

Digital Social Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Developing the Ecotourism Sector - Presenting Successful International Experiences

المقاولاتية الاجتماعية الرقمية كأداة لتنمية قطاع السياحة البيئية – عرض تجارب دولية ناجحة

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Abstract

This study aims to throw light on digital social entrepreneurship as a modern concept that combines two concepts that have received wide attention from researchers and decision makers recently, namely digital entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship. The study delved into the contribution of this form of entrepreneurship in the development of ecotourism while concurrently presenting successful international experiences in this domain in order to derive insights that can be applied in Algeria. The study found that digital social entrepreneurship contributes significantly to the development of ecotourism sector through digital platforms for sustainable hotel reservations and raising consumer environmental awareness, in addition to digital crowd funding for sustainable tourism projects and developing Apps and guides that promotes ecotourism destinations. Finally, a set of recommendations were produced for the benefit of decision makers in order to optimize the use of digital social entrepreneurship in developing the eco-tourism sector in Algeria.

Keywords: Digital entrepreneurship, Social entrepreneurship, Digital social entrepreneurship, Ecotourism.

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على المقاولاتية الاجتماعية الرقمية باعتبارها مفهوم حديث يجمع بين مفهومين يلقيان اهتمام واسع من طرف الباحثين وصناع القرار في الآونة الأخيرة وهما المقاولاتية الرقمية و المقاولاتية الاجتماعية. تم التطرق الى دور هذا النوع من المقاولاتية في تطوير السياحة البيئية مع عرض تجارب دولية ناجحة في هذا المجال من أجل الاستفادة منها وتطبيقها في الجزائر. توصلت الدراسة إلى وجود مساهمة واسعة للمقاولاتية الاجتماعية الرقمية في تطوير القطاع السياحي البيئي من خلال المنصات الرقمية الخاصة بالحجز الفندقي المستدام، زيادة الوعي البيئي للمستهلكين بالإضافة الى التمويل الجماعي الرقمي للمشاريع السياحية المستدامة وتطوير تطبيقات ودلائل سياحية رقمية تروج للسياحة البيئية. في الأخير تم الخروج بمجموعة من التوصيات لفائدة صناع القرار من أجل تحسين استغلال المقاولاتية الاجتماعية الرقمية في تطوير قطاع السياحة البيئية في الجزائر.

كلمات مفتاحية: مقاولاتية اجتماعية؛ مقاولاتية رقمية؛ مقاولاتية اجتماعية رقمية؛ سياحة بيئية.

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Digital social entrepreneurship as a tool for developing the Ecotourism sector - Presenting successful international experiences

Introduction

In recent times, the global tourism sector has witnessed a discernible shift towards more sustainable practices and the impetus for this transformation stems from a heightened awareness of the detrimental effects on the environment, and the socio cultural implications linked to traditional mass tourism.

On the other hand, Digital social entrepreneurship offers a novel and innovative approach to the development of eco-tourism as it combines the principles of social entrepreneurship with the capabilities of digital technologies to produce positive social impact, promote community engagement, and foster sustainable tourism practices.

Therefore, the convergence of technology and social entrepreneurship within the ecotourism industry presents a unique prospect for numerous enterprises to thrive, and this endeavor has resulted the emergence of many inspiring international experiences in this domain.

However, Algeria, unfortunately, suffers from a lack of scientific research in this field, especially regarding the contribution of digital social entrepreneurship in the development of ecotourism, so in order to fill this research's gap,

The following question can assist in determining the study's problem:

How digital social entrepreneurship contribute in the development of the Ecotourism sector?

Based on the aforementioned, the sub-questions were:

- 1- What is the concept of digital social entrepreneurship?
- 2- What is the concept of Ecotourism?
- 3- How do some successful digital social entrepreneurship initiatives contribute to ecotourism sector development?

The Relevance of the Research

The importance of this study is shown by the increasing interest in digital social entrepreneurship as this form of entrepreneurship uses innovative technology to address global social and environmental challenges. In addition, the research in this field contributes directly in developing the ecotourism sector in Algeria.

Research Objectives

We seek through this study to determine the following:

- 1- Clarify the concept of digital social entrepreneurship.
- 2- Clarify the concept of Ecotourism.

