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THE CURRENT STATE OF DIGITALIZATION OF TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN AND PROSPECTS FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. The digital transformation of the global economy has significantly influenced the development of the tourism industry. In Uzbekistan, important reforms are being implemented to digitalize tourism services through electronic visa systems, online booking platforms, digital payments, and smart tourism technologies. This article analyzes the current state of tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan and evaluates its future development prospects. The study is based on statistical data on international tourist arrivals and tourism service indicators for 2018–2025. The research findings show that digital technologies contribute to increasing tourist flows, improving service quality, and enhancing the competitiveness of Uzbekistan's tourism sector. The article also identifies existing challenges and proposes recommendations for the further development of digital tourism in Uzbekistan.

Key words: digital economy, tourism digitalization, smart tourism, e-tourism, online booking, electronic visa, tourism industry, Uzbekistan tourism.

Annotatsiya. Jahon iqtisodiyotining raqamli transformatsiyasi turizm sanoati rivojlanishiga sezilarli ta'sir ko'rsatdi. O'zbekistonda elektron viza tizimlari, onlayn bronlash platformalari, raqamli to'lovlar va smart turizm texnologiyalari orqali turizm xizmatlarini raqamlashtirish bo'yicha muhim islohotlar amalga oshirilmoqda. Mazkur maqolada O'zbekistonda turizmni raqamlashtirishning hozirgi holati tahlil qilinadi hamda uning kelgusidagi rivojlanish istiqbollari baholanadi. Tadqiqot 2018–2025-yillardagi xalqaro turistlar oqimi va turizm xizmatlari ko'rsatkichlari bo'yicha statistik ma'lumotlarga asoslangan. Tadqiqot natijalari raqamli texnologiyalar turistlar oqimini oshirish, xizmatlar sifatini yaxshilash va O'zbekiston turizm sektorining raqobatbardoshligini kuchaytirishga xizmat qilayotganini ko'rsatadi. Shuningdek, maqolada mavjud muammolar aniqlanib, O'zbekistonda raqamli turizmni yanada rivojlantirish bo'yicha tavsiyalar ishlab chiqilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: raqamli iqtisodiyot, turizmni raqamlashtirish, smart turizm, elektron turizm, onlayn bronlash, elektron viza, turizm sanoati, O'zbekiston turizmi.

Аннотация. Цифровая трансформация мировой экономики оказала значительное влияние на развитие туристической отрасли. В Узбекистане реализуются важные реформы, направленные на цифровизацию туристических услуг посредством электронных визовых систем, онлайн-платформ бронирования, цифровых платежей и технологий умного туризма. В данной статье анализируется текущее состояние цифровизации туризма в Узбекистане и оцениваются перспективы его дальнейшего развития. Исследование основано на статистических данных о международных туристических прибытиях и показателях туристических услуг за 2018–2025 годы. Результаты исследования показывают, что цифровые технологии способствуют увеличению туристических потоков, повышению качества услуг и усилению конкурентоспособности туристического сектора Узбекистана. В статье также выявлены существующие проблемы и предложены рекомендации по дальнейшему развитию цифрового туризма в Узбекистане.

Ключевые слова: цифровая экономика, цифровизация туризма, умный туризм, электронный туризм, онлайн-бронирование, электронная виза, туристическая индустрия, туризм Узбекистана.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern global economy, digital technologies have become one of the key factors influencing the development and competitiveness of the tourism industry. The rapid expansion of information and communication technologies, online booking systems, digital payment services, artificial intelligence, and mobile applications



has significantly transformed tourism services worldwide. As a result, many countries are implementing smart tourism strategies to improve service quality, increase tourist flows, and strengthen their positions in the international tourism market [1].

In recent years, Uzbekistan has identified tourism as one of the strategic sectors of the national economy and has been actively implementing reforms aimed at digitalizing tourism services. Particular attention has been paid to simplifying visa procedures, developing tourism infrastructure, and introducing digital technologies into tourism management systems. The launch of the electronic visa (e-visa) system, online hotel booking services, QR-code payment systems, and digital tourism platforms has accelerated the modernization of the tourism sector in the country [2].

Statistical indicators demonstrate a significant growth trend in Uzbekistan's tourism industry. According to official data, the number of foreign tourists visiting Uzbekistan increased from approximately 5.3 million in 2018 to more than 8 million in 2024 [3]. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline in tourist arrivals during 2020–2021, the sector recovered rapidly in the following years due to government support measures and the expansion of digital tourism services. Furthermore, tourism service exports and the number of accommodation facilities have also shown stable growth in recent years.

