

An Empirical study on impact of virtual tourism amid pandemic worldwide

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ABSTRACT: The Global pandemic of Novel Corona has not only brought entire socio-economic structures in a standstill but has challenged the globalization and global operations of enterprises. It is expected to play a significant role in regaining the socio-economic stability even after covid 19 pandemic. Tourism is one of the potential foreign exchange earnings sectors that contribute towards the overall development of ecotourism industry. Tourism destinations are always seeking new and innovative ways to better market tourism offerings and increase tourism revenues. And in recent years the tourism industry has slowly taken advantage of developments in the virtual space. Developing virtual reality technologies are becoming instrumental in addressing the many challenges of modern tourism. Virtual tours in marketing and management proved to be a promising tool to organize and manage tourism industry. Virtual tourism helps both to increase tourist flows and diminish the travelling cost, helps elder and disabled people will be able to enjoy travelling experience and safety is guaranteed. It is necessary to take into account the impact on the real person to form the culture of virtual tourism, which is going to help to make the tourism industry a people-oriented digital economy sector. Finally the future of virtual reality is considered in development of global booking and reservation networks and improvement of technical capacity for designing virtual tours, creating content for them. It presents challenges to better understand the effectiveness of virtual reality in shaping consumer attitudes towards tourism destinations.

Keywords: irtual Reality, Virtual Tourism, Global tourism business, Global pandemic, Digital economy

I. INTRODUCTION

Virtual Tourism

The introduction of digital technologies leads to the change of roles in the tourism industry with new forms and content. Virtual reality (VR) is touted to be one of the important contemporary

technological developments to greatly impact the tourism industry. While VR has been around since the late 1960s, recent developments in VR platforms, devices, and hypermedia content production tools have allowed for the technology to emerge from the shadows into the realm of everyday experiences. Virtual Reality promotes more convenient viewing of the collections comfortably sitting at home. Virtual Reality increase premise visibility through virtual exhibitions as you can watch your favorite exhibits in real life. So communication technology motivates to travel helping to see new and beautiful things. Nowadays computer technology grows rapidly presenting the real world on a computer screen or mobile devices in the new interactive way where you can feel what you have never felt before, and you can see objects hidden from the eye. Most of the population in urban and even in rural are good in computer skills, Mobile users and internet users have grown large in recent decades. With the advent of graphics, and animation new technologies have emerged like Virtual reality and Augmented reality which has shown significant success in many Industrial areas, Scientific innovations, Health care, Entertainment, Education, Travel and tourism sectors.

COVID-19 is hitting hard on already weak and fragile world economies forcing the world into a recession with the potential of deep consequences and historical levels of unemployment and deprivation (UN 2020b). Mitigation measures to reduce and slow down the spread of the virus (travel restrictions and lockdown of cities) have resulted in a significant reduction in demand and supply in the tourism sector. Most of the people in many countries worldwide who loved travelling to new places with their family, friends, relatives etc., to their favorite destinations have shifted their interests and likes towards Virtual tourism due to Covid situation, and they feel it is safe to protect themselves and their families as virtual reality offers a good substitute.

This paper assesses the possibility of using virtual reality in promoting tourism worldwide and primarily as an adaptive measure in the face of the current COVID-19 or Coronavirus pandemic. It explores if virtual reality can sustain the tourism sector while promoting the health and safety of the tourists as they virtually tour various tourist destinations in the comfort of their own homes.

II. Literature review

In an article, "Future of Travel and Tourism" by Oliver Wyman (Sept. 2020), the author conveys the survival of travel and tourism industry depends on the support and coordinated efforts of stakeholders and more importantly the government to adapt new policies and recovery strategies for sustainability of tourism and travel sectors. In the research paper *New realities: a systematic literature review on virtual reality and augmented reality in tourism research* by Yung, Ryan, Khoo-Lattimore, Catheryn (2019), the author identifies the gaps and challenges pertaining to Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality, issues related to the terminology and implies on the lack of theory based research. In another research paper on *Virtual Tourism (2018)(IRJET)* by Shabnam Shaikh, Karan Bokde, Ameysa Ingale, Prof. Bhanu Tekwani, gave extensive information about the background on VR which highlighted the importance of the human senses and the concepts of immersion and presence.

Virtual Tourism and its Current Scenario Importance for Safety & Health

Travelers' awareness of good practices in health & hygiene has and will continue to grow, influencing their expectations for travel. Even after a vaccine becomes available, travelers are likely to remain more cautious of health issues going forward. In fact, 88% of Americans stated that they will maintain this new hand-washing regimen even after the virus has passed. A report focusing on Chinese traveler consumption revealed that tourists would be more likely to seek out destinations with established infrastructure and high-quality medical facilities following the pandemic.

Current generations are highly techno savvy, they are born and living with computers and internet and are exposed with social media immensely. They accept and adapt to change rigorously. While digitization has been an emerging trend within the Travel & Tourism sector in recent years, stay-at-home orders have led to digital acceleration with more consumers becoming adept at using technological solutions in everyday

life including for online shopping and virtual meeting.

