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SMART TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS: LEVERAGING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TO ATTRACT AND ENGAGE MODERN TRAVELLERS

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Abstract: *As rural destinations seek to attract and engage modern travellers, digital tools such as interactive mobile applications, augmented reality, and data-driven insights provide new approaches to enhance visitor experiences and increase accessibility. This paper examines how rural areas can leverage these technologies to overcome traditional challenges, such as limited visibility and infrastructure, while preserving the authentic charm that draws tourists to these destinations. Through a comprehensive analysis of smart tourism's impact on rural areas, our research sheds light on how digital tactics might revolutionize rural tourism for the modern traveller.*

• Introduction

Rural tourism is gaining attention due to its unique appeal, connection with nature, and cultural heritage. However, challenges include limited infrastructure, accessibility, and technologically advanced services. Smart tourism solutions, integrating AI, data analytics, and mobile apps, can improve rural destinations' appeal and promote sustainable local development. These technologies enhance visitor engagement, cater to diverse preferences, and increase access to information. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital solutions in the tourism sector, with contactless payment and virtual engagement becoming crucial. This paper examines the impact of smart tourism strategies on rural areas, focusing on digital transformation.

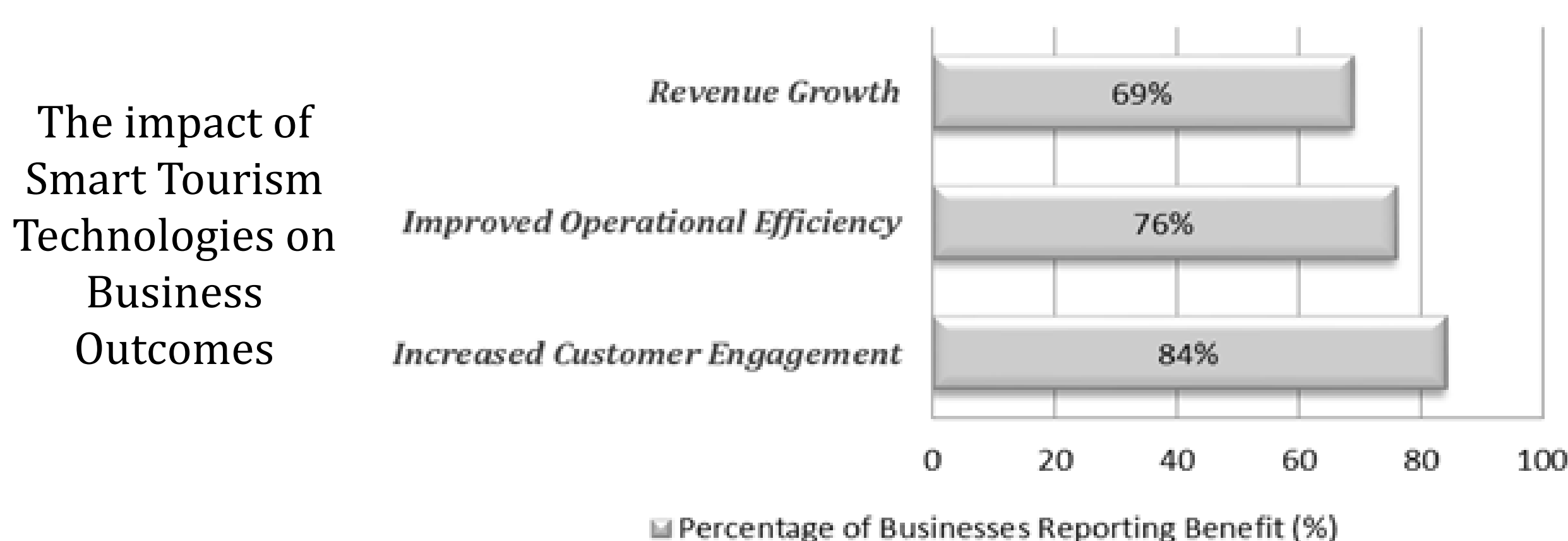
• Material and method

A systematic review of recent studies was conducted to evaluate the impacts of smart tourism technologies in rural tourism. Examples of digital implementations include mobile applications with interactive maps and augmented reality features, and AI-powered optimization engines. The evaluation of these technologies involves a blend of quantitative and qualitative metrics, including visitor engagement, visitor satisfaction, economic impact, and operational efficiency.

Metric	Before Implementation	After Implementation	% Increase
Website Traffic	10.500 visits	15.800 visits	+50%
Social Media Interactions	3.200 visits	5.600 visits	+75%
Online Bookings	1.500 visits	2.300 visits	+53%

Data synthesized from multiple studies on the impacts of digital tools in rural tourism

The Impact of Smart Tourism Technologies on Business Outcomes



• Results and discussions

This study highlights the positive effects of digital tools, such as mobile applications, AI-driven systems, and data-driven platforms, on improving visitor engagement, satisfaction, and operational efficiency in rural tourism. Mobile applications enhance accessibility, offer interactive guides, and assist tourists in navigating rural regions with real-time information. Examples include Visit Norway App, Waze, Tuscany+ App, AllTrails, Maps.Me, TripAdvisor, Culture Trip, Google Travel. AI technology plays a crucial role in providing personalized travel experiences, allowing tourists to explore attractions and activities that align with their preferences. Platforms like SmartSantander, Amadeus, and Hotjar offer valuable insights into visitor behavior, enabling rural tourism operators to optimize resource management and address visitor needs promptly.

Digital platforms have shown a positive impact on the economies of rural tourism, with mobile applications featuring booking capabilities and payment systems leading to increased visitor expenditure and smooth transaction processes. AI-driven systems have facilitated the customization of recommendations, resulting in increased expenditure per visitor and enhanced visitor retention rates.

Data-driven platforms demonstrate an enhancement in operational efficiency by offering insights into visitor flow and peak times, which facilitates improved resource management.

Comparative analysis of digital tools reveals that the total number of visits to the tourism website has increased from 10,500 visits before implementation to 15,800 visits after, indicating a 50% rise in online interest and accessibility. The overall number of interactions on social media platforms rose from 3,200 to 5,600, implying enhanced engagement and visibility of the destination across social media platforms. Online bookings through digital platforms have increased from 1,500 to 2,300, representing a 53% growth, indicating enhanced accessibility to booking systems and a possible increase in comfort and visitor conversion rates.

• Conclusions

The study demonstrates how digital tools, such as mobile applications, AI-driven recommendations, and data-driven platforms, can transform rural tourism by improving visitor engagement and economic resilience. The study suggests that stakeholders should focus on enhancing digital infrastructure, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and providing continuous training to support local businesses.