Chapter 10

Analysis of the Contribution of ICT to Cultural and Religious Tourism: In Communicating Religious Heritage to Visitors and Tourists

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ABSTRACT

The rise of new technologies in society have contributed to increase the tourism experience and caused changes in tourist behavior, while contributing to the acquisition of knowledge about the visited spaces, in general, and specifically to the religious tourist. Mobile technology with context-aware applications is relevant to supporting the religious tourist in their decision-making process, which in general includes searching, processing, and using information to solve problems. The methodology involved the development of a questionnaire with the objective of analyzing the influence of the use of personal technology on the religious tourism experience of places and culture in Valencia. The findings indicate that the utilization of ICT has positive implications in the cultural and religious tourism experience, mainly when visiting a cultural point of interest, and has contributed to planning a more successful trip, even contributing to adding value to the travel and to a learning experience associated with the acquisition of cultural knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism is one that leads more people to travel with the purpose of visiting religious and sacred spaces, as well as participating in pilgrimages and religious events. As with other types of cultural tourists, a religious tourist planning to visit a destination needs to plan their trip. In the trip planning there are several steps to take into consideration to meet the expectations of the traveler, whatever tourism they prefer. The trip planning is initiated by the collection of information about the destination, from price to the opinions of other tourists, in order to understand what they are going to visit, such as cultural events, cultural points of interest, thematic itineraries, among others. Then to share with the family or friends the information they have found and show them the possibilities of visiting places, attending events, accommodation, air tickets, itineraries, with the intention of defining a common goal among all traveling companions: family, friends, or colleagues.

The next step is the choice of where to stay, travel dates, different transport options, cultural and entertainment events, and places to be visited, with a view to meeting all the different preferences of the traveling companions. Following on from the previous step, the tourist should purchase or reserve accommodation, transportation, and entry into attractions, if included in the trip, in order to guarantee the necessary amenities to enjoy the trip, taking into consideration the cultural aspect of the travel. At the destination, the tourist will collect information about religious sites and events, to experience the religious environment as well as to acquire knowledge about the destination, in order to have a memorable trip. On returning home, the cultural tourist will finally share on social networks and blogs the knowledge acquired and the memories acquired during the journey, on an emotional, physical, and spiritual level.

Currently, all the steps presented above are carried out to obtain and communicate information, since information is the motor of the tourist activity (Sheldon, 1989), with the support of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). ICT allows the communication of information beyond the time and space in which they are produced, since it is possible to read, photograph, or visualize something produced many years ago (Cantoni & Danowski, 2015). At the same time, ICT has enabled the expansion of interaction over space and time (Giddens, 1984), and contributes to acquiring cultural knowledge and to adding value to the cultural heritage visited during a trip.

Mobile Technology, with context-aware applications, is relevant to supporting cultural tourism as it permits the tourist to search, process, and use the information to experience the most personalized cultural trip (Brown & Chalmer, 2003), in general, and in specific terms to people traveling for religious motives. At the tourism destinations (Vukonic, 1997), religious tourists, visitors, and residents have been affected by all new kinds of technologies, such as electronic travel guides, interactive maps, navigation systems, social media, websites, mobile apps, among others, to enrich their travel and daily life, as a support to communicating the information about places, heritage, and traditions of the destination in general, and in particular about the cultural environment.

However, people have different cultural backgrounds and levels of knowledge, different cultural preferences, and different experiences. To make known all the dimensions of the cultural heritage of a destination it is necessary to communicate it in a simple way, independently of the personal background, different cultural preferences, and different elements and points of interest that have to be explained clearly. In this context, it is relevant to include mobile apps and websites to transmit the cultural and religious heritage, to share knowledge and to educate visitors, while achieving the communication goals. And, it is relevant to understand how ICT contributes to educating and communicating religious heritage and at the same time creates a technological experience that adds value to the trip.
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