

Characterization of digital marketing and its key tools in the tourism sector

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Caracterización del marketing digital y sus herramientas clave en el sector turístico

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: tourism is the grouping of activities carried out by individuals during their travels and is recognized as one of the economic engines with the greatest potential in the world. Digital marketing has emerged driven by new technologies, the evolution of social media, globalization, increased consumer education, and changing consumption habits. Currently, digital marketing is an essential tool for companies in the tourism sector, seeking greater local, national, and international recognition.

Objective: to characterize digital marketing and its main tools in tourism.

Methods: a bibliographic review was conducted accessing databases such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate using keywords including digital marketing, tourist services, hotel, social networks, consumers and strategies. Seventeen articles were selected, with more than 70 % published in the last 5 years.

Discussion: technology and innovation have contributed to the emergence of new sales formats in tourist services. Studies have confirmed a significant relationship between digital marketing and brand positioning in tourist services. The main tools are websites, *Search Engine Optimization* (SEO), *Search Engine Marketing* (SEM), social networks, and e-mail marketing. These allow optimizing resources, improving interaction with the target audience, and expanding commercial reach.

Conclusions: digital marketing strategies are fundamental for the tourism sector as they increase visibility and improve interaction with customers. The combined and strategic use of these tools effectively reaches the target audience, strengthening promotion, recognition, and competitiveness in the tourism and hotel sector.

Keywords: Digital marketing; Tourist services; Hotel; Social networks; Consumers; Strategies.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el turismo es la agrupación de actividades realizadas por los individuos en sus viajes, este se ubica como uno de los motores económicos con mayor potencial en el mundo. El *marketing* digital surge por el impulso de las nuevas tecnologías, la evolución de los medios de comunicación social, la globalización, la mayor formación del consumidor y el cambio de hábitos en el consumo. Actualmente, el *marketing* digital es una herramienta esencial para las empresas del sector turístico, que busca mayor reconocimiento local, nacional e internacional.

Objetivo: caracterizar el *marketing* digital y sus principales herramientas en el sector turístico.

Métodos: se realizó una revisión bibliográfica accediendo a bases de datos como Google Académico y ResearchGate utilizando palabras clave incluyendo *marketing* digital, servicios turísticos, hotel, redes sociales, consumidores y estrategias. Se seleccionaron 17 artículos, más del 70 % publicados en los últimos 5 años.

Discusión: la tecnología y la innovación han contribuido al surgimiento de nuevos formatos de ventas en servicios turísticos. Estudios comprobaron la relación significativa entre *marketing* digital y posicionamiento de marca en servicios turísticos. Las principales herramientas serían páginas web, *Search Engine Optimization* (SEO), *Search Engine Marketing* (SEM), redes sociales y *e-mail marketing*. Estas permiten optimizar recursos, mejorar la interacción con el público objetivo y ampliar el alcance comercial.

Conclusiones: las estrategias de *marketing* digital son fundamentales para el sector turístico, ya que aumentan la visibilidad y mejoran la interacción con los clientes. El uso combinado y estratégico de estas herramientas permite alcanzar eficazmente al público objetivo, fortaleciendo la promoción, reconocimiento y competitividad en el ámbito turístico y hotelero.

Palabras clave: Marketing Digital; Servicios Turísticos; Hotel; Redes Sociales; Consumidores; Estrategias.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the group of activities carried out by individuals when traveling to places other than their place of origin. Historically, tourism has been positioned as one of the economic drivers with the greatest potential in the world.⁽¹⁾

According to Boston Consulting,⁽²⁾ in “new technologies to enjoy travel,” 73 % of travelers use online resources to decide their destination and 86 % to choose their accommodation. Thus, it is clear that this factor is of utmost importance for the tourism sector, regardless of the specific service offered.

It is therefore to be expected that hundreds of companies and productive sectors in general have opted to use digital media as a basic element in their promotional activities, especially those related to the tourism sector. Considering how quickly the latter has adapted to digitalization, not having an online presence has become a total disadvantage.⁽³⁾

In the second half of the 19th century, starting with the Industrial Revolution, the concept and evolution of *marketing* deepened, distinguishing three successive stages of development: product orientation, sales orientation, and market orientation.⁽⁴⁾

Marketing in the digital field began with the creation and growth of *websites* as a means of promoting goods or services.⁽⁵⁾

In the past, everything related to the perception between company and customer and advertising processes was managed from a traditional *marketing* concept, but with the introduction of digital media, this evolved into a new genre of *marketing* known as *digital marketing*, which arose due to the rise of new technologies, the evolution of social media, economic globalization, consumers now having greater education and information, and changing consumption habits.⁽³⁾

Today, *digital marketing* has emerged as an essential tool for businesses. It has been proven that the internet is fundamental to a brand's visibility, given the considerable amount of time we spend online. Brands that establish meaningful interaction with their customers experience greater growth and success in the market.⁽⁶⁾

