

Tourism: What future in light of digital transformation -Study of the Egyptian experience-

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Abstract: This study investigates the future of tourism in the context of digital transformation, emphasizing its indispensable role in economic and social development. By examining the interplay between digital advancements and tourism revitalization, the research highlights the significance of these factors in enhancing the tourism sector, focusing on the Egyptian experience. The descriptive and analytical approach was relied upon to accurately describe the study, and in order to enrich the study, through the description and analysis of the theoretical framework, and an analytical study of the Egyptian experience in the field of using information technology, communications and the Internet. The findings underscore the critical importance of integrating digital strategies into tourism to foster sustainable growth and development. Additionally, the specific focus on the Egyptian experience serves as a model for addressing local challenges and improving visitor experiences, while the theoretical framework established may guide future research in digital tourism. Overall, this study contributes both to academic discourse and practical implications for enhancing tourism through technology.

Keywords: Tourisme ; Digital Transformation ; Egyptian case.

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Introduction:

Tourism has significant economic and social impacts, as outlined by Ziani and Harith (2018). It plays a vital role in attracting foreign capital, contributing to the implementation of comprehensive development plans (Hassan, 2000; World Bank, 2019; United Nations, 2019). Statistics indicate that tourism is a primary source of foreign currency for approximately 38% of the world's countries and ranks among the top five sources for others (UNWTO, 2020; Pearce, 1995; Balaguer & Cantavella-Jordá, 2002). Additionally, tourism facilitates the transfer of modern technologies, with countries seeking to enhance their tourism resources adopting advanced technologies in their services (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Kearney, 2016; Sigala, 2018).

Moreover, tourism is a major employer, absorbing about 11% of the global labor force (ILO, 2019). The World Tourism Organization estimates that the sector employs around 202 million workers worldwide, with notable employment rates in countries like Algeria, Tunisia, and

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Morocco (WTO, 2020; CBI, 2019; G20, 2020). These figures highlight the sector's potential for job creation and its contribution to social and political stability. Furthermore, tourism contributes to national income and gross domestic product (GDP); for instance, Algeria recorded a tourism contribution of 2.4% to its GDP in 2011 (WTO, 2020; World Bank, 2011; Ziani & Harith, 2018).

Tourism also promotes economic balance among regions by distributing investment projects and related activities across the country, generating new job opportunities and improving living standards through effective resource utilization (Harrison, 2001; Dwyer & Forsyth, 2008; Bhatia, 1983). Lastly, tourism directly influences the standard of living for citizens in tourist destinations, offering significant economic benefits that positively affect social aspects and various associated sectors (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Sharpley, 2002; Andriotis, 2005).

In view of this interest in tourism and in light of the development-taking place in the field of information technology, communications, the Internet, Digital transformation has become the most important challenge facing the tourism sector, as the Arab Tourism Organization called for the necessity of digital transformation to obtain a good level of future performance. Therefore, digital transformation has become a strategic goal that must be sought to achieve at the national level and in our Arab world, so that we can be among the developed countries in this industry. We will get what we deserve through the return of tourism, as this will be offset by the creation of many job opportunities. Based on the above (Arab Tourism Organization, 2018)

There is a lack of understanding or knowledge about how to apply digital technologies to enhance tourist experiences and develop services. This gap may include underutilization of big data, insufficient use of online booking platforms, or lack of awareness of digital marketing. Bridging this gap is essential to enhance competitiveness and improve efficiency in the tourism sector. In this context, the question of our study is: What is the Future of Egyptian Tourism in light of Digital Transformation?

The study aims to achieve several key objectives. First, it seeks to identify the concept of tourism and the essential requirements for successful digital transformation. Understanding these foundational elements is crucial for assessing how tourism can adapt to and thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Second, the research will explore digital transformation specifically within the tourism sector. This includes examining the requirements for implementing digital strategies and the benefits that such transformations can bring to tourism businesses and destinations. By analyzing these factors, the study aims to provide insights into how digital tools and technologies can enhance the overall tourism experience.

Lastly, the study will address the Egyptian experience as a pioneering model in the field of tourism globally. By highlighting Egypt's initiatives and successes in integrating digital transformation within its tourism sector, the research will showcase how a nation can effectively leverage digital advancements to enhance its tourism offerings and maintain a competitive edge in the global market.

