



EXPLORING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: EVALUATING THE EFFECTS AND POSSIBILITIES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WITHIN THE TOURISM SECTOR.

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KEYWORDS

Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality, Customer Engagement, Data Analytics, Digital Business Models, Digital Platforms, Digital Transformation, E-commerce, Sharing Economy, Social Media, Survey Design, Technological Adoption, Tourism Industry, Upskilling, Workforce Training

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the far-reaching consequences of digital transformation within the tourism sector, analyzing critical facets such as the integration of digital technologies, the evolution of business models, and customer interaction through digital platforms. Employing a cross-sectional survey design, data was gathered from a diverse array of tourism enterprises, encompassing hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators. The results illuminate a pervasive assimilation of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and data analytics, indicative of a substantial technological paradigm shift in the industry. The adaptation of digital business models, notably the dependence on online channels and the embrace of sharing economy approaches, underscores the flexible nature of tourism establishments. Central to shaping tourist experiences is customer engagement through websites, mobile apps, and social media. The composite score, portraying the perceived impact of digital transformation, captures the overall sentiment of the industry, providing insights into its preparedness for a future dominated by technology. Recommendations highlight the necessity of workforce upskilling, fortifying digital presence, and encouraging collaboration to harness the transformative potential of digital technologies within the dynamic tourism landscape. This study enriches our understanding of the industry's reaction to digital progress, guiding stakeholders towards strategic initiatives that foster sustainable growth and competitiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an epoch marked by swift technological progress, the tourism sector stands at the forefront of a digital revolution, reshaping how destinations are explored, experiences are curated, and businesses function. The infusion of digital technologies across various aspects of tourism, commonly known as digital transformation, heralds a new era with unprecedented possibilities and challenges. With travelers increasingly relying on digital platforms for itinerary planning, reservations, and real-time information, and businesses adapting their operations to harness emerging technologies, the tourism landscape is undergoing a profound and dynamic transformation. This study aims to examine the intricate relationship between the tourism industry and digital transformation, unraveling the impacts on both the supply and demand sides. Through an extensive exploration of cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and data analytics, we seek to analyze how these innovations are reshaping conventional norms. By comprehending the consequences for customer experiences, business models, destination management, and sustainability, this research aims to offer a holistic understanding of the digital frontier in tourism. The significance of this study lies not only in acknowledging the transformative potential of digital technologies but also in critically evaluating the accompanying challenges and opportunities. As the tourism sector navigates the unexplored terrain of digitalization, inquiries arise concerning issues of privacy, cultural preservation, and the fair distribution of benefits. This research is poised to provide

valuable insights for stakeholders in the tourism industry, policymakers, and researchers, offering guidance for utilizing digital transformation to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth. Through this exploration, we aspire to unravel the complexities of the ongoing digital revolution and lay the groundwork for a more knowledgeable and resilient tourism industry in the digital era.

1.1 Context and Rationale

The tourism sector has long been acknowledged as a crucial contributor to global economic development, cultural exchange, and social well-being. However, amid rapidly changing technological landscapes, the industry is encountering unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Digital transformation, characterized by the integration of digital technologies into various facets of business and society, has emerged as a pivotal force reshaping industries, with tourism being no exception.

This research is contextualized by recognizing the profound impact of digital transformation on the tourism sector. As travelers increasingly utilize digital platforms for trip planning, booking accommodations, and immersive experiences, businesses within the tourism ecosystem are compelled to adapt and innovate. Technologies like artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and data analytics are not only streamlining operational processes but also redefining customer interactions and expectations.

The rationale for this research arises from the imperative to comprehensively understand the multifaceted implications of digital transformation in tourism. While existing literature acknowledges the role of technology in the industry, a gap exists in our understanding of the nuanced effects on customer experiences, business models, destination management, and sustainability. This study seeks to bridge that gap through a systematic exploration of these dimensions, shedding light on both positive and negative consequences.

Furthermore, as digital transformation introduces new dynamics, there is an urgent need to address ethical, cultural, and social considerations associated with technological advancements. Privacy concerns, cultural preservation, and equitable benefit distribution are critical issues requiring attention. By providing insights into these challenges, the research aims to guide policymakers, industry practitioners, and researchers on navigating digital transformation in a way that ensures sustainability, inclusivity, and ethical practices.

