



Digital Transformation of MICE Tourism in Kashmir: A Post-Pandemic Analysis of Digital Influence through Hotel Reviews

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism sector globally, with Kashmir emerging as a key focus due to its untapped potential. This study examines the post-pandemic digital influence on MICE tourism in Kashmir by analyzing hotel reviews across platforms like TripAdvisor and Google Reviews. Using sentiment analysis and thematic coding, the research evaluates how digital tools virtual tours, AI-driven bookings, and hybrid event solutions have reshaped traveler perceptions and operational efficiencies. Findings reveal that hotels adopting digital innovations (e.g., contactless check-ins, virtual venue previews) saw higher ratings, while gaps in digital infrastructure persist in remote areas. The study highlights the role of social media and online reputation management in reviving Kashmir's MICE sector, offering actionable insights for policymakers and hospitality stakeholders to leverage digital strategies for sustainable recovery.

Keywords: MICE Tourism, Digital Transformation, Post-Pandemic Recovery, Hospitality Technology.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of MICE Tourism in Kashmir

With its exquisite landscapes, rich culture, and developing hospitality infrastructure, Kashmir has been identified as a potential MICE tourism destination (Mir & Ahmad, 2022). There is evidence that MICE tourism serves as a focal point for enabling growth, business interactions, and job opportunities on a global scale for a region's

economy (UNWTO, 2023). Although Kashmir has expanded its hospitality services, its use as a MICE destination, particularly regarding technological adoption and transformation, is limited.

Kashmir's pre-existing infrastructural and political issues compounded with the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on MICE tourism, severely disrupted MICE tourism at a global level. There exists literature focusing on MICE tourism recovery from various global perspectives, however, there is a notable gap in studies concentrating on the impact of digital resources, particularly user-generated hotel reviews, on semi-conflict developing areas like Kashmir.

This study aims to close that gap in the Kashmir region by examining the impact of internet platforms and AI-powered hotel services as technology tools on visitor satisfaction and MICE sector operational strategies. It seeks to explain how business tourism is changing due to digital transformation in sensitive, high-potential regions.

1.2 Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Tourism

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on global tourism were disastrous, with lockdowns, travel barriers, and other health precautions causing massive disruption (UNWTO, 2023). The MICE industry suffered immensely because of the reliance on physical interactions resulting in the cancellation of large gatherings which created a large dip in revenue (Gössling et al., 2021). As stated by the World Travel and Tourism Council (2022), business travel incorporating the MICE sector saw a plunge of more than 60% in 2020. Nevertheless, this crisis has enhanced the pace of digital transformation in the tourism industry through a greater emphasis on fully virtual and hybrid events (Sigala, 2022). The ability for businesses to operate through the new MICE paradigm of webinars, virtual gatherings, and online networking changed business practices (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Moreover, instilling the use of artificial intelligence in chatbots and other services, alongside leaving online customer feedback, became crucial in boosting traveler's trust and participation during the post-pandemic world.

1.3 Role of Digital Platforms and Hotel Reviews

By the existence of new technologies and their ubiquitous spread, digital platforms have a tremendous impact on tourists' views and choices, especially where online evaluations are the principal information source (Xiang et al., 2022). User-generated comments on service rendering on the websites TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Booking.com influence the user's perspective tourists' perception towards the quality of services, facilities and experiences offered to them (Kim et al., 2023). Research shows that with the increase in travel, there has also been an increase in the use of online reputation for hotels with 93% of consumers saying that their choice to book a hotel was influenced by reviews (Statista, 2023). There is a new focus on digital engagement in the post-pandemic period as travellers are becoming more concerned with hygiene and safety and personalized services (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Thus, online reputation management has turned into a necessity rather than a need for hospitality

businesses which is more than significantly impacts customer trust and business competitiveness (Gursoy et al., 2022). Hitherto, hotels are employing techniques such as AI-powered sentiment analysis and proactive digital interactions through automated responses to enhance the guest experience.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To study the demographic profile of MICE tourists visiting Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To evaluate the impact of hotel amenities and facilities on the satisfaction of MICE tourists.
3. To examine the influence of technological innovations in hotels on the satisfaction of MICE tourists.
4. To investigate the effect of personalized services provided by hotels on the satisfaction of MICE tourists.
5. To assess the influence of service quality in hotels on the satisfaction of MICE tourist