- 3- Elucidate the contribution of digital social entrepreneurship to ecotourism development.
- 4- Point out a few successful international experiences in the field of the contribution of digital social entrepreneurship in the development of ecotourism sector to take advantage and apply them in Algeria.

Literary Review

Definition of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship, in its most basic form, can be described as self-employment based on innovation and applying advanced techniques to production (Imene, 2022). Diandra and Ahmad Azmy defined Entrepreneurship as a simple natural phenomenon in business that is closely linked to opportunity recognition and emphasizing the importance of knowledge and skill as the basic entrepreneurial abilities (Diandra & Azmy, 2020).

Thomas Eisenmann also defined Entrepreneurship as tactics that creative, inventive, opportunistic, and persuasive entrepreneurs can take to manage risk and mobilize resources (Eisenmann, 2013).

From the above it can be said that Entrepreneurship is the process of finding, developing, and seizing chances to develop innovative ideas, goods, or services into profitable, long-lasting companies.

Definition of Social Entrepreneurship

According to Sabah Brahmi, Social entrepreneurship is a combination that encompasses elements from both entrepreneurship and philanthropic organizations. It draws upon the fundamental traits of entrepreneurship, including profit, opportunities, innovation, and risk, while also embracing the distinct character of philanthropic organizations through its social mission. As a result, social entrepreneurship differs from traditional entrepreneurship in terms of its purpose of creation, value creation, the unique qualities of social entrepreneurs, and the diversity of funding sources (Brahmi, 2021, p. 1).

This type of entrepreneurship is also defined by Martin Roger and Osberg as encompassing three distinct elements. The first element involves the recognition of affairs that perpetuates the exclusion, marginalization, or hardship faced by a specific segment of humanity. The second element entails identifying an opportunity within this unjust equilibrium, creating a social value proposition, and employing inspiration, creativity, direct action, courage, and fortitude to challenge the dominant power structure. Lastly, the third element involves the establishment of a new and sustainable equilibrium that unlocks untapped potential or alleviates the suffering experienced by the targeted group (Martin & Osberg, 2007, p. 35).

According to A. Wale-Oshinowo and others, the term refers to organizations that are established with the objective of using entrepreneurial abilities and innovation to address societal challenges. A. Wale further pointed

Digital social entrepreneurship as a tool for developing the Ecotourism sector - Presenting successful international experiences

that individuals who combine the pragmatic strategies of a business owner with the ideals of a social advocate manage these organizations and such enterprises use innovative approaches to aggregate resources and create social value within the community(Wale-Oshinowo, Uba, Adeyeye, & Omobowale, 2019, p. 1).

Definition of Digital Entrepreneurship

Davidson defines digital entrepreneurship as “Subcategory of entrepreneurship in which some or all of what would be physical in the traditional settings has been digitized based on the use of digital media and technologies”(Davidson & Vaast, 2010).

In other terms , Digital entrepreneurship is producing new products and services based on the internet (services running only in the cloud using big data on artificial intelligence) where technology is an input factor as “Digital entrepreneurs often do not really care about the specific technology behind their business idea, they simply focus on the service that is based on it”.(Giones & Brem, 2017, p. 46).

In summary, it can be said that Digital entrepreneurship refers to the practice of developing or creating, and managing innovative businesses or ventures that leverage digital technologies and the internet to create, deliver, or enhance products, services, or experiences. Digital entrepreneurs use technology and online platforms to identify opportunities, develop and market their offerings, and build sustainable and scalable businesses in the digital age.

Definition of Digital Social Entrepreneurship

Through the previous definitions of digital entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship, the definition of this concept can be easily determined, as it can be said that Digital social entrepreneurship refers to the process that integrates digital technology with social entrepreneurship to solve social problems and promote the digitization of opportunities, resources, governance, and value measurement(Zhiyang, Chenfang, & Bin, 2020, p. 3).

Digital social entrepreneurship refers to the intentional use of digital technology by social purpose organizations to address social and environmental problems. It involves the application of digital innovations and technology to create transformative solutions and achieve social impact(Cannon & Dart, 2023).

