

Chapter-04

VIRTUAL REALITY IN TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Because of recent breakthroughs in Virtual Reality (VR) technology, the tourism industry has a significant opportunity. Although tourism specialists have debated the topic of virtual reality tourism extensively, the general public has yet to form an opinion on the subject. As a result, this study was done to fill the void and to better understand how individuals of all ages view virtual reality tourism. This study found that respondents have a good attitude toward virtual reality tourism, based on a quantitative and descriptive study with 82 participants. To begin with, virtual reality tourism can be simple and effective, particularly during times like as COVID-19. Second, during periods like COVID, VRT can fill the role of physical travel. Third, Price is one of the factors for consumers to not adopt this technology. Therefore, this study provides factual evidence to confirm the impression of individuals from different age group towards virtual reality tourism.

Keywords: *Virtual Reality, Perception, Tourism, Travel Substitute, E-tourism.*

INTRODUCTION

Through travel booking websites, movies, blogs, and travel images, technology has helped the tourism and tourism industries increase their reach over the last few decades. For travellers planning their next holiday or building a wish list for their location, digital tools and material will be a significant source of information. A Virtual Reality Tour allows a person to customise his surroundings and activities to his liking. With the exception of realistic gravity, topography, movement, and, on rare occasions, real-time action delays, it will be remarkably comparable to the real thing. Although the world may now be poised to take advantage of remote or virtual tourism, which has been debated in corporate circles, due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Virtual reality tourism is an area of research I chose to pursue in my academic career because of recent first-hand experiences with this simulated experience. I wanted to understand more about how valuable Virtual Reality may be in the tourism industry as a technology tool. The current covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns prompted me to reflect on the condition of tourism sector workers and determine whether there is a viable option for them to save their businesses in these unprecedented times. I felt compelled to review the literature on the topic and conduct research to support my hypothesis that Virtual Reality tourism could help people cope with the lockdown mentality induced by pandemics like Covid-19 as a result of my recent experiences with Virtual Reality and a few VR tourism applications. This sector has had a big head start thanks to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. Virtual reality travel is an excellent match for the profile. It can not

only immerse people in fantastic vacation experiences, but it can also do so without exposing them to the risks of physical travel during these trying times. The study has been conducted to fill the void which exists in the previous researches published on the particular topic of VR in Tourism as a majority of those researches have missed out on considering the efficacy of VR in tourism from a consumer/tourist perspective and have limited their scope to investigating the various factors within the VR Tourism industry. There have been many studies on virtual reality with tourism, but more research is needed to understand what customers think about virtual reality tourism. The research will also be useful in determining why customers are not adopting this technology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For many years, computer programmers, futurists, and scientists have speculated about virtual reality (VR) experiences. Recently, there has been a lot of media excitement and discussion regarding the potential applications of virtual reality in society. The article of Williams and Hobson, 1995, will illustrate some of the potential uses of virtual reality in the tourism sector, as well as the technology's realistic flaws. Additionally, some future advances will be highlighted in order to establish when and whether VR will be able to deliver on its promise.

Six areas of tourism in which VR could be particularly useful are planning and management, marketing, entertainment, education, accessibility, and heritage preservation. Virtual reality's potential as a preservation strategy stems in part from its ability to generate virtual experiences that tourists may accept as alternatives for actual visits to threatened sites. However, a tourist's ideas toward authenticity, as well as his or her goals and limits, will influence whether such substitutes are accepted. Future study into the topics covered will assist the sector, and various proposals for future research are offered in the article of Guttentag, 2010.

In the work of Bethapudi, 2013, with the Managing Directors, Directors, General Managers, Team Leaders, and Senior Managers, a purposive sample of 112 managers of tourism, travel, and hospitality firms in India were questioned through a questionnaire. The current research looks at business development, income growth, cost minimization, and client outreach. The study explains the disparities between tourism and other industries.

This study found various favourable effects of the sense of presence in VR experiences, based on two studies, one done in Hong Kong with 202 participants and the other in the United Kingdom with 724 individuals. To begin, having the sensation of being in a virtual environment enhances the enjoyment of VR activities. Second, the

enhanced sense of being there leads to increased liking and preference for the location. Third, a shift in one's mindset leads to an increase in the likelihood of visiting. As a result, this research of Tussyadiah, Wang, Jung and Dieck, 2018, provides empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of virtual reality in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviour.

Despite the fact that virtual reality (VR) is a relatively new tourism technology, little study has been done to determine what variables motivate customers to visit VR-enabled venues. To fill this vacuum in the literature, this study of Kim, Lee and Jung, 2018, used the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory to construct a theoretical framework that included authentic experience, cognitive and affective reactions, attachment, and visit intention with VR tourism. This research elucidates why potential visitors visit sites depicted in virtual reality.

Emerging technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), have had an impact on the tourism supply side as well as travellers. The goal of the research of Beck, Rainoldi and Egger, 2019, is to examine VR tourism research and present a comprehensive state-of-the-art review. This study tries to provide a systematic and structured review of VR, since the technological connotation of the term has changed and now comprises many VR systems with varying capabilities. The overarching goal of this work is to contribute to a better understanding of VR tourism research.

VR technology is fast evolving and deserves more attention in many areas of our lives, including tourism. Rácz and Zilizi, 2019, discuss several applications of virtual reality in tourism in their article. They also go over the important elements of the development process that lead to a VR project's success. Finally showing off their virtual reality application, which takes users on a virtual tour of a Mediterranean tourist area. They clarify the previously mentioned rules in the introduction to their project.

