

Chapter 11

A Classification of Mobile Tourism Applications

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces mobile technology and discusses its emergence in the tourism industry. As has been the case with other Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), tourism has manifested as one of the most well suited sectors to mobile technology and mobile applications. In contrast to other ICTs in the tourism domain however, mobile applications are capable of enhancing the tourist experience at the destination, creating a paradigm shift in how information is accessed and digested, and transactions performed. Nonetheless, little is known concerning how mobile technologies are changing the landscape of tourism and tourist behaviour and the content offered by tourism applications. In order to address the scarcity of research in this emergent area this paper focuses on mobile applications in the tourism industry and based on a literature survey proposes a framework for evaluating mobile tourism applications.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-041-5.ch011

INTRODUCTION

Information Communication Technologies (ICT) have become a critical element of the tourism industry, forming the 'info-structure' (Buhalis & Law, 2008) and the foundation of information access and use. Mobile phones, in particular, are changing the tourism landscape and the modus operandi of destinations, attractions and traditional tourism information sources, as they seek to match the evolving needs of tourists, who demand high-speed access to relevant information and media content on the move. In 2008, the number of mobile subscribers worldwide reached over four billion (ITU, 2009a). Amongst the proliferation of mobile phones, the smart-phone in particular offers advanced capabilities, comparable with PC-like functionality, often equipped with features such as keyboards or touch screens (Charlesworth, 2009; Park & Chen, 2007).

Before discussing mobile technologies and applications in the tourism sector, it is useful to begin by examining the overarching historic relationship between ICT and tourism. Tourism has long been recognised as an information-based, and information-intensive industry, well suited to ICT (Inkpen, 1994; Poon, 1993; Sheldon, 1997). Over the last ten years in particular, there has been an increase in research concentrating on the Internet and small and large scale operators (Buhalis, 2004; Carroll & Siguaw, 2003; Karanasios & Burgess, 2008), government tourism boards (Raventos, 2006), and tourist behaviour (Davidson & Yu, 2005). Furthermore, research has shown that the preferences and behaviour of tourists have shifted away from standardised packages, designed by tour operators, to individualized products, specifically tailored to customer needs and interests (WTO, 2001), leading to a higher involvement of customers in the planning process (Buhalis, 1999) of which the ICT becomes an important part.

Given the suitability between ICT and tourism, it is no surprise that tourism has emerged as one of the most well suited sectors for mobile appli-

cations. In contrast to other ICTs in the tourism domain however, mobile applications are capable of enhancing the tourist experience at the destination, creating a paradigm shift in how information is accessed and digested, and transactions performed. Werthner and Ricci (2004) suggested that tourists expect to get access to services and information from various devices, whenever and wherever they need it. Others have reasoned that smart-phones have improved the traveller experience (Mamaghani, 2009) and that "mobile travel will soon become 'a must-have' utility for travellers" (Langelund, 2007 p. 286). Supporting this, analysis of tourist backpacker trends reveals that tourists desire mobile applications that match the capabilities of their smart-phones (Pearce, Murphy, & Brymer, 2009).

Destinations management organisations, aware of visitor behaviour, are developing mobile applications in order to differentiate themselves from other destinations and cater to tourism demands. Hyun, Lee, & Hu (2009) argued that value-added mobile services through destination management organisations should be strategically developed to enhance awareness of a destination, satisfy travel experience, and create destination loyalty. Further, it has been suggested that large and mid-sized travel suppliers and intermediaries are likely to launch mobile services in order to stake a claim for their brand in the mobile sphere (Langelund, 2007). Nonetheless, little is known concerning how mobile technologies are changing the landscape of tourism, tourist behaviour and experience in relation to the content delivery of tourism applications.

In this paper we propose a frame of reference for the categorisation of mobile tourism applications and a framework for evaluating mobile tourism applications. This paper is organised as follows. The next section discusses the emergence of mobile tourism applications and the cumulative research in the field. Following this, we outline a means to categorise mobile tourism applications based on their inherent characteristics. Building

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