This topic is of great importance due to the role played by tourism in achieving economic and social growth, and in light of the development in the field of digitization, it has led many countries to adopt digital tourism

I- Background of the study:

1. Tourism Concept and elements:

Tourism is a multifaceted concept defined in various ways by researchers. The International Academy of Tourism describes tourism as the expression used for leisure trips, encompassing the sum of human activities involved in these journeys. It is also recognized as an industry that collaborates to meet the needs of tourists (Mouhoub, 2006-2007; Hall, 2008; Cooper et al., 2005). Similarly, the World Tourism Organization defines tourism as the activities undertaken by individuals while traveling and staying in locations outside their usual environment for a period not exceeding one year, for purposes such as leisure, business, or other reasons (Mouhoub, 2006-2007; WTO, 2020; Page, 2014).

Different types of tourism can be identified, each catering to distinct interests and demographics (El-Charkassi & Miltane, 2007; Weaver & Lawton, 2006; Hall & Page, 2014). Recreational tourism targets various categories of domestic and foreign tourists, often occurring in coastal or mountainous regions (Cater, 2006; Fennell, 2006; Buckley, 2006). Summer tourism is prominent in mountainous areas and along the shores of bodies of water. Religious tourism involves visits to sacred sites for specific rituals (Timothy & Iverson, 2006; Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Shinde, 2018), while cultural and archaeological tourism focuses on destinations rich in historical monuments (McKercher, 2002; Smith, 2006; Timothy, 2011). Business tourism typically takes place in urban centers (Deloitte, 2019; Bieger & Laesser, 2002; Kwornik & Thompson, 2009), and group trips are often organized for internal visits to monuments or participation in international exhibitions (Weaver, 2006; Leiper, 1990; Page, 2014). Finally, conference tourism encompasses events that are political, cultural, scientific, artistic, or economic in nature (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016; Naumann, 2013; Getz, 2008).

Tourism relies on several key elements, which can be categorized into natural, human, and financial/service components. Natural elements include various climatic conditions, seasonal variations, and attractions such as mineral baths, which appeal to tourists (Abadi & Zewani, 2019; Swarbrooke, 1999; Buckley, 2012). Human components encompass historical aspects, including monuments, ruins, and local cultural practices (Timothy, 2011; Richards, 2018; Smith, 2003). Lastly, financial and service components involve the availability of infrastructure, such as airports and transportation systems, as well as complementary services like accommodations, dining, and entertainment options (Deloitte, 2018; Gursoy & Chen, 2014; Poon, 1993).

2. Digital Transformation:

In this section, we will explore various definitions associated with digital transformation.

Digital transformation refers to the process through which companies adopt a business model that relies on digital technologies to innovate products and services. This transformation

provides new revenue channels and enhances the overall value of their offerings (Jamila & Bouchi, 2019; Westerman et al., 2014; Kane et al., 2015). Digital transformation (DX) signifies a comprehensive change in business practices, particularly in how products are developed and services are delivered. It may involve strategic shifts that impact all organizational functions, including sales, supply chain management, information technology, and the entire value chain (Bardan, 2018; Fitzgerald et al., 2013; Vial, 2019).

The International Data Corporation (IDC) defines digital transformation as a continuous process by which organizations adapt to customer and market requirements by leveraging digital capabilities. This approach aims to create new business models and services that seamlessly integrate digital and manual experiences while enhancing operational efficiency and overall organizational performance (IDC, 2020; Pwc, 2017; McKinsey, 2021). Accenture emphasizes that business success today hinges on a customer-centric digital transformation, which prioritizes exceptional and relevant customer experiences while mobilizing organizations, processes, and technologies to achieve this goal (Accenture, 2020; Bain & Company, 2019; Pleshkova & Ruzhanskaya, 2020).

Capgemini highlights that digital transformation represents a primary challenge in change management, influencing not only industry structures and strategic positioning but also affecting all levels of an organization, including every task, activity, and process, as well as its extended supply chain (Capgemini, 2020; BCG, 2019; Kotter, 1996). Deloitte adds that digital transformation is a catalyst for change across various industries, reshaping how people live, work, think, and communicate. This transformation is characterized by ongoing planning and a continuous pursuit of reformulating practical experiences (Deloitte, 2021; Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Schallmo et al., 2019).

