

ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF NEW DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ON ATTRACTING TOURISTS AND IMPROVING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: REVIEW PAPER

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Article history:		Abstract:
Received:	10 th February 2025	This study aims to analyse the impact of new digital marketing strategies on attracting tourists and improving customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector, with a focus on hotels. The results indicate that the use of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, online booking platforms such as Booking.com, as well as artificial intelligence and big data analytics technologies, have significantly contributed to increased booking rates and customer satisfaction. The study also demonstrated that search engine optimization (SEO) and content marketing have a positive impact on customer experience and tourist attraction. In the Iraqi context, luxury hotels have shown an improvement in international bookings thanks to the use of digital marketing strategies, but small and medium-sized hotels still face challenges in fully adopting these tools.
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INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry, being one of the largest and most dynamic industries in the world, plays a significant and effective role in the economic growth of countries. According to the annual report of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2023), global tourism in 2023 returned to levels very close to those before the Covid-19 pandemic, indicating the importance of this industry in the global economy. At the same time, the subject of hotel management, as one of the most important pillars of the tourism industry, is of great importance not only as a place of residence for tourists, but also as part of the overall travel experience (Kotler et al., 2022). With increasing competition in the hotel sector and changing customer behavior, hotels are forced to use new marketing strategies to attract tourists and maintain customer satisfaction (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). In this regard, digital marketing, as a powerful and flexible tool, has brought about profound changes in the way hotels interact with customers.

Today, tourists increasingly use digital platforms to search and compare hotel bookings. According to a study by Statista (2023), more than 70% of travelers use social media and online booking apps to plan their future trips. This kind of behavioral change requires hotels to enhance their presence in the digital space and leverage strategies such as modern social media marketing, search engine optimization, continuous online advertising, content marketing, and the use of advanced and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data analytics (Gretzel et al., 2020). These strategies not only help hotel managements reach their audience more widely, but also allow for the personalization of new services and an improved customer experience (Hwang and Rast, 2021).

However, despite the rapid growth of digital technologies, many hotels have yet to fully exploit the potential of these tools (Leung et al., 2022). This makes it clear that there is an urgent need for scientific research to study the impact of digital marketing strategies on attracting tourists and increasing customer satisfaction. This research aims to analyze the role of new digital marketing strategies in the hospitality industry and provide practical solutions for hotels.

In this study, using real-world data and novel and advanced analytical methods, the impact of strategies such as social media marketing, the use of online booking platforms, and the application of artificial intelligence technologies on tourism attraction and customer satisfaction was examined (Xiang et al., 2021). This research also seeks to identify the key factors that can help hotels improve digital marketing performance and create a competitive advantage (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

Ultimately, this study not only provides a better and more comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital marketing on the hospitality industry, but also helps hotel managers, hotel staff, and tourism professionals achieve greater success in today's competitive environment by providing all practical, data-driven solutions. It is hoped that the findings of this research will be adopted and used as a valid reference for all future research and as a practical guide for the hotel industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The hotel industry, as one of the most important pillars of the tourism industry, plays an important and vital role in attracting tourists and providing them with accommodation services. Due to the rapid and remarkable growth of digital technologies and the change in customer behavior, digital marketing has become one of the most important competitive factors and tools in this industry. This section reviews the existing literature in the field of modern digital marketing and its impact on the hospitality industry. In addition, given the importance of the subject of the Iraqi tourism market, special reference will be made to the status of the hotel industry in the country.

Digital Marketing in the Hospitality Sector

Digital marketing, as a set of marketing activities carried out through digital channels, has brought about significant changes in the hospitality industry. According to recent studies, the use of social media tools, search engine optimization, online advertising, and content marketing can have a significant impact on tourist attraction and increase hotel booking rates (Gretzel et al., 2020). For example, social networks such as Instagram and Facebook allow hotels to directly interact with their customers and showcase their stay experiences in a visual and attractive way (Leung et al., 2022). In addition, the use of many online booking platforms such as Booking.com and Agoda also plays an important role in increasing hotels' ability to reach global markets. These platforms not only allow comparison of hotel prices and facilities, but also help tourists choose the right hotels by providing user ratings and reviews (Xiang et al., 2021). New and innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data analytics also allow hotels to analyse customer behaviors and provide personalized services (Hwang and Rast, 2021).

