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THE EMERGENCE OF THE ‘SILENT-TRAVELLER’: CYPRUS AS AN INNOVATIVE DESTINATION

Extended Abstract

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Introduction

The main characteristics of today’s business environment that naturally affect the tourism industry are innovation and technological adaptation (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier 2015; Pesonen and Horster 2012; Aldebert, Dang and Longhi 2011; Hjalager 2010; Stamboulis and Skayannis 2005). Technological developments have outpaced initial expectations with applications for the business environment that alter how business is conducted. The speed with which technology moves forward is increasing at an uncontrollable rate and these changes have significant implications for the tourism industry. First and foremost, the nature of travelling has changed by fostering modern dispositions of the ‘silent-travellers’ whose wants and needs are very different from their predecessors and are tied with technological innovations in the travelling process.

The emerging market of the millenniums or the silent generation who include the group aged 18 to 34 accounts for 1.8 billion out of the total 7 billion on earth (Hargrove 2014; Horwathhtl 2015; Issa and Isaias 2016) have exponential abilities in using cyber technology via contemporary technological devices (Ozkam and Solmaz 2015). This particular segment of travellers is described in Rafat’s (2014) statement as follows:

‘The silent traveler is defined: who they are, what they want, how they travel.
How brands respond to the silent traveler: from technology to customer-service strategies, how the industry is reaching out to the digitally savvy and self-reliant consumer. New approaches to the brand-consumer conversation: the silent traveller isn’t so silent, after all’.

In other words, this market includes those who are savvy in technology or tech-savvy travellers seeking hi-tech interaction in all aspects of their stay experience (Gregory 2016; Hattery 2014).

Cyprus receives 2.5 million tourists per year with the majority (90%) coming from Europe. Tourism revenues account for US\$1.9 billion with a 12% contribution to the island’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (CTO 2016). The official body responsible for the development of tourism is the Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO) founded in 1969. The main aim of CTO is to ‘organise and promote Tourism within the Cyprus Republic by using all possibilities and resources available’ (CTO 2016).

CTO’s (2011) latest strategy on tourism places emphasis on Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) according to the following statement:

‘...the further use of the Internet is promoted so as to tap the business opportunities created by the new electronic environment in order to establish a comprehensive e-Business context’ (CTO 2011:4).

Relevant to this topic is not only the strategy of CTO for electronic tourism but also the stance taken by the country on promoting a digital world. This is reflected in the 'Digital Strategy of Cyprus' developed in 2013 and follows the objective of the Lisbon Agenda for a harmonised policy in Europe (Ministry of Communications and Works 2013).

The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of how the behaviour of this particular segment is perceived in the context of tourism and to examine whether key decision makers are familiar with this market and what actions have been taken in destination planning and development towards this end. Then, it will identify Cyprus' readiness for this cohort of travellers in the provision of adequate technological infrastructure and services to satisfy their needs.

Methodology

The methods were chosen in order to understand the readiness of a destination to react to the future development of tourism. This will provide a blueprint for destination planning that acts with immediacy in technological innovation and targets the so called 'silent- generation' and for the 'silent-traveller' who has confidence in using technological applications for the purpose of tourism. The island of Cyprus is an interesting area of study because it is highly dependent on the tourism industry and should be adaptive to new market trends. The aim will be achieved through self-administered questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with key decision makers in destination planning in order to understand how proactive Cyprus is regarding future developments in technological innovations. The sample is 'non-probability purposive' (Robson 1999) that targets people who have both knowledge and power regarding the issue of investigation (20 interviews – in progress starting December 2015). The questionnaire is composed by questions that aim to obtain more reliable results regarding the familiarity of the sample with the characteristics of the 'silent-traveller'. There are specific questions concerning the characteristics of this particular cohort of the market in order to identify how familiar people in the high echelon of the Cyprus Government are with this generation. This provides an understanding about the ways that the island is progressing towards technological advances. Semi-structured interviews are employed with key decision makers in destination planning from tourism and other domains from the government, for instance the Ministry of Communications and Works. The study uses NVIVO for the analysis of the qualitative data with the development of thematic networks and common patterns based on the results of the interviews. The analysis of the questionnaires is facilitated through SPSS software with descriptive statistics.

Findings

The initial results of the study suggest that Cyprus' key decision makers have adequate knowledge about 'silent-travellers'. In particular, they argued that they are more technologically driven and all decisions are based on technology. The results suggest that Cyprus is lagging behind in terms of technology and needs to be further developed towards this end. In other words, destinations that offer more technologically driven products and services and create the notion of an innovative destination are able to satisfy the needs of the 'silent-traveller' and to be more competitive. These needs are fulfilled through dynamic websites, electronic booking and ticketing, to simplified check-in procedures and on premise wireless technology and availability of technological devices. The country is not considered to be highly advanced in technological innovation and the main arguments were that ICTs policies and strategies have not been implemented adequately. This is because of the complicated bureaucratic procedures that delay the enforcement of new developments in the digital stance of the country. Additionally, the main conclusion was that in order for Cyprus to become more technologically driven in tourism, CTO should encourage all the stakeholders to adopt a common technologically driven strategy. A nexus of cooperation with private and public partnerships (PPPs)

should be developed with the Government and private stakeholders to monitor the technological provision of various services to the country. Additionally, stronger research is necessary that will lead to technological innovation which can be applied to tourism and hospitality services. Research and development (R&D) should be promoted within the CTO who can become more involved and forge links with business and academic institutions on the island. This can only be achieved with attractive Web Pages for the destination, airlines, hotels and local authorities in order to stimulate the interest of potential visitors. During their stay and tourism experience, these tourists will need a seamless technological infrastructure that should be updated and ready to access from personal technological devices. Undoubtedly, this will bring beneficial impacts and multiple effects to all layers of the economic and social life of the island.

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