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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION APPLICATION TO PROMOTE THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT OF INBOUND TOURISM IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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Abstract:

In the context of Covid-19 heavily affecting the tourism industry today, the topic of digital transformation of the tourism industry has become an issue of urgency and concern more than ever. Digital transformation is being viewed as a solution to help Vietnam's tourism industry recover and develop sustainably. The development of information technology has been changing people's habits. Ho Chi Minh City is a favorite destination for domestic and foreign tourists, the city's tourism stakeholders have not been drastic in digital transformation. Tourists have a high demand for online shopping and the trend of searching for travel information through smart devices increases rapidly. Recognizing the importance of digital transformation in state management and the operation of the tourism industry in general, especially the development of the tourism industry after the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of the study is to identify the causes and limitations, then propose solutions to apply information technology and implement tourism digital transformation in order to attract and develop sustainably Ho Chi Minh City's inbound tourism in the near future.

Keywords: *Inbound tourism, digital transformation, digital travel, digital transformation in tourism*

1. Introduction

For decades, most developed countries have viewed information and communication technology as one of the most important factors in enhancing the competitiveness of a destination. One of the characteristics of tourism products is their invisibility, inability to see and not having the opportunity to try them, by perceiving them in the light of information (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Such a feature requires the exchange of information to be accurate, fast, reliable, and cheap, that is, the formation of a common and comprehensive information network among tourist facilities in the tourist destination. Comprehensive tourist information can be efficiently stored and managed for each special purpose (Law, Leung, Buhalis, & marketing, 2009). (Page, 2007)

These tourists in a destination can greatly benefit tourism marketers in understanding consumer behavior. The need to search for information and choose a destination is very diverse, depending on gender, age, nationality, education level... From there, the information displayed, and the types of the search must be different. Find useful information to help tourists get acquainted and understand more about the tourist destination before deciding to book a tour. In a study of destination search sources through the analysis of visitors from different countries, it was concluded that visitors from different countries have different

requirements for different sources of information at different times before traveling (Steinbrink, Frenzel, & Koens, 2012). (Buhalis, Leung, & Law Rob, 2011). The rapid development of information technology in the world has been changing people's lives. Digitization and information systems in many fields are considered jobs that need to be studied and applied in the current global competitive period. (Mai & Tick, 2021)

Currently, Vietnam's tourism industry in general and Ho Chi Minh City is in a very important period. The strong impact of the COVID-19 pandemic requires the city's tourism industry to have a radical and comprehensive change to truly recover and develop sustainably in the coming time, the period being assessed will continue. there are many changes in all socio-economic fields. Many solutions have been proposed to accelerate the recovery process, in which, the city's tourism industry needs to identify digital transformation as a fundamental, inevitable, and long-term solution, especially in the era of 4.0 technology. development and influence all aspects of social life. Effective digital transformation will help tourism businesses adapt flexibly to market changes.

On the basis of new technologies, tourism service businesses can bring new experiences. (Ziyadin et al., 2019), safe, and fast experiences for tourists through automatic interpretation systems, QR codes, app tourism... Besides, businesses can increase their interoperability to understand psychology, behavior, and needs, thereby introducing and promoting suitable products. Recently, Ho Chi Minh City's tourism industry has been very proactive in implementing digital transformation activities associated with smart tourism. The perception of digital transformation is having a clear change and has a strong impact not only on tourism state management agencies but also on tourism businesses and destinations in the city. However, the digital transformation has not been really drastic, losing the competitiveness between city tourism and destinations, between domestic and foreign tourism business units. This poses many challenges for Vietnam's leading tourism industry in the coming time.

2. Theory Overview

2.1. Digital Transformation

It can be briefly and easily defined, digital transformation is the integration of digital technologies into all areas of an enterprise, taking advantage of technologies to change the environment, fundamentally change the way it operates, and its business model and deliver new values to its customers as well as accelerate its business operations and also digital transformation is imperative to keep up with the regulations of the governing body (Barykin et al., 2021). Digital transformation in the tourism business; applying technology in tour operation to operate the tour group with software - digital platforms; applying technology in tourist marketing and creating new tourism products or applications; use digital technology for all activities

2.2. Digitalizing

“Digital Transformation” can easily be confused with the concept of “Digitalizing”. To distinguish these two concepts (Hassan, 2022), it can be understood that "Digitalization" is the process of modernizing and converting conventional systems to digital systems (such as switching from paper documents to soft files on the Internet). computers, digitizing television to switch from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting...); whereas, “Digital Transformation” is about exploiting the data obtained from the digitization process, and then applying technologies to analyze, and transform that data and create new values. “Digitalization” can be considered as part of the “Digital Transformation” process and digitization is indispensable in the digital transformation process (Anh & Huy, 2021).

