
THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

OLGA MEJEVNIKOVA. PROSPECTS FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC VIRTUAL TOURISM // *The
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*Abstract. The article reveals the peculiarities of the formation of
religious (islamic) virtual tourism. The importance of developing a
system of tourist religious virtual space is due to the need to comply
with innovative processes affecting modern virtual reality technologies,
which are especially relevant during a pandemic. The author made an
attempt to trace the influence of virtual reality technologies on the
creation of virtual religious (islamic) tours and excursions. The
comparative analysis made it possible to trace the advantages and
disadvantages of traditional and virtual religious tourism.*

The tourism industry is one of the most dynamic industries that are rapidly developing in the world economy, its level of development is a kind of indicator of the state of society, its material wealth and spiritual health. Tourism development in general depends on the complex of natural, geographical, historical, political, socio-economic and demographic conditions and the factors that define them. From the point of view of socio-cultural significance tourism development improves the system of social and cultural services to the population, increases resources for modernization appropriate infrastructure, raises the quality of life. A well-thought-out government tourism policy promotes expanding cooperation in the field of international tourism, increases competitiveness of the tourism industry through effective use of innovations and information technologies.

The object of this study was the sphere of virtual Islamic tourism, which is currently undergoing significant changes due to the expansion of information technologies, as well as the political and economic situation in the world, caused by the pandemic.

Everything is changing under the influence of innovations that can be considered as a combination of a process, a service and a product that changes forms, moving from idea to implementation. "Today tourism is global business of IT technologies, in which well-known company cooperate" [1, p. 8]. For example, thanks to the ubiquitous spread of the Internet in the tourism industry the consumer has shifted from the "real" market to the virtual one. Development of information technologies in the tourism industry increases not only efficiency of the industry, but due to a closer integration with other sectors of the economy and technological modernization brings it to a new level of development. New technologies also help the industry recovery program, which is very important in the post-pandemic period. Perhaps the only constraining factors for rapid and high-quality growth of the virtual tourism industry, including religious tourism, remain weak communication, low

awareness of tour operators and high cost of equipment. It should also be remembered that Islamic tourism is to some degree associated with the dogma and practice of Islam, and in a virtual tour it is almost impossible to take certain actions or comply with instructions.

Religious tourism is “a special kind of activity, which is related to the provision of services and satisfaction of needs of the tourists heading to the holy religious centers located outside their usual environment” [2, p. 6]. The history of religious tourism goes back centuries. Religious tourists made travels on your own to visit places of preservation of saints relics. This is perhaps one of the very first tourist destinations all over the world, which appeared over 1000 years ago. The first mention of religious tourism dates back to ancient time when the ancient Greeks visited Delphi.

The following types of religious tourism are distinguished:

1. Pilgrimage, which is the pursuit of believers to worship holy places. Pilgrims have very different goals, for example, the desire to heal from mental and physical ailments, pray to the Almighty and be closer to him, find grace, realize godly work, atone for sins, express gratitude for the blessings sent from above, to find the meaning of life, etc. Modern pilgrims use a lot of amenities of civilization in their travels.

Religious tourism of Moslems has a pronounced pilgrimage component. Every Moslem must at least once in a lifetime make a pilgrimage (hajj) to the holy cities Mecca and Medina. ... Each year before the pandemic, these cities were visited by about 2 million pilgrims. One of the largest mosques in world, Haram beit Ullah, housing the Kaaba sanctuary, is erected here. Important Moslem shrines also include the Blue Mosque in Istanbul (formerly Hagia Sophia), the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Golden Mosque in Baghdad, Mosque of Ibn Tulun and Sultan Hassan in Cairo, the Qutb Minar minaret and the Kuwwat ul Islam mosque in Delhi and others.

2. Religious and educational tourism, representing the general familiarization with the culture and religion of a particular state, which is also of cognitive interest. "Tourists of this directions do not seek to achieve any enlightenment, to pray their sins, they just want to travel and meet new places of our world" [2, p. 62].

Factors influencing the development of tourism, including religious tourism are varied and multifaceted. Islamic tourism is not limited by frameworks of the religious, but, on the contrary, covers all its types, excluding those that are contrary to Islamic norms and values. The presence of favorable factors leads to the leadership of individual regions and countries in world tourism, and vice versa, undesirable factors reduce tourist flow.

In 2020, the tourism industry faces a major challenge in their development associated with the rapid spread of new type of coronavirus across the planet. The tourism industry has suffered colossal losses in all countries of the world.