The Rise of Virtual Tourism

Businesses and destinations alike will continue to adapt to the changing times, even offering virtual experiences as they work to re-inspire wanderlust in travelers and restart the sector. National parks such as Yellowstone and over 2,000 museums and archives from around the world, in collaboration with Google Cultural Institute, have already gone online through virtual reality. Already people are aware and have virtual reality experience before covid pandemic in most of the countries as they can be the source of medium to encourage others in creating realization and experience in using virtual reality technology.

In a similar vein, many hotel chains, restaurants and even airlines have begun to share classic recipes online to connect with travelers by reminding them of favorite treats, like United Airline's delicious stroopwafels. Destinations such as Switzerland Tourism with their "Dream Now, Travel Later", The rise of virtual tourism is a trend that will endure, becoming an increasingly important part of the sales and marketing process. The Bahamian Ministry of Tourism, for instance, has been hosting virtual sales programs in the US & Canada for business partners and suppliers, including virtual trip simulations and live social media sessions.

In the present scenario, most of the children's are engaged in online classes, while there is no scope for travel to their preferred destination even when there is no online classes and during holidays since the outbreak of covid. A large portion of this population is an opportunity to attract visitors through collaboration with schools and colleges in building networks through different sources by developing and enhancing virtual tourism.

Companies dealing with Virtual reality

Today, people Google a place and hotels before deciding to visit it. All they have got are pictures on Google, and what if they turn out to be photo shopped or of a different place. The tourists are highly disappointed. In such a situation, AR/VR companies for the tourism sector can provide a unique experience to your customers if you own tourism or tourism-related business. When a tourist can experience the place beforehand with the help of VR, the tourism industry is bound to see a boom. If you are on board with this idea, check out the virtual reality & AR companies for the tourism sector for your business. There are many Virtual

reality Tour companies providing services to many clients world-wide, below are few of them providing services creating a new experience with added benefits making an impact in the changing world day today.

1. **VARS** stands for Virtual and Augmented Reality Studio and specializes in developing XR (VR and AR) content and experiences for different use cases in different industries including; tour guides, tour businesses, psychology, and art. VARS believe in realities beyond our physical world, realities everyone can benefit from. Through Extended Realities.

2. **The Amsterdam VR Company** produces immersive Virtual Reality productions for the Real Estate, Tourism and Marketing industry. We bring to life an experience in a way that hasn't been seen before. Effective advertising background (working for 20 years at leading advertising agencies such as DDB and TBWA in Amsterdam and London and for leading clients such as Heineken, McDonald's and Dell) leading to strive for impact, interaction and good storytelling.

3. **World Travel VR** - a Virtual Reality Production company specializing in 360 2D and 3D virtual reality campaigns for high end brands. World Travel VR can capture resort in 360 or Virtual Reality. This is a great tool for agencies, sales representatives, and conference booths. The new and cutting edge tools with Augmented Reality can bring elements of your destination straight to your client. Promote your conference space, event halls, corporate deals, and more using virtual and augmented reality.

4. **Go360** is "virtual reality" Production Company. Go 360° provides high quality 360 degree virtual tours for websites and demonstration CDs, e-commerce, real estate, educational, corporate offices and other applications.

Role and Position of Virtual Tourism and its Impact on Indian Economy

The tourism sector of a country generates foreign exchange, drives regional development, and directly supports various businesses and numerous types of jobs such as catering, tourist operators etc. It contributes 8.1% of total employment in India, and was naturally not averse to the job losses and salary cuts inflicted by COVID-19. According to the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH), about 3.8 crore people in the country faced unemployment due to the pandemic and resulting lockdowns. The hospitality sector is

dependent on travel, trade and tourism for its sustenance. The pandemic has decimated the operations of major sectors like the, hotel industry and also affiliate branches like tour guides and lodging.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the massive rate of cancellations of bookings and trips have badly affected the ability of hotels to operate across India. As per Hotelivate, a hospitality consultancy, the hotel industry could have faced losses in the range of \$1.3-1.55bn this year.

Currently, 15-25% of employees in branded hotel chains are either contractual or regular employees who would be the first victims of any mass lay-offs. The coronavirus has also had a devastating impact on occupancy rates on hotels. In March 2020, towards the end of which month the nationwide lockdown began, Indian hotels registered an 80% YoY (Year over Year) decline in Occupancy Rate and 12-14% decline in average daily rates (ADR).

Scope & Solutions

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in collaboration with Google India today launched a 360° Virtual Reality (VR) experience video on Incredible India. Incredible India in 360 degrees, as never seen before takes through a journey across Hampi, Goa, Delhi and Amritsar, and to explore the places and people that make each of these iconic Indian sites incredible. Blended with unique experiences like Beaches, Bazars, Temples, Dances, Adventures, Spirituality and all are in a nutshell to users around the globe in the form of a 360° video. Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with Google India Arts and culture launched a Virtual Reality (VR) experience video on Incredible India.

