The Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Travel

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Abstract: This article explores the concept of virtual tourism and addresses four key questions: What is virtual travel? Can virtual travel replace real travel? What are the benefits of virtual travel? And what is the future of virtual travel?

Virtual travel has been around in various forms since the 1850s when pictorial materials such as postcards were used to invite people to a destination. Today, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the development of virtual reality technologies that attempt to replicate the tourist experience. However, while virtual tourism offers a sustainable alternative to traditional travel, it cannot provide a full sensory experience. Despite predictions that the virtual tourism sector will grow to $19 trillion by 2027, it is unlikely to replace real travel entirely. Nevertheless, virtual tourism has significant potential benefits, including a 94% reduction in carbon footprint, increased advertising opportunities, and improved accessibility for people with mobility impairments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to examine the concept of virtual tourism and answer important questions regarding its potential benefits and limitations. Specifically, we aim to answer the following four questions: Can virtual travel ever replace real travel or is it best seen as a complement to physical travel? What are the advantages and benefits of virtual travel, particularly in terms of sustainability and accessibility? What does the future hold for virtual tourism and what technological advancements can we expect to see in this field?

We explore the growing popularity of virtual tourism, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it has the potential to serve as an alternative form of tourism during and after the pandemic. Additionally, we discuss the positive effects of virtual tourism in terms of sustainability, particularly in reducing carbon emissions and waste. Moreover, we examine the benefits of virtual tourism for people with disabilities or limited mobility who may not have the opportunity to experience physical travel. Finally, we consider the future of virtual tourism and the potential technological advancements that could enhance the user experience, such as 4D or 5D experiences. Overall, this article aims to provide a detailed analysis of virtual tourism, its benefits and limitations, and its potential future in the tourism industry.

This article draws on a range of sources, including Google Scholar, the Google browser, and the YouTube platform, to provide an analysis of virtual tourism from 2016 to 2023. There are also positive effects in terms of advertising, acceptance of others, and, most importantly, people with reduced mobility can also enjoy traveling, even if only virtually.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following is a comprehensive literature review on virtual travel in recent years.

Djurdjić (2016) explains that the development of visualization, particularly in virtual reality and spatial video, has led to the emergence of virtual tourism. This allows individuals to explore remote locations from the comfort of their own homes. Lazzarus (2020) also discusses the psychological aspect of virtual tourism, highlighting that it offers a realistic experience through the use of sound effects, music, text, and accompanying visuals.

Fredericks (2021) describes virtual tourism as an immersive experience that utilizes various technologies, such as virtual reality, still images, video, audio, narration, interactivity, and other multimedia formats to provide users with a destination experience that they cannot get through images or websites alone. However, Wein (2021) argues that virtual tourism cannot replace traditional tourism as it lacks the physical contact and experience that comes with visiting a destination in person.

Chen (2020) reports that virtual travel has grown in popularity by 60% since December 2020, as many individuals are unable to travel due to pandemic-related restrictions. However, the cost and discomfort associated with virtual reality equipment make it less appealing than real-life travel.

Bruce (2023) notes that virtual tourism offers accessibility to individuals who cannot afford to travel due to their social situation. Additionally, virtual reality tours provide tourists with a 3D preview of their destination, allowing them to plan their trip more effectively.

Skirka (2019) discusses the potential of virtual travel to replace real-life travel in the future, while also acknowledging its limitations. Bruce (2023) highlights the cost savings associated with virtual travel, as well as the positive impact on the environment.

Fromat (2022) argues that virtual travel is a sustainable alternative to traditional travel, as it does not contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Tilly (2021) suggests that virtual reality can be used to enhance the travel experience by providing educational content, cultural exchange, and a glimpse of faraway destinations.

Finally, Lopez (2022) predicts that the global virtual tourism market value will grow (Figure 1) from 5 trillion dollars in 2021 to over 24 trillion dollars by 2027.

Overall, the literature suggests that virtual travel has grown in popularity, particularly during the pandemic, but it cannot replace the physical experience of traditional travel. However, virtual reality technology can enhance the travel experience, provide accessibility, and offer a sustainable alternative to traditional travel.

