



THE TOURIST GUIDE PROFESSION IN THE TECHNOLOGY ERA: POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

Abstract - In the era of rapid technological advancement, the tourism industry is experiencing significant growth, primarily driven by developments in information technology. These advancements have made it easier to access destination information, streamlined booking processes, and enhanced navigation. However, the impact of these technological advancements on the profession of tourist guides remains a critical area of inquiry. This paper examines the dual role of technology in this field: as a tool that can enhance the preparation and delivery of tours for guides, and, on the other hand, thanks to technology, tourists can avoid using the services of tourist guides altogether. This study aims to clarify the effects of technological progress on the tourist guide profession, exploring both the opportunities and challenges, with the main hypothesis being “The increasing reliance on technology in the tourist guide profession will lead to a transformation in the role of guides, shifting their focus from traditional information delivery to curating personalized, immersive experiences that leverage digital tools.” A comprehensive review of existing literature shows that while technology supports the use of guides in group travel settings, there is a continued demand for personalized and interactive experiences that guides provide during solo trips.

Keywords:

tourist guides, information technologies, smart tourism, digital transformation, professional challenges.

INTRODUCTION

New technologies have significantly affected the tourism industry and influenced the changes in recent years. This impact can be presented as both positive and negative. The increased number of tourists who travel daily and reserve transportation, accommodation, restaurants, and additional activities reflects economic strengthening. It increases the number of jobs, resulting in socioeconomic improvement (Khan *et al.*, 2020), representing the positive impact of technology. Positive impacts stand out to a greater extent. On the other hand, negative impacts can be over-tourism, negative feelings of the local population, hostile behavior towards tourists, loss of culture and tradition, and endangerment of the goods that make up the tourist offer (Tse & Tung, 2022). The literature shows that numerous researchers have recently explored the negative impacts of technology and how to reduce them (Cai *et al.*, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2020; Fan *et al.*, 2022; İnan

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et al., 2024). The negative impact of technology is evident in the increasing number of people experiencing anxiety when they are unable to use their mobile phones. This has led to the emergence of “digital-free tourism,” which encourages travelers to withhold using their mobile phones (Egger *et al.*, 2020).

Tourist guides have been integral to the tourism industry for centuries, and technology has greatly influenced this profession. Technology allows tourist guides to prepare for a tour more easily - they can access numerous pieces of information more quickly, use maps to find their way around the destination more efficiently and prepare for a destination they are guiding for the first time using various applications and videos (Şengöz, 2022). What represents a potential threat to this profession is that today, tourists rely heavily on technology during their travels. They generally do not need to hire a private tourist guide if they organize their trip independently or without the mediation of a travel agency, as technology saves time for tourists during their decision-making process (Azis *et al.*, 2020). Travel agencies still hire tourist guides as their representatives during trips to facilitate their tourists' stay in many ways and to ensure a certain level of security (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2020). This way, tourists have someone they can rely on during their trip and worry less about operational matters (Lee *et al.*, 2021).

This paper aims to recognize and analyze the importance of new technologies in the tourist guide profession and the advantages and threats to the profession through a literature review. It aims to determine the extent to which technologies affect guides and the future of this profession.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Information technologies have affected all segments of human life, and traveling is no exception. Depending on people's interests, technology can assist in choosing a destination, planning a trip, and providing support during the trip (Singh & Srivastava, 2019). The technology is used by both users and providers of tourism services, simplifying many processes in the tourism industry (Vij & Rizwan, 2022). Using technology, service providers such as transport companies, accommodation facilities, destination and localities managers, and other employees at tourist destinations can reach a higher number of potential tourists more easily than before. In addition, all business processes are significantly accelerated thanks to technology and the Internet, making achieving positive effects easier, especially thanks to algorithms that can offer tourists a personalized experience based on their previous searches (Renjith *et al.*, 2020). Some luxury hotels improve their business operations using artificial intelligence (AI) to analyze existing guest data. Based on this data, the hotel personalizes the guest's experience and increases the satisfaction of the stay. Personalization methods include loyalty programs, tailored recommendations, and customized rooms based on guest behavior. (Al-Hyari *et al.*, 2023).

Tourist guides play a vital role in the tourism industry. Due to their direct interaction with guests, they are often the destination's primary representative (Nejmeddin, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to explore how new technologies are shaping the profession of tourist guides and identify the advantages and threats posed by these advancements.

