Chapter 38
Augmented Reality for Tourist Destination Image Formation

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ABSTRACT

In principle, the application of technology is unprecedentedly increasing for destination image formation, and augmented reality (AR) can be a primal example in such context. This chapter synthesizes the functionalities of AR in tourism destination image formation. This chapter explores AR application aspects for tourism destination image formation while placing them in an emerging tourism economy perspective with Bangladesh as the example. A critical explanation generated from reviewing the current literature is offered. Results determine interrelatedness between tourist destination image formation and AR application. In the emerging tourism market scenario, the possibilities of AR application are unlimited, but the policy and structural capacities remain largely inadequate. Study upshots also show that this technology convincingly creates better perceptions leading to positive tourist destination image.

INTRODUCTION

Destination image in recent years is getting hugely interacted with innovative technology application (Lakshmi, & Ganesan, 2010). Tourism is granted as having attachments with destination image when, destination image beholds a significant position. In the simplest understanding, destination image is referred as the expression of an individual's or a group's all imagination, prejudices and objective knowledge about a particular location. In the given context of tourism, this study outlines the roles of AR in destination image formation when, the technology is seen as innovative. This is true that AR has turned into a buzzing word in terms of its uniqueness. AR has already been applied in many areas of human knowledge and business industries creating significant economic and non-economic benefits for both stakeholders and beneficiaries. Still, the benefit generating capacities of AR has not been fully exploited. When, AR and the term 'Gimmick' are almost intertwined, the application of AR in many industries including tourism can hardly be generalised as gimmick. AR does not only serve promotional or marketing activities but also can possibly expanded to destination image formation. This is particularly

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evident that AR application plays important role in destination image formation (Dadwal & Hassan, 2015). The recent popularity of AR is largely indebted to the technological advancements as wearable or handheld computing devices and Smartphone. Also on practical ground, Smartphones have played crucial roles for both introducing and popularising AR (Azim & Hassan, 2013).

BACKGROUND

Tourist Destination Image Formation: The exact meaning of tourist destination image is a bit difficult and knotty. So far, this term has been used in diverse perspectives relating destination image. Such image is normally projected by tourism promoters publicly, a destination's stereotype image or individual led destination images. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) noted that, a major part of the definitions of tourist destination image in earlier studies is obsolete. This means that a comprehensive research to define tourist destination image becomes essential. As defined 'image is one of those terms that won't go away ¼ a term with vague and shifting meanings' (Pearce, 1988: 162). Still, the actual meaning of 'image' centres at the core of such complexities. The term has been applied in as considerable number of knowledge disciplines including psychology, behavioural geography and marketing. In psychology, the notion refers to a type of visual representation. In behavioural geography, this turns as more comprehensive as associated with beliefs, values, knowledge, impressions and emotions. However, in marketing, the term points to the attribution underlying image and attach image to consumer behaviour.

One of the accepted definitions of tourist destination image is offered by Crompton (1979:18), 'the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination'. This definition clearly involves individuals when, many other definitions concedes that images can be shared by groups of peoples. From tourism marketing perspective, this is essential to understand the common image facts with a particular group's other members. Such considerations support market segmentations by facilitating marketing strategy formulations. Another commonly accepted definition of tourist destination image is offered by Lawson and Baud Bovy (1977) as, such image is the outlining of all objective knowledge, imaginations, prejudice, impressions and emotional thoughts that a group of people or an individual can have about a particular destination.

Augmented Reality (AR) and Destination Image Formation: AR technology certainly supports in destination image formation. The technology is viewed as a reliable source for providing necessary photographic and typographic information about a tourist destination (Hassan & Jung, in press). The technology affects tourists' decision by using virtual spaces. A number of platforms as Layar and few others offer the destination marketing organisations (DMO) to publish contents with geo-referencing, tourist attraction descriptions, accommodations, restaurants supported by required information and data about that particular destination (Hassan, 2013). However, such AR technology based contents cannot be widely available to adopt the general users.

Augmented reality (AR) operations rely on computer graphics, computing, sensor and wireless technologies (Hassan & Rahimi, in press). Conventional AR devices as head-mounted displays (HMDs) can be of many types depending on their applications and usability. In a modern GPS supported Smartphone, AR applications can also cover outdoor use. This becomes existent when, tourists normally point the device towards physical objects in a real environment. They are then become able to see the added virtual information on the camera view topped by virtual annotations. The amount and type of contents and information can differ ranging from images, texts, videos or symbols of diverse landmark types.

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