



DEVELOPING THE UNDERSTANDING OF ECO-TOURISM IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This study emphasis on young people who are likely to be first-time eco-tourists or to have little experience of ecotourism. This article tries to demonstrate the effective use of smart technologies in teaching primary school pupils in shaping their understanding of eco-tourism.*

Keywords: *ecotourism, youth travel, lifelong learning, smart technologies, primary education, Information and Communication Technologies(ICTs)*

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a form of travel involving natural attractions, which focuses on the preservation of nature, and in which the tourism activities must have the least impact on the environment as well as respecting local cultures and lifestyles [1;192]. Ecotourism encourages local communities to participate in the effective management of indigenous resources by cultivating awareness of the preservation of nature. The significant features of ecotourism include the enrichment of nature as well as promoting local cultures, traditions and lifestyles in order to attract travelers to visit an area [2;179].

The rapid growth of tourism affects the environment in terms of both natural attractions and local community identities. For instance, the physical environment may deteriorate due to the destruction of geological features, erosion along sensitive trails, pollution and contamination and the extraction and overharvesting of resources. Teaching the concept of eco-tourism to young learners makes a vital role in bringing up well-educated ecotourists. This study emphasis on young people who are likely to be first-time eco-tourists or to have little experience of ecotourism. However, young people are a great capacity to spread ecotourism awareness both in the present and the future. There is, therefore, a need for more studies into young people's awareness of the problems relating to ecotourism, and their perceptions and expectations of this issue must be considered as vital elements in the implementation and promotion of ecotourism [3;126]

It is obvious that the behavior and interest of young people pursued when traveling varies from that of the older generation, for example, young people quickly embrace modern travel technologies to find motivation for where to travel, study where to travel and do activities during a trip. Despite the fact that social media does not effect senior travelers, young travelers believe that social media is powerful. In this study, younger people are likely the first time eco-tourists with little knowledge of eco-tourism practices. They are the "information hungry" travelers, for using a search



engine to schedule a journey, gathering information they need, and exchange information with others [4;80]. Consequently, the design of the smart ecotourism application is essential to understand the behaviors of the young travelers.

Literature review. In our country the concept of ecotourism is still a new phenomenon since tourism has recently started developing. That is the reason we investigated mostly foreign researchers' findings. There have been just a little number of studies of ecotourism that have focused on young people, for instance, that of Cini et al.[3], who investigated the knowledge of ecotourism of university students from South Africa, Mexico, USA, Germany, and Italy and found that the students gained only limited knowledge eventhough their knowledge varied among countries, and the researchers noted that activities such as field trips and attending ecotourism events and workshops were a means of boosting young people's understanding. Kasim and Wickens[5] investigated the awareness, intentions and opinions about ecotourism among a sample of young Malaysians aged between 19 and 30, the age-group considered to be a key player in the growth of ecotourism, while Sangpikul and Batra [6]investigated the ecotourism experiences of young Thais and suggested that knowledge of environmental and ecotourism issues should be provided through both formal and informal channels, with formal channels including educational institutions like schools, colleges or universities who can provide special courses on the environment and ecotourism. Meanwhile, Kasim and Wickens noted that interest in environmental issues among young people could be generated by their own experience of travelling or knowledge gained from non-formal sources, such as television or the internet.

Discussion and results. Eco-tourism is supposed to make efficient, responsible and sustainable use of tourism resources at the destination. The aims of ecotourism can be accomplished by encouraging the appropriate activities, enhancing eco-tourist experiences, and managing tourism resources in a sustainable manner. Youth travel has become one of the most significant sectors in the global tourism industry because of the number of young travelers, the frequency of their trips, and the popularity of long distant travel [8]. The rise in youth travel has led governments to develop tourism policies and services specific to young people as well as other related niche markets. World Tourism Organization [7] noted that youth travel is a continuously growing market and that young people spend more money proportionately than other groups while their travel goals are gaining knowledge, having the opportunity to learn about different cultures, experiencing daily life at their destination and behaving responsibly in relation to issues affecting tourist attractions, the environment and society. Youth travel is a big and growing global market, a vital aspect of which is the social and cultural dimensions of the travel destination.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play an important role in developing tourism businesses. ICTs can build long-term relationships with travelers, provide more flexibility in terms of service timing and destinations, improve service

