Shifting the Experience in Hospitality to Enhance Humanness

Abstract:

The hospitality industry thrives on creating exceptional experiences for guests. However, in today's fast-paced world, there's a growing need to go beyond providing services and amenities. This paper explores the concept of humanness and its impact on human experiences. Humanness, composed of Human Nature and Attributes, plays a crucial role in shaping our perception and interaction with the world. Positive experiences enhancing humanness foster interpersonal warmth, communal sense and a desire for positive action. Conversely, experiences that degrade humanness lead to isolation, negativity and a decline in overall well-being. By understanding the fundamentals of humanness and its connection to emotions, hospitality professionals can create service paradigms that resonate deeply with guests, increasing satisfaction and loyalty. In this research, a "Pay it Forward" experiment was conducted in a local cafe to evaluate the impact of humanness. The findings highlight the positive effects of incorporating humanness into the experience leading to positive engagement.

Keywords: Humanness, Human Experience, Hospitality, Hospitality Management, Service Design, Emotional Intelligence.

Introduction:

The hospitality industry has traditionally focused on providing guests with comfortable accommodations, delicious meals and a range of amenities. While these elements remain essential, guests increasingly seek experiences that go beyond the physical aspects of their stay. They crave connections, a sense of belonging, and experiences that leave a lasting positive impact. This shift in guest expectations presents a unique opportunity for hospitality organizations to differentiate themselves by creating experiences that resonate with the fundamental human desire for connection and meaning (Nigel Hemmington, 2007).

This research explores the concept of humanness and its crucial role in shaping memorable experiences within the hospitality industry. It delves into the two key components of humanness: Human Nature and Human Attributes. Our Human Nature encompasses innate qualities like emotionality, empathy and a desire for social connection. On the other hand, Human Attributes are acquired through cultural and social influences and include civility, refinement and a sense of fairness (Haslam et al, 2008).

The research employs both empirical and supplementary studies to deeply explore humanness in the hospitality sector. The research explores the connection between emotions and humanness, highlighting how specific emotions serve as indicators of the level of humanness present within an experience. It showcases real-world examples of hospitality brands that have successfully implemented practices to elevate humanness within their guest experiences.

The paper documents an experiment that evaluates appreciation, reciprocation and impact of humanness. Tenets of humanness had been explained to guests in a cafe.

They were then told that their bill had been paid by the previous guest with a view to enhance the two aspects of humanness. Then the guests were asked if the humanness resonated with them. They were given a choice to express gratitude to the person who had paid for them. They were also given the choice to pay for the next person. This gives us an insight into the impact of humanness within service interactions.

The paper then discussed a seven-stage intervention framework of the Humanness and 'Humanness Index' that can be used as a valuable tool for hospitality organizations.

Experience Constructs in Hospitality

Within the realm of hospitality, experiences are more than just transactions; they are economic offerings that transcend mere services. Pine and Gilmore (1998) famously conceptualised experiences as the highest level of economic value, distinguishing them from commodities, goods and services. In this perspective, hospitality organizations are not just providers of accommodation and amenities but also creators of transformative and memorable moments for their guests.

Drawing from psychological research, hospitality professionals seek to understand and harness the power of experiences to create memorable and meaningful interactions with guests. Experiences have become a central focus in the hospitality industry, with researchers and practitioners alike recognizing their pivotal role in shaping guest perceptions and behaviours.

In the seminal work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Maslow (1964), experiences have been characterized by intense positive emotions and feelings of transcendence, leading individuals to lose track of time and place. These peak experiences, whether

encountered during a mountain climb or a cultural activity, are sought after by travellers to enrich their lives through memorable encounters.

However, calibrating experiences accurately poses a significant challenge for hospitality managers. Without precise metrics to gauge the impact of their efforts, managers are left in the dark regarding the effectiveness of their guest experiences. As emphasized by the management adage, "You can't manage what you don't measure," there is a pressing need for reliable methods of measuring the effects of experiences in the hospitality industry (McAfee and Brynjolfsson, 2012).

To measure experiences effectively, it is crucial to define what constitutes a memorable experience. As highlighted by Bastiaansen et al. (2019), experiences are only truly memorable and meaningful when they evoke emotions. Therefore, understanding the emotional constructs underlying guest experiences is paramount for hospitality professionals striving to create impactful interactions.