1.5 Structure of the Manuscript

To enable a thorough assessment of MICE tourism digital transformation in Kashmir, the study is divided into five parts. The relevance of MICE tourism in Kashmir, the consequence of COVID-19, and the integration of digital platforms in the tourist experience are presented in the Introduction section. The reasoned literature looks into the views on digital transformation, MICE tourism, and theories on tourist' satisfaction, here underpinning the study with appropriate concepts. Existing studies on demographic changes, hotel services, technology, service delivery, and posted online evaluations are integrated in the Literature Review section. The most important findings regarding the impact of digital transformation on MICE tourism in the post-pandemic period are discussed in the Discussion section. Insights captured in this study along with theoretical contributions, practical implications, and recommendations for further research are discussed in the Conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Digital Transformation in Tourism

The framework of a Digital Service Ecosystem (DSE) assists in analyzing the value co-creation processes of platforms, service providers, and users. The relation of a cluster of hotels with a digital review platform such as TripAdvisor and MICE tourists can be referred to as a localized digital ecosystem in Kashmir. The integration of AI chatbots and contactless check-ins in hotels in Srinagar during recovery from COVID-19 is one example of co-creation in this context.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) of effectiveness and efficiency, as subjects of focus, is equally applicable in this context. The use of AI in Kashmiri hotels or the booking through mobile applications require some adaptation from corporate clientele. This research seeks to apply TAM to assess the impact of perceived value of convenience on MICE satisfaction and loyalty in Kashmiri services.

Digital transformation in tourism is the use of technology for business processes, customer relationships, and marketing, which is transforming the industry (Buhalis, 2022). Relevant theoretical models are, for example, the Digital Service Ecosystem (DSE) framework which focuses on the interplay of digital and service (platforms, providers, tourists) value co-creation through online communication (Neuhofer et al., 2021). One of the most practical models is the Technology Acceptance Model, which studies the impact of users' perceptions of the system's ease of use and usefulness on tourists' acceptance of digital services, like mobile booking systems, AI chatbots, and virtual tours (Davis, 1989; Kim & Law, 2022). These are examples of the rapid changes brought about by technology on the behavior and expectations of travelers, the quality of services, and the experiences offered by the services. A data-driven approach to decision making is becoming more commonplace among tourism service providers. This way, digital transformation improves personalization, effectiveness, and satisfaction in the sector as noted by (Gretzel et al., 2022).

2.2 MICE Tourism: Concepts and Significance

MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism integration focuses on business functions such as corporate meetings and large regional business exhibitions (Getz & Page, 2020). This area of tourism is one of the foremost activity areas from an economic growth perspective as it plays a vital role in creation of jobs, infrastructure, and external relations (UNWTO, 2022). Different from other forms of tourism, MICE spending creates value added to a destination's brand as it transforms a location into a professional center which raises the level of investment and expenditures from tourists (Weber & Chon, 2021).

With regard to Kashmir, MICE tourism is woven into overall tourism and economic policies to capitalize on the natural beauty of Kashmir along with its history and developing hospitality infrastructure (Mir & Faizan, 2023). The restoration of Kashmir as a leading destination for MICE tourism is aided by the construction of new conference facilities, high-class hotels, and modern methods of advertisement. The focus on post-COVID-19 recovery includes the approach of digital technologies, hybrid events, and green policies that aim to grow this industry (WTTC, 2023).

