



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN RURAL TOURISM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: The digital transformation of rural tourism represents an essential strategic direction in the context of globalization and the increase in the competitiveness of tourist destinations, offering significant opportunities for the revitalization of local communities and the valorization of territorial resources. Given that rural areas frequently face problems such as depopulation, limited access to markets and insufficiently developed infrastructure, the integration of digital technologies can contribute to increasing visibility, diversifying the tourist offer and improving the visitor experience. However, the digitalization process also involves a series of challenges, related to low digital skills, lack of investment and resistance to change of local actors. The results highlight that digitalization significantly contributes to increasing the competitiveness of rural destinations, by facilitating access to markets, optimizing promotion processes and developing innovative services. In conclusion, the digital transformation of rural tourism is a key factor for the sustainable development of local communities, but the success of this process depends on strengthening institutional capacity, investing in infrastructure and developing the digital skills of the actors involved.

• Introduction

Digital transformation is one of the main drivers of change in the contemporary economy, having a significant impact on the tourism sector, including in rural areas. In the context of globalization and increasing competitiveness of destinations, rural communities are forced to adopt digital technologies to capitalize on their tourism potential and integrate into modern economic circuits.

The relevance of the theme derives from the need to reduce the digital divide between urban and rural areas, as well as from the role of digitalization in increasing the visibility, accessibility and efficiency of tourism services. Digital transformation is not only a technological process, but also a socio-economic one, which influences the structure of the labor market, the behavior of tourists and the way local activities are organized.

• Material and method

The paper aims to analyze the opportunities and constraints associated with digital transformation in rural tourism, using a quantitative approach. This consists of analyzing statistical data on the use of digital technologies in tourism, as well as applying a questionnaire to rural tourism operators, in order to assess the level of digitalization and the perception of the associated benefits and risks. It will also use documentary analysis of tourism development strategies at regional and European level.

• Results and discussions

In this context, the analysis of the opportunities and challenges generated by digitalization becomes essential for the sustainable development and competitiveness of rural tourism.

The results highlight that digitalization contributes significantly to increasing the performance of rural tourism, but its impact is differentiated depending on the level of technological adoption.

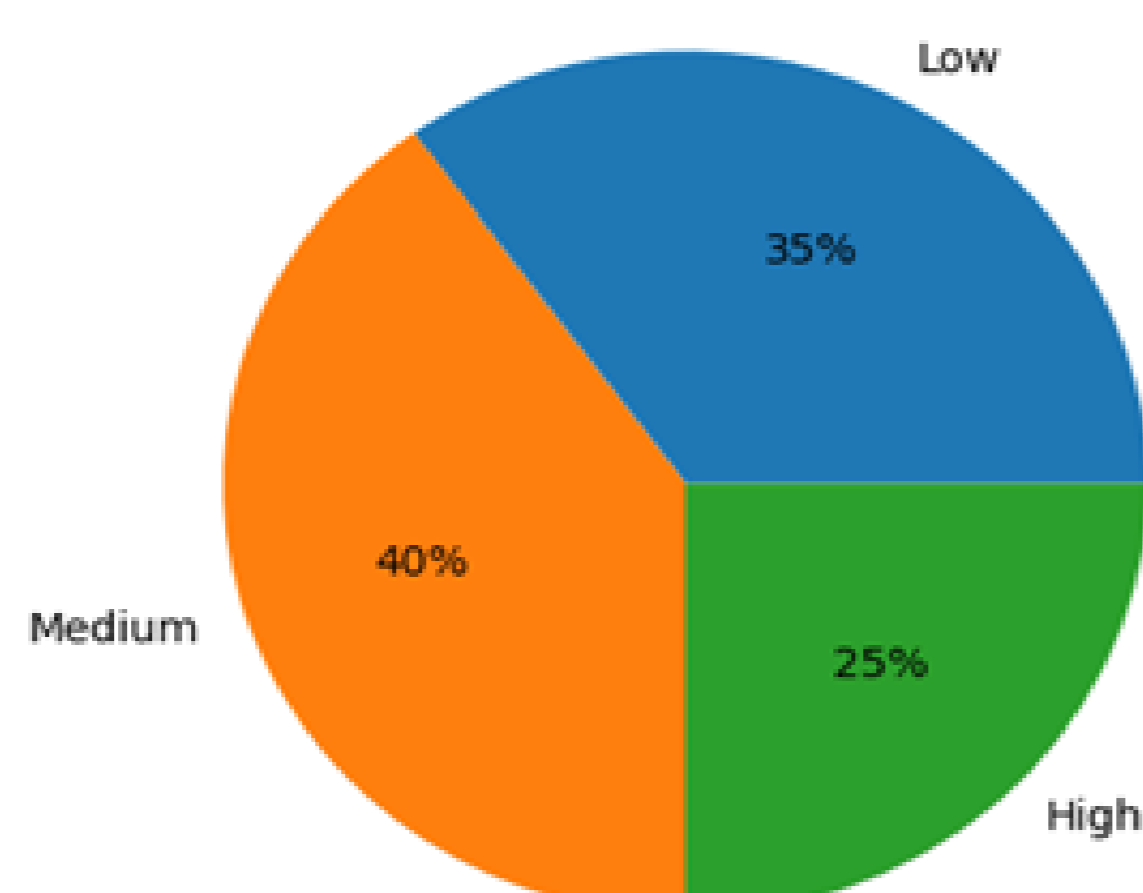


Figure 1. Level of digital adoption in rural tourism units

Establishments that use online platforms, digital booking systems and digital marketing are experiencing a significant increase in tourist flows and occupancy