Incorporating a nuanced understanding of embracing humanness and emotions through experience into hospitality practices allows organizations to go beyond mere service delivery and elevate the guest experience to new heights. As the industry continues to evolve towards an experience economy, the ability to enhance humanness and measure meaningful experiences will be essential for hospitality organizations seeking to thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape.

In the pursuit of enhancing humanness within the hospitality experience, it is imperative to consider the emotional dimensions of guest interactions. By leveraging insights from psychological research and experience management frameworks, hospitality

organizations can design experiences that resonate deeply with guests, fostering connections, and leaving lasting impressions.

Model of Humanness: The Cornerstone of Meaningful Experiences

Humanness is a complex and multifaceted concept, encompassing both Human Nature and Human Attributes, while some aspects of humanness are intrinsic, others are acquired through social conditioning. Human Nature encompasses elements such as emotionality, interpersonal warmth, and openness. Human Attributes comprise aspects like civility, refinement, and higher cognition (Haslam et al., 2012). Understanding these components is crucial for creating experiences that resonate with guests on a deeper level.

Human Nature: The Foundation of Connection

Our Human Nature is the foundation upon which we build relationships and connect with others. It includes three core qualities (Haslam et al, 2008):

- Emotionality: Our ability to experience and express a wide range of emotions is a fundamental aspect of Human Nature. Emotions are the functional states of the brain that provide causal explanations of certain complex behaviours allow us to empathize with others, understand their perspectives, and build meaningful connections (Ralph Adolphs, 2019).

- Interpersonal Warmth: The inherent human desire for warmth, affection, and positive social interaction is a key aspect of our nature. Hospitality experiences that foster a sense of warmth and belonging resonate deeply with guests. Interpersonal warmth refers to personality traits like friendliness, helpfulness and

trustworthiness (Williams & Bargh, 2008) that are important in relationships between guests and organizations.

- Openness: Our natural curiosity and openness to new experiences are essential for growth and learning. Hospitality settings can cultivate openness by providing guests with opportunities to explore new cultures, connect with local communities, and engage in stimulating experiences (Wade and Kidd, 2019).

When these aspects of Human Nature are nurtured within a guest experience, it fosters positive emotions like joy, gratitude, and a sense of belonging. Conversely, experiences that ignore or neglect these aspects can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness and disappointment.

Human Attributes: Refining Our Interactions

Human Attributes are the acquired behaviours and social skills that we develop through our cultural and social interactions. These Attributes help us navigate social situations effectively and contribute positively to our communities. Key Human Attributes include three components (Haslam et al, 2008):

- Civility: The ability to treat others with respect and consideration is a cornerstone of civilized society. Civility is about the communication of a deep mutual respect (Boyd, 2006). Hospitality experiences that prioritise courteous interactions and uphold high standards of service contribute to a positive and respectful environment for all guests.

- Refinement: The ability to appreciate beauty, engage in a thoughtful conversation and demonstrate cultural sensitivity are aspects of human refinement. Hospitality

experiences that showcase local art, promote intellectual engagement and cater to diverse cultural backgrounds demonstrate a commitment to refinement (Lutz, 2017).

● Higher Cognition: Critical thinking, problem-solving abilities and a sense of self-awareness are crucial for navigating complex situations. The ability to think critically is a person's ability to use his thought process to analyse arguments and provide interpretations based on valid perceptions through logical assumptions and interpretations ("Hamzah, Uno." 2007).

Model of Degradation and Enhancement of Humanness

To understand these aspects further, we refer to the model of enhancement & degradation of humanness (Manrao, 2023). The degree to which Human Nature and Attributes are present within an experience directly impacts the level of humanness felt by participants. Degradation of humanness occurs when experiences disconnect us from the context and core human values (Figure 1). This can manifest in several ways in the context of hospitality:

● **Misaligned Involvement, Aversion & Greed:** When experiences prioritize efficiency or profit over human interaction and genuine care, guests may feel like objects rather than valued individuals (Pullman, Gross 2003). Imagine a hotel lobby where guests are treated like numbers in a queue, with minimal human interaction and rushed check-in processes. This prioritizes efficiency over

warmth, affection and personal connection, exhibiting emotions like greed &
aversion which leads to degrading humanness.

- **Dampened Involvement, Worry & Doubt:** Experiences that are poorly designed
  or lack clear direction can leave guests feeling worried and doubtful. For
  example, a confusing layout within a hotel can cause anxiety and uncertainty,
  leading to frustration and a sense of lost time. This can dampen overall
  enjoyment, leaving guests questioning the quality of their stay and lowering the
  humanness quotient.

