

Franchising as an instrument of integration of Ukrainian tourist entities into the European tourist market in the context of digital transformation

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Annotation. The contemporary development of the tourism industry in Ukraine necessitates the search for effective instruments to integrate national enterprises into the European market. Franchising emerges as one of the promising mechanisms, enabling the standardisation of services, the enhancement of brand recognition, and the optimisation of managerial processes, while simultaneously combining traditional business models with digital technologies. The study aims to analyse franchising models in the tourism sector and assess their potential as a tool for integrating Ukrainian tourism enterprises into the European tourism market under conditions of digital transformation. The research findings demonstrate that franchising, when combined with digital tools, not only facilitates the standardisation of service provision but also significantly increases managerial efficiency, ensures business scalability, and fosters integration into international distribution channels. Based on Ukrainian and European franchising networks, it has been established that the application of online booking, mobile applications, CRM systems, and analytical platforms enhances service quality, enables prompt responses to customer needs, and fosters the personalisation of tourism products. The study also identified the potential of franchising in developing innovative tourism services, such as interactive and thematic tours and excursions incorporating VR/AR technologies, thereby making tourism offerings more attractive to youth and international audiences. The prospects for developing franchising networks in the tourism sector across EU countries and the opportunities for their implementation in Ukraine have been examined. The practical value of the research lies in formulating recommendations for Ukrainian tourism enterprises regarding the implementation of franchising models with the use of digital technologies. The proposed approaches enhance management efficiency, standardize service provision, optimize marketing activities, and create competitive tourism products that comply with European standards. The results may be applied in strategic planning for company

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development, in public policy within the field of tourism, and in educational programmes on tourism business management.

Keywords: tourism activity, digitalisation, international franchising networks, European integration, tourism business management, digital technologies.

Франчайзинг як інструмент інтеграції суб'єктів туристичної діяльності України у європейський туристичний ринок в умовах цифрової трансформації

Анотація. Сучасний розвиток туристичної галузі в Україні вимагає пошуку ефективних інструментів інтеграції національних підприємств у європейський ринок. Франчайзинг виступає одним із перспективних механізмів, який дозволяє стандартизувати послуги, підвищувати впізнаваність бренду та оптимізувати управлінські процеси, водночас поєднуючи традиційні бізнес-моделі з цифровими технологіями. Метою дослідження є аналіз франчайзингових моделей у туристичній сфері та оцінка їх потенціалу як інструменту інтеграції українських суб'єктів туристичної діяльності у європейський туристичний ринок в умовах цифрової трансформації. Результати дослідження показали, що франчайзинг у поєднанні з цифровими інструментами дозволяє не лише стандартизувати обслуговування, а й значно підвищити ефективність управління, забезпечити масштабування бізнесу та інтеграцію в міжнародні дистриб'юторські канали. На прикладі українських та європейських франчайзингових мереж виявлено, що використання онлайн-бронювання, мобільних додатків, CRM-систем і аналітичних платформ сприяє підвищенню якості сервісу, оперативному реагуванню на потреби клієнтів та персоналізації туристичних продуктів. Дослідження також виявило потенціал застосування франчайзингу для розвитку інноваційних туристичних послуг, таких як інтерактивні та тематичні тури, екскурсії з використанням VR/AR, що робить пропозиції більш привабливими для молодіжної та міжнародної аудиторії. Розглянуто перспективи розвитку франчайзингових мереж у туристичній сфері в країнах ЄС та можливості їх застосування в Україні. Практична цінність дослідження полягає у формуванні рекомендацій для українських туристичних підприємств щодо впровадження франчайзингових моделей з використанням цифрових технологій. Запропоновані підходи дозволяють підвищити ефективність управління, стандартизувати сервіс, оптимізувати маркетингову діяльність та створювати конкурентоспроможні туристичні продукти, що відповідають європейським стандартам. Результати можуть бути використані для стратегічного планування розвитку компаній, державної політики у сфері туризму та навчальних програм із менеджменту туристичного бізнесу.

