


Chapter 3

Smart Tourism Technologies in the Consumer Experience Journey

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ABSTRACT

Smart technologies are becoming rapidly used in various industries successfully. The tourism industry stands as one of the evolving industries, benefiting from these smart technological developments such as virtual and augmented reality, robotics, and internet of things. Anticipatory, experiential, and reflective are the three main phases of the consumer behavior process in tourism, which are regarded as pre-travel, during travel, and post-travel phases in tourism. Smart tourism technologies are being implemented to enhance the tourist experience in these phases of their journey. This chapter aims to highlight the smart tourism technology applications in every phase of consumer experience by presenting examples from the tourism industry.

INTRODUCTION

In today's age, technology can be regarded as a vital force that people should pay attention to, as it has a significant impact on people's lives due to its continuous and rapid developments. These recent developments in Information and Communication

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Technologies (ICTs) have changed the way how travelers plan, consume, create, perceive and share their experiences with other people (Wang et al., 2012). Experiences, in which ICTs are increasingly intertwined, also require new marketing and management approaches. Accordingly, tourism and hospitality businesses face both opportunities and challenges (Law et al., 2014).

Economy has evolved into an experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) where tourism stands as a pioneer example of it (Quan & Wang, 2004). Consumer experience has been a key research topic in tourism since the early 60's (Uriely, 2005). There have been mainly two approaches in experience researches in tourism. Marketing/management approach treats tourist experience as a consumer experience while social science approach regards tourist experience as a peak experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). We would like to note that, the marketing approach is being adopted in this chapter.

Tourist, consumer of tourism industry, creates a consumption set that will address the needs and it is expected to satisfy and match their expectations while generating experiences (Andersson, 2007). Consumer experience is a blend of many things. It consists both physical and emotional components; where physical component can be described as a company's performance while emotional component describes customer's emotions (Shaw & Ivens, 2002). Tourism companies aiming to succeed, require to enhance their customer's experiences in today's competitive environment (Mossberg, 2007). A wide variety of factors affecting the consumer experience should be taken into consideration with both a holistic approach and a narrow focus by tourism companies to create memorable positive experiences (Walls et al., 2011).

ICTs have started to play a very important role in providing competitive advantage to tourism organizations and destinations. It *"empowers consumers to identify, customize and purchase tourism products and supports the globalization of the industry by providing tools for developing, managing and distributing offerings worldwide"* (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005). Websites of traditional destinations or agencies, personal blogs, review sites, social networks, are important technologies for the tourism industry. In addition, new technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), robotics and Internet of Things (IoT) have created Smart Tourism Technologies (STTs) together. Its effects were felt by all stakeholders in travel and tourism industry, from travel vendors to collection providers, from information brokers to the consumers themselves (C. D. Huang et al., 2017). For example, due to increasing usage frequency of smartphones and their applications, smart tourism developments increased rapidly. Afterwards, with the adoption of STTs its very easy to integrate network technologies, hardware and software to provide real time data which help to make more viable decisions for all stakeholders (Gretzel et al., 2015).

STTs started playing an important role in consumer experience with its different tools in tourism industry. Various implementation examples can be seen in anticipatory

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