabilities, the audio is provided by Steves himself and includes interviews with locals and experts. This app enables users to explore on their own timetable with explanations of the sights, artworks, architecture, people, and culture of their destination from a trusted source.

The use of this app gives tourists the ability to forgo participation in tour groups, giving them the ability to explore at their own will and without the obvious tells common of tourists. The same freedoms that app users benefit from also complicates research methods, for instance, limiting the possibility for in situ interviews and other means of contact via a level of privacy provided through app stores. Taking the example of studies like, "The Role of Smartphones in Mediating Touristic Experience" by Wang et. al (2012), review analysis will be employed as a means of understanding tourist experience in direct relation to using the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app. Though review analysis poses its own limitations like the inability to ask questions or engage with app users and the low percentage of users that actually review apps, for instance, it does provide a glimpse into the motivations of tourists in their own words.

Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods, ratings and reviews will be investigated to determine the possible effect that use of the app has on tourists experiences. Methods will include breakdowns of the distribution of star ratings, causes of poor ratings, coding and comparison of revered qualities as told in reviews, investigation into valued app qualities, and discursive and deconstructive analysis of individual reviews.

The variety of methods employed hopes to holistically assess the ratings and reviews to inform the main research question of this paper; how does the use of Rick Steves' Audio Europe app affect tourist experience in Europe? Sub questions are designed to isolate elements in experience and the qualities of the app which have the greatest impact on users. Questions will be further detailed in Chapter 2, *Methodology.* Based on the author's personal experience, having taken the Amsterdam Jordaan walk offered by the app as a form of preliminary research, it is suspected that users will appreciate the ease of use of the app, interesting information presented and the freedom of touring a city without participating in crowded group tours at specific times.

This study will begin with a review of academic literature relevant to the themes applicable to this thesis, primarily app use, walking, guiding, and tourist experience. Following the literature review will be a chapter describing the methodology employed in this investigation. Chapter three is divided into sections, each focusing on different means of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected reviews. The results of the research will be summarized in the fourth chapter, *Discussion and Findings* before the final chapter offers a closing recap of the thesis.

Status Quaestionis

Chapter 1

I.   Urban Walking and City Experience: Unguided and Guided

Walking the city has only been analyzed for its greater meaning in the past few centuries. Studies on the role of the pedestrian in the social, political, economic, leisure and tourist landscapes have sought to understand the experience and power of this common mode of transportation. Even 'mode of transportation' is an oversimplification of the varied roles that walking can fulfill. Walking is an essential part of forming tourist experiences. People do not walk simply to reach their destination, particularly tourists: "… tourists seek to maximize the time spent wandering around the urban space, engaging all their body senses while 'on the move.'" (Gavalas et al., 14). Tourists seek to interact with the city, both physically and socially, as a way to experience and understand the culture they visit. Guided and unguided, walking can be a major component of the tourist experience.

The concept of walking the urban landscape for pleasure is largely attributed to the 19th century writings of Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin who wrote of the *flaneur:* an educated, privileged, man of leisure able to aimlessly wander the new boulevards of Paris, experiencing the city and consuming it with their senses. This is widely accepted as the premier, though dated and gendered, literature on the initiation of walking the city for pleasure, emphasized by the openness of Haussman's Parisian boulevards that allowed for a greater visual, auditory, olfactory, and overall sensory experience. "Part of the value of the *flaneur* as, a theoretical tool, is the foregrounding of the inherent meaningfulness of quotidian mobility. It gets one from A to B, but that is not all it does. Beliefs, values, and feelings get attached to mobility." (Shortell and Brown, 8) These 19th century writings initiated an analysis of the many life arenas that are informed by, or affected by, walking.

Since Benjamin's Parisian wanderings, many other groups have taken to the streets for political, social, practical or economic reasons. The role of the walker in the city continues to evolve and is a function of many facets of everyday life. Mobility plays a role in developing identity, connection, social order, political order or protest, and is a defining factor of urban life – one that can bridge gaps as easily as it creates them. "Mobility, however, is not as simple as the wanderings of upper-class male authors; artists and politicians – for some, movement throughout the city is not as simple and pleasurable. Movement can be voluntary and forced, the wealthy relish their freedom to travel how, when and where they want to while the impoverished may be forced to move through financial hardship, governmental pressures, violence, gentrification, etc." (Shortell & Brown, 6) Understanding mobility as an influential factor of life continues to inform literature on the subject.

In particular, psychogeographical studies and experiments seek to understand the city in terms of its mental perception. Inspired by the *derives* of the Situationalist Internationals, Keith Bassett's paper, "Walking as an Aesthetic Practice and a Critical Tool: Some Psychegeographic Experiments," recounts the psychogeographical experiments undertaken by a group of students on a trip to Paris. These *derives* focused on experiencing the city more sensationally, following both algorithmic and non-algorithmic patterns, even experimenting with being led by senses beyond sight, such as smell and hearing. From this paper one can gain insight into the wealth of perception that can be welcomed by a person walking the street, as these *derives* placed emphasis "…on the 'soft' mutable elements of urban scenes, such as play of the presence and absence, of light and sound, of rhythms of human activity in time and space, and the association of memories and places." (Bassett, 402) The link between city experience and the pedestrian is very strong because walking the city invites the person to interact with many different sensory experiences, creating memory based on the specificities of the place.

The evolution of the mobility in the city still recognizes the value of the pedestrian, the people on the street continue to be recognized very much as the heart of the city. While the *flaneur* is recognized as a dated, elitist and gendered role (Wearing & Foley, 2017), modern evolutions still populate the sidewalks of cityscapes, notably, the rise of the global nomad is seen as a changing force in

urban, international environments. "The kind of quotidian mobility the global nomad engages in is situated in a different class location that the *flanerie* of the nineteenth-century aesthete. It comes from an altered cosmopolitanism, where the meaning of national identity is loosened from the connection to a particular nation-state. The global nomad is transnational and transurban. This mobility is, above all, practical and aspirational." (Shortell and Brown, 7) The global nomad seeks to participate in numerous cultures, creating an international dialogue through interaction informed by their cultural experiences that continue to grow and evolve as they loosen their own cultural attachment in order to adapt to and potentially adopt the cultural elements they interact with on their global wanderings.

Tourist mobility and pedestrianism is varied from that of city residents. Tourists seek to consume a destination, though not necessarily passively. "Unlike commuters or permanent city residents, most tourists would trade a time-efficient walking shortcut or transit transfer in favor of a more indirect, scenic or roundabout walking route that offers more opportunities for amorphous exploration and discovery." (Gavalas et al., 16) While visits to museums, cultural and historic sites, restaurants and bars or natural sites may be the primary focus of many tourists' visit, they also seek to interact with the city.

Though tourists seek to interact with a city, their experiences often seek meaning through mediation. *The Guided Tour: A co-produced tourism performance*, a PhD thesis by Jane Widtfelt Meged, analyzes interaction between professional tour guides and foreign tourists participating in bus tours in Copenhagen. Widtfelt Meged describes it as, "a circuit of performance that blurs the distinction between production (choreographing) and consumption (acting), calling for a dialectic relation between structure and agency," following Haldrup and Larsen's performance turn in tourism studies. The discourse of the phenomenon varies from the belief that guided tourists are passive participants (e.g. Boorstin) that only visit staged settings to authors such as Bruner who see tourists as co-producers of their experience. This case study showed the interactions between professional local guides and foreign tourists who participated in multi-stop bus tours of Copenhagen.

Research focuses primarily on the role of the guides, the interactions between guides and tourists and the mediation process undertaken by actors in tourist

settings. Tourist destinations are cityscapes ripe for interpretation and mediation by a guide, something to be read and translated; a situation that creates the important role of the tour guide. As Tamara Ratz explains, "…in localizing the city for visitors, that is, enabling them to experience the destinations distinctive milieu and its specific way of life, while helping them create and consume authentic tourism experiences." (Ratz, 478)

Walking for tourists varies from many of the written concepts, but maintains similar goals of truly experiencing the city. Disorientation, as sought by the surrealists and situationist internationals is a standard feeling for many tourists. Interaction comes implicitly through the shared proximity of sidewalks and shared urban spaces like squares or high streets. Concepts such as those of the *flaneur*, the Situationist Internationals with the *derives*, the Surrealists *deambulations,* and the psychogeography employed by English authors living in London all toy with different aspects of the performance and urban interaction associated with walking – typically walking without destination. (Bassett, 2007) City experience for these groups was varied, aiming to disorient, force interaction, familiarize and defamiliarize oneself with the city, or to find the life of the city through noticing the subtle details making it a living thing. Exporting these values, feelings and goals, for the tourist (with some modifications) enables us to further understand pedestrian tourist experience, isolating that which creates lasting memory.

Stephen L. Wearing and Carmel Foley, authors of *Understanding the Tourist Experience of Cities,* appearing in the Annals of Tourism Research, apply a feminist analysis that challenges the gendered role of the *flaneur* and the dualist host/guest role. By suggesting a more complex and nuanced relationship between tourist and resident, applying the term *choraster* in place of *flaneur*, the authors complicate the definition of the experience of urban pedestrians. "The *choraster* is a person who practices place, who uses it, experiences it, and gives it social meaning…". (Wearing and Foley, 98) Wearing and Foley assert that the simple dualism of the host-guest relationship and the passive engagement of the *flaneur* and *flaneuse* is lacking and unfit to be ascribed to tourism, favoring a more complex relationship between the visitor and the destination.

"We argue that in order to encapsulate the complexities of the tourism experience it is necessary to conceptualize the tourist space not as one-dimensional and monolithic, but as many places which are constructed through use, visual consumption, imagination and experience. We envision a more nuanced theorization of the tourist and the tourism experience that explains the lived tourist experience in post-modern city spaces. One which can help us to understand, for example, finding that as tourists move through spaces there is an emotional engagement with the physical dimensions and the ways they experience and determine the contingent meanings of these spaces."
(Wearing and Foley, 101)

The implicit value of place is key in forming experience, specifically tourist experience. The urban culturalist paradigm is an urban social theory presented by Borer, "we make meaning in and through behaviors that enact culture, and these behaviors (and meanings) are always embedded in particular places. This is not simply to say that all social action must always occur somewhere. It is, rather, that the "where" is as vital as the "what" in understanding urban culture." (Shortell and Brown, 6) This theory places increased emphasis on the specificity of place, highlighting the practiced culture that occurs in space, understanding that it is not happenstance.

Walking continues to play an important role in the life of a city. Interaction with the fabric of cities, the people sharing the congested space, and the lived culture that is banal authenticity continue to be viewed as a major indicator of social constructs and the evolution of space in a rapidly changing world. In a time when walking is not always entirely necessary, more people elect to do so because they appreciate the aesthetic and performative value that arises from the active expression and participation in their immediate environment.

II.   Mobile App Use by Tourists

The use of technology as applied to tourism is varied, from audio guides at cultural sites to flight tracker apps and accommodation websites, and the field has changed drastically with the evolution and integration of technology into every facet of human life. Rapid changes in technological development over the past three decades have put "supercomputers" into the hands of much of the world with the wide availability of smartphones. Beginning with audio guides in museums, technology has developed to cater to tourists needs, rapidly changing in the past few decades with the integration of tourism and the internet, bringing us to the current moment where mobile technology use is a prominent part of tourist experience.

Academic research has analyzed the adoption of technology for use in booking and research, but the changes in tourist experience as a result of the widespread use of smartphones has been under studied. The fast pace of change means that many articles and papers become outdated within a short time span. For instance, Mang and Brown found that expensive roaming data and the lack of WIFI was the largest deterrent for use among the participants of their study. (2016) Since that article was published, WIFI has only become more prominent and since 2017, cell service providers can no longer charge roaming fees within the European Union. Prepaid SIM cards also make data use inexpensive for travelers from other countries. This rapidly changing landscape and the comprehensiveness required for academic research mean that little has been published to accurately reflect the current usage rates and experiences regarding apps and smartphone use by tourists.

Several studies have utilized the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology, or UTAUT, framework to analyze the adoption of technology by tourists. (Lai, 2015; No & Kim,) UTAUT rates the likelihood of mainstream adoption through evaluation of information quality (based on both informativeness and entertainment), performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions. Based on the subjects reading of these values, determining the perceived usefulness, the theory supposes the behavioral intention of users. These studies

have found that accurate and useful information is the greatest determining factor in the adoption of use, followed by entertainment value and performance expectancy. (Lei, 2015) Users familiarity and experience with technology influences the likelihood of adoption. Unlike other facets of life, tourists seek entertainment with their information; they continue to be "hedonistic pleasure seekers of enjoyment and fun." (Lai, 421)

Writings have hypothesized the growth of use that has occurred. Earlier studies focused on the likelihood of widespread adoption of tourism technology beginning with accommodation websites. Using the framework of Technology Acceptance Models or TAM's Kim, Park and Morrison found that connectivity and the use of mobile technology can positively influence tourist experience and urged stakeholders to embrace and facilitate connectivity in order to grow with the changing needs of tourists. This study supposed a growth in usage that has been proven since the publishing of this article in 2005.

The current climate of sharing culture is a product of the widespread use of the internet. Media studies have grown to reflect the changing view of how people interact with technology, Media Studies 1.0 assumed the consumers to be passive and that the growing prevalence of technology would be detrimental to society. Media Studies 2.0 had greater faith in the audience, supposing popular culture to be the apex of modernity, giving a larger voice to the people and less power to the institutions. Media Studies 3.0, a still developing ideology, examines how humans are formed by experience and social space, including digital social spaces. Media Studies 3.0 recognizes experience culture and its formational abilities. People create and influence media in a reciprocal relationship where media also inform and color the world; meaning is created in a circle between people and media. (Miller) "Access to cognitive, specialized, and emotional influence provided freely by tourists has become a successful tradable commodity that is reshaping the tourists marketplace." (Munar, 47) This speaks particularly to social media.

