

Influence of Digital Technologies on Sustainable Tourism –Key Challenges

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Abstract

The paper examines prospects of sustainable tourism through digital technologies and focuses on strengthening Indian tourism and hospitality sector with appropriate digital support to optimise tourist's experiences. Digital Tourism refers to improvement of the quality of tourism services through digital technologies. Digital Tourism offers a platform that enables consumers to experience the tourism products and services through digital technologies. Digitalization is transforming the way tourist companies and nations do their business. These tourist companies rely on a range of digital processes to remain efficient and competitive. They demand for high-quality services along with good digitalization. But, challenges are also plenty. Lack of digitally skilled work force, upgraded technology services and accurate digital communication skills pose a threat to tourism sector digitalization. There is a need for tourism sector to think of investing in suitable and futuristic technology. Tourists are in anticipation of high quality service. Hence, Tourism and hospitality sector must have skilled workforce, upgraded technology services and accurate digital communication skills.

Keywords: *sustainable tourism, digital technologies, Influence, challenges*

Introduction

Concept of digital tourism : Digital Tourism refers to improvement of the quality of tourism services through digital technologies. Digital Tourism is the use of digital tools to prepare, organize, control and enjoy the travel experiences. Digital Tourism offers a platform that enables consumers to experience the Tourism & Hospitality products and Tourism & Hospitality Related services through digital technologies. Digitalization is transforming the way tourist companies carry out their big business in Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors. These tourist companies rely on a variety of digital processes to compete and competitive and look for supplies with good levels of digitalization. Tourism & Hospitality Related Sector is facing steady development after COVID-19 pandemic and is recovering due to increase in cash less transactions and contact less quality services.

Objectives

1. To examine prospects of sustainable tourism through application of digital technologies
2. To provide strategies towards strengthening Indian tourism and hospitality sector with appropriate digital support

Review of Literature

1. Report on the national digital tourism mission 2022
2. Report of United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2022

Methodology

This paper has been prepared with published annual reports of tourism department

Factors influencing digitalisation in Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors- The digitalising of Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors are considered relevant and timely because of following factors .

1.	Application Of Big Data
2.	Application Of New Technologies
3.	Digitalization Of Daily Operations
4.	Increase In Consumer Searching Online
5.	Increase In Mobile Connectivity
6.	Increase In Online Sales
7.	Influence of Social Media
8.	Interpreting Of Big Data-
9.	Need For Digital Business Practices
10.	Opportunities Through Digitalization
11.	The Rapid Pace Of Innovations
12.	The Rise Of OTAs (Online Travel Agents)
13.	Website Optimization

These factors influence the Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors constructively .

1. **Application of new technologies** -Adopting technologies like AI chat bots are an example for digitising tourism sectors. Virtual reality for instance, a virtual travel experience is almost. The process towards full digitalization of a tourism business is a gradual one traditional tourism businesses have a focus on internal operations and creating value for tourists As they move towards increased digitalization through digital marketing and online sales full digitalization becomes smart tourism with a high level of innovation, instant and real time ecommerce and strong connections with consumers and suppliers.
 - ✓ Automatic billing processes
 - ✓ Automatic cancellation
 - ✓ Automatic spot bookings
2. **Big data** – use of software tools to gather and analyse big data to identify a customer’s interests and tailor products to their specific needs is one of the biggest challenges. This will promote Website optimization as companies wish to launch their own website to provide complete information digitally. This also promotes high end results with the customers and helps to target tourism market more creatively and swiftly.
3. **Digitalization of daily operations** –Building digitalization into internal Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors business operations such as
 - ✓ E -mailing systems
4. **Increase in consumer Searching online** -Consumer demands for digital services across the Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors have also grown faster since adoption of economic liberalization

policies. It is estimated that more than a 90% of travellers now research their holidays and business vacations online and through digital platforms. . Searching online using a smart mobile device is becoming increasingly widespread. Especially with younger consumers aged 20-35 who are twice as likely to discover travel destinations via mobile than travellers aged 35 and above. They consult a variety of online sources that include destinations , websites , tour operators influencer websites , travel blogs , travel media , and individual social media accounts . As mobile friendly websites increasingly used for room bookings , spot virtual visualization , premier destination video clippings, shopping information etc by smart mobile device has become too common nowadays. 72% of the young people plan their trips influenced by Tourism & Hospitality sector Related self shared blogs and vlogs.