- **Detached Involvement, Boredom & Distraction:** Experiences that fail to
  captivate guests' attention or evoke any emotional response can lead to feelings
  of boredom, distraction and detachment. Imagine a hotel room devoid of
  character or local charm, feeling sterile and generic. Such an environment fails to
  hold guests' attention and lacks engagement on a deeper level, diminishing the
  humanness of the experience.

In the same spirit, if we refer to the model of connectedness (Manrao, 2023) (Figure 2),
enhancement of humanness occurs when experiences nurture our natural inclinations
and foster positive social interaction. Here are some ways this plays out in the context
of hospitality:

- **Serenity:** Experiences that provide a sense of comfort and a tranquil
  environment allow guests to relax and connect with themselves and others. A
  sense of rightness or order gives rise to the experience of serenity (Kelly Bricker

et al., 2004). For example, a hotel offering a dedicated meditation space or a secluded spa area promotes inner peace and enhances humanness.

- **Compassion:** Experiences that facilitate genuine interaction and foster a sense of community contribute to a higher level of humanness. Through self-compassion, individuals can achieve a greater understanding of their experiences and suffering and can therefore be more willing to move beyond them (Neff, 2003a). This could involve encouraging guest interaction through social events or providing opportunities for guests to connect with local communities through volunteer initiatives.

- **Participative Joy:** Experiences that create a sense of shared joy and camaraderie enhance humanness. This can be achieved through interactive experiences, shared cultural events or simply providing opportunities for guests to celebrate special occasions together.

- **Larger Good:** Experiences that prioritize the larger good aim to foster a sense of collective well-being and societal impact. These experiences align with principles of sustainability, social responsibility and community empowerment, inspiring users to contribute positively to society and the environment.

Supplementary Analysis: Hospitality Brands Embracing Humanness by Evoking Emotions

Several hospitality brands have demonstrably incorporated the principles of humanness into their guest experiences, leading to positive outcomes. Here are the examples,

where calibrated interventions in the experience led to evoking/avoiding the emotions that alter the humanness of the experience:

1. **Enhancing Participative Joy:** The hotel industry is experiencing a pet-friendly boom, as it is recognized that pet owners are spending resources on their pets which also means they are willing to spend money on hospitality. Utilizing the opportunity, Kimpton Hotel, in the United States, started offering pet beds, toys and pet-sitting services for guests who want to explore the city without their furry friends. They label this initiative as "Paw-sitive amenities". This considerate approach enhances the comfort of pets and eases the minds of their owners. The initiative brought a wave of participative joy and focus that not only meets the practical needs of pet-loving travellers but also establishes a meaningful emotional connection, enhancing the overall travel experience. It fostered a sense of community and satisfaction (Maris Altermann, 2023).

2. **Enhancing Compassion & Reducing Greed:** The concept of experience has emerged as the new basis for the interactions between guests and organizations. Companies have moved away from the traditional approach of presenting features and benefits towards creating guest experiences (Shaw, (2007); Palmer, (2010)). Nowadays, it is a universal practice for hotels to inform guests about the environmental impact of refreshing linen. The water saved from not changing linen for one day can provide water to many households. It also reduces the energy consumption in cleaning linens and saves the additional effort of treating soiled water laden with detergents. The adoption of this practice not only creates compassion towards the environment but also reduces greed for the

consumption of resources. The near universality of the adoption of the practice indicates that the initiative brings in some positive change.

3. **Larger Good-** A sense of emotional connection and commitment to supporting local communities is essential in every industry. It fosters meaningful relationships and contributes to a more inclusive and vibrant society. In the hospitality industry, there is a significant opportunity to integrate local culture and creativity into guest experiences, elevating stays beyond mere accommodation and creating lasting impacts on both visitors and local communities. The ACE Hotel chain, with headquarters in Los Angeles and New York City, is an example of a company that embodies this approach and focuses on the Larger Good**.** By integrating local art and design into its properties, ACE Hotels not only creates a unique and vibrant atmosphere for guests but also supports the creative community in each neighbourhood. This thoughtful collaboration with artists and designers infuses each hotel with distinctive style and character, transforming them from mere places to stay into immersive destinations to experience. ACE Hotels also provides complimentary bikes for guests, encouraging them to explore and engage with the surrounding area. This fosters a deeper connection to local culture and attractions, enriching the overall guest experience (Chloe Borich, 2022).

