**Us and them? Is there a need for ‘accessible apps’**

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**Abstract**

*Introduction*

Academic studies in the field of tourism and hospitality continue to highlight technology as a vehicle to both simulate and enhance tourism experiences (Errichiello et al., 2019; Li et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2019; Tham et al., 2021). But while Tlili et al. (2021) explains that the integration of technologies in tourism has in many cases improved the tourism experience. Thirty-six million people are living with some form of sight loss (WHO, 2021) and age is commonly associated with declining vision (Age UK, 2022). Richards et al. (2021) note that smartphone apps alongside booking sites and information boards continue to come in inaccessible formats together with limited functionality for some users; meaning that the existing travel booking and mobility apps simply do not enable all people to live and travel independently (Khan and Khusro, 2021). This presents challenges for users who require support and assistance from smartphone and smartwatch devices (Chorfi et al., 2017). Besides the foundations of any tourism experience are permitting accessibility to destinations (Darcy, 2010), it is noted that inaccessible technologies limit both choices and enjoyment of travel for people with disabilities (Richards et al., 2021) and by extension older travellers who often face the same or similar accessibility challenges. Therefore, this submission will discuss the capabilities of travel apps and the need for such knowledge to be accessible.

*Methodology*

The researchers developed and administered an online survey via Qualtrics; this was distributed via several social media outlets, academic communities together with disability groups and employed both convenience and snowballing sampling methods. The data collection process embedded accessibility throughout via the provision of alternative formats including large print, telephone, and easy read, but was purposely designed to target the public, and was not aimed at any specific groups of the society. This resulted in 195 completed responses (n=195) overall.

*Results and Conclusion*

Most respondents were found to be confident in using smartphone apps for tourism purposes and have the rights skills to do so. However, that confidence and level of skill declined with age. Whilst most respondents do not have a problem using and accessing travel apps, there is medium confidence in the accessibility and personalization features current apps offer. For example, 49 % of the respondents think that travel apps should have more accessible features and design, rising to 79% when considered 18-24 years old. Significantly, 35% of respondents strongly agree and 41% were found to agree that using accessible travel apps would improve the booking experience. Interestingly, this applies to 48 % and 24 %, respectively, for the respondents aged 18-24, and 20 % and 60 %, respectively, for the people ages 60 and over. However, only 10 % of the respondents indicated they considered themselves having a disability. Therefore, the need for accessibility features and design in mobile apps is not limited to people with disabilities. Besides, Buhalis and Law (2008) over ten years ago alluded to the fact that there is an in-creasing number of independent tourists who are no longer reliant on packaged options. The implications are that going forward mainstream app developers and providers should put inclusive and accessible design at the core of the product, rather than offering a separate accessible solution aimed at people with disabilities alone.

**Keywords:** *Accessibility; Tourism Technology; Reduced Inequalities; Accessible Hospitality and Tourism.*

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