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Adapting to change: Exploring contemporary issues in the tourism and hospitality industry

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Abstract

The tourism and hospitality industry are a dynamic sector that constantly evolves in response to changing global trends, technological advancements, environmental concerns, and shifting consumer preferences. Contemporary issues in tourism encompass a myriad of challenges, trends, and concerns that are reshaping the global tourism landscape. Contemporary issues in the tourism and hospitality sector are influenced by a variety of factors, including economic shifts, societal changes, environmental concerns, technological advancements, and political dynamics. A major issue is the growing emphasis on sustainability and ecotourism, driven by rising environmental awareness and the demand for eco-friendly practices that benefit local communities. Over tourism in popular destinations strains infrastructure, exceeds environmental limits, and threatens cultural heritage. Technological advancements, such as online booking platforms, mobile apps, virtual reality tours, and AI-driven recommendations, are transforming the industry by enhancing visitor experiences and operational efficiency but also raising concerns about data privacy, cybersecurity, and maintaining human connections. Political instability, terrorism, and health crises, like pandemics, significantly impact tourism by deterring travelers, disrupting travel plans, and causing revenue losses. Cultural appropriation, respect for local customs, and the socio-cultural impact on host communities are vital considerations, with responsible tourism promoting mutual respect and cultural sensitivity. Economic fluctuations, currency exchange rates, and global economic crises influence travel patterns and consumer behavior. Lastly, adequate infrastructure is crucial for tourism growth and enhancing visitor experiences, while inadequate infrastructure can limit destination potential and hinder development. By employing a comprehensive methodology that includes literature review, field studies, and stakeholder consultations, this paper explores contemporary issues in the tourism and hospitality sector and proposes actionable strategies for sustainable tourism, emphasizing the crucial collaboration among governments, businesses, and travellers to effectively navigate these challenges and shape a resilient and responsible future.

Keywords: Environmental concerns, technological advancements, shifting consumer preferences, cultural appropriation

Introductions

The evolution of the tourism industry is a fascinating journey that reflects the changing dynamics of society, technology, and global economics over the centuries. From its humble beginnings as a means of trade and exploration to its current status as a multi-trillion-dollar global industry (Marin, 2015) ^[1], tourism has undergone significant transformations, driven by innovation, globalization, and shifting consumer preferences. The tourism and hospitality sector stands out as among the most rapidly expanding industries globally, contributing approximately 10% to the world's GDP (Bharwani & Butt, 2012) ^[2].

Consumer preferences, behaviour, and expectations evolve due to socio-cultural shifts, technological advancements, and economic changes, driving demand for personalized experiences, sustainability, and seamless booking processes. Technology, including online platforms, mobile apps, and AI-driven services, enhances efficiency and customer experiences (Wahab, 2017) ^[3]. Globalization exposes the industry to geopolitical tensions, economic crises, and health pandemics, necessitating adaptation to mitigate risks. Sustainability is increasingly crucial, with travellers favouring eco-friendly options. Intense competition, fuelled by new entrants and changing preferences, requires businesses to innovate and differentiate. Compliance with regulatory requirements, encompassing safety, licensing, taxation, and labour laws, is vital for operational continuity.

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Resilience to disruptions, such as natural disasters and economic downturns, entails contingency planning and diversification of revenue streams. Adaptation to these factors is essential for hospitality businesses to remain competitive and resilient.

Tourism's roots can be found in ancient societies where individuals journeyed for trade, religious quests, and cultural interactions. In civilizations like Egypt, Greece, and Rome, travellers looked for places to stay, meals, and advice from locals on established trade routes and pilgrimage routes (Sharpley, 2018) ^[4]. These initial hospitality practices set the stage for the evolution of structured travel and accommodation services during the medieval period (Towner, 1985) ^[5].