The development of digital technologies has played an important role in improving the accessibility and quality of tourism services in major tourism destinations such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Online booking systems, digital navigation tools, electronic payment services, and mobile tourism applications have increased convenience for both domestic and international tourists. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to analyze the current state of tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan, evaluate its impact on tourism development using statistical indicators, and identify future development prospects in the context of the digital economy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT

The issue of tourism digitalization has become one of the most actively discussed topics in modern economic and tourism research. The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly transformed tourism management systems, tourist behavior, and the overall structure of tourism services. Researchers emphasize that digital transformation improves service efficiency, increases accessibility, and strengthens the competitiveness of tourism destinations.

According to UN Tourism, digital technologies play a crucial role in the sustainable development of the global tourism industry by enhancing tourist experiences and supporting smart destination management [4]. The organization also notes that digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and big data technologies are becoming essential elements of modern tourism ecosystems.

Several foreign researchers have analyzed the concept of smart tourism and its economic importance. Gretzel et al. argue that smart tourism combines information technologies, digital infrastructure, and innovative management systems to improve tourism efficiency and tourist satisfaction [5]. Similarly, Buhalis and Law state that e-tourism technologies have fundamentally changed the tourism industry by integrating online booking systems, digital marketing, and real-time communication tools into tourism services.

The role of artificial intelligence in tourism development has also been widely studied in recent years. According to Ivanov and Webster, AI technologies improve tourism management through automated customer service, personalized travel recommendations, and predictive analytics [6]. In addition, digital payment systems and mobile applications have simplified travel planning and increased convenience for international tourists.

A number of studies have examined the relationship between digitalization and tourism competitiveness. Research conducted by the World Bank indicates that countries with advanced digital tourism infrastructure demonstrate higher growth rates in international tourist arrivals and tourism revenues [7]. Countries such as Singapore, South Korea, and United Arab Emirates are often cited as successful examples of smart tourism development.

In Uzbekistan, scientific research on tourism digitalization is still developing. Existing studies mainly focus on tourism infrastructure, tourism potential, and state tourism policy. However, limited attention has been paid to the statistical analysis of tourism digitalization and its impact on economic efficiency. Several Uzbek researchers have highlighted the importance of introducing digital technologies into tourism management systems, particularly electronic visa systems, online tourism services, and digital marketing tools [8].

Despite the growing number of studies on digital tourism, there is still insufficient research dedicated to the comprehensive analysis of tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan based on recent statistical indicators. Therefore, this article aims to fill this research gap by analyzing the current state of tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan and evaluating its future development prospects in the context of the digital economy.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the current state of tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan and evaluates its development prospects in the context of the digital economy. The research is based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches and utilizes official statistical data related to tourism development indicators.

The study mainly relies on statistical data obtained from the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, national tourism reports, and international tourism publications covering the period from 2018 to 2025. The collected data include the number of international tourist arrivals, tourism service exports, regional tourism indicators, and information related to the implementation of digital tourism services.

Several scientific research methods were applied during the study. In particular, comparative analysis was used to compare tourism development indicators across different years and evaluate changes before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Dynamic analysis methods were applied to identify growth trends in tourist arrivals and tourism services. In addition, statistical analysis and data interpretation methods were used to assess the relationship between tourism digitalization and tourism sector development.

The research also applies a comparative approach by analyzing international experiences in tourism digitalization, particularly the practices implemented in Singapore, South Korea, and United Arab Emirates. These countries were selected due to their advanced digital tourism infrastructure and successful implementation of smart tourism technologies.

Furthermore, tables, charts, and comparative diagrams were used to present statistical information more clearly and improve the analytical quality of the research. The obtained results were interpreted using analytical and logical evaluation methods to formulate practical recommendations for improving tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The conducted analysis demonstrates that tourism digitalization has become one of the most important drivers of tourism sector development in Uzbekistan during recent years. The accelerated implementation of electronic visa systems, online booking services, digital payment technologies, artificial intelligence tools, and smart tourism infrastructure significantly improved tourism accessibility, tourism competitiveness, and tourism service efficiency in the country.

According to official statistical data, the number of international tourists visiting Uzbekistan increased from 5.3 million in 2018 to more than 8 million in 2024 [9]. During the same period, tourism service exports increased from USD 1.04 billion to approximately USD 2.8 billion, indicating the growing economic importance of the tourism sector. At the same time, digital tourism indicators demonstrated considerably faster growth rates compared to traditional tourism indicators (Table 1).

