Accessible Mobile Apps - An Exploratory Study

Dr Kasha Minor*, Dr Vicky Richards, Dr Nic Matthews, and Dr Emmet McLoughlin

Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Events
Welsh Centre for Tourism Research
Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK

kminor@cardiffmet.ac.uk

*Corresponding author

Abstract

Purpose

This research relates to the exploratory phase of a wider project aiming to develop accessible travel booking and mobility apps. Despite the Equality Act (2010), and the growing importance of accessible tourism, Cassia *et al.* (2020: 205) warns that *'delivering high-quality tourism experiences to people with disabilities remains a major challenge'*.

Disabled citizens continue to encounter barriers in their tourism experiences; even though their travel motivations mirror those of tourists without disabilities. This current project reasons that information and communication technologies (ICT) *should* help disabled tourists navigate through their tourism experience. Unfortunately, booking sites, information boards, travel apps, etc often come in inaccessible formats or with limited functionality for disabled users. Richards *et al.* (2021) have argued that, despite their potential, inaccessible technologies can limit choices and enjoyment of travel for people with disabilities. As such, these technologies do not enable *all* people to be able to live and travel independently. This current exploratory project aims to assess the need for, and an engagement with, accessible mobile apps. It seeks to identify the desired features and to start to consider how the limitations of current technologies will be a factor in the future of app development. The project focusses on two types of applications: 1) mobility applications, designed to aid mobility within a destination; 2) booking apps, designed to book travel and travel related services.

Design/methodology/approach

Like Altinay *et al.*'s (2016) study on the role of social media in facilitating accessible tourism for disabled citizens, this project is also utilising a quantitative survey during this exploratory phase. The survey will be administered via Qualtrics and will assess the need for accessible mobile apps for tourism related activities in Wales. It is anticipated that both convenience and snowballing sampling will be utilised; capitalising on social media outlets and academic communities (e.g. Twitter, TRINET, personal social media outlets, disability groups, tourist forums) as well as disability groups (such as Wales Council of the Blind). Once completed, data will be analysed using Qualtrics and SPSS to identify trends relating to perceived need, benefits and drawbacks of accessible mobile apps and desired features. These data will be used as the foundation for further research into the design and experience of mobility apps for all.

Originality/value

There continues to be academic interest in accessible tourism (Altinay *et al.*, 2016; Cassia *et al.*, 2020) and in delivering accessible tourist experiences (Darcy *et al.*, 2020). However, more needs to be done to create a truly accessible environment. With a growing dependence on mobile and digital technologies, a greater appreciation on what 'universal design' looks like is required. This will ensure the estimated 36 million people living with some form of sight loss (World Health Organisation, 2020) are not left behind by the fourth industrial revolution. This context highlights the significance and timeliness of this research. This study will identify a path towards facilitating greater levels of accessibility for the provision of information and communication technology in tourism, while also providing baseline research on accessible tourism and technology in Wales.

Keywords: Accessible tourism, disability and tourism, information technology, Wales

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