

Smart Fields, Smart Yields: Unlocking Sustainable Agritourism through Digitalization

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ABSTRACT

Agritourism is emerging as one of the aspects that have the potential to assist India in achieving inclusive sustainable growth. The rise of digital platforms has transformed the way users interact, enabling them to access and share information effectively. The research proposes to assess the impact of technological advancements in the tourism industry and its application in agritourism to facilitate its expansion through digitalization. This study proposes to undertake a detailed assessment of the integration of innovations in the tourism industry and its application in agritourism research to comprehend the potential of the expansion of the industry through digitalization. It also highlights emerging challenges in the industry and recent findings on how advanced technology is fostering networking among farmers. Ultimately, the study anticipates that the adoption of digital solutions will not only enhance the promotion of agritourism but also contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas in India.

Keywords: Agritourism, Sustainable Rural Development, Digitalization, Digital Platform, Smart Technologies

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a thriving industry that welcomes individuals from all walks of life and provides an abundant variety of career possibilities. It empowers

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individuals and catalyses socioeconomic progress in regions and communities, from skilled workers to unskilled labour. With its fascinating consumer interaction, tourism transforms into a transformational force, generating a brighter future for everybody involved.

Tourism in the Context of Agriculture

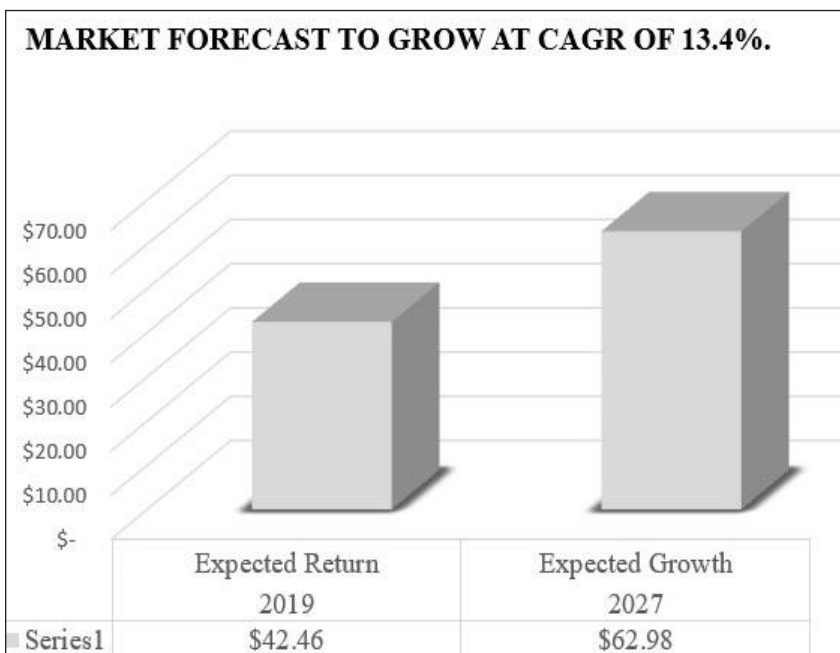
While tourism is a leisure activity to unwind from daily labour and stress, agriculture provides people with a means of sustenance (Rane, 2022). Any activity focused on agriculture that draws visitors away from their typical homes to visit farms is considered agritourism. Agritourism is one of the few activities that can widely contribute to exposing urbanites to the richness of rural societies. Through this, urban residents and visitors get increasingly interested in learning more about farming, farmers' daily activities, and rural life. Urban residents and visitors also gain interest in learning about the crop's production and planting phases (Boraste, 2022). The reasons for boom in the agritourism industry include greater prevalence, increased interest in learning about agricultural work and how the food is being cultivated, enhanced accessibility, and environmental sensitivity (Nagaraju, 2014).