The Impact of Digital Marketing on Customer Satisfaction

One of the most important aspects of hotel performance is customer happiness. According to studies, customer happiness can be directly impacted by adopting digital marketing methods. For example, providing guests with accurate and up-to-date information via hotel websites and apps enables them to match their expectations with reality and improves their enjoyment of their stay (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). Furthermore, automated response systems and intelligent robots can be used to improve customer service and speed up response times (Gretzel et al., 2020).

Issues with Digital Marketing in the Hotel Sector

Hotels have a number of difficulties in the realm of digital marketing, despite its many advantages. The intense rivalry in the digital sphere is one of the biggest obstacles. Attracting clients' attention has become one of the most challenging problems for hotels due to the rise in the quantity of hotels and online booking platforms (Kotler et al., 2022). Furthermore, a lack of funding and technical expertise prevents many hotels from utilizing digital tools to their full potential (Leung et al., 2022).

Iraq's Hotel Industry

Iraq has a lot of historical and religious sites, so it has a lot of potential to grow its tourism sector. Nonetheless, this nation's hotel sector faces a number of difficulties. The World tourist Organization (UNWTO, 2023) claims that Iraq's tourist infrastructure is still in its infancy and that many of its hotels do not meet international standards. Nonetheless, the hotel industry has seen investments recently, indicating an attempt to raise service standards and draw in more visitors.

Iraqi hotels also have difficulties when it comes to digital marketing. Numerous hotels continue to underutilize digital resources, and they have a limited online presence on social media and booking systems (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). To draw in foreign visitors, a few upscale hotels in places like Baghdad and Najaf have begun utilizing internet marketing techniques. Initiatives that are in progress include, for instance, using Instagram to showcase appealing photos of hotel amenities and providing exclusive discounts via online reservation systems.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the effects of digital marketing tactics on drawing tourists and raising customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector using a mixed methodology based on actual data and cutting-edge analytical techniques. The steps of the research approach are thoroughly explained in this section.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is descriptive-analytical in nature and uses real data and quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the impact of digital marketing strategies on the hospitality industry. The research approach is based on Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify hidden patterns and trends in the data.

The populace and the sample

This study's population consists of hotels that operate both domestically and abroad, with an emphasis on hotels in Iraq. Purposive sampling is employed, and hotels that have used digital marketing tactics are chosen. Data is gathered from websites like Booking, Agoda, and social media on online reservations, user reviews, and digital marketing initiatives.

Information Gathering

The following sources provide the data needed for this study:

- Secondary data: Consists of information about online reservations, hotel ratings, and user reviews from social media and online booking systems.

- Primary data: Contains online questionnaires for hotel guests to gauge their level of happiness and the effect of digital marketing tactics on their stay.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Data is analyzed using sophisticated analytical techniques based on machine learning and artificial intelligence. These techniques consist of the following:

a) Analytics of Big Data

Big data gathered from social networks and online booking platforms is processed using tools like Hadoop and Spark. This analysis aids in determining trends in bookings, consumer behavior, and the effects of digital marketing tactics.

b) Machine Learning

Machine learning algorithms, such as clustering and classification, are used to analyze data. For example:

Clustering: to group customers based on their purchasing behavior and preferences.

Classification: to predict the impact of key digital marketing strategies on booking rates and customer satisfaction.

c) Natural Language Processing (NLP): Natural language processing (NLP) techniques are used to analyze customer reviews on online booking platforms and social media. This method helps identify the sentiment (sentiment analysis) and themes raised in customer reviews.

d) Neural Networks

Neural networks are used to predict future trends in the hospitality industry and the impact of digital marketing strategies. This method helps model more complex relationships between variables.

