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TABLE OF CONTENT

APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY AND BIG DATA IN THE FIELDS OF FINANCE, ACCOUNTING AND AUDITING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

BANK RUN AND SILICON VALLEY BANK	1
Lam Dang Xuan Hoa, Ho Minh Khoa, Huynh Vo Nhat Linh	1
BIG DATA AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS.....	14
Le Thi Minh, Vo Trung Hau	14
THE EFFICIENCY OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM IN RISK MANAGEMENT AT THE NAM A COMMERCIAL JOINT STOCK BANK	23
Truong Thanh Loc, Tran Ngoc Thanh.....	23
VIETNAM - AUSTRALIA ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION IN THE NEW NORMAL: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR VIETNAMESE INVESTORS.....	30
Nhu Nguyen Phuc Quynh*, Anh Nguyen Thi Nguyet, Duy Nguyen Anh	30
IMPACTS OF CREDIT GROWTH AND CREDIT RISK ON THE PROFIT OF VIETNAM JOINT STOCK COMMERCIAL BANKS	43
Dao Le Kieu Oanh*, Tran Thi Huong Ngan	43
FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMERS' DECISIONS TO USE E-BANKING AT JOINT STOCK COMMERCIAL BANKS IN HO CHI MINH CITY	57
Nguyen Duy Khanh ¹ , Pham Quoc Tham ²	57
HOW CHINA_USA POLITICAL TENSIONS AFFECT STOCK MARKET RETURN OF CHINA AND THE USA? A QUANTILE VAR CONNECTEDNESS APPROACH	70
Hao Wen Chang ¹ , Tsangyao Chang ² and Mei-Chih Wang ³	70
BANKING HUMAN RESOURCES BEFORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AI	92
Nguyen Huynh Chi.....	92
IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TRAINING THROUGH IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENT TESTING AND ASSESSMENT – CASE IN ACCOUNTING BRANCH, UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE	102
Thuy Thi Ha	102
ACTIVITIES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN VIETNAMESE COMMERCIAL BANKS: AN OVERVIEW DURING THE COVID-19 RECOVERY PERIOD.....	109
Nguyễn Thị Quỳnh Châu, Đào Lê Kiều Oanh	109
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR VIETNAM IN ATTRACTIVE FDI IN GLOBAL MINIMUM CORPORATE TAX IMPLEMENTATION	117
Ngo Hoang Thong	117

IMPACTS OF STATE OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS ON TAX AVOIDANCE: EVIDENCE IN VIETNAM.....	128
Huyen Ngoc Nguyen, Thanh Dan Bui	128
RUSSIA'S IMPACTS AND SCENES ON BEING BANNED FROM SWIFT	143
Lam Dang Xuan Hoa ¹ , Phan Ngoc Anh ²	143
THE ROLE OF ACCESS TO FINANCE AND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION OF YOUNGERS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PROVINCE, VIETNAM.....	151
Vu Truc Phuc*, Nguyen Dang Hat, Nguyen An Phu, Dao Le Kieu Oanh	151

DIGITAL ECONOMY IN VIETNAM, TRENDS AND POTENTIABILITY

DEVELOPING SMART HOME MODEL FOR APARTMENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY BASED ON INTERNET OF THINGS (IoT) TECHNOLOGY	182
Dang Thanh Thuy ¹ , Nguyen Thanh Dien ²	182
TRANSPARENCY OF ACCOUNTING INFORMATION OF CONSTRUCTION ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY – CASE STUDY OF APPLICATION OF ACCRUAL ACCOUNTING	193
Truong Thanh Loc ^{1*} , Pham Thi Yen Nhi ²	193
FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	207
Truong Thanh Loc [*] , Dang Nguyen Tuong Han, Nguyen Ngoc Mai Phuong, Nguyen Thi Quynh Huong	207
THE CRITICAL FACTORS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' INTENTION TO USE METAVERSE TECHNOLOGY FOR SUBJECTS RELATED TO IMPORT-EXPORT LEARNING	221
Van Thuy Nguyen Ho, Chau The Huu, Luan Thanh Nguyen [*]	221
CONSUMER PERCEPTION ABOUT THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT OF LUXURY BRANDS IN VIETNAM AND CHINA MARKETS.....	233
Tran Minh Tu ¹	233
INFLUENCE OF WOM AND EWOM IN MAKING DECISION BUYING GOODS	247
Doan Anh Tu ¹ , Kim Phi Rum ² , Nguyen Pham Hai Ha ³	247
DIGITAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL IN VIETNAM.....	257
Hoang Thi Chinh, Nguyen Hoang Phan	257
BLOCKCHAIN APPLICATION IN MODERN LOGISTICS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM	266
Nguyen Nu Tuong Vi.....	266
FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY IN VIETNAM	272
Vo Tien Si	272
LEGAL FRAME FOR THE OPERATION OF THE REAL ESTATE BUSINESS UTILIZING THE BLOCKCHAIN PLATFORM IN VIETNAM.....	284
Le Thi Khanh Linh.....	284