Agritourism operations may be found all over the world. They range from modest seasonal companies that provide minimal consumer services to massive operations that provide a wide variety of consumer services year-round. Stanford Museum & Nature Centre in the U.S., Alpacas & Mini Farm Animals of Winchester Creek Farm in the U.S., Agriturismo Al Verneto in Italy, Agri Fac Farm Stay in Sri Lanka, Gokyo Cho-La Pass Trek in Nepal, and Agriturismo Pantilica Ranch in Sicily (Agritourism World, 2017) are the common global agritourism examples. The major agritourism destinations in India are as follows- Baramati Agri & Rural Tourism Training, Research & Development Centre in Pune, Coconut Creek Farm and Homestay Kumarakom in Kerala, Ganesh Agro Tourism in Maharashtra, Greener Pastures in Assam, Himalaya Herbal Stores in U.P., Dewalokam Farm Stay Retreat, Karimannoor in Kerala, and The Country Retreat Farm Stay, Pali in Rajasthan (Selvam, 2021).

Agritourism's Future in India

Based on a study by Business Economics (2019), India's agritourism business is growing at a pace of 20% per year. As exhibited in Fig. 1, the worldwide agritourism industry was valued at \$ 42.46 billion in 2019

and is expected to reach \$ 62.98 billion by 2027, with a CAGR of 13.4% between 2019 and 2027. Revenues of agritourism in India are also growing at a rate of 20% each year. As a freshly evolving field, it certainly has its own set of obstacles and managerial concerns to deal with. Issues such as the guest-host connection, sustainability, and economic feasibility are critical for any potential tourism development.



Source: Business economics (2019).

Fig. 1: Expected Growth of Agritourism (2019-2027)

Development of the Agritourism Industry

The following elements must be considered while developing agritourism; (a) the layout and management of areas as well as sustainable spatial planning, (b) providing information and educating farmers about the value of protecting the environment, natural resources, and culture, (c) enhancing a region's unique characteristics and historical significance, (d) ensuring that facilities offered are comfortable and appealing to tourists, (e) contributing value to the local community, and (f) taking sustainability into account (Kristiana & Stephanie, 2016).

The current scenario of agritourism development is promoting the community to process agricultural goods and enhance on-farm and off-

farm management. The developments are assisting agricultural product processing, farm management, and non-farm management activities significantly boosting farmers' family income (Sriyadi, 2021). The farmers will benefit financially if they allow visitors to explore their farms and the agricultural environment. Agritourism is a cutting-edge agricultural approach that is specifically focused on tourism providing farmers with a direct source of revenue. It is, therefore, a crucial component of rural sustainability (Boraste, 2022).

Relationship between Agritourism and Sustainable Development

Considering the connection of agritourism with the concept of sustainable development, the reproduction of human capital and demographic resources, and at the same time a significant impact on natural resources, sustainable agritourism marketing can be seen as a model for the strategic development of the territory, focusing on the long-term coordinated development of tourism activities with society, business, and the environment (Nosirova, 2022). Sustainable rural development necessitates a holistic strategy in which every day fundamental requirements of rural communities are met by dependable public services in conjunction with technological, social, and environmental circumstances to encourage regional enterprises and urban-rural ties. Following this, an agritourism development pattern is required so that tourist and agricultural operators may collaborate to plan, organize, and programme agritourism that benefits the community, entrepreneurs, and the government (Mursito, 2021).

The Economic Impact of Developing Agritourism

Agritourism is an essential method of helping farm economic diversification. In this regard, agritourism farms may significantly improve farm revenue streams by offering new services and implementing excellent e-commerce websites to learn more about how farmers can seek advantage of agritourism opportunities (Sunitha, 2021). The development requires an innovative technique to assess the scope of the agritourism phenomenon in a specific region and to assess the B2C e-commerce web services for a subset of agritourism farms (Salvatore, 2013).