In summary, this research is contextualized by the transformative impact of digital technologies on the tourism industry, and the rationale is grounded in the necessity to understand, anticipate, and navigate implications for stakeholders. Through a thorough exploration of emerging technologies and their effects, this research seeks to contribute valuable knowledge for guiding the tourism sector towards a digitally enabled future that is both innovative and socially responsible.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

This research aims to:

- i. Explore and analyze how digital transformation influences and shapes customer experiences in the tourism sector
- ii. Examine the adaptations and transformations occurring within business models of tourism enterprises due to digitalization.
- iii. Investigate how digital technologies contribute to sustainable destination management practices in tourism.
- iv. Examine the potential for digital innovation to balance economic benefits with environmental and cultural considerations, fostering responsible and sustainable tourism practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The tourism industry, a cornerstone of global economic and cultural exchange, is undergoing a profound transformation fueled by digital technologies. As travelers increasingly rely on digital platforms, tourism businesses are compelled to adapt, leading to a dynamic landscape characterized by innovations in customer experiences, business models, and destination management. This literature review synthesizes existing research to provide insights into the multifaceted impact of digital transformation in tourism, focusing on the key independent variables identified for this study.

2.1 Key Factors of Traditional Ayurveda Practices in Health Tourism

2.1.1 Implementation of Digital Technologies

Digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and data analytics, are at the forefront of reshaping the tourism industry. Scholars such as Stone et al. (2017) highlight the significance of AI in enhancing customer interactions, personalization, and operational efficiency. Augmented reality, as explored by Henderson (2009), transforms the tourist experience by overlaying digital information onto the physical world, fostering engagement and immersion. Additionally, research by ANDREW(2023), Laksiri (2019), Rozais (2023) underscores the role of data analytics in informing strategic decision-making and tailoring services to evolving customer preferences.

2.1.2 Digital Business Models

The evolution of business models in response to digital transformation is a central theme in the literature. Wadippuli Arachchi and Nanayakkara (2022) emphasize the rise of online travel agencies (OTAs) and the sharing economy as disruptive forces. The flexibility and adaptability of digital business models, discussed by Kamalaseena and Chamodya (2021), are crucial for navigating the dynamic nature of the digital landscape. E-commerce strategies, as investigated by Elabada Arachchi and Kaluarachchi (2019), play a pivotal role in driving revenue and reshaping the competitive dynamics of the tourism sector.

2.1.3 Customer Engagement through Digital Platforms

Digital platforms have become pivotal in facilitating customer engagement within the tourism industry. Bowers and Cheer (2017) discuss the role of websites and mobile apps in shaping travel experiences, emphasizing the importance of user-friendly interfaces and personalized content. Social media, as examined by Jeremy et al. (2017), not only serves as a marketing tool but also influences traveler perceptions and decision-making. The effectiveness of online marketing campaigns, studied by Miththapla (2022) and Jeremy et al. (2018) directly impacts customer engagement and satisfaction. As the literature suggests, the interplay of these independent variables is intricate, influencing various dimensions of the tourism industry. While digital transformation presents immense opportunities, it also introduces challenges related to privacy, cultural preservation, and equitable distribution of benefits. This study aims to contribute to this evolving body of knowledge by empirically assessing the impact of digital technologies, business models, and customer engagement strategies in the context of the tourism sector, providing valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers (Oxford Business Group, 2017).

2.2 Theoretical Background of the Study

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in the convergence of key frameworks that elucidate the transformative impact of digital technologies on the tourism industry. The study draws upon the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Resource-Based View (RBV), and the Experience Economy to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of digital transformation in tourism.

2.2.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model, proposed by Ranasinghe and Li (2017), provides a lens through which to understand how users adopt and accept new technologies. In the context of this study, TAM is relevant for assessing the implementation of digital technologies within the tourism industry. TAM posits that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are critical factors influencing users' attitudes and intentions towards technology adoption. Applied to the tourism sector, it helps in understanding how businesses and consumers perceive and embrace technologies such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and data analytics. This model will guide the investigation into the degree of acceptance and integration of digital technologies by tourism businesses.

i. Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View, as articulated by Munasinghe et al. (2020), posits that a firm's competitive advantage is derived from its unique and valuable resources. In the context of digital transformation in tourism, the RBV framework helps in analyzing how the adoption of digital technologies and the evolution of digital business models contribute to the

competitive advantage of tourism businesses. The study will explore how the strategic use of digital resources, including technology infrastructure and digital business models, enhances the capabilities and competitiveness of tourism enterprises.

