Requirements for Implementing E-tourism in Algeria

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Abstract:

This study deals with e-tourism as a modern form of tourism, resulting from the development of information and communication technologies, the growth and spread of which was made possible by globalization or so-called "globalized tourism". This has contributed in increasing the number of tourists worldwide and in helping organize and develop the tourism sector in many countries. This study deals with the situation of e-tourism in Algeria it offers a realistic diagnosis of tourism and its related fields such as economy, e-commerce and the banking system, and suggests a number of measures that might help develop e-tourism in Algeria based on a productive, efficient, competitive and sustainable tourism sector.

Keywords: E-tourism; information and communication technologies; Tourism globalization; Algeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many reasons may drive people to go on tourist tours: these might be psychological, social or economic factors. However, people go on tourist tours mainly for cultural, historical and educational reasons: to discover ancient ruins, attend festivals and exhibitions, discover famous places and more widely enrich their intellectual life. Motivations may also include rest, leisure and entertainment, like enjoying one's free time in quiet and beautiful places like beaches or picturesque sceneries.

Some people have religious motives, namely those visiting holy places such as Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, or those visiting famous religious shrines. Other people long for their motherland and travel to renew family ties. Health is also a reason for traveling either to recover from an illness, to get healthcare or to simply relax.

Some sporting events attract thousands of visitors worldwide, while some people just travel driven by economic purposes, seeking to grow their businesses or activities.

Since the end of the last century, many countries are using e-tourism extensively. This has deeply changed this sector, and some professions have started to simply disappear: for instance, hotel and transportation bookings are now made directly by tourists who no longer need to use the services of travel agencies.

Booking for trips and payments are also directly made via the Internet and electronic bank cards, which reduces the offers made to tourists via the agencies' websites. Tourists no longer use brokers. [1]

Algeria is slowly moving towards e-tourism in order to modernize the Algerian tourism offer and contribute to the country's economy, but indicators suggest that more efforts should be made to empower e-tourism. So, how could we promote e-tourism in order to boost the tourism sector in Algeria?

We address this issue in the following points:
- The role of information and communication technologies in the globalization of tourism.
- The concept of e-tourism.

- The Algerian experience of e-tourism.
- Ways of empowering e-tourism in Algeria.

2. The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in the Globalisation of Tourism

Information and communication technologies have played a major role in the globalization of tourism through the implementation of e-tourism services; these e-services and modern applications have benefited from cost-reducing and time-reducing policies, in a highly competitive market thriving to modernizing travel, tourism, e-marketing and all tourism services provided. [2]

Electronic services in travel and tourism have evolved from online booking to e-ticketing and other services offered through websites and information and communication technology solutions. Services offered by airlines and other tourism institutions tend towards digitalization, mainly to help streamline procedures at airports and hotels, improving the quality of services, building customer loyalty in a competitive environment and reducing the cost and time of managing bookings .[3]

The expression "tourism globalization" is an emerging wording. Tourism has often been referred to as a manifestation of globalization, as tourism is a global business and industry. It is naturally associated with the main aspects of globalization, such as economy, culture, society, environment, media, and information. Globalization affects individuals, funds and cultural patterns as well as tourism. Tourism is a highly competitive sector, thanks to its added value, the foreign investments it generates and the employment opportunities it offers.

In his essay "Tourism in a Globalized Society", writer Kevin Methan shows that globalization is not all that bad and that it does not necessarily mean destroying national cultures; on the contrary, globalization can lead to their strengthening. The author believes that transforming popular or cultural spots into a "commodity" and an economic resource through

tourism is not necessarily negative, since it represents a means of preserving or developing those spots and the people who live there.[4]

Globalization has led to significant changes in the form and nature of tourism.
Streamlined transportation and the information and communication revolution have led to a significant increase in the number of tourists and a shift in tourists' behavior and tourism products with a heightened interest in nature and culture.

New values are emerging such as appreciating and leveraging other peoples' experiences. These major shifts in tourists' behavior and values are stimulating and pushing modern tourism forward. New tourists' needs (such as flexibility, independence, entrepreneurship and adventure) are generating a new demand for quality tourism.

In recent years, the demand for new types of tourism has increased. People want to travel to enjoy sports, medical care, adventure, nature, culture, cruises or religious spots; this shift in the demand has led to the advent of a more environmentally conscious and demand-driven tourism. [5]

In addition, information and communication technologies play an important role in linking tourism offer to tourists' demand on the world market and in bringing producers closer to consumers, forcing all countries that wish to remain competitive to restructure, organize and update their tourism sector from an e-standpoint, in order to keep pace with the trend the world is witnessing.[6]

3. What is E-tourism?

E-tourism is a modern concept of tourism, which overlaps the concept of e-commerce. E-tourism is described as "a tourism model in which transactions are carried out between one tourism institution and another, or between a tourism institution and consumers (tourists), by means of information and communication technologies, where offers of tourism services via international information networks (the Internet) converge with interested tourists who accept tourist services provided via the Internet."

