

докторант ЕМИЛИЯ ТРАЙКОСКА

УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ЗА НАЦИОНАЛНО И СВЕТОВНО СТОПАНСТВО, СОФИЯ

МОДЕРНИТЕ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ В СПА И УЕЛНЕС ТУРИЗМА

THE MODERN TECHNOLOGIES IN SPA AND WELLNESS TOURISM

PhD Student EMILIYA TRAYKOSKA

UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD ECONOMY, SOFIA

Abstract: The twenty first century is a time of modernization. In recent years, growth rates in tourism have been higher than those of the overall world economy. We witness a significant change in the world tourism. Given the economic and moral climate, people are increasingly embracing travel with a higher benefit for their wellbeing. With the increase in individuals actively seeking out to improve their health and lifestyle, there has been a prosperous growth in the wellness tourism industry. The purpose of this paper is to determine the current state of modern technologies in the tourism industry, indicating the future directions and benefits of its development.

Key words: modern, technologies, spa, wellness, tourism

The twenty first century is a time of modernization. Tourism as a whole is one of the fastest growing industries in Europe and worldwide. In recent years, growth rates in tourism have been higher than those of the overall world economy. We witness a significant change in the world tourism. Wellness tourism means traveling for spa and wellness vacations for preventive health services. The tourists stay in a particular destination where they are provided with various health-promoting physical activity, relaxation methods and nutritious food. Given the economic and moral climate, people are increasingly embracing travel with a higher benefit for their wellbeing. With the increase in individuals actively seeking out to improve their health and lifestyle, there has been a prosperous growth in the wellness tourism industry.

The purpose of this paper is to determine the current state of modern technologies in the tourism industry, indicating the future directions and benefits of its development. Achieving this goal suggests analysis of the main technologies used nowadays, its future development and influence. They will help us to understand

the accents, to which efforts should be directed to the entrepreneurs in this sector.

Spa and wellness tourism is one of the most promising niche markets within the tourism field, but it remains an area with few empirical studies. Currently, there seems to be little understanding of who wellness tourists are, how they can be sorted, and the benefits they seek from their wellness tourism experiences. Existing wellness tourist typologies indicate that there is not one single, homogenous group of wellness tourists, but different groups. Wellness has been defined as a positive psychological state of well-being which is the result of practicing a wellness lifestyle based on the belief in self-responsibility for one's own health and well-feeling.¹

The core essence of seeking out wellness is the improvement in health, which automatically leads to an enhanced quality of life. Several wellness programs aims to eliminate the physical and intangible 'toxins' from an individual through the use of relaxation and de-stressing

¹ Voigt, C. (2010), Understanding wellness tourism, University of South Australia

methods.¹ Along with this, wellness centers and retreats encourage maintaining a healthy lifestyle through a wholesome, nutritious diet and fitness-related activities. They also emphasize spiritual and mental health, beauty treatments and healthy sleeping techniques all in the hope of improving and bettering one's health.

There are many benefits that are associated with receiving spa and wellness treatments. The primary benefit of spa and wellness tourism is the ability to combine high-quality medical treatments with travel to beautiful places. Convenience and speed are among the most-cited reasons for wellness travel. This is especially true considering that it is possible to travel to a spa and wellness tourism destination and receive a treatment in a matter of days or weeks. Last, but not least, the tourists have the possibility to have a relaxing vacation and discover new people and places.

Many factors are critical for the business success in the tourism industry. Among the financial and human resources, one of the most important resources for a successful spa and wellness tourism is the presence of informational, communicational and technological resources. All of these resources play an important role in the hospitality and tourism industry as a whole. Both customers and businesses can benefit from the advances in the communication, reservations and customer services systems. Technology allows continuous communication and streamlines the customer experience, from reservation to checkout. There is no doubt that technology has an important role in the tourism industry. It has the advantage that it allows tourism industries to replace expensive human labor with technological labor, thus not only reducing labor costs but also avoiding issues of customer service. Most of the consumers are now used to booking airline, hotel or even spa and wellness reservations on line, dealing with smart phones and