Therefore, priority attention should be paid to information technologies, which, due to their special catalyst properties actively contribute to technological breakthroughs not only in information sphere, but also in many other equally important directions. Virtual religious tourism is developing rapidly and its ultimate goal is the ability to make people feel, see, travel, study, work and live inside the world, which is nothing more than a perfect imitation and at the same time to enrich and cultivate their religious spirituality. There are now 1.9 billion adherents of Islam in the world, and experts predict that by 2025 the Moslem population of the planet will make 30% [3]. Therefore, the tourism business cannot ignore this group of customers, and tends develop this industry more and more actively.

Virtual reality can offer the consumer the opportunity to visit the place of interest of a prospective tourist or a pilgrim without actually staying there. That is why marketers and scientists are researching virtual reality and virtual reality factors that can affect the purchase of the tour. The total immersion

effect, high image quality, vast possibilities of displaying objects of worship and interest – it all makes virtual reality a powerful marketing tool today. Interactivity of a virtual tour creates an illusion of the client's involvement, a feeling of freedom of action. Virtual tours simulate finding a person at these objects, make it possible to view all expositions at any convenient time and solve accessibility problems, since not all of us are able to visit especially remote objects due to certain reasons.

Before talking about religious (Islamic) virtual tourism, let's figure it out, what is a virtual tour after all? It is viewed as a way of realistic display of three-dimensional multi-element space [4]. It is a "stitched" combination of panoramas with the function of transition from one volumetric photo to another. Such tours can be supplemented with music, voice-overs, videos, captions, video clips and other content. The main difference between a virtual tour and a set of conventional photos is its interactivity: the user himself chooses which fragment is attractive to him at the moment to use full motion control technology. In other words, the viewer independently controls the picture, being able to change his position and examine the details.

By analyzing various sources of travel agencies, one can note that mostly the most popular countries where a decent vacation for Moslems is organized, are Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Malaysia [5]. Such tourism includes in advance the most detailed set of Moslem requirements for rest according to Sharia – new trends in the tourism industry that allow people rest in accordance with their religious beliefs. The same countries offer the most diverse virtual tours of the saint places and attractions. ... In general, we can say that virtual tourism replaces genuine travel and real tourism. Such a "tourist trip" is more comfortable and convenient, safe as it is carried out within the comfort zone of the chair or sofa.

However, there is a large gap between using virtual reality as a trial before purchase real tickets, and treating virtual reality as full-fledged tourism. "From the point of view of the development

of religious (Islamic) tourism is important to understand that Islamic norms are not just religious precepts, but Quranic commandments clothed in a legal shell. They are conventionally divided into five categories: commanded, recommended, legally indifferent, permitted (halal), prohibited (haram) behavior. On their basis Moslem norms regulate not only economic activities, but also how to dress, what to eat, etc. And from the fact how precisely a Moslem adheres to these requirements, the level of his religiosity is determined. The same is reflected in choice of rest: either it is tourism as an entertainment industry, as a pleasant travel, or, on the contrary, abandoning all that in favor of pilgrimage, if we are talking about cult objects" [6, p. 49]. In virtual tourism the problem of religious precepts disappears, but sometimes with its disappearance disappears the meaning of "travel" as well, especially if we are talking about a pilgrimage. After all, pilgrimage is the fruit of Islamic spirituality, its visual embodiment in activity, its addition and support for spiritual life. Therefore, in our opinion, a virtual pilgrimage is absurd. In Islam, the concept of a pilgrim has a completely different meaning than in other religions. A pilgrim, from the point of view of Islam, you can call a person who performed the Hajj to Mecca, to whose name after that, the honorary title of Hajji is added.

But we can talk about virtual Islamic tourism when it is religious and educational tourism, filled with emotions, new knowledge and vivid impressions. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of a virtual religious educational (Islamic) tourism.

First, one of the main advantages of virtual religious tour or travel is its availability for those who for some reason cannot travel in reality. It may be lack of funds and physical disabilities, and the inability to leave just for the purpose of travel, and ignorance of foreign languages required for communication with the indigenous population in the country of stay, and the political situation in the country chosen as the travel purpose. For example, according to UNESCO experts, in the historic center of

Aleppo in Syria as a result of military conflicts almost 30% of the buildings listed as objects of the World Heritage Site were destroyed, and about 60% of the buildings suffered serious damage. Significant damage was done to the Umayyad mosque, the citadel, mosques, museums, traditional Arab markets, caravanserais, madrasahs, hammams [7]. However, to see all the sights of the Islamic Syria, and in particular the Umayyad Mosque, can be done using a virtual tour.

