

# Chapter 55

## Smart Destination as Key Element: Looking for Improving the Experience of Consumer

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study intends to show the business opportunities generated through the use of technology in the tourism sector by identifying its key elements, with the aim of improving the user's experience. In order to achieve this, the Way of St James has been taken as the object of analysis, given its relevance at a national level as a tourist attraction, and its impact at international level. The methodology applied uses a content analysis of the key technologies that are being used in its promotion, dissemination, information and management. The main results obtained showed that companies are not taking sufficient advantage of social media, which are a key element in user communication and feedback. It was also noted that their webpages had only basic information that was not dynamic enough, and showed an almost general lack of tools such as augmented or virtual reality, and more intuitive interfaces and applications.*

### **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

The use of technology in day to day is a reality, which in the coming years is going to be more present and latent in all areas. One of the areas with largest impact is the tourism industry. Technological changes happened in the last decade are transforming the traditional operations of the tourism industry very

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quickly, and a failure in the adaptation to these changes can have a negative effect on the destinations. Given the importance of these changes, this paper is focused on the important role that technology can play in a destination as a distinguishing element, which enables to get a competitive advantage, in our case, the improvement of the tourists' experience.

Nowadays, most services and activities can be viewed, planned, managed and acquired through a device connected to the Internet. The current tourist is mobile, multi-device, is always connected and looking for personalized service before, during and after the trip (Portela, 2010). For this reason, destinations have to assimilate this new market trend to differentiate their offer as soon as possible.

To become a smart destination should be a goal for the destination authorities because it is considered an immediate market opportunity. Many countries are already working in this direction, for example in Spain through the National Tourism Plan 2012-2015, which establish the smart destinations as one of the main lines of action. The objective is to create a homogenous framework to facilitate the incorporation of the innovation in destinations, providing them with technology, promoting their sustainable development and generating comprehensive experience. Now, the focus is not on a specific product or segment, because it is necessary to work with the idea of destination as a whole, incorporating technology in the tourist experience and in the service offerings. In this stage is where the Internet becomes the key element. The Internet fails to be a tool to be presented as a comprehensive system of organization and management of destinations, establishing relationships between different tourism components in order to be able to communicate with the market individually and with messages, products and services with high added value. In this way, the tourist experience is improved with the widespread use of the Internet in these destinations, mainly through mobile devices. An example of this is that in the "WIFI cities" 80% of the Internet connection is using these devices, 20% by PC, laptop or netbook (Hosteltur, 2013). One out of four minutes consumed in Internet is through a mobile and one of every five travel searches comes from these devices, where more than half of the users visit more than 15 sites and almost a quarter of accesses more than 20 pages before booking, which represents 40% of total expenditure made in one trip (Marcos, 2013). If this strategy is well developed and implemented, it will be possible that tourists have a good experience in an easier way by the technology use. Therefore, it is used to create content, publish their own experiences and give advice, become the best destination messenger thanks to ICT.

According to several experts, there are five technologies helping to transform the tourism sector: cloud computing, which improves flexibility and scalability of organizations, reducing the costs associated with technology, big data, providing large information volumes that can become in specific knowledge of customers and their preferences; digital platforms that facilitate ongoing interaction with customers in order to adjust supply to their specific demands; apps, which are a new model of services and content consumption, and finally, natural interfaces that are transforming the travel experience through devices that are used through gestures, body movements or voice.

This paper seeks to present an approach for the business opportunities generated by the standard use of technologies in the tourism industry by identifying their key elements, with the aim of improving the tourist experience. In order to do that, it will be carried out a case study focused on the tourist attractions of the Way of Saint James. The methodology used will be focus on the evaluation of the offer through a content analysis of all existing technological resources and in-depth interviews were carried out with the Director of Tourism Competitiveness in Galicia and the Director of the Modernisation of the Public Administration who are both in charge of the development of the 2014-2020 *SmartCamiño* plan.

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