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Usage of ICT for hospitality industry of Uzbekistan: Analysis and suggestions

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Abstract

Despite the fact that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have transformed the travel, leisure, and hospitality sectors around the world, there have been no studies that show the impact of ICTs (such as Internet usage, secure Internet servers, mobile cellular subscriptions, high-technology export, communications as well as computer, and fixed broadband subscriptions) on the Uzbek hospitality industry. It's probable that ICTs have a variety of or non-linear effects on countries moving through different stages of tourism development. Using national data and an observational technique, this study tries to see if and how ICTs affect tourist development in Uzbekistan, specifically the hospitality business. Results shows that increased technology, secure Internet servers, and unique platforms for the hospitality business all have favorable effects on traveler arrivals.

Keywords: ICTs in hospitality, Hotel Dilimah, Royal Hotel, PMS, Ancillary system

Introduction

Prior to the pandemic, World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC,2021) accounted for 1 in 4 of all new jobs created across the world, 10.3% of all jobs (333 million), and 10.3% of global GDP (US\$9.6 trillion). Meanwhile, international visitor spending amounted to US\$1.8 trillion in 2019 (6.8% of total exports). Surprisingly, because of pandemic there are a lot of organizations and people have learnt how to use ICT for their business. Additionally, to redevelop tourism industry as previous years both industry representatives and customers can not reject the usage of ICT.

Since the pioneering work by Buhalis and Law (2008), an increasing interest in the studies of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and tourism management has emerged by international scholars (Navío-Marco et al., 2018). ICT plays a crucial role in accelerating economic growth, particularly through the generation of new competitiveness in the tourist management, destinations and organizations (Benckendorff et al., 2019; Fernández et al., 2020). The process of digitalization of the economy is re-shaping the tourism industry in terms of market

competition, cost optimization, marketing and distributional chain in view of a more sustainably-oriented society (Assaf and Tsionas, 2018). The same process is also affecting the personalization of the touristic offer by emphasizing the tourist's motivation, his/her own desires and personal experiences (Kotiloglu et al., 2017; Sigala, 2012). For the above reasons, an increasing attention of the tourism literature is now being paid to the demand-side. First, the evolution of the concept of 'value co-creation' in tourism (Casais et al., 2020) which contributes to the understanding of the social sphere of the sustainability paradigm (Font et al., 2021). Second, the relevance of tourists' attitudes in relation to several tourist activities (Crouch et al., 2016). Third, the residents' attitudes and behaviors in viewing tourism as a driver of sustainable development (Blasco López et al., 2018). In consideration of this latter aspect, the following elements allow us to argue why it is relevant an understanding of the residents' attitudes to consider tourism, driven by ICT use, a relevant factor for a sustainable regional development.

Given the above considerations, the usage of ICT for tourism and hospitality industry as a driver of sustainable regional growth lacks of a clear understanding of the resident and business owners' perception in Uzbekistan. Our work intends to cover this gap and offers new insights for bottom-up hotels and ICT policies to achieve sustainability goals in lagging behind regions of Uzbekistan. To do this, the present study has been conducted to investigate the existence of the ICTs in hospitality industry of Uzbekistan.

The present work is structured as follows: Section 2 illustrates a brief review of the literature; section 3 defines the methodology of the work; section 4 describes the survey analysis; and finally, section 5 concludes the work and gives suggestions to develop ICTs for hospitality industry of Uzbekistan.

Literature review

Regarding the resource-based view, Wernerfelt (1995) pinpoints that it is a truism that firms have different resource endowments and that it takes time and money to change these endowments. Thus, the level of ICT usage is thought to be not as high as expected, it becomes apparent that ICT implementation causes numerous limitations, especially in the hotel industry. The advantages coming from ICT application in the hospitality sector vary from productive communication between the hospitality industry and clients to a reduction of operational costs for business. Furthermore, advertisement of hotel services is more efficient via the Internet rather than through published brochures or catalogs. Customers can find out a lot about the product by searching it on the internet. As Daria Jaremen (2016) claims, the Internet is becoming an increasingly significant source of knowledge about a product, and by not providing any information regarding their offer on the virtual market, enterprises lose their competitive position quickly. Since the Internet was introduced into our lives, it has opened opportunities for communication enabling the messages provided by advertising to gain new functionality. Currently, ICT is more frequently linked with digital solutions rather than traditional information transmission technologies. However, the definition of ICT may change over time.