5. **Interpreting of big data**- Selling goods and services online includes the gathering and interpreting of big data which can assist developing new activities or change existing activities Post COVID embedding digitalization will help tourism business to be more agile and resilient moving forward. Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors
 - ✓ Linked e-calendars
6. **Mobile connectivity** –ensuring all tourism products and hospitality services are available via mobile devices is one of the key factors
7. **Need for digital business practices** -The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for digital business practices as travellers demand digital communications online sales and contactless solutions. Digitalization is defined as the use of digital technologies to manage and cultivate tour business.
8. **Online sales** -Selling trips , tours , holidays and other experiences online either through own website via an OTA , or using e commerce platforms , or cloud management technologies is a welcome .
9. **Opportunities through Digitalization** - it is always seen that digitalization offers multiple opportunities for Small and medium entrepreneurs (SMEs) and destinations. It assist to access new markets and assists in developing innovative travel products and hospitality services. It is all about making sure that in this competitive world, tour business is optimized to target and reach the ideal customer for the ideal product. Because these strategies influence tourists’ experiences constructively.
10. **Social media usage and handling** –managing social media accounts and planning and implementing campaigns based on insights gathered from big data is very challenging .The know observation on this reveal the mistakes and lapses in social media handling has negatively affected the tourism destinations. Some social media users dumbly believe what is written through social media while some miscreants deliberately create furore and present half truth write ups and messages through social media.
11. **The rapidity of innovations in IT sector** - The rapidity of innovations in IT sector is called as digital revolution has completely changed the way tourism business operates. Tourism sector is one of the primary sectors to embrace digitalization. As tourism sector adopted digitalisation by selling flights and hotel room tickets online. The rise of OTAs (online travel agents) is one of the most spectacular illustrations of the digital transformation in Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors. This has positively

assisted in digitalisation of distribution channels in the Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors and paved way for hospitality services to become further pleasant and transparent .

12. The rise of OTAs (online travel agents)- OTAs are technologically advanced E- Commerce platforms and have captured an estimated 40% of the total global travel market. The largest OTAs are aggregate websites like booking and which offer price comparisons and booking facilities across a range of suppliers . OTAs specialize in selling trips tours experiences are another growth area and include several trip advisor companies. Customers also like the quick and rapid travel services provided by OTAs.

Building digital knowledge --Building digital knowledge, developing skills and creating new products are some of the biggest challenges. In addition to this, investing in technology can be expensive, particularly in areas where the infrastructure is not yet available. However, there are numerous digital activities that can be adopted as first step as the digital environments continues to evolve.

1.	Ensuring Digital Preparedness
2.	Ensuring basic technological skills-
3.	Ensuring Training needs
4.	Ensuring investment in futuristic technology
5.	Ensuring Distance working

- 1. Ensuring Digital Preparedness-** A key challenge for Tourism & Hospitality Related Sector businesses in the early stages of the digital transformation process is ensuring that the work force is prepared digitally. Host of workforce including Tour operators, tour guides , hotels , Home stays, restaurants , resorts, were new to pandemic situations and were literally tied in hands to move further to adopt digital services. COVID -19 proved extremely disruptive to the travel industry and saw numerous employees being informed to work from home while others who did not fit in the digital working mode were out of work. . Working from home thus became a key factor in digitalization of Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors. Sooner, the Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors started to look for work force who are techno savvy and who are digitally upgraded. This called for digital up-gradation of hotel bookings, tour operating, home-stay booking, rail services, flight services etc. Every activity related to Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors started to include digital applications.
- 2. Ensuring basic technological skills-** - ensuring that work force has good understanding of the technologies required to operate tour business is very apparent. This includes digital based office systems, website management and social media platforms. Tourism & Hospitality Related Sector started to diversify to digital mode and workforce were compelled to adapt to digital mode.
- 3. Ensuring Training needs-** Digital skills training providing is also very much necessary factor. Providing digital skills training to Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors staff and sub staff is very essential. Customers have increasingly high anticipation of quality service providers. Tour staff must be skilled workforce with upgraded technology and have the right digital communication skills to transact with the requirements of techno- savvy tourists and global travel sector suppliers.

4. **Ensuring investment in futuristic technology** - making sure that Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors think of investing in the appropriate technology so that they are able to do their work effectively and remotely. This includes
- ✓ **Ideal conferencing,**
 - ✓ **Using tools such as micro-soft teams,**
 - ✓ **Enabling files sharing ,**
 - ✓ **Using micro soft one drive ,**
 - ✓ **Cloud team technology etc.**

These services use cloud based which is online storage to securely store and share data.

5. **Ensuring Distance working-** Tourism & Hospitality Related Sectors

Conclusion

There is a need for tourism sector to believe in investing in suitable and futuristic digital technology answering all challenges . Tourists are in anticipation of high quality service. Hence, Tour and hospitality sector must have skilled workforce , upgraded technology services and accurate digital communication skills . Application of new technologies and application of big data calls for visionary policy guidelines from related sectors as well. There is a need for digital business practices through efficient use of opportunities through digitalization of daily operations related to tourism and hospitality services.

References

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