The use of digital tools has transformed the reality of *marketing*. This is due to technological advances in recent years and the opportunities that have arisen as a result of social distancing measures implemented due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have generated changes in the market and among consumers. In this sense, *digital marketing* plays an important role in the commercial dynamics of a business, as customers can find out about offers, promotions, and new products without having to physically visit a store or seek the help of sales staff.^(7,8)

Organizations today cannot achieve success without a *digital marketing* strategy, and tourism is no exception. Digital marketing has become a powerful tool for the development of the tourism sector at all levels, promoting everything a place has to offer, from accommodation to its history, among other aspects that form part of that place.⁽⁹⁾

The adoption of *digital marketing* strategies represents an opportunity to gain greater recognition at the local, departmental, national, and international levels.⁽¹⁾

Companies must keep up with their customers and design their digital strategies in a more planned, controlled, and executed manner to achieve their objectives. These objectives can be achieved at low cost, as this *marketing* strategy allows for easier marketing campaigns than traditional ones.^(6,10)

The importance of strategies such as *websites*, corporate blogs, search engine optimization, social media, online advertising,

email *marketing*, and *influencer* *marketing* is highlighted

All of the above allows us to understand that, in order to propose a *marketing* plan in the tourism and hotel sector, we must take into account consumer identification, the means they use to purchase tourism services, the tools we must use to measure consumer behavior, and the strategies to get the right product to the right person at the right time through the right sales channel.⁽¹¹⁾

Tourism, as a global economic driver, has undergone a significant transformation through the incorporation of digital technologies into its promotional and commercial processes. Consumers' growing dependence on *online* platforms to plan their trips has prompted companies in the sector to adopt more efficient digital *marketing* strategies geared towards user behavior. This evolution has redefined the company-customer relationship, favoring the visibility, segmentation, and reach of tourism services. Given the above, the objective of this research was to characterize *digital marketing* and its main tools in the tourism sector.

METHOD

A literature review was conducted by accessing databases such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate using keywords including *digital marketing*, tourism services, hotel, social media, and consumers combined with the Boolean operator AND. A total of 17 articles were selected, of which more than 70 % were published in the last 5 years. Relevant information was extracted, summarized, and organized to support the development of this research.

DISCUSSION

Technology and innovation have contributed to the emergence of new formats for selling tourism services. Companies already established in the market must integrate the aforementioned factors into their business models, with the aim of expanding the range of means for selling their services.⁽⁴⁾

Several studies^(6,12,13) have tested the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between *digital marketing* and the brand positioning of different hotels and tourism services.

Given the above, the authors consider that knowledge of digital marketing tools is essential for designing effective strategies that promote tourism products and services in virtual environments. In a highly competitive sector that depends on *online* visibility, such as tourism, these tools allow for the optimization of resources, improved interaction with the target audience, and expanded commercial reach. Below, we characterize *digital marketing* and the main tools used in this field.

Digital Marketing: Definitions and Characteristics

In practice, *digital marketing* involves managing a company's online presence (*websites* and social media pages) in different ways, together with online communication techniques, in order to achieve traditional *marketing* objectives through the application of digital technologies.^(13,14)

A digital strategy must undoubtedly encompass all relevant spaces where the target group interacts, seeking to influence opinions and operators, combining design, creativity, profitability, and analysis in pursuit of a return on investment.⁽⁵⁾

The first step in creating *digital marketing* is to define the audience and know who to target. The second step is to plan the content, defining the best content to suit the needs of the

plan. The third step is to distribute the content, diversifying the content used in the different scenarios valid for this distribution.⁽¹²⁾

Digital *marketing* plans aim to raise awareness among society of each of the tourist attractions that a specific attraction has to offer, leveraging these tools to promote potential tourism in this area and contribute to economic recovery through growth in the number of domestic and foreign tourists.⁽⁵⁾ The authors believe that, although digital marketing plans can boost tourism, their effectiveness depends on prior market analysis and the authenticity of the content. Promoting without a contextualized strategy could generate unrealistic expectations.

Online marketing is immediate and interactive: buyers can interact with sellers on the seller's *website* to accurately inquire about the products or services they want and then order them right there. In addition, *online marketing* offers consumers a greater degree of control, as consumers decide which catalogs to browse and which *websites* to visit.⁽¹³⁾

This type of *marketing* is considered a powerful tool for building customer relationships, as it allows for greater learning about mutual needs and thus enables the customization of products and services to the customer's liking, all thanks to the power of constant feedback provided by social media. Finally, the correct use of digital *marketing* allows sellers to access buyers who would not have been accessible through other channels, thus expanding their potential customer base.⁽¹³⁾

Given the breadth of issues surrounding digital *marketing* in these types of organizations, it is worth mentioning the existence of administrative barriers (lack of specialized personnel), technological barriers (creation and proper use of networks), cultural barriers (society's adaptation to change), and financial barriers (high investments), which prevent the correct planning and timely execution of digital processes in the field of *marketing*.⁽¹⁴⁾ The authors consider that it is essential to promote continuous staff training, foster an organizational culture open to innovation, and establish strategic alliances that facilitate access to technological and financial resources in order to overcome these obstacles.