Nowadays, Uzbekistan is quite efficiently implementing ICT platforms and other technologies in the hospitality industry, as a result, the hotel service in capital cities has increased dramatically over the past few years. But these platforms have not been used in all tourist destinations.

The use of ICT radically improves business productivity. The main reason why some hotel managements seem so smooth and flexible in their operations is that they use special software. Fidelio is one of the software that is slowly occupying the majority of hotels in Uzbekistan, such as Hotel DiliMah and Grand Hotel Sogdiana. It is a fully integrated, flexible software suite, designed to maximize hotel performance. All the functions required for the daily operations of the hotel can be found in this software. Such ICTs allow hotel management to develop plans tailored to their specific needs and broaden their scope of usage. Since nowadays tourism is a significant sector, the majority of the developed countries use various means of communication to keep up with competitors. The UK, for example, has been quite successful in attracting a huge number of tourists using these methods. On the other hand, Uzbekistan has had difficulties in this area, due to a lack of ICT and internet development. According to Abir & Khan (2022), “it is impossible to increase visitor numbers unless a country promotes its tourist attractions to the rest of the world”. One can conclude that the integration of well-designed ICT solutions is required for corresponding cases.

There is hence no consensus as to how ICTs impact tourism development. It is also doubtful that currently usage of ICTs in every tourist destination is impossible because of facilities and lack of budget of hotels and other tourist related organizations. Based on the literature mentioned above, it is presented the hypothesis as follows.

H1: ICTs have substantial impacts on tourism development, however, there might be financial issues for hospitality and tourism organizations.

1.1. ICT Developments in developing countries.

The ICT application in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry (THI) is not a new phenomenon in advanced countries. Despite the immense importance of ICT in the tourism and hospitality industry, many countries are yet to reasonably use it, especially in developing countries like Uzbekistan and other most Asian countries. Below there is given the usage of ICT in developing countries with an example and comparison of Bangladesh and Uzbekistan.

ICT is regarded as one of the most cost-effective marketing channels through which tourism and hospitality service providers reach customers effectively and efficiently. This mode of marketing is called e-marketing or online marketing. (S., Sardar, et.al., 2020). Currently, e-marketing is an important factor in promoting a product on the market and with the development of information technologies, much attention is paid to promoting your brand on the Internet. This function is well developed in Bangladesh, which shows good results, that is why it is worth improving the Internet-marketing system in Uzbekistan, which will be a good impetus for entering the world arena.

Innovation for our country will be the introduction of one of the developing ICT e-strategic management tools. Managers who use ICT in their hotel operations are positively different in terms of working performance and the transaction cost (Law et al., 2014). It also generates efficiencies and creates a new dimension of business operations for the organizations and stakeholders (Salguero & Espinilla, 2018). Having studied and implemented the E-strategic management system Uzbekistan will enter a new stage of development in the field of ICT usage in the hospitality and tourism industry which will be a big boost in the promotion and implementation of innovative ideas on a par with developed countries.

H2: Because of modern marketing modules which are being used in the world there some ICTs are in operation in hospitality industry of Uzbekistan

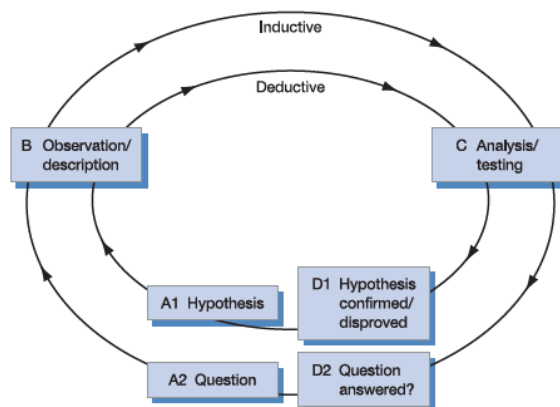
Methodology

In terms of methodological approach, our study adopts a survey and its analysis at Samarkand region including Royal Hotel and Hotel Dilimah.

Inspired by the issues arising in different papers which have been looked through and to respond to our research questions, it is aimed to deepen the understanding on ICT use as an important determinant of the business owner's perception of tourism as a driver of sustainable regional development in lagging behind regions. To do this the study considers deductive and inductive approach carried out in Samarkand city. This region is one of the famous destinations in Uzbekistan.