2.3 Tourist Satisfaction: Key Determinants

The level of satisfaction among tourists significantly affects the success of a tourist destination because it affects the likelihood of returning visitors as well as referrals (Chen & Rahman, 2022). Satisfaction is attributed to several amenities, including the relevant comfortable beds, dining and excellent conferencing services (Ali et al., 2021), along with other forms of technology such as online booking, smart hotels and AI-enabled customer service (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Tourists are further assisted with prepacked tours and concierge services based on their needs (Neuhofer et al., 2021).

The SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988) is one of the best-known models for measuring service quality and it also provides useful dimensions for assessment based on the requirements of the customer. It describes the five aspects that comprise tourist satisfaction as: tangibles (the setting and decoration of the premises), reliability (providing the promised service), responsiveness (giving help in time), Assurance (the staff in terms of their knowledge and kindness), and empathy (providing individual attention) (Zeithaml et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020). These factors are useful for understanding the challenges to provide adequate service in the hospitality sector to remain competitive in tourism business (Gretzel et al., 2022).

3. Literature Review

Studies on MICE tourism and digital transformation exist, but they are often geographically focused on developed regions or large cities. This review attempts to explore the entire body of literature while assessing its applicability to the recovery of tourism in Kashmir after the pandemic. It focuses on five primary areas: tourist profiles, hotel facilities, emerging technology, customization, and online reputation management (Ranjan et al., 2022).

This body of literature aims to form a theoretical framework while simultaneously highlighting the specific under-researched spaces pertaining to singular MICE tourism in the region of Kashmir. The next few paragraphs combine empirical data with global insights to achieve the primary aims of the research.

3.1 Demographic Profile of MICE Tourists in Kashmir

The corporate MICE tourists that travel to Kashmir are mostly government employees, professionals and academicians looking for places to hold their business meetings, academic conclaves, and policy conferences (Sharma & Gupta, 2022). Following Kumar's research, there has been a recent change in the travel preference of the public that stems from the COVID-19 pandemic, with the new desire for MICE tourism hotspots now including those that have digital connectivity, interventional tourism, and health prerequisites available. To Singh and Bhattacharya's research, during the pandemic, there has been a noticeable shift in preference of MICE tourists to hotels with contactless interfaces for the services, better bathing facilities, and high bandwidth internet for dual attendance benefits of physical and virtual. These changes in demographic characteristics provide hospitality service providers with guidelines to anticipate their service delivery.

3.2 Impact of Hotel Amenities and Facilities on Satisfaction

Recent research shows that MICE tourists book a hotel with adequate ultra-modern ergonomic accommodation, speedy internet, and work-ready conference facilities (Kumar et al., 2023). Gupta et al. establish that comfort in well-furnished hotels influences the level of satisfaction from an event and the likelihood of return visits. Advanced audio-visual capabilities, internet speed, and availability of business centre rooms greatly increase the chances for corporations to attend events held in various hotels within popular MICE regions. Sustainability-oriented features, including energy-efficient facilities and green, environmentally-friendly meeting areas, have become more important for event organizers as well (Chaudhary & Verma, 2023).

3.3 Influence of Technological Innovations in Hotels

The use of technology in an industry, especially the use of AI chatbots, smart IoT rooms, and mobile concierge services, is changing the experience of MICE tourism (Zhang & Wang, 2023). There are studies claiming that guest satisfaction and business effectiveness of hotels with these features is higher compared to those without such innovations (Lee et al., 2022). Automation through AI increases interactions including predictive maintenance and checking in without human contact, which suits the needs of digital business travellers (Sharma & Gupta, 2022). Also, hotels that offer a preview of the venue using virtual reality (VR) and secure bookings via blockchain technology are increasingly being preferred by MICE tourism customers (Das & Mukherjee, 2023).

