

# The Relationship between Innovation and Tourism: The Case of Smart Tourism

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## Abstract

Innovation, derived from the Latin word "innovatus", means to turn an idea into a product that can be sold or developed (goods or services) (TÜSİAD, 2003:53). Innovation means to start using new methods in the social, cultural and administrative environment and it is covered with words such as renovation or renewal. However, the meaning of innovation is too broad to be expressed in a single word. According to the Oslo Guide, innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations and thus transforming it into economic and social benefits (Demirkaya ve Zengin, 2014:107). The aim of this study is contributing a view to innovative usages in the tourism industry.

## INTRODUCTION

Several definitions of innovation have been made in the literature; Jorde and Teece (1992:76) defined innovation as exploring, developing, improving, embracing and commercializing new processes, products, organizational structures and methods, while Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong (1999:603) described as the development and marketing of new ideas, products and technology that customers perceive; in the case of Harrison and Enz (2005: 287) with Elçi and Karataylı (2008: 1) expressed innovation as the introduction of new products, methods and processes of a product that a customer does not already know or a new quality of an existing product, the introduction of new production, methods and processes, finding new markets for the provision of resources for business activities, the reorganization and redesign of the business. Focusing on technology, Moge and Schact consider innovation as "process of creating an industry, product or production improvement" (Vatan ve Zengin, 2014:513), while according to Joseph Schumpeter, innovation is described as "the driving force of development" (Işık ve Meriç, 2015:4). Similarly, Tutar and colleagues (2007: 196) consider innovation as the conversion of new ideas into the economy.

Innovation can be an idea, practice, process, or product that turns a problem-solving idea into practice (Ottenbacher and Gnoth, 2005: 206). Indeed, Drucker considers innovation as an opportunity (Sipe and Testa, 2009: 2). Therefore, innovation is not just a concept for concrete products, but also for businesses that provide services to customers, such as restaurant or hotel management.

In today's increasingly competitive environment, scientists, researchers and practitioners focus on the necessity and importance of innovation to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and focus on improving products, processes, techniques or procedures and constantly changing their managerial understandings (Oerlemans, Buys and Pretorius, 2001). Nevertheless, the innovation-related processes conducted by enterprises allow one side to reduce the costs of enterprises and increase their qualities, on the other side to meet the ever-changing needs and desires of the consumers (Riel, 2005: 493).

While the innovation process has the advantages of getting a competitive edge for enterprises, increasing quality and image, and allowing customers to fully meet their needs and demands, it can face some obstacles from time to time because innovation process has a complex, risky, and difficult to predict structure. There are many factors affecting innovation in enterprises (Erdem, et al., 2013: 79). The lack of top management support and motivating people to adopt innovative culture, the need to develop ideas that cannot be easily imitated by competitors and the need to preserve innovations (Oke, Burke ve Myers, 2004:38-40), the resistance of employees to innovation, the diversity of customer wants and anticipations are the elements that can prevent innovation. On the other hand, factors such as innovation, failure in project management, inadequate resources, time pressure and competition can hamper or prevent the implementation of innovation activities (Wong and Pang, 2003: 30).

There are several reasons for businesses to innovate. These reasons are as follows (Vatan and Rich, 2014: 514);

- Desire to grow
- Trying source and capabilities in a different field
- Economical scales and opportunities

- Intercorporate financial situation
- Market power
- Personal management reasons

Enterprises choose the type of innovation according to the reasons for development. For instance, an enterprise that wants to grow can choose to make innovations to the process or to market.

## **INNOVATION IN TOURISM SECTOR AND SMART TOURISM**

In the tourism sector, different companies such as hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, car rental companies and entertainment companies provide different services. The tourism sector is a demand-driven and growing sector with demand (OECD, 2006: 33). However, for tourists participating in tourism activities and demanding the services of these companies, tourism is not just about a business that offers tourism products. Due to the abstractness of tourism products, the socio-cultural structure of the local people and psychology and habits of the tourists also affect the tourism experience. Therefore, companies in the sector are in competition with each other to satisfy the tourists and ensure the continuity of the tourists. For this reason, innovation is needed to gain a competitive advantage.

Another reason for innovation-oriented tourism policies is to increase productivity and encourage growth. This can only happen when the customer is satisfied and integrated with it. Particularly, individuals who participate in mass tourism provide their knowledge by spreading their experiences. Innovations in information and communication technology in tourism allow enterprises to analyze this information from customers more effectively and efficiently (OECD, 2006: 58). This allows the creation of databases for innovations that need to be done in the product, process, market or organization.