From above we can conclude that the objective of digital social entrepreneurs is to merge business principles with a focus on social or environmental objectives, where the employment of technology is a mean to facilitate constructive transformation. In another word, social digital entrepreneurship refers to the use of digital technologies, online platforms, and innovative strategies in order to tackle social and environmental challenges to generate favorable impacts on society. This process entails harnessing digital instruments, such as websites, mobile applications, social media, data analysis,

and other technologies, to create and deploy solutions that address urgent social matters.

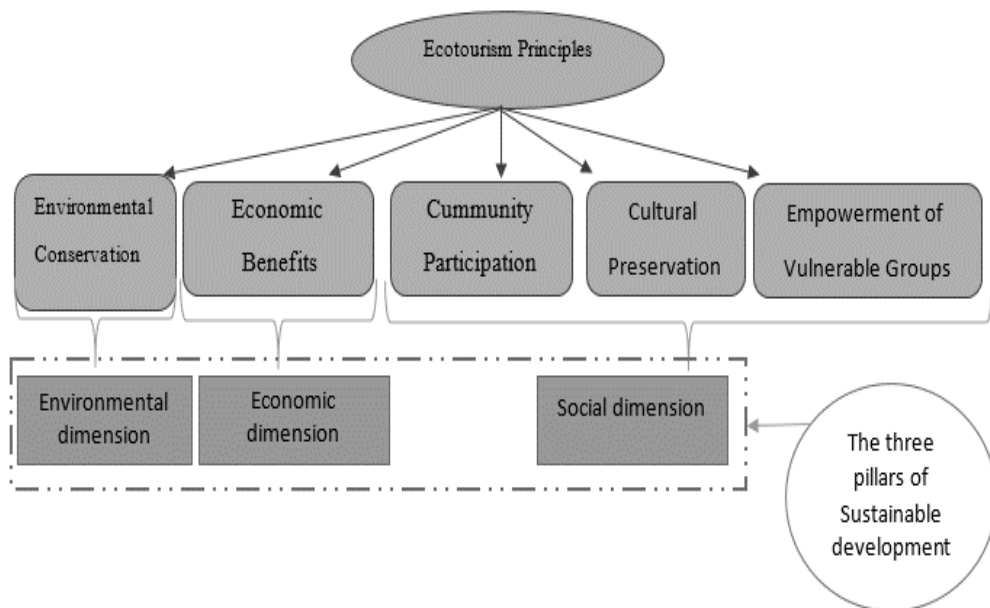
Definition of the Ecotourism Sector

Ecotourism is defined by Kropinova and others as a type of tourism that focuses on responsible travel to natural areas, aiming to educate and inspire visitors while conserving the environment and benefiting local communities. According to the same previous Authors, this particular form of Tourism aligns most comprehensively with the principles of sustainable development as Ecotourism aims to diminish the impact of tourism on ecological environments, foster initiatives for nature conservation, and advance the well-being of local communities (Kropinova, Anokhin, & Primak, 2023).

The International Community for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, in 1999, established a definition for ecotourism as "a responsible travel to natural areas that preserve environment and ensure the continued well-being of the indigenous population." (Mimoune, 2023, p. 87)

In other terms, the ecotourism sector is a part of the tourism industry that aims to provide sustainable travel experiences to natural areas. This sector follows the principles of sustainable development as this green form of tourism aims to balance economic development with the protection of natural and cultural resources as illustrated in the figure below:

Figure (01): Ecotourism Fundamental Principles



Source: Prepared by the Researchers based on (Cobbinah, 2015, p. 182)

Methods

Digital social entrepreneurship as a tool for developing the Ecotourism sector - Presenting successful international experiences

The researchers used the descriptive method, as it relies on defining the various concepts related to digital social entrepreneurship while also shedding light on the pivotal contribution of this modern innovative form of entrepreneurship in bolstering the growth and progress of the ecotourism sector. In order to effectively elucidate this significant contribution, we selected a sample of a few successful international experiences and examples in this regard. Data is collected from scientific articles, international reports, books, and websites.