The agritourism industry is experiencing an era of innovation. The urban sector specially is showing increased interest in this sector to fulfil

the urge of discovering rural life and living through experiences of the farm. Such family-friendly leisure activities including learning about rural cultures, rituals, meals, festivals, and traditional attire, etc. have been attracting the young and old alike. The scope and significance of this study lies in the advancement of this growing industry through digitization. The suggestions offered by the article are expected to enhance the integration of digitization in agritourism leading to growth of the industry. The study offers revolutionary procedures for the farmers to associate social networking with environmentally sustainable tourism in economically disadvantaged communities.

The paper has been divided into four sections. The first section introduces the subject ‘Agritourism’ with emphasis on agritourism in India and the economic and developmental implications of agritourism. The second section discusses the previous literature on agritourism in a matrix format along the establishment of research objectives. The third section contains a brief discussion on research methodology and analysis. The article culminates with the final section on discussion and findings followed by the conclusion.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dalve and Shastri (2022) observed the agritourism industry’s digitalization and see what information technology methods farmers employ to acquire agricultural information. The study highlights ways of helping tourists to keep track of the whereabouts of their pre, during and post-trip situations. This will also be useful to the travel farms that are hosting them. The agritourism industry, which involves a rural region, uses the same procedure. The agritourist industry differs somewhat from our tourism industry due to this cultural variance.

Surabhi et al. (2022) assessed the objective of retaining farmland using farm resources in a better way and increasing farm produce direct sales. The researcher discovered that some important actions with digitization must be taken to attract consumers and boost the sector. This study offers insights to the farmers on how to inoculate the farm. It suggests ways for farmers to earn auxiliary income.

Gauri et al. (2022) investigated the area of Maharashtra to demonstrate a link between sustainable agritourism and new business potential. This study contributes a number of variables that enhance the farm owner’s standard of living while increasing the potential of agrifarm and

agrifarmers.

Khaydarov (2022) identified the motivations for and benefits of agritourism development. The study shows that the expedition of agritourism is a possibility; the support of agritourism by the central government and local governments is expedient for increasing the level of employment in rural areas and improving its structure.

Zhao et al. (2022) investigated the underlying linkages of the relationship between consumer intents and environmental ideals towards agritourism. The study provides potential measures (to the authorities) which are crucial, since they demonstrate the essential underlying factors that impact people's attitudes towards agritourism.

Shah et al. (2021) evaluated important legislative measures aiming to improve agritourism expansion. This study shows that agritourism significantly reduces food imports, boosts farm profitability, provides better living standards, and supports economically sustainable growth.

Cassia and Magno (2021) suggested that the tenacity of the local rural system may help to forward the conversation about the necessity of developing long-term, sustainable plans for agritourism. For proactive tourism initiatives to have a beneficial impact on agritourism enterprises, they must enhance CSR behaviours, according to the research gap this study revealed for agri-business. This study offers suggestions to make the system more resilient, which makes it possible to successfully co-create an experience for the tourism industry.

Selvam (2021) reckoned to estimate that the agritourism strategy has a lot of potential to transform and build a provincial economy into an advanced economy by fully using the neighbourhood assets. Farmers must collaborate so that the usage, advancement, and administration of vacationer regions may be given real consideration for the improvement of their region.

Gunawan and Hamayana (2021) evaluated the advancement of Human Resources (HR) or farmer proficiency in its agribusiness may be improved with the availability of intense and systematic existing. The study asserts that there is an impact of education on farmers' motivation, and there exists domination of farming time and extension on farmers' motivations.

Kothari and Perwej (2021) figured out the potential of agritourism as a powerful tool for environmental betterment in rural areas, by benefiting both the visitors and the local population. Additionally, it can give outsiders a better understanding of the cultural heritage and way of life in rural areas. It is opined that revenue earned by Govt. is used for research

to locate sustainable agriculture practices that are in demand as consumers become more conscious of the environment and the ethical impacts of their food choices.

Upadhye and Shingare (2021) disclosed the concept of agritourism and evaluated the practices implemented by agritourism farms to retain customers post-pandemic. Secondary data is used for this study. The study highlights that farmers are creating an online booking system for customers and this helps farmers to control the crowd through methods such as package designing, positive social media marketing, and guest interview.