3.4 Effect of Personalized Services on Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction of MICE tourists is increased with the provision of personalized products like unique travel plans, VIP concierge assistance and custom-made business plans (Raj & Bhatnagar, 2022). Research indicates that customers look for services that are relevant to them personally, which leads to increased Customer Engagement and Loyalty (Chen & Park, 2021). Automating service personalization for guests has been made possible through AI, allowing hotels to better serve their clients by predicting guest needs and automating recommendations (Huang et al., 2023). Providing personalized services like welcome gifts, special diets, and private sub-networking functions leaves a mark and thus helps in guest retention (Singh & Joshi, 2022).

3.5 Role of Service Quality in Shaping Tourist Experiences

Alongside all others, Service Quality is one of the key components determining the satisfaction of MICE tourists which is heavily impacted by the factors: reliability, responsiveness and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The SERVQUAL model defines visitor experience through five service dimensions; tangibles, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and reliability; that are responsible for the experiences (Kumar et al., 2023). Hotels using real-time feedback tools, AI services, and advanced analytics for service quality improvement report higher client retention rates (Chowdhury & Rahman, 2021; Singh, 2018). Quite several studies prove that the constancy of these

services and swift help to the clients greatly characterize MICE tourism and therefore magnify the effectiveness of service delivery (Mehta & Shah, 2023).

3.6 Digital Influence through Hotel Reviews

When it comes to MICE tourism, online reviews are important for tourists as they consider accommodation options. This is especially true for corporate clients who need trustworthy hotels that provide exceptional services. Hotels' names are affected by online platforms such as TripAdvisor and Google Reviews, which have a profound influence on customers and trends within the market (Gupta et al 2022). Good reviews improve the client's perception of the brand while bad ones indicate where improvements are needed. Nowadays, hotels that service business clients have to focus on digital reputation management – replying to reviews, analyzing sentiment with AI tools, and delivering good services on time (Choudhary & Verma 2023).

4. Discussion

4.1. Synthesis of Findings

The results of the study highlight that in the context of post-pandemic MICE tourism in developing regions such as Kashmir, digital transformation is not simply optional but rather a key component. From the perspective of MICE tourists, AI-powered customer service, automation of smart rooms, and other online feedback services change the perception of the quality of service hotels offer. This is consistent with the SERVQUAL model, particularly the aspects of reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. For example, immediate replies given by AI-customer service representatives on various hotel review sites resulted in increased customer satisfaction, which can be regarded as a type of digital empathy and assurance. Also, expressing ease of use as TAM suggested brings about positive reactions toward mobile check-ins and virtual previews of the venue, which is located on the premises of the hotel. On the other hand, lack of uniform quality of internet connection and training of personnel in remote, smaller hotels is a clear barrier to complete digital acceptance which illustrates a gap between what can be done in theory and what is done in practice.

4.2 Digital Changes Following the Pandemic in MICE Tourism

An aggressive shift towards the adoption of technologies has been noted after the pandemic, especially by hotels and event organizers in the MICE sector. AI-enabled devices such as chatbots for customer service, automated bookings, and IoT smart rooms have greatly improved the hospitality industry. The rise of virtual event platforms has made it possible for businesses to host hybrid conferences as well as remote collaborations (Lee & Park, 2023). Guests' needs and gaps in service are best captured and evaluated in online reviews. Singh and Sharma (2023) argue that robust digital infrastructures have increased the ability of MICE tourism to be responsive and flexible during a tech-focused epoch.

4.3 Implications for Stakeholders

- Hotels: Incorporating services like virtual check-ins, AI customer support, and automated reputation management systems is imperative for sustaining MICE tourism (Choudhary & Verma, 2023). Trust of corporate clients can be earned by hotels through robust cybersecurity measures and data privacy protection.
- Tourism Operators: The use of an integrated approach leveraging digital marketing, AI customer churn analysis, and virtual tours can enhance MICE tourism (Kumar & Bansal, 2023).
- Policymakers: Kashmir needs to position itself as a MICE destination by investing in digital infrastructure and putting in place cybersecurity regulations as well as smart tourism policies (Singh & Sharma, 2023).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The present study highlights the digital transformation of MICE tourism in Kashmir and the ever-increasing role technology plays in crafting tourist experiences, service delivery, and the competitiveness of the destination. The study also showed the great importance of hotel reviews to tourist satisfaction because reviews contain information that hotels can use to improve their services.