2.3. Inbound enterprise / inbound travelers

According to the Law of Vietnam (2017), “Tourism enterprise is a unit with legal status, independent accounting established for the purpose of making a profit through transactions, signing of travel contracts and organizations performing tourism activities. tour programs sold to tourists”. Tourists are divided into 2 objects, international tourists and domestic tourists, International tourists include outbound tourists and inbound tourists. Tourists coming to Vietnam are foreigners, Vietnamese people residing abroad are called inbound tourists.

3. Research Results

3.1. Status of digital transformation application in inbound tourist attraction to Ho Chi Minh City

3.1.1. State management agencies

Recognizing the importance of digital transformation in state management and the operation of the tourism industry in general, especially the development of the tourism industry after the Covid-19 pandemic; Contributing to solving the existing problems of the tourism industry in order to enhance the facilities and experiences for tourists; Actively digitize data of the tourism industry and strengthen cooperation and data connection with related industries to collect data from which to have a practical basis to analyze tourism needs, trends and preferences and better forecast, plan and develop the tourism industry. Over the past years, the Department of Tourism has been promoting the implementation of the Smart Tourism Project, most recently implementing a series of contents on the application of digital technology in management activities, specifically: Smart tourism project for the period 2020-2030: The Department of Tourism has implemented 02 important contents:

- + Building a database system of tourism services: This data warehouse is designed and built on the basis of integrating data from many different sources of the city to serve 04 users: Tourists and Residents, Tourism Businesses, and Tourism Administrations.

- + Enhance attraction and experience for tourists and residents: Build an ecosystem of closely related information technology solutions, using tourism sharing databases to help tourists and People look up tourist information, hunt and book transport tickets, choose to book accommodation, learn about specialties combined with shopping to use services, ...

- Information technology applications have been deployed

- + Operate smart travel software applications (Apps) on Android and iOS platforms; 2.2. Upgrading the Department's electronic portal, building and operating its own website of tourism introduction www.visithcmc.vn

- + Having operated information pages on social networks: Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram, regularly posting the latest information about city tourism activities, so the number of visits, interactions, and sharing is increasing.

Deploying the application of 3D technology in tourism information and promotion in 2022 to recreate the space of a part of the City from above, giving visitors interesting experiences in a visual and vivid way.

- + Deploying and operating the 1022 Portal to provide and support tourism information, as well as help visitors interact with the government to reflect the quality and security of tourism in the City.

- Update 366 tourism resources to Google Earth and Google Maps platforms;

- + Putting tourism products on the e-commerce trading floor (shopee, traveloka)

- + Promote administrative reform in the state management of tourism with practical solutions, increase the satisfaction of people and businesses as a measure to evaluate the effectiveness of

administrative reform; shorten the processing time of 100% of administrative procedures for public services at the Department of Tourism; the project of integrating information about the city's tourism services;

3.1.2. Tourism enterprises

Tourism enterprises here are tour operators, hotels, restaurants, transportation, and other service providers in epidemic zones; Tourist areas, tourist spots; establishments providing other tourism services such as dining, shopping, sports, amusement, entertainment, health care, monuments for tourism, and other related services for tourists. Being aware of the importance of information technology, most organizations have websites, fan pages, and sales applications on internet platforms. But through a direct survey of a number of tourism business organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, the author found that the travel agency that deals with inbound tourists is still too dependent on foreign partners (B2B) and have not actively invested in information technology, high-quality human resources to sell products directly to customers, and meeting the needs of tourists buying tours directly online (B2C). Online travel has been applied in all business organizations, especially when the Covid-19 pandemic has spawned many experiential travel activities entirely on the Internet. However, online tourism is still limited in the cooperation between sectors in the tourism industry and has not yet created a rich and effective cross-sectional experience for visitors and maximized the efficiency of business enterprises.