Ключові слова: туристична діяльність, цифровізація, міжнародні франчайзингові мережі, євроінтеграція, управління туристичним бізнесом, цифрові технології.

Introduction

The contemporary development of Ukraine's tourism industry is characterised by significant opportunities alongside numerous challenges related to integration into the European tourism market. Following the intensive digitalisation of European tourism and the growing demand for standardised, convenient, and technologically advanced services, there arises an urgent need for Ukrainian tourism enterprises to adapt their business models to

European standards. However, most small and medium-sized tourism enterprises in Ukraine face challenges from an insufficient resource base, limited experience in international operations, and a low level of digital readiness [1]. These factors substantially constrain their ability to rapidly integrate into the European market and develop competitive offerings for international tourists.

Franchising emerges as a potentially effective instrument for addressing these challenges. It facilitates the standardisation of services, the implementation of international marketing strategies, the optimisation of managerial processes, and the integration of digital solutions [2], all crucial factors for successfully entering the European market. At the same time, the effectiveness of franchising mechanisms in the context of the digital transformation of Ukraine's tourism activities requires scholarly investigation and practical substantiation. The issue of integrating Ukrainian tourism enterprises into the European tourism space through franchising, under conditions of digital transformation, is therefore highly relevant both for academic research and for the practical implementation of governmental and business strategies in the field of tourism.

In recent scholarly research, franchising has been considered a significant factor in developing the tourism and hospitality industry; however, the degree of study within the domestic academic discourse remains limited. Considerable attention is paid to the impact of the franchising model on the hospitality sector. For instance, L. Honchar and others [3] substantiates that franchising drives revenue growth and enhances the competitiveness of enterprises, while simultaneously contributing to employment and the development of small businesses. The authors also emphasise the increasing role of digital technologies in the functioning of the franchising market, which directly aligns with the theme of digital transformation in tourism.

Nevertheless, the research primarily focuses on general trends within the hospitality sector, without a detailed analysis of the tourism segment, leaving space for further investigation. A separate line of inquiry concerns the accounting practices of franchising activities. In the work of O. Vysochan and others [4], methodological approaches are proposed for reflecting in financial statements the specific payments of franchisees (lump-sum fees and royalties). The authors stress the necessity of improving accounting procedures for tourism enterprises operating within franchising networks. While this study contributes to establishing a financial and economic foundation for establishing franchising agreements in Ukraine, the practical aspects of integration into the international market remain insufficiently explored.

In the context of digital transformation, the study by I. Dadić and others [5] is of particular significance, as it analyses the role of online distribution channels in tourism. The authors emphasise the importance of OTAs, global distribution systems, and social media in enhancing the efficiency of the hotel business in Europe. Although the work does not directly focus on franchising, the findings are relevant for assessing the competitive advantages of franchising networks that actively integrate digital tools into their operations.

The cultural aspect of franchising is also noteworthy. A. Figueruelo [6] examines examples of museum franchises as an innovative form of cultural entrepreneurship. The authors highlight the economic, social, and political challenges associated with this approach, demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature of the franchising phenomenon. At the same time, this topic remains relatively novel and requires further investigation within the tourism industry context.

In the hospitality sector, considerable attention has been paid to comparing franchising and independent models. A. Kavarić and S. Đurašević [7], using Montenegro as a case study, demonstrated that franchised hotels can generate higher tourist flows and longer client stays. This underscores the potential of franchising to enhance the attractiveness of national tourism products.

The issues of financial stability and investment decisions in franchising companies have been addressed in the works of T. Dogru and others [8] and S. Choi and others [9]. Both studies confirm that franchising expands investment opportunities and increases enterprise resilience in a dynamic market environment. However, the results broadly apply more to the restaurant industry than to tourism. It is also worth noting the research of B. Kim and S. Lee [10], which demonstrates that franchising can catalyze the implementation of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development strategies. This opens a new avenue in franchising research, linking business models with ESG principles.