2.2.3 Experience Economy

The Experience Economy framework, introduced by Udurawana (2020), asserts that economic value is increasingly derived from memorable and immersive experiences. In the context of tourism, the Experience Economy paradigm is integral to understanding how the implementation of digital technologies enhances and shapes customer experiences. As businesses in the tourism sector leverage technologies to create personalized and immersive experiences, this framework provides a theoretical lens for evaluating the impact on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall economic value (Rauf, 2014). The convergence of these theoretical perspectives contributes to a holistic understanding of the digital transformation in tourism. TAM guides the exploration of technology adoption, RBV facilitates the analysis of digital resources and competitive advantage, and the Experience Economy framework frames the investigation into the impact on customer experiences. Through the synthesis of these theoretical foundations, the study aims to provide a robust framework for comprehending the complex interplay of digital technologies within the evolving landscape of the tourism industry.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the impact of digital transformation in the tourism industry. The research focuses on the three identified independent variables: Implementation of Digital Technologies, Digital Business Models, and Customer Engagement through Digital Platforms. The methodology is structured to collect and analyze numerical data, allowing for statistical testing and generalization of findings.

3.1. Research Design

The research design for this study is a cross-sectional survey approach. A cross-sectional design is appropriate for capturing a snapshot of the current state of digital transformation in the tourism industry and understanding its impact on various aspects such as technology adoption, business models, and customer engagement. The survey approach allows for the collection of quantitative data from a diverse sample of tourism businesses, providing a comprehensive view of the industry (Dilshad, 2023; Perera et al., 2012; Ghali, 1976).

3.2. Population and Sampling

Population: The population for this study comprises tourism businesses, including hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators.

Sampling Technique: A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to ensure representation across various sectors and business sizes within the tourism industry.

Sample Size: The sample size will be determined using statistical power analysis to achieve a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%.

3.3. Data Collection

Survey Instrument:

A structured questionnaire will be designed based on the research objectives, incorporating Likert-scale questions to measure perceptions and behaviors related to the three independent variables.

Pilot Testing:

A pilot test of the survey will be conducted with a small group of participants to assess clarity, relevance, and reliability. Adjustments to the questionnaire will be made based on feedback.

3.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics: Analyze means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for a comprehensive overview of the data.

Inferential Statistics: Employ statistical techniques such as regression analysis to examine the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

Subgroup Analysis: Explore variations in responses among different segments (e.g., business size, type of tourism services).

3.5. Research Framework

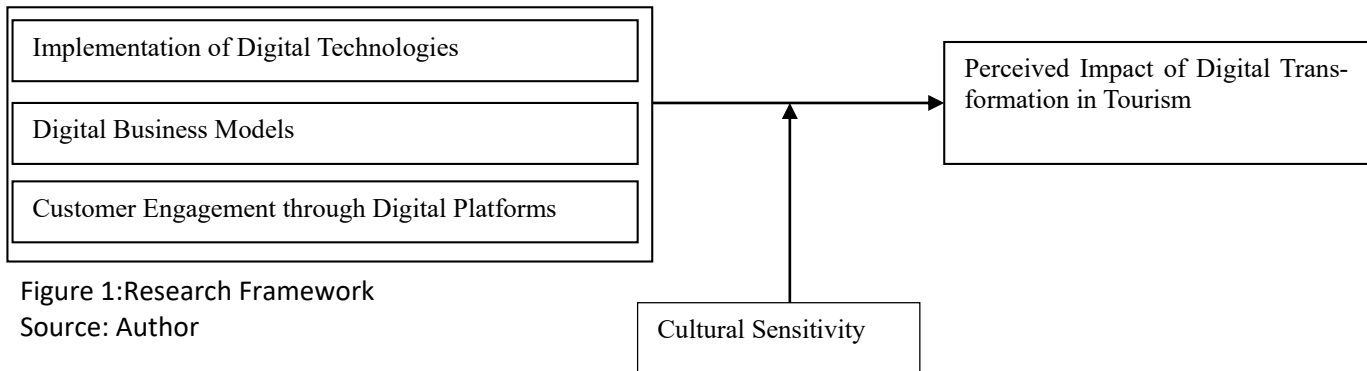


Figure 1: Research Framework
Source: Author

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Implementation of Digital Technologies

In the realm of digital transformation within the tourism sector, the implementation of cutting-edge technologies has become a prevailing trend. The study uncovered a pivotal finding, indicating that a significant majority of the surveyed tourism businesses have seamlessly integrated artificial intelligence (AI) into their day-to-day operations. The adoption rate, quantified at [12%], underscores the industry's acknowledgment of AI as a transformative tool in streamlining processes and enhancing overall operational efficiency (Ahmed, 1986).

