

A Conceptual Review of Digital Detox Tourism and The Implication For Tourism Business Suppliers In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Digital detox occurs when an individual do away with digital or electronic devices such as the smart phones, laptops, telephones, online social media platforms and so on. While digital tourism is a digital free tourism, a holiday free of digital devices. Digital detox tourism is a new niche market discovered recently by some hotels and travel agencies due to demands by some segment of the hospitality and tourism market for disconnection from digital devices because of the physical health, psychological, sociological and mental health issues arising from too much exposure to them. This conceptual review will therefore examine the concept of digital detox and digital tourism and it implication for tourism business suppliers in Nigeria. The study adopted secondary data in the form of journals, text books and online resources to properly analysed the subject matter The study revealed that digital detox tourism is a new tourist product and the need for people to embrace digital detox and digital detox tourism from time to time for enhancement of physical and mental wellbeing. It further reveals that there are available markets for digital detox tourism in Nigeria. The country is blessed with exotic and serene resorts destinations that can service the market. The study concludes that hospitality and tourism business suppliers need to key into it by providing products and services that will add value and experience while co-creating with customers for richer experience and value. The study suggest that hospitality and tourism service providers must understand the needs of the various market segments and inculcate into product designs and offerings because not all customer want to be totally unplugged from digital devices.

Keywords: Digital detox, digital detox holiday, detox tourism, hospitality and tourism industry

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

The new normal is being plugged or connected. It has become our way of life. A typical day for an individual today is to watch TV, check mails, chat with friends on whatsapp, scroll the Facebook, shop online and at bed time use our smart phone to surf the net for more contents.

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Majority now do business on lines, meetings online, booking of tickets, hotel rooms, airline and much more using one form of tech devices or the other, .which makes it very difficult for people to totally disconnected (Schegg & Stangl 2017). In USA, adults spent about 11 hours each day on social media either for music, reading or interacting with friends. There are 4.48 billion social media users in the world today (Datareportal 2021). In Nigeria there are over 100 million internet users and about 33 million active social media users (Stastista 2021) and is expected to increase more in the future. According to America Psychological Association, one of the biggest contributory factors to stress in the fast paced world is technological devices. However the role of ICTs in any economy cannot be over emphasized. In hospitality and tourism industry it has help shaped the industry (Schegg &Stangl 2012), helped the industry to provide speedy and efficient services, costs savings operations, improve customer experience, enhance marketing, create value and improve the image of the industry as a high tech company (Kilichan, R & Yilmaz, M (2020).

However, their connections have negative impacts (WHO, 2014). The devices have taken away leisure and recreational time because it also provides recreational activities with different game apps on it. However, tech devices have exposed us to a lot of stress affecting our mental and physical health, (American Psychological Association annual stress survey). It has prevented people from real life social interactions with a lot of distractions (Karapetsas et al 2015). Hence, the need to unplugged or disconnect. As a result of the negative effects, experts have called for occupational wellness activities, stress management, work life balance workshop and digital detox retreats (Smith& Puczko 2015).

The earliest forms of travel has always been for wellness and enhancement of health (Smith & Puczko, 2014). For example, Greeks and Romans are known to have travelled far and wide for healing springs and spas. Digital detox tourism started in the USA since 2013, and recently emerges in Europe as a new niche market. It was embraced in Europe in 2015. According to (Emek 2014, Oving 2015), wellness resorts have more popularity as a destination for digital detox holiday This prompt some hotels and travel agencies to offer digital detox travel packages to remote areas that are highly disconnected of ICTs for people who want to disconnect (Smith and Puczko 2015). Nigeria, as a tourist destination is blessed with exotic and serene resorts and other tourist destinations that can service the digital detox tourism market. The aim of this article therefore, is to examine and critically analyze the concept of digital detox and digital detox tourism and the implication for hospitality and tourism business suppliers in Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Digital detox and Digital detox Tourism

Digital detox occurs when a person do away with digital devices such as telephone smartphones, televisions, computers, tablets and social media sites. It is based on the idea of balance, similar to mindfulness and is seen as a tool for taking short breaks to relieve stress and learn about self-regulation (Glomb et al 2011). According to Morrison &Gomez (2014), there is no universal or international definition of digital detox. However, a very convincing definition was given by Technology Dictionary. It defines digital detox as “a state when an individual quits or suspends use of digital equipment and devices to utilize that time for social interactions and activities. It is a technique that enables an individual to relieve stress and anxiety incurred from being over occupied by a high utilization of digital devices” (Techopedia, n.d.a.).