3.1.3. Management agencies of tourist sites

Through the survey in Ho Chi Minh City, the main tourist sites attracting inbound tourists still do not have a QR code scanning information system such as the War remnants museum, the Reunification Palace, the city post office, Notre-Dame Cathedral..., Some destinations also use leaflets, practice handouts for visitors when buying tickets to visit, even in front of the city post office, there is a large board that summarizes the history of the Post Office. Information at the tourist destination and information on the websites of state agencies, and travel agencies do not match and are not regularly updated. Tourists come to Vietnam from many different markets, but the most spoken languages are English and Vietnamese. This makes it difficult to attract the main source of inbound tourists to Vietnam, Korea, China... Tourist attractions on pilgrimage, learning about religious culture in the area such as Thien Hau Pagoda, Giac Lam Pagoda, Phuoc Hai Pagoda, Tan Dinh church, mosque, and Hinduism are introduced and promoted. Foreign independence travelers (FIT) are unsatisfied with lacking of information when coming to those places.

3.1.4. Local community

The local community here is understood as the direct product suppliers for customers such as homestay services, grab cars, cyclos, street vendors, owners of souvenir shops, and local eateries..., They already know how to apply information technology to advertise products and services directly to customers or cooperate with technology companies to sell tourism products. In particular, the local community is willing to invest in a stable internet network, supporting tourists when required, updating new information, and new software, and coordinating with travel agencies to further promote local tourism products. However. They need to work closer with other stakeholders for sustainable tourism development.

4. Assessment and solutions of digital transformation application for restoring sustainable development inbound tourism in Ho Chi Minh City

4.1. Evaluate the application of digital transformation to restore sustainable development of Inbound tourism in Ho Chi Minh City

In addition to the jobs done in the past time, inbound tourism in Ho Chi Minh City still has some limitations in digital transformation and information technology applications. Firstly, the digital transformation activities of Ho Chi Minh City. The tourism stakeholders still occur spontaneously, in small numbers without unity and synchronization. Secondly, the ecosystem, common software, and big data system have not been built throughout, connecting the state management agencies and tourism business units. Thirdly, many businesses have encountered difficulties. Challenging in learning and choosing technology to apply to the operation's products. The above limitations come from many different reasons; some part of tourism businesses and individuals are not fully aware of the importance and role of digital transformation in the development of tourism; the tourism industry is lacking human resources with expertise in the field of digital transformation, capable of receiving and operating technology applications in the management of tourism activities; difficulties in attracting investment, accessing financial resources for digital transformation activities; lack of orientation, specific projects of state management agencies in digital transformation development.

4.2. Evaluation and application of digital transformation solutions to restore and develop sustainable inbound tourism in Ho Chi Minh City

In the coming time, to be able to promote digital transformation in tourism activities in the city. The author would like to propose some specific solutions as follows:

Firstly, focus on propagating and raising awareness of authorities, businesses, and people about the importance of digital transformation for tourism activities in Ho Chi Minh City. Diversifying forms of communication through training programs on tourism reports on media channels, Conferences - Workshops "Digital transformation of the Culture, Sports, and Tourism industry" 100 newspapers and radio systems of the city and the central government, through the system of electronic websites, tourism FM channels...

Secondly, develop mechanisms and policies to support tourism business units to promote digital transformation which focuses on building programs to support training, and improve professional knowledge for officials and employees engaged in tourism activities in the area; mechanism to encourage and support financial and human resources for digital transformation plans and programs of tourist destination units in the city.

Thirdly, focus on researching and completing major projects such as a project on building a tourism database system integrated into the city's general database system, building a tourist digital map, and application of digital address platform in tourism activities.

Fourthly, strengthen the application of information technology in tourism propaganda and promotion. Actively build electronic promotional publications suitable to the tastes of each key region, organize promotional campaigns, and promote electronic and digital tourism. Research and use professional consultants to conduct research and forecast activities, organize domestic and international promotional activities

5. Conclusion

Ho Chi Minh City is the center of inbound tourist attractions. The implementation of digital transformation in tourism activities in order to attract inbound tourists, adapt to the new post-epidemic image, and according to the weak market needs of customers and partners is essential, contributing to improving the efficiency of the tourism industry. The results of management and administration work contribute to preserving tourism resources and promoting tourism in Ho Chi Minh City in particular and in Vietnam in general. However, in order to implement this activity really effectively, meeting the requirements of reality requires the efforts of the city's Department of Tourism and related parties and the

attention and support of relevant levels of authority, especially in terms of mechanisms and policies to be able to mobilize social resources to contribute to the development of inbound tourism in Ho Chi Minh City in a sustainable way.

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