¹ Dr Prem, <http://drprem.com/wellness/benefits-of-wellness-tourism/> (08.10.2013)

other cost saving devices. These technological advances have allowed companies to save on labor while at the same time authorizing customers to make their own decisions. With the raise and modernization of the technology, the companies are trying to use more eco friendly ways to stay in touch with its customers. They have entered into the world of e-marketing and are sending on-line surveys, by which they have much more efficient way of collecting and analyzing the collected data. We can say that the tourism industry is highly dependent on technology and its use has made life a whole lot easier.²

The economic importance of tourism and travel has increased tremendously in the last decades. This development is influenced by a number of factors, such as the growing prosperity in society, an increase in leisure time, new modes of communication and a growing population. Furthermore, globalization and the emergence of new tourist destinations worldwide have created more competition. There is also a growing pressure on service providers in tourism and destinations to maintain their position in the market. Therefore, especially information and communication technologies (ICT), which allow access to essential knowledge and information, will continue to play an important role in tourism.

ICTs enable tourists to access reliable and accurate information as well as to undertake reservations in a fraction of time, cost and inconvenience required by conventional methods.³ ICTs can assist in the improvement of the service quality and contribute to higher customer satisfaction. The main ICT consists of internet, reservations systems, computer systems and mobile communication.⁴

² Tarlow, P., <http://www.tourism-review.com/the-world-of-technology-affects-tourism-industry-immensely-news2757> (09.10.2013)

³ O'Connor, P. (1999), *Electronic information distribution in tourism and hospitality*, Wallingford

⁴ Smith, E. <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/technology-used-hospitality-tourism-31033.html> (10.10.2013)

The Internet has a powerful impact on the tourism industry that has changed tourist's behavior. A significant part of the purchase decision process is the search in the internet. For many businesses and locations, the experience starts long before a customer arrives. It begins with the first visit to the website, when a person sees photos of the location and gets a sense of what to expect. The customer expects the website to be informative, interactive, easy to use and attractive. In the hospitality and tourism business, effective use of Internet technologies can improve revenue. Websites, blogs, online advertising, social media, online ordering and information repositories all help convince customers to choose a location or business. There are so many ways for people to take care of their tourism needs with the ease of using an internet that it has made the old-fashioned way of booking a vacation nearly obsolete. The internet has affected tourism in:¹

Pricing – The prices of vacation packages have been drastically reduced because of the internet possibilities. The internet allows people to find better and better vacations at lower and lower prices. The competition is so great that it would be impossible for the prices to stay high. This makes tourism one of the best markets for buyers of great vacations and services; *Booking* – Nowadays almost everything can be booked online. That means that the internet has made traditional travel agents a thing of the past. Tourists don't have to spend extra money on a travel agent when they can do it with a few clicks of the mouse from home. Booking a vacation or a treatment was never easier and that makes tourism easier and cheaper. The effects the internet has had on tourism are too numerous to count. One of the benefits is that it's cheaper to book a tourism service online than hiring a travel agent.

The Reservations Systems are a very common way of making a booking. The

¹ Demerica, J., <http://www.helium.com/items/1631178-how-technology-has-affected-tourism> (10.10.2013)

Booking engines allow easy access to the systems which enable individuals to make reservations online and compare prices. Many reservation systems, like Expedia and Booking, are available through online interfaces. Booking engines cut costs for travel businesses by reducing call volume and give the traveler more control over their purchasing process.

Because many tourism businesses are large and dispersed, they use **computer systems** to stay connected. Computer systems allow communication between branches and locations which makes it easier to streamline reservations and cross-company policies. They are also used internally to keep all of the staff on the same page and make it easier to access information that can improve the guest experience: guest preferences, house keeping information and reservation details can all be kept on a single system.