The literature analysis allows us to conclude that scholars consider franchising in the tourism sector as an effective mechanism for ensuring competitive advantages, financial stability, and the international integration of enterprises. Within the academic discourse, there is a clear emphasis on digitalisation and innovative channels for promoting tourism services. At the same time, the research reveals a lack of systematic studies regarding the specific adaptation of European franchising practices to the Ukrainian tourism market under conditions of digital transformation, which defines the scientific novelty and relevance of further investigations in this field.

The study aims to analyse franchising models in the tourism sector and assess their potential as a tool for integrating Ukrainian tourism enterprises into the European tourism market under conditions of digital transformation.

Results

Digitalisation is one of the key factors in the contemporary development of the tourism market, influencing all its components – from marketing and booking to service management and customer interaction. Digital technologies enable enterprises to increase operational efficiency, optimise internal processes, and offer tourists more personalised and convenient services. In the context of integrating Ukrainian tourism enterprises into the European market, digitalisation serves as a strategic instrument, ensuring the standardisation of service provision, accelerating information exchange, and facilitating the implementation of innovative products. It creates conditions for competitiveness, allowing Ukrainian tourism enterprises to meet high European standards and to interact effectively with international partners and clients.

Franchising has become one of the key mechanisms for developing the tourism market, enabling enterprises to rapidly scale their businesses, standardise service quality, and strengthen their brand [11]. Through franchising models, small and medium-sized tourism companies access effective marketing strategies, technological solutions, and international distribution channels, enhancing their national and European competitiveness [12].

Digitalisation significantly amplifies the effectiveness of franchising by integrating online booking systems, mobile applications, CRM platforms, and other technological tools into franchisees' operations. This optimises managerial processes and service standards and creates conditions for faster and more efficient integration of Ukrainian tourism enterprises into the European market. The synergy of franchising and digital technologies is crucial for developing the tourism sector and enhancing its international competitiveness.

Table 1 demonstrates the key franchising models applied in the tourism sector, their main characteristics, and examples of service provision. Particular attention is given to the impact of digital transformation on each model, highlighting improvements in management efficiency, service standardisation, and the integration of Ukrainian tourism enterprises into the European market.

Table 1

Key franchising models in the tourism sector and the impact of digital transformation

Franchising Models	Key Characteristics	Service Examples	Impact of Digital Transformation
Traditional Travel Agency Franchising	Use of brand, marketing materials, service standards	Tour sales, consultations, service packages	Online booking, CRM for customer management, digital marketing
Hotel Chain Franchising	Service standardisation, managerial procedures, quality control	Accommodation, catering services, additional amenities	Mobile booking apps, hotel management systems, online payment
Tour Operator Franchising	Access to package tours, logistics, franchisor marketing channels	Package tours, excursions, logistics	Route automation, integration with global distribution systems, electronic tickets
Innovative Tourism Services Franchising	Niche products, technological solutions, staff training	Ecotourism, adventure tours, cultural projects	VR/AR tours, mobile apps, digital tickets, interactive excursions

Source: compiled by the authors based on [3; 6; 7; 13; 14]

Table 2 presents successful examples of franchising models operating in the Ukrainian tourism sector. It illustrates the types of activities, core services, features of franchising interactions, and the role of digital technologies in enhancing the efficiency of business processes. This approach enables an assessment of how Ukrainian tourism enterprises integrate into standardised and technologically advanced operational models that comply with European requirements.

Table 2

Examples of franchising in the Ukrainian tourism sector and the impact of digitalisation

Franchise / Network	Type of Tourism Activity	Core Services	Franchising Features in Ukraine	Impact of Digitalisation
TEZ Tour	Tour operator	Package tours, flight and hotel bookings	Use of international tour operator standards, training of franchisee staff	Online booking, CRM for customer management, mobile app
Join UP!	Tour operator	Travel packages, excursions, flight and hotel bookings	Standardised products and marketing, support for franchisees in sales	E-tickets, booking automation, integration with tour search platforms
Ukrainian Hospitality Group (hotel chain)	Hotel business	Accommodation, catering, additional services	Brand usage, service standards, staff training	Hotel management systems, online

				booking, mobile apps for guests
Adventure.ua	Ecotourism / adventure tours	Tourist routes, active recreation, excursions	Niche franchising, local partnerships, instructor training	Mobile apps, online booking, digital tickets
Visit Ukraine / local excursions	Cultural and educational tours	City and regional excursions, themed programmes	Local franchisees operate under the franchisor's brand and methodology	Online booking, digital route maps, interactive tours