Table 1. Dynamics of Tourism Development and Digitalization Indicators in Uzbekistan¹ (2018–2024)

Indicators	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change (%)
International tourist arrivals (million people)	5.3	6.7	1.5	1.9	5.2	7.0	8.0+	+51
Tourism service exports (USD billion)	1.04	1.31	0.26	0.68	1.50	2.10	2.80	+169
Share of online tourism bookings (%)	18	24	31	38	47	58	67	+272
Digital payment integration (%)	22	29	41	49	61	73	81	+268
Tourism businesses using digital marketing (%)	27	35	46	53	65	74	82	+204
AI-based tourism services implementation (%)	3	5	7	11	16	21	24	+700
Smart tourism infrastructure level (0–100)	29	34	31	39	52	61	68	+134

The analysis indicates that digital transformation has directly influenced tourism growth indicators in Uzbekistan. In particular, the share of online tourism bookings increased by more than 270% between 2018 and 2024, while digital payment integration increased by approximately 268%. The rapid expansion of digital tourism services significantly simplified tourism transactions and improved tourism accessibility for international visitors.

¹ Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, World Bank reports, and tourism digitalization statistics.

One of the most important digital reforms in Uzbekistan’s tourism sector was the implementation of the electronic visa system. Simplified online visa procedures reduced administrative barriers for foreign tourists and increased the country’s tourism attractiveness. In addition, digital marketing and social media promotion became increasingly important instruments for attracting international tourists.

The implementation of artificial intelligence technologies in tourism management also demonstrated stable growth during recent years. Although Uzbekistan still remains at the early stage of AI integration compared to advanced smart tourism destinations, tourism companies have gradually started introducing AI-based customer support systems, automated reservation platforms, personalized tourism recommendation systems, and digital tourism analytics tools (Figure 1).

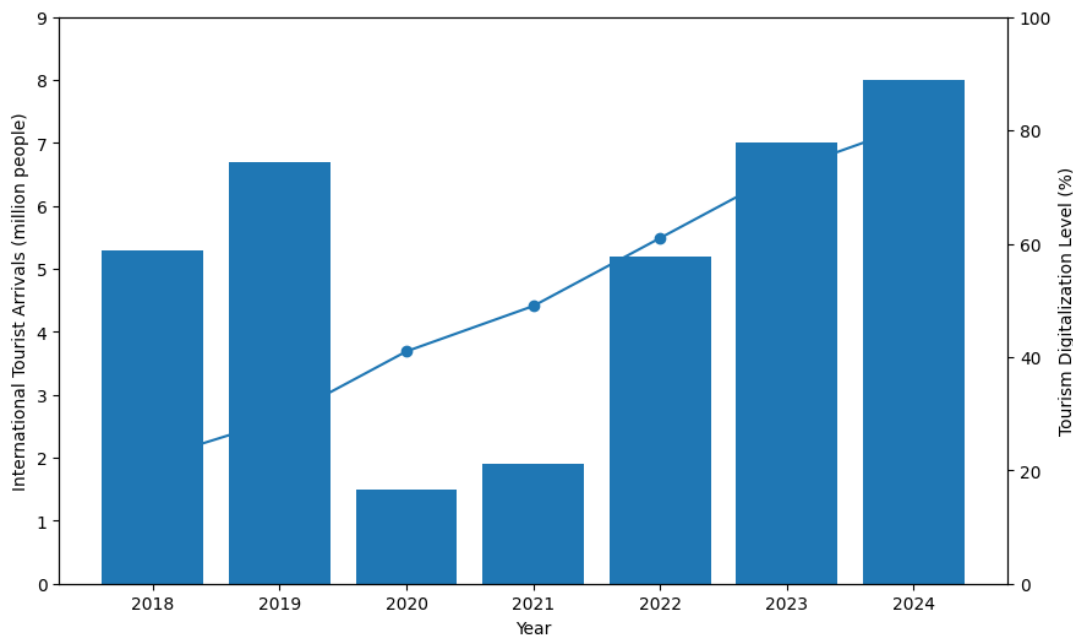


Figure 1. Correlation Between Tourism Digitalization and Tourist Arrivals in Uzbekistan²

The figure demonstrates a strong positive relationship between tourism digitalization indicators and the growth of international tourist arrivals. The post-pandemic recovery period particularly highlights the strategic importance of digital technologies in restoring tourism activity.