Though the power structures have changed somewhat with the development of open-source wikis and social media, they present a paradox of freedom of contribution while being heavily moderated. Limited access in parts of the world and impoverished communities partnered with website moderation maintains economic,

social and political hierarchies. User Generated Content, or UGC, creates more voices but hierarchies may still limit the voices of local communities. "These platforms allow a cacophony of voices but in many cases discourses of local communities are just missing. In review sites or travel blogs, the conversation is one of tourists for tourists. These platforms contribute to a virtual touristification of place based on the view of the visitor." (Munar, 50) With this comes a greater sense of self-awareness for tourists and they monitor their experiences more closely in order to relay information to the cybersphere.

Social media has created an entire bank of public images, videos and stories without commercial motives. Tourist experience is being greatly altered by the omnipresence of smartphones and the continuous connection between the physical and digital selves, or digital elasticity as framed by Ksenia Kirillova and Dan Wang. Studies have shown that maintaining a social connection to home can improve tourist experiences. Kirillova and Wang argue, "Scholars acknowledge that tourist experience is transforming from liminal experiences to one mediated by ICT [Internet Connectivity Technology] and becomes unavoidably decapsulated." (Kirillova and Wang, 158) Tourists share their travel experiences (potentially in real-time), stay connected to loved ones at home and find peace in the feeling of being remembered. (Kirillova and Wang)

Changes in tourist behavior extend beyond communication with home. Smartphones are mediating experience and directing tourist behavior. As noted from Kirillova and Wang (2016), connectivity can contribute positively to tourist experience, "These studies show that the smartphone use mediates tourist experience in multiple aspects including movement, unplanned behavior, decision-making, and communication with distant social networks." (Kirillova and Wang, 158)

Review sites like TripAdvisor have been more thoroughly studied, but Wang, Park and Fesenmaier analyzed a collection of travel related app reviews to find their effect on tourist experience. Their analysis of "storytelling reviews" of the Top 100 more popular travel apps available through iTunes revealed that apps can influence tourists to explore outwardly more confidently with the handheld knowledge to reduce the risk of their exploration. "These storytelling customer reviews included 11

cases (5% of total 202 cases) whereby tourists describe their experience in which the smartphone apps helped them to learn, replan, and visit new places and/or attractions." (Wang et al., 379) The mediation and therefore facilitation of safe, new experiences in unfamiliar locales enriched their overall experience of tourists. "These findings demonstrate that smartphones enable travelers to go beyond the 'hermeneutic circle" and to become more creative and spontaneous, which in turn leads to greater satisfaction." (Wang et al., 384)

Use of mobile tour guiding apps is scarcely researched. The likelihood of adoption has been supposed through academic research but the actual use and adoption is greatly unknown. Gavalas et al. wrote a paper corresponding to their development of a scenic route-walking app in Athens, Greece called *Scenic Athens*. While a tourists main interests at a destination may be historical and cultural sites, partnered with museums, tourists do seek to interact with the banal authenticity that is real life for the residents of the destination. Moving from point A to point B is an interactive experience for tourists. "Unlike commuters or permanent city residents, most tourists would trade a time-efficient walking shortcut or transit transfer in favor of a more indirect, scenic or roundabout walking route that offers more opportunities for amorphous exploration and discovery. Apart from offering a glance over everyday life activities, these walking routes allow strollers to appreciate the scenic value as well as the cultural and architectural elements of historical districts." (Gavalas et al., 138) This demonstrates that tourists seek to explore beyond the typical tourist destinations and peek into the reality of life in the cities they visit.

Findings consistently suggest that with growing availability of data connection, familiarity and high usage rates of smartphones in day-to-day life, and interest in specialized information (be it cultural, exploratory, culinary, practical, or social) utilization of mobile app technology will continue to grow. (Mang & Brown; Munar; Kim et al.; Miller; No & Kim; Wang et al.; Gavalas)

Methodology

In an increasingly technological world where people rely on their smartphones more and more, it is important to understand how the use of smartphone applications is changing the tourism and travel industries. Though there are changes that impact sites and policies, this thesis is focused on the changes in tourist experience. Research on app use with regards to tourism is under studied, likely as a result of the short time that this technology has been available and widespread. Very few articles highlight specific apps or functions, i.e. guidebooks, accommodation, review sites, flight tracking, transport, etc.

This thesis focuses on the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app. Rick Steves' Audio Europe functions as a tour guide, not a guidebook, functioning more as a mediator than accommodation, guidebook, or travel information apps. Rick Steves' guidebooks are especially popular in North America, thanks in part to his popular travel shows. With constantly updating walks across many European cities hosted by a well-known American travel writer and television host, this app creates a unique semi-self-guided experience for travelers who participate. Rick Steves' is especially well known in the United States and Canada and the app is targeted at users from these areas, though not exclusively used by North Americans. Understanding the experiences of tourists who use this app could grant insight into current trends in tourism, the desires of modern tourists and the unique factors at play that influence tourist experience. The choice to focus on this app is rooted in its popularity, format, and coverage area.

The main research question of this thesis to be explored is, how does the use of Rick Steves' Audio Europe app affect tourist experience in Europe? Supporting questions aim to address more specific parts of their experience, do tourists find greater agency through the use of this audio guide? Do tourists find more banal authenticity, as in, interaction with everyday local culture with the app? Do tourists

venture out of main touristic hubs to explore less touristic areas? What qualities in the app do tourists find most valuable and have the largest impact? And what does that say about the needs of modern tourists? These questions will be assessed in combination with a grounded analysis that will serve to reveal the auxiliary factors related to the use of the app that composed and informed their experiences.

The nature of using the Rick Steves' app separates these tourists from tour groups and gives them the freedom to travel at their own pace and on their own timetable; because of the level of independence while using this app, it is difficult to obtain data on their experiences. Users are difficult to identify and surveys are hard to distribute, therefore, it was determined that review analysis would be the most effective method of research.

Reviews for the app are publicly posted and accessible to anyone in the Google Play store and Apple iTunes store and can only be written by customers that have downloaded the app they are reviewing. Customer reviews of smartphone apps provide "snapshots" of the touristic experience, and analysis of these reviews reveals how their use mediates the touristic experience by changing behavior and emotional states. (Wang et al., 2012) These reviews provide freeform written documentation of users tourist experiences as they directly pertain to the use of the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app, therefore, it was determined that review analysis would be the most effective method of research. Weaknesses of this method include that review writing is elective, therefore, only a small percentage of app users participate. Freeform reviews are also subject to the whims of the reviewer, each will speak to different aspects of app usage, thereby the only commonality between users is that they have downloaded the app. Additionally, users post under a screen name and no demographic data is available, therefore, reviewers maintain a degree of anonymity; because tourists are participants in their environment, their cultural perspectives inform their experiences, but that cannot be gathered in this study.

Reviews were analyzed utilizing a mixed method combining both a quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis consisted of conducting a statistical breakdown of review star ratings and a word count for unique words indicating positive and negative experiences based on Neuendorf's content analysis. The quantitative investigation was used as a starting point for a grounded analysis

identifying common themes throughout the reviews. From there, a hybrid method of qualitative content analysis based on narrative and discursive analyses was employed to determine the affect the use of the app had on users experiences.

The mixed method framework employed for this paper was used in order to combine numerical, statistical data with the more subjective qualitative analysis of the documents in order to compose a more holistic view of the data. Quantitative analysis of this data provided context and served as an organizational tool to identify common themes mentioned in the reviews, isolating traits of the app and its use that were meaningful to numerous users. Recurring themes identified through the quantitative analysis informed the discursive reading that followed. Because not all reviews qualified for a more intensive analysis, the quantitative numerical data was then used as a support in order to make generalizations based on the deeper readings of the material. This combination of methods was chosen in order to reduce the risks of biases, assumptions, or other influences on an analysis of such subjective material.

I.   Data Collection

As stated, the main source material for this thesis is the body of reviews posted in the Google Play Application Store and Apple's iTunes Application Store. Both stores rate on a system of stars, rating from one to five stars, with a freeform text box for reviewers to write a more detailed description of their experience with the app. The Rick Steves' Audio Europe app operates with the same interface and content (audio tours, interviews and maps) across both platforms. Reviews were either copied and pasted or transcribed verbatim into a word document, including their given star rating. All posted reviews as of May 2018 were compiled. 108 reviews were gathered from the Google Play store and 144 were collected from the Apple iTunes store. Both the Google Play and Apple iTunes store require that users can only write a review if they have downloaded the app. All reviews used were written in English, based on my own login credentials (US iTunes store) and search terms. There is no suspected overlap within the reviews because they function on

different operating systems and hardware; in order to review on both platforms, a user would need phones operating on each and to have downloaded the app on each phone, though possible, it is unlikely.

Of the 252 reviews collected, zero reviews were eliminated in creating the bank of data used for analysis. The choice was made not to eliminate reviews that focus on functionality of the app from the analysis because functionality can influence and play a role in tourist experience, both positively and negatively. Furthermore, functionality is a key criterion for the likelihood of technological adoption based on the aforementioned Technology Acceptance Models (TAM) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) models (Kim et al., 2008; Lai, 2015; No & Kim, 2014).

Google Analytics data of the app was provided by Rick Steves' Europe Incorporated following an email request by the author. This data provided numerical records of downloads, usage, and platform for the period between May 15, 2017 and May 14, 2018. A year was chosen as a representative period due to the seasonal fluctuation of North American travelers and likelihood that they only travel to Europe once a year, as specified by my contact. Google Analytics is a free and independent application that measures website and mobile app performance. Information provided by Google Analytics is privileged but objective, therefore, despite the fact that this data was provided by the app purveyors, it is not modified or altered by them and is fit for research purposes. Mobile app performance data was provided via email in the form of screenshots with stipulations that the information may only be used for academic purposes and is not to be shared with competitors.

II.   Quantitative Analysis Methods

The bulk of the review analysis was conducted qualitatively, but research began with a grounded quantitative analysis of reviews in order to provide context and identify recurring themes and terms. Quantitative analysis was conducted in three ways: an analysis of app usage data, an analysis of star ratings given by written reviewers and word/theme frequency counts.All quantitative analysis was conducted manually by the author, meaning that no data analysis software or programs were used to code or read the data. The purpose of the quantitative analysis was to generate context, identify overarching themes, levels of satisfaction and the occurrence of positive and negative terms/words. This numerical overview gives insight into the language that users frequently employ to describe their experiences with the app and the most meaningful elements of their experiences.

After the reviews were collected from both the Google Play store and iTunes store a manual analysis determined that all reviews were valid for inclusion in the quantitative portion of the study. Of the 252 reviews, 108 were collected from the Google Play store and 144 were collected from the iTunes store. Counts were analyzed both within their operating system and compiled together, in order to deduce any potential differences as a result of varied software (iOS versus Android) and hardware (iPhone versus varied other phones).

Usage information was provided in the form of screenshots of Google Analytics and compared with the numerical data acquired from the app stores to identify the size of the sample against the number of app users.

A simple statistical analysis of the star ratings, determining overall positive and negative results, was calculated manually through determining the distribution between 1-5 star reviews. Reviews of one, two and three stars were then assessed to determine whether their rating was influenced by content or functionality/ technological problems, this was done to justify generalizability. This information was used to eliminate reviews for the more limited, qualitative analysis that is expressly focused on experience. For instance, if reviewers do not infer whether they were

able to use the app at all, then it did not have a measurable impact on their tourist experience for the purpose of this study, which is primarily focused on experiences based on the audio guide/ app content. Complaints about content imply the use of the app as intended, which would affect their experience, and therefore were included in the analysis. Users who experienced technical problems while using the app were still exposed to its content and those reviews were included in the data. For example, the following excerpt describes and user who experienced technological problems but also heard the content, "I love the content of this app :: the podcasts and the interactive walking features. But TWICE this app has crashed when I was using it and all of the downloaded content was lost… this was especially frustrating when it happened in the Uffizi on my recent trip to Florence."

Word and term counts were conducted manually in order to eliminate misreads by a program that may not understand tone, colloquialisms, or incorrect associations, for instance, "Good app" and "Good luck getting this app to function" both make use of the word "good" but in both positive and negative phrasing. Through manual assessment, "good" was only included if it was in a positive context. Utilizing a word/term occurrence chart maintains consistency within research of this nature as a scientific method for analyzing large amounts of data, this method was employed by Wang et al. in the paper, "The Role of Smartphones in Mediating Touristic Experience." (2012)

 While quantitative research is a valuable tool, it is employed as a complementary analysis for this paper. The subjective nature of freeform review writing means that numerical analysis cannot effectively deduce all of the necessary information required for research on tourist experience. Stories cannot be analyzed for their content effectively through word counts. Percentages and statistics can only tell part of the story, especially with regard to experience. The numerical evidence that can be produced through quantitative research can, however, provide supporting evidence in order to generalize reviews based on the selection analyzed in the qualitative portion of the analysis.

