

Research Paper



Advancing virtual tourism in urban destinations: current status and future potential in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Virtual Tourism is Rapidly Expanding worldwide and serves as a practical support for traditional tourism by enhancing tourist experiences. In major cities, virtual tourism is widely utilized to advance smart tourism and promote night tourism activities. In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City has taken initial steps in this domain, incorporating virtual tourism applications to cater to both domestic and international tourists. However, its development remains limited when compared to other relevant urban destinations. This paper utilizes the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework to evaluate the current state of virtual tourism development in Ho Chi Minh City and its future potential. The research results indicate that tourism businesses that participated in the poll acknowledged that technological advancement is available, but they are not financially or human resource prepared, despite the fact that leaders favor the growth of virtual tourism. Furthermore, the business environment does not support the growth of virtual tourism effectively. Based on the results, several recommendations are proposed to better exploit virtual tourism, positioning Ho Chi Minh City as a key hub for smart tourism in Vietnam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Virtual tourism has gained increasing attention in the ongoing digital transformation of the tourism industry, addressing both contemporary travel trends and the specialized needs of modern tourists [1], [2]. In the context of increasingly modern technology and its profound impact on the tourism industry, tourism businesses need to provide interesting products and experiences. Among these technologies, virtual reality technology and virtual tourism are gaining attention. These virtual experiences enable tourists to visit and immerse themselves in destinations, even before they physically travel [3]. Ho Chi Minh City is a leading tourist center in Vietnam. The city is renowned for its vibrant culture, historical sites, and dynamic city life [4]. However, digital transformation and the application of modern technology in tourism are still limited, in which virtual tourism is still unfamiliar to tourists and businesses do not have many applications [5]. This gap raises the question: How prepared are tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City to embrace and implement virtual tourism?

When it comes to the body of literature, in Vietnam in general and in Ho Chi Minh City in particular, there is not much research about virtual tourism that has been conducted; mainly, studies have examined virtual tourism as a tourism marketing and promotion application. There are also studies that investigate the role that virtual tourism plays in the promotion of tourism brands, and there is also research that investigates the experiences that tourists have when they visit in virtual worlds [6]. As a result, doing research on the degree to which tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City are prepared to adopt virtual reality and create virtual tourism can make a contribution to the body of tourism literature in general. This study aims to evaluate Ho Chi Minh City's tourism businesses' level of virtual tourism application readiness by implementing the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework. The study intends to present a novel perspective on how digital solutions can be more effectively included in the tourism ecosystem of the city by assessing the present situation of virtual tourism development and its prospects for growth.

The study takes a fresh approach by concentrating on the supply side of tourism, more especially, how travel agencies are marketing and selling tourism products using virtual tourism. It also examines how virtual experiences might improve and enrich the whole travel experience at various destinations. By means of this lens, the study aims to draw attention to chances for businesses to develop creative tourism solutions satisfying the growing demands of tech-savvy tourists.

2. RELATED WORKS

2.1. Application of Virtual Tourism in Travel-Related Businesses

The rapid growth of digital technology and its influence on changing real tourism practices have led virtual reality (VR) tourism to become a main trend [1]. Virtual tourism allows tourists to virtually explore locations using immersive digital worlds [7]. This method presents a fresh, interesting approach to appreciating travel by combining convenience with a better sensory experience [8]. Consequently, it is growing increasingly known in the travel industry as a useful tool for bridging the gap between imagination and reality.

The use of VR in tourism is expected to remain increasing since it can meet the particular tourism requirements of different groups, including the elderly, tourists with disabilities, and those whose travel is limited by visas or regional conflicts [9]. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of the importance of VR experiences; hence, virtual tourism is a dependable substitute in erratic times and recession [10]. VR's adaptability has piqued the interest of more travel-related companies in including it in their product line.

Using VR, a creative marketing tool, tourism companies can change tourist behavior and improve destination branding [11]. Virtual experiences increase the likelihood of real visits by letting possible

tourists evaluate facilities and attractions before choosing to take the trip [12], [13]. This strategy also helps businesses more successfully market their products and leave enduring impressions of their destination brand. Through "try-before-you-travel" activities, VR can also help tourists create emotional ties with a destination, so improving traditional marketing strategies [12].