Technology has greatly influenced tourist guides in recent years, both positively and negatively. The positive impact appears in the form of easy and quick access to an extensive amount of information, easier connections with other guides who can be helpful during the destination preparation process, as well as the promotion of their services on applications and social networks, thanks to which they can get in touch with potential users of their services (Banerjee & Chua, 2020; Shidende, 2020). Unfortunately, there is also a negative impact. The most significant threat is the potential impact of various information and audio guides which could reduce the demand for professional guides (De La Harpe & Sevenhuysen, 2020). However, many guides believe that applications and audio guides are not a significant threat to their profession as there will always be people who do not want to travel and explore the destination independently, who will want to use the services of a travel agency, and who appreciate the human influence and emotion provided by tourist guides (Podsukhina *et al.*, 2022).

Audio guides are used in many destinations and localities today. The advantage of an audio guide is that tourists can use the application at their own pace without rushing after the group (Ponsignon & Derbaix, 2020). In museums, modern technology and mobile applications should enable more freedom and flexibility for users over the information they like to have and what they wish to see by not imposing any conditions (Fonseka, 2022).



Another advantage of audio guides is that localities are trying to make audio guides available in many different languages, which is more difficult for guides as human beings. The negative aspect of using an audio guide is that there is usually no opportunity to ask questions or engage in discussions, which limits the ability to obtain more detailed information of particular interest to tourists. This conclusion was drawn from in-depth interviews with 15 users of the audio guide application (Podsukhina *et al.*, 2022). In addition, the audio guide provides each tourist with the same information without possibly adapting it to their needs and interests. There is always a possibility of outdated information or technical glitches, presenting an ongoing challenge for developers (Şen & Demir, 2023). Many locations offer both options - hiring a guide or using an audio guide. This is important because it adapts the site's offer to visitors' different interests and wishes to create the best possible impression. By creating a positive impact through experiences, word-of-mouth promotion or online reviews will be boosted (Nanggong & Mohammad, 2020; Safitri & Rahayu, 2024).

The researchers explore this topic from several points of view – the viewpoint of service users, tourist guides, destination management organizations, and online reviews. Opinions and experiences vary, with most coming down to the personal preferences of service users (Pan *et al.*, 2021). These authors conducted an online survey to gather information about the decision-making process for choosing a future travel destination. They analyzed a valid sample of 756 respondents, focusing on the destination image and its impact on this process. As each traveler is an individual, he can make final decisions, which is a very complex process. Therefore, it can be said that there is no unique solution to this problem.

METHODS

The authors carried out a desk research study featuring a comprehensive literature review to examine the impact of technological advancements on the tourist guide profession. The literature review involved academic literature on the influence of technology on tourist guides. Extensive secondary data were collected from journals and conference papers to achieve the aim of this analysis.

The reviews started with the definition of the research question that, for this study, is defined as follows:

RQ: How does the development of information technology alter the traditional roles of tourist guides and the experiences they offer to tourists?

The answer to this question provides insight into the impact of new technologies on the tourist guide profession through a review of various research studies by different authors, presenting advantages and threats to the profession.

RESULTS

Khatri (2019) indicates that information technologies are completely changing all tourism industry segments - from basic to strategic ones. Information technologies are widely used during all organizational and innovation processes. Competition within the industry provokes further development, which is why it is believed that technology will progress even faster in the future.

Tourist guides recognize the potential of technology to facilitate their business, including promoting their services and preparing tours. This insight was gathered in 2018, through an online survey of 55 tourist guides, along with 10 in-depth interviews, all of whom live and work in Europe (Navalón-García & Mínguez, 2021). However, they believe that nowadays, it is much easier and faster to review an extensive quantity of information compared to the time before the Internet (Şengöz, 2022). Many experienced tourist guides recognize the benefits of technology (Carvahlo, 2021), as they remember having to rely on physical maps and books for information, but now they use online maps and websites for quick access to information. Despite this, technology can fail unexpectedly, and it is not good to be completely reliant on it (Holmes, 2023). In some types of tourism, such as gastronomy, it is not enough to search for information in written literature (books or magazines), as a detailed acquaintance with local gastronomy is necessary (Ülkü & Göktaş, 2022). Indeed, the need to use written literature is highlighted, but it is believed that technology can serve as a reminder and quick search



for forgotten or incomplete information. For example, if the guide does not immediately have an answer to the question, he can say that he will check and answer as soon as possible (Düz, 2023). These results were obtained from the author's research, which included 13 semi-structured interviews with tour guides from Turkey, who had encountered the aforementioned situations. Technology allows him to search for specific information quickly. If a guide does not provide an answer to a guest, it can create a negative impression and lead to a loss of credibility. This is especially true for young and inexperienced guides, as shown by research conducted through interviews with 47 tourist guides from Scotland (Rihova & Alexander, 2024). Technology allows guides to search for specific information quickly. At the same time, this process was much more difficult because it would be necessary to know where to search for information, and there is a high probability that the guide does not have that source with them. Today, all information is available in a few clicks (Alam & Mohanty, 2023).