Tourism is certainly not a new phenomenon but a process which has characterised human behaviour for centuries (Butler 2015) ^[6]. The origins of tourism can be traced back to ancient civilizations where people traveled for trade, religious pilgrimages, and cultural exchanges. In ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, travelers sought accommodation, food, and guidance from local hosts along well-established trade routes and pilgrimage paths. These early forms of hospitality laid the groundwork for the development of more organized travel and lodging services in the medieval era (Towner, 1985) ^[5].

The Middle Ages saw the rise of coaching inns, monasteries, and pilgrimage sites that provided essential services to travelers, merchants, and pilgrims. The advent of the Renaissance and the Age of Exploration further expanded the horizons of travel, as explorers ventured beyond their borders in search of new lands, treasures, and knowledge, fueling the demand for more sophisticated travel services (Legassie, (2017) ^[7].

The hospitality and tourism sector thrives in a fiercely competitive landscape, often dominated by a few key players offering similar offerings and vying for the attention of potential customers. This industry is characterized by its intangible nature, perishability, variability, and inseparability, as highlighted by Kotler *et al.* (2021) ^[8], making operational management quite complex. Unlike tangible goods, hospitality and tourism services cannot be experienced until consumed, nor can they be stored for future use (Narayan *et al.* 2009) ^[9]. Moreover, the quality of services tends to fluctuate between providers, creating a challenge in standardization. The close link between the service provider and the delivery of the service further complicates matters, making them essentially inseparable. Additionally, the operational costs in this sector are notably high due to both fixed infrastructure expenses and variable costs, and the labor-intensive nature of the industry requires a diverse workforce with various skill sets and roles.

Success in the hospitality and tourism sector hinges on stakeholders' comprehension of the business landscape (Dwyer *et al.* 2009) ^[10]. This industry faces a spectrum of trends and challenges stemming from both internal and external factors. The challenges facing the tourism industry require a concerted effort from all stakeholders. Governments, businesses, and travellers must work together to foster a resilient and sustainable future for tourism. By aligning their efforts, these groups can create a synergistic effect that enhances the positive impacts of tourism while mitigating its negative consequences (Higgins, 2020) ^[11]. Collaboration is the cornerstone of sustainable tourism. Governments must create enabling environments through

supportive policies and infrastructure; businesses must innovate and implement sustainable practices; and travellers must adopt responsible behaviours (McMinn, 1997) ^[12]. Together, these efforts can ensure that tourism continues to be a force for good, driving economic growth, preserving cultural heritage, and protecting our planet for future generations.

This paper utilizes a comprehensive approach, blending literature review, field studies, and stakeholder consultations to analyze current challenges in the tourism and hospitality industry. It underscores the critical need for collaboration among governments, businesses, and travelers to effectively address these challenges and promote a resilient, sustainable future for tourism.

This paper delves into the investigation of current issues within the hospitality and tourism realm, with dual objectives:

- Examining contemporary challenges in the hospitality and tourism sector.
- Emphasizing the vital importance of collaboration among governments, businesses, and travelers in effectively addressing these challenges and fostering a resilient and sustainable future for tourism.

Literature Review

This literature review aims to explore the contemporary issues facing the tourism and hospitality industry, with a focus on understanding the various factors influencing its operations and strategies for effective adaptation.

The tourism and hospitality industry operates within a dynamic environment characterized by constant change and evolution. In order to remain competitive and sustainable, stakeholders in this sector must continuously adapt to emerging trends and challenges. In the study conducted by Ballantyne, Packer, and Axelsen (2009) ^[13], an examination of trends in tourism research was undertaken. According to Rosing *et al.* (2015) ^[14], a trend is characterized as "a prevailing direction in which something is progressing or undergoing change". Hospitality and tourism trends, such as demographic transitions, the emergence of new markets, and the digitalization of information technology (IT), as noted by Kapiki (2012) ^[15], exemplify the dynamic nature of the industry. Nevertheless, these trends are in a constant state of flux, necessitating ongoing research to stay abreast of evolving developments. Researchers like Fonseca (2012) ^[16] and Hole, Khedkar, and Pawar (2019) ^[17] have delved into the myriad challenges within the tourism sector. These challenges, often referred to as issues, pose significant hurdles to the effective management of hospitality and tourism facilities. They encompass a wide spectrum, ranging from natural disasters to wildlife poaching, as well as the seasonality of tourism, security concerns, and inadequate infrastructure. Economic fluctuations, technological advancements, sustainability imperatives, intensified competition, and evolving safety standards also contribute to the complexity faced by hotels, as highlighted by Nain (2018) ^[18]. Addressing these issues necessitates the continuous refinement of strategies and tactics aimed at minimizing their adverse impacts.