The World Tourism Organization defines e-tourism as "a virtual way to make tourists travel and provide Internet users with an overview about a potential trip in order to convert them into tourists. This is made possible through providing them with electronic brochures using effective mobility through the diversity of tourism offers".[7]

The International Organization for Electronic Tourism (IOETI) defines e-tourism as "services provided through information and communication technologies for the purpose of carrying out and promoting travel and hospitality services on various open and closed networks, based on the principles and fou ndations of electronic commerce. E-tourism goes beyond this strict definition since it includes mobile tourism (m-tourism) based on mobile electronic devices, such as mobile phones, portable electronic devices, etc.".

Information and communication technologies can be used by all businesses in the tourism sector, including institutions, individuals and organizations. Thus, tourism entities can be created using these resources which operation requires a certain level of technological knowledge, such as smart hotels, built and managed using modern technologies .[8]

Any tourism model can be described as "electronic" if modern technology is involved to display products and present them to tourists on the information network. [9]

3.1. Importance of E-tourism:

E-tourism has now become an imperative because of the various benefits it offers to producers and consumers of tourism services, which can be summarized as follows:

-Tourism relies on the availability of information in a quick and easy way. A global information network (Internet) helps promote tourism products, providing detailed information, descriptions and pictures that make it easier for consumers to select a product and trust suppliers;

-The widespread use of e-tourism has a major impact on prices, which generally decrease due to reduced production, marketing and distribution expenses. The processes related to communication between producers, customers and even intermediaries are mostly carried out via the Internet, which is not expensive. In addition, the spread of e-tourism reduces the use of labor and employee expenditure;

-The widespread use of e-commerce allows the development of new tourism products that can be quickly and easily identified; it allows customers to give their opinion on products and helps suppliers design and prepare new products. This clearly increases the quality of services, the volume of sales and the added value earned by the sector; [10]

E-tourism offers several benefits to tourists:

- It helps provide tourists with the required information 24/7, in an easy and fast way, since all the information and data they need in already available on the Internet;

- It helps reduce the costs of the tourism services provided; the tourism end product has therefore a competitive advantage due to lower prices;

- It helps improve the economic performance of tourism businesses, especially small and medium-sized companies. It also helps cut tourism services costs and streamline tourism products development. New tourism activities emerge which meet various tourists segments demands, in addition to increasing the competitiveness of tourism businesses and boosting profits. [11]

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was among the first Arab countries to use e-tourism, namely to automatically organize the process of issuing Umrah visas and licenses for Umrah businesses and institutions, and to manage Umrah travels through an electronic system. Tourist visas were also issued via an electronic system. In 2003, the Kingdom established an electronic tourism portal on the Internet, as a basic reference for any tourist wishing to know more about tourism in Saudi Arabia. [12]

3.2. How to Implement and Develop E-tourism?

E-tourism is tourism relying on information and communication technologies for advertising products, services, projects, presentations and marketing methods. E-tourism is closely connected to the availability of electronic transactions within a legislative framework that governs tourism transactions. Some requirements must be met:

- An incentive economic framework based on the adoption of appropriate policies of economic freedom to develop the tourism sector as well as openness to the outside world by concluding bilateral and regional agreements and by adopting international multilateral agreements on e-tourism;
- A developed economy, as e-tourism serves various sectors, and this type of tourism grows in developed economies;[13]
- A strong information infrastructure, with a modern and advanced communication base that requires computers, telephones and other related equipment;
- Efficient human resources, as e-tourism needs qualified and skilled resources capable of creativity, innovation and knowledge and creative methods and means, to design tourist sites with content and data analysis and to prepare electronic payment systems, able to compete with tourism institutions and companies;
- The development of e-management: the use of the Internet to exchange data and information and to carry out transactions must be an integral part of the management strategy of the country's tourism businesses that wish to develop electronic management;
- The existence of a specific legal framework at the local and international levels: e-tourism is part of international trade that operates within the framework of the World Trade Organization's General Agreement for the Liberalization of Trade in Services (GATS), which has led most countries to include tourism services in the lists of their obligations under the GATS with a view to gradually liberalizing the tourism sector

in order to achieve desired development goals and attract foreign investment; [14]

3.3. International Efforts to Improve E-tourism

In order to develop e-tourism, the International Organization of the E-Tourism Industry (IOETI) has been established, which aims to develop and promote e-tourism through the use of information and communication technologies. The organization aims at:

- Assisting its members in making optimal use of information and communication technologies by providing tourism services and e-marketing;

- Creating a fair competitive environment among all members and helping them upgrade their services online;

- Providing training courses for the benefit of members in the field of e-tourism and related topics, such as e-marketing;

- Protecting tourists worldwide with the use of electronic means in their demand for tourism services and products;[15]

4.The Algerian Experience in E-tourism:

Algeria's experience in the field of tourism in general is very limited due to the lack of some requirements:

-Algeria's market share in tourism worldwide is very small due to the inadequacy of the country's accommodation facilities and to the fact that the hospitality offer does not meet international standards;

- Algerian expatriates account for three quarters of the number of tourists.

