

STATE MANAGEMENT OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN TOURISM IN CAN THO CITY

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Received date: June 15, 2026

Revised date: July 01, 2026

Accepted date for publication: July 10, 2026

Abstract:

This study assesses the current status of state management of digital transformation in Can Tho City's tourism sector. Secondary data from government agencies, policy documents, and industry reports were examined using comparative analysis and synthesis. The findings show that the city has begun implementing digital transformation initiatives in tourism management, promotion, and development through smart tourism platforms, digital communication channels, and technological applications at tourism sites. However, progress remains constrained by limited data interoperability, uneven technology adoption among tourism businesses, inadequate data utilization capacity, and weak stakeholder coordination. Accordingly, the study proposes policy implications to strengthen state management and foster a more integrated and sustainable digital tourism ecosystem in Can Tho City.

Keywords: digital transformation, state management, smart tourism.

Quản lý nhà nước về chuyển đổi số trong lĩnh vực du lịch tại thành phố Cần Thơ

Tóm tắt:

Nghiên cứu đánh giá thực trạng quản lý nhà nước về chuyển đổi số du lịch tại thành phố Cần Thơ. Dữ liệu thứ cấp từ cơ quan nhà nước, văn bản chính sách và báo cáo ngành được phân tích bằng phương pháp so sánh và tổng hợp. Kết quả cho thấy thành phố đã bước đầu ứng dụng nền tảng du lịch thông minh, truyền thông số và công nghệ tại các điểm du lịch. Tuy nhiên, quá trình này còn hạn chế do dữ liệu thiếu liên thông, mức độ ứng dụng công nghệ không đồng đều, năng lực khai thác dữ liệu thấp và phối hợp giữa các bên chưa hiệu quả. Nghiên cứu đề xuất hoàn thiện chính sách và cơ chế quản lý nhằm phát triển hệ sinh thái du lịch số tích hợp, bền vững tại Cần Thơ.

Từ khóa: chuyển đổi số, quản lý nhà nước, du lịch thông minh.

1. Introduction

Digital transformation is reshaping the tourism industry by transforming destination promotion, service delivery, and interactions with tourists. According to Buhalis and Law (2008), advances in information technology and the Internet have significantly changed the operational landscape of modern tourism. In this context, the adoption of digital technologies not only improves business performance but also enhances destination competitiveness and the effectiveness of tourism management.

In Vietnam, digital transformation in tourism has been promoted through a series of key government policies. Decision No. 749/QĐ-TTg identifies tourism as one of the priority sectors for digital transformation, while Decision No. 147/QĐ-TTg further emphasizes the integration of digital technologies and smart tourism ecosystems into tourism development. These policies provide a foundation for localities to strengthen the application of technology in tourism promotion, management, and service provision. Accordingly, Can Tho City has gradually implemented digital transformation initiatives to promote destinations, provide tourism information, and support tourism businesses. However, several challenges remain, including fragmented data systems, uneven levels of technology adoption among businesses, and limited coordination among stakeholders. As highlighted by OECD (2020) and the World Bank (2021), the success of digital transformation depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on the management and coordination capacity of local authorities.

Although digital transformation in tourism has attracted increasing research attention, most studies focus on businesses or tourist behavior, while the role of local government management has received relatively limited attention. Therefore, this study examines the current state of government management of digital transformation in the tourism sector in Can Tho City and proposes several policy implications to improve management effectiveness and promote tourism development in the digital era.

2. Theoretical background and research methodology

According to Vial (2019), digital transformation refers to the process of applying digital technologies to create fundamental changes in the way organizations operate and generate value. This process involves not only the adoption of technology but also transformations in business models, organizational structures, and interactions within digital environments. Similarly, Nambisan et al. (2017) argue that digital innovation is reshaping relationships among actors within digital ecosystems.

In the tourism sector, advances in information and communication technologies have transformed the tourism value chain, ranging from information search and service booking to tourist experiences (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Gretzel et al. (2015) emphasize that data, digital platforms, and connectivity play a crucial role in enhancing tourist experiences and improving tourism management efficiency.

