

Determinants of digital technology adoption in marketing strategy for sustainable tourism destinations

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

This doctoral dissertation aims to analyze the perceptions and determinants that influence the adoption of digital technologies in the marketing strategies of Moroccan DMOs, while examining how these elements are reflected in tourist behavior, with an emphasis on the sustainability dimension.

Objectives

This research examines the impact of digital transformation on Morocco's tourism ecosystem, focusing on how digital technologies shape destination marketing strategies and visitor behavior within the context of sustainable tourism development. The study pursues the following specific objectives:

Objective 1: Analyze the role of Regional Tourism Councils (CRTs) in promoting and developing tourism at the regional level amid ongoing digital transformation.

Objective 2: Investigate tourists' behavior and intentions regarding the adoption and use of digital technologies within the context of sustainable tourism in Morocco.

Objective 3: This study aims to extend the UTAUT2 model by integrating a sustainability dimension, thereby providing a comprehensive framework to better understand the adoption of digital technologies in a context where sustainability has become a key priority.

Methodology

This research adopts a sequential exploratory mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2017), combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital transformation in Moroccan tourism and its relationship with sustainability. The first phase involved conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews with representatives of Regional Tourism Councils (CRTs) to explore their perceptions, strategies, and challenges regarding the adoption of digital technologies in regional tourism development. These interviews offered valuable contextual insights that informed the subsequent quantitative phase. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding and word frequency analysis through DB Gnosis software. The second phase consisted of a quantitative survey administered to tourists who had recently visited Morocco. The questionnaire was structured according to the extended UTAUT2 model (Venkatesh et al., 2012) with an added sustainability dimension. Quantitative data were analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using R (SEMinR) to identify the key determinants of technology adoption in sustainable tourism contexts.

Results

The findings of this study reveal important insights related to the main research objectives. Regarding Moroccan DMOs, digital technologies are viewed primarily as tools to enhance marketing effectiveness and improve international competitiveness, particularly through better targeting and communication of sustainable practices. The qualitative results align with existing literature emphasizing the role of technology in transforming destination marketing strategies (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

From the tourists' perspective, social influence and facilitating conditions strongly impact their adoption of digital tools, with peer recommendations on social media and ease of access playing key roles. Effort expectancy is no longer a major barrier, reflecting growing digital familiarity among travelers. Additionally, sustainability is increasingly important in tourists' decision-making, although this awareness does not always translate into concrete behaviors. These findings are consistent with

international research trends, which show that sustainability is increasingly integrated into travel decision-making processes (Budeanu, 2007).

Theoretical conclusions

From a theoretical perspective, this research makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by bridging two major fields: digital marketing and sustainable tourism. While each of these areas has been extensively studied, their intersection remains underexplored, particularly in the context of emerging tourism destinations such as Morocco. The integration of the UTAUT2 model (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology) with an added sustainability dimension represents a noteworthy theoretical advancement. This approach expands the understanding of the factors influencing the adoption of digital technologies in a sector where sustainability has become a pressing priority. The thesis thus offers an innovative framework for exploring the synergies between digitalization and sustainable practices.

Practical Applications of the Dissertation

From a practical perspective, this study holds significant relevance for multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, tourism professionals, and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). Tourism constitutes a vital sector of the Moroccan economy (Yasin et al., 2011), and the country aims to enhance its international competitiveness while committing to a sustainable development approach. By identifying the key determinants influencing the use of digital technologies in destination marketing, this research will offer concrete recommendations to strengthen the promotional strategies of Moroccan destinations. For tourism professionals, the study will provide practical tools and actionable insights to optimize marketing strategies through the effective integration of sustainability principles.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 presents a theoretical analysis of digital technology adoption in organizations, tracing the evolution from information and communication technologies (ICT) to digital technologies. It also introduces the theoretical framework through various technology adoption theories, with a particular focus on TAM and UTAUT, and their application in tourism and hospitality research (El Archi & Benbba, 2023).

Abstract of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 examines the role of digital technologies in the marketing strategies of tourism stakeholders. It explores the integration of digital platforms, the challenges related to sustainability, and stakeholder engagement in the context of smart destinations.

Abstract of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of the sustainable tourism destination as the study's empirical setting, with a specific focus on the case of Morocco. This chapter analyzes the characteristics, challenges, and prospects of sustainable tourism destinations, while highlighting the role of digital infrastructure.

Abstract of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 focuses on the research methodology adopted in this study. It justifies the choice of paradigms and the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and describes the techniques and tools used for data collection and analysis. This chapter also presents the research model and the associated hypotheses.

Abstract of Chapter 5

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the analysis, discussion, and interpretation of the results. It compares the findings from the qualitative and quantitative phases and evaluates the key determinants influencing the adoption of digital technologies by tourists, from a sustainability perspective.

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