

Adoption of Virtual Reality Tourism: A Catalyst for Economic Revitalisation

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The global tourism industry has significantly grown in the past few years. It gained around 10% of the world's GDP, which marks around \$10.9 trillion in 2024. Besides this, particularly focusing on technological and experiential aspects of the industry, it stands at a critical stage which needs to redefine the needs of the overall industry. Among technologies, VR has played an extensive role in the tourism industry by making a significant contribution of \$10 billion in 2024 and is expected to gain a CAGR 30% in the next ten years. North America and Asia Pacific countries dominate the VR tourism industry, contributing in the form of hardware development to transforming the software needs of the industry. Adopting such technologies is a key driver for economic diversification, sustainable growth and resilience, especially for developing countries like Pakistan, which already have an enriched nature and diverse culture.

Although VR tourism has been widely explored in prior literature, it continues to evolve in the recent era, where industry stakeholders are studying more about immersive experiences through the adoption of VR. This not only sparks interest and curiosity among travellers but also helps people who cannot travel for any reason, including lack of finances, cultural barriers, or health issues. Moreover, another interesting aspect VR tourism has created is travelling to past experiences. Events from history are nowadays another interesting creation of VR travel and tourism. Various countries are now promoting their religious and cultural events through VR tourism, as people are attached to them nostalgically and religiously. From an environmental perspective, virtual tourism supports eco-friendly choices. It gives an alternative for places with sensitive environments or limited resources, reducing the physical impact of travel. At the same time, it creates value through online ticket sales, digital innovation, and engaging story-based platforms.

By combining digital innovation with economic benefits, VR protects cultural and natural heritage and supports sustainable, inclusive growth. From an industry point of view, VR adoption fosters new business models and employment opportunities for direct and indirect investors. Various stakeholders, including local entrepreneurs, video loggers, content developers, small tourism companies, and travel agents, can leverage VR for storytelling, educational purposes, and branding local places and culture. This ripple effect extends to individuals indirectly linked with the industry, for countries already sacrificing their international image. However, successful adoption requires multi-stakeholder collaboration among policymakers, academia, and industry players. Governments must support authorities to create environments through digital infrastructure, incentives for innovation, and partnerships with technology firms.

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Academic including software engineers, 3D modelling, and AI-driven analytics, forming a digital value chain contributing to GDP through technology exports and skill development. Furthermore, VR-based training for tour guides, hospitality staff, and cultural interpreters enhances human capital for the nation, improving service quality and competitiveness in the global tourism market. It also helps improve the nationwide presence and image, especially institutions can support this transformation by researching user behaviour, adoption models, and socio-cultural implications, ensuring that VR tourism remains ethically grounded and contextually relevant.

In conclusion, adopting VR tourism is not only a technological advancement but also essential for economic growth, especially for developing countries. Nations can compete in a digitised global economy, and those who are willing to invest in VR driven experiences can gain global visibility and sustainable economic growth. By bridging innovation with cultural authenticity, VR tourism has the potential to become a cornerstone of the next generation of bright, inclusive, and economically vibrant travel economies.