The article titled “Virtual Technology - A Game Changer for the Future of Travel?” examines the potential impact of virtual technology on the tourism industry, with a specific emphasis on the realm of business travel. The article suggests that virtual meetings may soon transcend the limitations of Zoom apps and allow attendees to participate as avatars in virtual space (Eagan, 2022).
According to researcher Sablich (2019) in the article “The Future Is Here, Almost: Virtual Travel Becomes More of a Reality,” virtual travel trends will prioritize the experience, particularly in scenarios where showcasing certain aspects, such as the presentation of food in a restaurant, proves challenging.

**Figure 1.** Market size of the virtual tourism industry worldwide in 2021, with forecast for 2027  
*Source: Lopez, 2022.*

### 3. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### 3.1. What is Virtual Travel?

Virtual tourism refers to the ability to visit remote locations from the comfort of one’s own home through the use of visualization techniques, according to Djurdjić (2016). Lazzarus (2020) highlights the psychological aspect of the experience, noting that virtual travel can be achieved using sound, real audio recordings, and text. Fredericks (2021) discusses various types of virtual tourism, all of which share the common feature of interactivity.

**Picture 1.** Virtual Roma  
*Source: Kumar, 2020.*
3.2. Can Virtual Travel Replace Real Travel?

Wein (2021) reports that the tourism industry has lost 4.5 trillion dollars and 62 million jobs worldwide in the last year. As a result, immersive experiences were developed to help the more than 2000 museums recover at least some of their losses. Although brands invested 64% in virtual experiences and gained over 50% of customers, they concluded that virtual tourism can never replace traditional tourism due to the psychological aspect of physically visiting a destination. Chen (2020), writing for the National Geographic travel guide, observes that despite the 90% closure of tourist destinations and increased use of virtual travel, the equipment necessary for realistic observation is expensive, heavy, and uncomfortable, resulting in an unrealistic depiction of the tourist destination.

Skirka (2019) discusses the potential of virtual travel as a form of entertainment and advertising, noting that while users may experience some disorientation and nausea, it can still be a positive experience. However, Skirka emphasizes that virtual travel cannot fully replace the benefits of real travel and should not be viewed as a substitute. Nonetheless, the potential for virtual travel continues to expand and it may not be long before individuals can climb Mount Everest from the comfort of their own homes.

3.3. Where Are the Benefits of Virtual Travel?

Bruce (2023) notes that virtual travel is cost-effective compared to real travel and can provide a 3D virtual tour of a destination to help plan visits to local attractions. It can also help individuals with disabilities “travel” and experience destinations they might not otherwise be able to visit. Fromat (2022) argues in Luxiders magazine that virtual travel has a positive impact on the environment by avoiding the destruction of natural landscapes and reducing carbon footprints. Tilly’s (2021) blog highlights the educational content and improved communication between people of different nationalities that virtual reality provides, making it a powerful tool for advertising and marketing purposes.

3.4. The Future of Virtual Tourism?

Lopez (2022) predicts that virtual tourism will grow from $5 trillion in 2021 to over $24 trillion in 2027. Eagan (2022) describes the evolution of virtual business travel from Zoom meetings to virtual worlds where users interact with avatars. Sablich (2019) emphasizes the importance of focusing on the experiential aspect of virtual travel to make it more competitive with traditional travel.
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Picture 3. Benefits of virtual travel

Picture 4. The future is here
Source: Bruce, 2023.

4. CONCLUSION

Extensive research has been conducted on the topic of virtual travel, resulting in numerous articles, papers, and blogs. It is evident that virtual tourism has been around in various forms since the 1850s when the first photograph was taken, and it has evolved to its current form, where video content can be accessed on wearable devices. Despite its growth, virtual tourism cannot replace real tourism, as the primary psychological aspect of not physically being at the destination remains a significant motivator for travelers.

However, the virtual travel market is expected to grow by $19 trillion from 2021 to 2027, highlighting the priority destinations place on its development. Over 2000 museums and sites worldwide have utilized virtual travel during and after the pandemic, indicating its sustainability as a travel option. The benefits of virtual travel include reduced costs, lower carbon footprint, improved ecosystem, and increased accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, it can be utilized for educational purposes and bridging cultural gaps.
The future of virtual tourism lies in the growth of global revenues, with experts predicting virtual business journeys where individuals will choose avatars for virtual meetings. However, to compete with real tourism, there is a need to improve the user experience, potentially incorporating senses such as taste and smell to make it more realistic.

Overall, virtual travel is in full swing and expected to increase in popularity, providing an alternative means of travel for those unable to physically travel or seeking a more sustainable option.

References


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Additional reading