From a sustainable standpoint, virtual tourism has great promise [9]. By lowering the physical impact of tourism on historical sites, cultural monuments, and sensitive ecosystems, it can help to preserve them. For sites where environmental damage or overtourism could influence them, especially, this is crucial. Using VR to visit places that are otherwise inaccessible due to safety concerns, political unrest, or natural disasters can result in a safer and more inclusive travel experience [9], [14].

Although virtual tourism has some benefits, its main drawbacks could prevent it from becoming popular [5]. Many academics and companies contend that virtual tourism should be mostly seen as an auxiliary tool, especially in view of the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Creating high-quality virtual experiences with their technological complexity, which calls for advanced hardware, software, and technical knowledge, is one of the greatest obstacles [15]. For small and medium-sized businesses without the required capital in particular, this complexity could be an obstacle.

Moreover, many tourism companies find it challenging with the possibly unaffordable initial capital expenditure required to implement VR infrastructure on a sizable scale. Furthermore, some studies imply that although virtual experiences are enjoyable, they might actually lower the possibility that tourists would visit the real site since they believe they have already seen it virtually [16], [17].

2.2. Technology, Organization, and Environment (TOE) framework

Originally developed in the 1990s by Alok K. Chakrabarti, Mitchell Fleischer, and Louis G. Tornatzky [18], the TOE framework is a suitable theoretical framework for considering the application of new technologies in enterprises. It considers three main elements: organizational, technological, and environmental contexts [18], [19], offering a perspective on how businesses adopt and use new technologies.

The dimension of technological context addresses the elements of technology that affect adoption, namely those related to perceived benefits, complexity, compatibility, and accessibility of technical resources [18], [20]. Virtual tourism includes evaluating the company's technical knowledge, VR tool accessibility, and viability of including VR with current travel offers. The organizational context looks at internal elements including the size, resources, and structure of the company as well as management's support of the new technology implementation [18], [20]. This includes determining whether travel companies possess the human capital, strategic vision, and financial means required to effectively embrace virtual tourism. The dimension of the environment addresses outside elements influencing technology acceptance, including market trends, competition, and legal systems [18], [20]. In the framework of virtual tourism, one must evaluate outside prospects and pressures, including consumer demand for digital experiences, competition, and the impact of industry policies on the usage of virtual technology.

Many studies across a variety of sectors have made extensive use of the TOE framework to evaluate a company's capacity to embrace new technologies. Though especially in relation to virtual tourism, it has not been used much in tourism research. This work uses the TOE framework, which consists of three dimensions developed especially to handle particular aspects of the acceptance of virtual tourism. **Figure**

1

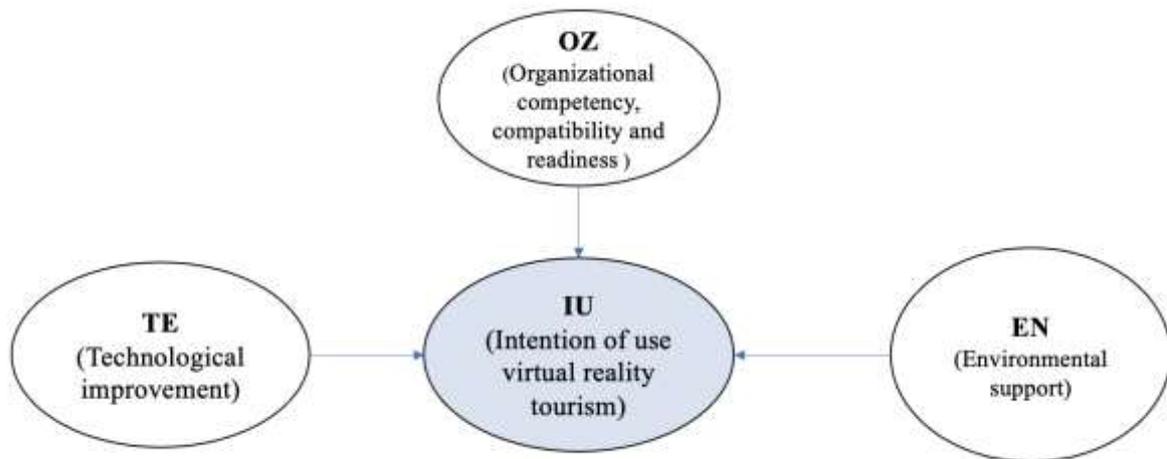


Figure 1. Research framework

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a novel analysis of the research problem. The sample consists of 260 tourism enterprises based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Managers at the head of division level or higher who are responsible for product development and strategic decisions were chosen. Data were collected through a structured email questionnaire between May and September 2023.

