Journal of Smart Tourism

Journal of Smart Tourism: A New Platform to Support and Define an Emerging Field

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It was with great pleasure to learn that a few colleagues of mine were putting together a new academic journal called "Smart Tourism." Considering tourism is already a fairly crowded field with 100 or so outlets for academic research, this was obviously a bold move and I admire and commend their courage. However, I was not surprised, because, like my colleagues, I also believe that now is time to channel an increasingly important discussion into a formal outlet in the shape of a new journal.

The notion of smart tourism has been gaining traction in both practice and theoretical development. In countries such as South Korea, China, Spain and several others, smart tourism has been adopted as a general principle for national level policy making with respect to tourism development and sustainability. Destinations around the world are increasingly using smart tourism as an overall strategic framework to redefine destination marketing and management. Tourism enterprises are embracing and utilizing various smart technologies to re-engineer and re-design their products and services in order to cater to the digitally connected, technology-enabled consumer market.

In general, the idea of smart tourism, which implies the infrastructure of state-of-the-art technology and sustainable, innovative business practices in destinations that support and enhance the quality of the tourist experience, has been well accepted in many tourist destination, cities, and business sectors (Gretzel & Koo, 2021). With smart technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, robotics and emergent new interfaces becoming important forces driving travel and tourism, there are good reasons to believe smart tourism will remain an important topic for tourism management, development and governance in the foreseeable future.

Academic research on smart tourism is a relatively new undertaking. Some of the earliest publications can be traced back to less than 10 years ago, e.g., in Wang, Li, and Li (2013) and Buhalis and Amaranggana (2013). Since then, there has been literally a "boom" in research activities around the world. For example, a simple keyword search in Google Scholar using "smart tourism" yields more than 400K search results, mostly in the forms of academic publications. Smart tourism is also an umbrella term that encompasses several commonly used concepts such as smart tourist and smart destination/city, which implies the entire domain of smart tourism could be even larger.

Several distinct streams of research have been developed, linking smart tourism to consumer psychology and behavior (e.g., Pearce, 2020; Tribe & Mkono, 2017), destination branding (e.g., Femenia-Serra, Neuhofer, & Ivars-Baidal, 2019; Gretzel & Collier de Mendonça, 2019), data analytics (e.g., Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2017), tourism design (Xiang, Stienmetz, & Fesenmaier, 2021), and sustainable development (e.g., Lee, Hunter, & Chung, 2020), to name just a few. While smart tourism can be seen as a sub-domain of tourism, its research has generated considerable interests in disciplines outside tourism. For example, some of the widely cited papers were published in not only tourism but also mainstream business journals (e.g., Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang, & Koo, 2015; Gretzel, Werthner, Koo, & Lamsfus, 2015b). These developments attest to the growing significance of smart tourism as a field of study with multidisciplinary interests among communities surrounding tourism.

Obviously, there is huge room to further develop this knowledge. Currently, much of the research on smart tourism tends to be conceptually focused or case study based. There is very little theory-driven or large-scale empirical research. Perhaps more importantly, our world, in both technological and socio-cultural terms, is fast evolving especially with recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and mega forces such as globalization and social movements reshaping the fabrics of society. There is now a growing need for researchers and practitioners in smart tourism to join forces to develop actionable knowledge to define and support a more resilient, equitable, sustainable future of tourism. As such, the Journal of Smart Tourism can serve as a perfect platform to support researchers to participate in some of the big conversations in our society in a global context.

Congratulations to the editors for taking the lead to build this important platform!

Declaration of competing interests

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