Perhaps one of the most interesting areas is **mobile and wireless technologies**. Wireless is a term used widely to describe telecommunications in which electromagnetic waves (as opposed to wire) carry a signal. ICT developments have reproduced the use of wireless applications and devices, including: cellular phones and pagers; global positioning system; cordless computer peripherals and telephones; home-remote control and monitor systems. The development of mobile telephony over the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) and the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) allowed the communication of voice and data over mobile phones. General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) and Universal Mobile Telecommunications System (UMTS) as well as I-Mode in Japan gradually introduce third generation (3G) mobile phones and services, empowering the communication of multimedia information on interactive mobile devices.² Many travelers take some form of **mobile**

² D. Buhalis, R. Law (2008), *Tourism Management* 29, pg. 615

communication device with them on the road, whether it is a tablet computer or a mobile phone. To keep customers advised of changes many tourism and hospitality businesses use mobile communication, where they can send delay notices, offer deals and sponsor location-based advertising. Depending on the type of business the communication might happen through emails or text messaging.

ICT, and in particular the internet, can be used in various ways to support **marketing activities**, including the communication with customers, offering products or services for sale or developing new marketing strategies. By the recognition of the potential of ICT for the marketing and sales needs, the move towards web-based sales activities in tourism is much more advanced than in other economic sectors.

In these uncertain economic times, the hospitality industry composed of tourism and travel is facing new tendencies. The spa and wellness industry requires ICT usage which in the hotel management system consists of: Computer Reservation System (CRS), Property Management System (PMS), Online booking engine and Customer Relationship Management (CRM).¹

The spa and wellness organizations increasingly use computerized systems to maximize their profitability by lowering the labor. They are using online systems and reducing the operational costs by communicating with their customers throughout the World Wide Web. In order to have better organization in the spa and wellness sector, the management is using *computer reservation systems* (CRS) which help them improve the capacity management and operations efficiency that provides them availability information easily. The used systems provide options for quick and efficient data analyzing.

¹ International Federation for IT and Travel and Tourism <http://www.ifitt.org> (11.10.2013)

The computer-mediated transaction between a seller and a buyer, which replaces traditional paper-based invoicing processes, is named *e-invoicing*. In e-invoicing, the invoice is electronically generated and sent by the invoicing party, and electronically received, processed and archived by the buyer. In practice, e-invoicing typically goes hand in hand with making payments electronically.²

The use of ICT and e-business to support and optimize intra-corporate processes has become increasingly important. By digitizing previously paper-based processes, information and documents related to incoming or outgoing orders or bookings can be seamlessly processed along the company's value chain; reservations can be linked with capacity management, and the underlying software systems support controlling and management by enabling full transparency of all business processes. Furthermore, collaborative processes within and between companies are supported, planning and demand forecasting, organizing and archiving documents, and human resources management. In general, in all different economic sectors ICT solutions for these purposes are predominantly used by large companies and, to a lower degree, by medium-sized companies.

In the tourism industry, about every fifth company uses an intranet, which can be a useful platform for the secure exchange of information within a company and, possibly, the implementation of internal training programs, but also for the distribution of planning data among employees.

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems are software solutions that help to integrate and cover all major business activities within a company, including product or service planning, purchasing of subsidiary services, inventory management, order tracking, human resources, projects

² Report "ICT Security, e-Invoicing and e-Payment Activities in European Enterprises" (September 2005). Available at www.ebusiness-watch.org ('resources')

management and finance. Ideally, they integrate business processes of different functionalities electronically to improve the efficiency in operating those processes. Prime examples of ERP in tourism are capacity management systems in the hospitality sector (e.g. sector-specific software solutions from providers like Sabre, Amadeus, Gastrodat or Fidelio). In addition, ERP systems can play an important role for supporting the connectivity between enterprises.¹

The information and communication technologies are a powerful tool to support management and controlling functions in an enterprise, mainly by providing information faster, more flexibly and more concisely than it would be possible without the respective tool. It cannot replace the human factor in management and decision-making, but they can greatly support the process.

The impact of ICT on planning and decision-making is derived from two inherent characteristics of ICT: first, their capacity to store any sort of data and information in a structured and linked way, provided that clear standards for data entry have been defined beforehand; second, their capacity to increase the transparency of information and processes by enabling shared access to information in a distributed working environment.

