Journal of Smart Tourism

Interview

TechTalk with Dr. Cathy Hsu: Editor-in-Chief of Tourism Management

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Dr. Cathy Hsu, the Chair professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, is the Editor-in-Chief of Tourism Management (TM). In an interview with Journal of Smart Tourism (JST), titled as "TechTalk," Professor Cathy Hsu shared her view on the role of innovation technology and future research directions. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

"The Role of Innovation Technology and Future Research Directions"

1. Technologies in Tourism and Hospitality: The Past, the Present, and the Future

Dr. Hsu shared her thoughts on the impacts of technology on the tourism and hospitality industry in three stages of chronological order. She started with technological evolvement within the industries. At the beginning, technology was mainly initiated by computer scientists, and the situation was far different from what it is today when everyone can easily access technology based on their needs and wants. She said, "When technology was first developed, we could think of a central reservation system, and gradually check-in systems, some components of the hotel's financial management accounting system, and later DMOs began to develop websites. So, I see that in the past, the use of innovative technology was very fragmented. Also, in the past,

technology development was driven mainly by computer scientists rather than industry professionals communicating their needs to the technology industry." By the meaning of fragmented technology, Dr. Hsu highlighted that technology within a company back then was adapted separately by the functions of various departments, such as marketing or human resources management tools, instead of one integrated system.

Dr. Hsu continued that as time goes by fragmented technologies within a hotel became more powerful and smarter. Hotels began to consider the importance of connecting the different modules as they realized the operating costs could be much lower under one integrated system. At the same time, Dr. Hsu emphasized that this way of thinking has only emerged in the past few years from some hotel owners. However, due to the cost issues of introducing an integrated technology system to a single property, the industry has hesitated to actively adopt such technology to their business.

While COVID-19 changed the paradigm of the tourism and hospitality industry in various ways, Dr. Hsu explained that COVID-19 offers us many opportunities. In line with cost efficiency, for example, human resources were seeking a way to reduce staffing costs. However, at the same time, due to the labor-intensive nature of the industry, many companies tried not to lay off many of their employees during the pandemic. From the management perspective, technology may relieve the staffing pressure and shortage temporarily; however, such a strategy is neither a long-term view nor sustainable, depending on the

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positioning of the business model. Here, she stated that the industry needs to holistically consider how technology can solve the problems derived from COVID-19 and present future directions of managing and building a relationship among industry stakeholders. "Innovative technologies could reduce staff costs in the long run. I guess this is a good time for the industry to take a hard look and see how we can integrate the different tasks in hotels using one system. The whole supply chain would be better integrated to provide a well-combined experience to the end users. So, I think more and more adoption of innovative technologies would give each company a competitive advantage, and it becomes a necessary part of the expectations of customers," she said.

2. Technology Integration in Tourism and Hospitality: Academic and Research Directions

Dr. Hsu shared the academic endeavor at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) to help students understand the future of technology integration and innovation in the tourism and hospitality industry. Believing that expanding students' knowledge with coursework on technology and updating ourselves with current industry practices and intelligence are two of the important ways for students and academics to be well informed of the future, Hotel ICON, a property wholly owned by PolyU as an extension of the curriculum laboratory, provides a unique educational approach with the practical learning environment. As understanding industry trends and consumer needs is critical for enhancing the learning experience and research impact, having hands-on experiences plays an incomparable role in developing practical insights with theoretical underpinning.

To comprehend technology integration adapted to the industry (e.g., front of the house and back of the house), especially in the hotel industry, PolyU students are exposed to the process of integration happening at the Hotel ICON and learn different technology-related courses in the curriculum. Particularly, PolyU has launched a new curriculum with technology-concentrated courses this year, such as data analytics, AI, and more. Dr. Hsu mentioned, "Moving forward, our students will be better prepared for what they need to get into the industry in terms of understanding and applying technology and have some basic analytic skills, using hotel ICON as a laboratory."

As the Chair Professor of PolyU, Dr. Hsu expressed the importance of active communication between academic researchers and industry practitioners. By combining theoretical research background and industry phenomena, previous theories and literature can be modified, challenged, and eventually advanced with new knowledge. "I always have communicated that editors are not the gatekeeper of knowledge. We do not decide what people should investigate. We only assess the quality of their work. However, I think the researchers and students need to know the industry's needs. Researchers need to know the consumer needs rather than think about ideas inside our office or cubicle. We must challenge ourselves to go outside of our office and outside our comfort zone. We need to talk to the industry and see what they need and think. I would challenge the researchers to come up with practical ideas that the industry can use. Also, besides conducting relevant and practical research that can be applied, we need to cover the theoretical aspect as well." she said.

3. Future of Research

As researchers' own philosophy influences their research topics and research design, Dr. Hsu advised that the researchers should thoughtfully consider whether their research could adequately explain the investigated phenomena. "From a journal perspective, we don't want to publish something that will quickly become

outdated." Dr. Hsu pointed out the cross-sectional study as an example. It requires a great amount of accumulation of time and sample studies on certain phenomena to be generalizable. Without the accumulated studies, cross-sectional survey inherently possesses limits to generating knowledge. Dr. Hsu urged that researchers need to present implications of the study beyond the samples with various sources of evidence instead of based on data collected at a one-time point from a specific sample. Simultaneously, the balance between theoretical aspects and research implications should be well organized in order to create knowledge value that lasts for a long time. "With Tourism Management as a single journal, we don't have that much space to allow authors to accumulate evidence over time. So, we would like to see implications beyond the sample for each and every piece published in the journal. Also, with that in mind, the theoretical aspect becomes crucial. Obviously, if you see some deficiencies in published work, you're welcome to challenge that. But then you need to demonstrate the rigor of your argument through multiple sources of evidence rather than a cross-sectional survey."

4. Recommendation to the Journal of Smart Tourism

As the Editor-in-Chief of Tourism Management, Dr. Hsu commented the roles and commitments that the Journal of Smart Tourism should fulfill for the next several years highlighting the clear positioning and the concept of the journal. "The Journal of Smart Tourism will probably be the first one to be rightfully named in five or ten years' time. Because in the future, everything will be "smart." The concept of smart tourism is still a bit unclear. The journal can help people to paint a picture of what it is, a comprehensive vision of smart tourism. The journal may invite some scholars to write conceptual pieces that could guide future smart tourism research."

To conclude the conversation, Dr. Hsu drew attention to the ethical and moral issues with some open questions. "The ethical issue people are talking about is more on data privacy. But I don't think many people have discussed a more comprehensive range of moral issues yet. For example, hotels are trying to reduce manpower needs by using robots. Taking a step back to think about it from a moral perspective, are we taking away the livelihood of the grassroot members of the society? They need a job, and we're taking away the job from them and giving them to robots. That's just an example of a plurality of moral issues. I think there are a lot of moral issues that we have not seen in research yet."

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