The world is in a constant state of flux, and the factors influencing the travel and tourism industry vary from location to location and evolve daily (Poon, 1993) ^[19]. This sector continuously evolves and expands, with its customer base growing steadily (Evans *et al.*, 2003) ^[20]. While the

industry has demonstrated significant progress in terms of profits, revenues, and the range of products and services offered (Loretto *et al.*, 2010) ^[21], it also contends with numerous challenges that require effective management by companies operating within it.

Despite the rapid advancements in technology and changing consumer preferences, there remains a gap in understanding the long-term implications of these changes on sustainability practices within the tourism and hospitality industry. While there is existing research on the integration of technology and its impact on guest experiences, there is limited exploration into how these advancements can be leveraged to promote sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive studies addressing the socio-economic impact of shifting consumer preferences towards eco-friendly accommodations and experiences. Therefore, there is a need for research that delves deeper into the intersection of technology, consumer behaviour, and sustainability within the context of the tourism and hospitality industry to inform strategic decision-making and policy development.

Discussions and Findings

The tourism industry, a cornerstone of global economies and a bridge between diverse cultures, faces an array of challenges that necessitate robust collaboration among governments, businesses, and travellers. The unprecedented disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the pressing threat of climate change, and the evolving expectations of travellers all underscore the need for a unified approach to ensure the resilience and sustainability of this vital sector.

Economic Shifts

Economic fluctuations, currency exchange rates, and global economic crises exert profound effects on the travel and tourism industry, influencing travel patterns, consumer behaviour, and the sector's overall health. Firstly, economic fluctuations impact consumer spending power and discretionary income, directly affecting travel decisions. During economic downturns, consumers may prioritize essential expenses over leisure travel, leading to decreased demand for tourism services. Conversely, periods of economic growth often correlate with increased travel expenditures as individuals feel more financially secure and willing to indulge in leisure activities. Currency exchange rates play a pivotal role in shaping international travel dynamics. Fluctuations in exchange rates can either encourage or deter travel to specific destinations, depending on the strength of the traveller's home currency relative to the destination's currency. A weaker home currency may make international travel more expensive for travellers, potentially leading to a shift in destination choices towards more affordable options or domestic tourism. Global economic crises, such as recessions or financial meltdowns, have far-reaching ramifications for the travel and tourism industry. These crises can precipitate declines in consumer confidence, reduced business travel budgets, and disruptions to supply chains, all of which impact the industry's revenue streams. Furthermore, economic downturns often coincide with increased unemployment rates, which can further dampen travel demand as individuals prioritize job security over leisure expenditures. The interplay between economic factors and the tourism industry underscores the sector's

vulnerability to external economic forces. Businesses within the industry must remain agile and responsive to economic shifts, adjusting pricing strategies, diversifying target markets, and offering value-added services to remain competitive. Government intervention through fiscal stimulus packages and tourism promotion initiatives can also help mitigate the adverse effects of economic downturns, stimulating demand and bolstering industry resilience. Ultimately, understanding and effectively navigating economic fluctuations are essential for sustaining the long-term viability of the travel and tourism industry in an increasingly interconnected global economy.