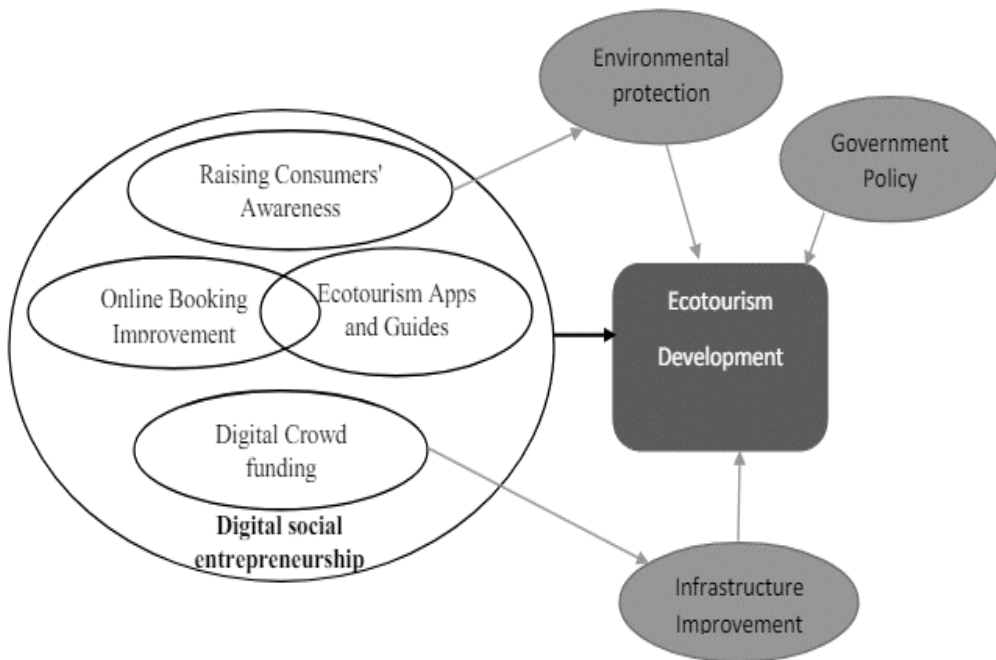
Results and Discussion

1. The Contribution of the Digital Social Entrepreneurship in the development of Ecotourism

Digital social entrepreneurship has a substantial and noteworthy influence on the advancement and progress of the ecotourism sector. This impact is achieved through the utilization and exploitation of cutting-edge digital technologies and novel, inventive methods that aim to foster and advocate for sustainable and responsible travel experiences.

To highlight, the presence of digital social entrepreneurship is not the only factor influencing the growth and advancement of the ecotourism sector. However, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of other pivotal variables that play a crucial role in this development, with particular emphasis on the policies implemented by the government within this specific field and the underlying infrastructure that supports and facilitates the sector's operations. In order to foster the expansion and enhancement of this sector within the Algerian context, we have put forth a comprehensive model (Figure 02) that elegantly elucidates the intricate ways in which digital entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst for the progression and prosperity of the tourism sector.

Figure (02): Proposed Model for Ecotourism Development



Source: Prepared by the Researchers

The following points explain more precisely the contribution of digital entrepreneurship to the development of the ecotourism sector:

1.1 Promoting Online Platforms for Sustainable Travel Booking

The proliferation of digital social entrepreneurship initiatives has led to the creation of online platforms that connect eco-conscious travelers with sustainable and responsible travel options as these online platforms offers eco-friendly accommodations and green tourism activities, allowing users to make well-informed and environmentally conscious decisions. Additionally, these platforms play a crucial role in facilitating community based tourism initiatives by bridging the gap between local communities and travelers seeking authentic and immersive experiences.

In addition to the mentioned above, social entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in the establishment of collaborative online platforms that bring together various stakeholders in the tourism industry, including government bodies, non-government organizations and local communities as this platforms serve as a hub for knowledge sharing, best practices and collaborative efforts aimed at fostering sustainable tourism development.

Digital social entrepreneurship as a tool for developing the Ecotourism sector - Presenting successful international experiences

Furthermore, these digital platforms have the potential to support the implementation and promotion of ecological certification and rating systems for accommodations and tour operators as social entrepreneurs can develop tools that aid travelers in identifying and selecting businesses with recognized ecofriendly practices, which will improve the quality of services in this field(Zainol & Rahman, 2023).