Based on all of the above, the answer to the posed research question indicates that technology has made it possible to change the role of tourist guides positively because they can prepare for a destination more easily and quickly. Although today, anyone can access information online or read in a book, someone needs to bring that word to life and provide an unforgettable experience for visitors (Demir & Demir, 2022). Also, if the guide works as a local tourist guide, they can learn more quickly about the culture of their guests, based on which they can provide them with a personalized service without making a mistake through something that can potentially be inappropriate in the culture of their guests (Van Sang, 2020). Local tourist guides can offer their services through websites and various applications, leading to more potential service users (Shidende, 2020). Many of the impacts of technology on the profession of guides are positive. However, there are also some negative ones - such as the reduced use of their services due to the availability of apps and audio guides (De La Harpe & Sevenhuysen, 2020). Although there are numerous positive and negative influences, the employment of a tourist guide depends on the personal preferences and habits of the tourists (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022), because if they decide to buy a travel package from an agency, the guide will travel with them (Avci, 2020), while for individual trips they may or may not use services of a local tourist guide at the destination (Kromidha *et al.*, 2023). The advancement of technology has affected all sectors of the tourism industry. Tourist guides and agencies should work together to improve their skills and collectively distinguish themselves in the market to stand out among competitors (Inan *et al.*, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

A literature review reveals significant differences in user attitudes towards tourist services and the utilization of technology for tourism purposes. Technology has permeated all stages of travel experience—preparation, execution, and post-trip. This conclusion comes from a thorough bibliometric analysis conducted in April 2019, in which the authors analyzed scientific papers published in English from 2011 to 2019 (Soliman *et al.*, 2021). Technological tools enable access to necessary information that makes it easier to choose a destination during the preparation phase. Furthermore, technological advancements have simplified the booking processes for transportation, accommodation, and additional activities. For instance, individuals seeking to travel through a travel agency can now access comprehensive information online from the comfort of their homes on multiple agencies' websites, preventing the need for in-person visits, which was previously necessary to gather adequate and complete information, even though many travel agencies need to improve their websites (Eusébio *et al.*, 2020). During the travel phase, technology allows tourists to access real-time updates, book attraction tickets, and make restaurant reservations, thereby avoiding issues such as long lines and crowds. This advancement allows tourists to focus more on enjoying their destination with an exciting and seamless travel experience (Pai *et al.*, 2020). When choosing travel services, such as hiring a local tourist guide or using a travel agency offer, tourists can delegate these logistical concerns, leading to a more relaxed and enjoyable experience, being a part of mass tourism (Kusumaningrum & Wachyuni, 2020). Post-trip, it can be helpful for other tourists to provide feedback through electronic Word-of-mouth, whether positive or negative. Positive reviews can highlight satisfactory experiences, while negative feedback serves as a cautionary note for future travelers, helping them make informed decisions and reducing potential post-travel dissatisfaction. These insights are supported by results obtained from interviews with 21 recent travelers (Liu *et al.*, 2020). This feedback benefits both individual travelers and contributes to the travel community's collective knowledge and experience, as well as a useful tool for companies to improve their customer targeting (Tapanainen *et al.*, 2021).



Tourist guides play a critical role throughout the travel experience, particularly for those choosing agencies' offers or local guide services. Guides not only simplify travel organization and enhance relaxation but also offer personalized interactions customized to the group's needs. This personalized approach significantly contributes to the overall satisfaction and impressions of tourists. In general, a lack of personalization can lead to negative feelings, reduce loyalty, and drive tourists to competitors (Tomczyk *et al.*, 2022). Professional tourist guides should have sufficient knowledge about the destination and the ability to explain it in the language of the guest's choice as the representative of the local community (Safitri & Rahayu, 2024). The primary advantage of a tourist guide over technological solutions lies in the human element and personalized attention, which technology alone cannot replicate (Carvalho, 2021).

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