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Technological Mediated Applications at Sacred Heritages: Usefulness and Challenges- A Managerial Perspective

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The rapid development of technologies introduces smartness to all organisations and communities (Buhalis, & Amaranggana, 2014. P. 553), for which sacred heritages are no exception, as evident in their increasing use of technological mediated applications towards enhancing the visitors experience and data generation. This development in the use of technological applications, has in part been triggered by the identified changing needs and expectations of contemporary sacred site visitors, as well as their importance and role in changing the nature of the consumers expectations and the nature of the visitor's experience.

Thus, applying these smart tourism concept in addressing the changing needs and expectations of their diverse market segment, inevitably presents operational challenges for these missionaries, who might not be conversant with the operational complexities of new technologies. Consequently, the lack of necessary capabilities in dealing with this presents a set of new challenges for the custodians of these ecclesiastical resources.

Therefore, although within the religious and pilgrimage tourism scholarship, extant literature acknowledges the use of technological mediated applications as an emerging sacred site visitor experience marketing and management tool (Enongene & Griffin, 2016; Prats, Aulet, & Vidal, 2015). Yet, there is no scholarly exploration or empirical analysis into its usefulness, as well as the challenges in utilising these technological applications towards enriching the visitors experience at sacred sites, and in the religious and pilgrimage tourism scholarship from both the consumer and managerial perspectives respectively. This therefore, represents a significant gap in literature the study seeks to fill, through an exploration of the phenomenon specifically from a managerial point of view. Crucial given the huge investments going into the use of different forms of technology as visitor management tools at these holy places.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach

Therefore, in providing an understanding into the phenomenon, a qualitative methodological approach to inquiry was employed. Semi-structured interviews with sacred site managers across a diverse category of Irish sacred sites were utilised as primary data collection tool. While observational techniques were also employed as data collection instruments.

Findings

Findings generated from the study reveal that onsite technological mediated applications, are seen to be falling to provide the anticipated enhanced visitor experience and engagement with the sites. While management incapability somewhat in dealing with visitor's online comments or user-generated content is seen as a deterrent to the generation of organic data, that is invaluable in informing visitor experience management decisions and subsequently product and service development strategies aimed at meeting the increasingly changing needs and expectations of these growing and economically viable market segment.

Research Implications

The research findings have significant implications for sacred site managers and religious and pilgrimage tourism scholars, where there is a need for investigations in to sacred site visitor's perception of the usefulness and importance of both the onsite and offsite technological applications in the enhancement of their experiences at these sacred resources.

Research Contribution

Give the absence of scholarly investigation or an empirical analysis in to the importance, usefulness and challenges in the use of technological mediated applications in the visitor experience management at sacred sites, from both the consumer and management perspective respectively, the study thus, provides a unique theoretical contribution, as the study is the first attempt at an empirical analysis into the usefulness and challenges in the use of technological applications in the visitor experience management at sacred sites, and across a diverse category of sacred heritages. Thus, the study advances knowledge and understanding of the usefulness and challenges involved in utilising technological applications as visitor experience management tools. Thus, the study provides a platform and a starting point into a critical analysis of the phenomenon, especially from the consumer perspectives.

Selected Readings:

Buhalis, D., & Amaranggana, A. (2014). Smart Tourism Destinations. In Xiang Z., Tussyadiah, I. (eds.) *Information and communication Technologies in Tourism*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

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