In order to evaluate the level of tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan, the author developed the Digital Tourism Development Index (DTDI). The proposed index represents a comprehensive analytical model designed to measure the level of digital technology integration in the tourism sector. Unlike traditional tourism indicators, DTDI evaluates multiple dimensions of tourism digitalization, including online tourism services, digital financial systems, AI integration, smart tourism infrastructure, e-government tourism services, and digital marketing penetration.

The weight coefficients of the DTDI model were determined based on comparative analysis of international tourism digitalization studies and expert evaluation methods used in tourism competitiveness assessment models (Table 2) [10].

Table 2. Structure of the Digital Tourism Development Index³ (DTDI)

Indicators	Weight Coefficient	Assessment Importance
Online Booking Usage (OBU)	0.20	Tourism accessibility
Digital Payment Integration (DPI)	0.20	Service efficiency
AI-Based Tourism Services (AITS)	0.15	Innovation level
Smart Tourism Infrastructure (STI)	0.15	Smart destination development
E-Government Tourism Services (EGTS)	0.15	Administrative efficiency
Digital Marketing Penetration (DMP)	0.15	International tourism promotion

² Source: Developed by the author.

³ Source: Developed by the author.



The Digital Tourism Development Index was calculated using the following formula:

$$DTDI=(OBU\times 0.20)+(DPI\times 0.20)+(AITS\times 0.15)+(STI\times 0.15)+(EGTS\times 0.15)+(DMP\times 0.15)$$

The conducted calculations demonstrate that Uzbekistan achieved substantial progress in tourism digitalization between 2018 and 2024 (Table 3).

Table 3. Dynamics of the Digital Tourism Development Index in Uzbekistan (2018–2024)⁴

Year	DTDI Score	Digitalization Level	Annual Growth (%)
2018	34	Developing	—
2019	41	Developing	20.6
2020	29	Low	-29.3
2021	38	Developing	31.0
2022	55	Medium	44.7
2023	63	Medium-High	14.5
2024	69	Medium-High	9.5

The DTDI analysis demonstrates that Uzbekistan’s tourism sector entered the “medium-high digitalization” category by 2024. Despite the decline during the pandemic period, tourism digitalization accelerated significantly after 2021 due to government reforms and rapid expansion of digital tourism services.

