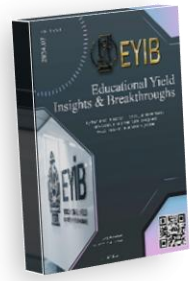
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EVALUATING THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ENHANCING GUEST EXPERIENCES (IN SAMARKAND, UZBEKISTAN)

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Annotatsiya

This article seeks to evaluate how moderntechnologies contribute to enhancing guest experience in tourism and hospitality industry in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. This paper will also focus on the guest journey in hospitality, from planning and preparation to arrival and post-travel. Technology is today being used in each stage of the journey, from applying for and receiving a visa, booking hotels and renting transport, to sharing experiences on the way home. The Government of Uzbekistan has implemented several innovative digital services such as the e-visa, online guest registration, online booking of train tickets, cashless payments via phone, while samarkand have also adopted a new approach to visitor experience in the form of the 3D mapping projection show at the Registan square, Modern Museum of Imam al-Bukhari, modern Silk Road Samarkand complex. With the help of academic literature and studies, this article describes the use of technology at each stage of the guest journey. The findings suggest that technology may facilitate travel as it is faster, easier and more memorable, and is most effective when complemented by the Uzbek people's warm hospitality.

Kalit so'zlar: Technology, guest experience, smart tourism, hospitality, digitalization, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

Introduction.

The hospitality industry plays a huge part in Uzbek culture. An essential part of hospitality is offering your guest a plate of bread and tea. However, now the way we travel has changed. People book their holidays online, check in using their mobile phone, pay for things without any money and take pictures to share on social media. Technology can now be seen as an integral part of the experience. Uzbekistan have kept up with this trend. In 2020 the 'Digital Uzbekistan 2030' strategy was approved (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2020). Many tourism services were moved into the digital world. New modern hotels and interesting venues have opened in Samarkand. This article aims to learn how technology helps improve the experience for tourists in Uzbekistan and Samarkand. The journey itself can be split into four sections: pre-trip, arrival/travel, during your trip and post trip. Each section

will look at what technologies are being used and how it helps improve the tourists experience.

Literature review and research model.

Pine and Gilmore (1998), we are living in an "experience economy" as customers are not only paying for products or services but also for experiences, which includes emotions and moments that they will remember for a long time, where technology can help. Law, Buhalis and Cobanoglu (2014) demonstrated that technology affects every process of hospitality and tourism including marketing, booking, service to guests and feedback. Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang and Koo (2015) brought the concept of "smart tourism" as a destination using data, mobile devices and connected systems to provide guests with better services. Buhalis and Leung (2018) introduced the concept of "smart hospitality" as a connected system of a hotel and room with the guest's mobile phone. One of the most important advantages of technology is being able to personalise experiences. Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2015) came to the conclusion that smart technologies learn about each guest and provide them with personalised services, so the guest's experience will be more valuable. At the same time, some researchers mentioned the use of robots and artificial intelligence. Tung and Law (2017) and Ivanov and Webster (2019) demonstrated that robots or automation can speed up the service process but the human touch is still important for the hospitality industry. According to the original Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), people accept new technology when they perceive it as being useful and user friendly, so tourism technology should be simple and clearly useful for the guest. Acharya, Mekker and De Vos (2023) confirmed that satisfied travel experiences influence guest satisfaction at the destination as well as the willingness to revisit. Based on all of these, the model for this research is as follows: the use of technology in each stage of guest journey increasing convenience and creating memorable moments results in guest satisfaction and their intent to revisit.

Methodology.

In this study a literature-based, qualitative approach was used. No surveys or statistical calculations were made. The article is based on secondary sources such as academic articles and books about technology in tourism and hospitality, official documents of Uzbekistan, and information about digital services and attractions in Samarkand. These sources were compared with the real situation in the city. The analysis focuses on three main points:

1. Which technologies are used by guests in Uzbekistan and Samarkand at each stage of their trip.
2. How these technologies make the guest experience easier and more comfortable.
3. How technology helps to create memorable and personal experiences for guests.

Results and discussion.