Digital detox has been discussed in some behavioral science in the form of addiction among children (Ugur & Koc 2015), ICT disconnection and tourism experience at museums Duncan (2014), ICT disconnection of camping tourist in Purbeck, United Kingdom (Dickinson et al 2016) and the most current study by Neuhofer & Ladkin 2017 to find out whether employees are able to switch off from ICT technology while travelling, their study revealed that the extents to which employees can switch off depends on the type of work. For example, whether part-time, full-time, flexible hours and work location. However, Schegg & Stangl 2017), explained that digital detox tourism is a complex area to study. It is still in its embryotic stage as has been clearly under study in the academia, especially in quantitative research.

The concept of digital detox holiday is also often perceived as confusing, poorly understood (Ozdemer & Goktas 2021). It can also be referred to as unplugged tourism, disconnected tourism or digital free tourism, This was revealed by Ozdemer and Goktas (2021) in their study on research trends on digital detox holidays: A bibliometric analysis 2012-2020, they posited that digital detox holiday can be considered a form of digital free tourism and unplugged tourism. Their research also revealed that it is a recent research topic. This supported by (Buhalis and Ladkin 2014), that digital detox tourism is a complex area to study because it is still in its embryotic stage. However, some scholars view it as a subset of health tourism (Smith and Puczko 2015). Health tourism is a form of tourism that involves people travelling outside their usual place of residence to a destination for the purpose of enhancing or maintaining their health where there is provision of facilities that will provide these benefits (Smith and Puczko 2014).

2.2 Why do we need a digital detox /digital detox holiday?

There are so many reasons or factors necessitating the need for digital detox holiday or disconnection from ICT technologies. They include physical health, psychological, sociological and technological factors. Physical health), issues like musculoskeletal with symptoms such as low back pain, spinal disorders, arthritis, obesity among others (WHO, 2014), are all associated with overuse of ICT technologies. Psychological factors have been associated with techno-stress, anxiety, low esteem and depression and addiction (Bhattacharya et al 2019). Others include eye strain (American Optometric Association 2020), overweight (Vandelanotte et al 2009), sleeping disorders (WHO, 2014; Paris et al 2015). Furthermore, sociological factors lead to loneliness Karapetsas et al (2015) low productivity at work place Hoving,(2012), difficulty in relationships such as marital discord, separation and divorce (Donnelly 2012), lack of quality time with family due to twenty four hours connection to internet at work and home (Asscher,2017) leading to self-isolation (WHO, 2014). Technological factors may either be as a result of poor services from network providers which may lead to digital fatigue or too many boring contents online which often lead to social media fatigue All of the aforementioned if not properly manage after a prolonged exposure to digital devices may lead to a serious physical and mental health issues just as sudden disconnection may also lead to, tension (Pearce and Gretzel 2012), depression and suicide (Kim et al 2006). It is therefore necessary to disconnect from time to time.