From a governance perspective, the World Bank (2021) highlights the role of government in creating an enabling environment, promoting digital infrastructure, and improving institutional frameworks to support digital transformation. Likewise, OECD (2020) stresses the coordinating role of local authorities in organizing and implementing digital transformation initiatives. Therefore, digital transformation in tourism depends not only on technological advancement but also on the role of government in providing direction, support, and coordination among stakeholders.

The study utilizes secondary data collected from the Can Tho Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, policy documents, and reports issued by government agencies. Based on these data sources, the study employs comparative, analytical, and synthesis methods to assess the current state of government management of digital transformation in tourism in Can Tho City. The analysis helps identify key achievements and existing limitations, thereby providing policy implications for improving the effectiveness of digital transformation in the local tourism sector.

3. Results

3.1. Current status of digital transformation in tourism in Can Tho City

The growth in tourist arrivals and tourism revenue in recent years has provided strong momentum for tourism enterprises in Can Tho to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies in their business operations. In 2025, the city welcomed approximately 11.19 million visitor arrivals, recorded nearly 4.95 million overnight guests, and generated tourism revenue of VND 9,991 billion. The expanding tourism market not only creates development opportunities for businesses but also requires the modernization of management practices and service delivery through digital transformation to better meet tourists' needs. With approximately 80 travel companies and nearly 870 accommodation establishments offering more than 14,500 rooms, the adoption of digital technologies has become increasingly essential for businesses to expand their market reach, improve service quality, and enhance competitiveness.

Through websites, social media platforms, and online booking systems, many tourism enterprises have expanded their access to domestic and international customers while improving interactions with visitors. In addition, digital solutions such as electronic payment systems, hotel reservation management software, customer-service chatbots, and destination information applications have gradually been introduced into operation. The application of technology not only helps businesses optimize operational processes but also enhances tourists' experiences throughout the stages of information search, service booking, and tourism consumption. The growing popularity of digital platforms also reflects changes in tourist behavior, as travelers increasingly seek information, compare services, make reservations, and complete online payments before their trips. This trend requires tourism enterprises to strengthen their digital presence and improve customer engagement through online platforms.

However, digital transformation remains uneven across tourism businesses due to differences in resources and managerial capabilities. While some large enterprises have adopted digital management solutions, many small businesses and community-based tourism operators still rely on basic online tools. Limited data connectivity among stakeholders also hinders service integration within the tourism value chain. In addition, distinctive tourism products such as floating market, orchard-based, and community-based tourism continue to face challenges related to financial resources, technological human resources, and digital management capacity.

Overall, digital transformation has begun to reshape tourism business operations and service delivery in Can Tho. Nevertheless, current efforts remain largely concentrated on marketing, sales, and customer interaction activities, while data utilization and linkages among stakeholders within the tourism value chain are still limited. These constraints represent significant barriers preventing digital transformation from generating broader impacts and fostering stronger integration across the local tourism industry.

3.2. Current status of government management of digital transformation in tourism in Can Tho City

Alongside the digital transformation of tourism activities, Can Tho City has gradually incorporated digital transformation objectives into its tourism development strategy and smart city agenda. Under the National Digital Transformation Program, the city has implemented various initiatives to strengthen digital infrastructure, improve management efficiency, and promote smart tourism. Notably, the Smart Tourism Portal and Smart Tourism Mobile Application have been launched to provide destination information, support service searches, and connect tourism businesses with visitors. These platforms have recorded more than 6.45 million visits and interactions, reflecting growing demand for digital tourism information and their initial effectiveness in destination promotion and tourism connectivity.

Several digital solutions, including digital maps, QR codes, and automated audio-guided interpretation systems, have been introduced at key tourist attractions. Digital infrastructure has also been improved, with approximately 70% 5G coverage across the city, creating favorable conditions for the development of smart tourism applications. In addition, local authorities have collaborated with technology firms to

organize digital skills training programs and support tourism enterprises in adopting digital solutions for their business operations. Alongside investments in technological infrastructure, the city has gradually developed programs and action plans to support digital transformation in line with smart tourism development. In 2025, the tourism sector participated in the formulation of action programs related to smart city development toward 2030 and contributed to the development of the Smart City Development Project and the IoT Application Project for selected sectors. This demonstrates that digital transformation in tourism is not being implemented in isolation but is integrated into the broader digital transformation and smart city development strategy of the locality, thereby facilitating resource mobilization and strengthening intersectoral coordination.

