Leveraging on Digital Technologies to Up-Scale Tourism for Economic Growth in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The application of digital technologies in various human endeavours today is unabated. This article presents information and communications technologies (ICTs) as a driving force for promoting tourism in Africa for accelerated economic growth. Descriptive methodology was used in the study. The study relied on the explored impacts of tourism on socio-economic development of the developing nations of Africa and encourages the adoption of persona models in implementing technological strategies geared toward the promotion of tourism products and services on the continent. The article advocates technology compliance by all tourism organizations and involvement of all stakeholders, agencies of governments and ICT drivers in making Africa a destination of choice to the world by adopting appropriate technological provisions.

KEYWORDS

Africa, Economic Growth, ICT, Tourism, Tours And Trips

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a sector that has remained relevant over time in the world’s history. Due to its attractive nature, tourism has not only drawn many visitors but also supports the growth of the economies of continents that have identified and aligned with its inherent economic benefits. In the year 2013, the World Bank reported that the tourism industry in the sub-Saharan Africa would spur more economic growth for the area and proudly employ 6.7 million people by 2021 (World Bank, 2013). Furthermore, the World Travel and Tourism Council reported in the same year that:

the tourism sector is directly and indirectly responsible for 8.8 percent of the world’s jobs (258 million); 9.1 percent of the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (US$6 trillion); 5.8 percent of the world’s exports (US$1.1 trillion); and 4.5 percent of the world’s investment (US$652 billion). It is estimated that 3.8 million jobs (including 2.4 million indirect jobs) could be created by the tourism industry in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) over the next 10 years (World Bank, Africa House, & ATA, 2010; WTTC, 2013).

This presented an amazing future for the SSA with effect from 2013. Africa has a rich ecosystem, not only for human habitation but also for tourism. The vast landmass, large water bodies, and numerous natural resources in the continent provide exciting platforms and sites for tourists attraction across the land. Some of these interesting sites found in different countries of the continent include waterfalls,
beaches, game reserves, aquariums, rainforests, Wildlife, lakes, scenic beauty, natural habitats, natural meal cuisines, cultural heritage, etc. There are also some man-made or human-enhanced collections of beautiful sight like arts galleries, museum of natural histories and wars, potteries centres, resorts, international hotels, recreation parks, etc. (Itumo, 2017).

In the developed world, tourism enhances economic growth by helping generate a substantial income earned through foreign exchanges (World Bank-AFTFP, 2011). This is obviously not the case in Africa. Although Africa is blessed with huge potentials, the tourism opportunities are yet to be optimally utilized to support sustainable development. Sadly, the natural tourist centers that abound in the continent are largely not discovered and so remain unknown to the rest of the world who would need them for recreational, educational, or religious purposes. Due to the apparent hidden nature of these resources, therefore, they have become untapped and their potentials unharnessed. This implies wasting away what should ultimately generate revenues for the continent.

As we approach the predicted year 2023, how close are we to the reality? Africa would be able to meet this target and exceed its expectation with huge supports from its stakeholders, policy makers, investors and strategic planners and leveraging on computing technologies, which define the new way of doing things today.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses related works in ICT adoption for tourism promotion in Africa and concepts bordering on smart tourism and digital marketing as a collection of tools for developing the travels and tours sector in Africa are explored. A brief analysis on the personas model as applicable to the sub-Saharan African scenario is performed. Section 3 discusses digital avalanche for tourism promotion in Africa. Here, the recent digital tools and options are enumerated and applied to African peculiar environment. The benefits of leveraging on ICT for tourism promotion in the continent are presented in Section 4 and the conclusion is drawn in Section 5.

2. ICT ADOPTION IN THE AFRICAN TOURISM INDUSTRY

From when the ICT found its way into the society, it has continuously penetrated deeply and permeates every facet of the human life. Today, there is hardly an identified area in the society where digital technologies have not gained access into and have not in real terms transformed. ICT has the propensity to transform any area where it is applied. In this paper, we argue that ICT can help tourism boost the economic purse of Africa.

Studies by Iain et al. (2016) and Itumo (2017) have shown the possibilities of Africa’s economy significantly improving through tourism. However, these can only become a reality with strategic plans and structured modalities to make the tourist sites in the continent visible and attractive to the prospective tourists. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, typically through aggressive promotion. In marketing, advertising and products promotion are key tools that must be given due attention if a firm is to remain in business. Since every product requires an adequate exposure for increased patronage, the tourism industry in Africa cannot but adopt adequate techniques to showcase its blessings to the rest of the world.

Previous studies on tourism in Africa had focused on the developmental rates across countries in the continent (Martín et al., 2017). Others were interested in estimating and forecasting the demand for tourism and probable income that can be or has been generated through the multiplier process. All of these studies leave a lacuna in the area of tourism promotion in the sub-saharan African region for which this paper attempts to address using computing privileges as the tool.

The present-day availability of digital tools and avenues provides the opportunities for announcing to the world the blessings of God in the region. ICTs grant us the ability to take a glance at a tourist site before actually planning a trip. Websites such as Yelp, TripAdvisor and other online travel research sites make it easier for one to digitally explore places and have a digital experience of those places before thinking of an adventure there.