4. **Reducing Boredom-** Fostering emotions such as nostalgia through participative joy is an essential practice to create meaningful and memorable experiences for guests. By invoking feelings of warmth, comfort and a sense of belonging, organizations can establish stronger connections with their audience and

enhance their overall experience. The Nines, a Luxury Collection Hotel in Portland, Oregon, exemplifies this approach through its unique incorporation of vintage elements that evoke a sense of nostalgia. As guests enter the lobby, they are welcomed by the charming sight of vintage typewriters and elegant antique writing desks. The gentle clicking of keys and the soft rustling of paper create an atmosphere of old-world charm and sophistication. Travellers are encouraged to take a moment to sit down and write a note or postcard, capturing a special memory of their stay or reaching out to a loved one. This experience adds a touch of nostalgia to the ambience and fosters a sense of connection and community among guests. This lowers the Sense of Boredom associated with check-ins & lobby experiences (John M. Tess, 2010).

5. **Reducing Distraction**: It is essential to consider the emotional impact of design choices on guests' experiences. Creating a sense of clarity within the environment is key to ensuring guests have a positive experience. This involves providing convenient and practical storage solutions for baggage and clothing, enabling guests to relax and enjoy their surroundings without concern. The American multinational hospitality company, Hilton based in McLean, Virginia, exemplifies this approach by offering reasonably priced and technologically advanced accommodations, which add to the overall sense of focus within the premises. The hotel's minimalist rooms are thoughtfully designed, reducing distraction and providing guests with a comfortable and functional space. Each room is curated to maximize the use of space while ensuring ease of storage and accessibility for guests' belongings. By focusing on creating a sense of clarity, the

hotel sets an example of how thoughtful design and functionality can lead to a sense of lowering of distraction for the guests (Sitara Kishore, 2019).

6. **Reducing Worry:** Since we are living in an era of increasingly fast-paced, rapidly evolving and stressful society, seeking more meaningful lifestyles with modern iterations of ancient practices such as massage, Ayurveda, acupuncture, yoga naturopathy, meditation so on (GSS, 2010) is the fundamental desire for individuals to increase healthier well-being state of mind (Chen, Chang, & Liu, 2015). Nowadays people are demanding more refined, nutritious, delicacies and other unique food characteristics in daily life (Chen et al., 2015). EVEN hotels have caught up with the trend as well, it provides a sanctuary where worry and stress are greatly diminished, allowing guests to experience tranquillity and focus on their health and wellness goals. With a focus on Keep Active, Rest Easy, Eat Well and Accomplish More, every aspect of an EVEN Hotel is designed to promote wellbeing. The dedicated hotel staff are well-versed in health and wellness practices, offering guests advice on local running routes and ensuring a seamless experience. At the core of this commitment to wellness is the role of the hotel general manager, known as the 'chief wellness officer', who goes above and beyond to organize group runs and activities for guests to explore the city and stay active during their stay. The wellness officer ensured that the guests enjoyed a worry-free stay (Ting-Ting Cheng 2018).

7. **Reducing Aversion:** Creating tranquil environments where guests can escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life and reconnect with themselves and nature is paramount for promoting relaxation and overall well-being. In line with this

philosophy, the 21c Museum Hotel chain has taken innovative steps to eliminate noise and disruptions, fostering a serene atmosphere for its guests to unwind and enjoy their stay while reducing any doubts or uncertainties they may have. Nestled within historic buildings transformed into contemporary art-filled havens, 21c Museum Hotels have implemented soundproofing measures that minimize disturbances and ensure a peaceful environment. By strategically incorporating acoustic design elements, such as sound-absorbing materials the hotels effectively mitigate external noise from urban surroundings or bustling common areas.1c Museum Hotels offer guests a unique retreat where they can immerse themselves in art, culture, and tranquillity. (Mary Stanton Knight, 2019)

8. **Enhancing Serenity-** Providing environments where individuals can immerse themselves in nature and find respite from the stresses of modern life is essential for promoting a sense of peace and well-being. Such experiences can deepen individuals' appreciation for the environment and the interconnectedness of all living things. Nestled deep in the lush rainforest of Costa Rica, the Finca Bellavista treehouse community provides an immersive experience that embodies serenity. By offering guests the chance to stay in treehouses built entirely within the treetops, the community creates a space where visitors can connect with the surrounding natural world in a meaningful way. The treehouses are thoughtfully crafted with rustic and sustainable materials, providing comfortable beds, outdoor showers and fully equipped kitchens. By offering this unique retreat, Finca Bellavista fosters a deep sense of compassion and appreciation for the natural world (A Brochado, 2019).