III. Qualitative Analysis Methods

The retelling of experience requires detail, it is the composition of all of the words that reveal the users perception of the destination as experienced with the mediation of the audio guide. Each review is rooted in the unique perception of the user, making the data subjective. A discourse analysis was chosen so that an interpretation of narrative and storytelling reviews could reveal the experiences of users of the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app. The validity of review analysis for the purpose of this thesis is rooted in the perception of the reviewer, which speaks to their unique experience. The subjective nature of experience is personal and therefore must be relayed by the subject, which is done so via reviews. As stated earlier, app use and tourism has not yet been thoroughly studied. Commonly, experience studies employ a questionnaire, but review analysis has also been employed, particularly with regard to studies based on experiences informed by smartphone app use. (Wang et al., 2012; Lai, 2015)

Qualitative analysis of the reviews was conducted following the initial quantitative grounded analysis. Coding was determined based on the findings of the grounded analysis and informed by the research questions of this thesis. Common themes were tracked and used in the formation of the body of 42 codes that were used to analyze the final body of data.

This paper focuses on tourist experience as created by the content of the app, therefore, reviews that describe technical issues resulting in the app not being used were eliminated. This was not to discount the anticipatory phase of tourist experience and deny the negative experience of tourists who had hoped to use the audio guides, but to focus on the experience created through the content and use of the app.

After eliminating reviews, 216 remaining reviews created the body for a deeper qualitative analysis. The body of reviews was entered into and analyzed using the program Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti is a program created for qualitative analysis of bodies of text, photos, videos and audio data. The program allows for a systematic

and organized assessment of large bodies of data allowing for code occurrence comparisons, graph and chart building, and other scientific assessment tools.

 Reviews were coded and read for concurrences to determine the most commonly occurring themes within user reviews. Following that, a selection of reviews falling under the code *Trip Enhanced* was analyzed both discoursively and deconstructively. Deconstruction was used to break reviews down into different components, isolating the more detailed and storytelling elements to determine the most influential qualities that informed the user review. Discursive reading was employed in order to break down the meanings behind the lexicon used by the reviewers, getting a deeper meaning into their experience through how participants relayed their feelings about the app. Discourse was determined to be useful due to the varied phrasing, vocabulary, levels of enthusiasm, punctuation and formats that users utilized when writing their reviews.

Ratings and Review Analysis

Chapter 3

I.   Quantitative analysis

In order to create a baseline understanding to inform the qualitative analysis, the reviews and Google analytics data were first analyzed in a numerical way. Experience cannot be captured through empirical data, rather, this data was used to identify statistical information about usage, gauge overall satisfaction levels, and to identify recurring themes as a base for grounded theory qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis was conducted in three ways: an analysis of app usage data, an analysis of star ratings given by written reviewers and word/theme frequency counts. Usage data will be introduced first as a point of reference for popularity of this app and the frequency of user reviews to provide context for the study. Following that, star ratings were dissected to gauge user satisfaction levels and the distribution of ratings, including a reading into one, two and three star reviews. Last is a presentation of the word and theme frequency counts, serving to identify the language reviewers use to talk about their experiences with the app, revealing the values found most important to users. These three quantitative focuses are then used as the substructure for the discursive analysis that follows.

This study includes all reviews posted in the Google Play and Apple iTunes stores through May 2018. All reviews were deemed usable for this portion of the study, creating a bank of 252 user reviews. Each review had an accompanying star rating, from one to five stars. Star ratings without written reviews are also presented in the Apple iTunes store, but they were not included because counts are not specified, however, the distribution of one to five star ratings mirrors that of the written reviews.

I.a.   Usage Data Analysis

Usage data was determined to be a valuable addition to this study as a means of understanding the popularity of the product and the relative size of the reviews sample in contrast to the usage rates of the app. Determining the use of this app demonstrates the value of using this app for a case study.

Data acquired from Google Analytics is from the period May 15, 2017 to May 14, 2018 and specifies 494,454 users, 367,684 Apple users (75%) and 123,997 Android users (25%). The slight discrepancy in numbers is a result of Amazon users downloading the app, it will not, however, work on their phones because Amazon runs a proprietary form of Android. During the one-year period there were 2,969,049 sessions, meaning times the app was opened for use. Eighty-five percent of the sessions were from returning users, with the remaining 15% coming from new users, demonstrating loyalty to the app with healthy growth.

Comparing the number of reviews reveals that less than one percent of users have written reviews for each platform, .04% of Apple users and .09% of Android users. Cumulatively, .05% of users between each platform have written reviews. These numbers are consistent with review percentages across for apps, therefore, the sample size is consistent with other studies that have used reviews as a primary source. (Quora)

I.b.   Star Ratings Analysis

The star rating average determines the overall rating for an app, written feedback is optional. Star ratings without written reviews are not displayed in specific numbers, so this analysis will only assess the distribution of the ratings from written reviews. The purpose of assessing the distribution of star ratings is to determine the overall satisfaction level users have with the app. Following the initial distribution assessment, will be a dissection of one, two and three star reviews to determine how many of these low reviews speak to technical issues and how many express

displeasure with the app content. By determining the star distribution and the causes for negative reviews, we can reassess the ratings to exclude reviews that do not refer to a problem with the content. Understanding the root of negative reviews will clarify whether the problems lie in technical problems with the phone, app or service, or if users had negative experiences on location that changed their touristic experience. Reviews that do not speak to the tourists experience will then be eliminated. Once the reviews are eliminated, a reassessment will be made to will have a supplementary figure in order to justify generalizations based on the qualitative analysis.

Of the 252 reviews collected for this study, a strong majority are positive reviews. Four and five star reviews cumulatively compose 80% of the reviews. The distribution displayed in the chart is representative of the bar chart displayed on the review pages. As evidenced by the star ratings, users are typically happy with the app; even if they have not written a more detailed review.

The chart below reflects the distribution of ratings across both platforms and cumulatively, compared with the visual representations of star ratings taken from the Google Play and iTunes stores.

Star Rating	App Store		Google Play		Cumulative Totals	
5 stars	91	63%	88	81%	179	71%
4 stars	12	8%	11	10%	23	9%
3 stars	5	3%	3	3%	8	3%
2 stars	13	9%	1	1%	14	6%
1 star	23	16%	5	5%	28	11%

Figure 3.1   Star Ratings Chart

Figure 3.2   Google Ratings Chart

Figure 3.3   iTunes Rating Chart

One, two and three star reviews are considered negative for this study. A simple reading of these reviews reveals if the reasons for the low ratings are based on their experiences using the audio tours or if they are based on misunderstandings and technical problems. If negative reviews do not reflect a negative experience had on location (i.e. at the travel destination) they are not relevant for the purpose of this ratings assessment, as this study focuses on tourist experience. Reviews that cited problems while using the app at a destination or displeasure with the content in the tours will be counted as "content" and those that are tallied as "technical."

iTunes had a total of 41 reviews and Google Play had nine reviews in the negative scale from one to three stars in this study. Of the 49 cumulative low ratings, only nine refer to the app content or on site technical issues that resulted in a poor experience. The findings can be seen in the chart below.

Star Rating	App Store		Google Play		Cumulative Totals	
	Content	Technical	Content	Technical	Content	Technical
3 stars	1	4	2	1	3	5
2 stars	1	11	0	1	1	12
1 star	3	20	2	3	5	23

Figure 3.4   Negative Star Rating Causes

Eliminating the poor reviews that do not reflect a touristic experience results in the chart below and shows overwhelmingly positive reviews with 95% of reviews being four or five stars, suggesting that app users are quite pleased with the experience offered by the app. This supports the evidence examined in the qualitative analysis and supports generalizations made as a result of these analyses.

Star Rating	App Store		Google Play		Cumulative Totals	
5 stars	91	84%	88	85%	179	84%
4 stars	12	11%	11	11%	23	11%
3 stars	1	1%	2	2%	3	1%
2 stars	1	1%	0	0%	1	>1%
1 star	3	3%	2	2%	5	2%

Figure 3.5   Star Rating Distribution without poor technical reviews

As previously established, walking tours narrated through the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app offer an experience in a foreign city, but app users are difficult to contact so reviews are a suitable assessment source to gauge users feelings about their personal experience with the app. Preliminary assessment of the reviews was done with a word and theme count. An initial reading was conducted to reveal commonalities between reviews, leading to a refined selection of themes that would form the base of the grounded analysis. This initial reading helped to establish the language used and themes that are important to users.

Word counts began with some selected criteria, such as 'experience', 'interesting', 'informative', 'culture/ cultural', and 'history/ historical.' During the process of counting these preselected themes, recurring themes were added to the count as a means of capturing the most important aspects of the reviews as written by the app users. Reviews were triple counted, manually and with count software to ensure that all occurrences were accounted for and included in the proper context. Apple iTunes store reviews allow for a review title or subject line, this text was also included in the word counts. Initial counts including unique adjectives such as 'brilliant,' 'fantastic,' etc. but were excluded from the final count and left for more detailed assessment in the qualitative analysis. Words denoting technical problems or app crashes were counted, but determined to be irrelevant because they do not speak to tourist experience but to the technical experience of the users. Reviews that specify crashes or technical difficulties on location at their destination will be examined in the qualitative analysis.

After establishing initial themes mentioned in the reviews, a cleaned up version simplifying the most important, common and relevant themes was formed with fifteen themes. Terms like "recommend" or "must have" were included in the same themes of recommendation, though it can be argued the degree of enthusiasm is different, these messages maintain the same sentiment. Terms like "personal guide" and "private guide" were included in the same theme, while a comparison with

guided group tour or on site audio tour were included together. Though both terms allude to a comparison between tours, the words "personal" and "private" allude to a greater degree of intimacy and luxury, rather than simply separating from mass tourism products.

Theme	App Store	Google Play
Saves Money/ Free	36	29
Interesting	4	8
Informative	26	13
Humor – Positive	4	5
Humor – Negative	2	4
Recommend/Must Have	20	15
Useful/Helpful	14	10
Easy to Use/Follow	16	8
Thank You	18	8
Better than Group/Guided Tour	8	3
Personal/ Private Tour	5	2
Saved Time	4	3
Culture/Cultural	3	0
History/ Historical	8	6
Experience	11	5

Figure 3.6   Theme Counts

The chart shows the most commonly recurring themes or comments, identifying the topics that reviewers find important enough to write about and phrases frequently

employed. Based on this chart, the reviews will be further dissected to distill what informs the overall positive reviews.

II.   Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative Analysis of the reviews was focused on isolating the characteristics of the app and the common themes that users identified as key in contributing to their experience with using the app. Most codes were revealed through a grounded analysis, and while some codes may appear to overlap, explanations and examples will be given for their distinction. The author has taken great caution in limiting projections or interpretation in an effort to maintain scientific integrity in this study.

The first section of this analysis will be a quick examination of the app use based on the TAM and UTAUT models employed in other studies. Following that, will be a detailed explanation of all the codes employed, how they were applied – including examples, their distribution, how they are grouped and why. The primary focus of this explanation is to provide transparency in analysis of such subjective text and ensure the possibility of replication. The third section will focus on reading the code co-occurrence tables produced in Atlas.ti to find patterns between the codes and code groups. Analysis will then inform a deeper reading of selected reviews utilizing a deconstructive method that illustrates the main components of the experience using the app. Following that, will be an analysis of outlying reviews that highlight unique experiences and use of the app.

II.a.   Technology Acceptance Models

Understanding tourists' potential motivations for downloading this app provided a base for detailed reading of the reviews based on users desires and expectations. Some reviews are useful but ambiguous, written with little to no detail and leaving much to the imagination. For example, one review stated, "Great app with great audio guides! So nice not having to pay for the expensive ones that the

attractions provide themselves!," which details that the user appreciates the financial savings and positively reviews the app but does not describe with any other details what informs her "great app with great audio guides," remark. This could be interpreted in so many ways, but as a measure to reduce the author's influence it was simply coded as *good content*. However, based on the findings of other studies, some assumptions can be made with regard to tourists expectations when using mobile technology while traveling.

In Ivan K. Lai's paper, "Traveler Acceptance of an App-Based Mobile Tour Guide," it was found that information was the greatest determining factor in continued use of a mobile tour guide, followed by entertainment and performance expectancy using the UTAUT (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology) model. "Travelers' needs when using AMTG [a mobile tour guide] are thus more closely related to PE (efficiency, productivity, convenience, and usefulness) than FC (resources, knowledge and assistance), SI (subjective norm), and EE (ease to use and ease to learn)." (Lai, 2015)

It was assumed that people who downloaded the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app were seeking further information on their destinations, whether walking the city or using the museum guides so long as it was more efficient and convenient than using other guides, whether audio or tour groups. Travelers' needs, however, are not as straightforward as simply seeking convenient information as they also crave entertainment. "Travelers are hedonistic pleasure-seekers of enjoyment and fun," and are "delighted to obtain functional information about the destination and attractions." (Lai, 2015) An app must deliver on multiple fronts to be of value to tourists' wide range of needs.

As previously established in Chapter 2 (Status Quaestionis), travelers/tourists are seeking both information and entertainment, therefore they seek multi-layered content in order to fulfill both their information and entertainment needs while travelling. Lai even concludes his findings with a recommendation in order to capitalize on the complex needs of tourists; "Travel app designers and service providers should adjust their strategies to deliver relevant, timely, up-to-date, accurate, enjoyable, and funny travel information to travelers." (Lai, 2015)

In addition to seeking information and entertainment, tourists also seek to "maximize the time spent wandering around the urban space, engaging all their body sense while 'on the move'." (Gavalas et al, 2017) Tourist movement through cities is not the same as residents, as tourists seek to absorb the foreign environment of their destination. Scenic and cultural values are easily imbibed while walking the city, providing opportunity for detours into local life and a full sensory experience of the sights, smells, sounds, tastes and feelings of the city. Walking the city provides opportunity for exploration and greater interaction with the fabric of the city and its local inhabitants, fulfilling another range of desires for tourists.

