

Editorial Preface

Angelo A. Camillo, Woodbury University, Burbank, CA, USA

SPECIAL NOTE FROM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The digital revolution has had a powerful impact on a variety of industries and sectors. The tourism, hospitality, and leisure industries in particular have witnessed a dynamic shift as more consumers are turning to digital platforms and service providers to plan and complement their personal recreational activities. Understanding the true potential of integrating digital services and tools into the customer experience is an essential component for success in the digital economy.

After almost a decade since the last hospitality related journal was introduced and published, The International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management in the Digital Age (IJTHMDA) was launched to explore managerial solutions, business models, digital tools, and service innovations for maintaining a competitive edge in the hospitality, travel, and leisure industry. The main scope was to narrow and close the gap between educators, students, researchers, and practitioners in the field of hospitality and tourism. Emphasizing topics such as web-based platforms for travel planning and management, online reviews and their impact on brand trust, and mobile technologies and apps for tourism engagement and enhancement, IJTHMDA presents emerging research and real-world examples of how technology is reshaping the tourism, travel, and hospitality industries. IJTHMDA aims to be a pivotal reference source for emerging research, concepts, and managerial solutions within the hospitality and tourism industry with emphasis on the impact of technology on consumer behavior, service demand and delivery, and customer experience.

One of the problems that remains with the current state of hospitality studies is that academic research and publishing is still relatively new compared to other journals in the area of business in general and management. As a result, the impact factors remain rather low, except for a few journals which enjoy a very high rating. Accordingly, much more work needs to be done to climb to the rank of other academic journals as they bring recognition, fame, and prestige to the various institutions with which research scholars are affiliated.

Understandably, IJTHMDA is just in its infancy and there is a long road ahead until maturity. Nevertheless, the journal meets the research needs of managers, business executives, researchers, educators, and graduate-level students in the areas of travel and tourism, hotel management, event planning, luxury services, and restaurant management. The double – blind reviewed manuscripts undergo a rigorous scrutiny by expert scholars before being considered for publication. This first issue has marked a desk rejection rate of 60% and a blind review rejection rate of 40%.

The hospitality, travel, and tourism industry is unique as it encompasses all major sectors of any economy: service, production, and trade. And, for as long as people live, they will need to eat, drink, and sleep; therefore, this industry will continue to engage scholars and practitioners until the end of time. By conducting research to explain and solve problems, and by developing theories to prevent problems, we will advance our studies which involve not only humans, but also the entire environment surrounding us. Using some borrowed words, I conclude that we as research scholars

will continue to investigate, find, determine, and attempt to explain phenomena which, at the end, will be the ultimate answer to our scientific inquiry.

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This issue of the IJTHMDA opens with a paper authored by Surender Kumar, Karuna Chauhan, and Abhay Kumar Srivastava titled: *Role of ICT and Tourism in Economic Growth of India*. Their research deals with tourism being seen as an opportunity for the economic growth of developing economies as its demand is still growing. Over the years, tourism mediation has experienced major changes, including the arrival of the Internet and the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The paper investigates the relationship between ICT, tourism, and growth of India by employing co-integration, error correction models, and Granger causality tests using annual data from the last two decades. The major focus is to test the existence of a long-term equilibrium relationship between international tourism, ICT, and economic growth. “In Indian economy, it seems that tourism is led by economic growth and we are not able transform our strength in ICT to the expected level.” In this study, the authors have made efforts to highlight the ability of tourism to become a leading factor of influence on GDP through optimum use of ICT.

In the next paper, Ebru Tekin Bilbil presents research on “The Role of the UNWTO in VISA Facilitation; The Diverse Impacts on Tourism Industries of China, Russia and Turkey.” The author argues that in the last decade, many destinations made substantial improvements in their VISA rules and procedures as reflected in the reports prepared by the UNWTO. The article first argues that the impact of the UNWTO on state behavior in VISA liberalization has become more significant in relation to the convergence of states’ interests that are constrained with the conditions in the international environment (such as financial crises), and global political ties embodied within the international forums (such as the G20). Second, analyzing the diverse impacts of the changing rules and procedures applied in VISA policies on tourism indicators in the selected countries, the article argues how different rules and procedures produce different policy outcomes in tourist VISAS, and how this diversity generates different tourism indicators. The article suggests more diverse VISA facilitation techniques (i.e., in Turkey) could boost the impact of VISA facilitation on inbound tourism (i.e., China and Russia).

The third paper, authored by Francesca Di Virgilio, Isabell C. Camillo, and Angelo A. Camillo, presents research on “The impact of social network on Italian users’ behavioral intention for the choice of a medical tourist destination.” The findings reveal that medical tourism is not a new phenomenon: mankind has traveled to foreign lands to access treatment for many years. Current research shows that many aspects of medical tourists’ behavior are under-researched. One greatly unexplored aspect is the impact of social media on tourists’ behavior for the choice of tourist medical destination, which is the original focus of this research. The paper explores how a social network can become a strategic platform using electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) as a tool for disseminating fast and detailed information for the choice of medical tourist destination. The findings support the development of medical tourism communication strategies focused on the online contexts as factors capable of influencing medical tourists’ behavior in a more efficient way. Implications and future research directions are presented and discussed.

The fourth paper, titled “How Do Online Reviews Affect Business Travelers’ Accommodation Choices? The Application of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)” is authored by Faranak Memarzadeh, Shane Blum, and Charlie Adams. Their research focuses on parameters of online reviews that affect business travelers’ attitude and subjective norms on intention to purchase. The sub-constructs of attitude include: the quality of offered service, the value of money, hotel business facility, hotel security, food and beverage, and service recovery. Panel database, which was provided by Qualtrics,

was used to examine the hypotheses of this study. Data was collected from 275 business travelers who stayed at a hotel in the last six months and read e-comments in advance of the purchase. Results of hypotheses testing indicated that quality of offered service, the value of money, and subjective norms have a positive effect on business travelers' intention to purchase. The findings of the research are valuable to both hoteliers and online-review website operators. Since business travelers are considered an important target market in the hotel industry, hoteliers need to put more emphasis on these factors to attract more business travelers.

Articles

1. Surender Kumar, Karuna Chauhan, and Abhay Kumar Srivastava. Role of ICT And Tourism in Economic Growth of India
2. Ebru Tekin Bilbil. The Role of the UNWTO in Visa Facilitation: The Diverse Impacts on Tourism Industries of China, Russia and Turkey
3. Francesca Di Virgilio, Isabell C. Camillo, and Angelo A. Camillo. The impact of social network on Italian users' behavioral intention for the choice of a medical tourist destination
4. Faranak Memarzadeh, Shane Blum, and Charlie Adams. How Do Online Reviews Affect Business Travelers' Accommodation Choices? The Application of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)
Angelo A. Camillo
Editor in-Chief
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Angelo A. Camillo, PhD is Associate Professor of Strategic Management at Woodbury University in Burbank California, USA. He has over 35 years of international hospitality industry management experience and has worked and lived in ten countries and four continents. He holds a degree from Heidelberg Hotel Management School Germany, a MBA from San Francisco State University, and a PhD from Oklahoma State University. He teaches courses in Strategic Management, Global Enterprise Management, Entrepreneurship, Management Consulting, and special topics in Hospitality Management and Business Development. He is also hospitality business consultant to major international corporations.