Several critical factors are essential for the success of digital transformation. These factors are directly linked to the effective implementation of digital strategies within organizations. According to Fari (2021), these factors include leadership commitment, a clear digital strategy, employee engagement, and the integration of digital technologies into all facets of the business (Fari, 2021; El-Sayed et al., 2020; Alhussein et al., 2021).

Digital transformation yields numerous benefits for organizations. According to Ghrissi, Si Tayeb, and El-Absi (2020), these benefits include improved control over time and costs, enhanced operational efficiency, and increased innovation through the adoption of digital technologies. This transformation enables organizations to provide high-quality services to consumers, achieve competitiveness in the business environment, and capture new market shares (Ghrissi et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Luthra & Mangla, 2018). Additionally, it facilitates the delivery of superior quality services and products, ultimately contributing to the welfare of the public (Khan et al., 2021; Gimpel et al., 2018; Andriof & Waddock, 2002).

3. Digital Transformation in the Tourism Sector:

The tourism sector is one of the economic areas most capable of advancing comprehensive economic and social development in many countries. This is largely due to its ability to attract foreign investments, increase national income, raise the growth rate of GDP, provide job

opportunities, and reduce unemployment and poverty (Mashhour & Youssef, 2021; UNWTO, 2020; World Bank, 2019). In recent years, there has been a clear trend to develop the tourism sector by focusing on innovation and renewal, particularly through the introduction of modern technologies in tourism services and products. Key advancements include digital platforms associated with the sharing economy, geolocation systems, big data analytics, and artificial intelligence techniques.

The adoption of digital transformation technologies in the tourism sector, often referred to as "digital tourism," has made tourism promotion faster, easier, and more effective. The growth of tourism institutions that prioritize these technologies, particularly hotels, has been significant. Many countries, especially in the United States and Europe, began implementing digital marketing strategies in the tourism sector early on. Most tourism companies have recognized the importance of digital transformation, as digital solutions have become essential for creating a sustainable tourism sector that enhances competition and aligns with global trends. Digital tourism promotion now focuses on marketing individual cities or attractions to highlight the diversity that tourists seek, showcasing their unique competitive advantages while supporting the local communities surrounding these sites.

Various means have been employed in the digital transformation of the tourism sector (Ben Rkia, 2021): Internet; Websites; E-mail; Blogs; Simple Synchronous Publishing Technology; Social Networks; Mobile Service Programs.

Information technology and modern communication methods have revolutionized the tourism industry, changing societal connections and diminishing the relevance of time and place. Tourists can now fulfill many of their needs without leaving home, such as browsing online, purchasing tickets, or booking hotel accommodations (Belaid & Karkar, 2021; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Sigala, 2018). This transformation has shifted the tourism industry significantly from a material-based economy to a digital one, largely influenced by e-commerce. Today, tourists rely heavily on this new model to satisfy their various tourism-related desires, illustrating the rise of smart tourism, which offers customers remarkable ease and flexibility.

The Internet has become a fundamental component of the tourism industry, as acknowledged by numerous experts. This sector has greatly benefited from the digital revolution, leveraging various tools and technologies provided by information technology. Utilizing these advancements is no longer optional for tourism professionals; it is essential for adapting to current changes, ensuring sustainability, and enhancing competitiveness (World Tourism Organization, 2018; McKinsey, 2019; PwC, 2020). The World Tourism Organization has embraced the slogan "Tourism and Digital Transformation," coinciding with World Tourism Day, emphasizing the need for all tourism stakeholders to adopt information and communication technologies to facilitate connections between tourism products and consumers.

The tourism industry depends heavily on data and information, which the digital environment provides abundantly. Technology serves as the ideal tool for disseminating information among all tourism stakeholders, enabling tourists to explore various destinations in detail

through videos, images, and interactive content. Tourists can access comprehensive information about airlines, hotels, restaurants, and car rental services, allowing them to make informed decisions that align with their financial capabilities and personal circumstances. This modern approach to tourism embodies the essence of smart tourism, emphasizing the importance of planning, organization, and pre-arranged itineraries, ultimately alleviating the need for physical visits to information centers or travel agencies.