Source: compiled by the authors

Table 3 presents examples of successful franchising networks operating in the tourism sector of EU countries. It provides information on the type of activity, country of origin, features of franchising interactions, and the role of digital technologies in enhancing the efficiency of business processes. This information allows for an assessment of key practices and strategies that ensure the success of franchises in the European tourism market and that can be adapted for Ukrainian enterprises.

Table 3

Successful franchising networks in the tourism sector of the European Union and the impact of digitalisation

Franchise Name	Type of Activity	Country of Origin	Franchising Features	Impact of Digitalisation
TUI Group	Tour operator, hotel business	Germany	The largest European tour operator with a hotel network; offers franchises for agencies and hotels	Integration of online booking, mobile apps, personalised client offers
Lufthansa City Center	Travel agencies	Germany	Network of independent agencies supported by the Lufthansa brand; offers franchises across Europe	Use of CRM systems, online booking, integration with global distribution systems
UNIGLOBE Travel	Travel agencies	Canada	International agency network actively expanding in Europe through franchising	Digital booking platforms, mobile apps, client data analytics
Travel Leaders Network	Travel agencies	USA	One of the largest agency networks globally, with European presence through franchising	Integration with online booking, use of CRM systems, personalised marketing campaigns
BCD Travel	Corporate travel	Netherlands	International network specialising in corporate travel; offers franchises for agencies	Travel management technologies, mobile apps for clients, expense analytics

CityPal	Urban tourism services	Croatia	Network of city guides offering franchises for providing urban tourism services across Europe	Online tour booking platforms, mobile apps with interactive maps and routes
InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG)	Hotel business	United Kingdom	International hotel network offering franchises for independent hotels in Europe	Integration with online booking, mobile apps for guests, hotel management systems
Marriott International	Hotel business	USA	International hotel network actively expanding in Europe through franchising	Use of digital technologies for hotel management, mobile apps for guests, personalised offers

Source: compiled by the authors

Franchising in the tourism sector has become a powerful development tool for both national and international companies. It is particularly effective when combined with digital technologies, which enable the standardisation of services, optimisation of business processes, and delivery of high-quality customer service. The analysis of successful franchising networks operating simultaneously in Ukraine and European Union countries demonstrates various approaches to business scaling, adaptation to local markets, and digital tools. This allows for identifying key factors that determine the success of franchising models in the tourism sector and the assessment of their potential adaptation for Ukrainian enterprises in the context of integration into the European market.

Join UP! [15] is one of the largest Ukrainian tour operators, actively developing a franchising model to expand its presence in international markets. Since its establishment in 2010, the company has established itself as a leader in tour organisation, offering a full range of services, including flights, accommodation, transfers, excursions, and insurance. In 2024, Join UP! opened its first franchised agency abroad – in Katowice, Poland – which marked a significant step in its international expansion strategy. By the end of 2025, the company plans to expand its operations to ten European markets, including Slovakia, Hungary, and other Baltic countries. Join UP! operates actively in Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Digital tools such as online booking, mobile applications, and CRM systems are actively utilised to optimise processes and enhance the customer experience.

BCD Travel [16] is an international company specialising in corporate travel management, headquartered in the Netherlands. The company has offices in over 100 countries, including Ukraine. In Ukraine, BCD Travel operates through its partner, Telehaus Kiev International Tourism, offering a wide range of services such as flight and hotel bookings, car rentals, and transfer organisation. Digital solutions, including mobile applications and online platforms for travel expense management, enable clients to control their costs and ensure traveller safety efficiently.

FCM Travel [17] is a global Flight Centre Travel Group network, with offices in over 90 countries, including Ukraine. In Ukraine, FCM Travel provides corporate travel management services, catering to the needs of both national and international clients. The company offers customised business travel solutions, including flight and hotel bookings, car rentals, and

transfer organisation. Digital tools like the FCM Platform allow clients to manage their travel efficiently, obtain expense analytics, and ensure traveller safety.