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION – COOPERATION – GLOBAL INTEGRATION IN BUSINESS

FACTORS INFLUENCING BUSINESS ACCEPTANCE OF INDUSTRY 4.0 TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS IN DONG NAI PROVINCE.....	291
Thanh-Thu Vo*, Minh-Huong Tang.....	291
DIGITAL ORIENTATION, INNOVATION CAPABILITY AND FIRM PERFORMANCE: A PROPOSAL RESEARCH MODEL	298
Nguyen Van Hau	298
PREDICTION OF STUDENT'S BEHAVIORAL INTENTION TO USE SMART LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A COMBINED MODEL OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE	309
Nguyen Thi Hai Binh ¹ , Dao Y Nhi ² , Nguyen Thanh Luan ³ , Dang Quan Tri ⁴	309
THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPACT OF GRAMMARLY ON EFL WRITING COMPETENCY: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT.	323
Nguyen Thi Hong Lien ¹ , Nguyen Truong Gia Minh ² , Nguyen Ngoc Vu ^{3*}	323
FACTORS AFFECTING PURCHASING DECISION OF THE YOUTH ON TIKTOK	336
Ngoc Pham ¹ , Thanh Cong Tran*.....	336
FACTORS AFFECTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY BEHAVIORS OF WORKERS DIRECT PRODUCTION AT CU CHI POWER COMPANY.....	345
Minh Luan Le, Thi Trang Tran.....	345
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND EMPLOYEES' ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR.....	355
Nguyen Xuan Hung ¹ , Ha Le Thu Hoai ¹ , Nguyen Huu My Truc ^{2&3} , Pham Tan Nhat ^{2&3}	355
THE INNOVATION CAPACITY - THE ROLE OF LEADERS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM.....	365
Huynh Nhut Nghia	365
PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ON THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON BUSINESS	376
Ton Nguyen Trong Hien, Bui Tuyet Anh	376
FACTORS AFFECTING BRAND SWITCHING INTENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM	382
Ly Dan Thanh, Nguyen Phu Quoi, Tran Hoang Nam, Vo Hong Son, Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Tien	382
ENHANCE THE DIGITAL COMPETITIVENESS	398
Tran Quang Canh, Hoang Thi Chinh.....	398

ASSESSING PATIENT SATISFACTION (BRAND) AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AT THU DUC CITY HOSPITAL.....	408
Nguyen Hoang Dung ^{1*} , Nguyen Huynh Bao An ² , Van Phuong Trang ²	408
INDUSTRIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES FORM THE FOUNDATION FOR BINH DUONG'S SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	408
Hoang-An Nguyen	417
IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL FAIRNESS ON THE EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	426
Le Thi Nhu Quynh ^{1,2} , Le Thi Giang ² , Truong Quang Dung ¹	426
THE EFFECT OF PERSONAL MOTIVATION ON THE TACIT KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR OF 5-STAR HOTELS' EMPLOYEES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	440
Le Thi Giang, Nguyen Bach Hoang Phung.....	440
DIGITAL COMPETITIVENESS AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF ENTERPRISES IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE CASE OF VIETNAMESE ENTERPRISES	453
Diep Nguyen Thi Ngoc ^{1*} , Canh Quang Tran ² , Anh Bach Hoang Ngoc ¹	453
FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' SELECTION OF PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS IN THU DUC CITY	466
Thi-Trang Tran ¹ , Thi-My-Dung Pham ² , Thi-Bich-Diep Le ^{1*}	466

