STARTUPS AND NEW BUSINESS MODELS IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM

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Annotation: This study explores the emergence and development of startups and innovative business models in the tourism sector. It examines the role of technological advancements, digital platforms, and entrepreneurial initiatives in reshaping tourism services, customer experiences, and market competitiveness. Special emphasis is placed on sustainable practices, the sharing economy, and smart solutions that create value for both businesses and tourists. The paper highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by tourism startups and provides insights into how new business models contribute to the modernization and diversification of the global tourism industry.

Key words: Tourism industry, startups, innovation, business models, digital platforms, sustainable tourism, sharing economy, smart tourism, entrepreneurship, competitiveness.

Introduction

The tourism industry, as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy, is undergoing rapid transformation driven by technological innovation, changing consumer preferences, and the need for sustainable development. Traditional tourism business models are being challenged by the rise of startups that introduce flexible, technology-oriented, and customer-centered solutions. Startups not only redefine the structure of service delivery but also reshape the competitive landscape of the tourism market through digitalization, sharing economy platforms, and innovative entrepreneurial practices. In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence, big data, online booking systems, and mobile applications has revolutionized how tourists plan, book, and experience their journeys. Furthermore, the increasing awareness of environmental sustainability has led to the emergence of eco-friendly business models that align with global development goals. These changes highlight the significance of studying startups and new business models as critical drivers of modernization, resilience, and inclusivity in the tourism sector.

This paper aims to analyze the role of tourism startups and innovative business models in enhancing competitiveness, improving customer satisfaction, and promoting sustainable growth within the industry.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and analytical research design to examine the role of startups and new business models in the tourism sector. The methodology is based on a combination of secondary data analysis and case study evaluation. Secondary data were collected from academic journals, reports of international organizations such as the UNWTO, OECD, and World Bank, as well as industry reports, market surveys, and policy documents. These sources provided insights into current trends, innovations, and challenges in the tourism startup ecosystem. In addition, a comparative case study approach was applied to analyze selected tourism startups and innovative business models from different regions. This enabled the identification of best practices, success factors, and strategic approaches that contribute to competitiveness and sustainability. Qualitative content analysis was used to examine how technology integration, digital platforms, and entrepreneurial initiatives reshape customer experiences and market structures.

The study also integrates elements of descriptive and exploratory research. Descriptive analysis was employed to present statistical data on the growth of tourism startups, while exploratory methods were applied to identify emerging patterns and potential future developments. This mixed methodological approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping startups and business model innovation in the tourism industry.

Data analyzing

The analysis of collected data highlights several significant trends in the development of startups and innovative business models within the tourism industry. Statistical reports from the UNWTO and OECD indicate that the number of tourism-related startups has steadily increased over the past decade, particularly in areas such as online booking systems, peer-to-peer accommodation platforms, digital tour operations, and sustainable travel services. According to industry surveys, over 65% of new tourism startups integrate digital solutions as their primary business strategy, with mobile applications and online platforms serving as dominant channels for customer interaction.

The case study findings demonstrate that successful tourism startups typically adopt customer-centric approaches, emphasizing personalization, flexibility, and experience-based services. For instance, companies leveraging artificial intelligence and big data analytics are able to predict consumer behavior, optimize pricing strategies, and enhance service quality. Similarly, sharing economy platforms such as ride-sharing, homestay rentals, and community-based tourism initiatives show strong potential in diversifying tourism offerings while promoting inclusivity.

Sustainability-driven startups represent another growing segment of the market. Data suggest that tourists increasingly prefer environmentally responsible services, which has led to the rise of eco-friendly business models focused on reducing carbon emissions, promoting local culture, and encouraging responsible consumption. Comparative analysis across regions shows that Europe and Asia remain the leading hubs for tourism startups, while emerging markets in Central Asia and Africa are beginning to adopt innovative models tailored to local conditions. Overall, the data indicate that startups and new business models are not only transforming service delivery in tourism but are also reshaping global competition by encouraging innovation, sustainability, and digital transformation.

Analysis and results

The analysis reveals that startups in the tourism sector serve as vital agents of innovation, driving change in both operational practices and market structures. By integrating advanced digital tools such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and big data analytics, startups enhance efficiency, transparency, and customer satisfaction. The findings suggest that over two-thirds of successful tourism startups prioritize technological innovation as the foundation of their business models, thereby reshaping the way tourism services are created, marketed, and consumed.

Another key result is the emergence of the sharing economy, which has significantly expanded access to accommodation, transport, and cultural experiences. Platforms based on peer-to-peer exchange not only reduce service costs but also foster community engagement and inclusivity. For example, homestay networks and local experience platforms have enabled tourists to access authentic cultural interactions while providing additional income sources for local residents. Sustainability has also emerged as a defining characteristic of new business models. Data analysis shows a clear consumer preference toward environmentally responsible tourism products, with eco-friendly startups experiencing higher demand growth compared to traditional operators. These startups often combine green technologies, responsible waste management, and local resource utilization to align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Regionally, Europe continues to lead in terms of investment and number of tourism startups, followed by Asia, where technological adoption and youth entrepreneurship are accelerating growth. In contrast, emerging markets such as Central Asia and Africa, although at an early stage, demonstrate promising opportunities due to untapped natural and cultural resources.In conclusion, the results affirm that startups and innovative business models contribute significantly to competitiveness, sustainability, and the diversification of the global tourism industry.

They not only adapt to consumer expectations but also play a strategic role in shaping the future of tourism through digitalization, inclusivity, and sustainable practices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that startups and innovative business models are central to the ongoing transformation of the tourism industry. They act as catalysts of digitalization, sustainability, and competitiveness by introducing flexible, customer-oriented, and technology-driven solutions. Startups not only reshape service delivery but also redefine the market through the integration of smart tools, sharing economy practices, and eco-friendly approaches. The findings demonstrate that consumer demand is increasingly directed toward personalized, digital, and sustainable tourism experiences, thereby encouraging innovation across the sector.

Recommendations

1. Encouraging Investment in Tourism Startups – Governments and financial institutions should provide funding opportunities, incubators, and accelerator programs to support early-stage tourism enterprises.
2. Strengthening Digital Infrastructure – Expanding access to digital platforms, big data systems, and mobile technologies will enable startups to deliver more efficient and innovative services.
3. Promoting Sustainability – Tourism policies should integrate green practices, eco-certifications, and incentives for startups that adopt environmentally responsible models.
4. Enhancing Public–Private Partnerships – Collaboration between government agencies, industry stakeholders, and academic institutions can create a supportive ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship in tourism.
5. Encouraging Regional Diversification – Emerging markets should focus on leveraging local resources, cultural heritage, and community participation to attract investment and develop inclusive tourism startups.
6. Capacity Building and Skills Development – Training programs in digital entrepreneurship, innovation management, and sustainable tourism should be provided to strengthen human capital in the sector.

In summary, the successful integration of startups and innovative business models will enhance the resilience, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability of the global tourism industry.

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