Based on other studies regarding app use by tourists, it can be assumed that they seek convenience, information, entertainment, and the possibility of comfortable exploration in a new environment. (Lai, 2015; Gavalas et al., 2017) This information was kept in mind while coding in order to inform some of the more generic comments in reviews such as, "good content", "enjoyed it", or "good app", when more descriptive information is not provided. In order to reduce projections by the author, these ambiguous reviews were coded as *good content* with an understanding that the positive review is likely related to one of the aforementioned themes.

II.b.   Coding the Data

Once the final selection of reviews was made, creating the body of data comprising of 216 reviews for coding, the data was coded three times. The third set of codes became the final, workable coding data and was more specific and organized than its predecessors. Initial coding was done by hand, then the program Atlas.ti was used. Atlas.ti was selected based on it's user reviews, high recommendation from academics, and the fact that it was designed by scholars based on their needs in research. Atlas.ti is a program designed to simplify coding of large data in various media formats. Atlas.ti made it possible to code and organize the data in a more efficient manner with the possibility for easily determining the most important relationships through tools like the co-occurrence tables, which showcase the cross-over between various codes.

Using a grounded method, whereby codes are extracted from the data, 42 codes fell under seven themes with the code *trip enhanced* appearing separate from the other categories. Codes were divided into *enthusiasm (en), experience (ex), practicality (pr), qualities (qu), results (re), technological (te),* and *tourism (to).*These groups were created to organize review information into common themes and distinguish the qualities mentioned in reviews into corresponding categories for easy comparison and organization.

The first code group, *enthusiasm*, was created as a method of distinguishing the reviews that expressed more excitement about the app. As previously established, the reviews are overwhelmingly positive, so a measurement of enthusiasm was created to separate reviews based on this measure to determine which users really loved this app. Enthusiasm levels were separated into high, mid and low levels. This measurement was then cross referenced with the other code groups in order to create connections with the traits that made people really excited about using the app, thereby revealing some of the most valued qualities the app boasts.

Levels of enthusiasm were determined through reading the vocabulary, the strength of the recommendation, punctuation employed and overall enthusiasm relayed in the review. Examples of vocabulary that qualified for a high enthusiasm code were "superb", "fantastic", "brilliant", "wonderful", etc. Strength of recommendation was used when reviews insisted on downloads, "Don't do Europe without this app!" and "Must have!" are both examples of reviews that were coded with high enthusiasm. Punctuation determined enthusiasm through the use of exclamation marks, particularly excessive use of exclamation marks. Examples of overall but generic enthusiasm included people who used phrases like "life-saver", "brought the city to life", or "best app ever."

The *experience* code group is quite straightforward and focuses on the phase of experience: anticipation, post-trip and armchair travelers - people who utilize travel media like books, television programs, radio shows and podcasts as a means of mental escape without actually traveling. A code was not included specifying the stage of actual experience, i.e. during their trip, because this applied to nearly every review and is generally assumed. Anticipation, post-trip and armchair travel were

coded because they are more unique results for a guided tour app and it was worth coding reviews that showcased users listening to the tours before or after their trip. Most surprising were the few reviews that described using the app without a planned trip and thus were included in the codes as armchair travel.

Codes grouped under *practicality* speak to practical qualities of the app that serve a functional purpose for users making them more efficient, things more convenient, or serving a useful purpose. *Interactive maps, pace and timetable, saved money, simplified/useful/helpful* and *tips and tricks* were all coded within the group *practicality*. Reviews coded with *saved money* also included mentions praising the app for being free. *Simplified/useful/helpful* was used to code reviews that specified using the app as making things easier for the traveler. The *practicality* codes focus on practical concerns for travelers like their budget, navigation, time management and making the most of their trip with insider information about cities and venues.

The *qualities* code group is composed of 19 codes that describe the qualities of the app that users specified. Qualities coded were revealed through a grounded reading of the reviews. The codes are *accessible, concise, dated, easy to use/follow, enjoy, entertaining, family friendly, fun, funny, good content, hard to follow, inaccurate, informative, interesting, like Rick, nice delivery, not funny, not objective* and *offensive*. Though some codes are similar, they were kept separate to avoid any projections by the author, for instance, fun and funny or fun and enjoy. These codes are distinguished in order to prevent interpretations on the part of the reader because statements such as "enjoy" are based on the reviewers interests, for example some reviewers may enjoy a tour because it is informative while others may enjoy it because it is lighthearted, so the code was kept as enjoy using reviewers own words without projecting potentially inaccurate meanings. Another example of similar but distinct codes are fun, funny and enjoy, because fun does not necessarily imply funny and enjoy does not mean it was fun, but that they found it pleasurable. The Like Rick code was used when reviews specifically mentioned that they are fans of Rick or appreciate his specific guiding style, calling him out by name or referencing his other travel materials like his PBS show *Rick Steves' Europe* or his collection of guidebooks.

Results codes were used when reviews included text that was not reflective of a specific quality but instead created a scenario or feeling as a result of using the app. These five codes are *familiarity, future use, outward exploration, thank you* and *travel companion*. Familiarity was used on reviews when the author described a greater sense of familiarity or feeling less overwhelmed with the destination. Future use was coded on reviews when the app user specified or implied that they would be using the app again on future travels. Outward exploration speaks to reviewers who specified that they found areas, restaurants or experiences outside of what was expected or outside of the tourist hubs of the cities they visited, sometimes described as "hidden gems". Many reviewers included an expression of gratitude for the app (often they specifically thanked Rick) and this unique but personal interaction via an online app review was coded as thank you. One of the most interesting codes, travel companion, was used when app users felt that they had found a travel companion in Rick as a result of using the guiding app. All results codes were based on specific mentions within the reviews not discourse readings to ensure that code co-occurrence readings were accurate, not a comparison of interpretations by the reader.

The *technical* code group was used for reviews that mentioned technical issues but still managed to use the app. *Annoying problems* was the code for reviews where users specified technical issues with the phone that proved minimal for users. *Bad experience* was used for reviews in instances where the user was able to use the app but it suffered from poor functionality or crashes, creating a bad experience for the user while on site.

Codes grouped in the *tourism* category were used when reviewers mentioned or made comparisons to aspects of the tourism industry. The code *better than other guides* was used when reviews compared the app with other audio or guided tours. *Compliment to guidebook* was used when reviewers specified that they used both the app and a guidebook, frequently the Rick Steves' guidebooks. Reviews were coded with *escape mass tourism* when users described escaping the crowds or group tours, for instance one reviewer described the relief of not "being herded like cows." Similar but distinct from better than other guides was the code *personal guide*. Users who described their experience with the app as having a

personal guide implied a more personal and intimate experience as if they were traveling with Rick, similar but varied from another similar code, *travel companion*. The subtle distinctions between these codes are in the specific phrasing used by reviewers, for example one review described their experience, "Rick's style of presentation offers history, local tips and insights that sometimes makes you feel he's walking beside you as your personal guide." This portion of the review was coded as *personal guide* because of the specific mention, but not as a *travel companion*. The comparisons to the tourism industry provided value for distinguishing experiences with the app from experiences otherwise facilitated by the tourism industry.

Trip Enhanced was the only standalone code, but one of the most important. The *trip enhanced* code was used when reviews specifically described their trip or experience being enhanced as the result of using the app. These reviews were often more descriptive and employed phrases like "made the trip", "brought it to life", "added excitement to the trip", and even in one instance saying, "…but I forgot to use it on my more recent travels. That's my only regret," implying that the trip was less exciting than others with the app had been. This code helped to isolate some of the most descriptive reviews. Codes that co-occurred with *trip enhanced* provide insight into the qualities that create a greater experience with a stronger lasting impression for users of the app.

The distribution of codes for the 216 reviews, separated by group, appears in the table below. Each group is color coded and abbreviated with the initials of it's code group. Enthusiasm is coded blue and abbreviated *en, experience* is orange and abbreviated *ex, practicalities* appear in green with the abbreviation *pr, qualities* are coded yellow with the abbreviation *qu, results* appear in red with the abbreviation *re, technical problems* are coded grey with the abbreviation *te, tourism* codes are color coded purple abbreviated *to, and trip enhanced* appears without color or abbreviation.

Figure 3.7   Code Frequency Table (with color coding)

Code	Frequency
En – High	142
En – Mid	48
En – Low	26
Ex – Anticipation	15
Ex – Armchair Travel	6
Ex – Post	2
Pr - Interactive Maps	11
Pr - Pace & Timetable	19
Pr – Saved Money	64
Pr – Simplified/Useful/Helpful	37
Pr – Tips & Tricks	15
Qu - Accessible	23
Qu - Concise	16
Qu - Dated	2
Qu - Easy to Use/Follow	46
Qu - Enjoy	8
Qu - Entertaining	6
Qu - Family Friendly	3
Qu - Fun	9
Qu - Funny	11
Qu - Good content	66
Qu - Hard to follow	1
Qu - Inaccurate	4
Qu - Informative	70

Qu - Interesting	21
Qu - Like Rick	59
Qu - Nice Delivery	18
Qu - Not Funny	6
Qu - Not objective	3
Qu - Offensive	1
Re - Familiarity	9
Re – Future Use	22
Re – Outward Exploration	8
Re – Thank You	32
Re – Travel Companion	6
Te – Annoying Problems	29
Te – Bad Experience	9
To – Better than other guides	36
To – Compliment to Guidebook	9
To – Escape Mass Tourism	8
To – Personal Guide	12
Trip Enhanced	43

II.c.   Code Co-occurrence Tables

Code co-occurrence tables are one of the many tools available for data analysis in Atlas.ti. These tables measure and chart the occurrences when a portion of text is coded multiple times, making a clear display of which codes commonly occur with one another in the data. Co-occurrence tables are a useful tool in a case like this, where so many codes are used on short texts, in order to help identify patterns. Tables display both the number of co-occurrences and a figure

representing the strength of relationship between co-occurring codes, called the c-coefficient.

The c-coefficient is a number indicator of intensity of the co-occurrence of two codes calculated by the program; numbers closer to 1.0 represent a stronger connection with numbers closer to 0.0 demonstrating a weaker intensity. This figure is calculated in the program "based on the 'normalized co-occurrence' measure as used in quantitative content analysis." (Friese, 190) C-coefficient numbers that show a low numeric representation but a significant overlap in data are denoted by a yellow circle, suggesting that the connection may still be worthy of analysis. Yellow circles will not be represented in charts in this thesis, but will be considered for analysis. Co-occurrence charts will be presented in simplified forms in this chapter to demonstrate the most meaningful data overlap and provide visual representation of data overlap suggesting connections between the codes. C-coefficient numbers are represented in the tables in parentheses.

Analysis of the co-occurrence tables will focus on connections with the codes *high enthusiasm, trip enhanced,* all codes in the *results* category (*familiarity, future use, outward exploration, thank you* and *travel companion*), and all of the codes in the *tourism* category (*better than other guides, compliment to guidebook, escape mass tourism*, and *personal guide*). These codes will be analyzed against one another, as well as the codes in the *practicality* and *qualities* groups in order to identify patterns between positive experience and the offerings presented through the app that left a marked impression on app users. Additionally, a quick assessment of the co-occurring *qualities* codes will be reviewed in order to assess the reviews for the most commonly occurring traits of the app that combine to motivate positive reviews. Focus is directed toward co-occurrences to identify possible connections between the qualities of the app with the behavior and experience of users. Examples of reviews will be provided in order to demonstrate how the qualities of the app worked together to create an experience for the user. Spelling and grammatical errors in reviews are maintained in quotations.

The 142 reviews coded with *high enthusiasm* have been distinguished for further analysis because the high excitement level of the review alludes to a greater change in the tourists' experience. Reviewers who were enthusiastic about using the

app more fervently recommended its use to others based on their own positive experience. This assumption can be demonstrated in the high co-occurrence with *trip enhanced* (37), showing that 26% of *en-high* reviews specified that their trip was enhanced directly with relation to using the app. The table below shows all codes that co-occurred with *en – high*, codes that did not have been excluded. Codes that appeared with a yellow circle in the program are denoted here with an asterisk, suggesting that though they appear with a low c-coefficient number, they are still worthy of analysis based on a possible connection. As the most frequently occurring code, it is expected to have many co-occurrences, as is demonstrated by the high frequency of asterisks. This alludes to multiple different elements within the app creating memorable experiences for users.

Figure 3.8   High Enthusiasm Co-occurrence Table

Code	Co-occurrence with *En-High*
Pr - Interactive Maps	9 (0.06)*
Pr - Pace & Timetable	14 (0.10)*
Pr - Saved Money	51 (0.33)
Pr - Simplified/ Useful/ Helpful	22 (0.14)
Pr - Tips & Tricks	11 (0.08)*
Qu - Accessible	18 (0.12)*
Qu - Concise	9 (0.06)*
Qu - Easy to Use/Follow	26 (0.16)
Qu - Enjoy	6 (0.04)*
Qu - Entertaining	5 (0.03)*
Qu - Family friendly	3 (0.02)*

Qu - Fun	8 (0.06)*
Qu - Funny	8 (0.06)*
Qu - Good content	36 (0.21)
Qu - Informative	49 (0.30)
Qu - Interesting	14 (0.09)*
Qu - Like Rick	50 (0.33)
Qu - Nice Delivery	14 (0.10)*
Qu - Not Funny	2 (0.01)*
Re - Familiarity	8 (0.06)*
Re - Future Use	19 (0.13)*
Re - Outward Exploration	7 (0.05)*
Re - Thank You	27 (0.18)
Re - Travel Companion	6 (0.04)*
Te - Annoying Problems	9 (0.06)
Te - Bad Experience	1 (0.01)*
To - Better than other guides	25 (0.17)
To - Compliment to Guidebook	7 (0.05)*
To - Escape Mass Tourism	7 (0.05)*
To - Personal Guide	11 (0.08)*
Trip Enhanced	37 (0.25)

As demonstrated in the table, *practical* qualities showed many co-occurrences with *en- high,* with the strongest being *saved money,* demonstrating that users who were enthusiastic about the app were pleased with the app being free and saving

them money on other tours. This only affirms that travelers are looking to reap the most reward at the best price while traveling, though seeking high value is a well-known trait for tourists so this is unsurprising.