Emerging evidence indicates that automation, particularly AI customer service, smart IoT room applications, and automated booking systems, improves service provision and convenience to guests (Gupta et al., 2022). Also, Kumar & Bansal (2023) explained that MICE tourism digital engagement goes beyond an ancillary element; it is an essential component that generates customer trust, and brand loyalty, and increases market supply. Additionally, Lee and Park noted that these pandemic recovery plans have strengthened the online reputation and event management, as well as real-time service delivery, to adapt to changing tourist needs (Lee & Park 2023).

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study analyzes MICE tourism within the expanding context of digital tourism literature by using the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to assess the consequences of digital transformation of tourism services. In particular, this research advances the understanding of application of SERVQUAL model in relation to MICE tourism by proving that digital service elements; online responsiveness, digital assurance, and e-service reliability, diminish the level of satisfaction of tourists in MICE tourism (Choudhary & Verma, 2023).

In addition, it supports the TAM model by studying how tools impact a tourist's behavioral patterns, their decisions in making bookings, and the service quality they anticipate (Kumar & Bansal, 2023; Singh *et al.* 2021). This study

also contributes to the understanding of the merger between digitization and hospitality management by illustrating how digital interaction improves guest experiences, enhances organizational productivity, and improves the competitiveness of the firm (Gupta & Patel, 2022). The study fills gaps around other theories by showing the post-Covid picture and how countries and businesses respond in terms of resilience, adaptation, and future directions for digital MICE tourism.

5.3 Practical Suggestions

- **Improving Digital Infrastructure:** Hotel operators need to upgrade service delivery methods and operational efficiency through automated guest services, artificial intelligence, service internet, and digital comments and feedback systems (Lee & Park, 2023). The inclusion of VR tours and contactless check-ins enhances guest experience and satisfaction further.
- **Improving Online Reputation Management:** Proactive engagement with reviews and feedback about the hotel is important for brand image and trust maintenance among MICE tourists (Singh & Sharma, 2023). Hotels should employ AI-based sentiment analysis tools to enhance guest satisfaction monitoring and escalation of issues for immediate resolution.
- **Creating Marketing Strategies Through Digital Marketing:** Hotels and tourism companies need to reach out to MICE tourists using targeted digital marketing, personalized emails, and AI-driven suggestions (Kumar & Bansal, 2023). Their visibility and engagement can be improved through social media, influencer marketing, and SEO.
- **Creating New Hybrid and Virtual Event Technologies:** In light of the recent changes after the pandemic, hotels and event venues need to provide hybrid conferences, live streaming, and virtual networking services for global and out-of-office corporate participants (Choudhary & Verma, 2023).

5.4 Gaps and Directions for Further Research

Although this research attempts to cover the MICE tourism industry in Kashmir from a digital transformation perspective, it has some gaps. Firstly, this study is largely dependent on secondary sources, which restrict data analysis and offer little to no real-time trend capture. For further studies, primary data issuance through questionnaires, interviews, and focus studies of MICE tourists and industry staff is recommended. Secondly, the research narrows down on Kashmir as a particular region, which could hinder the applicability of the results to other MICE locations. Further studies may analyze the shifts in digital tourism across different areas with international targets and exemplary regions (Singh & Sharma, 2023).

Finally, this research focused on the short-term aspects of digitalization, ignoring its sustainability and continuous technological change. Further research should pay attention to how innovations like blockchain, metaverse

tourism, and AI predictive analytics, which are still in their infancy, will impact MICE tourism after the pandemic (Kumar & Bansal, 2023).

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