Societal Transformations

Societal transformations, including shifts in demographics, lifestyles, and cultural norms, present substantial challenges for the tourism industry. Changing demographics, such as an aging population or shifts in family structures, influence travel preferences and demand for specific types of tourism experiences. Additionally, evolving lifestyles, such as a growing emphasis on wellness and experiential travel, reshape the expectations of tourists and drive demand for unique and immersive experiences. Cultural norms and values also play a critical role, as travellers increasingly seek authentic and culturally enriching experiences. However, societal changes can lead to conflicts between preserving cultural heritage and meeting the demands of mass tourism, highlighting the importance of sustainable tourism practices. Moreover, societal transformations bring about new concerns regarding inclusivity, diversity, and social justice within the tourism industry. Issues such as over tourism, displacement of local communities, and unequal distribution of tourism benefits underscore the need for responsible tourism development that respects local cultures and fosters positive social impacts. In response to these challenges, tourism stakeholders must adapt their strategies to cater to changing societal preferences while addressing ethical considerations and promoting sustainable tourism practices that benefit both travellers and host communities.

Environmental Considerations

Environmental considerations present substantial challenges in the realm of tourism. The industry's reliance on natural resources and ecosystems for attractions and activities places it at the forefront of environmental impact. Issues such as carbon emissions from transportation, habitat destruction due to infrastructure development, and waste generation from tourist activities contribute to environmental degradation. Climate change exacerbates these challenges, leading to rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and ecosystem disruptions, which directly affect tourism destinations and their viability. Coastal areas, in particular, face threats from erosion and loss of biodiversity due to tourism-related activities and development. Furthermore, the phenomenon of overtourism, where popular destinations become overcrowded, puts additional strain on local ecosystems and infrastructure, leading to environmental degradation and degradation of the visitor experience. Addressing environmental concerns in tourism requires a multifaceted approach involving sustainable development practices, conservation efforts, and responsible tourism management. Strategies such as eco-friendly infrastructure, waste management initiatives, and

carbon offset programs aim to minimize the industry's environmental footprint while preserving natural resources for future generations. Collaboration between stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and local communities, is essential to implement effective solutions and ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations.

Technological Advancements

Technological advancements present both opportunities and challenges for the tourism industry. While they have revolutionized the way people research, book, and experience travel, they also pose significant challenges that the industry must navigate. One major challenge is the democratization of information through the internet and social media. While these platforms provide vast exposure for destinations and businesses, they also empower travellers to share their experiences instantly and widely, influencing others' perceptions. Negative reviews or viral incidents can significantly impact a destination's reputation, making reputation management crucial for tourism businesses. Additionally, the rise of online booking platforms and aggregators has increased price transparency and competition, squeezing profit margins for traditional travel agencies and tour operators. They must adapt by offering unique, personalized experiences that cannot be easily replicated online. The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics has transformed how businesses understand and target consumers. While this enables personalized marketing and customer service, it also raises concerns about data privacy and security. Tourism companies must navigate the ethical use of customer data to maintain trust and compliance with regulations like General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Moreover, advancements in transportation technology, such as supersonic flights or autonomous vehicles, could disrupt traditional travel patterns and destination preferences. For example, shorter travel times may lead to increased visitation to remote destinations, putting strain on their infrastructure and ecosystems. Furthermore, the integration of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) into the tourism experience offers immersive pre-trip planning and on-site experiences. However, it also challenges destinations to preserve their authenticity amid virtual representations and gamified experiences. Lastly, the rise of sharing economy platforms like Airbnb has disrupted the hospitality sector, offered travellers unique accommodation options but raised concerns about over tourism and housing affordability in popular destinations.

