Editorial: Meta-tourism and destination experience

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Meta-tourism is transforming the tourism industry by leveraging advanced digital tools to enhance traveller experiences, streamline business operations, and enable highly personalised services. Core technologies such as online booking platforms, mobile applications, artificial intelligence (AI), virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), and social media have made trip planning more efficient while strengthening marketing efforts. Travellers now rely on apps for real-time bookings, seamless navigation, and access to tailored content, while VR enables them to virtually explore destinations or hotels before making decisions. For tourism businesses, digitalisation significantly improves operational efficiency. Tools for scheduling, data analytics, and workflow management allow companies to better understand customer behaviour, optimise resource allocation, and enhance service delivery. Platform technologies further support data-driven personalisation by analysing large volumes of user data to generate recommendations aligned with individual preferences and past behaviours. Digital transformation is reshaping the tourism landscape by driving innovation that makes travel more accessible, personalised, and sustainable (Ivanov and Webster, 2024). Among the most impactful developments is the integration of AI and machine learning, which expands automation, predictive analytics, and customer engagement capabilities. Digital technologies that have already been proven to enhance quality function deployments in manufacturing, marketing, and operations have emerged from broader advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs). These platforms now play a central role in fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and development, contributing to both social and economic growth.

AR and virtual reality (VR) technologies have transformed how travellers explore and engage with destinations. VR enables potential tourists to virtually experience locations before making travel decisions, offering immersive previews of hotels, attractions, and even entire cities. By simulating real-world environments, VR reduces the uncertainty associated with visiting unfamiliar places and supports more confident, informed choices. AR enhances the on-site travel experience by overlaying digital information onto the physical environment. Travellers can access interactive maps, historical facts, or real-time guidance simply by using their smartphones or AR-enabled devices. In the hospitality sector, internet of things (IoT) technologies further elevate the experience. Smart hotels integrate IoT devices that allow guests to control lighting, temperature, and entertainment systems directly from their mobile phones, improving comfort while enabling hotels to optimise energy usage and reduce operational costs (Buhalis et al.,

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2019). Tourism research consistently highlights the central role of ICTs in enhancing travel experience and generating positive service outcomes. Smart tourism technologies (STTs) supported by AI-driven tools such as AR, VR, and chatbots provide immersive, interactive, and personalised services at scale. These innovations are reshaping how destinations engage with visitors, enabling more seamless, engaging, and intelligent tourism experiences (Sustacha et al., 2023).

The rapid advancement of modern technology during and after the global pandemic has profoundly reshaped the tourism industry, accelerating the integration of innovations such as QR codes, VR, robotic services, and AI to meet the evolving customer expectations. The widespread availability of mobile internet and smart devices has further strengthened the adoption of these digital tools, enhancing both safety and service efficiency. Contactless and mobile technologies have also improved accessibility for travellers with diverse needs, while reducing dependence on physical resources and supporting more sustainable, eco friendly practices. At the same time, the incorporation of AI, VR, and other emerging innovations equips the tourism sector to respond more effectively to future disruptions by enabling adaptable, data driven service models. Collectively, these developments position technology adoption not merely as an operational requirement but as a strategic driver of a more inclusive, efficient, sustainable, and future ready tourism industry (Zhang et al., 2025).

Tourists' adoption of new technologies is typically influenced by factors such as ease of use, perceived trust, and the experiential value these tools provide. In contrast, tourism providers base adoption decisions on cost considerations, organisational readiness, and competitive pressures. Prior research shows that successful technology adoption is strongly associated with higher customer satisfaction and engagement, which subsequently enhance loyalty and revisit intentions (Camilleri and Filieri, 2023). The continuous evolution of ICTs has accelerated the digitalisation of traditional business processes and advanced the integration of the IoT into organisational operations. As firms engage more intensively with virtual technologies, new business models (BMs) emerge within hybrid environments that merge physical and digital components. This shift has significantly contributed to the growth of the new hybrid business economy, driven increasingly by developments linked to the metaverse (Rajagopal and Rajagopal, 2026). In cyber physical ecosystems, business models function through combined physical and virtual world mechanisms that generate both social and economic value. Within this evolving technological landscape, AI is now widely regarded as the 'fifth wave' of computing (Kim, 2024), marking a major phase of transformation characterised by autonomous systems capable of making decisions and operating independently in complex contexts. Digital technology innovation represents a parallel 'fifth wave' of industrial transformation, influencing innovation-driven growth, entrepreneurial activity, and automation strategies. As a result, advancing technologies create both opportunities and challenges, requiring businesses in service-oriented industries such as tourism to adapt their strategies, redesign operations, and navigate broader economic restructuring (Rajagopal, 2025).

The connection between technology adoption and value co creation in tourism has become increasingly prominent. Digital platforms, mobile applications, and immersive technologies enable tourists to actively co create value with service providers by personalising their experiences, sharing feedback, and engaging in interactive, participatory processes (Borges-Tiago and Avelar, 2025). Trust and social influence play essential roles in shaping users' intentions to adopt these technologies. Prior research

highlights the multifaceted importance of AI driven chatbots in fostering trust and delivering reliable information, particularly for solo travellers, emphasising that customisation and problem solving features are vital for effective marketing. Similarly, studies show that trust mediates the relationship between perceived value and intention to adopt QR code payment systems, underscoring the need for proactive trust building strategies to support the adoption of innovative digital payment tools (Zhang et al., 2025).

Smart destinations further strengthen co creation by integrating advanced technological infrastructures that support innovation, sustainability, and accessibility. Built on cutting edge ICT systems, smart destinations enhance tourist interaction with the environment, improve the overall visitor experience, and contribute to the well being of local residents (SEGITTUR, 2015). The implementation of smart tourism technologies (STTs) enables both supply and demand sides to co-create value, enrich experiences, and generate competitive advantages for businesses and destinations. STTs have fundamentally reshaped how visitors experience destinations. With the widespread use of the internet, mobile devices, and social media, businesses and consumers can now connect, interact, create, and share experiences on an unprecedented scale (Sustacha et al., 2023). These technologies empower tourists to participate more actively in shaping their journeys while helping providers deliver more responsive, personalised, and engaging services.

This issue of the journal includes four papers that broadly address pro-tourism behaviour, role of digital platforms in tourism services performance, community engagement, and viewing experiences. The research papers with the above focus represent the study areas of UK, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. These papers discuss contemporary research propositions and attempt to establish convergence between the role of technology, touristic experience, and performance in the competitive technology-led marketplace. I hope this collection of research papers appearing in this issue will enrich the existing literature and stimulate future research.

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