1.2 Raising Consumers' Awareness about Ecotourism

Digital social entrepreneurship encompasses the use of digital marketing strategies to promote sustainable destinations and attracting responsible travelers by raising awareness about the ecological and cultural significance of destinations through the means of social media campaigns, content marketing and online storytelling.

In other terms, digital social entrepreneurs have taken the initiative to create online educational platforms that aim to raise awareness about responsible and sustainable travel practices since these platforms provide travelers with a plethora of resources, guides and interactive content that serve to inform and educate them about the environmental and cultural impact of their choices.

Furthermore, digital social entrepreneurs are using Virtual Reality Technology “VR” to offer virtual tours to convince green consumers to visit natural places, which will improve the ecotourism sector since these immersive experiences allow individuals to virtually explore natural environments and wildlife conservation efforts, thereby promoting awareness and garnering support for sustainable practices.

1.3 Digital Crowd funding for Sustainable Tourism Projects

Digital crowd funding is the practice of leveraging modest sums of money from a large network of people through social media and crowd funding websites to launch a new business endeavor. Social entrepreneurs have recognized the potential of digital crowd funding platforms as a means to support community driven ecotourism projects as these platforms seek funding for a variety of initiatives, such as nature conservation projects, sustainable infrastructure development and community based tourism enterprises(Chandna, 2022).

1.4 Ecotourism Apps and Guides

Digital social entrepreneurs are involved in the development of ecotourism apps and guides that provide travelers with comprehensive

information regarding the environmental and cultural significance of specific locations as these digital tools enhance the overall travel experience by offering valuable insights into the unique features of ecological destinations.

In conclusion, digital social entrepreneurship in the ecotourism sector revolves around leveraging technology to promote responsible and sustainable travel practices and support local communities by preserving the natural and cultural heritage and these initiatives contribute significantly to the overarching objective of making a positive impact on the environment and fostering a more sustainable tourism industry.

2. Successful International Digital Social Entrepreneurship Experiences in the Ecotourism Sector

Benefiting from international experiences holds significant importance in order to formulate a comprehensive and well-defined strategy for the purpose of effectively developing and enhancing the eco-tourism sector in Algeria. Below we will review a group of successful international experiences in the field of exploiting digital social entrepreneurship in developing the ecotourism sector.

✓ 2.1. iNaturalist (U.S.A)

iNaturalist is an online nonprofit social network for citizen scientists and a phone app that allows people to post photo observations of organisms in nature. It is used for collecting, identifying, and mapping biodiversity worldwide. The platform utilizes artificial intelligence technology to process uploaded images and identify various biodiversity data. This app supports community learning and collaboration, allowing users to record data, share it with fellow naturalists, and discuss research results. Moreover, this platform is used for ecological, environmental, and biodiversity research, as well as in biology learning to train science process skills and taxonomy learning. iNaturalist also enables the participation of diverse volunteers, including young people and those with limited science experiences, and facilitates science learning and the development of science competence and understanding (Goldberg, 2023, p. 2).

Digital social entrepreneurship as a tool for developing the Ecotourism sector - Presenting successful international experiences

Figure (03): iNaturalist Website Vision



Source:(Lehightrails, 2020)

This Digital social entrepreneurship example contributes to ecotourism development by serving as a popular science data portal that allows users to submit pictures of biological observations, which are then reviewed by the online community and used for biodiversity research. It also provides a platform for users to plan community projects and bio-blitzes, as well as learn more about species identification and biodiversity.

Furthermore, iNaturalist promotes and encourages Eco tourists to partake in nature oriented experiences such as observing wildlife and exploring botanical wonders as these activities are instrumental in establishing a deeper connection with the natural world and cultivating a genuine appreciation for various natural habitats and make consumers more aware of ecotourism importance.

In addition, the information produced by iNaturalist is used to offer assistance for local preservation efforts in ecotourism locations by meticulously documenting occurrences of different species and gathering essential information about their habitats, in other terms, this online platform actively contribute to the knowledge foundation necessary for the efficient planning and management of conservation efforts.