In this context, the tourism industry cannot be considered separately and independently from the technology. Technology enters tourism industry via Computer Reservations Systems (CRS), Global Distribution Systems (GDS), Internet and Smart Technologies (connected through sensors and data clouds) (Koo et al., 2015:99). The concept of Smart is used in technological, economic and social developments that are nourished by technological infrastructures. In these developments, the most important indication of addressing about the concept of smart is that technological perceptions, massive data, open data, new ways of connection and knowledge exchange are being used in the developments. The concept of Smart brings advantages in communication and synchronization between individuals or institutions rather than individual benefits. Because smart systems make the world a small village, accelerate communication, provide data integration and share, and interpret and optimize complex analytical models (Gretzel, et

al., 2015: 179). Thus, more accurate operational decisions can be made.

“Smart” technology, which we are constantly intertwined with applications such as smartphones and smart cards in everyday life, is supported by various physical infrastructures and confronts with examples such as intelligent home, intelligent factory. Even within the tourism industry, the concept of “smart city”, which is equipped with modern technologies as a pillar of innovation, effectively and fairly managed without consuming resources in the concept of sustainability is derived. Smart cities use information and communication technologies at the highest level to increase resource efficiency and reduce consumption (Gretzel, et al., 2015:559). These innovations increase the quality of life for the city dwellers, that is the local people. (Lopez de Avila, 2015:24).

Smart cities benefit from information and communication technologies (Hojer and Wangel, 2014: 7), which are digital in the dimensions of smart living, smart mobility, smart governance, smart people, smart environment and smart economy. The smart city concept covers multiple industries, including tourism. The smart tourism is an important part and a practical attempt of the smart city strategy (Guo, 2014:55). As a matter of fact, these dimensions can also be applied directly in tourism destinations, so it can be said that smart city concept gives rise to smart tourism concept.

The UNWTO underlines the links between modern tourism development and new tourism destinations (UNWTO). It is impossible to discern modern tourism development from the innovations of the modern world where information and communication technologies are heavily used. In this connection, Gretzel et al. (2015) emphasizes that both information and telecommunications in the tourism sector are mobile and modernized by integrating with global distribution channels, central reservation systems, social media adaptation, web-based technologies. New tourism destinations are a concept that has been created in the smart tourism of the smart city concept under the smart destination name. What is smart tourism?

Although there is not a unique definition for smart tourism, besides intelligent tourism, tourism intelligence and e-tourism, the combination of ICT and tourism is becoming popular about the incorporation of social media or mobile internet with tourism (Chao, 2015). In fact, smart tourism is a major contributor to the development of the tourism industry in consequence of the mobile technology is in the hands of potential tourists with opportunities to make online bookings, maps, restaurants or online bookings, to buy airplane tickets, to catch campaigns. Individuals can see, know and choose their tourism alternatives without losing time and money. According to Hunter, et al., (2015:110), smart tourism makes information more interactive and more reflective of the interests of the user, makes new capabilities and resources available to the traveler and to destination based stakeholders.

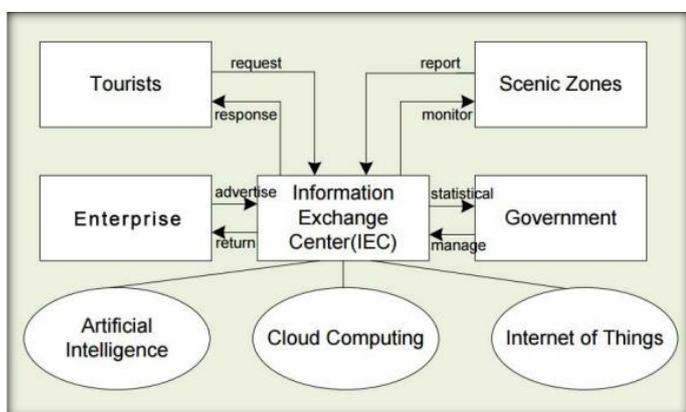
Although there is no single definition, Smart tourism focuses on 4 topics. Firstly, smart tourism provides the adaptation of 'smart' technologies with tourism, the internet, cloud computing, mobile communication technologies, artificial intelligence, fast wireless communication, GIS (Geographic Information System) and VR (Virtual Reality). Secondly, smart tourism services are not only for tourists but also for the state, local people and tourist business owners. As a third, smart tourism offers information access opportunities to tourists and the public at an instant, ultimately being 'smart' has a supporting role for systematic, intensive, knowledge sharing and innovation (Tu and Liu, 2014).