The table also suggests that using the app made travel easier by providing helpful and useful information, the code *simplified/useful/helpful* was used when reviews described the app making things easier for them. The flexible *pace & timetable* afforded by using the audio tours also proved a valuable quality for users – making it possible for them to move at their own pace and when they wanted to, allowing for economic and changeable time management. One reviewer succinctly captured three *practicality* codes in a couple of sentences, "Traveled to 8 cities over 15 days armed only with Rick Steves' app on my iPhone… walking tours were nothing less than fantastic and author interviews were informative. This app saved us hundreds on guided tours and allowed us to do stuff according to our own schedule. In hindsight, I would pay fair money for this app but the free price tag makes it even better."

Qualities codes showed the strongest factors in relation to *en-high* to be *like Rick*, *informative*, *good content, easy to use/follow*, *accessible*, *interesting* and *nice delivery*. Of the 19 qualities, the strongest co-occurrences were based on Rick Steves being the guide, suggesting this app is, naturally, popular among his fan base. Steves' popularity and delivery style were influential factors in over one third of all high enthusiasm reviews and nearly one quarter of the reviews comprising the bank of data.

Results co-occurrences with *en-high* showed the strongest connection with gratitude, with 27 connections with *thank you.Thank you* is an interesting and valuable code because this expression of gratitude is an implication that something was done for or given to the app user. "Thank you" is a response in reaction to something, in this case, users are thankful for the app, therefore, the experience, information and entertainment provided. *Future Use* also shows that many enthusiastic reviews expressly stated their intent to use the app on future trips. As one reviewer writes, " Just returned from Italy where we used 7 of Rick's audio tours in Rome and Venice. They were wonderfully informative and easy to use – and no data roaming charges! I will look for more audio guides for future trips. Thank you,

Rick!". This review is a brief summary of hours of educational tours taken easily and for free, and they felt they had received something and personally thanked Rick Steves.

The only *Tourism* group code that showed a moderate connection was *better than other guides.* This connection implies that the most common link that app users made between the tourism industry and this app experience was the quality of the guide. Users found that the audio guide provided by the app was better than tour groups or on-site audio guides provided at museum and heritage sites. One reviewer writes, "I downloaded Rick's audio tour of the louvre and rented the audio guide at the louvre as I had never used either one. We started with the audio guide from the museum but found it impossible and worthless. We switched to Rick's and were so impressed. It was easy and very informative without being boring…" Another wrote, "Rick's tour of Berlin was better than any local guide, and best of all, it's free, and also very easy to navigate. You can also pause and rewind as needed…"

Overall, the *high enthusiasm* co-occurrence table highlights travelers desire for practical aid (saving money, allowing for economic time management, making travel easier), and quality information delivered via an accessible presentation style. Steves' travel expertise and popularity as a host coupled with the financial relief provided by the free app left users feeling enthusiastic about their experience, to the point that many expressed preference for the app over other guides. This table showcases a positive experience for users who felt so grateful for the app that they included a "thank you" in the review and vocalized their intent to use the app again in the future.

Figure 3.9   Trip Enhanced Co-occurrence table

Code	Co-occurrence with *Trip Enhanced (c-coefficient)*
En - High	37 (0.25)
Pr - Pace & Timetable	7 (0.13)
Pr - Saved Money	17 (0.19)

Pr - Simplified/ Useful/ Helpful	8 (0.11)
Pr - Tips & Tricks	6 (0.12)
Qu - Accessible	13 (0.25)
Qu - Concise	7 (0.13)
Qu - Easy to Use/Follow	11 (0.14)
Qu - Enjoy	4 (0.09)*
Qu - Entertaining	3 (0.07)*
Qu - Family friendly	1 (0.02)*
Qu - Informative	20 (0.22)
Qu - Interesting	7 (0.12)
Qu - Like Rick	20 (0.24)
Qu - Nice Delivery	8 (0.15)
Re - Future Use	10 (0.18)
Re - Outward Exploration	3 (0.06)*
Re - Thank You	7 (0.10)
Re- Travel Companion	4 (0.09)*
To – Better than other guides	11 (0.18)
To – Compliment to Guidebook	5 (0.11)
To - Escape Mass Tourism	2 (0.04)*
To – Personal Guide	6 (0.12)

Of the 43 reviews coded *Trip enhanced*, 37 co-occurred with *en-high*, confirming that reviewers who felt that their trip had been positively influenced showed a high level of enthusiasm and excitement in relaying their experiences with

the app. The high level of enthusiasm is not surprising, only a small percentage of app users write reviews so it can be expected that the reviews that are written are expressing a higher level of enthusiasm. In the case of this app, the level of emotional expression is skewed to the positive spectrum based on the overall high reviews of the app.

Interestingly, all four *practicality* codes appear with a high enough c-coefficient number to indicate a connection suggesting that practical aid was commonly connected with a high level of satisfaction. As one review details, "This audio guide has saved us so much time, research, and money. We are currently on a cruise and not only did these audio guides save us at least $50 pp so far, but it's the ease of use and Rick's insights that have truly enhanced our vacation." Saving money, economizing time, making things easier and getting insider tips all fulfill tourists' needs for relevant and current information, playing less to the hedonic, entertainment needs of travelers and more to their needs to efficiently, affordably and conveniently move through an unfamiliar locale.

The strongest *qualities* associated with a better trip were *accessibility, informative,* and *like Rick*. Rick Steves' popularity, combined with his informative and accessible presentation contributed to an enhanced tourist experience. *Enjoy, entertaining,* and *family friendly* were also noted by the program for potential relationships. The only review that co-occurs with *trip enhanced* and *family friendly* describes, "Rick Steves' guided tours bring ancient ruins to life. He has a great voice, provides interesting details and made my kids excited to spend a whole hour at the Roman Forum."

Once again, the favorable comparison of Rick Steves' to other guides showed the strongest tourism industry relationship, though all *tourism* codes suggested a relationship. It is expected that when reviews talk about their trip being enhanced they would compare their experience with the app to other guides and aspects of tourism.

Figure 3.10   Results code group co-occurrence

	Re - Familiarity	Re - Future Use	Re - Outward Exploration	Re - Thank You	Re - Travel Companion
Ex - Anticipation	4 (0.20)	2 (0.06)	1 (0.05)	3 (0.07)	
Pr - Pace & Timetable	1 (0.04)	7 (0.21)	1 (0.04)	6 (0.13)	1 (0.04)
Pr - Saved Money	3 (0.04)*	10 (0.13)	3 (0.04)*	13 (0.16)	2 (0.03)*
Pr - Simplified/ Useful/ Helpful	1 (0.02)	7 (0.13)		7 (0.11)	
Qu - Accessible	2 (0.07)	5 (0.09)	4 (0.15)	5 (0.10)	1 (0.04)
Qu - Concise		4 (0.12)	2 (0.09)	1 (0.02)	
Qu - Easy to Use/Follow		3 (0.05)		10 (0.15)	2 (0.04)*
Qu - Enjoy		3 (0.11)		1 (0.03)	
Qu - Entertaining		3 (0.12)		1 (0.03)*	
Qu - Fun	1 (0.06)	1 (0.03)	2 (0.13)	3 (0.08)	
Qu - Good Content	1 (0.01)*	5 (0.06)	1 (0.01)*	4 (0.04)	1 (0.01)*
Qu - Informative	4 (0.05)*	12 (0.15)	4 (0.05)*	11 (0.12)	2 (0.03)*
Qu - Interesting	3 (0.11)	3 (0.07)	2 (0.07)	5 (0.10)	1 (0.04)
Qu - Like Rick	1 (0.01)*	9 (0.12)	3 (0.05)*	23 (0.34)	5 (0.08)*
Qu - Nice Delivery	1 (0.04)	4 (0.11)	1 (0.04)	4 (0.09)	1 (0.04)
Qu - Not Funny		1 (0.04)	1 (0.08)	1 (0.03)*	
To - Better than other guides	2 (0.05)	8 (0.18)	2 (0.06)	4 (0.07)	2 (0.06)*
To - Compliment to Guidebook	1 (0.06)	2 (0.07)	1 (0.06)	4 (0.11)	1 (0.07)
To - Escape Mass Tourism	1 (0.06)	1 (0.03)	3 (0.23)	2 (0.05)	1 (0.08)

To - Personal Guide	1 (0.05)	2 (0.06)	3 (0.18)	3 (0.07)	1 (0.06)
Trip Enhanced	2 (0.04)	10 (0.18)	3 (0.06)*	7 (0.10)	4 (0.09)*

Connections within the *Results* co-occurrence table are sparse, with a limited number of meaningful connections. The connections that do suggest relationships are, however, interesting. Each *Results* code and its co-occurrences will be analyzed independently.

One of the strongest c-coefficient numbers appearing on the table demonstrates a connection between *familiarity* and *anticipation.* It is easy to understand how app users who listened to the audio guides as a form of anticipatory research found themselves less overwhelmed in their destinations. Other codes with noteworthy connections are *good content, informative, interesting,* and *like Rick.* Most of the co-occurrences that suggest a relationship with *familiarity* are information based, which is a logical connection. As one Google Play reviewer explains, "I listened to the talks and interviews with Berlin dwellers on the flight to Berlin, and as I landed it did not feel like a strange city, the podcasts and the audio help establish a connection much before kne [sic] gets there…absolutely brilliant!!" Feelings of familiarity are generated based on feelings of comfort and knowledge, so the understanding of their vacation destinations as provided by Steves' made their destination less overwhelming, giving users a feeling of confidence.

Future use codes show connections with three of the *practicality* codes, particularly *pace & timetable.* Additionally, moderate connections were found with *better than other guides,* and, unsurprisingly, *trip enhanced.*

Regarding exploration, *outward exploration* and *escape mass tourism* show one of the strongest connections, followed by *personal guide*. Other suggested areas to explore further marked by the asterisk in the chart above include *good content, informative,* and *like Rick.* These relationships help to illustrate a potential sense of adventure felt by users of the app. For instance, one reviewer stated, "Get to know lesser known places which turned offered [sic] good attractions without the usual tourist hubbub." As they break free from the confines of large tour groups and

organized, mass activities, potentially with the app as their private and *personal guide* they are more empowered toward exploration in their foreign locales.

Thank you illustrates a close connection with *like Rick,* followed by *saved money* and *easy to use/follow.* Reviewers who felt inclined to include a "thank you" in their reviews frequently addressed their gratefulness directly to Rick Steves, and frequently had already referred to him by name in the review. This familiar method of addressing the narrator and namesake of the podcast is an interesting interaction between the app users and the narrator, implying that the exchange is a dialogue rather than a monologue and the app users feel a greater sense of connection to Rick Steves.

Last of the *Results* codes, *travel companion* shows weak c-coefficient numbers, but potential avenues for further exploration with the codes *saved money, good content, informative, like Rick, better than other tour guides,* and *trip enhanced.* One review helps boil their experience down, "Thank you, Rick Steves for your amazing Florence and Rome tours. You brought to life these cities in a way that was animated, easy to understand, and personable (we felt like you we [sic] beside us). The pace and commentary were perfect for every tour we took! Grazia!". This review is one example of several that describe Steves as a part of their travel party, or as joining them on their trip. Essentially confirming that the personable presentation style of Steves makes both him as the host and the city more accessible through the walking tours.

What can be gathered from the *results* co-occurrence tables is the *practical* qualities of the app grant users confidence in their travels. The freedom to move at their own pace, the saved money, and the wealth of valuable information simplify their travels and encourage them to explore cities without feeling overwhelmed, potentially with the feeling of Steves as their knowledgeable companion. As a result of the knowledge and accessibility of the audio tour host and the city via his expertise, app users feel connected to the city and comfortable exploring, enhancing their trip.