To accommodate its size and scope, the study employed a quota sampling technique. More specifically, through the support of the city's Department of Tourism, the research contacted Ho Chi Minh City-based tourism businesses via their email and sent the questionnaire in Google form with an email outlining the survey's objectives and contents. The research findings are comparatively inferential for the whole because of this limitation.

The survey was structured using the TOE framework and employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was developed through an extensive literature review and reviewed by twelve academic experts. Two senior tourism managers assessed its clarity and relevance, resulting in minor revisions.

Data were analyzed using SPSS 24.0, focusing on descriptive statistics and mean scores to evaluate the current state of virtual tourism development in Ho Chi Minh City from the point of view of tourism businesses.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Sample Profile

Table 1. Sample profile (N=260)

Category		Frequency	Percent
Size of tourism enterprise	Under 30 employees	133	51.2
	From 30 employees to under 60 employees	92	35.4
	From 60 employees to under 90 employees	31	11.9
	From 90 employees to under 120 employees	2	0.8
	Over 120 employees	2	0.8

	Total	260	100.0
Capital of tourism enterprise	From 250 million Vietnam dong to under 500 million Vietnam dong	87	33.5
	From 500 million Vietnam dong to under 1 billion Vietnam dong	83	31.9
	From 1 billion Vietnam dong to under 2 billion Vietnam dong	65	25.0
	From 2 billion Vietnam dong to under 4 billion Vietnam dong	18	6.9
	Over 4 billion Vietnam dong	7	2.7
	Total	260	100.0

Source: Author

The demographic profile of tourism enterprises, based on a dataset comprising 260 respondents, offers insights into their size and capital distribution as shown in Table 1. Notably, 51.2% of these enterprises have fewer than 30 employees, while 35.4% fall within the 30 to under 60 employees category. Furthermore, 11.9% of enterprises operate with staff ranging from 60 to under 90 employees, and a mere 0.8% of businesses have 90 to under 120 employees. Similarly, 0.8% of the surveyed enterprises employ over 120 individuals.

Concerning capital, 33.5% of enterprises operate with capital ranging from 250 million to under 500 million Vietnam dong, while 31.9% have capital between 500 million and under 1 billion Vietnam dong. Additionally, 25% are situated in the 1 billion Vietnam dong to under 2 billion Vietnam dong capital category, with 6.9% operating with capital between 2 billion Vietnam dong to under 4 billion Vietnam dong. Finally, 2.7% of enterprises report capital exceeding 4 billion Vietnam dong.

4.2. Technological Advancement Evaluation

Table 2. Technological advancement evaluation result

No	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Reference
1	The development of technology facilitates businesses to adopt virtual tourism.	260	3.89	0.750	Agree
2	VR technology is suitable for tourism businesses to use with related technologies.	260	3.71	0.970	Agree
3	It is possible to observe the changes and business efficiency when adopting virtual tourism.	260	3.52	0.907	Agree

Source: Author

The results in Table 2 show that tourism enterprises have a positive perception of technological readiness, with businesses recognizing the utility and practicality of incorporating VR technology into their operations. With a mean score of 3.89, the majority of companies believe technology is facilitating the adoption of virtual tourism. This viewpoint sees VR as an effective tool for improving product offerings and customer engagement because it demonstrates a link between strategic opportunities and technological advances.

With a mean score of 3.71, the compatibility of VR technology with existing systems indicates that businesses see VR as a complementary enhancement rather than a disruptive influence. This compatibility is critical because it makes the adoption process more efficient and lowers integration barriers. Furthermore, the ability to monitor changes and evaluate organizational effectiveness (mean score of 3.52)

indicates that businesses have the necessary technologies and are beginning to see tangible results on performance. This demonstrates how VR is increasingly becoming a practical operational asset rather than just a theoretical tool.

Ho Chi Minh City's reputation as a leading hub for technology and digital transformation is critical to fostering this readiness. The city's established infrastructure and robust digital ecosystem create an environment in which businesses can experiment with and implement advanced digital solutions like virtual tourism [4]. Collectively, these elements point to a significant opportunity for virtual tourism to expand not only as a marketing tool but also as a strategic component of the tourism value chain, allowing businesses to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market.