RECOVERY COMMUNICATIONS IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

DEVELOPING A SPIRITUAL TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE MEASUREMENT SCALE OF AN GIANG	474
Nguyen Vuong Hoai Thao ¹ , Nguyen Quyet Thang ²	474
PROSPECTS OF VIRTUAL REALITY TOURISM APPLICATION IN VIETNAM TOURISM PROMOTION	487
Nguyen Thi Hong Ha, Pham Thi Huong Giang.....	487
PERSONALIZATION TRAVEL TRENDING IN HO CHI MINH CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POST COVID-19	497
Duong Bao Trung.....	497
IMPACTS OF MEDIA ON CUSTOMERS' DECISION TO CHOOSE FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICES POST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	511
Nguyen Thi Bich Van	511
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION APPLICATION TO PROMOTE THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT OF INBOUND TOURISM IN HO CHI MINH CITY	521
Tran Trong Thanh	521
VIETNAM TOURISM AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC	527
Nguyen Hoang Phan ¹ , Hoang Thi Chinh ²	527
NAVIGATING THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DATA MINING AND PRIVACY	537
Pham Thai Hien	537
THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENT SELF-REPORTED GENERAL WELL-BEING AND PERCEIVED SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS, TEACHERS, AND UNIVERSITY	545
Virginia Kelsey ¹ , Đặng Thị Mai Ly ^{2*} , Nguyễn Anh Khoa ² , Nguyễn Văn Tường ²	545

DIGITAL VERSUS NON- DIGITAL

PROVIDING CONVENIENCE TO CUSTOMERS IN THE DIGITAL MARKETING ERA: OBSERVATIONS FROM COMMERCIAL BANKS IN HO CHI MINH CITY	556
Nguyen Quang Trung	556
VIRTUAL REALITY: AN INNOVATIVE TOOL IN TOURISM EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING	564
Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Le ¹ , Khuong Thanh Nguyen ²	564
THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING FOR PLACE BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF DONG THAP PROVINCE	580
Phan Bao Giang.....	580
LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON VIETNAM'S SMALL AND THE MEDIUM BUSINESS ENTERPRISES (SMEs)	587
Lê Kim Nguyên *	587

CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN NON-TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

PROPOSE AN ONLINE TEACHING COMPETENCE SCALE FOR UNIVERSITY LECTURERS

.....596

Duong Thi Kim Oanh*, Dang Thi Dieu Hien596

EXAMINE USAGE OF LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LMSS) BY FACULTY
STAFF AT UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS (UEF) AND FINANCE WITH EXPANDED
TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM).....608

Ha Truong Minh Hieu, Ngo Minh Hai*, Mach Tran Huy.....608

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
AN INDISPENSABLE EVOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATES

FACTORS AFFECTING THE APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING AT MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE	618
Truong Thanh Loc ^{1*} , Nguyen Thi Thanh Truc ²	618
HRM DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: TAKING A ROAD OF SUCCESSION PLANNING ..	629
Trương Phan Hoàng Anh, Giang Ngọc Anh.....	629
THE IMPLICATION OF CONTACTLESS SERVICE AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER REVISIT INTENTION	640
Linh, Nguyen Duy Yen*	640
TOURISM BRAND LOVE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE ROLE OF ONLINE TOURIST EXPERIENCES, TOURIST-BRAND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY	651
Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Le	651
CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS IN CROSS-CULTURAL SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (SoTL): A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY	662
Punithan Moganathas ¹ , Jenny Hill ² , Andy V.-M. Kok ² , Matt Barr ² , Ruffin Relja ^{2*} , Philippa Ward ² , Duong Tran Quang Hoang ³ , Quynh Phuong Tran ³	662
LEVERAGING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATE EVOLUTION IN VIETNAM	677
Nguyen, Tan Dat ¹ , Le, Dinh Thang ²	677

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND APPLICATIONS

FB-PROPHET MODEL FOR TIME SERIES FORECASTING IN SALES	691
Thanh Cong Tran	691
USING AI CODE IN C# PROGRAMMING	698
Nguyen Ha Giang.....	698
DETERMINANTS OF CONTINUANCE USAGE INTENTION OF MOBILE FOOD ORDERING APPLICATIONS (MFOAS) AMONG VIETNAMESE USERS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF E- SATISFACTION	705
Lam Hoang Phuong ^{1*} , Nguyen Thi Kim Lien ² , Tien Hung Nguyen ³ , Vinh Long Nguyen ⁴	705
DECODING MARKETING INSIGHT: INSIGHT FROM OUTSIDE.....	718
Hoàng Thị Hằng, Trần Thành Công*	718
DIGITAL DISRUPTION AND DATA SECURITY: HOW FINTECH IS RESHAPING BANKING ...	724
Hoàng Văn Hiếu, Trần Ngọc Thiên Ngân.....	724