Virtual tourism experiences of various historical places, museums and other tourist attractions offer a novel digital solution. Such measures will boost the confidence of tourist operators and tourist guides, while also incentivising users of such platforms to travel when the pandemic subsides. For instance, BSocial is a travel company that launched an app named "Experience Makkah" for virtual Hajj pilgrimages. Companies like and Beyond, Singita, Lewa Wildlife etc. have begun rolling out "Virtual Safaris" on social media. And the response has been overwhelming.

India can develop an application or web page through which frequent updates are shared regarding the business and economic situation to those engaged in the hospitality industry. They could serve as the first point of contact when the

economy is finally reopened for tourists. All in all, there is a critical need to adopt tourism policy based on a customer-centric scientific approach by maximising the utilisation of technology and integrating this with the governmental approach so that relief measures are consistent. By aligning the policies of the Government with those specific to the tourism industry, this can not only safeguard numerous jobs but also make recovery more rapid.

Future of Virtual Tourism World wide

Insights into the different facets that influence perceived usability or perceived ease-of-use will be important in driving future development of the technology. A consideration for future research would be exploring the impact of introducing VR/AR booths in spaces like travel agencies and tourism information centers. This could potentially increase awareness of the technology amongst the general population whilst also removing the challenge of ease-of-use with an expert or guide-person on hand to offer assistance.

Another major consideration for future research should be on 360° VR experiences. The emergence of 360-degree camera can create VR experiences without the need to understand complex technical programming, signaling the potential exponential increase of VR content ready to be consumed. Social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook readily support VR. Optimal adaptation of the technology could potentially usher in a new phase of destination marketing, holiday homes rental, and couch surfing, combining aspects of virtual communities, entertainment, interactivity and novelty.

Arrival of new platform will combine the interactivity of the Second Life virtual world, with the immersion of modern VR head-mounted displays. Many companies in the tourism industry have their sights set towards the future, and some even go so far and publish reports about their expected future developments. As an example, in the 2014 Skyscanner report 'The Future of Travel 2024', published by the company which is mostly known for offering a global travel search engine, they envision VR as a major influence on touristic experiences.

COVID-19 has further enhanced the role of technologies in the recovery and reimagination of tourism, while it reinforces existing paradigms in the e-tourism evolution. Developmental trends and adoption of smart destinations and tourism services, AI, robotics and other digital advances are now accelerated to combat the COVID-19 tourism implications.

Effect of Pandemic on Virtual Tourism Business

The global tourism and hospitality industry is severely affected by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. A pandemic impacts the tourism industry the most as it involves traveling of people from one place to another. History has witnessed that epidemics and pandemics have an immediate impact on the hotels and restaurants, airlines industries, travel agencies, etc., due to the international travel restrictions, media coverage and government measures.

World Bank shows that the cost to the global economy of SARS is projected to have been US\$54 billion. At the same time, the organisation foresees that a 'severe flu pandemic' could cost more than US\$3 trillion, roughly 5% of global GDP. Coronavirus outbreak has devastated in such a way that the travel and tourism sectors cannot expect to resume to pre-pandemic levels until 2024. Well, with the latest advanced technologies like virtual reality (VR) technology, airlines, travel agencies, and tourism boards can attract and engage prospective customers.

Virtual Reality immerses users in a computer-generated and interactive 3D environment. It's unlikely that most of the companies pushing through virtual reality tourist experiences intend to replace physical tourism. World realises the potential of VR and its varied applications in different industries, including travel, retail, and automotive, India is also witnessing a similar trend. Although VR was relegated for only a gaming geek, it is now gradually ending up with the tourism sector, explicitly experimenting and testing out its fascinating potential.

III. SUGGESTIONS

- Most of the countries are witnessing second wave and third wave and new virus are spreading instantly in UK and other countries. It is better to restrict for few years and avoid spread of wide infection by adopting safety measures and control travelling.
- It is advisable to encourage people to use virtual tourism as the better option or substitute that prevents spread of infection and paves the way for other set of population to experience new technology that is Virtual reality for tourism who have been never exposed.
- Government worldwide have to frame new policy and guidelines with travel and tourism industry and develop tie-ups with hotels and resorts with tourism places to encourage virtual tourism and avoid risk externally.
- There is lot of scope for creating awareness and usage of virtual reality in tourism. Virtual

tourism companies can build relationship or connect with schools and colleges and educate them in using virtual reality technologies as it influences children's and their families who have planned to go for travel and tours to opt for virtual tourism that leads to reduction in costs, ensures safety.

IV. CONCLUSION

Virtual tours are not a substitute for the original experience, but can help in recreating it if the user has already been to the site, bringing out different in their experiences, or give them a taste of the place in advance if they are yet to visit. Quality content that is well-researched and insightful will determine the future of virtual travel. In a nutshell it helps in saving time and money, providing aesthetic experiences and making travel more inclusive and a valuable resource.