

Review Article

DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT DIGITAL TOURISM AND TOURISM INFO STRUCTURE IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article describes the directions of improving digital tourism and tourism info structure in Uzbekistan. Digital tourism is a great way to save not only money, but also nerves and precious time thanks to the electronic services provided to travelers before, during and after the trip. The article provides the author's comments, conclusions and suggestions, along with an analysis of the relevant literature.

Key words: tourism, digital tourism, tourism info structure, service economy, digital economy

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INTRODUCTION

In the international arena, tourism is one of the most lucrative sectors of the world economy. The successful development of tourism has a positive impact on important areas of economic activity, such as transport, construction, agriculture, hotel and restaurant services, consumer goods production. Tourism is a leading field of service and requires modern innovative forms and technologies of customer service.

Great work is being done in Uzbekistan for the development of modern information and communication technologies, the creation of an integrated system of e-government services and the introduction of new mechanisms of communication between government agencies and the population. Along with the establishment of innovations in the system of economic relations, the objective necessity of the digital space in Uzbekistan and the socio-economic research of the digital economy has been noted. In addition, today, the implementation and improvement of the digital economy is becoming a priority and important task of every developing country.

In his Address to the Oliy Majlis, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev clearly stated that the active transition to the digital economy is one of our priorities for the next 5 years [1]. This task and as well as the global trend in tourism, highlights the need to develop digital tourism in Uzbekistan.

As one of the largest tourist destinations in Central Asia, the country has great potential for the development of this sector of the economy. In the last 3 years, great attention has been paid in our country for the further development of the regulatory framework in the field of tourism, the prosperity of tourist infrastructure, the promotion of tourism potential, the strengthening of human resources. Such reforms in the tourism sector will certainly serve to increase the number of tourists.

At the present stage, one of the development trends of the global tourism industry is the improvement of Internet technologies, in other words, the modern progress of tourism is taking place in the digital economy.

In fact, the process of digitization has not bypassed the tourism industry, as in many other areas.

The widespread use of web resources by potential tourists has led to the emergence of digital tourism, the development of

intelligent web services to develop recommendations that help customers make travel directions and decisions in the field of tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The rapid development of advanced information technologies and telecommunications systems has led to the digitization of the tourism industry. Many scientists around the world have expressed their views on this. For example, while Abovd G. and other scientists (1997) have noted the use of a mobile guide installed on your smartphone while traveling [2], Ardissono L. and others (2003) have argued that digital support before, during, and after a tourist activity is a system of recommendations that allows you to find suitable accommodation during your trip [3].

Uriely N. (2005) highlights in his article that the purpose of using technologies is to further improve the quality or level of the tourist experience [4].

De Karolis B. and another group of scientists (2009) argued that tourists use a variety of tools and solutions, such as interactive maps, travel assistants, in order to watch sightseeing, search and buy souvenirs, and these tools and approaches represent digital tourism design [5].

Durrant A. and other scientists (2011) in their another research focused on the benefits of using digital tourism in a variety of areas, such as museums, rural areas, zoos, and theme parks [6].

Schinke T. And others (2010), Vatanabe A. and another group of scientists, (2012), focused on the important aspects of mobile devices in tourism, emphasizing the importance of tourism and geolocation applications, virtual reality applications in the display of tourist destinations [7], [8].

Benyon D. and others (2014) focused on the meaning of digital tourism, emphasizing it as supporting the tourism experience through digital means.

Digital tourism is an information and communication tool, IT-solution, using of which helps to meet the needs of tourists and increase the competitiveness of organizations and enterprises in the field of tourism [9].

One of the leading experts on digital tourism, Dmitrios Buhalis, a professor at the University of Bournemouth in the UK, points out that digital tourism is synonymous with e-tourism and smart tourism and e-tourism means the digitization of the all processes' and services' chains which allows to increase

efficiency of the tourism, travel, hospitality and catering spheres[10].

The essence of e-tourism is that the use of information and communication technologies is found in all areas of tourism. E-tourism as a type of e-commerce, as well as the sale of products and services through the electronic system[11]. Like e-commerce, it also includes electronic data transmission, distribution management, e-marketing, online transactions, electronic data exchange, management systems, and automated data management [12]. In addition, e-tourism makes emergence of the specific activities of e-tourism, such as, variety offers from tour operators and travel agencies [13]. E-tourism also includes e-data, e-booking (hotels, transportation, etc.) and e-payments for consumers. Today, digitization is developing in all spheres of life. According to Buharis D. and Jun S. (2011), digital tourism is a paradigm shift in tourism due to the emergence of digital tools and techniques [11].

As a result of the analysis of the literature in this area, we believe that digital tourism is the use of digital tools in the planning, organization, control and enjoyment of travel, with a set of electronic services provided to travelers before, during and after the trip.