In the tourism industry, virtual reality is becoming increasingly popular. The most studied application thus far has been destination marketing. The technology, on the other hand, has been considered as a technique of limiting or reducing the number of tourists at a certain sight or place. In this way, virtual reality might be thought of as a substitute for a real journey. This research of Rauscher, Humpe and Brehm, 2020, investigates the prospect of using virtual reality technology to transmit real-world experiences to the digital realm.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To analyse the opinion of the general public towards virtual reality tourism.
2. To identify the reasons for consumers to not adopt this technology.
3. To acquire and evaluate individuals' comments on virtual reality tourism.
4. To find out if VRT can substitute the physical travel during times like COVID.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was based on quantitative and descriptive research, with primary data acquired from a Google Forum survey that was distributed across social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram. The survey was conducted online from March 15th to March 28th, 2022, and a total of 82 people replied based on random sampling. A multitude of factors can have an impact on these replies, resulting in inaccurate analysis. As a result, because this study was done on a small scale, none of the findings can be applied to the full population. Forms were filled out in an entirely anonymous manner. The online survey had 29 questions, and responses were rated on a five-point scale (5-strong agreement, 4-agreement, 3-moderate view, 2-disagreement, and 1-strong disagreement), with pie charts and histograms applied for analysis. The data was collected using a self-structured questionnaire based on the literature.

ANALYSIS

This paper focused at how individuals feel about virtual reality tourism and whether they see it in a positive or negative light. A survey was conducted to determine the public's perspective, and the factors considered yielded the results with 82 responses. Males made up the bulk of participants (51.2%), with females coming in second with 45.1%. Out of 82 respondents, 3.7% of them opted to remain anonymous about their gender. Almost over 95% of the people were over the age of 18 or above.

The youth appeared to be the most engaged in the survey, with the most of those who took part were between the ages of 18 and 24 (67.1%). The majority of people had at least attended college or university, indicating that they were well-educated and knowledgeable. Additionally, socio-segment data of the respondents was obtained, with the majority of students first, followed by full-time, part-time employment, unemployed and then retired. Prior to Covid-19, the majority of respondents only travelled less than twice each year. Following that, 34.1 percent of respondents said they travel three to four times per year. 62.2% of the respondents said they experienced no motion sickness, 15.9% said they had it occasionally while 2.4% said they didn't know if they had it or

not. During Covid-19, the majority of respondents didn't travel anywhere each year and even if they did, it was only once a year. Following that, 19.5% of respondents said they travelled twice a year. 41.5 percent of respondents said they didn't feel secure travelling during covid, 28 percent said they felt safe while 2.4 percent said they weren't sure. Also majority of the respondents were aware of the virtual reality technology. It was also found out that 46.3% of the respondents had tried VR technology while 39% yet have to try. Moreover, half of the respondents don't find it hard to adapt to the new technologies.

Price remained the most opted option for respondents to not use this VR technology which proves the assumption made in this study. Majority of the respondents felt VR very enjoyable and easy to use while 18.3% and 17.1% were neutral about it respectively.

It was also clear that most of the respondents tried to keep up with the latest technological advances and hence were aware of virtual reality tourism. 39% of the respondents very strongly felt that virtual reality tourism would make their travel plannings very comfortable while 30.5% felt neutral. It was also found out that majority of the respondents felt very stressful to stay confined at home in lockdown period and therefore, VR tourism seems like a good tool for reducing the lockdown mentality.

Hence, one of the assumptions made was proved. Moreover, if given access to, majority of respondents were willing to use the system and they also felt interested in employing computer-based technologies such as virtual reality with tourism. When it came to the affordability, majority of the respondents were neutral about it, 24.4% felt that people could afford it but 9.6% strongly agreed whereas 19.5% didn't feel the same and 15.9% were strongly against. Majority also felt that this technology would become a barrier and interfere their daily routine.

Around 32.9% were neutral about whether this technology would offer more disadvantages than benefits. Also 34.1% weren't sure if they have hard time trusting technological equipment especially for tourism purpose. Furthermore, most of the respondents were also scared of the concept of making a blunder when using a technological gadget. But nonetheless, majority felt that they could let go of their real-world problems in virtual stimulation and would love to try virtual reality tourism and recommend to others as well.

There were comments provided by the respondents as well where they found out to appreciate the VR technology and VR tourism but few comments which weren't in the favour, also found. It was finally clear that the majority favoured VR tourism and

would love to try once. Though, it has its drawback as well and needs more improvements in the future but nonetheless the benefits of the technology exceed the drawbacks. The perception towards VR tourism was positive overall.

CONCLUSION

Considering virtual reality's ever-evolving technology, a person might conceivably get a thorough tour experience through virtual reality. Although some argue that virtual reality will never be a substitute for being in nature, seeing, and breathing in a real setting, VR has the potential to transform the tourism industry. People who are terminally sick or have physical limitations may benefit greatly from the further development of such technology, as it may allow them to enjoy virtual tours of beautiful locations. Technological improvements may provide a solution for tourists who enjoy high-risk activities. Virtual reality tourism has a positive image; cost may be a reason in why people do not adopt this technology; and virtual reality tourism can help with the lockdown mindset, according to the three assumptions made in this study article. Though the fourth assumption, that the technology has more drawbacks than benefits, cannot be regarded legitimate because, while virtual reality tourism has drawbacks, the benefits outweigh them. The general opinion of virtual reality tourism was favourable.

SUGGESTIONS

VR tourism research should be kept updated with technology advancements. For the sake of inspection and valid information study, new information should be acknowledged in research. Testing should be carried out by people from various countries in order to achieve accurate and significant results. Following the respondents' VR tourist experience, research should be undertaken to learn more about the various aspects.

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