Bhatta and Ohe (2020) opined that to ensure that farmers have access to credit or subsidies and that the benefits of agritourism are maximized for both tourists and the local economy, policymakers in developing nations should encourage the participation of women, insist on maintaining a skilled workforce, and oversee the planning and growth of agritourism. The study found that the operators can promote genuine indigenous and sporting activities on their farms, such as winemaking and organic farming, to tourists.

Joshi et al. (2020) aimed to determine how agri farms may create a more genuine and immersive experience for visitors, leading to repeat visits and favourable word-of-mouth marketing for analyzing the dynamic destination of agritourism sites and measuring the effectiveness of various supply chain partners. A framework for determining the critical aspects of competing agrotourism in a mountainous landscape has been offered by the study.

Vasavada (2020) discerned the drivers of growth in agritourism, which has become a popular form of tourism in recent years. Agritourism can provide a memorable and enjoyable experience for visitors. The study emphasised the significance of agritourism's social media effect on merchants and the ecotourism industry in creating enticing travel arrangements. Furthermore, the study discovered that the perceived cost of agritourism has a substantial influence on the purpose of the vacation, particularly among teens in India.

Chatzigeorgiou et al. (2018) exposed that customer retention in agritourism is conceptualized as the behavioural to embrace branding for an agritourism offering to persuade other people to do the same. The study found that achieving an agritourism brand projection requires consistency, which ensures that marketing companies try not to make too many drastic changes to products and services to achieve their agritourism

brand projection.

Kumbhar et al. (2009) examined the benefits and importance of agritourism in India. ATDC is the primary promoter of agritourism in India. ATDC promotes agritourism to increase income, employment, and financial steadiness in rural regions. It contributes to the expansion of a variety of activities, offerings, and facilities offered by farmers and rural residents to attract urban tourists to their area, allowing urban residents to reconnect with their rural roots.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To comprehend the potential of the expansion of agritourism through digitalization.
- To propose the integration of smart technologies in the promotion mix of the agritourism industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

This research focuses on the digitalization of agritourism in India and its subsequent growth. It is conducted through the analysis of secondary information from publications; research articles from Scopus-indexed journals, yearly reports, and standard websites, among other sources. Following the examination of the literature, a research gap was discovered. This gap exposed itself as an unsolved question that must be addressed to provide an efficient way to achieve the digitalization of agritourism.

The literature is quiet on the interconnectivity of the elements that encourage or are influenced by digitization in the tourist business. Furthermore, the research has not amply discussed the main aspects that must be addressed to secure an efficient way to improve the digitalization platform in the agritourism business in India.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Through this study, it has been evaluated that agritourism organizations do not intend to relinquish existing technology, which indicates their contentment with the services. The majority of promoters of agritourism want to enhance their usage of technology to elevate their efficiency.

The availability of multiple online reservation apps is in line with

the trend of the internet in the tourism sector. Today's travellers rely increasingly on mobile applications to choose suitable hotels while lounging comfortably at home. Agritourism centres can give guests lodging options so that customers enrol in any of the online booking apps.

The findings are aligned with previous research on the relationship between social networking use and ecologically viable tourism in financially deprived communities. Previous studies have reported that tourists sought data from administration websites such as ATDC, Bookagri.com, and other travelling websites of certain regions where the farms exist (Dalve, 2022).

Trends in Technology and Agritourism Research

Accelerated technological escalation has also had an impact on the agritourism industry. Ascribed to increasing digitization and technical improvement, research on the technological aspect of agritourism in India has experienced significant growth. There is not much literature available on the application of technology in the travel industry. An instance of the site utilizing the ATDC website on the application of technological innovation in tourism illustrates the fundamental issues and trends that the literature holds around. The agriculture industry's value of social media is based on the social capital's worth. It schlepps farmers, sectors, and consumers' proximity, resulting in greater openness, involvement, credibility, and originality throughout the distribution chain. Pecuniary rewards are frequently an associated outcome of increased social capital, although this is hard to detect.