In this context, e-Tourism and Smart Tourism concepts which are available to be mixed in conceptually are compared in the table below (Gretzel, et al., 2015:182);

**Table 1:** Smart Tourism vs. e- Tourism

	e-Tourism	Smart Tourism
<b>Sphere</b>	Digital	Bridging digital & physical
<b>Core Technology</b>	Websites	Sensors & smartphones
<b>Travel Phase</b>	Pre-&post travel	During trip
<b>Lifeblood</b>	Information	Big data
<b>Paradigm</b>	Interactivity	Technology-mediated co-creation
<b>Structure</b>	Value chain/intermediaries	Ecosystem
<b>Exchange</b>	B2B, B2C, C2C	Public-private-consumer collaboration

In Table 1 it is seen that smart tourism connects the physical world with the digital world by creating a link. If e-tourism is used before and after a trip on the internet by linking to websites, smart tourism can be used during travel and through many phone or tablet that can be accessed from many sources.



**Figure 1:** Structure of Smart Tourism

**Source:** Chao, Z. (2015). Study on Innovative Design of Chinese Smart Tourism Products. p.24

As seen in Figure 1, tourists, regions, businesses and government departments for smart tourism are receiving a response from the same information exchange center. IEC is powered by artificial intelligence, cloud computing and IoT (Internet of Things). The information is easy to access and streamlined. Demos, statistics, reports, requests are shared in this IEC and accessible to everyone.

As a result, with the fast improvement of information technology and mobile Internet, more technology combines with smart tourism according to different needs of different issues.

### SMART EXAMPLES IN TOURISM

Enterprises are looking for ways to continually improve the quality of their products and services which can lead to success. Tangible products include goods such as alarm clocks, curtains or hairdryers in hotel rooms, services that are intangible include facilities such as the speed of internet in the hotel or the period of the cleaning of the room. For the satisfaction of the customers, these products and services should be improved from time to time or replaced with innovations within the scope of technological changes. Particularly, the feedback from customers is an important resource for these developments. The other way should be keeping the eyes open for challenges, following new trends, learning new technology and products (O'Shannessy and Minett, 2008: 257). As a matter of fact, enterprises do not remain behind the competition nor lose the customer.

Nowadays, new products and services are being developed in consideration of technological developments and innovations in the smart tourism gateways. Some of these are the following;

#### 1. Online Social Media Websites (such as Facebook, Booking.com)

Whereas in the past, travel agencies or intermediaries had chosen from a limited number of hotels selected from catalogs, nowadays hotel, airplane and restaurant reservations can be made anywhere in the world through social media channels. Customers and potential customers can easily find places in the standard they want, within the price ranges they choose from the regions.

With the implementation of Smart systems in the tourism sector, increasing social media channels enable online booking, as well as positive or negative consumer comments to be tracked. Thus, ideas can be formed on consumers' minds even for small hotels that are not included in the famous

chains and are not recognized, and these hotels can be translated on travel. these hotels can be preferred for traveling (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009:123-124). In this case, it might be said that the inclusion of online technologies has left behind the best understanding of traditional 5-star hotels.

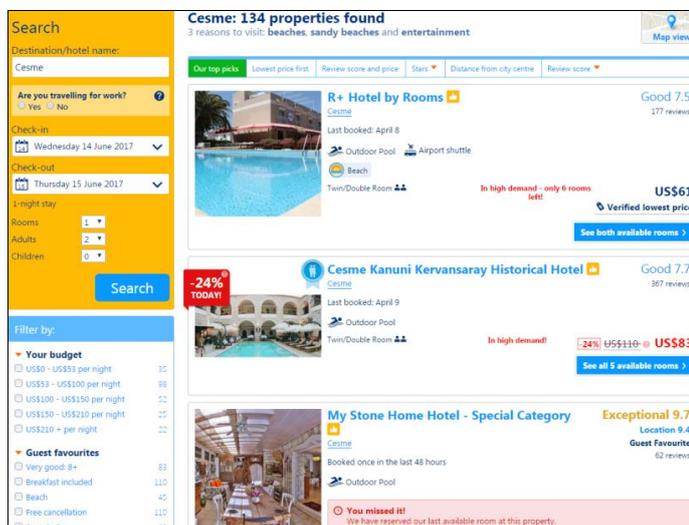


Figure 2: Booking.com Example - 1

In the example of Figure 2, when looking for a hotel to stay for June in İzmir-Çesme on April 13, 2017, it is seen that starless hotel received 9.7 points out of 10 within the scope of consumer comments and evaluations and there is no room at the hotel even though the entrance date to the hotel is only 2 months.