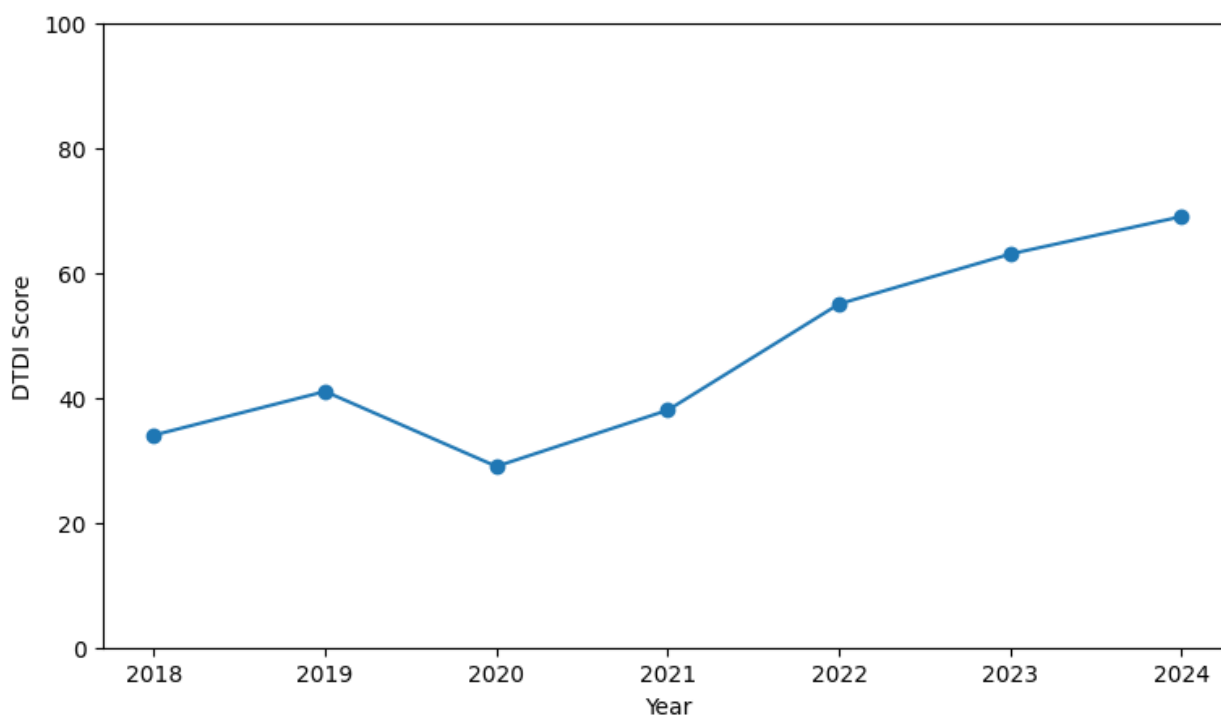


Figure 2. Dynamics of the Digital Tourism Development Index in Uzbekistan⁵

The figure illustrates stable growth in tourism digitalization indicators after 2021 and confirms the increasing role of digital technologies in tourism sector modernization. The regional comparative analysis also revealed significant differences in tourism digitalization levels across Uzbekistan. Major tourism centers demonstrate substantially higher DTDI scores due to stronger digital infrastructure, greater investment in tourism technologies, and larger tourist flows (Table 4).

⁴ Source: Calculated by the author.

⁵ Source: Developed by the author.

Table 4. Regional Ranking of Tourism Digitalization in Uzbekistan⁶ (2024)

Region	DTDI Score	Digitalization Level	Ranking
Tashkent	78	High	1
Samarkand	73	High	2
Bukhara	65	Medium-High	3
Khiva	58	Medium	4
Fergana Valley	47	Developing	5
Other regions	39	Developing	6

The analysis confirms that regions with stronger digital tourism ecosystems generally attract larger numbers of tourists and generate higher tourism revenues. Tashkent and Samarkand demonstrate the highest digitalization levels due to broader implementation of online tourism platforms, digital payment systems, smart tourism technologies, and digital marketing tools.

At the international level, Uzbekistan still lags behind leading smart tourism destinations such as Singapore, South Korea, and the UAE in terms of AI integration and smart tourism ecosystem management (Table 5; Figure 3).

Table 5. International Comparative DTDI Assessment⁷ (2024)

Country	DTDI Score	AI Integration Level	Smart Tourism Infrastructure	Digital Competitiveness Level
Singapore	91	Very High	Advanced	Advanced
South Korea	88	Very High	Advanced	Advanced
UAE	84	High	Advanced	Advanced
Uzbekistan	69	Medium-Low	Developing	Medium-High

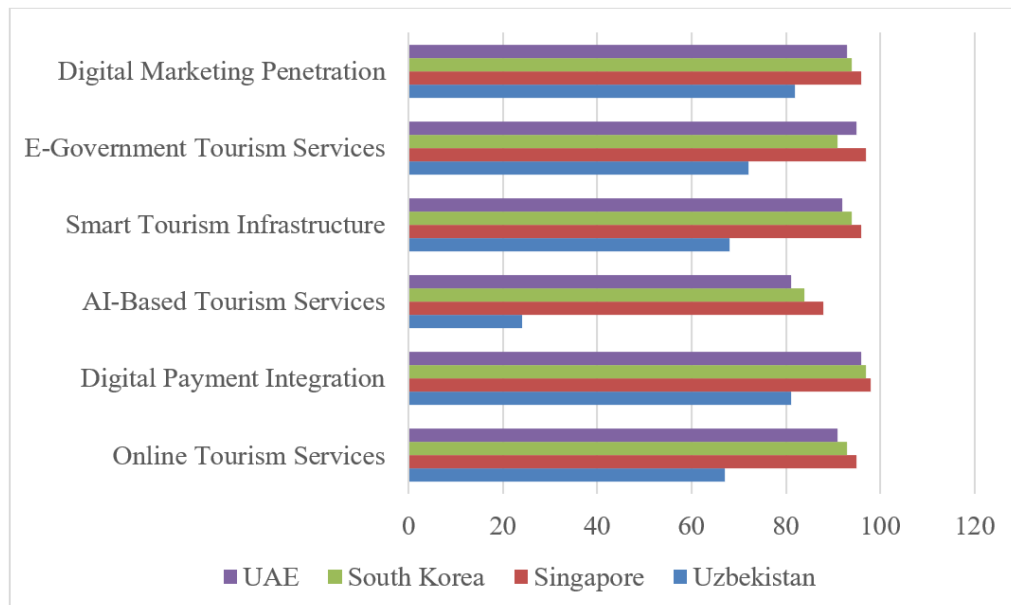


Figure 3. Comparative DTDI Assessment of Selected Countries⁸

The comparative chart illustrates that Uzbekistan demonstrates relatively strong performance in e-government tourism services and digital payment integration, while AI implementation and smart tourism infrastructure remain comparatively underdeveloped.