Farmer-Farmer Networking using Platforms on Social-Media

Farmers may learn about new technology and equipment by using social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter. The information posted on social media may provide rapid answers to farming problems ranging from weather forecasts to farm machinery repair. Farmers' use of social media, however, extends beyond simple information collection as discussed below:

- Farmers' alienation will be reduced allowing connection and exposure to rapid technological advancements.
- It will allow farmers and agribusinesses to connect and network with other farmers, agribusinesses, and consumers on a national and international scale.

- It will facilitate direct interaction with influential persons.
- Networking can enhance access to a supply of a variety of information and ideas from multiple sources.
- The AgChat model (Twitter online discussion groups), which is extensively utilized in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Ireland, is a great idea for promoting talks about industrial concerns between farmers and agribusinesses.
- Some factors can affect understanding of the sector, enlargement, and promotion by campaigning on social media that unites a unified power to effect movement and changes by directly communicating with persons of prominence and authority. These platforms make it easy to facilitate big gatherings of individuals and discussions on important issues.
- Some factors are expected to help in consumer engagement. Farmers may use digital platforms to participate in discussions on contentious and sensitive matters related to farming techniques. For example, animal welfare, genetic alteration, and ecological concerns. Individuals may converse over our business if or not we are connected.
- Transparency and authenticity improvement through stronger networks will help to develop credibility.

Integration of Smart Technologies in Agritourism

Enhancement in industry training is needed for farmers and agribusinesses so that they can better appreciate the possibilities of the equipment. ATDC discussion forum establishment and website blog posts must be multilingual or translated. Farmers should be used more in worldwide social media promotion of their products as they represent the social element in the distribution network, providing authenticity and trust.

Entrepreneurs can apply the following smart technologies in agritourism (as demonstrated in Fig. 2):

Data Mining

The data mining technique practically eliminates the possibility of an analyst's relativism in large amounts of information and is feasible for yielding beneficial findings of specific traveller habits, offering authorities and tourism boards supplementary instruments to establish an impactful resorting promotional mix effectively.

Forecasting the Number of Tourists

To successfully forecast the number of inbound overseas tourists, youth, and millennials, promoters should develop applications with advanced AI that can dismiss overlapped bookings by consumers. It will ease the task of promoters or staff to keep track of their customers as agritourism draws many visitors.

Traverse Promotion

Traverse promotion in agritourism requires conceptual alignment with Farm Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Health Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Cuisine exploration by recognising your client's needs and expectations and serving them accordingly.

Tourism Advertisement Classification

Farmers may publicize the tourism industry widely through newspapers, television, and through other media such as online webpages and blogs, and establish links with schools, universities, NGOs, clubs, unions, and other organisations.

Forecast of Cancellation

By forecasting the cancellation, farms can reject reservations that are likely to be cancelled, allowing promoters to have a more accurate assessment of demand, which aids in pricing modelling and resource allocation.

Exploration of Historic and Traditional Farming Equipment in Virtual Reality (VR)

Agrifarm Convenience Tour

Unique learning experiences by exposing participants to real-world working farms from the convenience of their laptops, classes, conference rooms, and living rooms can be provided to consumers for enriched value delivery.

Holistic Ecosystem Experiences

This tourist market is interested in areas with flora and fauna attractions, which comprise the natural ecosystem as a whole. Flora refers to the many plant or vegetative species, whereas fauna represents the lifestyles of animals, birds, invertebrates, and fish.

