

Artificial Intelligence: The New Normal in Tourism

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Prof. Aarti Saini



Prof. Athula Gnanapala

The Coronavirus outbreak has shattered world's economy. This outbreak has moved so quickly and is to be blamed for disrupted economic life. The spread is so fast that some of the present perspective may soon become outdated. WHO has declared, Coronavirus as pandemic on March 12, 2020. The existence of coronavirus, popularly known as Covid-19 has created a havoc, resulting in disruption of social and economic life considerably during the time of imposed quarantine and contagion. Travel industry has been the worst hit amid COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the nationwide lockdown and social distancing measures, nations have completely restricted travel and other transportation mediums.

As a result of which tourists and locals are forced to cancel the travel reservations and bookings. There are several nations where the economy is totally dependent on tourism. These nations are the most volatile in this time of global crisis, due to the worldwide panic of the Corona Virus across the nations the duration and scope is still unknown. Tourism industry is thinking about saving the industry workers jobs and countries' economies. Tourism industry is considered to adopt the technology and innovations it welcomed Artificial Intelligence (World AI Show, 2019) with the motive of transformation of customer experiences.

Artificial Intelligence creates an important role in today's digital world. The pandemic has forced many people to move digitally. Marketers are facing critical time attracting the customers to get connected. They are trying multiple ways. In today's digital transformed economies artificial intelligence has been a great support to the marketing managers to understand the customer needs and wants. AI is a digital spy which tracks every digital foot prints and helps the Companies to let customer to land on the page depending upon their searches and interest. The advanced AI detects the facial expressions, enlarging and shrinking of customer's retina measuring the excitement or ignoring expression which has helped marketer to identify the customer touch points and enhance customer experience. Today Companies are spending enormous amount to understand the customer preference through AI. AI can be used to personalise the customer needs with fast responses without human interventions. Travel industry with the time has introduced AI. Some most significantly used AI in travel industry chatbots and online customer experience exSam, intelligent travel chatbot which aims at providing assistant to customer and connected with them to arrange all travel plans including booking, flights and hotel, with the reminders.

Similarly, WELC maps-travel in augmented reality, an app which assist the customer scanning the map of the place and making suggestions for hotels, interesting places to be viewed also helping in booking tickets of the place customer want to visit online with assistance in booking cab, showing directions and duration to the destination with the brief about the price.

Some interesting apps can let to travel the world without leaving their home. Google Earth VR, NASA Mars 2030, design by fusion media in collaboration with NASA, can help you to experience panoramic view of Martian surface with VR technology. Technically Virtual Reality is a 3-D computer generated technology which gives you real time experience. For history lover who love to explore history and visit museums "Boulevard" Can give you an excellent VR experience and feed your knowledge craving to. The blue by WEVR can give you undersea experience.

The world famous hotel chain Hilton collaborated with IBM pilot 'Connie', the world's first robot concierge which assist its tourists with all the travel information they need. Sensing their facial expressions like humans and suggesting accordingly. It has replaced the human intervention. AI helps in maintaining the database and make suggestions where VR helps in creating a virtual world for the consumer. Today marketing practices have been more Customer oriented focusing on enhancing their experience with their services. With current pandemic scenario people have practicing social distancing avoiding stepping out of their houses. The question remains how do the Company will be trying to cope up with the digital advance Customer and experience? Artificial Intelligence certainly enhances customer experience, but

cannot replace human touch. It can be added for affective complimentary dimensions for the future tourism. The travel industry will completely transform when people get back to new normal? It will be a big challenge as customers would be more cautious about their spending and also about the surely to be communicated with less social interactions. Prof. Athula Gnanapala, Dean of the Faculty of Management Studies of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, has interviewed on the implications of AI on the Tourism industry Prof. Aarti Saini of the University of Delhi.

What is the impact of industry 4.0 in tourism?

“Industry 4.0” is a term to describe the digital transformation. It is made possible by combining a wave of next-generation technologies. The internet of things (IoT), artificial intelligence, robotics and 3D printing can turn travel and tourism sector into flexible, self-maintaining operations. The advanced digital Sensors are able to understand and store real-time data into machine learning algorithms which can successfully remotely adjust processes.