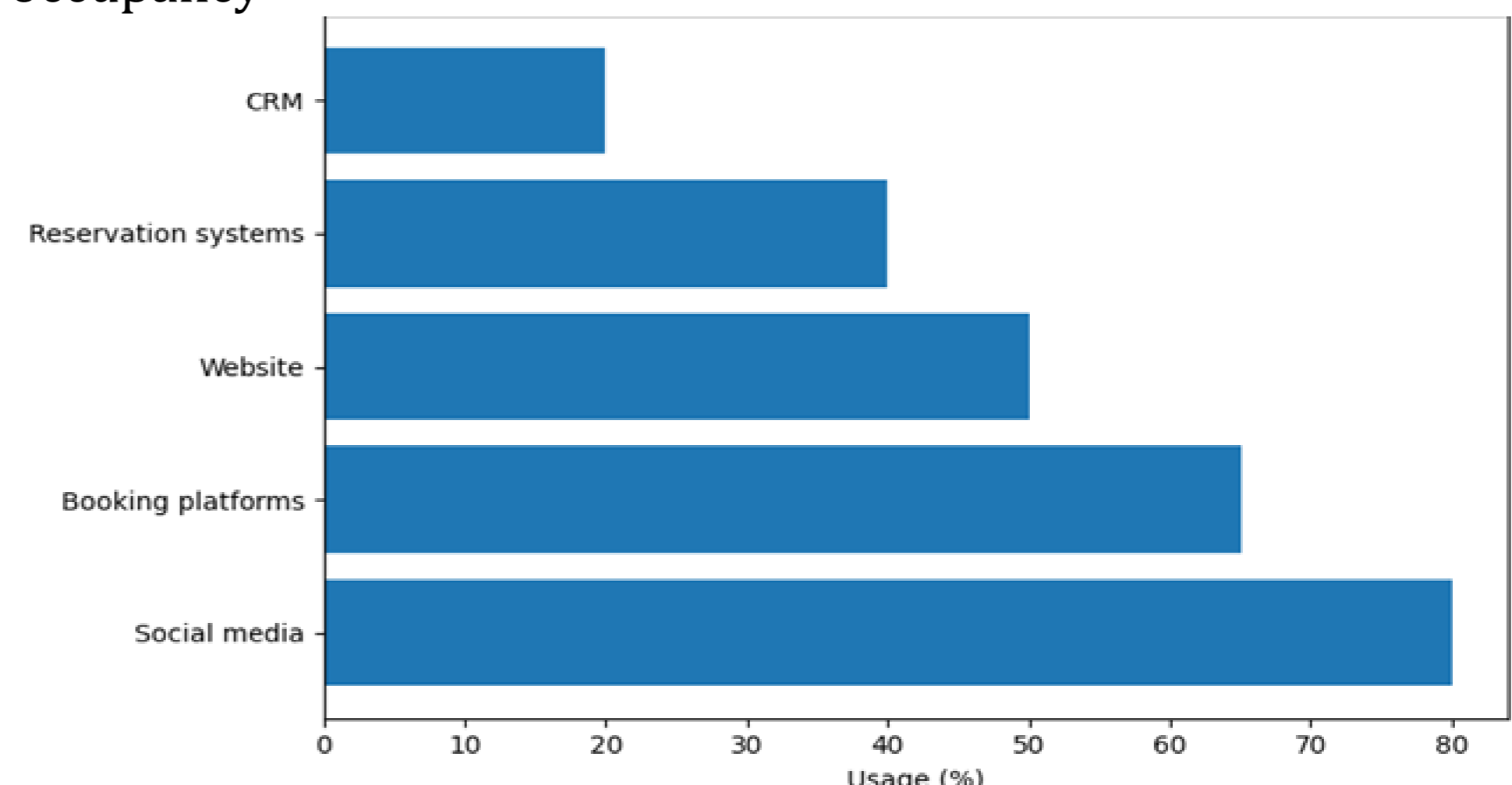


Figure 2. Digital tools usage

From an economic perspective, digitalization contributes to increasing competitiveness and diversifying tourism services, allowing for the personalization of offers and access to wider markets.

However, the analysis also highlights a series of structural constraints, the main barriers being educational and infrastructure: lack of digital skills, weak IT infrastructure, high costs, limited access to financing and resistance to change.

Overall, the results confirm that digital transformation positively influences the economic performance and visibility of rural tourism, but its implementation is conditioned by structural and institutional factors

• Conclusions

The study highlights that digital transformation is a key factor for the development and competitiveness of rural tourism. By using digital technologies, rural communities can increase the accessibility of services, attract a greater number of tourists and diversify their sources of income.

However, the digitalization process is limited by a number of barriers, such as lack of skills, poor infrastructure and limited access to financial resources. These constraints directly affect the ability of communities to capitalize on the opportunities offered by digital transformation.

In conclusion, to support the development of rural tourism, it is necessary to implement public policies aimed at:

- ❖ development of digital skills
- ❖ investments in IT infrastructure
- ❖ supporting the digitalization of SMEs

Digital transformation is not just a technological opportunity, but a strategic pillar for the sustainable development of rural communities.