9. **Reducing Doubt:** Hotel companies are enhancing their communication skills to

meet consumer expectations and fundamental requirements, aiming to ensure

customer satisfaction. Pleased customers are more inclined to return or extend

their stay at the hotel (Al Khasawneh et al., 2021). A virtual tour facility enhances

customer communication by allowing them to visualize and interact with a

property realistically and engagingly. Gîtes du Domaine's 360-degree virtual tour

provides an immersive experience, allowing guests to explore the property before

booking. Showcasing the restored colonial buildings, lush gardens, private pools

and modern amenities. Hotel Pushkar Palace offers a 360-degree Virtual tour

and innovative 3D presentation technology. This interactive 3D media format

enables users to zoom in and out and rotate their view to get a comprehensive

understanding of the hotel's atmosphere, enhancing their ability to make

informed booking decisions. Effective communication is pivotal in reducing

feelings of doubt and uncertainty among hotel guests.

Empirical Study: Humanness in Hospitality

While these case studies look at elements of humanness in parts, we need a study to

look at the elements that combine the aspects of both Human Nature and Human

Attributes.

As a part of the research, we planned an experiment that integrates the ten emotions

into one situation. The study called " Pay it Forward" delves deeper into the

phenomenon of humanness, specifically through the lens of emotions evoked by

everyday transactions.

Study Design & Methodology:

The "Pay it Forward" experiment is designed in four parts (Exhibit 1). Each part investigates the manifestation of humanness within a service encounter. In the first part, guests were introduced to the concept of humanness, the "Pay it Forward" experiment and were informed that their bill had been paid by a previous guest. They were then given the choice to appreciate this gesture of humanness or express disinterest. This introduces Openness and Civility into consideration. In the second part, guests who appreciated the humanness were given the option to write a personalized handwritten note of gratitude for the guest who paid their bill. This brings Emotionality and Refinement into consideration. The third part involved asking guests if they wanted to continue this initiative by paying a certain amount forward to the next guest which evokes interpersonal warmth (Exhibit 2). Finally, in the fourth part, the degree of humanness was inspected by the amount paid forward to the next guest which introduces cognition level.

Results:

The results indicate a high level of appreciation and engagement among guests. Graph 1 illustrates that 84% of the guests appreciated the initiative, demonstrating a widespread positive response to acts of kindness within the experience.

Graph 2 reveals that around 83% of the guests who appreciated humanness expressed their gratitude through a personalized handwritten note. This further emphasizes the significance of human connection in enhancing the overall guest experience.

Graph 3 highlights that 88.1% of guests reciprocated the humanness by contributing a certain amount towards the next guest's bill, showcasing a sense of community and reciprocity fostered by humanness.

Graph 4 gives insight into the degree of humanness shown by the visitor. Around 26% of guests paid more for the next guest than what they availed, whereas 23% paid equal and 38% paid less than their bill amount.

These findings underscore the positive impact of humanness within the experience, ultimately resulting in a positive engagement.

Application: Tools for Hospitality Professionals

The results can guide hospitality professionals to make calibrated interventions in the experience. We propose a five-stage intervention framework of Humanness.

1. The Humanness Index: The foundation of the "Humanness Index" lies in its assessment of ten emotions experienced by users. This index not only provides an overall rating but also pinpoints specific factors influencing the user experience (Manrao, 2023). Hospitality establishments can leverage this by encouraging guests to evaluate their experiences based on these recognized emotions, gaining valuable insights into the degree of humanness embedded within their offerings.

2. Identify Areas for Improvement: Analyzing the Humanness Index data can help hospitality organizations identify areas where guest experiences could be calibrated to enhance humanness. For example, if guest feedback reveals high levels of aversion and low levels of participative joy, it might indicate a need to

improve service efficiency or create more opportunities for social interaction and activities.

3. Develop Targeted Interventions: Once areas for improvement are identified, hospitality professionals can implement targeted interventions designed to enhance humanness, such as staff training in emotional intelligence, creating dedicated spaces for social interaction or incorporating local cultural experiences into guest offerings. By intentionally designing experiences that evoke positive emotions and promote human connection, hospitality organizations can create a more human-centric environment, incorporating interactive elements, designing spaces that facilitate socialization and prioritizing personalized service.

4. Technology Integration: Technology can be used to enhance, not replace, human interaction. For example, chatbots can offer basic support and answer simple questions, freeing up staff to focus on personalised interactions with guests.