Overall, the integration of iNaturalist into ecotourism endeavors not merely heightens visitor interaction and engagement but also significantly contributes to the enduring viability and longevity of ecotourism destinations. In other terms iNaturalist plays a significant role as a highly regarded instrument for the advancement of ecotourism by fostering the dissemination of knowledge regarding the environment, encouraging active citizen involvement in scientific research, endorsing ethical and sustainable travel practices, and facilitating cooperation and coordination in the preservation of

biodiversity.

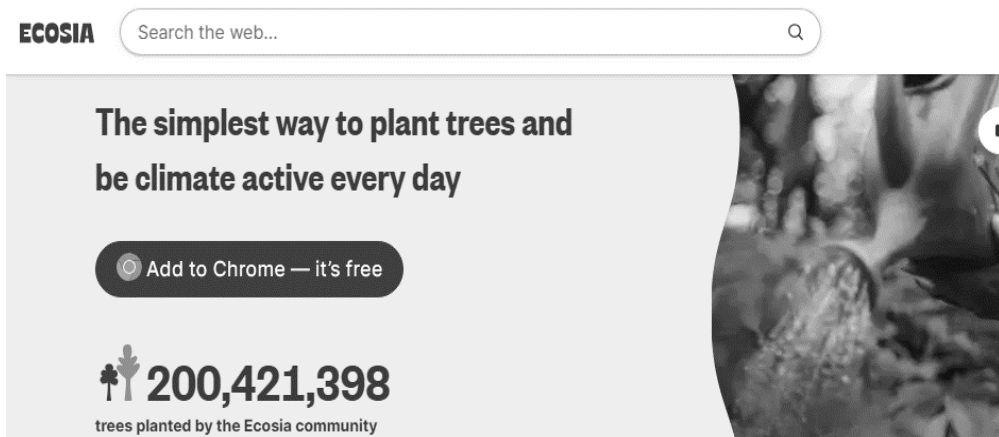
✓ 2.2 Ecosia (Germany)

Ecosia is a search engine and Google alternative that aims to promote sustainable development and environmental conservation by donating most of its profits towards tree planting and forest protection projects. It is a nonprofit certified B-Corporation that funds high-impact agroforestry and tree planting initiatives around the world (Cussans, 2023, p. 84).

Founded in 2009 by Christian Kroll, Ecosia operates on a cause-related marketing strategy, where users can benefit themselves while helping social causes. This new form of search engines follows a green social business model by donating most of its revenues to the world wildlife fund. This model is based on innovation management values, which involves continuous reconsideration and negotiation of values to manage the business model innovation as this search engine plants a tree for every forty-fifth search made by a user, contributing to mitigating the effects of climate change and deforestation. Moreover, this search engine has been implemented in various projects, including a multidisciplinary initiative aimed at the secondary prevention of the loss of autonomy for patients with traumatic brain injury and stroke (Sharma, Misri, & Pandey, 2020, p. 45).

As demonstrated in the Figure 04, the official front page of the Ecosia shows that search ad profits have funded the planting of over 200 million trees since its creation.

Figure (04): Ecosia Search Engine Front Page



Source:(Ecosia, 2024)

Several ecotourism destinations worldwide are currently faced with a variety of significant challenges, such as deforestation, loss of habitat, and environmental degradation. These threats not only damage the natural beauty and ecological integrity of these areas but also threatens their potential as

Digital social entrepreneurship as a tool for developing the Ecotourism sector - Presenting successful international experiences

sustainable and thriving ecotourism destinations. However, Ecosia's attempts at reforestation plays a crucial role in the conservation and protection of these environmentally fragile regions since this reforestation contribute to the restoration and preservation of the natural ecosystem. In other terms, Ecosia reforestation initiatives effectively ensures the long-term viability and resilience of the valuable ecotourism destinations.