The findings of this research demonstrate how technology affects guest experience in all four stages of the journey. Stage one - before the journey - now most of the trips to another country start on the internet. Uzbekistan introduced an electronic visa system in 2018 and now the citizens of many countries can apply for the visa from the comfort of their home without visiting an embassy. Official tourism portal

uzbekistan.travel offers an insight into cities, monuments and routes in various languages. Guests are also able to compare and book hotels in Samarkand via international booking sites and read comments from other visitors thus save time and be sure about their trip, this is "useful and easy" effect that Davis (1989) claims. Stage two - arrive and move around the country - for many tourists the journey begins with the high-speed train Afrosiyob from Tashkent, tickets for which can be purchased on-line via the railway website and app. Once again we see a guest comfort effect but also as Acharya et al. (2023) highlight, with good travel experience the guest's perception of a destination area also improve. Upon arrival in the city foreigners have to be registered and now the E-mehmon system allows the hotels to register guests on-line instead of using paper forms. When guests are moving about the city taxi applications such as Yandex Go eliminate the need to communicate with a driver and avoid discomforts related to native language and find it easier to pay via local payment systems (Click, Payme) or bank card. Stage three - stay - here technology helps create memories. One of the bright examples is the Tourist complex "Silk Road Samarkand", opened in 2022. The complex comprises modern hotels, a congress hall and the territory of "Eternal City". There are smart systems in the complex, for example, the lighting of the square is automatically controlled. Guests are able to relax in comfortable rooms, use modern services and communicate using high-speed Wi-Fi and feel the spirit of Uzbek culture. Another example is a light show - projection mapping - that is displayed on the walls of three madrasahs of Registan square at night. The history of Samarkand is shown in light, music and colors. There is also a convenient digital instrument known as the mobile application "Nazarr", which allows tourists exploring Samarkand's famous sites to take pictures of the monuments with their smartphones and instantly see on their screens interesting historical facts, stories and videos, revitalizing the monument. Yet another example of using technology in the field of cultural heritage is the newly established Museum of Imam al Bukhari located in the reconstructed Memorial Complex in Khartang. The Museum unites nine specialized digital pavilions where deep theological history and modern digital tools are combined. Visitors learn about the life of the famous Muhaddith, his journeys and the complicated process of compiling authentic Hadiths by means of artificial intelligence, interactive tools and 3D-graphics. As in light projection mapping, this modern digital image of the sacred history helps guests from around the world feel closer to history.

All of these great experiences could be called, according to the authors Pine and Gilmore (1998), as memorable. The most important thing is that there is no change in the monument, it just provides a new experience to the guests and adds to their knowledge of the history. On the contrary, the usage of QR code related virtual guides at a hotel and a museum would allow the tourists to learn everything about a monument in their own language with a smartphone. The last stage includes post-tour. Before leaving a land, people share their experience and pictures on social networks, leave reviews on booking pages which not only help other tourists to select a suitable place to visit, hotel to stay, but for Uzbek hotels in Samarkand - is the free advertising and an idea for the hotel managers about their service. Thus, the tourists could enjoy the tour not only during the trip, but also after it. However, as Tung and Law (2017) argue, services which are provided with the help of digital tech should not be able to fully

substitute the humans. The most advantageous service of Uzbek tourism is friendly hosts who can do the host job 5 times faster than a booking form and chatting online.

Recommendations.

To develop the role of technology in guest experiences further, the following steps can be useful:

1. Small hotels and family guest houses in Samarkand can use simple and cheap tools, such as online booking pages, Telegram bots and multilingual QR menus.
2. Museums and monuments can add more digital guides, virtual tours and evening shows, like the one at Registan, to tell their stories in an interesting way.
3. Training programs on digital skills can be organized for hotel staff and guides, so that they can use new technologies confidently while keeping the traditional Uzbek hospitality.

Conclusion.

To conclude, this paper has proved that technology is critical to secure and memorable experience of the Samarkand and Uzbekistan. Prior to the trip, the most important thing that made the planning convenient was e-visa process and availability of online booking. While on the road, electronic train tickets, e-registration in hotels and cars with smartphones equipped with taxi applications and mobile payments made the trip enjoyable. During the visit, the 3D showing at Registan and Silk Road Samarkand brought unforgettable experience; the online review process after the visit continued the impression with the visitors. And of course, most importantly, technology is nothing if it doesn't serve as an additional tool to the warm hospitality of the Uzbek people and Samarkand has great potential to combine the modern technology with the inviting atmosphere that tourists love!

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