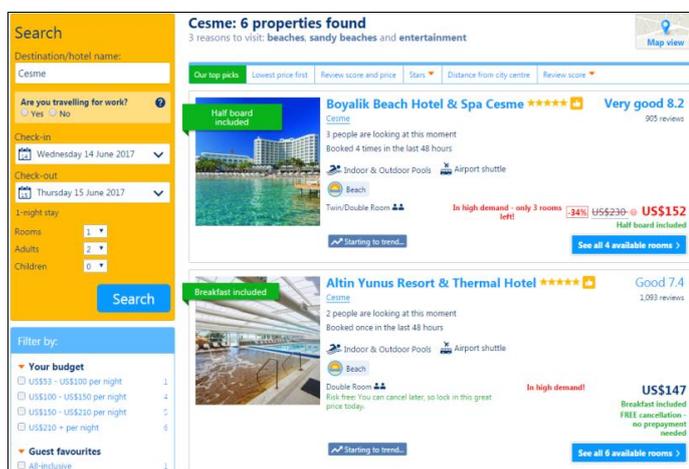


Figure 3: Booking.com Example - 2

In Figure 3 it is seen that while only 5-star hotels are being browsed for the same dates, the rooms can be found even though there is a lot of demand and these hotels have lower scores than a starless hotel in the comments and ratings of the consumers. However, it will be useful to consider the number of consumers who are present when making decisions. The

starless hotel was rated 62 and 5-star hotels were rated 1000 on average.

## 2. Use of Technology in Hospitality Industry (such as tablets in guest rooms and restaurants, Smartphone keys)

One of the types of innovation is product innovation as it is documented in the first part of the study. In such innovations, significant improvements are made to the existing products to provide improvements in terms of efficiency and speed. Methods used in process innovations which are other types of innovation are being improved. The starting points and objectives of such innovations in goods and services should be to increase customer satisfaction. Because increasing customer satisfaction will bring continuity, loyalty and competitive advantage to enterprises. In this context, the technological innovations that can be used or used in hospitality enterprises are confronted as improvements in products and processes. For example, nowadays people often travel with their smartphones, tablets and/or computers. During their travels, these people need internet service in their accommodation. While many hotels have previously offered internet services at certain rates per hour but now they are starting to give this service free of charge in various parts of the hotel (lobby, restaurants, fitness center, guest rooms, etc.) with the awareness of their needs. Smartphones now also function as room keys in some hotels.

Hotels will increasingly install smart room access systems that allow guests to unlock their doors by simply swiping their phones across a keyless pad on the door. Starwood (owner of the Sheraton, Weston and “W” hotel chains) has already upgraded 30,000 room locks across 150 hotels with this system and Hilton will be implementing a similar system (Aurecongroup). With this system, guests will not lose their keys and front office workers will not be involved in the key exchange process.

In another example of innovation in hotel rooms; the Aria Resort and Casino hotel located in Las Vegas allows hotel guests to control the lights, curtains, radios, televisions, air conditioning in a room on a tablet. The tablet also provides charging via USB ports and can turn on and off the "Please do not disturb" light outside the room door.

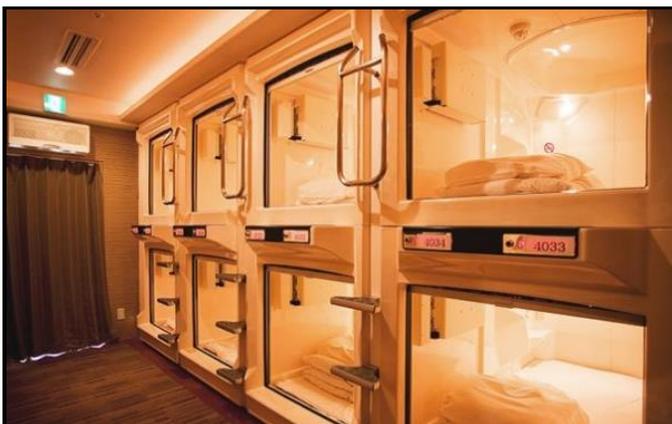


**Figure 4:** Tablet Application in Hotel Rooms

In another example of innovation in the hotel rooms of Figure 4; the Aria Resort and Casino hotel located in Las Vegas allows hotel guests to control the lights, curtains, radios, televisions, air conditioning in a room on a tablet. The tablet also provides charging via USB ports and can turn on and off the "Please do not disturb" light outside the room door (Businessinsider).

