



Chapter 6

Augmented Reality, a Tool to Enhance the Visitor Tourism Experience in Ecotourism: A Systematic Review With Future Research Directions


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ABSTRACT

The advent and rapid growth in new digital technologies, every industry is going through transformation. More specifically, augmented reality (AR) in tourism context has been progressing. With this growth, AR potentially could shape visitor tourism experience (VTE) in Eco-tourism (ET). For this purpose, the present chapter focuses on understanding the current state of the literature on AR and VTE within a broader context of ET. By following a systematic literature review approach, we selected and analyzed the full text of 31 peer-reviewed journal articles to synthesize theoretical, contextual, and methodological choices of the extant literature. Moreover, this chapter highlights the key elements of how AR could potentially be a tool to enhance VTE. Finally, the authors present the future research agenda on AR and VTE within ET context.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, tourism, a significant economic sector, has undergone remarkable expansion. In recent years, ecotourism (ET) received growing attention from scholarly and practitioner communities across the globe to foster responsible and sustainable tourism. Visitors in the globalized and mobility intensive world seek experiential values and adapt pro environmental behaviors (Walker & Moscardo, 2014). Currently, technology's attractiveness extends to the tourism industry as well as more established industries like manufacturing, education, and economics (Stankov & Gretzel, 2020). Augmented Reality (AR) is one of the technological marvels attracting the most attention (Bec et al., 2021). To give tourists an immersive, real-time experience, AR effortlessly blends the worlds of reality and virtuality (Tussyadiah, Jung, tom Dieck, 2018). Even while its primary dependence remains on screens or other similar mediums for delivering visual, audio, or tactile experiences, augmented reality has opened exciting possibilities for tourists. Through AR, visitors can realistically interact with the real world while utilizing smartphones or digital cameras to view digital overlays (Han, Tom Dieck, & Jung, 2019).

Recently, Statista report denoted that the immersive technologies (e.g., AR) market size is anticipated to achieve USD 100Bn by 2026 (Statista, 2023), which emphasizes the significance of AR-technologies for the future growth of society. AR has a variety of uses in the tourism industry. By providing insights into many areas of their travels, including physical structures, historical accounts, cultural heritage, exhibitions, and museums, it acts as a useful tool for travelers (Loureiro, Guerreiro, & Ali, 2020). AR has the power to stimulate tourists' interest by creating unique interactions and enhancing their comprehension and cognitive engagement with the environment, geography, and cultural nuances, going beyond simply providing information (Bec et al., 2019). The visitor's experience can be improved before, during, and after their trip thanks to augmented reality. Its effects go deeper since AR advances both the cause of sustainable tourism and experiential tourism (Mustapha et al., 2021). This soaring interest in augmented reality is supported by a Business Wire story published online that highlights technology's significant growth, particularly within the tourism sector.

Tourism, which is typified by heterogeneity and intangibility significantly benefits from the adoption of immersive technologies in increasing visitor experiences (Bretos et al., 2023; Rather, 2020; Rather et al., 2021, 2024; Satar et al., 2023). Specifically, this novel wave of immersive-based technologies, like AR might assist to confound the challenges created by intangible character of tourism services/products by allocating potential visitors to experience them in new means (Jiang et al., 2023; Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2023). Furthermore, AR-based technologies

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