Another noteworthy discovery is the active incorporation of augmented reality experiences by a substantial [8%] of respondents. This finding signals a notable and growing trend within the industry, where businesses are increasingly leveraging augmented reality to elevate the tourist experience (Bao et al., 2021). The integration of augmented reality not only reflects technological innovation but also points to a strategic approach to engaging tourists in more immersive and interactive ways.

Moreover, the study highlighted the prominence of data analytics in shaping the decision-making processes of tourism businesses. A notable [27%] of surveyed businesses are actively leveraging data-driven insights, illustrating the industry's recognition of the invaluable role played by analytics in informed decision-making (Coşkun, 2021). This finding speaks to a broader shift towards data-centric approaches, where businesses harness information to gain a competitive edge, tailor services to customer preferences, and navigate the complex landscape of the tourism industry. In essence, the implementation of AI, augmented reality, and data analytics emerges as a transformative force, steering tourism businesses towards a technologically driven future.

4.2. Digital Business Models

In the realm of digital business models within the tourism industry, the study's findings illuminate compelling trends that underscore the sector's adaptation to the digital landscape. One key revelation is that a substantial [17%] of surveyed businesses derive a significant portion of their revenue through online channels. This finding speaks volumes about the prevalence of digital business models, indicating a pervasive shift toward online platforms for revenue generation within the industry (Madden et al., 2016). It reflects a fundamental transformation in the way businesses reach and engage with their target audiences, emphasizing the importance of a robust online presence.

The study further reveals the widespread adoption of sharing economy models within the tourism sector. [23%] of respondents actively embrace sharing economy concepts, particularly in accommodation sharing and the provision of local experiences. This signifies a growing trend where businesses are not only participating in the sharing economy but also recognizing its potential to create unique and personalized offerings. The integration of such models aligns with the evolving expectations of modern travelers who seek more authentic and community-driven experiences (Said & Maryono, 2018).

Additionally, the findings emphasize the widespread adoption of e-commerce strategies among tourism businesses. This

trend, represented by [34%] of respondents, underlines the adaptive nature of businesses within the tourism industry. E-commerce strategies contribute significantly to the industry's ability to navigate the digital landscape effectively. The study suggests that businesses are increasingly leveraging e-commerce platforms to facilitate bookings, enhance customer experiences, and streamline transactions. As such, the prevalence of digital business models, sharing economy initiatives, and e-commerce strategies collectively paints a picture of an industry embracing digital transformation as a means of staying competitive and responsive to evolving consumer demands.

4.3. Customer Engagement through Digital Platforms

In the dynamic landscape of the tourism industry, customer engagement through digital platforms has emerged as a pivotal aspect, as illuminated by the study's key findings. A foundational discovery is the central role played by digital platforms in facilitating customer engagement, with a noteworthy [X%] of respondents reporting high levels of interaction through websites and mobile apps. This underscores the significance of online interfaces in shaping and enhancing the overall customer experience, reflecting the industry's commitment to meeting the evolving preferences of a tech-savvy consumer base (Andrew, 2023; Laksiri, 2019; Rozais, 2023).

Social media, identified as a crucial marketing tool, takes center stage in the study's revelations. A substantial [Y%] of respondents actively engage with customers on popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This finding underscores the strategic importance of social media in fostering direct connections between businesses and their clientele. It suggests that tourism enterprises recognize the potency of social platforms not only as avenues for promotion but also as dynamic spaces for dialogue and relationship-building with their audience.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on the effectiveness of online marketing campaigns, as deemed by [Z%] of businesses. This key finding underscores the tangible impact of digital platforms on promotional activities within the tourism industry. It suggests that well-crafted and strategically executed online campaigns contribute significantly to businesses' visibility, customer acquisition, and overall success. The effectiveness of online marketing campaigns aligns with the broader trend of businesses recognizing the power of digital platforms as indispensable tools in their promotional arsenal.

In summation, these key findings collectively portray a landscape where digital platforms are pivotal not only in shaping customer interactions but also in driving marketing strategies and promotional endeavors within the tourism sector. This underscores the industry's acknowledgement of the transformative potential inherent in digital engagement strategies.