Figure 3.11   Tourism Co-occurrence Table

	To - Better than other guides	To - Compliment to Guidebook	To - Escape Mass Tourism	To - Personal Guide
Ex - Anticipation	1 (0.02)	2 (0.09)		2 (0.08)
Pr - Interactive Maps	3 (0.08)	2 (0.11)	2 (0.12)	4 (0.21)
Pr - Pace & Timetable	7 (0.17)	4 (0.17)		1 (0.03)
Pr - Saved Money	21 (0.29)	3 (0.04)*	6 (0.09)*	6 (0.09)*
Pr - Simplified/ Useful/ Helpful	7 (0.12)	4 (0.10)	1 (0.02)	1 (0.02)
Pr - Tips & Tricks	5 (0.12)	2 (0.09)		2 (0.08)
Qu - Accessible	6 (0.13)	4 (0.14)	2 (0.07)	5 (0.17)
Qu - Concise	4 (0.10)	1 (0.04)	1 (0.04)	3 (0.12)
Qu - Easy to Use/Follow	5 (0.07)	3 (0.06)*	1 (0.02)*	1 (0.02)
Qu - Enjoy	4 (0.12)	2 (0.13)		1 (0.05)
Qu - Entertaining	4 (0.12)	1 (0.07)		
Qu - Fun	4 (0.11)		1 (0.06)	3 (0.17)
Qu - Funny	4 (0.11)	1 (0.05)	3 (0.19)	
Qu - Good content	2 (0.02)	1 (0.01)*		1 (0.01)*
Qu - Informative	16 (0.19)	6 (0.08)*	4 (0.05)*	6 (0.08)*
Qu - Interesting	5 (0.11)	1 (0.03)	2 (0.07)	1 (0.03)
Qu - Like Rick	11 (0.14)	5 (0.08)*	3 (0.05)*	9 (0.15)

Qu - Nice Delivery	4 (0.09)	2 (0.08)		4 (0.15)
Re - Familiarity	2 (0.05)	1 (0.06)	1 (0.06)	1 (0.05)
Re - Future Use	8 (0.18)	2 (0.07)	1 (0.03)	2 (0.06)
Re - Outward Exploration	2 (0.06)	1 (0.06)	3 (0.23)	3 (0.18)
Re - Thank You	4 (0.07)	4 (0.11)	2 (0.05)	3 (0.07)
Re - Travel Companion	2 (0.06)	1 (0.07)	1 (0.08)	1 (0.06)
To - Better than other guides	-	2 (0.05)	5 (0.15)	5 (0.14)
To - Compliment to Guidebook	2 (0.05)	-		2 (0.11)
To - Escape Mass Tourism	5 (0.15)		-	1 (0.05)
To - Personal Guide	5 (0.14)	2 (0.11)	1 (0.05)	-
Trip Enhanced	11 (0.18)	5 (0.11)	2 (0.04)*	6 (0.12)

The *tourism* code group was created to gauge how users referenced other aspects of the tourism industry. *Compliment to guidebook* was included to document the instances of users supplementing their more traditional media (guidebooks) with the new media of an app based mobile tour guide. This code gives insight into the mixing of the two travel information sources. While some reviews specified relying solely on the app for information or maps, a handful of users used their app as a complementary source and/or activity. While technology continues to advance the tourism industry, these reviews highlight the loyalty some travelers maintain for traditional travel information. Guidebook users also showed connections with *practical* codes showing that these travelers seek useful information, value, and economic use of their time.

  Better than other guides, escape mass tourism and *personal guide* are all codes that are uniquely related. Guides, whether they are group, personal, or audio guides are all mediators of the destination, museum or site, offering insight into the history and unique aspects of the city or site for visitors. Though similar, these codes

highlighted different perspectives regarding this app. Reviews coded with *better than other guides* show connections with *practical* codes, again demonstrating the high value travelers place on their money and time. Additional connections with *simplified/useful/helpful*, *tips & tricks,* and *informative* show the high worth of the information provided by the app. This potentially highlights an arena of information shared in the audio tours and interviews that isn't typically included in other tours, practical information rather than just cultural or historic information.

Information, while a prominent reason for liking the Rick Steves' guide is not the only reason. Reviews coded with *escape mass tourism* describe an affinity for the privacy and privilege of escaping large groups while still enjoying and understanding the significant sites, "…So much beter [sic] than a group tour where you are herded like cows and given way too much information. Being on your own gives you a true sense of exploration. Rick and guests provide just the right amount of information. Museums in Italy have so much content you really need help in knowing what the highlights are." The sense of freedom tourists feel as the result of escaping groups leaves them with a greater sense of exploration and personal experience.

Personal experiences, for some, are generated by the feeling that Steves is their *personal guide.* The quality of the guide, *accessible* information provided and *interactive maps* all demonstrate co-occurrences with *personal guide.* Information in the table suggests that users who likened Steves to their personal guide did so with the aid of the maps and had a *fun* experience. Co-occurring with *outward exploration,* the following review relays how the knowledge gained through their private guide inspired them to venture out, "Wow, we felt like we were on a private tour without having to pay for one! And Rick's radio episodes were also very helpful to understand the culture and find hidden treasures sightseeing." Empowered with their free information, these travelers sought out the "hidden treasures" suggesting that they felt they had broken out of the typical tourist experience or areas.

The *tourism* code co-occurrence table highlights some of the qualities that influenced user reviews and experiences. As with the other code groups, *practical* information showed many connections. *Practical* knowledge gained through the app, coupled with the *accessible* delivery by Steves' helped to create a distinction

between Steves' and other guides resulting in more personal experiences for app users. Some users felt grateful to escape large groups, some felt as through Steves' was their personal guide, affirming that app users find Steves' a superior guide to others. Tables continue to demonstrate that both practical knowledge and historical/cultural information play well together in this app, helping to establish trust between users and their audio host, Rick Steves. This section demonstrates that traditional guidebooks are not necessarily abandoned in favor of this new media, but serve as a supplementary tool for travelers. Somewhat surprisingly, app users do not appear to find the audio guide lacking in comparison to a tour guide, but prefer it based on the practical information and freedoms afforded through the app. Rather than feel the absence of the tour guide, travelers instead feel, and appreciate, the absence of other tour group members, finding themselves in a position of privilege, gaining all the information necessary to understand their surroundings without sacrificing their time, money, or personal space.

Figure 3.12   Practicalities and Qualities Co-occurrence Table
                 (split into two images)

	Pr - Interactive Maps	Pr - Pace & Timetable	Pr - Saved Money	Pr - Simplified/ Useful/ Helpful	Pr - Tips & Tricks	Qu - Accessible	Qu - Concise	Qu - Easy to Use/Follow	Qu - Enjoy
Pr - Interactive Maps		2 (0.07)	6 (0.09)*	4 (0.09)	2 (0.08)	1 (0.03)	2 (0.08)	4 (0.08)	1 (0.06)
Pr - Pace & Timetable	2 (0.07)		14 (0.20)	6 (0.12)	5 (0.17)	5 (0.14)	6 (0.21)	4 (0.07)	3 (0.12)
Pr - Saved Money	6 (0.09)*	14 (0.20)		10 (0.11)	7 (0.10)	8 (0.10)	7 (0.10)	11 (0.11)	2 (0.03)*
Pr - Simplified/ Useful/ Helpful	4 (0.09)	6 (0.12)	10 (0.11)		6 (0.13)	4 (0.07)	4 (0.08)	10 (0.14)	3 (0.07)
Pr - Tips & Tricks	2 (0.08)	5 (0.17)	7 (0.10)	6 (0.13)		1 (0.03)	1 (0.03)	1 (0.02)	2 (0.10)
Qu - Accessible	1 (0.03)	5 (0.14)	8 (0.10)	4 (0.07)	1 (0.03)		5 (0.15)	6 (0.10)	2 (0.07)
Qu - Concise	2 (0.08)	6 (0.21)	7 (0.10)	4 (0.08)	1 (0.03)	5 (0.15)		2 (0.03)	2 (0.09)
Qu - Easy to Use/Follow	4 (0.08)	4 (0.07)	11 (0.11)	10 (0.14)	1 (0.02)	6 (0.10)	2 (0.03)		1 (0.02)
Qu - Enjoy	1 (0.06)	3 (0.12)	2 (0.03)*	3 (0.07)	2 (0.10)	2 (0.07)	2 (0.09)	1 (0.02)*	
Qu - Entertaining		2 (0.09)	4 (0.06)*	1 (0.02)*	1 (0.05)	1 (0.04)	2 (0.10)	3 (0.06)*	1 (0.08)
Qu - Family friendly			1 (0.02)*	1 (0.03)*					
Qu - Fun	1 (0.05)		4 (0.06)*	2 (0.05)		3 (0.10)	2 (0.09)	2 (0.04)*	1 (0.06)
Qu - Funny	1 (0.05)	3 (0.11)	5 (0.07)*	1 (0.03)*	2 (0.08)	2 (0.06)	1 (0.04)	1 (0.02)	1 (0.06)
Qu - Good content	1 (0.01)*	2 (0.02)	13 (0.11)	6 (0.06)	2 (0.03)	3 (0.03)		11 (0.11)	1 (0.01)*
Qu - Informative	8 (0.11)*	13 (0.17)	30 (0.29)	19 (0.22)	7 (0.09)	14 (0.18)	10 (0.13)	22 (0.23)	3 (0.04)*
Qu - Interesting	1 (0.03)	5 (0.14)	6 (0.08)	3 (0.05)	1 (0.19)	7 (0.19)	5 (0.16)	5 (0.08)	1 (0.04)
Qu - Like Rick	5 (0.08)*	8 (0.11)	23 (0.23)	13 (0.16)	9 (0.15)	11 (0.15)	3 (0.04)	14 (0.15)	4 (0.06)*
Qu - Nice Delivery	3 (0.12)	3 (0.09)	5 (0.06)	6 (0.12)	1 (0.14)	5 (0.14)	2 (0.06)	5 (0.08)	1 (0.04)

	Qu - Entertaining	Qu - Family friendly	Qu - Fun	Qu - Funny	Qu - Good content	Qu - Informative	Qu - Interesting	Qu - Like Rick	Qu - Nice Delivery
Pr - Interactive Maps			1 (0.05)	1 (0.05)	1 (0.01)*	8 (0.11)*	1 (0.03)	5 (0.08)*	3 (0.12)
Pr - Pace & Timetable	2 (0.09)			3 (0.11)	2 (0.02)	13 (0.17)	5 (0.14)	8 (0.11)	3 (0.09)
Pr - Saved Money	4 (0.06)*	1 (0.02)*	4 (0.06)*	5 (0.07)*	13 (0.11)	30 (0.29)	6 (0.08)	23 (0.23)	5 (0.06)
Pr - Simplified/ Useful/ Helpful	1 (0.02)*	1 (0.03)*	2 (0.05)	1 (0.02)	6 (0.06)	19 (0.22)	3 (0.05)	13 (0.16)	6 (0.12)
Pr - Tips & Tricks	1 (0.05)			2 (0.08)	2 (0.03)	7 (0.09)	1 (0.03)	9 (0.14)	1 (0.03)
Qu - Accessible	1 (0.04)		3 (0.10)	2 (0.06)	3 (0.03)	14 (0.18)	7 (0.19)	11 (0.15)	5 (0.14)
Qu - Concise	2 (0.10)		2 (0.09)	1 (0.04)		10 (0.13)	5 (0.16)	3 (0.04)	2 (0.06)
Qu - Easy to Use/Follow	3 (0.06)*		2 (0.04)*	1 (0.02)	11 (0.11)	22 (0.23)	5 (0.08)	14 (0.15)	5 (0.08)
Qu - Enjoy	1 (0.08)		1 (0.06)		1 (0.01)*	3 (0.04)*	1 (0.04)	4 (0.06)*	1 (0.04)
Qu - Entertaining					1 (0.06)	5 (0.07)*	1 (0.04)	1 (0.02)*	1 (0.04)
Qu - Family friendly							1 (0.04)*	1 (0.02)*	1 (0.05)*
Qu - Fun				2 (0.11)	1 (0.01)*	5 (0.07)*	1 (0.03)	7 (0.11)*	1 (0.04)
Qu - Funny	1 (0.06)		2 (0.11)		1 (0.01)*	7 (0.09)*	4 (0.14)	5 (0.08)*	1 (0.04)
Qu - Good content			1 (0.01)*	1 (0.01)*		11 (0.09)*	3 (0.04)	8 (0.07)	6 (0.08)
Qu - Informative	5 (0.07)*		5 (0.07)*	7 (0.09)*	11 (0.09)		12 (0.15)	21 (0.19)	11 (0.14)
Qu - Interesting	1 (0.04)	1 (0.04)*	1 (0.03)	4 (0.14)*	3 (0.04)	12 (0.15)		7 (0.10)	3 (0.08)
Qu - Like Rick	1 (0.02)*	1 (0.02)*	7 (0.11)*	5 (0.08)*	8 (0.07)	21 (0.19)	7 (0.10)		10 (0.15)
Qu - Nice Delivery	1 (0.04)	1 (0.05)*	1 (0.04)	1 (0.04)	6 (0.08)	11 (0.14)	3 (0.08)	10 (0.15)	

Co-occurrences on the *Practicalities and Qualities* table confirm the qualities that are popular amongst reviewers. Unlike the other tables, this focuses only on the app traits and benefits rather than its relationship to other aspects of the tourism industry, behavior changes in tourists or their enthusiasm level. Having already assessed the other co-occurrence tables, the co-occurrences found here continue to highlight qualities that users found valuable. Useful information, freedom to move at their own pace on their own timetable, an appreciation for Rick as the host and his accessible but concise delivery style.

Surprisingly, codes like *fun, entertaining, funny,* and *enjoy* did not demonstrate strong relationships. While some of these codes show suggestions for further investigation, app users did not relay their positive experiences in these words as frequently, suggesting they played a less important role. The infrequency of codes highlighting the entertainment aspect appear to suggest that they do not use the app seeking entertainment so much as they do for information. While some reviews do mention having fun or being entertained, it confirms that information carries more value for travelers than entertainment. This is consistent with the findings of Ivan K. Lai's article (2015), that found information to be the key-determining factor in use, with entertainment having an indirect effect.