Political Dynamics

Political dynamics can pose significant challenges for the tourism industry, impacting everything from destination perception to traveller behaviour and infrastructure development. One major challenge arises from geopolitical tensions and conflicts, which can lead to travel advisories, border closures, or heightened security measures, deterring tourists from visiting certain regions deemed unsafe. This can have devastating effects on the tourism-dependent economies of affected areas, leading to loss of revenue, unemployment, and economic instability. Political instability and regime changes can also disrupt tourism. Sudden policy shifts, changes in visa regulations, or government instability can create uncertainty for travellers and investors, reducing confidence in the destination's safety

and reliability. For example, shifts in diplomatic relations between countries can lead to visa restrictions or bans, impacting tourism flows between those nations. Moreover, protectionist policies and trade disputes between countries can affect tourism. Tariffs on imported goods, changes in currency exchange rates, or trade barriers can influence travel costs, making certain destinations more or less affordable for tourists. For instance, fluctuations in currency values can affect the purchasing power of international travellers, influencing their destination choices. Political polarization and civil unrest within countries can also harm tourism. Protests, demonstrations, or civil disturbances can disrupt travel itineraries, damage infrastructure, and create safety concerns for tourists. Images of unrest circulated in the media can tarnish a destination's image and deter potential visitors, leading to declines in tourism revenue and investments. Furthermore, political decisions regarding environmental policies and conservation efforts can impact tourism. Failure to address climate change or protect natural habitats can result in environmental degradation, affecting the attractiveness of destinations and jeopardizing ecotourism initiatives. Political dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the operating environment for the tourism industry. Geopolitical tensions, political instability, protectionist measures, civil unrest, and environmental policies all pose significant challenges that require careful navigation and proactive management by tourism stakeholders. Building resilience through diversification, risk assessment, and collaboration with policymakers is essential to mitigate the adverse effects of political uncertainties on the tourism sector.

Robust Collaboration: A Cornerstone for Sustainable Tourism

Governments play a pivotal role in shaping the future of tourism through policymaking, regulatory frameworks, and the provision of infrastructure. Their efforts are crucial in promoting sustainable tourism practices and in mitigating the adverse impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities. For instance, the implementation of policies that enforce environmental standards can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of tourism activities. Governments can also facilitate the development of sustainable tourism by investing in eco-friendly infrastructure and supporting innovations in green technology. Moreover, governments must foster international cooperation to tackle global challenges such as climate change. Collaborative efforts can lead to the establishment of international guidelines and best practices that ensure consistency in sustainable tourism practices across borders. This international cooperation is essential in managing resources effectively and protecting the natural and cultural heritage that attracts tourists worldwide. Businesses in the tourism sector, including airlines, hotels, tour operators, and local enterprises, are at the forefront of implementing sustainable practices. By adopting eco-friendly operations, businesses can significantly contribute to reducing the environmental impact of tourism. This includes measures such as reducing waste, conserving water, and using renewable energy sources. In addition, businesses have a responsibility to support local communities. By prioritizing local hiring, sourcing local products, and engaging in fair trade practices, businesses can ensure that tourism generates inclusive economic

growth. This not only helps in preserving the cultural integrity of destinations but also fosters goodwill and cooperation with local populations. Businesses can also drive innovation in sustainable tourism through partnerships and collaborations. For example, tech companies can develop applications that help travellers make environmentally conscious choices, while hospitality businesses can implement advanced energy management systems. By investing in research and development, businesses can lead the way in creating new models of sustainable tourism.

Travelers themselves have a crucial role to play in the sustainability of tourism. Conscious travel choices can greatly influence the industry's impact on the environment and local communities. Travelers can support sustainable tourism by choosing eco-friendly accommodations, respecting local cultures and traditions, and minimizing their environmental footprint through responsible behaviour. Education and awareness are key in empowering travellers to make informed decisions. Governments and businesses can collaborate to create campaigns that raise awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism and provide practical tips for travellers. This can include promoting lesser-known destinations to alleviate pressure on popular sites, encouraging off-season travel, and providing information on sustainable travel practices. Moreover, the rise of digital platforms and social media offers a powerful tool for travellers to share their experiences and promote sustainable practices. Influencers and travel bloggers can play a significant role in advocating for responsible tourism and inspiring others to follow suit.