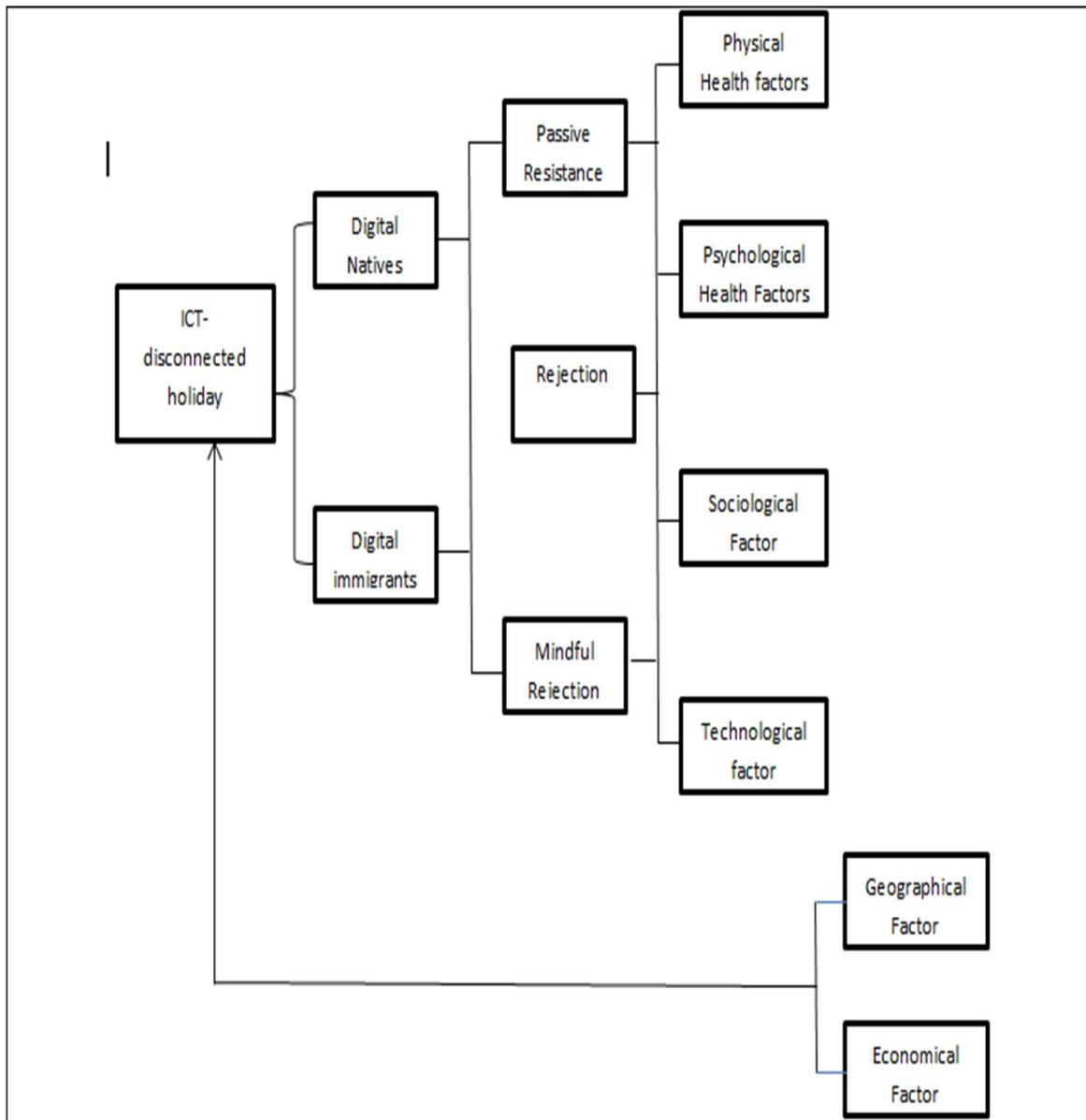


Figure 1: showing motives for undertaking digital detox holiday.
Source: Adapted from Kristel Hoving (2017) Illustration

2.3 Benefits of digital detox holiday

High productivity and sharper focus

The greatest benefits of unplugging is making an individual to be productive and have sharper focus because there is less distractions from beeps, frequent notifications from different devices. It is also makes one to be aware of what is happening in the immediate environment which ordinarily these devices would have prevented. For examples, many people have been knocked down by vehicles because they are so much into their telephone.

Less stress

There are too many contents online and too much information can be stressful. Evidence has shown that stress is one of the causes of physical and mental issues that arises due to too much exposure to digital devices

Better social interactions

In the absence of digital devices, there is more opportunities to pay attention to those around you. For example, , you naturally interact with family at home, enjoy social interaction with friends by hanging out eliminating the feeling of isolation caused by digital devices..

More control of time

Taking a break from digital devices or media helps individual to take control of his or her time. Since there is less distraction from beeps, alerts and so on. One is free to plan and monitor is time. Time spent on Facebook can be used to do something more productive at home or in the office.

2.4 Types of digital detox holiday packages

According to Kristel Hoving (2017) there are three different types of digital detox holiday packages offered by travel agencies :

- a. Detox packages where the traveller is allow to disconnect his or herself without the holiday resort interference, they can also provide ICTs package within the establishment
- b. Tech-free attitude package this accommodation does not offer digital services but may have nearby.
- c. Highly disconnected package offer total disconnection, destinations are located in highly remote area away from ICT connections

From the above packages, it can be deduced that different tourist needs were considered. For example the first type of package is for those who want to disconnect voluntarily for a particular period even with the availability of some tech devices at the destinations and if guest want to be plugged again the facilities will be informed. In this case .there should be a good understanding between the guest and the organization because of the availability of digital devices at these destinations. It also mean that destination need not be too remote. implying some hotels in sub urban locations can offer this service.

The second package is similar to the first package, however, in this case the facilities does not have digital services within their premises like the first package but when guest are tired of being off grid, services can be provided for them at a nearby facility on request. The third and last package is for those who want total disconnection, they want to stay in highly remote area where ICT connectivity will be difficult. This package is for those who want to eliminate tech-stress from their lives and will be willing to pay for the experience. In this type of package addition of wellness and health package will make it a richer experience as reported by Emek, (2014), in a nutshell, the various type of packages indicates that not everyone wants total disconnection, type and duration of disconnection depends on individual motivational factors

2.5 Factors that influencing demand for digital detox holiday

The demand for digital detox tourism or holiday may be dependent on some factors. It could be economical or geographical. Economically, price will determine choice of destination. A tourist that needs a luxury resort should be ready to pay the price or rather choose budgeted comfortable facilities that will still serve the purpose of the holiday which is primarily to detox. Geographically, ease of access to destination, climatic condition and adequate facilities that will serve the purpose of the holiday will be an important factor. The location for the digital detox holiday may also be one of the motivation (Hoving & Steijger,2014).