Secondly, it saves money and time. With virtual travel there is no need to waste time for travel arrangements and getting to the place of destination, no need to spend money on visiting and sightseeing, on the way to them, accommodation, meals and etc. All you need to travel is Internet access [8, p. 83]. The cost of virtual reality technologies gradually becomes cheaper, availability increases. Great prospects in this direction opens the development and implementation of mobile applications with augmented reality.

Thanks to the latest technologies, every Moslem in every point of the globe at any time will be able to perform a virtual Hajj thanks to the new Mecca 3D application. "There are thousands of books by famous scholars on how to perform the Hajj, but see with your own eyes how to bypass the Kaaba, standing on Mount Arafat and other stages pilgrimages is something quite different. We live in the 21st century, and when the world is under our fingers, it would be foolish not to use this for studying Islam" [9]. Virtual reality gives a certain freedom and comfort, because you don't need to negotiate with anyone about the time and program of the excursion, the traveler himself controls the pace of his activity.

Thirdly, the effect of presence and detailing of the visual object. Virtual technologies provide a unique opportunity see with an immersive effect not only landmarks and shrines closed to the public, but also reconstructed historical monuments that have been destroyed by time or circumstances. For example, Mecca and Medina are allowed to visit only for Moslems, which

limits the excursion component, since sightseers – representatives of other religions cannot visit the main shrines of Islam, where rituals of religious worship of Moslem pilgrims from all over the world are enacted. Applications from developers from Saudi Arabia let everyone see these sacred cities in virtual reality.

Fourthly, the virtual religious tour is always successful. The “traveler” will never be affected by the lack of halal food, halal-certified restaurants, prayer rooms, separate for men and women, an unfavorable political environment, strike by air traffic controllers or the collapse of a travel company.

Fifthly, if a virtual religious excursion attracted your attention, you can participate in it an infinite number of times and at any time using the opportunity posted additional information and tips. So, in Uzbekistan, along with others, monument of medieval architecture Shahi Zinda, located in Samarkand is worthy of admiration. According to guests, it is a “time portal” [10]. Living in Tashkent and being a fan of this great architectural heritage, the author of the article may not be there all the time, but the virtual tour provides an opportunity to review, re-listen to the necessary information, clarify the details of interest, because the “traveler” has an unregulated amount of time. At any moment the virtual trip can be interrupted and continued at any other time suitable or desirable for a person.

Sixthly, indisputably the most important constituent element of religious tourism is visiting places that have some either meaning for religion, and obtaining knowledge, which are the most important motivation to travel. Virtual religious tourism is a great additional tool for general intellectual and spiritual development of a person.

As you can see, the merits of religious virtual tours to Islamic shrines are numerous. But they are overshadowed by a very large flaw: this is not real and gives much less sensations, impressions and religious thrill than a real trip. Tourists tend to be less focused on simple terrain exploration and sights. They are more focused on new impressions and “spiritual” discoveries.

The Quran calls on a person to get on the path of searching for sacred knowledge – spiritual search. Islam has many original references to the path as a kind of metaphysical state of the believer, who must constantly be in the spiritual search – search for the Almighty. Such an experience cannot yet be reproduced in virtual reality.

Another disadvantage is dependence on creators of the virtual tour. It is impossible for the client to see what is not included in a virtual tour – he is given as many opportunities, as have already been developed before. It is impossible on such a “journey” to discover for yourself a little-known attraction, of course, if this option has not been programmed already. Also companies that create virtual tours, often hide many things in order to provide the most enjoyable experience to your clients. For example, in a virtual tour you will not be told about the fact that in Saudi Arabia at the site of demolished historical monuments – places sacred to Moslems – luxury hotels, restaurants, shopping centers and spas arte built, Not by chance the creators of virtual travel programs themselves admit that their programs do not replace real tours, but complement them and encourage people to travel even more.

Along with a fairly high consumer interest in virtual religious tourism as a new direction it should be noticed that ordinary users for the most part still do not refer viewing virtual tours to a separate type of religious tourism or pilgrimage. However, it is moving at a steady pace towards further distribution in the conditions of the modern technological world. This is a promising area that definitely is to be developed.

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