Recommendations

Some recommendations for addressing each of the factors shaping the global tourism landscape

Economic Shifts

- Conduct regular economic impact assessments to understand the effects of economic fluctuations on tourism demand and spending patterns.
- Diversify tourism offerings to attract visitors across different income brackets and mitigate risks associated with economic downturns.
- Collaborate with financial institutions to develop flexible payment options and financial assistance programs for tourism businesses during periods of economic instability.

Societal Transformations

- Embrace cultural diversity and inclusivity in tourism marketing and service delivery to cater to the evolving demographics of travelers.
- Implement training programs to educate tourism professionals about the importance of cultural sensitivity and responsible tourism practices.
- Engage with local communities to ensure that tourism development projects align with their social values and contribute to sustainable livelihoods.

Environmental Considerations:

- Adopt sustainable tourism practices, such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and water management, to minimize the environmental impact of tourism activities.

- Promote eco-friendly transportation options, such as public transit, cycling, and electric vehicles, to reduce carbon emissions associated with travel.
- Support conservation efforts and biodiversity preservation initiatives in tourism destinations to protect natural resources and wildlife habitats.

Technological Advancements

- Invest in innovative technologies, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and mobile applications, to enhance the visitor experience and streamline tourism operations.
- Utilize data analytics and predictive modeling techniques to anticipate consumer preferences and tailor marketing strategies accordingly.
- Enhance cybersecurity measures to safeguard sensitive customer information and protect against potential data breaches or cyberattacks.

Political Dynamics

- Monitor geopolitical developments and assess their potential impact on tourism flows and traveler safety.
- Advocate for policies that facilitate visa facilitation, open borders, and diplomatic relations to promote international tourism cooperation.
- Engage in dialogue with government officials and policymakers to address regulatory challenges and promote a conducive business environment for tourism investment and development.

By addressing these diverse range of challenges, trends, and concerns, stakeholders in the tourism industry can adapt to the dynamic global landscape and ensure sustainable growth and resilience in the long term.

Conclusion

The tourism and hospitality industry stands at a pivotal juncture, navigating through a myriad of contemporary issues that are reshaping its landscape. From economic shifts and societal transformations to environmental considerations, technological advancements, and political dynamics, stakeholders in this sector are faced with multifaceted challenges and opportunities. Throughout this exploration, it has become evident that adaptation to change is not merely an option but a necessity for survival and success in this dynamic environment. The industry must embrace innovation and transformation across various fronts to remain relevant, competitive, and sustainable.

The tourism and hospitality industry faces a multitude of challenges across economic, societal, environmental, and political fronts. Economically, it must remain agile to respond to fluctuations, diversify offerings, and ensure financial resilience. Societally, a focus on inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement is crucial to equitably share tourism benefits. Environmentally, sustainability practices are imperative to minimize ecological footprint and preserve natural and cultural heritage. Technological advancements offer avenues to enhance visitor experiences and operational efficiency. Politically, navigating geopolitical complexities and advocating for favourable policies are essential tasks, requiring constructive dialogue with policymakers. In

addressing these issues collectively, the industry can foster resilience, innovation, and responsible growth. However, adaptation cannot occur in isolation. Collaboration and partnership among stakeholders are paramount. Governments, businesses, communities, and travellers must work together to co-create solutions that balance economic prosperity with social responsibility and environmental stewardship. Furthermore, as we adapt to change, we must not lose sight of the industry's core values of hospitality, inclusivity, and authenticity. Amidst technological innovations and shifting trends, human connections remain at the heart of the tourism experience. Preserving and nurturing these connections is essential for fostering meaningful and memorable travel experiences. In essence, while the road ahead may be fraught with challenges, it is also brimming with opportunities for innovation, growth, and positive transformation. By embracing change, leveraging collective expertise, and staying true to our values, the tourism and hospitality industry can navigate through these contemporary issues and emerge stronger, more resilient, and better equipped to meet the needs and expectations of tomorrow's travellers.

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