Experience is individualized; it is based on a multitude of internal and external factors. For instance, a visitors mood can be altered by stresses at home or while traveling, weather and unforeseeable events can influence experience and bodily discomfort can affect how a tourist behaves. While star ratings analysis, word counts, and co-occurrence tables can help to create an overview of tourists' experiences using the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app, individual experiences are necessary examples for this research. This section will also address unique and outlying reviews, including negative reviews and armchair travelers. Referring back the main and sub-research questions for this thesis, reviews will be chosen to understand what affect use of this app had on tourist experiences and if it pushed them to find greater agency, interact with local culture, and explore lesser known areas. If the app has done this, what qualities therein motivated the tourist?

Reviews will be selected based on their coding and length, in order to provide the most descriptive reviews illustrating their experience with the app. Though length is a qualifier, this is simply a motivation to find the most detailed reviews, therefore, the ultimate qualifier for reviews analyzed in this section is content. Focus will be directed toward reviews with any combination of the codes *en-high, trip enhanced, re-outward exploration,* and *to-escape mass tourism.* Google Play reviews will appear with the name of their reviewer while Apple reviews appear with a header or title; numbers included in the reviews were assigned by the author while compiling data for organization and tracking purposes.

1.023   Worked Amazingly Well in France   5 stars

- -

I cannot recommend this app enough. I downloaded prior to a trip to France, and listned to almost every interview Rick Steves provided on Paris, and beyond Paris. The interviews were informative, light hearted, and seriously educational. My girlfriend and I downloaded the "self-guides tours" that we're offered for France. We used the Versailles tour, Musee d'Orsay, and Historic Walking Tour of Downtown. They were all wonderful! We popped in our headphones and had Rick walking us around lie pros. We discovered places, sites, and histories, that we would never have noticed or appreciated without following the self-guided audio tours. The Historic downtown tour, and Versailles were the best. The Musee d'Orsay tour needs revamping since the museum is undergoing renovation, but we managed to use portions of that audio tour at the l'Orangerie, as many of the impressionist painters were featured in both museums. Great app, download as much as you can before your trip, and enjoy!

- -

The above review is representative of the level of detail typical the body of data. It provides a good understanding of the users experience without significant detail. The author explains listening to multiple tracks for their destination, Paris, combining city walks and museum tours. Steves' light-hearted yet informative approach led them to a greater understanding of their destination "We popped in our headphones and Rick had us walking around lie [like] pros." Implied is a sense of confidence and comfort in their destination, rooted in the information given to them via the app that left them walking the city self-assuredly.

While this review does not expressly describe exploring beyond the guided walk, the users *feel* they have made discoveries. "We discovered places, sites, and histories, that we would never have noticed or appreciated without following the self-guided audio tours." Whether exploring within the tour or outside of it, the users

were engaged in their surroundings to a greater degree, noticing and appreciating details that would have otherwise been lost on them.

Even faced with inaccuracies due to the renovation of Musee d'Orsay the reviewers maintained appreciation for the app. Like many other reviews, technological annoyances or small inaccuracies were dealt with in stride and did not hinder their experience.

Review 2

1.032	Rick is awesome travel guide!	4 stars

- -

Rick is manage to educate you about Europe history in a friendly, fun, interesting that you actually remember kind of way ! We tried several travel guides app and personal guides. They all tell you information that is more suited to a computer than a human (who found the price when and where) Rick explains why what you are seeing is important and has significant (in other words why you bother yourselves travelling all this way to see this item). The app could use some adjustment and a GPS is a must cause you can get lost, but the images help you to know you're looking at the right item.

In conclusion: we choose our destination based on Rick's audio a because you just make our travel that much more enjoyable ! All other travel apps just bores us to death with irrelevant information !

Rick, keep doing what you're doing!

- -

Review 1.032 immediately dives into the heart of what influenced their review by praising Steves' presentation style, specifically his ability to make it interesting and fun, *accessible.* Oddly, the tour presented through the app was more personable than other guides, making clear the significance of the sites. Later in the review the author reiterates how much more enjoyable travel is with this interesting guide, calling out other apps as boring. This review particularly emphasizes the value of the presentation, expressing that Rick Steves has engaged them and made destination

more interesting and palatable. Again, the reviewer notes small technical difficulties yet leaves a very positive review going so far as to disclose that they travel to destinations with Rick Steves' audio guides because their trips have been so enhanced by its use.

The phrase "more suited to a computer than a human" is particularly interesting, stating discovery, price and location as the information relayed, compared with the significance as taught by Steves through the audio guide. Taken it it's entirety, the statement suggests a warmer presence in Steves', showcasing a desire for personality and emotion rather than a straightforward approach.

Review 3

2.085   Jay Margolis   5 stars

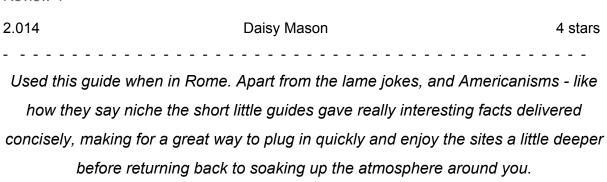- -

Perfect companion for top sites I can't thank Rick enough for this amazing app. The city walking tours and guides to top sites made our trip a success. The talks are a perfect blend of history, contextual tidbits and a bit of comic relief. Hard to believe this is free. Forget overpriced audio guides at the sites or tour groups in general and just enjoy this wonderful app.

- -

Retelling his experience with the app, the reviewer above personifies the app, describing it/Rick as a companion while visiting unspecified sites. Once again, this user combined city walks and site guides, citing them as the source of their trips success. The cities and sites visited by this reviewer were put into context and given background without sacrificing fun, based on the reviews mention of "comic relief." Given the quality of the audio guide, this reviewer is amazed that he hasn't had to pay for any of this valuable information and highly recommends this app in favor of tour groups and "overpriced audio guides". This provides an example of culturally interested tourists seeking to learn about their destinations, yet finding the on-site media and guides lacking or uninteresting. Though this app user, like many others,

values the information that provides insight into their destination, they consider tour groups and on-site audio guides too expensive.

2.014   Daisy Mason   4 stars

- -

Used this guide when in Rome. Apart from the lame jokes, and Americanisms - like how they say niche the short little guides gave really interesting facts delivered concisely, making for a great way to plug in quickly and enjoy the sites a little deeper before returning back to soaking up the atmosphere around you.

- -

This compact review quickly illustrates the ease with which the user was able to absorb the information from the app, then engage themselves further in their foreign environment. Based on the criticism of "Americanisms" this user is likely not from the United States or Canada (Canadian dialect is so similar it is an unlikely statement from someone of that nationality), putting her outside of the target area for the app. This likely also makes her less familiar with Steves' since his popularity is mostly concentrated in North America where his shows (radio and television) air and books are published. Minor criticism aside, the review maintains the similar assessment delivered by others, appreciating the concise, interesting information made easily accessible through the app. Interested in "soaking up the atmosphere," this reviewer describes using the guides quickly and intermittently in order to fully appreciate her surroundings. The app provides context so that the reviewer is free to absorb the atmosphere, i.e. the unique sensory information and character that makes a city unique.

Though she finds the humor outside of her taste, this review again praises the information that makes it possible for her to understand the city she is visiting, Rome, providing her to opportunity to enjoy it more.

In this study, which is based on app influenced experiences and not on the technical functionality of the app, negative reviews are outliers. As well established, most users are emphatically happy with this app based on its content. Even those who express disappointment in technological features or the lack there of, even detailing glitches, describe this as a minor problem well within their limits of tolerance based on the high quality of the content of the app. The following section will analyze a small selection of negative reviews. Reviews were pulled from the same body of data used for the rest of the study, therefore, each of these reviewers has also engaged with the content of the app.

Review 5

| 1.028 | APP crashes, downloaded tracks… | 2 stars |

- -

Picture this. Late night in Prague, the internet speed has only one dot if I'm lucky. All I want to do is to download Rick Steve's audio tour for tomorrow so I'm all set to explore Prague with the new City Tour track. The download bar, after 5-7 minutes finally finishes downloading the 75min file and as soon as it hits 100% download, the APP crashes and the download is gone!!!

I refuse to believe it happened, the internet must have dropped so I tried it three more times and it crashes again and again and again!! I'm unable to write this review without any internet connectivity issue so it must be the APP!

The app is well designed and really user friendly and organize well, but why does this new track crash the APP, Pls fix this problem…

- -

Frustrated, this reviewer found themselves trapped in their room, hoping for an audio tour to download for the following day online to encounter repeated download problems, preventing a complete download. Craving an informed

mediator, and clearly having experienced the offerings of the app before, the user pleads for the app designer to correct the issue.

Interestingly and despite the low review, the user still likes the app. Concluding their review with a request for the problem to be fixed, this user shows intent to resume use of the app once the solution is applied. Rather that seek another app or even mention taking another tour, the reviewer appears loyal given the virtues they had previously experienced. This is another demonstration of the desire for information that provides context and understanding for the tourists' destination.

Review 6

2.008   Tom Sko   3 stars

- -

This app is only as good as the tracks you can get on it, and Rick's "bubbly" discussions about everything that pops into his head during a walking tour gets very tiresome. To dramatically increase the usability and *improve* the quality of the tracks please add a "skip forward 5 second button". That way, when I don't want to hear the lively banter, I won't have to. I don't want his opinions on the sites, I want FACTS! The only other thing I can think of is being able to copy and paste the transcript.

- -

Analysis of the bank of reviews has revealed a great appreciation for Rick Steves' personable delivery style. The light-hearted and sometime funny narrations have typically proved to make the occasionally dense information palatable. In the case of this review, however, Steves' personality is unwelcome. This reviewer finds the objectivity lacking and discussion tiresome. While many reviews appreciation the concision, this description feels that it could be more so if the host stuck to straightforward information and fact delivery.

Contrary to many reviews, this user seeks a drier delivery, finding Steves' "lively banter" unnecessary while trying to learn about their destination. Consistent

with the needs of other travelers in this study, information is the primary motivator for downloading this app. Even with the clash of personalities occurring between the host and the listener, the reviewer left three stars and resolved to refer to the transcripts of the audio tours. This compromise further proves the desire for information but breaks from the pattern in the data by seeking a different presentation style.

Review 7

1.011	Offensive!	1 stars

- -

I have a great deal of respect for Rick Steves, his knowledge of Europe, and his packing tips. I wish he had that same level of respect for women and art. Which he clearly do not, In his Louvre audio tour, he actually talks about Winged Victory winning wet T-shirt contest. And, he compares great artwork of the Madonna to the 80s pop star,
It may be free, but it's trashy. Next time, I'll spend the extra 5 euro on a quality audio tour.

- -

In the collection of over 200 reviews, this review is the only one that expressed offense. Numerous other reviews have cited using the tours in Paris and even specified the Louvre tours, but none described anything close to the displeasure of this review. Expecting more from a familiar and informed host, the listener was extremely displeased at the comparisons between classic sculpture and a wet t-shirt contest, sexualizing the work in a somewhat vulgar context. Citing another instance of what they felt was an inappropriate comparison, this reviewer concluded that in the future they would seek out a paid audio tour.

This review is another example of an outlier. Though this users motivation for downloading was consistent with others, a clash in the personality of the host and the listener proved enough to deter future use. Similar to interactions with tour guides, the compatibility between the mediator and the visitor influenced the tour.

Even without Steves' being present, the personality element was an essential element in the success or failure of this tour.

Discussion & Findings

Chapter 4

        The goal of this thesis was to investigate the effects an audio tour guide has on tourist experience. Through a mixed method analysis of the reviews for the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app, insight was gained into tourists' perception of the app and into the tourism industry as it changes with evolving technology. A comparison of the varied analyses in this project has yielded awareness of what qualities and experiences influences such positive reviews of the app, showcasing the potential in this growing media. In light of the newly gained knowledge, the sub-questions and main research question of this paper will now be revisited. First, the sub-questions will be addressed in support of the comprehensive main research question, which will be answered last. Following the research questions, unexpected findings will be addressed in order to include all potentially valuable results before concluding with a summary of the value of these findings to the tourism industry as a whole.

I.   Sub-questions

I.a.   Do tourists find greater agency through the use of this audio guide?

        Use of a free audio guide available on a smartphone naturally provides tourists with more freedom. Liberated from the limitations presented by tour groups like crowds, timetable and other possible hindrances, app users can begin any tour at any time. The access to knowledge deemed valuable for gaining an understanding of a foreign locale creates a feeling of self-empowerment for app users. Many reviewers did describe themselves feeling more familiar and confident, enjoying the freedom to tour at will and thereby engage with the cities in a greater capacity. The combination of these effects demonstrate a greater sense of agency in tourists' who used the guide.

As evidenced in the data, a sense of familiarity, the freedom from large tour groups, and the ability to move at one's own pace and timetable resulted in reviewers feeling more confident and capable while traveling. As exemplified in one review, the guidance had them "walking around like pros," while another specified that being on their own gave them, "a greater sense of exploration."

The limitations presented by the often-vague reviews do not paint a complete picture of tourists' experience while on their vacations, but the snapshots that are provided demonstrate an overall feeling of comfort and understanding, at times providing a companion to walk the city with in instances of solo travel. Based on the evidence provided in the review, it is concluded that tourists did find greater agency.

I.b.   Do tourists find more banal authenticity and interaction with everyday local culture with the app?

The body of reviews did not reference meeting local people or grasping a greater understanding of local life specifically. Users did appreciate the contextual and historic information, and while the city walks to lead tourists through parts of the city they may not have encountered otherwise, the reviews do not provide data to suggest a change in the level of interaction with local life. The closest suggestions of this are one review that described, "soaking up the atmosphere," and others that specified finding "hidden treasures." While *outward exploration* does imply that app users may have developed a more holistic understanding of their destinations, no instances in the data expressly mention interactions with local life as such. Based on the absence of any such mentions, no conclusions can be drawn for this question.