Technology has affected tourism by directly influencing the ability of potential tourists to not only discover potential destinations, but travel there easily after investigating them at their leisure. With instant information, reliable travel networks, and great tools to overcome language and cultural barriers, the travel of today is far improved over the travels of the past. And aside from the distant aspects of global tourism, even local tourism is much improved by the benefits of technology.²

¹ Report "ICT Security, e-Invoicing and e-Payment Activities in European Enterprises" (September 2005). Available at www.ebusiness-watch.org ('resources')

² Carlson, M. <http://www.helium.com/items/1570708-how-technology-has-affected-tourism> (12.10.2013)

The spa and wellness tourism has a tendency of becoming more a local tourism. In the busy everyday life, people need to gather more information easily, so that they can spend their free time enjoying themselves. Therefore they rely on the internet where they search spa and wellness centers nearby or by different criteria. The more options that the modern website offers, the greater the benefits are for both sides. The requested information from the spa and wellness customer is to see the offered services in details, to see their prices, the rooms where these services are offered and the possibility to easily book a treatment.

In the world of today, technology has put information in the hands of the tourist whenever they need in. This information can be gathered at travel offices, brochures, the Internet, and other places. With special rates for prices and developed paths to and from these places, it is possible to figure out exactly how much things will cost before hand, and to be aware of the areas before visiting. In the case of local tourism, it's as easy as walking into a gas station and buying a local brochure. All areas are known for at least some redeeming feature or something they try to advertise to those of the outside world, even if the only thing they have to offer is privacy.

New technologies and web functionalities like dynamic packaging will lead to an additional substitution of products and services originally provided by traditional service providers like travel agencies and tour operators. In the past few years, online tourism players progressively substituted the services of traditional travel agencies. First, a direct web-based access to an abundance of travel information was provided, thus allowing the independent planning of travels. Subsequently, real-time transaction functionalities were added, enabling customers to book their journey independently. Most recently, dynamic packaging solutions have enabled tourists to independently assemble travel

arrangements of multiple components in real-time.¹

In conclusion we can say that the competition in the online market is increasing, as ever more online service providers offer ever more types of services, leading to the development of all-embracing travel websites. The trends of the technology modernization will give the professionals in the sector, the needed guidance for future development. Logically, an entrepreneur

from the spa and wellness industry cannot invariably follow all trends. It is sufficient to bet on any of them for successful positioning on the tourist market. The spa and wellness sector will continue to evolve and address new challenges to tourism entrepreneurs. Ultimately only those who will be sufficiently innovative to meet the demands of modern spa and wellness customer will survive.

References:

1. Carlson, M. <http://www.helium.com/items/1570708-how-technology-has-affected-tourism> (12.10.2013)
2. D. Buhalis, R. Law (2008), *Tourism Management* 29, pg. 615
3. Demerica, J., <http://www.helium.com/items/1631178-how-technology-has-affected-tourism> (10.10.2013)
4. Dr Prem, <http://drprem.com/wellness/benefits-of-wellness-tourism/> (08.10.2013)
5. International Federation for IT and Travel and Tourism <http://www.ifitt.org> (11.10.2013)
6. O'Connor, P. (1999), *Electronic information distribution in tourism and hospitality*, Wallingford
7. Report "ICT Security, e-Invoicing and e-Payment Activities in European Enterprises" (September 2005). Available at www.ebusiness-watch.org ('resources')
8. Smith, E. <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/technology-used-hospitality-tourism-31033.html> (10.10.2013)
9. Tarlow, P., <http://www.tourism-review.com/the-world-of-technology-affects-tourism-industry-immensely-news2757> (09.10.2013)
10. Voigt, C. (2010), *Understanding wellness tourism*, University of South Australia

¹ Report "ICT Security, e-Invoicing and e-Payment Activities in European Enterprises" (September 2005). Available at www.ebusiness-watch.org ('resources')