Overall, the extent of Ecosia's direct involvement in the development of ecotourism may be limited, but its efforts to preserve the environment from climate change, deforestation and many other problems, indirectly contribute to the advancement and endurance of ecotourism projects on a global scale as shown in the figure below:

Figure (05): The Role of Ecosia in Ecotourism Development



Source: Prepared by the Researchers

✓ **2.3. Book Different (Netherlands)**

BookDifferent is a social enterprise that provides a free online platform for travelers to explore and reserve accommodations that prioritize the concepts of environmental sustainability and responsible tourism practices by endorsing eco-friendly alternatives and endorsing accommodations that are dedicated to sustainability(Sustainableideas, 2024), In other terms, this platform strives to enhance the accessibility and convenience of sustainable travel for globetrotters worldwide. For better understanding of the platform goal, the following figure demonstrated the official company mission announced on twitter:

Figure (06): Book Different Mission



Source:(Bookdifferent, 2019)

This digital platform educates travelers about the consequences of their choices and provides recommendations for reducing their ecological impact while traveling, through its website, blog posts, and social media presence. Moreover, numerous eco-friendly accommodations featured on this platform prioritize job creation, cultural heritage preservation, and community development initiatives, thereby contributing to the economic and social progress of the destinations visited by travelers. This initiative also seeks to foster the expansion of ecotourism by generating a demand for accommodations that are committed to environmental responsibility.

Overall, BookDifferent assumes a crucial role in furthering the expansion of ecotourism by fostering sustainability, heightening awareness, endorsing businesses that uphold environmental responsibility, and fostering responsible travel conduct among individuals who engage in travel.

Conclusion

This study aimed to elucidate the notion of digital social entrepreneurship as a modern form of entrepreneurship that facilitates the development of ecotourism through the promotion of online platforms for sustainable travel booking, Digital crowd funding for ecotourism projects and the potential to leverage it as a mechanism for augmenting consumers environmental and social consciousness.

In addition, the paper was exposed to a number of successful international experiences in the field of digital social entrepreneurship, such as Ecosia, BookDiffrent, and iNaturalist. The purpose behind presenting these experiences is to illustrate how this modern form of entrepreneurship initiatives contribute to ecotourism development, take advantage of these experiences, and apply them in Algeria to advance the ecotourism sector.

Findings

-Digital social entrepreneurship refers to the process that integrates digital technology with social entrepreneurship to solve social problems and promote the digitization of opportunities, resources, governance, and value measurement.

-Ecological tourism is a type of tourism that focuses on responsible travel to natural areas.

-Digital social entrepreneurship in the ecotourism sector revolves around leveraging technology to promote responsible and sustainable travel practices, support local communities, and preserve natural and cultural heritage.

Digital social entrepreneurship as a tool for developing the Ecotourism sector - Presenting successful international experiences

-BookDifferent assumes a crucial role in furthering the expansion of ecotourism by fostering sustainability, heightening awareness, endorsing businesses that uphold environmental responsibility, and fostering responsible travel conduct among individuals who engage in travel.

-Ecosia efforts to preserve the environment from climate change, deforestation and many other problems, indirectly contribute to the advancement and endurance of ecotourism projects on a global scale.

-iNaturalist plays a significant role as a highly regarded instrument for the advancement of ecotourism by fostering the dissemination of knowledge regarding the environment, encouraging active citizen involvement in scientific research, endorsing ethical and sustainable travel practices, and facilitating cooperation and coordination in the preservation of biodiversity.

Recommendations

In order to effectively use digital entrepreneurship for the advancement of the eco-tourism industry in Algeria, this study presents the subsequent recommendations for decision-makers in the country:

-Promoting scientific research in the field digital social entrepreneurship in the ecotourism sector.

-Providing tax relief for digital social entrepreneurs to motivate them to tackle specific issues encountered in eco-tourism development, such as waste management, conservation monitoring, and sustainable transportation.

-Establish policies and regulations that facilitate the practice of digital social entrepreneurship within the eco-tourism sector while ensuring the preservation of environmental sustainability, cultural authenticity, and social inclusivity.

-Exploring contemporary Islamic sources of financial support to digital social entrepreneurs.

-Improving the digital infrastructure, which includes providing a better access to high-speed internet and mobile connectivity, particularly in rural regions and ecotourism-rich areas.

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Digital social entrepreneurship as a tool for developing the Ecotourism sector - Presenting successful international experiences

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