What are the challenges to implement AI?

AI can be truly positive force for societies and economies. When we discuss about the challenges, it may have infrastructural challenges. It requires strong foundation and access to data as data is considered to be the key driver of digitised economy. The digitised economy also needs to have skilled human capital. It also needs to be developed in safe and ethical environment. There should be multi-stakeholder collaborations and sustainability in consumer trust as consumers’ data is being taken up to give them experience. Affordability of technology can be a major challenge.

What is the influence of AI and VR in Travel & Tourism Industry?

Travel industry have transformed over the period of time. From going personally to travel agency to make customised travel plan investing hours or days to finalize the travel plan to the journey of unique experience provided by travel websites or apps, the traditional travel booking is modified to convenient and time saving task. Introduction of AI has somehow made the task easier as they are able to understand their customer better. It has offered recommendations based on customer previous searches possibly recommend the choice they made in previous searches about the destinations, category of hotels etc. Virtual reality has enabled the people to experience virtual tours (Zumoka-AR for tourism) changed the way people see the things around them. By simply facing your mobile camera to any place, the details started showing about the building name, restaurants available near that place.

How AI is enhancing customer experience?

Many Companies are introducing AI into their digital platforms (websites/apps/searches) to understand what the visitor wants. AI records digital footprints which starts giving suggestions on the basis of recorded footprints. The customer with less efforts are able to land on their desired search in no time, which ultimately satisfy the customer by showing what they want to see and saving their time. Many researches confirm the Customer experience is satisfactory even

while communicating with the chatbots, who takes in all the details of the customer. It helps in planning the trip from flight booking, hotel booking, cab, tourist places to be visited to return flight. Transformation and redefining the way of customer experience.

What are different AI tools available in tourism industry?

Travel industry is going through digital transformations during recent years. Big data, AI and machine learning are at the phase of technological changes. Companies are trying to collect data through AI tools like Chatbots, apps, YouTube video watch, Google searches etc. Companies' shows the recommendation on the basis of these access which have been allowed by the customer. The customer agrees to give location, files, photos, library etc. access in order to get the rich Customer experience. Marketers have successfully found their spots on social media platforms where they can reach their Customers too.

What would be the future of AI in tourism industry?

The year 2020 has become the era of technological shifts in many areas. Introduction of 5G technology is expected to take the industry to next level. Internet of everything is possibly becoming omnipresent. Customers' giving permission to grant access can give the company liberty to make a customized travel itinerary based on the information provided by the Customer. Customer services are expected to become superior as digital communication is enhanced through AI chatbots ex-Utrip can provide the customised travel plan based on the information provided by the customer. AR and VR is going to transform the way people perceives the place to be.

The expansion of knowledge dissemination through the mobile camera, Google lens, Google interpreter etc. to provide detailed information. Not to ignore the latest proposal of face scanners where we can enter and travel through the airport without physically carrying the passport/visas, documents etc. which will be uploaded on the cloud and with just physical presence of the person every information can be taken through the biometric saved in the system. Also, the high-tech security system at airports through which we are under scanning system from the time we enter the airport till the time we board.

How industry may transform post covid-19?

The travellers will need to feel safe and confident that their health is protected. The government and travel industry will have to understand the travellers' behaviours. The use of digital identity and biometrics technology may come in the line of transformations which may ensure seamless journey.

The conditions remain with the use of these tools as this is possible only when the user feel that their information data is safe.

As per world economic forum report there will be two key areas where digital transformation through technology should be used: touch less travels airport curb side to hotel check-in.

Automation would be the new norms. Health hygiene by maintaining cleaning protocols and surface touching may be given, more importance.

Digital health passport could be a big transformation Apple and Google are working on contact-tracing software, for developers to build compatible apps are nearly close to launch. The pandemic is likely to introduced two trends is seamless travels, where your face and body will be your digital passport and the other being the decentralised identity. The challenge still remains. Are we ready for this transformation?

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