I.c.   Do tourists venture out of main touristic hubs to explore less touristic areas?

As popular cities face growing problems with overtourism, solutions are sought to solve the myriad of problems associated with the phenomenon. In cities where the centers are becoming overrun with tourists, local life is pushed out and the

threat to the cultural integrity of these areas begins to beg the question if tourists are experiencing anything beyond the Disneyfied tourist-catered neighborhoods. Rick Steves' Audio Europe app offers guided city walks leading tourists to the main sights but encouraging exploration in other areas. It is this mix of catering to common desires of tourists to see the most popular sites while romanticizing and educating about the lesser-known charms a city has to offer that gives this app so much potential to motivate travelers out of the main touristic areas.

Several reviews described seeing more of their destinations than they would have otherwise, noticing details and discovering hidden treasures. The gained confidence rooted in a greater feeling of familiarity and understanding of their vacation spots inspired app users to "discover" more. This is exemplified in multiple reviews and supported by the co-occurrence tables that demonstrated information, feeling as though they had a personal guide, and escaping mass tourism helped lead tourists to outward exploration.

In addition to engaging in their surroundings more with the tour, the added time gained through practical knowledge and the freedom to tour at will provided guests with more free time in their destination. Gained leisure time for tourists could lead them to spend more time outside of tourism sites and areas. As one reviewer stated, "Used this traveling throughout Rome, Siena and Florence. Saved us time and money, the tours hit exactly the main pieces we wanted to see." By economizing their time in large museums the app somewhat indirectly allowed tourists time to see other parts of the cities they visited.

Based on the review analysis, this study finds that the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app does inspire and allow for tourists to explore cities outside of the condensed tourists centers.

I.d.   What qualities in the app do tourists find most valuable and have the largest impact?

To understand the appeal and potential of this media is to dissect the elements that app users find most attractive. Traits of the app provide a foundation

for tourists to enrich their experience of the cities and sites they visit. Straightforward benefits comprise a large amount of appeal for fans of the app, but the residual impacts of the app substantially contribute to reviewers' satisfaction levels.

Practical qualities of the app were consistently cited in reviews. Saving money, making travel easier, and moving at one's own pace and on one's own timetable, were consistent benefits for users. The impact of gaining practical information informed a greater feeling of comfort and familiarity, contributing to a greater feeling of confidence and freedom in their destination.

Beyond that, reliable information from a trusted source was the primary appeal of the app. As a secondary element, the delivery style and entertaining elements also influenced the high satisfaction level. Steves' recognition as a leading voice in travel media contributed to the experience for many. *Like Rick, good content, informative* and *accessible* coded frequently; a clear demonstration of the high value of easily understood information.

By escaping group tours, users also expressed having more personal experiences. As one user describes, "One of the most impressive aspects of the Acropolis tour for me was during the entrance to the Acropolis. The tour spoke of grand processions thousand of years previously and Rick paused has [sic] triumphant horns and music sounded, as if on cue as I walked through. It really gave a stronger sense of place, history and meaning that is unmatched with a couple hundred other tourists around you."

The popular elements as relayed through these reviews confirm the findings of Lai (2015) that information followed by entertainment are the primary elements for the adoption of a mobile tour guide. In gaining a deeper understanding of their destinations app users felt their trips were enhanced, making them more successful overall. The privilege element of skipping tour groups in favor of a private guide aided in creating a personal experience for app users.

Condensing the more prominent themes within the collection of reviews affirms tourists continued desire for both practical and historic/cultural information about their destinations. Consistent comparisons with on site audio guides and tour groups, however, demonstrated the need for change in the presentation style of tour guides.

Practical information will continue to be of need to tourists. Understanding how to function in a city, "tips and tricks", saving money and economizing time will always be priorities for travelers seeking to maximize their experience in their destination.

What this tells us about tourists' information needs and experience with tour and audio guides is more interesting. Though guides will not be able to offer the liberal timetable and freedom to go at will like the app does, the repeated compliments on the delivery style, Steves' ability to make things interesting and convey the significance of the subjects he spoke on, and lightheartedness allude to a potential elitist rift. In most cases, the humorous and accessible delivery was able to engage tourists further, deepening their understanding of foreign cultures and historic sites or artworks. His casual approach created a more personalized experience for his audience. In providing context and understanding on their destinations, Steves' was able to enrich the experience for many travelers who expressed they would have been lost without it. The commonality of reviews who described the app as "bringing it to life" or "making the trip" highlight the hosts ability to educate viewers while entertaining them.

As cities, museums and historic sites around the world look to improve their presentation, it is worth noting that a less dry, more accessible approach leaves a greater impact on tourists and therefore, gives a greater sense of satisfaction. Tourists continue to be aware of their status as outsiders but annoyed with the presence of others like them, but an ability to convey a personal experience in a crowded location alleviates some of the frustration of the crowds.

II.   Main research question

II.a.   How does the use of Rick Steves' Audio Europe app affect tourist experience in Europe?

Users of the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app have overall expressed high satisfaction. The variety of codes revealed in the grounded analysis demonstrates the diverse desires of tourists. This app has managed to deliver memorable experiences for travelers. Quality information delivered accessibly is the root of app users enhanced experiences. The enhanced experiences can be attributed to the interesting and useful information, which generated a greater understanding of the destination. Through this greater understanding of their destination, travelers felt less overwhelmed and more confident. The gained confidence, coupled with money and time savings, contributed inspiration to explore further. A combination of all these factors contributed to an improved experience for tourists, which is exemplified by the high rating of this app.

III.   Unexpected findings

While it is recognized that tour guides function as important and valuable mediators for tourists, the co-production of tours don't not depend on a person in the flesh. The dialogue that is present on many tours does not appear to be missed by users of the app. Reviewers did not seem to miss the presence of an in-person guide. While some noted that they couldn't ask questions to the audio guide, the financial and time benefits appear to outweigh the loss of dialogue. In fact, the personality as relayed by Steves' in the audio guides made him more accessible and real as a guide for app users. The prominence of reviews that thank Steves' highlight the personification of the app as a guide. Even the negative reviews are based on personality and conflict of taste, further showcasing the presence of Steves' as an audio guide.

A second unique finding was the few occurrences of app users listening to the audio guides as armchair travelers. A small handful of reviews detailed listening to the guide in traffic or on walks as a means of mental escape, "I love this app! I listen to the audio on Bluetooth in my car and it definitely helps in traffic. It really takes you away to another place…" For some app users, the audio tours and interviews served as an opportunity to travel mentally when unable to otherwise. The detailed and educational glimpses into distant cities and museums provided an opportunity for listeners to be "transported by Rick's upbeat voice from the treadmill and morning shows on TV in cardio-rehab to the streets and sights of Paris, London, Athens, and elsewhere!". This illumination speaks again to Steves' delivery style and ability to engage readers with the rich history and culture of the cities he speaks on.

IV.   Contribution to Tourism

The insights provided through this paper serve to illuminate this understudied area of tourism. App use will continue to grow, particularly as affordable and fast data becomes more widely available. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of this developing industry from the tourists' perspective allows for utilization of this tool to manage destinations more sustainably. Recognizing the power this app has to empower and inform travelers, while engaging them in their surroundings and inspiring them to explore cities further could help to relief some of the pressures of overtourism in popular destinations. Tourists continue to mix their time spent traveling with seeing the prescribed and canonical sites while finding undiscovered gems and breaking free from the tourist hot spots. Well produced audio tours could be designed to both indulge desires of tourists to see expected sites while leading them out of the tourist hubs to find the charm in varied surrounding areas. By properly engaging listeners, the app has the ability to make the seemingly mundane more extraordinary for visitors.

Development of apps like this will likely begin to impact tour groups and museum audio guide sales. Historic sites and tour guides should be aware of the appeal of these apps and adapt their presentation technique if they expect to rival

this free mediator. The friendly, accessible warmth of Steves' delivery coupled with the valuable practical benefits of using the app may serve as a formidable opponent in the future.

The use of apps continues to grow, with apps designed for nearly every aspect of life from banking to game playing to travel. Maintaining currency with the technological trends becomes more valuable as people's dependency on mobile technology grows. The tourism industry should look to this new technology for the opportunities it presents. Accommodation, maps, booking and guidebook apps are already well-represented but apps that deliver an experience will continue to emerge, playing into our experience culture and the world of tourism will not be excluded. At this time we should look to app development to provide solutions to overtourism, an opportunity to broaden the voices represented and to encourage travelers to engage deeper with their destinations, forgoing a visit touching the surface of a culture in favor of a deeper delve into what makes each destination unique.

Conclusion

Chapter 5

This thesis has sought to understand the growing role of mobile technology as it influences tourist experience and the tourism industry as a whole. Isolating the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app as a case study, rating and review assessment was deemed the most valuable means of researching experiences related to the app. The snapshots of tourist experience as told by app users in their own words provided insight into the elements of the app that contributed to their holidays. By implementing a mixed method analysis of the data this research aimed to identify the patterns in user behavior, influential qualities of the app, and the value this information holds for the tourism industry at this moment in time.

Throughout the research and analysis process, the methodology developed in order to understand the data as comprehensively as possible. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for systematic and scientific data analysis of the ratings and reviews for the app acquired from the Google Play and Apple iTunes stores. After identifying the source of negative reviews, a content-based elimination refined the final body of data for deeper investigation. Codes were generated through a grounded analysis and compared against one another in order to identify complementary traits, relationships between app qualities and behavior and to discern the underlying desires of tourists that were fulfilled. Discursive and deconstructive analysis was then applied to individual reviews in order to showcase the perceptions of individuals in their entirety and provide examples of complete reviews. The varied analytical processes provided insight into the data from multiple perspectives in order to excavate the root of the overwhelmingly positive reviews.

Evaluation of the data revealed that the positive impact the audio tours had on tourists who employed it in their travels was due to a compilation of qualities, the most important of which being the trusted information and friendly delivery style. As established in the review analysis, tourists find the wealth of information presented in

a friendly and accessible manner by Steves'. The information he presents allows tourists to feel more freedom and confidence by providing practical knowledge that simplifies their travels, saves them money and economizes their time. Additionally, historic and cultural guiding familiarizes visitors with the cultures, art, architecture and societies that they visit, granting them a deeper understanding of the value that endears popular sites, musea and cityscapes to the desires of tourists. These two types of information are complemented by the luxuries afforded to app users via the freedom to move at their own pace independent of large tour groups and without paying additional fees for guides (audio or otherwise).

While tourists continue to seek mediation and guidance in understanding the urban environments and museums they visit, their growing desires for liberation from the hermeneutic circle of tourist experience that confines them to crowded, designated tourist areas and activities are met with this app. Tourists can continue to fulfill their desires to see and learn about the canonical sites while being made comfortable enough to venture outward to find "hidden gems". The confidence and familiarity that app users gain positively influences their experiences in European cities, engaging them further in their surroundings and enriching their experience through providing a greater understanding of the sites they traveled to see. All of the information, freedoms, and gained confidence lead tourists to, in fact, develop a greater sense of agency. Gained confidence, agency, comfort, and knowledge - both historical/cultural and practical - delivered in a warm and friendly manner by a trusted host, concentrate to provide Rick Steves' Audio Europe app users with an enhanced experience.

By using the ratings and reviews of the app to glean understanding of the user experience afforded to users of the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app, this thesis was able to gain insight into the honest opinions of users as relayed in their own words. The value of the opinions of users based on online reviews through the app stores, Apple and Google Play, is in the honest experiences as relayed by users in their own words. Analysis of this data revealed the varied traits that users find pleasing (and displeasing) about this app. This method did, however, prove to have its own limitations. Reviews were frequently lacking detailed description or employed vague verbiage that could be open to interpretation.

Future studies would likely benefit from the use of a questionnaire maintaining a similar open-ended format so as to make use of tourists' own words while inquiring about specific elements of their experience, though a likert scale questionnaire could also grant insight into the beneficial elements of an app that influence user experience. Further representations of tourist experience with the app could also be explored through the examination of social media making use of the hashtags associated with the app. Research that further explores app use and tourism should implement in depth analysis of other apps; by breaking down the unique offerings presented by the variety of apps the tourism industry can gain a deeper understanding of the changing needs of tourists as influenced by technology that can provide up to the minute information, different perspectives and unique experiences.

Outside of tourist experiences, apps also show potential for solving problems in tourism like overcrowding. Destinations can utilize apps to engage visitors on a deeper level, push them outside of tourist hubs and update their content regularly to reflect new information and perspectives. Apps could also prove a valuable media tool to broaden the voices of historic and cultural sites and vary presentation styles, thereby appealing to a broader range of visitors and engaging tourists in their destinations in a way that enhances their experiences and therefore, their memories of a city. The particular value of this study gives insight into the growing acceptance of mobile tour guides, showcasing the qualities of presentation and information that appeal to tourists' needs. This insight could be of value to app developers, destinations, and historic sites that seek to enhance their presentation, expand their offerings, or spread the concentration of tourists through this growing media.

Overall, this thesis has provided insight into app use in relation to tourism through an analysis of reviews of the Rick Steves' Audio Europe app as a case study. Through a careful dissection of user reviews it can be concluded that app use can be a strong positive influence in the tourist experience, in this case, by providing accessible information that helps to simplify travel itself while providing cultural and historic insight into the destination. The high level of user satisfaction found in this study speaks to the gained confidence, agency and sense of independent exploration tourists found while using the app and showcasing the potential that this media holds for the future of tourism.

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