The methodology used in this research was based on the study and analysis of the relevant literature. For this, we used the integrated literature review method. During our research, we have been studied past and present researches which are focused on the digitalization of the economy, digital tourism, e-tourism. Lectures, conference materials, Internet publications and journals devoted to the study of this field, as well as new literature on the subject and prospective project data were studied, and methods such as analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, and generalization were used.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The tourism potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan is developing rapidly. In recent years, as one of the strategic sectors of the national economy, comprehensive measures have been taken to develop tourism, which is aimed at its rapid development, creating new jobs, increasing incomes,

improving living standards and quality of life, as well as increasing investment attractiveness.

It should be noted that important trends of digital transformation are emerging in the field of tourism, and the integration of these technologies into tourism products and services is a key element of the innovative process leading to digital tourism.

The current state of the tourism industry largely depends on the Internet, electronic transactions and services provided through the network, and in this regard, the expansion of the use of digital solutions is a prerequisite for adapting tourism enterprises to business needs.

It is clear that a similar situation is happening in other sectors of the economy, but it should be noted that the tourism industry is different from other industries, so there is a growing need for the use of Internet technologies.

According to Datareportal.com's "Digital 2020" report in January 2020, 59 percent of the world's 7.75 billion people, or 4.54 billion, use Internet, 67 percent (5.19 billion) are mobile phone users and 3.80 billion people, or 49 percent of the world's population, are active social media users [24]. These numbers are growing accordingly every year.

However, Internet users are people of different ages, different incomes and social status. Interestingly, among the active users of Internet resources, every year there is an increase in older people who communicate on social networks and use the Internet to search for information.

In line with global trends, the total number of Internet users in Uzbekistan has exceeded 22 million, and the number of people who use mobile Internet has exceeded 19 million [25].

Also, the number of mobile base stations is increasing and the capacity of the international data transmission network is accelerating (Table 1). These indicators of digitalization in the economy of our country make it necessary to develop digital tourism in Uzbekistan.

Table 1. Digitalization indicators of the economy of the Republic of Uzbekistan

№	Indicators	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	Total number of Internet users (million)	4.9	10.2	12.1	14.7	20	22
2	Number of mobile subscribers (mln.)	19.6	20.1	20.6	21.4	22.8	23.9
3	Number of mobile base stations (unit)	14309	14921	16265	18194	22178	26017
4	International data network bandwidth (Gbit / s)	10	16.07	25.7	64.2	1 200	1200
5	Total distance of fiber-optic communication lines (thousand km)	14.4	16.4	17.9	20.3	24.5	36.6

Source: prepared by author based on the date from stat.uz and mitc.uz

Targeted tasks is being done in order to accelerate the development of tourism, create a suitable infrastructure for tourists, improve the quality of services, effectively use the tourist potential of the regions and create new jobs, increase the production of national tourism products.

In our opinion, for the further development of tourism in Uzbekistan, along with tourism infrastructure, it is necessary to improve the tourism **info structure** as well.

Tourist info-structure is a set of information on all types of services related to tourism. The implementation and

improvement of innovative sources of information in all areas related to the development of tourism, the formation and effective use of the digital space are one of the important factors not only for local travelers but also for foreign tourists. In digital tourism, the priority will be given not for traditional booklets, flyers, leaflets, brochures and banners about services, but for digital web pages and portals, pages on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, ...), channels and bots on messengers (WhatsApp, Telegram), profiles on video portals (You Tube, Rutube, Mytube), mobile applications and QR-codes for smartphones and tablets (Figure 1).

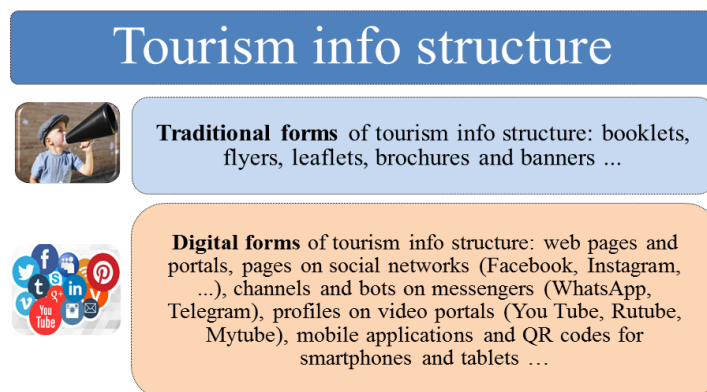


Figure 1. Tourism info structure

Source: Prepared by O.K Khurramov as a result of research

The rapid development of unorganized tourism in Europe and the United States (i.e. without any tour operators and travel agents) is precisely the contribution of digital tourism. Before choosing a tourist destination, tourists independently without leaving their houses search and get detailed information (even through 360-degree and panoramic views) about that place, buy e-air (rail, bus) tickets on convenient them routes, choose one of the hotel types from the offers of many Internet portals, follow reviews and recommendations of the travelers about routes, hotels, restaurants in social medias and express their own opinions, they will achieve maximum satisfaction through the effective use of online and offline maps such as Google Maps, Maps.me, geolocation services, mobile applications, QR code technologies during their trip.