5. Training Programs: Training staff in emotional intelligence around the ten emotions enables them to recognize and respond to guest emotions effectively. This fosters deeper connections with guests and contributes to a more human experience.

Conclusion:

Our study suggests that by prioritising humanness and acknowledging its profound impact on guest experiences, hospitality professionals can significantly enhance their competitive advantage. Focusing on fostering positive emotions, promoting meaningful connections and designing experiences that resonate with our natural human desires may help ensure that hospitality enterprises enhance lives and produce everlastingly happy memories in addition to offering services. This shift in perspective has the potential to not only benefit individual organizations but also contribute to creating a more positive and connected global community.

Future Work:

Future work covers the practical application of the five-stage intervention framework of Humanness within real-life settings. Additionally, we will analyze the ten emotions outlined earlier, in a real-life setting aiming to derive the coefficient for a Humanness Index. This index is poised to serve as a valuable tool, empowering users to make informed choices among varied experiences. Consequently, it will incentivize organizations to prioritize humanness in the design and delivery of their offerings. This study can explore the long-term impact of human-centric experiences on guest loyalty and brand perception.
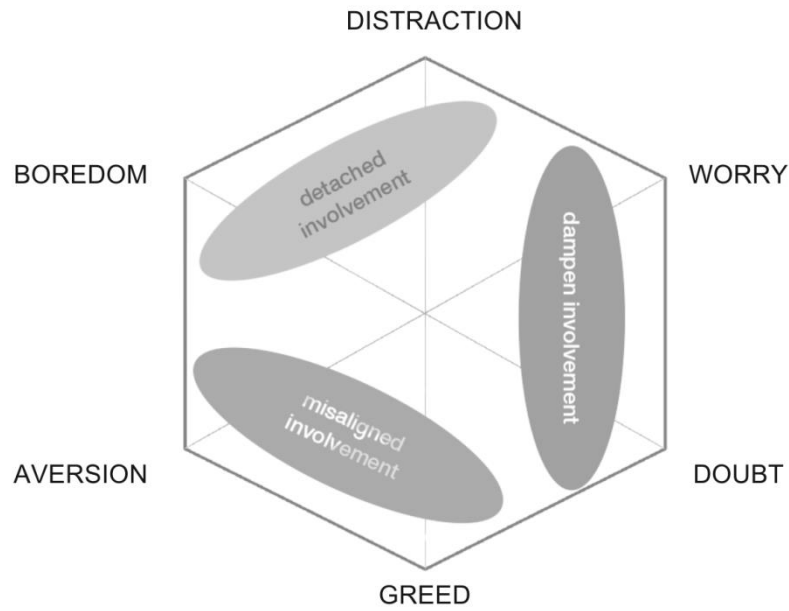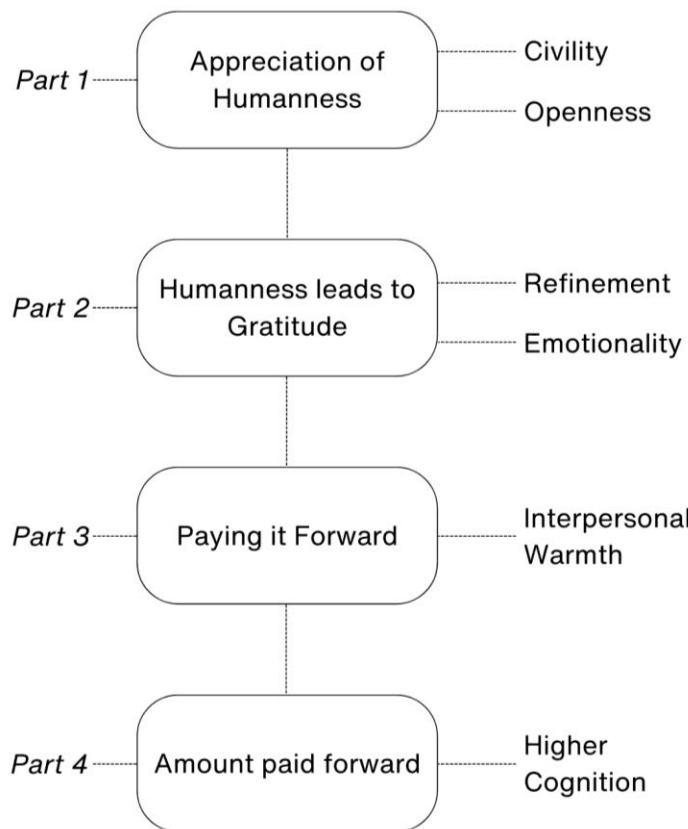
Figure 1: Proposed Model of disconnectedness in an experience (Manrao, 2023)
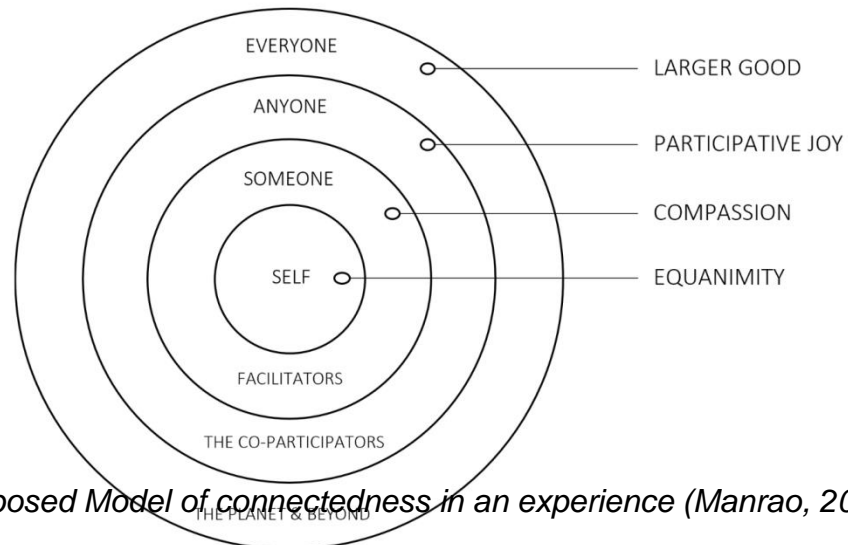
*Figure 2: Proposed Model of connectedness in an experience (Manrao, 2023)*