Figure 1 depicts our research framework. Compared to the large majority of related quantitative studies (e.g., Bethapudi 2013; Bizirgianni and Dionysopoulou 2013) using questionnaires that suffer the shortcomings of particular populations, self-selection bias, and collected samples from limited sets (Wright 2005), our analysis covers data on ICTs from the WDI issued by the World Bank Database. Taking these shortcomings into consideration, to get the required data inductive and deductive approaches were used by implementing observation and analysis.

Figure 1.



Source: Wright, 2005

Results

To get and analyze the required data, we did a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to hotels located in Samarkand city. The answers were taken using the note taking technique and the answers some of the staff members of the hotels were recorded using the Dictaphone. The analysis of the results is given in one **Table 1** taking into two given hypotheses of the article.

H1: ICTs have substantial impacts on tourism development; however, there might be financial issues for hospitality and tourism organizations.

H2: Because of modern marketing modules which are being used in the world there some ICTs are in operation in hospitality industry of Uzbekistan.

Table 1.

	Hotel Dilimah Premium Luxury	Royal Hotel	Hotel Zilol Bakht	Hotel Alexandra	Hotel Asia
Q1. What kind of ICT technologies does the hotel use?	Fidelio	None	PMS	None	None
Q2. What are the benefits of using ICT technologies (for staff, customers)	For staff: easy to manage operations and improve service quality in the hotel For clients: easy to book and pay.	It would save time, money and energy.	Very comfortable to manage almost all operation in the hotel including revenue, housekeeping, ancillary system and others.	It would attract more and more clients and improve staff members' jobs	It would improve quality of service for clients.
Q3. Did it effect on the budget / was it costly to implement these technologies?	It did not affect on our budget, but it was not cheap to install	We're not financially ready	To use full operation of the system, need to pay money. During the low season, yes it has effects on our budget. Because it requires regular updates.	No idea	No idea
Q4. What are the drawbacks of ICT that hotel faced in the past?	Problems with Internet sometimes speed of internet decreases, another problem is electricity	There was no regular electricity to use technologies.	Low internet, and PMS was a bit difficult to use for the first time	Regular electricity	Regular electricity
Q5. Was the situation improved (or is the hotel still facing the same problems)?	Yes	Yes	Partly yes	Yes	Yes

Q6. What was the first communication technology that was implemented in the management system of the hotel?	Fidelio	Microsoft excel	PMS	None	None
Q7. What is the latest ICT technology that has been installed in the management system of the hotel?	None	None	None	None	None
Q8. Do guests have an easy access to all ICT, and how the hotel ensures that?	Most of our clients know to use the system and ICTs	No idea	We use content marketing to make them learn how use	No idea	No idea
Q9. Will the hotel continue using ICT in the next 5 years? Why?	Absolutely yes	Yes	Absolutely yes	Yes	Yes
Q10. What would the hotel want to install from ICT in the future and what is preventing them from doing so?	Current ICTs are enough, but if there is any new ICTs, we are willing to install	It has not been planned yet, but we'll absolutely install. It depends on our budget	No exact plan about it.	Yes, it depends on the hotel budget	Yes

Note: Our elaborations.

According to the first hypothesis, it is shown in the Table 1 that hotels named Royal, Alexandra and Hotel Asia have absolute financial problems to adopt or install the latest technologies in hospitality industry. To be more precise, general manager of Royal hotel clearly expressed that currently they have financial issues to use ICTs in their business operation and the others even have no idea about this process. However, all of them can clearly understand that ICTs have substantial impacts on tourism development.

Findings for modern marketing modules which are being used in the world there some ICTs are in operation in hospitality industry of Uzbekistan have shown that hotels in Samarkand city know about modern marketing modules including content marketing, chatroom marketing, affiliate marketing and social media marketing modules. They have admitted that these modern marketing models undoubtedly require to use ICTs in hospitality industry. Specifically, to fully use content marketing hotels have to bring and adopt ICT tools like computer hardware and software.

Conclusion and recommendations

in the business world or in organisations as regards to the way functions are performed now. In particular, the hospitality industry are currently incorporating property management systems mostly Fidelio Opera in their operations and services

in order to remain relevant, achieve customer satisfaction which results to competitive advantage in the hotel industry. The findings from this research work could serve as new knowledge to the hospitality industry especially those in the third world countries to know that this industry can only achieve guests' satisfaction and improve on service delivery when they make the accessibility and availability of data to be of paramount importance because the hospitality industry depend highly on data, data including reservations rates, inventories, and room status.

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