- The quality of services is not competitive and is not able to adapt in terms of quality and quantity; accommodation offers are very limited with a lack of experience compared to neighboring countries; [16]

- The Government lacks a strategic vision regarding the hospitality sector, which provides foreign currency and creates jobs. The sector may also contribute to the local and national development. Moreover, local communities and municipalities (for instance, state directorates for tourism) have limited powers in this matter and legal texts organizing

the sector are often inconsistent. Finally, there is a clear lack of coordination between the various stakeholders of the sector;

However, after the fall in fuel prices in 2014, the Algerian Government has initiated a development and support plan for the tourism sector, and the organization of tourist agencies, in the light of the development of information and communication technologies and resources, in order to boost e-tourism: firstly, by electronically connecting national tourism departments; secondly, by creating a structure that enables tourism institutions to conclude trade agreements and tourists to purchase offers and pay electronically; thirdly, by enabling the tourism sector to benefit from e-commerce services and to complete transactions electronically. The Ministry of Tourism has also created Tour Algerie.dz website which contains data related to the tourism sector in Algeria, as well as a list of approved tourism businesses. However, Algeria is far from implementing e-tourism.

5 . How to Implement E-tourism in Algeria?

Here are some suggestions in order for Algeria to implement e-tourism:

- **Establishing a clear, specific and integrated legal framework**, from the centralized to the decentralized level, and coordinating legal and regulatory texts between all the stakeholders.
- **Promoting electronic commerce in various transactions** by providing electronic payment methods and expanding the use of credit cards. Algeria has adopted Law No. 18-05 on e-commerce, which is a very positive step that should be supported by a set of technical measures in order to ensure the confidentiality of transactions: thus, a strong communication infrastructure and the access to the Internet at low prices should be made available for all.
- **Establishing foreign exchange offices:** as mentioned earlier, tourism aims at attracting foreign currency. Accredited foreign exchange offices should be made available in airports, hotels, tourist sites…etc. This shall

contribute to the growth of the sector. Regulation No. 20-04 dated March 15th, 2020, issued by the Governor of the Bank of Algeria, on the foreign exchange market, local currency exchange operations and convertible foreign currencies [17] is a positive step towards the promotion of tourism.

- **Developing information and communication technologies**: the existing technical structure must be developed, expanded and invested in; a network of parallel websites for all actors of the tourism sector should be created. Social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube should be used to promote tourism, by creating groups who interact with users and potential consumers. They could for example:

- Collect tourism data (offers, prices, maps, reports, etc.).
- Digitize data collected through different technological means.
- Publish the collected information via the internet and several electronic media in multiple languages.
- **Extensive e-marketing**: providing the information a tourist needs about tourist destinations and hospitality services, food, entertainment and other information about travel bookings, currency exchange, etc. In this regard, it is recommended to create a digital platform for price comparison at the local, national, and even regional and international levels.
- Establishing a national coordination body or institution in the tourism sector: its mission would be to supervise e-tourism and coordinate with all concerned sectors. E-tourism should be supervised by a national authority through a comprehensive electronic portal for various tourism products and services that have a direct and indirect relationship (such as banking, means of transport, land, sea and air transport) [18]Tourists should also be able to get a travel visa in the least possible time.
- Training qualified human resources: higher education and vocational training institutions specializing in tourism and hospitality should keep pace with the progress made internationally in the sector, especially with regard to how information technology is being used to promote

tourism and improve tourism management in order to achieve sustainable tourism.

-Citizens involvement in promoting tourism: It is necessary to work on educating citizens about the importance of tourism and its role in the national economy, through civil society associations and local bodies so that citizens protect the environment and keep it clean, respecting tourists and welcoming and interacting with them.

6. CONCLUSION:

Information and communication technologies have contributed to the promotion of tourism in many countries, getting rid of many processes that were long, costly and time-consuming.

Thanks to e-tourism, the number of tourists worldwide has increased to about four times since the beginning of the new millennium.

However, modernizing e-tourism requires great efforts in all sectors.
As far as Algeria is concerned, the e-tourism experience is still recent and shy, but more efforts aiming at creating a strong information and communication technology infrastructure, developing the use of electronic commerce and securing all related transactions. Moreover, coordination should be made in various sectors at central and local levels.

Citizens should also be involved and their awareness of the importance of this sector is highly important if e-tourism is to make an effective contribution to the development of the country's economy.

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