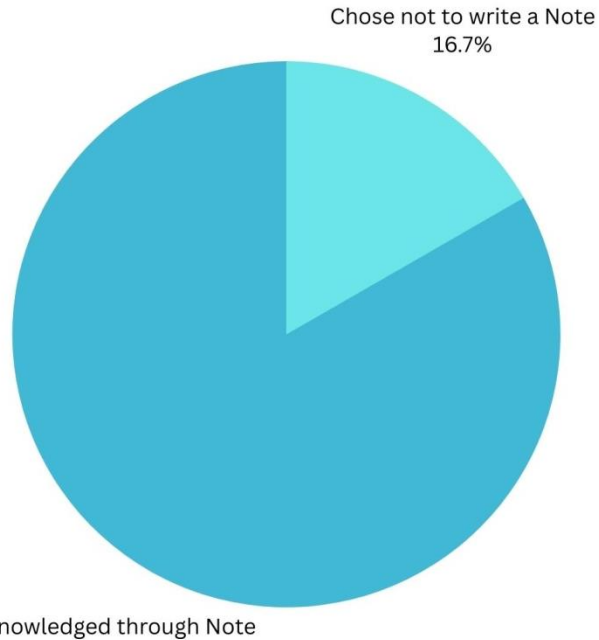**Exhibit 1: Design Basis for Experiment**

Part 1	Appreciation of Humanness	Civility Openness
Part 2	Humanness leads to Gratitude	Refinement Emotionality
Part 3	Paying it Forward	Interpersonal Warmth
Part 4	Amount paid forward	Higher Cognition

Exhibit 2: Questionnaire

Participants were asked the following questions:

- Would you like to appreciate this gesture of Gratitude?

  O Appreciated   O Not Interested

- Would you consider leaving a note of gratitude for the person who paid your bill?