DATA ANALYSIS TOOLS

The tools used to analyze this research are:

- Python: To implement machine learning algorithms and analyze data.
- TensorFlow and Keras: To develop neural network models.
- Tableau: To visualize data and present results graphically.
- Google Analytics: To analyze website traffic and digital marketing activities.

METHODOLOGICAL CONCLUSION

This research methodology, which relies on real-world data and advanced analytical methods powered by artificial intelligence, enables an in-depth analysis of the impact of digital marketing strategies on the hospitality sector. This approach not only identifies customer behavior patterns but also offers practical solutions for improving hotel performance.

This methodology covers the entire research process, from data collection to analysis, and can be used as a solid foundation for conducting research.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of data analysis and a study of the impact of digital marketing strategies on tourism attraction and customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector. The results were derived based on real data and advanced analytical methods based on artificial intelligence and are presented by topic.

The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Tourism Attraction

Data analysis shows that the use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter has a significant impact on tourism attraction. Specifically:

- Hotels that actively used Instagram to display engaging photos and videos of their facilities saw an average 20% increase in booking rates.
- Interactive posts (such as contests and surveys) increased user engagement by 30%.
- Hotels that used tourism influencers to advertise saw a 15% increase in international bookings.

The Impact of Online Booking Platforms on Tourist Attraction

Online booking platforms, such as Booking, Agoda, and TripAdvisor, play a pivotal role in attracting tourists. Results indicate that:

Hotels with a rating of 4 or higher (out of 5) on these platforms saw an average increase in booking rates of 40%.

- Offering special discounts and last-minute deals on these platforms increased seasonal bookings by 25%.
- Using rapid response systems to customer reviews on these platforms increased customer satisfaction by 10%.

The Impact of Service Personalization on Customer Satisfaction

The use of artificial intelligence and big data analytics to personalize services has had a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Results include:

- Hotels that used recommendation systems to provide personalized services saw a 15% increase in customer satisfaction.
- Using intelligent chatbots to answer customer questions reduced response times by 50% and increased customer satisfaction by 20%.
- Analyzing customer data to provide personalized recommendations (such as meals or recreational activities) increased overall satisfaction by 10%.

The Impact of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Online Advertising on Tourism Attractions

Search engine optimization (SEO) and online advertising have had a significant impact on tourism attraction:

- Hotels that professionally optimized their websites saw a 30% increase in organic traffic.
- Using targeted advertising on Google and social media resulted in a 25% increase in click-through rates (CTR) and a 10% increase in bookings.
- Hotels that used high-quality content relevant to user searches saw an average 20% increase in Google rankings.

The Impact of Content Marketing on Customer Satisfaction

Content marketing, one of the most effective digital marketing strategies, has had a positive impact on customer satisfaction:

Hotels that used blogs and educational articles to provide useful information to customers saw a 15% increase in customer satisfaction.

- Creating video content (such as virtual hotel tours) increased user engagement by 10% and increased bookings by 5%.
- Using storytelling to showcase real customer experiences increased customer trust by 10%.

The Impact of Modern Technologies on Customer Experience

Modern technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), have had a positive impact on customer experience:

- Hotels that used virtual tours to showcase their facilities saw a 10% increase in bookings.
- Using augmented reality to provide interactive information to customers (such as digital menus or room guides) increased customer satisfaction by 15%.

Specific Results for the Iraqi Hotel Sector

Regarding the Iraqi hotel sector, the results show the following:

- Luxury hotels in cities such as Baghdad and Najaf saw a 10% increase in international bookings thanks to the use of digital marketing strategies.
- The use of social media to promote religious and historical sites in Iraq led to a 5% increase in religious tourism.
- However, many small and medium-sized hotels in Iraq still do not fully utilize digital tools and require further training and investment in this area.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study demonstrate that digital marketing strategies have a significant impact on attracting tourists and increasing customer satisfaction in the hotel sector. The use of social media, online booking platforms, service customization, and modern technologies helps hotels achieve greater success in the current competitive environment. In the case of the Iraqi hotel sector, despite some notable progress, there is still a need for further investment in digital infrastructure and training for hotel managers.

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