



## TechTalk: Changes in the Tourism Industry as Technology Advances by Prof. Brian King

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### 1. Changes in the Tourism Industry as Technology Advances

#### 1.1 The Evolution of Technology and its Relationship to Humans

In particular, the third industrial revolution, based on computers and the Internet, made life easier for humans, and the fourth industrial revolution, based on new technologies such as IoT, AI, big data, and hyperconnectivity, is rapidly changing our lives. The prevalent tourism industry paradigm is also changing, and we asked Prof. Brian King for his opinion. Before answering this question, Prof. Brian King mentioned the importance of starting from a human centered philosophical perspective. He said that technological developments originate from humans and humans are at the center of technological progress. Such progress has both shaped and facilitated human exchanges and interactions which occupy a pivotal role in tourism experiences and how they are managed. This changes are evident in processes across various sectors of the economy with the tourism industry being a

prominent example. As a concrete example, though the development of technology has changed both vacation and business travel, the hospitality perspective remains crucial. He emphasized that although there are technological changes, the human element is likely to remain constant. Therefore, at a time of rapid change for industry it is necessary to think about humanity when considering how to integrate technology and humans.

#### 1.2 Business and Consumer Impact of Innovations in the Tourism Industry

Due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the emergence of new technologies (e.g., AI, Big data, and hyperconnectivity) in the tourism industry is transforming tourism businesses and consumers. We asked Prof. Brian King to comment on this. He said that innovative technologies have been integral to the tourism industry since its inception and have been an ongoing process shaping its development. Despite the longstanding history of technological innovation, the impacts of artificial intelligence on the industry are still in their early stages. The most significant recent leap forward has been the penetration of digital technologies into all aspects of the tourism experience, albeit varying by industry sector and by location. He noted that the rapidly digitization of the tourism industry is impacting on both the visitor experience and on prevalent business models. Specifically, he observed that emergent technologies are leading to a transformation of the MICE industry into a more hybrid mode combining participants who are present at gatherings and others joining remotely. This requires venues and operators to embrace emergent technologies within their business operations to meet the expectations of different customer segments (eg those seeking a face to face experience and those joining remotely). According to Prof. Brian King, the development of mobile devices has changed not only the relationship between customers and service workers but also the interaction between products and services. As examples, he mentioned the transformation of the restaurant industry due to home delivery options and central kitchens and the taxi business due to ride-sharing apps. In the case of hotels, a combination of digitalization and the sharing economy has also disrupted the hospitality sector by creating competition between traditional hotels and alternative accommodation through platforms such as Airbnb.

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## 2. Texas A&M's Recent Change to Hospitality, Hotel Management and Tourism.

### 2.1 Curriculum Transformation to Hospitality & Hotel Management at Texas A&M University Literature Review

For 57 years, Texas A&M has been a prominent University provider of programs in the fields of recreation, resource management, and tourism within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. However, according to Dr. Brian King, the rapid pace of hospitality growth in Texas and development of the Texas A&M Hotel and Conference Center prompted University leadership and faculty to identify an opportunity to embrace hospitality and hotel management education as a complement to recreation and tourism. He said that the University's addition of a hospitality dimension has extended and enriched the established core curriculum of recreation, park and events. The programs have been revised based on a shared view that the development of tourism resources can be enhanced by applying hospitality principles, including a strengthening of links across the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. According to Prof. Brian King, a stronger emphasis on the private sector and business is an important addition to the more established offerings. While such aspects have always been present in the curriculum, there has previously been a greater emphasis on the needs of organizations in the not-for-profit, voluntary, and government/public sectors. The emerging spectrum is more strongly weighted towards private and for-profit businesses, notably in the recently introduced undergraduate degree track in business hospitality, a collaboration with the College of Business. The second aspect has been embracing a new range of supporting partners, notably hotel groups and food service organizations. These can benefit from the perspectives brought by other departments across the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences such as Nutrition and Food Science and Technology.