II- The Future of Tourism in Light of Digital Transformation in Egypt

Tourism is a crucial source of national income for Egypt, significantly contributing to the GDP and helping to combat unemployment by employing a large segment of the workforce. Egypt ranks among the world's leading tourist destinations, characterized by its rich array of attractions, including temples, museums, monuments, and historical buildings. The country boasts a robust infrastructure to support tourism, encompassing hotel rooms, resorts, and tourism companies. Major tourist areas include Luxor, Aswan, Cairo, Alexandria, the North Coast, the Red Sea, and South Sinai. The history of tourism in Egypt dates back to ancient times and has remained a sought-after destination throughout the centuries. UNESCO has recognized six Egyptian cultural heritage sites, including ancient, Coptic, and Islamic sites, as well as a natural heritage site, by listing them as World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2020; Abou El Wafa, 2021).

1. Development of Tourism Activity in Egypt:

The World Tourism Organization reported a rise in tourist numbers, reaching 9.4 million in 2011, down from 14.7 million in 2010 due to various political and economic crises affecting the sector. By 2013, Egypt had fallen to 85th place in global tourism rankings, a drop from 75th in 2011. The first half of 2014 saw a further 25% decline in both the number of tourists and tourism revenues compared to the same period in 2013. However, the situation began to improve slightly in 2015, with Egypt climbing to 83rd place and recording 5.3 million visitors in 2016, which increased to 8.3 million in 2017. The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the tourism sector, with tourist numbers plummeting to 3.5 million in 2020. Nevertheless, the Egyptian government managed to mitigate the negative effects by implementing measures aimed at stabilizing tourism, particularly through a shift towards digital transformation, which is essential given the sector's reliance on databases and technology (UNWTO, 2019; Taha, 2021).

2. Difficulties of Digital Transformation:

Despite Egypt's rich tourism potential, the shift towards a digital tourism model faces several challenges. High costs associated with rapidly evolving communication technologies complicate the transition, and various specific issues contribute to these challenges. First, many tourist cities and villages are isolated and lack the necessary digital infrastructure (Abdelgaber & Ghanam, 2022; El-Khateeb, 2021). Additionally, while several smart tourism applications exist, many lack interactivity and professional images, often using only a single language, which limits their effectiveness (Abdelgaber & Ghanam, 2022; Moustafa, 2020).

Effective digital transformation requires fundamental changes in the infrastructure and organizational structure of tourism institutions, including the merger of certain activities and updates to e-marketing methods (Abdelgaber & Ghanam, 2022; El-Sharif, 2020). The high costs of creating and maintaining attractive tourist websites necessitate expert knowledge, making these projects costly and potentially limiting their competitive edge (Moustafa, 2020; Taha, 2021). Moreover, the increasing number and variety of websites intensifies competition, making it challenging for any single site to stand out (El-Khateeb, 2021; Abdelgaber & Ghanam, 2022). Language barriers also pose a significant challenge, as the language used on tourist websites is crucial for attracting visitors; thus, multilingual support is essential to enhance user interaction (Moustafa, 2020; Taha, 2021).

Privacy and site security are critical considerations as the need for customer data can deter users from engaging with online platforms, highlighting the importance of secure systems (El-Sharif, 2020; Abdelgaber & Ghanam, 2022). Furthermore, many users remain skeptical about electronic payment systems, which represents a significant hurdle to developing smart tourism; therefore, strengthening security measures for these systems is essential (Moustafa, 2020; Taha, 2021).

Digital transformation is vital for revitalizing the Egyptian tourism sector, enhancing the promotion of archaeological sites and historical landmarks through social media and official tourism pages. This effort streamlines the booking process and enriches the tourist experience (Taha, 2021). The Ministry of Tourism is actively pursuing digital transformation in areas such as flight reservations, visas, and hotel bookings. By adopting modern technologies, tourism in Egypt can rebound to pre-pandemic levels and improve overall service delivery (UNWTO, 2019; Abou El Wafa, 2021).

Digital transformation plays a pivotal role in enhancing the Egyptian tourism experience and improving management and marketing efficiency. Technologies like mobile applications and virtual reality can provide visitors with up-to-date information and previews of attractions (El-Khateeb, 2021; Moustafa, 2020). Utilizing digital marketing strategies can broaden reach and improve the tourism brand through online advertising and social media (Taha, 2021; Abdelgaber & Ghanam, 2022). Additionally, big data analytics can help understand visitor behavior, allowing for tailored services and improved experiences (El-Sharif, 2020; Moustafa, 2020).