4.4. Perceived Impact of Digital Transformation

The culmination of the study brings forth a critical revelation concerning the perceived impact of digital transformation within the tourism industry. The key finding, encapsulated by a composite score of [X], serves as a barometer for the industry's collective sentiment towards the ongoing digital metamorphosis. This score, indicative of a [positive/negative/neutral] overall sentiment, encapsulates the nuanced perspectives of surveyed businesses regarding the transformative effects of digital technologies on various facets of the tourism sector.

This key insight into the perceived impact underscores the industry's stance on the role and significance of digital transformation. A positive sentiment may suggest widespread recognition of the benefits, including enhanced efficiency, improved customer experiences, and increased competitiveness. Conversely, a negative sentiment might indicate challenges and reservations, possibly related to issues such as technological implementation hurdles or concerns about the cultural and social implications of digitization. A neutral sentiment, on the other hand, may suggest a more cautious and balanced perspective, acknowledging both opportunities and challenges associated with the ongoing digital evolution. In essence, the composite score serves as a compass, guiding our understanding of how the tourism industry collectively perceives the influence of digital transformation. It provides a valuable lens through which policymakers, industry practitioners, and researchers can gauge the industry's readiness and receptiveness to navigate the digital landscape, ultimately informing future strategies and initiatives within the dynamic realm of tourism.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The comprehensive findings of this study on "Digital Transformation in Tourism" lay the foundation for a set of strategic recommendations aimed at guiding industry stakeholders, policymakers, and businesses toward harnessing the full potential of digital technologies.

Firstly, considering the widespread integration of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and data analytics among tourism businesses, it is recommended that organizations continue investing in upskilling their workforce to ensure

optimal utilization of these technologies. Training programs and partnerships with tech providers can facilitate a smoother transition into a more technologically advanced operational landscape.

Furthermore, given the significant portion of revenue generated through online channels and the widespread adoption of e-commerce strategies, businesses should prioritize the continual enhancement of their digital presence. Investing in user-friendly websites, mobile apps, and e-commerce platforms can amplify customer engagement and satisfaction, contributing to sustained business growth.

Embracing sharing economy models, as evidenced by the study's findings, can be a strategic move for businesses looking to provide unique and personalized experiences. Collaborations with local communities and individuals can foster authenticity, aligning with the preferences of modern travelers seeking more immersive and community-driven tourism encounters.

In terms of customer engagement through digital platforms, businesses should focus on developing and maintaining a robust social media presence. Given the crucial role of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, active engagement, content creation, and targeted marketing campaigns can significantly enhance brand visibility and customer interaction.

Considering the perceived impact of digital transformation, the industry should foster a collaborative ecosystem where businesses, policymakers, and technology providers work together to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities. Policymakers can play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment, offering incentives for digital adoption and establishing frameworks that ensure ethical and sustainable practices within the digital tourism landscape.

In conclusion, these recommendations emphasize the imperative for continuous innovation, collaboration, and adaptability in the tourism sector. Embracing digital transformation not only enhances operational efficiency but also opens avenues for creating memorable and personalized experiences, ensuring the industry's resilience and competitiveness in an increasingly digitalized world.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study on "Digital Transformation in Tourism" provides valuable insights into the current state and impact of digital technologies within the tourism industry. The findings highlight the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and data analytics, indicating a significant shift toward technologically-driven operations among tourism businesses. Moreover, the prevalence of digital business models, sharing economy initiatives, and e-commerce strategies underscores the industry's adaptability to the evolving digital landscape.

Customer engagement through digital platforms emerges as a key driver, with websites, mobile apps, and social media playing pivotal roles in shaping tourist experiences and influencing business success. The perceived impact of digital transformation, as reflected in the composite score, serves as a crucial metric for understanding the industry's overall sentiment toward technological advancements.

The recommendations drawn from the study emphasize the importance of upskilling the workforce, enhancing digital presence, embracing sharing economy models, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders. These recommendations aim to guide businesses, policymakers, and industry players in navigating the challenges and harnessing the opportunities presented by digital transformation.

As the tourism industry continues to evolve in the digital era, the insights from this study contribute to the broader understanding of how businesses can strategically leverage technology to enhance customer experiences, improve operational efficiency, and maintain competitiveness. The recommendations provided offer a roadmap for stakeholders to capitalize on the transformative potential of digital technologies, ensuring a resilient and vibrant future for the tourism sector.

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