TRENDS AND ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNICATIVE GAME-BASED GRAMMAR TEACHING	736
Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	736
APPROACHES TO TEACHING L2 LISTENING:.....	749
CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN REAL-LIFE AND CLASSROOM-BASED LISTENING	749
Luu Thi Mai Vy	749
DEFINING ROLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY LANGUAGE CLASSROOM	755
Ho Xuan Tien, Duong My Tham.....	755
EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING INVESTMENT IN PORTFOLIO - BASED ENGLISH WRITING LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW	763
Ly Gia Huy ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	763
EXPLORING EFL LEARNER IDENTITIES IN PROJECT-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN AN GIANG PROVINCE	774
Nguyen Hong Thien ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	774
THE VALUES OF SYNTACTIC COMPLEXITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A LITERATURE REVIEW	791
THE ISSUE OF AMBIGUITY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.....	801
Nguyen Dinh Tuan	801
RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL EFL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING	812
Huynh Thanh Nhon ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	812
EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF WRITING ANXIETY ON VIETNAMESE ESL UNDERGRADUATES' WRITING PERFORMANCE: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY.....	821
Nguyen Ngoc Nguyen, Nguyen Hoang Phan.....	821
THE APPLICATION OF THE "FLIPPED CLASSROOM" MODEL IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT	838
THE USE OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN EFLFLIPPED CLASSROOMS	847
Nguyen Quynh Thao Vy ^{1,*} , Duong My Tham ²	847
INSIGHTS INTO ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS' USE OF PHRASAL VERBS IN ACADEMIC WRITING.....	860
Do Thi Thanh Thuy, Tran Quoc Thao	860

LAW IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION

LEGALISING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INFRINGEMENTS IN RUSSIA – A WAR TACTIC IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIA’S INVASION OF UKRAINE.....	869
Bui Thi Hong Ninh*	869
MODEL OF ASSET REGISTRATION WORLDWIDE AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM IN IMPROVING ASSET REGISTRATION LAWS.....	880
Vu Anh Sao ^{1,2} , Nguyen Thi Xuan Mai ²	880
LEGAL ISSUES ARISING FROM THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) - INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM	887
Le Hoang Minh Huy*, Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, Dao Trong Duc, Ky Dieu Linh, Bui Thi Thuy Linh, Nguyen Nam Trung.....	887
SOUTH KOREA’S EXPERIENCES ON PROPERTY REGISTRATION LAW - LESSONS FOR VIETNAM	896
Vu Anh Sao, Pham Huynh Bao Oanh.....	896
THE RISE OF REMOTE WORK: LEGAL CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT LAW IN VIETNAM	903
Nguyen Thi Xuan Mai ¹ , Nguyen Thi Ngoc Loan ²	903
CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN THE EMERGING AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.....	910
Nguyen Thi Thu Trang	910
THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL MINIMUM TAX ON FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) CORPORATIONS IN VIETNAM.....	921
Trần Ngọc Thanh ¹	921
CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES AND TAX MANAGEMENT ISSUES	933
Le Huynh Phuong Chinh, Ngo Thi Khanh Linh, Pham Ngoc Lan Anh.....	933
EXPERIENCE IN KOREA AND CHINA ON TAX MANAGEMENT FOR CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES	941
Duong Anh Son ¹ , Tran Vang Phu ²	941
LEGAL PERSPECTIVE ON REGULATIONS RALATED TO PERSONAL INCOME TAX WHEN EARNING INCOME THROUGH E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS IN VIETNAM, TAKING THE CASE OF INDIVIDUALS DOING BUSINESS THROUGH TIKTOK APPLICATION.....	946
Nguyen Duc Tri ¹ , Hoang Minh Châu ²	946
THE COMPATIBILITY ON THE SCOPE OF MUTUAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE (MLA) IN CRIMINAL MATTERS AND THE CONDITIONS OF REFUSAL MLA IN CRIMINAL MATTERS BETWEEN VIETNAMESE LAW AND INTERNATIONAL TREATIES WHICH VIETNAM HAS SIGNED.	956

Pham Huynh Bao Oanh.....	956
TAX POLICY FOR E-COMMERCE OF COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO VIETNAM.....	967
Nguyen Thanh Minh Chanh, Ha Thi Van Anh, Pham Lam Tam Nhu	967
LEGAL REGULATIONS FOR ENTERPRISE OBLIGATIONS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON E-COMMERCE PLATFORM	974
Truong Kim Phung*, Nguyen Hoang Chuong	974
“ROBOT TAX” – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM.....	981
Gian Thi Le Na, Pham Phuong Doanh.....	981
WTO APPELLATE BODY REFORM IN THE CONTEXT OF ESCALATING GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS.....	988
Nguyen Nam Trung.....	988

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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