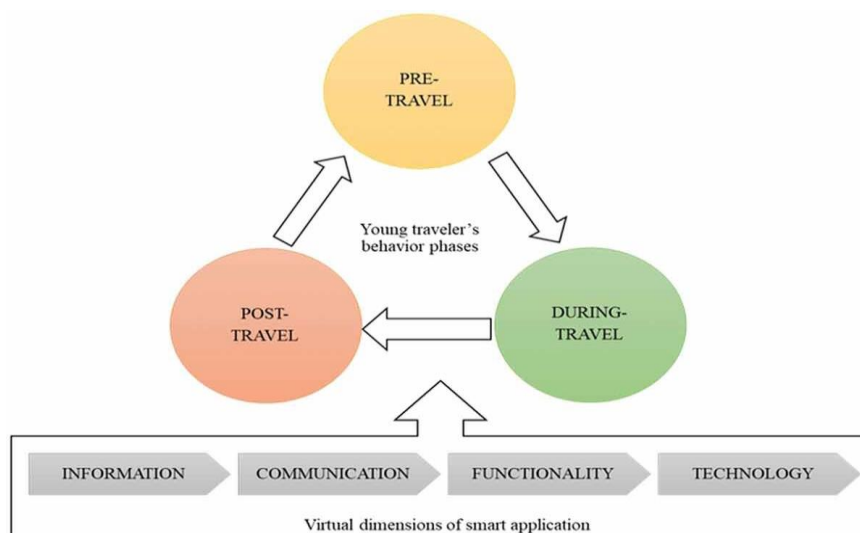


quality and reduce operating costs [9;554]. ICTs are now regarded as a significant means by which tourists obtain information, make bookings, etc. Furthermore, recent trends in its use have increased the range of activities in which it is used, for example, by using multimedia technology to gain knowledge and enhance flexible learning including learning how certain activities can negatively affect the natural environment. ICTs can thus be used to educate people and build knowledge of ecotourism attractions through the use of digital media and also replace some tourism activities which could lead to the destruction of natural resources by replicating locations which are fragile or difficult to access on virtual platform.

The key aspects of ICTs relating to ecotourism, are concerned with (1) the conservation and minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on nature-based destination and local communities, (2) increasing awareness and educational opportunities, and (3) supporting stakeholders' contribution to conservation [10;105].

The nature-based destination relates to the activities at a destination which take place primarily in natural surroundings with minimal human interference and entail a healthy ecotourism, as well as providing an opportunity for tourists to visit natural areas. In terms of environmental education, the activities involved are building ecotourism knowledge, encouraging interaction with nature and increasing awareness and understanding of the natural area.

Smart ecotourism technologies include advanced ICTs and other strategic tools used in developing solutions for ecotourism. Advanced ICTs can play a significant role in facilitating ecotourism, for example in managing destination resources, visualizing sites and attractions, providing tourism education, collaborating with local businesses at the destination, providing information to tourists and planning transport routes to protect and maintain the natural environment [11;179] and the use of social media and mobile apps to allow travelers to communicate and increase their ability to obtain information. For instance, when people use social media or mobile phone apps to share their experiences through location-based services, other tourists and local residents also obtain information. Additionally, tourism services can use smart technology to suggest their services and gain information through user feedback to ensure service sustainability. Finally, Destination marketing organizations, which are responsible for providing information to potential visitors can use smart technologies to encourage visitors to purchase destination-related products.



Picture 1. Research framework adopted in designing and developing the smart ecotourism system [12;895]

As illustrated in the picture above, in the pre-travel phase, the system can be used in planning an eco-tour prior to travelling to the destination [12] and potential tourists can use the system to learn about ecotourism attractions, with the information included being directly provided by the local community [13]. In the during-travel phase, the system demonstrates data related to the local environment, accommodation, tourist attractions and activities, community stores, etc., to ensure that tourists are able to experience the most fascinating features of the areas [12]. Finally, in the post-travel phase tourists can contribute reviews including both photographs and written evaluations of the quality of the local services and any goods they purchase while in the [12]. The information gained from the post-travel phase can be used to enhance the local services and to disseminate information to future newcomers as well as encouraging further visits, since it has been found that information gained from users in this phase has an effect on repeated tour.

Conclusion.

From the findings it can be concluded that the research manages information, boosts learning and creates opportunities for young people to understand and be aware of ecotourism, as well as allowing a destination to advertise its attractions.

The previous literature revealed that there has been little research attention devoted to the study of ecotourism emphasizing young people although the topic is significant in terms of the impact on future ecotourism.

Young people may be first-time eco-tourists or may have limited experience or knowledge of ecotourism. Therefore, gaining knowledge and experience of ecotourism using ICTs will enhance travelers understanding of the possible negative environmental effects of ecotourism and its impacts on local ecosystems by raising their awareness of environmental and cultural considerations.

This study contributes to the current ecotourism literature and broaden understanding of the ICTs-based ecotourism, particularly on Uzbek context.



Moreover, they will provide suggestions for ecotourism business in Uzbekistan to develop the smart application attractive to the targets of young people.

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