

An Evaluation of the Current Status of the Use of Information and Communication Technology in Tourism Industry (E-Tourism): The Case of Shiraz

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction

Tourism as one of the most important phenomena of the third millennium has significantly influenced the growth and economic dynamism, and cultural exchanges of countries over the past half century. As such, many scholars have called this period the century of tourism.

"Iran is a country with four seasons and a few thousand years of civilization, including diverse and unique historical, religious, cultural, natural, and so on" (Ashraf Zadeh, Madadi, Khademi, & Boniadi, 2011, p. 84). And attraction enrichment in Iran has caused the world to call for a boundary. As believed by many experts and affirmed by UNESCO, now Iran ranks first in terms of tourism attraction (Ghadami, Tavalaei, & Fatemi, 2011) while it is also among the five top countries in the world regarding richness and diversity of ecosystems (Saadat & Mozaffari, 2010). However, the development of tourism industry in Iran is 40 years behind the advanced countries.

Shiraz, the third largest religious city (Zare, 2007) and the cultural capital city of the country, plays a talented, artistic, and festivals role (Farid, 1995) in the heart of Persia (Persia & Iran) as one of the five great cultural and historical city centers, which is considered the fifth largest tourist city in Iran and has an important position in the national program of tourism development (Taheridamene & Safarabadi, 2012). Thus, the city can build technical infrastructures and appropriate

foundations to be considered as a center of tourist attraction in the world.

2. Theoretical Framework

ICT applications are related to a range of technological tools that can be used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, manage, process, and transfer information to a wide range of users. The use of ICT in tourism can be divided into three domains, namely "Intranet, Extranet, and Internet" (Parvaneh, Ameri Siahooee, & Taghavi Godarzi, 2008, p. 104). The role of information technology in developing tourism industry is explored from two perspectives: 1) information and provision of tourism services; 2) virtual tourism. In this sense, tourism potential of cyberspace is of two types, including electronic tourism and virtual tourism (Mirjalili, 2008; Ravdrad & Haji Mohammadi, 2010).

3. Methodology

The nature of this study is of developmental applied research following a qualitative-quantitative method. To collect the necessary data, the field survey method was used, including a designed questionnaire whose reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha after a pilot test. The sample size of the population, including the tourists entering the city since 2014 was estimated 384 using formula Cochran; however, the sample size increased to 400 to ensure a more reliable sample of the whole population. Data were then

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analyzed using SPSS software and were conducted at two levels: 1) descriptive; 2) inferential.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

In general, Iran and Shiraz in particular, have failed to obtain an appropriate place in the international tourism competition in spite of having high potential tourism. Therefore, to change the current situation and improve its strategic position in the field of tourism, ICT has been used. In this regard, some useful measures have been taken in the field of ICT, especially on the Internet for giving information and advertising about its tourist attractions and facilities and welfare services. However, these activities still lack the necessary unity and integrity for the field of electronic tourism to meet the growing needs and requirements. As such, improving the situation needs some fundamental changes in policies, programs and actions.

In this sense, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the use of ICT in tourism from the perspective of tourists in Shiraz. Some general outcomes of the study are summarized in the following:

1) It is concluded that promoting the e-readiness of individuals and the society through policies which increase the access to ICT tools and skills to use them is required in this context. However, generally electronic tourism is still relatively an

unknown concept to tourists in cultural tourism; currently the tourists' use of ICT in the tourism sector is relatively low and is confined to receiving information on tourism.

2) Because ICT plays a major role in the selection of Shiraz as a tourism destination, the role played by radio, television, satellite and the Internet are thus highly emphasized.

3) Overall, the tourists do not consider the current status of ICT applications in providing information and services related to tourism (E-tourism) in Shiraz very desirable and are not satisfied with them either.

5. Suggestions

- Creating and developing ICT infrastructures.
- Giving information and advertising for introducing institutions, companies, and websites active in the field of electronic tourism.
- Establishing and developing an organization responsible for management of e-tourism and formulation of the related policies, standards, and rules.
- Creating an e-bank of tourism information and updating it frequently.

Key Words: Tourism, ICT, E-tourism, Virtual tourism, Shiraz

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