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E-learning: An overview of tourism and hospitality sector

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Abstract
The everlasting impact of Information and communication technologies on the tourism and hospitality industries has been widely reviewed and considered as one of the most significant changes within the domains over the last decade: new methods of communicating with potential tourists and new methods of purchasing products have emerged and are now part of the industries' daily life. So far, little thought has been given to the function of new media in education in these fields. In several industries, there is a vast and growing interest in the practice of eLearning. This study looks into the influence of new media in tourism and hospitality education, gathering online courses and dividing them into sub domains to present a comprehensive perspective. The findings might be viewed as a preliminary impression of the tourism-related eLearning domain.

Keywords: Electronic learning, online tourism training, hospitality, online courses

Introduction
According to the European Union, e-learning is "the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by improving access to information and services, as well as remote exchanges and collaboration" (CEC 2001, p.1). It can comprise internet (online) education and training; the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and training; and the ability to change education and training via the use of ICT, depending on the researcher's viewpoint (Cantoni & Tardini, 2006; Cantoni, Botturi, Succi & New MinE Lab, 2007) [8]. In reality, all of these perspectives may be applied to the tourist industry, where ICT and the internet have had a huge influence at all levels, and where acquiring new information and skills is vital for all players, including clients. As a result, the hotel and tourist industries are a good site to investigate the function of eLearning, its acceptance, applications, and future prospects, as well as success criteria and best practices (as well as problems and failures). This study offers a preliminary map of the eLearning options available in the tourism industry, as well as a research agenda for additional examination. Following a literature analysis that reveals (e-) Tourism academics' interest in the subject, but a significant paucity of research in the eLearning community (Cantoni & Rega, 2003), a provisional map of the region is presented, based on a multiple case study research design. Only the most restrictive definition of eLearning, i.e. online learning as it can occur through courses/training modules, has been considered in this study. The map has been classified into four groups based on a sample of 300 cases, each of which has been further researched to highlight its primary characteristics. The final paragraph contains a summary and discussion of the findings, as well as a proposal for a study agenda on the subject.

Literature review
Furthermore, recent technology advancements have dramatically transformed the tourist business (Buhalis, 2003) [5], influencing both the way prospective visitors are dealt with and the way tourism goods are purchased (Werthner & Klein, 1999) [19]. Vacationers, on the one hand, are rapidly turning to innovative media tools, satisfying their data requirements at all levels of tourism consumption (i.e. before, throughout, and after – Gretzel, Fesenmaier, & O'Leary, 2006) [12]; tourism managers, on the other hand, are starting to realize that, if properly managed, technological advances can generate valuable contributions for their businesses. Moreover, technological advancements and modern internet usage have had a significant impact on educational process, altering educational curricula, learning resources, and teaching approaches (Sigala, 2002) [18]. Among the six type of industry, tourism sector have one of the upper ranks of skills gaps and personnel turnover.

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Furthermore, Boisevert (2000) [2] highlighted training as a vital success factor for the hospitality business, despite the fact that it is a costly and time-consuming aspect. Despite this, little thought has been given to the role that technological advances will play in the future of tourist learning. As per Haven and Botterill (2003) [14], eLearning is the use of computer, networked, and web-based techniques to offer and manage learning opportunities and help in order to promote individual performance and progress. The benefits, drawbacks, and opportunities of eLearning have indeed been widely explored and used, such as leeway in terms of delivery time and place, and ongoing learning opportunities and assistance using computer, networked, and web-based technologies to improve individual performance and growth. The benefits, drawbacks, and possibilities of eLearning have been widely debated and utilised, such as flexibility in terms of delivery time and location, ongoing professional development, and catalyst for structural reforms (Poehlein, 1996), but its relevance as well as benefits for tourism related education have only recently been recognised (Christou & Sigala, 2000; Kasavana, 1999) [10]. Thus according Sigala (2002) [18], the Entire internet, and eLearning in specifically, provide a great degree of flexibility in meeting specific work requirements in the tourism and hospitality industries. Additionally, Cho and Schmelzer (2000) [9] feel that eLearning helps tourism & hospitality students think critically, solve problems, and make sound decisions while being technologically proficient. Braun and Hollick (2006) [3] explored the role of flexibly dispersed online knowledge and skills sharing in tourist technical assistance. Haven and Botterill (2003) [14] conducted research on the use of elearning in the hospitality, recreational, sports, and tourist industries. Sigala (2001) investigated and analysed the development of techniques in online pedagogy in order to uncover viable eLearning approaches for tourism and hotel education. To accomplish the research goals, 300 distinct results were collected and analyzed. From March 9th to March 13th, 2009, both search results were searched from Lugano (Switzerland).

Research design and methodology

According to the examination of literature, there is a dearth of substantial research on eLearning in the hospitality and tourist fields, as well as a map of online training courses. As a result, the general purpose of this work is to map and categorize current online courses in the hospitality and tourism fields using formal knowledge map classification (Eppler, 2008) [11] criteria in order to identify their major characteristics, settings, and desired results.

As a result, the key research objectives are as follows

- To determine whether online training courses in the hotel and tourist industry are available;
- To classify current online trainings according to their similarities; and
- To identify the key features of each category.

To meet these goals, a multiple case study research technique was used, as well as to assess the various types of existing online training programmes in the hotel and tourism industries. The study was considered to be appropriate for the multiple case study research technique because it includes an in-depth investigation of unique educational solutions in a real-life context.

Results/Conclusions and Limitations

Many different classification criteria, such as the course's topic, level, technologies used, or intended audiences, have been tried, but none of them have provided a convincing map because they are either different all together and jointly lengthy or not properly defined. The course provider was the lone well-defined criterion that was both mutually and collectively exhaustive (i.e., it captured all 500 results). Academic, corporate, destination management organizations and independent suppliers have all been modeled.

This study investigated the availability of eLearning courses in the hotel and tourist industries, classifying them into four categories depending on their providers: education, Management, destination management enterprises, and independent. All categories have been further qualitatively defined based on its target audiences and training subjects. This study employed a hybrid qualitative-quantitative approach to gather examples in order to develop an overall map of the researched region in order to satisfy the aforementioned research aims. As a follow-up, the four subjects might be further described. Because of the keywords employed, online courses aimed at practitioners have taken precedence, although there are many more aimed at improving and enriching the personal experiences of travellers (for example, imparting a deeper appreciation of modern art). This observation is related to the contrast between formal and informal education and training, in which neither curriculum nor particular subjects are offered, but rather a diverse variety of knowledge experience that are not necessarily differently labelled as such ""Learning" or "teaching" " This article focuses on "subjects" (or "curriculum" or "modules"); however, with the proliferation of so-called web2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005), effective teaching and information exchange are now becoming increasingly important, with blogs, webcasts, wikis, and social networking sites now playing an important role in life-long learning, up-skilling, and knowledge gathering inside this travel and tourism community. Future research endeavors should be made to incorporate these learning methodologies, strategies & tactics. More research might be directed to two main areas of study: Various research methods might be utilized to generate maps with finer granularity, and different research methods may be used to provide maps with more clarity and detailing. Surveys and interviews can be a great source to measure eLearning spread among masses (Cantoni & Succi, 2008) [7] and taught topics in the corporate sector, while Destination Management Organizations might be examined individually to give a complete overview of their online offerings. The same can be used in the academic context, which can be investigated independently in specialized disciplines. Future research can be conducted using comparative analysis among discussed themes: vertical investigation can be done individually, for instance understanding psyche of customers, context types, methods, and so on; however, the research can also be undertaken in horizontal manner, encompassing all providers and technologies used to train specific learners.

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