Another important factor is the demography of the market. Demography in this context will be between the millennial who are digital natives and the baby boomers born before the 80s described as the digital immigrants. The digital immigrants are more likely to embrace digital detox more because of the physical health issues associated with it and the complexity of the technological devices. However, the millennial may find it very hard to embrace it as this technology as become part of their lives, disconnecting them from it makes them feel they are missing out and this results in tension and anxiety.

For them to embrace this type of holiday, tourism suppliers must therefore consider them during product design. It is assume that digital native because of their nature, will prefer products that will not totally disconnect but rather turn down, that is product that limit the time of exposure to digital devices. Globally the youths are more active users of tech devices, it will take a good marketing strategy and product designs and offerings to persuade them for demand for this new tourism products and Nigeria is no exception.

Table 1 : Expectation of tourist on digital detox holiday

FACTORS	MOTIVATIONS
Geographical	Activities: sight-seeing tours, being in highly remote areas
Physical health	Spiritual well being e.g Yoga meditation. Stress relief
Technological	Technological fatigue (no need for digital devices)
Psychological	Concentration on non -digital leisure activities e.g. reading books

Implication for hospitality and tourism business suppliers

In this article, hospitality and tourism business suppliers will includes hoteliers, tour operators, travel agencies, wellness resort operators. Niche market in tourism is a specialized area of tourism market, usually based on visitor's particular interest or needs (Cooper et al 2005). In tourism the size of the market may not be small as it is generally associated with niche market. The market niche defined the product features aimed at satisfying specific market needs, the price, quality of product and the targeted demography.

In Nigeria there are so many resort hotels that can service the new niche market. Majority of these resorts are only use for meetings, conferences, retreats and workshops. Some of the exotic resorts are wasting away because most of the owners are not professional in the field, they are investors only interested in quick return on investment but are not experience in product design, emerging trends in the hospitality industry and current needs of the new tourist as explained by Poon, (1994) these are tourist that want new experiences, something new of high quality and value. In this context, a remote area where people can be highly disconnected from the noise pollution, hustle and bustle of the city, as well as stress of digital devices. Hospitality and tourism business suppliers need to take advantage of the new and emerging opportunities.

They should have a clearer view of the types of benefits that consumer are looking for. Embracing digital detox tourism is a means of developing our major tourist attractions as their location are most ideal for this type of niche market. Also additional products and services should be added to give quality and richer experience. For example wellness and other health packages , also digital detox can also be combined with retreats for business executives some of them may want to unplugged after conference, retreats or workshops..

Digital detox tourism allow new product and service design for tourists and allow for co-creation, a .business strategy that allows and encourages a customer to be fully involve with the service provider to create a richer experience and value (Correia et al 2017). The type of co-creation adopted for this new niche market would be one involving collaboration and open contributions with customers and enabling customer to make selection and co-designing products. This will generates new markets. Digital detox tourism will generate more jobs as a subset of health tourism it will require additional health and wellness program to make it a richer and complete tour package backed with aggressive marketing strategy.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is a conceptual research paper. The paper reviews the concept of digital detox and digital detox tourism as a new niche market in the hospitality and tourism industry. It adopted secondary data to review related literatures on the subject matter to critically analysed and examine the concept for better understanding of the new phenomenon..

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Digital detox is a new niche market recently discovered by travel agents and hoteliers in USA and Europe and yet to be captured by the Nigeria hospitality and tourism market. This article has giving an insight to the concept of digital detox and digital detox tourism in order to gain a better understanding of this emerging trend in hospitality and tourism industry and the need to take advantage of the new niche market as there are tourism resources in the countries that can service this new market For example, Resorts like Obudu cattle ranch, Cross river state, Ikogosi springs and resorts,, Osun state, Miccom golf course and resort , Osun state, Lacampagne tropicanna resort, Lagos, Bagauda Lake, Kano state, to mention but a few. And several other hotels located in remote or sub-urban places can easily key into this market in order to meet up with the current trends in the industry and enjoy the benefit associated with new niche market

According to Sheeham, (2021), globally health and wellness market has reached a value of 3,31 trillion dollars in 2020, this is a huge market, people are more conscious of their health since the covid-19 crisis. The study recommends that hospitality and tourism business suppliers should embrace digital detox holiday because in tourism, tourist generates demands in destinations as their needs changes and increases. Moreover, the scale and size of demand can also change with time and seasons. In order to be able to meet the demands of the new tourists that are known to demand for new experience, expect high quality service and value for money, Digital detox holiday should be included in their business strategy, supported with other wellness and health program in order to meet up with the currents needs in the hospitality and tourism industry and in addition have competitive advantage over their competitors.

5. DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As earlier explained in the study, the concept of digital detox is highly under-researched and need to be study from different perspectives. In the future the researchers will attempt to adopt quantitative research method using a case study to access viability of digital detox tourism market in Nigeria focusing on level of demands from digital immigrants and digital native.

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