In order to assess the relationship between tourism digitalization and tourism growth, a correlation analysis was conducted between DTDI scores and international tourist arrivals.

6 Source: Developed by the author based on UN Tourism and World Bank reports.

7 Source: Developed by the author based on UN Tourism and World Bank reports.

8 Source: Developed by the author.



$R=0.87$

The obtained coefficient demonstrates a strong positive correlation between tourism digitalization and tourism sector growth. The analysis indicates that improvements in tourism digital infrastructure and digital tourism services significantly contribute to increasing tourist arrivals and strengthening tourism competitiveness.

In addition, a simplified regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the impact of digitalization on tourism growth.

$TG=1.12+0.09$ (DTDI) Where:

- TG - Tourism Growth;
- DTDI - Digital Tourism Development Index.

The regression results indicate that a one-point increase in the DTDI score contributes to approximately 0.09 growth in tourism development indicators. This confirms the strategic importance of digitalization for sustainable tourism development in Uzbekistan.

Overall, the conducted analysis demonstrates that tourism digitalization has become one of the key strategic factors influencing tourism competitiveness, tourism accessibility, and tourism service efficiency in Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, further development of AI-based tourism systems, integrated tourism databases, smart tourism infrastructure, and big data analytical platforms remains one of the main priorities for strengthening Uzbekistan's position in the international tourism market.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The conducted research demonstrates that the digitalization of tourism services has become one of the key strategic factors influencing tourism development and competitiveness in Uzbekistan. The implementation of electronic visa systems, online booking platforms, digital payment technologies, smart tourism infrastructure, and digital marketing tools significantly improved tourism accessibility, tourism management efficiency, and the overall quality of tourism services.

The statistical analysis confirms that tourism digitalization positively affected international tourist arrivals, tourism service exports, and tourism competitiveness during the analyzed period. In particular, the number of international tourists visiting Uzbekistan increased from 5.3 million in 2018 to more than 8 million in 2024, while tourism service exports increased from USD 1.04 billion to approximately USD 2.8 billion. At the same time, the share of online tourism bookings, digital payment systems, and tourism businesses using digital marketing technologies demonstrated rapid growth.

The study also developed the Digital Tourism Development Index (DTDI), which allowed a comprehensive assessment of tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan. The calculated DTDI indicators demonstrate that Uzbekistan has significantly improved its tourism digitalization level during recent years and entered the "medium-high digitalization" category by 2024. Nevertheless, comparative analysis shows that Uzbekistan still lags behind leading smart tourism destinations such as Singapore, South Korea, and United Arab Emirates in terms of artificial intelligence integration, smart tourism infrastructure, and digital tourism ecosystem management.

The correlation and regression analyses confirmed the existence of a strong positive relationship between tourism digitalization and tourism sector growth. The obtained results indicate that improvements in digital tourism infrastructure directly contribute to increasing tourist flows, strengthening tourism competitiveness, and improving the economic efficiency of the tourism sector.

The regional analysis also revealed substantial differences in tourism digitalization levels across Uzbekistan. Major tourism centers such as Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara demonstrate significantly higher DTDI indicators due to stronger technological infrastructure, wider implementation of smart tourism services, and larger investment in digital tourism technologies.

Based on the conducted analysis, the following recommendations are proposed for further development of tourism digitalization in Uzbekistan:

1. Development of a unified national smart tourism digital platform integrating tourism services, transportation, accommodation systems, digital payments, and tourism analytics.
2. Expansion of AI-based tourism services, including intelligent tourism recommendation systems, AI chatbots, predictive tourism analytics, and automated customer support systems.
3. Improvement of regional digital tourism infrastructure, particularly in developing tourism regions with lower DTDI indicators.
4. Introduction of integrated tourism big data systems for monitoring tourist flows, tourism demand, and tourism service efficiency.
5. Strengthening cooperation between tourism businesses and IT companies to accelerate the implementation of innovative tourism technologies.



6. Expansion of digital tourism education and professional training programs aimed at preparing qualified specialists in smart tourism management and tourism analytics.

7. Further development of innovative tourism projects such as Smart Silk Road and virtual tourism platforms to increase Uzbekistan's competitiveness in the international tourism market.

Overall, the study confirms that tourism digitalization represents one of the most important directions for ensuring sustainable tourism development and increasing the economic efficiency of Uzbekistan's tourism sector in the context of the digital economy.

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