



AN ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN AND NATIONAL RESEARCH ON DEVELOPING CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH DIGITAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
<p>The rapid expansion of digital tourism has changed the way individuals encounter cultural heritage, communicate with representatives of different communities and participate in tourism-related learning. Digital platforms, virtual tours, augmented reality, online museum resources, QR-based information systems and digital storytelling tools are no longer limited to destination promotion; they increasingly function as educational environments for developing cultural awareness and social communication skills. This article analyzes foreign and national research devoted to the development of cultural and social skills through digital tourism. The study is based on a comparative literature review of international scientific works, policy documents and national studies related to digital tourism, smart tourism, cultural heritage, tourism education and intercultural competence. The findings show that foreign research mainly emphasizes digital competence, intercultural communication, user experience, social inclusion and sustainable tourism education, whereas national research, particularly in Uzbekistan, focuses more on digitalization of tourism infrastructure, promotion of cultural heritage, smart tourism mechanisms and sustainable development of heritage destinations. The article concludes that digital tourism can become an effective pedagogical and socio-cultural tool if it is integrated with interactive learning, local cultural content, multilingual communication and community-based tourism practices.</p>	<p>Digital tourism, cultural skills, social skills, intercultural communication, smart tourism, cultural heritage, tourism education, Uzbekistan, digital competence, sustainable tourism.</p>

Introduction

In the modern information society, tourism is increasingly connected with digital technologies. Online booking systems, virtual excursions, mobile applications, digital maps, social media platforms, QR codes, 3D visualization, augmented reality and virtual reality tools have transformed not only the tourism industry but also the process of cultural learning. International tourism education documents emphasize that contemporary tourism curricula should include digital literacy, online marketing, communication skills, sustainability, language skills, cultural and social communication, innovation and creativity [1]. Therefore, digital tourism should be understood not only as a technological phenomenon but also as a socio-cultural and educational environment.

The development of cultural and social skills is one of the important outcomes of tourism education. Cultural skills include understanding cultural diversity, respecting traditions, interpreting heritage, and developing intercultural awareness. Social skills include communication, empathy, cooperation, active listening, tolerance, conflict resolution and the ability to interact appropriately in multicultural environments. UNESCO also stresses the growing role of digital and green skills in hospitality and tourism, because the sector is moving toward technology-supported services, sustainable practices and new competence requirements [2].

Digital tourism can support the development of these skills by creating interactive access to cultural heritage. UNESCO initiatives in the field of culture and digital technologies show that digital mapping, online cultural platforms and 3D modelling of World Heritage sites can expand access to cultural resources and strengthen public engagement with heritage [3]. In this sense, digital tourism becomes a bridge between cultural knowledge, digital competence and social interaction.

In Uzbekistan, the relevance of this topic is connected with the country's rich cultural heritage, historical Silk Road cities and the need to present national tourism resources through modern digital tools. Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shahrisabz and Tashkent have strong potential for digital routes, virtual museum resources, QR-based heritage descriptions and multilingual tourism content. National studies have increasingly discussed smart tourism, digital platforms, regional tourism management and the digital promotion of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan [9], [10]. However, the specific issue of developing cultural and social skills through digital tourism remains insufficiently systematized in national pedagogical research.

The purpose of this article is to analyze foreign and national research on the development of cultural and social skills through digital tourism and to identify the main trends, opportunities and research gaps in this field.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on a qualitative comparative literature review. The research materials include international scientific articles, tourism education guidelines, UNESCO and UN Tourism documents, works on digital competence in tourism education, and national research related to digital tourism and smart tourism in Uzbekistan [1], [2], [3], [9], [10].

The analytical method was used to study the theoretical foundations of digital tourism, cultural skills and social skills. This made it possible to clarify the meaning of the main concepts and identify their relationship with tourism education. The comparative method was applied to compare foreign and national research. Foreign studies were analyzed in terms of digital competence, intercultural communication, virtual tourism, digital storytelling and social interaction. National studies were analyzed in terms of smart tourism, digitalization of cultural heritage, tourism infrastructure and sustainable development of tourism in Uzbekistan.

The synthesis method was used to generalize the findings of previous studies and determine how digital tourism can contribute to the formation of cultural and social skills. The selection criteria for the literature were relevance to digital tourism, connection with cultural or social competence, scientific reliability, relation to tourism education or cultural heritage, and applicability to the national context of Uzbekistan. The article does not present experimental statistical data; instead, it provides a theoretical and analytical basis for further empirical research.

RESULTS

The analysis of foreign and national research shows that digital tourism influences the development of cultural and social skills in several interrelated directions.

First, digital tourism expands access to cultural heritage. Virtual museums, 3D models of historical monuments, digital archives, interactive maps and online exhibitions provide learners and tourists with opportunities to study culture in a visual and interactive form. This contributes to the development of cultural awareness, historical thinking and respect for heritage. UNESCO’s work on culture and digital technologies demonstrates that digital resources can make heritage more accessible, participatory and educational [3].

Second, digital tourism supports intercultural communication. Through multilingual tourism platforms, social media, online reviews and virtual communities, users interact with representatives of different cultures. Such interaction develops tolerance, empathy, intercultural sensitivity and communication skills. Tourism education guidelines also connect tourism training with cultural and social communication, language skills and innovation [1].