Digital communication activities have been implemented across multiple social media platforms. The official Facebook page “Can Tho Tourism” currently has approximately 45,000 followers and page likes; the TikTok channel has more than 6,800 followers and 48,100 likes; the Zalo channel has around 750 subscribers; and the YouTube channel has approximately 500 subscribers. Maintaining a presence across multiple digital platforms enables tourism authorities to reach a wider audience, promote tourism events, and provide destination information more efficiently, thereby enhancing the image of Can Tho tourism in the online environment.

At the same time, the city has promoted digital transformation initiatives associated with smart city development through the application of digital technologies and data-driven management. The tourism sector has gradually integrated tourism-related information into digital platforms and piloted the use of population data, digital identification, and electronic authentication. These efforts have helped establish a tourism database that supports management, business monitoring, and destination promotion, providing a foundation for the transition toward data-driven governance.

These achievements reflect the growing role of local authorities in guiding and supporting digital transformation in tourism. Investments in digital infrastructure, smart tourism platforms, and business support programs have promoted technology adoption across the sector. Pilot applications of population data and digital identification are also expected to improve tourism management and online public services. However, these efforts remain at an early stage and require further investment in infrastructure, data-sharing mechanisms, and data utilization capabilities.

Despite these positive developments, data connectivity and sharing remain limited, constraining integrated management and decision-making. Many small tourism enterprises and community-based tourism operators continue to face difficulties in adopting digital technologies, while their digital governance and data utilization capabilities remain weak. Moreover, the lack of unified data standards reduces the effectiveness of data use for market forecasting, tourist behavior analysis, and policy formulation. Consequently, digital data have not yet fully served as a strategic tool for tourism governance and development in Can Tho City.

4. Policy implications

Based on the research findings, the study proposes several policy implications to improve state management of digital transformation in tourism, thereby enhancing management effectiveness, strengthening linkages among stakeholders, and promoting the sustainable development of digital tourism in Can Tho City.

First, priority should be given to developing a shared tourism database across the city to connect government agencies, travel companies, accommodation establishments, tourist attractions, and transportation providers. At the same time, data-sharing and utilization mechanisms should be strengthened to support tourism management, market forecasting, and tourism product development. In the short term, priority should be given to digitizing data at key destinations such as Cai Rang Floating Market, Ninh Kieu Wharf, and river-based ecotourism routes.

Second, support mechanisms for digital transformation should be tailored to different groups of tourism businesses. Large enterprises should be encouraged to invest in data management and digital platforms, while small accommodation providers, homestays, and community-based tourism operators should receive support in digital skills training, online promotion, and access to basic digital tools.

Third, continued investment in digital infrastructure should be closely linked to enhancing tourist experiences. Solutions such as digital tourism maps, QR codes, cashless payment systems, and automated interpretation services should be implemented consistently across destinations, particularly for distinctive tourism products such as floating market tourism, orchard tourism, and community-based tourism.

Fourth, greater attention should be paid to developing digital human resources for both tourism authorities and businesses. Stronger collaboration among government agencies, technology firms, and educational institutions is needed to provide training in digital platform management, data analytics, and digital marketing to meet the sector's digital transformation requirements.

Finally, the coordinating role of local government in promoting tourism digital transformation should be strengthened. Enhancing cooperation among tourism businesses, technology providers, and related stakeholders, together with initiatives for data sharing and smart tourism development, will improve sectoral linkages, management effectiveness, and the competitiveness of Can Tho's tourism industry in the years ahead.

4. Conclusion

Digital transformation is gradually becoming a key driver of tourism development in Can Tho City. The findings reveal that government management has laid an initial foundation for the digitalization of the tourism sector through policy orientation, investment in digital infrastructure, and the deployment of tourism support platforms. However, the effectiveness of digital transformation remains uneven due to limitations in data integration, coordination mechanisms, and technological capabilities among tourism businesses. The study highlights that digital transformation in tourism is not merely a technological issue but also depends heavily on the coordinating, supporting, and connecting roles of government authorities. Strengthening these roles is essential for promoting a more modern, sustainable, and competitive tourism sector that aligns with local development conditions in the future ■

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