  O Yes   O No

- Are you interested in continuing this initiative by contributing a certain amount towards the next guest's bill?
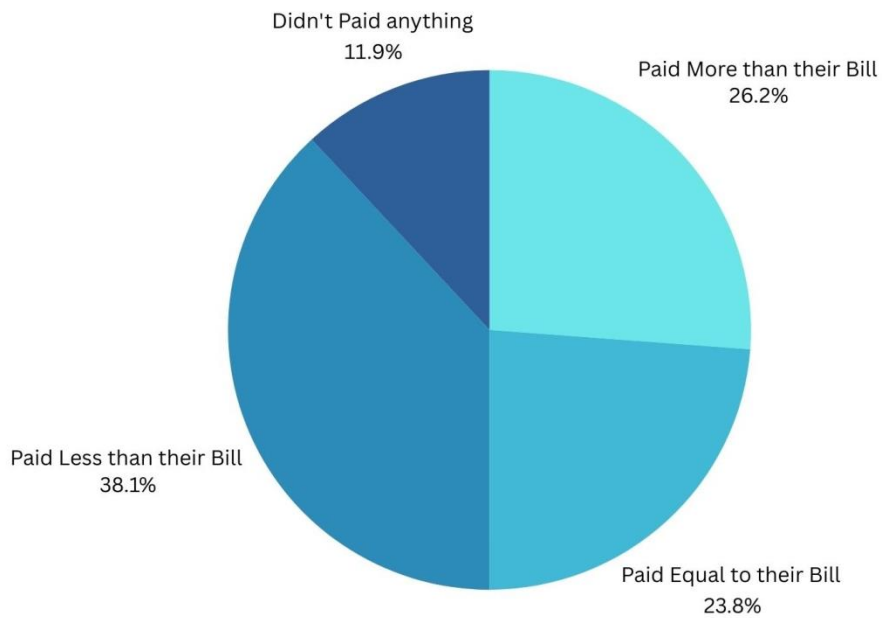
  O Yes   O No

Not Interested in Humanness
16%

Appreciated Humanness
84%
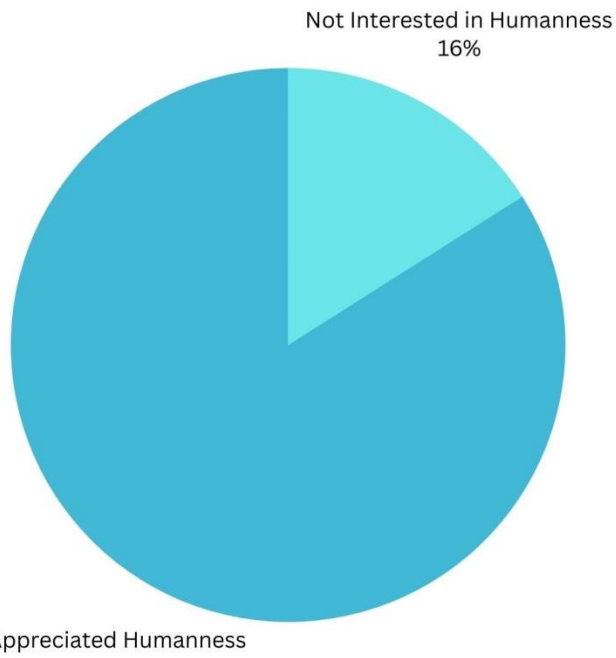
Graph 1: Appreciation of Humanness (50 Guests)

Chose not to write a Note
16.7%

Acknowledged through Note
83.3%

Graph 2: Humanness Leads to Gratitude (42 Guests)
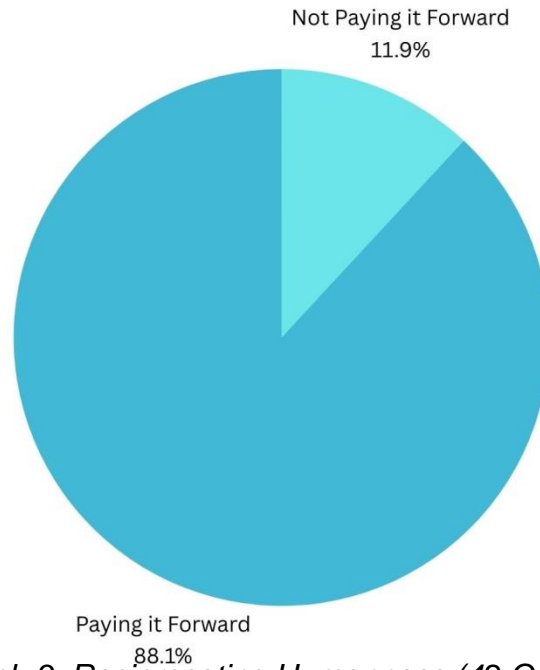
Graph 3: Reciprocating Humanness (42 Guests)

Not Paying it Forward
11.9%

Paying it Forward
88.1%

Graph 4: Degree of Humanness (42 Guests)

Didn't Paid anything
11.9%

Paid More than their Bill
26.2%

Paid Less than their Bill
38.1%

Paid Equal to their Bill
23.8%

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