Third, digital tourism strengthens digital competence. Tourism students and professionals must be able to use online platforms, digital maps, social media tools, content management systems, virtual communication channels and data-based tourism services. The DigComp 2.2 framework presents digital competence as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to engage confidently, critically and safely with digital technologies [4]. In tourism education, empirical research has shown that professional training can influence the digital competence of tourism students [5].

Fourth, digital tourism creates conditions for collaborative learning. Students can work in groups to design virtual routes, prepare digital stories about cultural objects, create multimedia presentations, analyze tourist behavior and develop online tourism content. These activities develop teamwork, responsibility, creativity and problem-solving skills. Research on sustainable tourism and hospitality skills also shows the growing importance of digital, green and social skills for future tourism professionals [6].

Fifth, national research in Uzbekistan shows that digital tourism is becoming an important factor in promoting cultural heritage and sustainable tourism development. Studies on smart tourism in Uzbekistan emphasize the importance of digital platforms, smart technologies, tourism infrastructure and destination management [9], [10]. Research on heritage destinations, particularly Bukhara, also indicates that digital technologies can support sustainable tourism development when environmental, social and governance dimensions are considered together [11].

Table 1. Comparative analysis of foreign and national research directions

Direction of analysis	Foreign research	National research
Main focus	Digital competence, intercultural communication, social skills and tourism education	Smart tourism, tourism infrastructure, cultural heritage promotion and digital transformation
Educational aspect	Strongly developed through curricula, digital skills frameworks and interactive learning	Developing, but not yet sufficiently systematized in pedagogical methodology
Cultural skills	Studied through heritage education, digital storytelling and virtual tourism	Studied mainly through preservation and promotion of national heritage
Social skills	Connected with communication, empathy, teamwork and multicultural interaction	Mostly discussed indirectly through service quality and tourism development
Research gap	Need for more empirical studies in different cultural contexts	Need for pedagogical models for cultural and social skills through digital tourism

The comparative results show that foreign research pays more attention to educational and competence-based dimensions, while national research pays greater attention to technological, economic and infrastructural dimensions. This means that the educational potential of digital tourism in Uzbekistan should be further strengthened through methodological models, practical assignments and assessment criteria.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that digital tourism should be considered not only as a tool for tourism promotion but also as a learning environment for developing cultural and social skills. In foreign research, digital tourism is often analyzed together with digital competence, intercultural communication, user experience and sustainable tourism education [1], [2], [5], [6]. This approach is scientifically important because tourism is based on interaction between people, cultures and technologies.

One of the key advantages of digital tourism is its ability to make cultural heritage more accessible. A student who cannot physically visit a historical site can explore it through a virtual tour, multimedia platform or digital museum. This creates opportunities for inclusive education, independent learning and visual understanding. Studies on e-learning in tourism education also show that digital learning environments can support flexibility, interaction and content personalization [8].

Another important aspect is the development of intercultural competence. Tourism always involves contact between different cultures. Digital platforms can prepare students and tourists for such contact by providing information about traditions, behavior norms, language, history and local values. Cantoni notes that the digital transformation of tourism and cultural heritage changes the way heritage is communicated, experienced and interpreted [7].

However, digital tourism also has certain limitations. The first limitation is the risk of superficial cultural perception. If digital content is prepared only for advertising purposes, it may simplify or commercialize culture. Therefore, digital tourism content must be scientifically accurate, ethically prepared and culturally sensitive. The second limitation is the digital divide: not all students, tourists or local communities have equal access to digital devices, internet resources and digital literacy. This problem is especially important for regions where tourism potential is high but digital infrastructure is still developing.

The third limitation is the lack of pedagogical methodology. In many cases, digital tourism tools are used as technical instruments, but their educational potential is not fully realized. To develop cultural and social skills, digital tourism should be integrated into project-based learning, discussions, reflective tasks, collaborative assignments and assessment rubrics. Uzbekistan's cultural heritage and Silk Road destinations provide a strong basis for such pedagogical integration [12].

In the national context, students may create digital routes about Samarkand, Bukhara or Khiva, prepare virtual exhibitions about national traditions, develop QR-based information materials for local museums, or design multilingual tourism content. Such activities develop not only digital skills but also cultural interpretation, communication, cooperation and creativity. Therefore, the integration of digital tourism into education requires a balanced approach that combines technological tools, cultural content, pedagogical methods and social interaction.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of foreign and national research demonstrates that digital tourism has significant potential for developing cultural and social skills. Foreign studies mainly focus on digital competence, intercultural communication, social interaction, tourism education and sustainable development. National research, particularly in Uzbekistan, focuses on the digitalization of tourism infrastructure, smart tourism, promotion of cultural heritage and sustainable tourism management.

The study shows that digital tourism can develop cultural skills by increasing awareness of cultural heritage, promoting respect for traditions, supporting historical understanding and encouraging intercultural reflection. It can also develop social skills by creating opportunities for communication, cooperation, empathy, teamwork and interaction in multicultural environments.

At the same time, the research reveals that the pedagogical potential of digital tourism is not yet fully used in national studies. Therefore, future research should focus on developing methodological models, practical tasks, assessment criteria and digital learning environments aimed at forming students' cultural and social competence through digital tourism. In conclusion, digital tourism should be understood as an innovative socio-cultural and educational tool. If it is used systematically, it can contribute to the development of culturally aware, socially active and digitally competent specialists who are able to work effectively in the modern tourism and education sectors.

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