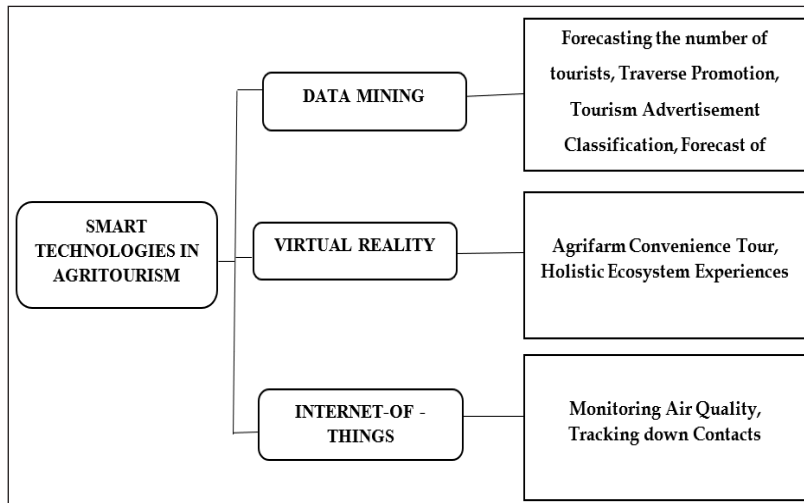
IoT (Internet-of-Things)

Monitoring Air Quality

Smart-Air was created using IoT technology to properly evaluate air quality and relay data to the host in real time through LTE. A microprocessor, pollution-detecting sensors, and an LTE modem are included in the gadget to avoid future issues for travellers.

Tracking Down Contacts

To discover more about end customers and truly comprehend consumer behaviour, the employment of techniques of tracking down contacts and data analysis is essential for improved traveller's satisfaction.



Source: Author's compilation.

Fig. 2: Smart Technologies in Agritourism

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

As a result of technological improvements, the current study focuses on revolutionizing agritourism to become a more engaging and efficient business. It intends to contribute to theory by referring the recommended technology solutions for agritourism in the scholarly discourse. Technology can improve the overall visitor experience by making previously inconceivable things feasible.

For agritourism managers and marketers, it unveils a treasure trove of insights, revealing how digitalization can unlock new levels of consumer engagement and reinvent marketing strategies. Adopting these technology improvements may lead to flourishing networks, knowledge development, client base expansion and increase in the wealth of agricultural community.

Furthermore, the tourist industry could employ smart technology to improve service delivery and company success. Integrating these developments allows consumers to have unrivalled experiences, increasing customer happiness and propelling the sector forward. This study lays the way for a more fascinating, efficient, and customer-centric landscape as we chart a course towards a tech-driven agritourism future, benefiting all parties involved.

CONCLUSION

Agritourism is a rising sector that provides chances for farmers as well as rural areas to flourish as a result of emerging patterns in travel demand, which is likely to contribute greater priority to cultural, culinary, and ecological virtues. It has the potential to make an important contribution to the long-term development of rural communities. Although there is literature on agritourism, this study focuses on the perspective and relevance of its development with digitalization. A significant conclusion that can be derived from this is that operators of agritourism may employ digitalized technologies e.g., Data Mining (Forecasting the Number of Tourists, Traverse Promotion, Tourism Advertisement Classification, Forecast of Cancellation), Virtual reality (VR) (Virtual Trip of Agri Farm, A glimpse of Natural Beauty such as Trees, Birds, Flora, and Wildlife), Internet-of-Things (IoT) (Monitoring of Air Quality, Tracking Down Contacts), and augmented reality (AR) to market their agritourism in numerous ways. Because this sector is heavily reliant on farmer connections, farmers perform a significant influence in delivering services and amenities to tourists through agritourism. Based on the discussion this research will greatly assist in the creation and dissemination of modern and inventive approaches and technologies for networking users as innovation and information bodies (Ammirato, 2017). With benefits, digitalization holds some limitations in agritourism sectors including a lack of comprehensive understanding of agritourism, small farmers' poor communication skills and lack of a business mindset, inadequate funding to create basic

infrastructure for agritourism, etc. Therefore, the implementation of technologies in rural settings needs to be reconsidered and developed for user-friendly experiences and engagements.

The scope of future research in the proposed area lies in the necessity of empirical investigation to statistically study the impact of various drivers of digitalization on the sustainable growth of agritourism. There is ample scope for agritourism in digital marketing as part of the digital revolution.

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