

Chapter 6

Tourist Experience and Digital Transformation

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ABSTRACT

As technology affects the tourism sector as it does all sectors, smart tourism has emerged. The ultimate goal of smart tourism is to improve the efficiency of resource management, maximize competitiveness, and increase sustainability through technological innovations and practices. The digital transformation of the tourism sector, especially in recent years, has greatly affected the tourist experience by completely changing the supply-demand interaction in the industry. The spread of information and communication technologies, the development of the web, and the growing technology use skills in the population, in general, have helped increase the level of self-organization of tourists and have led to smart tourists. This new tourist profile created by smart tourism technologies frequently benefits from technology before, during, and after their travels.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet and other information technologies have had serious effects on consumer behavior (Huang et al., 2017). In 2021, the number of internet users reached approximately 5.1 billion in the world (Internetworldstats, 2021), 218 billion mobile applications were downloaded in 2020, and at the end of 2020, 46.45 percent of the world's population owned a smartphone (Statista, 2021). In addition, with digitalization, many economic sectors such as energy, construction, banking, transportation, retail trade, education, health, media and security have been transformed and the social vision of the world has changed (Okhrimenko et al, 2019). As technology affects the tourism sector as it does all sectors, smart tourism has emerged. The intensive use of information and communication technologies and the adoption of new ideas and approaches to the tourism sector have allowed new services and the re-transformation of

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traditional services (Sigalat-Signes et al., 2020). In order to bring smartness to tourism destinations, it requires the use of a technological platform where information about local resources, tourists, activities/events and consumption habits can be gathered in a single center and presented to various stakeholders (Buonincontri & Micera, 2016).

The concept of smart tourism is defined as systems that coordinate all activities, information and services in real time with the intensive use of technology, connect all local organizations and allow to increase urban efficiency (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014). According to Molz (2012), smart tourism is;

- the establishment of connections via web-based applications with location features,
- the creation of shared value with tourists through the applications in the destination,
- the development of experiences through new technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality,
- connecting and interacting with local communities and other tourists at the destination,
- the development of social and environmental sustainability.

Thus, it can be said that the ultimate goal of smart tourism is to increase the efficiency of resource management, maximize competitiveness, improve the quality of life for both local people and tourists, and increase sustainability by using technological innovations and practices (Lee et al., 2018). Buhalis and Amaranggana (2015) cite the four key dimensions of smart technology that can be found in a destination as information, access, interaction and personalization. First, the environments in which the technology is placed should allow information sharing among all users (locals, previous visitors and current visitors). Second, smart technology needs to be connected to a real-time communication system that can be much more interactive among all users. Third, it is necessary to contribute to the high accessibility of information with smart devices (smartphones and portable tablets). Finally, personalized service should be provided through data from various information sources. Technologies in tourism have played a critical role not only for the competitiveness of tourism organizations, but also for the tourist experience with personalized service delivery (Huang et al., 2017).

The primary purpose of offering tourists a particular tourist destination is to provide a memorable experience. For this purpose, it is necessary to re-establish the destination by making it attractive and exciting (da Costa Liberato et al., 2018). The spread of information and communication technologies, the development of the Web, and the growing technology use skills in the population in general have helped to increase the level of self-organization of tourists (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012) and have led to smart tourists. This new tourist profile, created by smart tourism technologies, frequently benefits from technology before, during and after their travels. For example, tourists can search for information about the price and places to visit before their travel. During travel, they can ask for directions, get digital guidance or make e-payment transactions. After travel, they can use various applications to share their experiences, make suggestions or warnings. Tourism service providers have to respond to these demands and produce value-added services. Hence, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become an integral part of the experience, as tourists use technology to plan their travel, enjoy the destination experience and share it when they return (Wang, Li & Li, 2013).

When the scientific studies on the interaction between technologies and tourists are examined; Chung et al., (2015) investigated the relationships among quality, convenience, satisfaction, and intention to use consistently of destination websites, and the relations between these factors and the intention to visit destinations. According to the findings, website information has an impact on the destination preference

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