### 3. Specialist Accommodation (e.g. Capsule bed hotels)

One of the innovations in hospitality today is accommodation in the capsule, first developed in Japan in the 1970s (Kotaku) and then spread to the world. They are also known as Pod hotels. In capsule hotels which are considered as one of the reasonably priced accommodation types, the guests stay in box-like compartments where they can only lie down and sleep.



**Figure 5:** Capsule Hotel - Japan Instance

It is also possible to find capsule hotels in Amsterdam that have become a trend that started in Japan and spread rapidly in other countries of the world. In Figure 6, Amsterdam CityHub offers compartments reasonably priced, wireless internet access in each area and a panel of light and a window

for claustrophobics compared to many hostels (Businessinsider).



**Figure 6:** Amsterdam City Hub

Lastly, India's first capsule hotel was opened in Mumbai-India in March 2017.

The compartments are slightly larger than the other examples and there are TVs in these compartments (Dnaindia).



**Figure 7:** Capsule Hotel - Mumbai

### 4. Hotels of the Future (e.g.: Space hotels and robotic hotels)

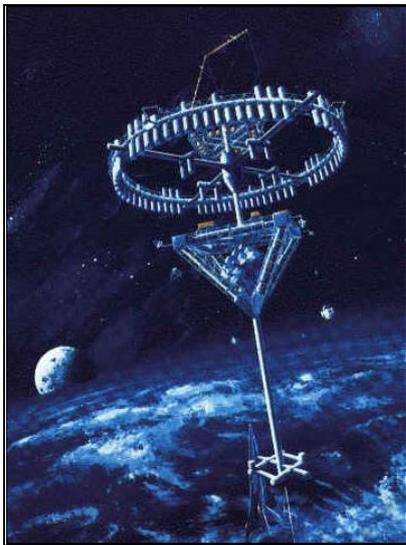
Nowadays, there are also hotels where robots are used. For instance, these robots bring towels to guests in the pool at the Aloft Cupertino hotel in California, pick up and place luggage at the Yotel in New York, and make check-in at the Weird Hotel in Japan (Businessinsider).



**Figure 8:** Robotic Hotel - The Weird Hotel/Japan

In the future, it is anticipated that robots will clean the rooms and technological innovations will reduce the operating costs of the hotels (Rentokil).

Those who predict the possibility of space tourism in the future have developed the concept of the spaceship. In the future, the space hotels that can be built in space would move at 27,500 km/h (17,000 mph), circling the planet every 90 minutes. Thus, 16 sunrises and sunsets would be visible. (BBC).



**Figure 9:** Shimizu Corporation Space Hotel Design

Hotels in orbit will offer the services given like in other hotels, private rooms, meals, bars. But they will also offer two unique experiences; stupendous views of the Earth and space and the endless entertainment of living in zero G including further possibilities such as space walking (Spacefuture).

## CONCLUSION

It is a fact that the tourism sector, which has a great economic and social importance throughout the world, is under the influence of contemporary innovation practices. The tourism sector which is human-focused by its nature is open to the continuation of customer satisfaction. It would be difficult for the sector to advance in an environment where customer satisfaction is not provided; changing technological and environmental conditions are ignored. For this reason, studies are being made on innovation applications.

Nowadays both competitive environments and preferences of the consumers are constantly changing in the tourism sector. Under these conditions, tourism enterprises keep taking the pulse of the market and carry on with various innovations. Innovation provides renewals and changes in the goods and services in the tourism sector as it is in every area, facilitates the work of tourism employees, helps to promote and marketing the unknown and incorporates the customer into the production process. Current innovation practices are available in the tourism sector around the world as part of smart technology. The development of these examples in short and long term and transforming new ideas and inventions into marketable ones in the sector is important for the future of tourism. Smart technologies make the business life easier, shorten the duration of the work and even some professions can be abandoned in time. It is, therefore, necessary to pay attention to the need for human labor in tourism which is a labor-intensive industry while these inventions are being carried out. According to the WTTC, will the tourism sector, which is one of the leading gateways of every 10 people in the world, cause millions of people to become unemployed due to these technological innovations?

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