In the digital age, many tourists and travel agencies visit websites where they can see all the necessary information, including 360-degree and panoramic views without leaving home.

Digital tourism services can advise the traveler on finding the accommodation they need in order to help them plan their itinerary. In addition, they will be able to install the mobile app on their mobile phones.

Digital tourism is not a new concept and has already entered the online activities of many people. Tourists also review recommendations and comments on sites like TripAdvisor, Orbitz and Expedia. Some travel management sites like TripIt and Kayak allow you to compare the prices of services on other sites and book flights and hotels from travel portals such as Google Flights, Priceline.com, Booking.com and Hotels.com.

Digital tourism also helps travelers change the way their online shopping. Well-known entities of the global tourism market, such as Marriott, Best Western, Kayak, Carlson Rezidor and others, are already using these technologies effectively.

People who love to travel are already familiar with using Picasa, iPhoto, Flickr and Facebook to manage their photos.

Digital tourism includes e-services that include:

- information services (e.g., addresses, tourist destinations, or hotel information, Google Maps, TripAdvisor, and Wikipedia);
- communication services (e.g. discussing with a client or sending an email);
- payment or transaction services (e.g. booking, electronic payment information).
- electronic marketing services (e.g. search engines, banner advertising, mobile applications, QR code, social media, etc.)

In the context of the digitalization of the tourism business, the customer himself searches for information about a particular tour, selects a particular company and compares the prices of services. The process ends with the customer purchasing the tour they like and the services are provided to him 24/7, which improves the quality of service and increases customer

satisfaction. Note that digital capabilities are constantly expanding and accessibility is increasing.

We can list the advantages of digital transformation for the tourism industry by increasing the knowledge of the tourist by providing detailed information about places of recreation and travel, the availability of reasonable payment mechanisms and the ability to quickly and easily make payments for services consumed by the customer.

One of the main directions of digital tourism is the use of cloud technologies, the use of cloud technologies in travel companies depends on the fact that all applications work online. In this case, the unlimited amount of data storage, system maintenance, software updates and management are carried out in real time mode.

In other words, for travel companies, cloud technology is a tool that focuses more on customers rather than management technologies, so companies don't need additional resources or hire a large number of employees and rent offices.

Another striking example of digital tourism is that, today, many travelers are becoming active users of mobile devices. In this regard, mobile communication, on the one hand, allows responding immediately to the needs and problems of customers during travel, on the other hand, leads to a decrease in the number of customer visits to the offices of companies and, accordingly, a decrease in demand for consulting services.

The advantages of using mobile technologies in the tourism business are personalization in the field of customer service, the formation of innovative models of cooperation between tourism companies and the further development of the infrastructure of tourist areas. Using mobile apps makes it easier for companies to gather and analyze a large amount of customer-related information needed for marketing research and customer segmentation, such as their location, costs, preferences, friends.

Digital tourism is further developing with the emergence of smart watches, geolocation bracelets, virtual reality glasses, mobile apps to pay for tickets and e-tickets.

The role of social networks in the development of digital tourism is also invaluable. With help of social networks, modern tourism enterprises have the opportunity to identify new markets, develop tourism brands, gain the opportunity to communicate with their potential customers and build trusting relationships with them.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Thus, the availability and diversity of travel information based on digital tourism technology, feedback from users about a particular destination, shared photos and videos help tourists decide, plan and accomplish.

It is expedient to identify the following priorities for the development of digital tourism in our country:

- a) To develop tourism infrastructure relatively with the info structure

b) With purpose of developing competitiveness of the specialists and employees of the tour operators, tour agents, hotels, restaurants, transportation and other tourist service it's important to ensure regular attendance of the specialists and employees in seminars and trainings about opportunities of the digital marketing, e-business, Google Analytics, Yandex.Metrics, Social media, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, e-mail marketing, mobile marketing (QR code, mobile app), modern information technologies and e-advertising held by local and foreign experts. As a result, employees who have acquired modern knowledge in the trainings will be able to identify shortcomings in their work, eliminate them, as well as develop practical recommendations and suggestions, and further develop their field.

c) In order to overcome the backwardness of tourism enterprises, organizations and institutions in the field of economic relations and management of our country, it is necessary to slowly transform (online) their activities, by communicating with consumers and introducing new forms of electronic payments.

d) Supporting scientific and practical research, creation of textbooks, manuals and guidelines for the development of digital tourism in Uzbekistan will serve to further improve this area.

f) In order to mitigate the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the global crisis on the tourism industry it's recommended to develop tourism info structure of the country and adapt it into local digital tourism activity through offering tourists use online web sites' platforms and watch 360 degree panoramic sightseeing's without leaving their country and houses by paying online.

Tourism digitalization make the tourism business not only flexible for global modern activities but also turn the business competitive in the developing "digital world". The digitalization of the tourism industry gives customers not only great convenience, satisfaction and benefits, but also helps to provide an opportunity that allows the owners of tourism companies to earn a higher income.

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