Furthermore, these findings indicate a shift in the travel industry's attitude toward VR technologies. Initially regarded as an ancillary tool during travel restrictions, VR is now viewed as a strategic facilitator with unique value propositions such as immersive pre-travel experiences, virtual guided tours, and hybrid tourism solutions that combine digital and physical experiences. This shift in perspective indicates that tourism businesses are beginning to see VR not as a temporary fix but as a long-term strategic investment capable of transforming customer experiences.

4.3. Organizational Readiness Evaluation

Table 3. Organizational readiness evaluation result

No	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Reference
1	Our company is technologically prepared to adopt virtual tourism	260	3.25	0.932	Neutral
2	Our company is financially prepared to adopt virtual tourism	260	2.57	0.843	Disagree
3	Our company is human resource prepared to adopt virtual tourism	260	3.22	0.789	Neutral
4	Our company leaders support the development of virtual tourism	260	3.55	0.671	Agree

Source: Author

Table 3 shows that although virtual tourism generates some interest, companies are not sufficiently ready to carry it out. It especially emphasizes a clear lack of financial readiness for virtual tourism. Though there is some interest in implementing these technologies, the low average score for financial readiness (2.57) shows a major obstacle. This highlights that financial restrictions are a major barrier, as the neutral scores for technological readiness (3.25) and human resource readiness (3.22) show. Given the predominance of micro, small, and medium businesses in the tourism industry of Ho Chi Minh City, financial constraints greatly limit investments in advanced technologies like VR.

Still, a positive note is that business leaders, with a mean score of 3.55, show a rather strong degree of support for the development of virtual tourism. The support of leaders is crucial since it shows a readiness to investigate and maybe apply fresh digital strategies despite currently limited resources. Strategic transformation often starts with leadership support, which offers a basic foundation capable of future progress. The current state reflects a gap between strategic interest and operational readiness. Although technological, financial, and human resource capacities are lacking, leadership support could help overcome these barriers through targeted investments and skill development in the future. Thus, while most businesses are currently focused on traditional tourism activities, the presence of leadership support suggests a readiness to pivot toward digital transformation when conditions allow [5].

This leadership endorsement, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises, is the most important factor in achieving readiness. With adequate support and strategic planning, these businesses could gradually build the necessary resources to implement virtual tourism.

4.4. Environmental Factors Evaluation

Table 4. Environmental factors evaluation result

No	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Reference
1	Competitive pressure from the tourism industry environment makes businesses need to adopt virtual tourism.	260	3.33	0.679	Neutral
2	Pressure from the need to increase tourists' experience makes businesses need to adopt virtual tourism.	260	3.47	0.592	Agree
3	External support makes businesses choose to adopt virtual tourism (policies, consulting, resources, etc)	260	3.15	0.724	Neutral

Source: Author

According to the findings, businesses have not been particularly moved to adopt virtual tourism in response to outside factors, including outside support and competitive pressure. With a mean score of 3.33, the competitive pressure shows a neutral posture, which suggests that at this point virtual tourism adoption is not particularly motivated by rivalry inside the travel industry. Likewise, with a mean score of 3.15, companies are not especially driven to invest in this technology by outside policy, consulting, and resource support.

With a mean score of 3.47 reflecting a positive agreement, the need to enhance tourists' experiences seems to be the main element generating interest in virtual tourism. This indicates that businesses realize the growing demand of guests for unique and fascinating experiences, which VR solutions can help to somewhat meet. This demand-driven interest aligns with the supply and demand theory, according to which businesses' decisions on offering such services mostly rely on consumers' perceived value.

These results reflect the current state of Ho Chi Minh City, where strong policy-related or competitive pressure does not yet drive acceptance of virtual tourism. Rather, it is mostly shaped by the evolving tastes and expectations of guests searching for more interactive and immersive travel experiences [4], [5]. Companies will be able to fully commit to virtual tourism by clearer policy direction, stronger competitive forces, or more outside support, creating a fit environment for adoption. Until then, the evolution of virtual tourism will mostly depend on direct consumer demand and the readiness of businesses to investigate this growing market depending on tourist preferences instead of industry or legal constraints.

The tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City understand that VR and related technologies could help virtual tourism to flourish. Basic virtual tourism products have already been revealed by some companies and the government. However, lack of qualified staff and financial resources renders businesses unprepared to fully enter this sector. While many people see the value of investment, many have not exactly noticed any financial benefits from virtual tourism. From a market perspective, the minimal demand for virtual tourism has not put much pressure on businesses to commit big expenditures. Moreover, lacking enough motivation for general acceptance are industry policies and guidelines.

This situation reflects more general trends in Ho Chi Minh City, the main destination in Vietnam. Although the government's digital transformation projects seek to improve the tourism brand of the city, most businesses have been slow to join the movement. Many still focus on their current business and view virtual tourism as a complementary experience rather than a main offering. Survey results show that virtual tourism is still in its early years and is more seen as an improvement to conventional travel than as a stand-alone attraction. Still, there is future possibility for growth should market demand and financial viability rise.

Although the data of the research match current observations in Ho Chi Minh City, they cannot be compared with other studies since the city lacks any past research on this topic. More thorough investigation is thus needed ahead to either support or contradict these findings. [Table 4](#)

Recommendation

The results drive several recommendations for advancing virtual tourism in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. These recommendations apply to locations with like conditions and surroundings to Ho Chi Minh City.

First, governments should lead virtual tourism initiatives if they are to properly promote it. This strategy would show the advantages and viability of such technologies, so guiding private companies in line.

Second, companies should concentrate on developing more immersive and interesting virtual tourism products that highlight the special benefits of virtual experiences, such as access to restricted or remote locations and the capacity to offer very interactive content. By improving the availability and quality of virtual tourism products, one can change tourist impressions and increase their inclination to use these offers, thus augmenting virtual tourism as a useful addition to conventional travel.

Third, particular government support policy, including grants for implementing virtual technologies, tax incentives, or subsidies, help remove obstacles pertaining to financial and technological preparedness. By means of a supportive policy framework, small and medium-sized tourism companies will be able to invest in virtual tourism, augmenting their capacity and inclination to include these technologies in their corporate plans.

At last, since the acceptance of virtual tourism depends much on management support, it is imperative to enhance this feature even more. Programs including seminars, strategic planning meetings, and partnerships with technology companies can enable leaders to better grasp the possibilities of virtual tourism and how it fits corporate expansion.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the readiness and potential of tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City to adopt virtual tourism using the TOE framework. The findings reveal that while there is a foundational level of technological capability and leadership support, significant barriers exist in financial and human resource readiness. External factors such as competition and policy support are currently insufficient to drive widespread adoption, making consumer demand the primary catalyst for business interest in virtual tourism. The results reflect the current state of technology development in general and virtual tourism in particular in Ho Chi Minh City. Based on the findings, governments can take the lead by piloting virtual tourism projects, while businesses focus on creating immersive, compelling virtual experiences that highlight their unique advantages. Additionally, governments can implement policies (e.g., subsidies, tax incentives, or grants) to encourage the adoption of virtual technologies.

However, the study has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the analysis was primarily based on mean scores, which may oversimplify the complexities within each business group. Second, the use of a survey alone limits the depth of insights and may not fully capture the nuances of all tourism enterprises in the city. Additionally, the sample focused mainly on traditional tourism businesses, excluding other relevant groups such as museums, cultural centers, and heritage sites, which could offer unique perspectives on virtual tourism adoption.

Future research should consider incorporating a broader range of tourism stakeholders, including cultural and heritage institutions, to obtain a more comprehensive view of the industry's readiness. Moreover, employing qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or case studies, could provide richer insights into the challenges and opportunities for virtual tourism. Comparative studies across different cities or regions would also be valuable to understand how contextual factors influence virtual tourism

adoption. Expanding the research scope in these directions will contribute to a more nuanced and complete understanding of virtual tourism's role in the evolving tourism landscape.

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The author designed the study, conducted the survey, collected and processed the data, wrote the manuscript, and finalized the draft. This research is part of a thesis, conducted under the guidance of the supervising professor.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Tran Tuyen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Disclosure:

The author declares no conflicts of interest relevant to this publication.

Informed Consent

The tourism businesses were provided with full information and gave their consent to participate in the survey.

Ethical Approval:

The study was approved by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities at Vietnam National University, Hanoi research evaluation board, which reviewed and approved the research proposal.

Data Availability:

The data were collected by the author and are not available.

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