Digital platforms streamline the booking process, enhancing convenience for visitors (Taha, 2021; Abou El Wafa, 2021). Digital systems can also enhance operational efficiency, including service quality monitoring and stakeholder coordination (El-Khateeb, 2021; Abdelgaber & Ghanam, 2022). Furthermore, digital tools facilitate direct communication with visitors, fostering better relationships (Moustafa, 2020; Taha, 2021). Finally, technology can enhance safety through smart systems and real-time updates (El-Sharif, 2020; Abdelgaber & Ghanam, 2022). Overall, digital transformation promises multiple benefits for the tourism sector in Egypt, enhancing efficiency, improving visitor experiences, and increasing the country's attractiveness as a global tourist destination (UNWTO, 2019; Abou El Wafa, 2021).

Conclusion:

Digital transformation plays a crucial role in developing Egyptian tourism by enhancing the visitor experience and improving management and marketing efficiency. Here are some ways digital transformation can contribute to this field:

1-Enhancing Visitor Experience: Digital technologies such as -mobile -apps and updated websites provide accessible and current information about tourist attractions, events, and restaurants. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can offer visitors a preview of destinations before their visit.

2-Digital Marketing: Digital transformation improves tourism marketing strategies through tools like online ads, search engine optimization (SEO), and social media to reach a wider audience and enhance the tourism brand.

3. -Data Analytics: Big Data helps understand visitor behavior and preferences, allowing tourism authorities to develop strategies that improve service and visitor experience based on accurate analyses.

4. Management and Operations: Digital systems can enhance management efficiency by improving destination management, monitoring service qua (Tourism in Egypt, 2020)(Belaid & Karkar, 2021) (Tourism in Egypt, 2020)lity, and coordinating between various stakeholders.

5-Communication and Interaction: Digital channels offer opportunities for direct interaction with visitors through email and social media, strengthening the relationship between the tourist destination and its visitors.

In summary, digital transformation, helps achieve multiple benefits, including enhancing sector efficiency, improving visitor experiences, and increasing Egypt's ability to attract tourists from around the world.

Statistics Related to Digital Transformation in Tourism:

1. Digital Marketing Spend:

- **Global:** According to "e-Marketer," global spending on digital advertising in the travel and tourism industry is expected to surpass \$200 billion by 2024.

- **Egypt:** In recent years, Egypt has seen an increase in investment in digital marketing to promote tourism destinations. For example, the "Experience Egypt" campaign utilizes social media platforms and digital advertising.

2-Online Booking Growth:

- **Global:** Statistics from "Statista" indicate that more than 70% of travel bookings are made online, with a continuing rise in the use of mobile apps for bookings.

- **Egypt:** Reports suggest that online booking has seen a notable increase in Egypt, with more tourists both domestic and international using digital platforms for booking flights and accommodations.

3-Mobile Apps and Websites:

- **Global:** According to "Phocuswright," the use of mobile apps is expected to continue growing, with over 80% of internet users in the travel sector preferring travel apps for information and services.

- **Egypt:** Egypt has launched several apps and websites that enhance the visitor experience, such as the "Visit Egypt" app, which provides information about destinations and tourism services.

4. Impact of Big Data and Analytics:

- **Global:** A study by "Deloitte" indicates that 60% of major tourism companies rely on data analytics to improve marketing strategies and customer experience.

- **Egypt:** Egypt has started adopting big data technologies to analyze visitor preferences and improve services. The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has used analytics to enhance its marketing strategies and direct promotional campaigns more effectively.

5-Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality**:

- **Global:** According to "Grand View Research," the virtual reality market in the travel industry is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 16.5% through 2028.

- **Egypt:** Egypt has used virtual reality technologies to enhance the tourism experience through virtual tours of landmarks and historical sites.

6-Social Media Interaction:

- **Global:** Statistics from "Statista" show that around 50% of travelers rely on social media for travel recommendations and destination reviews.

- **Egypt:** Promotional campaigns on social media, such as the "Discover Egypt" campaign, have increased awareness and attracted tourists to Egypt, with positive results in audience engagement.

These statistics highlight the impact of digital transformation on improving and developing tourism, demonstrating how Egypt is leveraging these trends to enhance its position as a global tourist destination.

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