These examples demonstrate how franchising, combined with digital technologies, contributes to developing tourism companies, enabling them to scale their businesses effectively, standardise service quality, and integrate into international markets.

Franchising in the tourism sector is one of the key business development models in the European Union. It enables rapid scaling of services, implementing innovative approaches and quality standards, while supporting local economies. The experience of EU countries demonstrates the effectiveness of franchising models in sustainable tourism, hotel business, glamping, and digital tourism services [3; 4; 6]. At the same time, Ukraine has significant potential to adapt these practices, contributing to developing domestic tourism, attracting investment, and facilitating integration with international tourism markets (Table 4).

Table 4

Prospects for the development of franchising networks in the tourism sector in EU countries and their potential application in Ukraine

Aspect	European Union	Ukraine
General Trend	Recovery after the pandemic, with international tourist arrivals projected to grow by 4.9% in 2025 compared to 2024	Recovery of domestic tourism, notably through initiatives such as the creation of tourist routes through former conflict zones
Popular Franchises	Franchises specialising in sustainable tourism, glamping, designer hostels, and eco-hotels are gaining popularity in Italy	Join UP! franchise plans expansion into the Baltic and Kazakhstan markets in 2025
Investment Opportunities	Low-entry franchises, such as Cruise Planners, with minimum investments from \$6,995, available for home-based or part-time operations	Franchises with varying levels of investment are available in Ukraine, including in the tourism sector
Support and Training	Many franchises offer comprehensive training and support; for example, The Travel Franchise provides industry-specific training and mentorship	Reikartz Hotel Group franchise offers partnership programmes supporting project financing
Digitalisation and Sustainable Development	The EU actively implements digitalisation and sustainable development in tourism, including via the European Green Deal and short-term rental regulations	Ukraine is also working on restoring tourism infrastructure and implementing sustainable practices, notably through partnerships with international companies

Source: compiled by the authors based on [18-22]

In the European Union, there is a consistent trend towards developing franchising networks in the tourism sector, focused on implementing sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. Contemporary franchises actively integrate innovative concepts, including glamping, designer hostels, and digital tourism services, which enhance service quality and attract a wider audience [23]. Furthermore, digitalisation and the automation of business processes in tourism have become integral to franchising models. At the same time, regulations related to environmental standards and sustainable development encourage companies to offer new, more eco-friendly products and services [24].

In Ukraine, the tourism industry is undergoing active recovery following periods of crisis, and franchising can serve as an essential tool for accelerated market development. There is significant potential for adapting international experience, particularly in digital solutions, eco-tourism, and innovative accommodation formats. Implementing such models will improve service standards, attract investment, and facilitate the integration of Ukrainian tourism into global markets, while simultaneously developing domestic tourism potential.

Conclusions

Franchising in the tourism sector effectively integrates Ukrainian tourism enterprises into the European tourism market. It allows for standardizing service quality, enhances brand recognition, optimizes management processes, and creates conditions for rapid business scaling. Implementing franchising models gives Ukrainian companies access to proven international practices, marketing strategies, and technological solutions, thereby increasing their competitiveness.

Digital transformation is a crucial factor in the development of franchising, as integrating online booking systems, mobile applications, CRM systems, and analytical platforms improves management efficiency and enhances the customer experience. The experience of successful European networks demonstrates that combining franchising models with digital technologies generates a synergistic effect, promoting the growth of the tourism business and facilitating rapid adaptation to market changes.

For Ukraine, integrating franchising and digitalisation opens up significant opportunities: from raising service standards and developing innovative tourism products to active participation in international markets. Successful examples of Ukrainian and European franchising networks show that using these tools enables the creation of competitive, technologically advanced, and flexible business models capable of meeting contemporary tourist demands and supporting Ukraine's integration into the European tourism space.

Further research could examine the effectiveness of implementing franchising models in combination with digital technologies to enhance the international competitiveness of Ukrainian tourism enterprises.

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