### 2.2 Expectations for expansion into hospitality and hotels

Hotels, lodging, and food service are dynamic sectors of the fast-growing Texas economy, including in the region surrounding College Station (the Brazos Valley). Texas has an expanding population - it now exceeds 30 million and is increasing by about half a million each year. Texas A&M University is a massive institution with 73,000 students on the main College Station campus alone. He believes that emerging partnerships with the hospitality sector allow an extended reach for the University brand, including the opportunity to capitalize on a vast alumni network (there have been ½ a million graduates from TAMU) who share a set of values that align well with hospitality. With the base of the University campus in a college town, he feels that hospitality courses can impact the whole regional business ecosystem by introducing a new cadre of professional hospitality leaders. The scale of the visitor economy is evident when the Texas A&M football team is playing - the stadium (Kyle Field) is filled to capacity with 105,000 spectators. In addition, the large population of Texas is bigger than many countries. With this number growing fast (by about 500,000 people per year), there is vast population of domestic travelers requiring the services of the hospitality and hotel industry. The scale and scope of the visitor economy is massive.

### 2.3 Smart Tourism Curriculum at Texas A&M University

Backed by the support of a major donor, the University is developing a multi-million dollar Center for Hospitality Innovation which will feature a virtual reality room. This will provide an excellent venue for experiential student learning. In terms of curriculum development, Texas A&M's Department of Hospitality, Hotel Management, and Tourism is offering a new senior level undergraduate subject/course in Information Technology for the Hotel and Tourism Industry. The undergraduate marketing subject/course which is more established, has been revised to provide a stronger emphasis on

the context of the digital economy. Noting the University's multidisciplinary strengths, Prof. Brian King said that because Texas A&M University is a major provider of engineering and computer science education, it will be have an opportunity to engage in cross college and faculty collaborations to keep up with the latest technologies and trends in tourism. This has great potential for the development of smart tourism.

## 3. The Spread of Global Culture

### 3.1 The Meaning of Global

Increased global mobilities (with the exception of the abrupt curtailing of travel through the COVID-19 pandemic) have led to a greater shared familiarity with cultural practices in different parts of the world. To those able to travel internationally, such mobilities have made the world feel like a smaller place. Prof. Brian King said that human diversity is manifest through the different cultures and languages spoken across the world. On the other hand, hospitality shown to visitors from around the world is a commonality evident in global tourism and hospitality along with the universal appeal of emerging cultural forms such as K Pop.

### 3.2 The Biggest Difference between Domestic and International

Apart from the obvious distinction that international travelers cross the borders separating countries, international and domestic travel can be understood in cultural terms. "Not all travelers are looking for something different and exotic when they cross borders, but international travel generally involves stronger interactions with cultural differences." Professor Brian King points out that one experiences cultural differences when eating at an unfamiliar ethnic restaurant in his or her hometown versus moving to a different location for a similar meal. However, the cultural differences are even greater when he or she moves that experience to an international setting. In other words, international travel offers relatively more opportunities to experience cultural differences than its domestic equivalent.

### 3.3 The Phenomenon of Diffusion in Korean Culture as Technology Advances

Exporting Korean culture can strengthen familiarity amongst foreigners who often view Korea as an unfamiliar and inaccessible destination. During his nine years as a Hong Kong resident, Professor King was very conscious of the strong attraction to Korea as a travel destination amongst locals, who liked to enjoy the food and shopping in Seoul and mountain skiing. Cultural background can undoubtedly enhance destination appeal. He believes that an increased familiarity and interest in Korean culture can be linked effectively to tourism, especially alongside technological developments.

### 3.4 Advice for the Journal of Smart Tourism

The term "smart" is highly contested and notions of data privacy vary widely/ Hence it was noted that it will be necessary to engage in deeper investigations of smart tourism that do not assume a standard and universally applicable models and recognize the importance of place-related considerations. There are many interesting examples of smart tourism/start city initiatives across Asia (e.g., India and Indonesia, as well as the more familiar Japan and Taiwan). The Journal of Smart Tourism should embrace inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches and research methods based on the relationship between smart technologies and tourism.

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The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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