Current positioning tools

Digital media such as *websites*, *blogs*, and social networks like *Facebook* and *Instagram* have not only had a major impact on the development of social relationships since their emergence, but have also had a strong influence at the commercial level, especially with regard to the level of interaction between companies and their customers, as well as the way in which products and services are promoted.^(3,15)

A *website* is defined as an information or communication structure that has different specific elements within tabs that are linked together to create a space that meets a need within a specific market seeking information about a product or service they wish to purchase, linking information and/or communication processes both internally and externally, which makes it possible to study the behavior of the page in order to identify trends among users. Additionally, today it has become one of the most widely used tools by companies in the tourism sector to market their products and/or services.⁽¹¹⁾

These sites are designed to win over consumers, obtain their feedback, and complement other sales channels, rather than to sell the company's products directly. They generally offer a wide variety of information and other features in an effort to answer customer questions, establish closer relationships with them, and

generate enthusiasm for the company or brand.⁽¹⁶⁾

The authors consider websites to be fundamental tools for tourism marketing and consumer interaction. However, this view may be limited, since if the user has no prior knowledge of the destination or service, they are unlikely to actively search for the website. Therefore, although they are useful for reservations and specific inquiries, they do not always represent the most decisive channel in the initial customer acquisition process.

Search engine *marketing* consists mainly of two parts: organic or natural *web* positioning (SEO) and search engine promotion consisting of pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns or sponsored links. The latter is generally referred to as *Search Engine Marketing* (SEM). Both have specific functions and objectives, so it is important to understand them well and apply the one that best suits your needs or, where appropriate, a combination of both.⁽⁹⁾

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) positioning strategy. This is the set of activities carried out on a website to obtain positive results, analyze search factors, increase *online* visibility, and attract new customers, with the aim of growing tourism companies and increasing their revenue.⁽¹⁾

Generally, when users begin searching on search engines, they ignore links that are not visible within the first three pages.⁽¹⁷⁾

Therefore, when implementing an SEO strategy, it is important to have a well-designed platform with appropriate parameters to provide better information to customers. This is a long-term strategy, so it is recommended to start implementing it from the moment the company is launched.⁽¹³⁾

On the other hand, there is a technique similar to SEO called *Search Engine Marketing* (SEM), which is based on placing paid ads in search results through advertising platforms such as *Google Ads*, *YouTube Ads*, *Facebook Ads*, *Instagram Ads*, *Tik Tok Ads*, *LinkedIn Ads*, and *Twitter/X Ads*. In this case, the ads reach them directly based on different parameters that are generated by their online activities. It is best to combine SEM with SEO to achieve greater access.⁽³⁾ The authors believe that SEO is key to online tourism growth and recommend combining it with SEM for greater reach. However, without a recognized brand or attractive content, these strategies do not guarantee immediate results.

To use these two strategies effectively, it is vital to use keywords in the title, meta description, and content of the page.⁽¹¹⁾

Every day, millions of interactions take place around the world through social networks such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, *YouTube*, among others. We are therefore facing a particular phenomenon that is having a special impact on relations between companies and consumers. This has given rise to a new area that focuses on promoting brands, creating preference, and increasing sales using marketing channels in cyberspace, particularly social media.⁽⁹⁾

Currently, social networks are strategic allies for human beings, but especially for organizations, considering that they involve the use of various tools for brand building and increasing visibility on platforms. The structure and use of social media in tourism organizations should be identified as a valuable and intangible asset for achieving the proposed objectives. Likewise, in the execution of this type of strategy, it is pertinent to diagnose the social media currently in use and determine the positive impacts of being present on the different platforms mentioned above.⁽¹⁾

Facebook is considered the digital platform that allows for the most promotions, through the use of integrated audiovisual

devices. Users of this social network do not usually interact with companies unless they obtain some kind of benefit in return. On *Twitter/X*, it is more difficult to generate promotional messages, as users value information related to their environment more highly; however, it is useful for finding out what customers think about a brand. *LinkedIn* is not intended to generate advertising, but it is useful for expanding your network of professional contacts. *YouTube* is the realm of viral promotions, where companies can upload videos with the intention of going viral and thus spreading the brand's message more quickly. *Instagram*, on the other hand, is ideal for quick visual promotions, as users respond well to images and short videos with an attractive style.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The authors believe that Instagram currently stands out as the most suitable platform for this task, thanks to its visual focus, high level of interaction, and reach among audiences interested in travel experiences.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity that social media offers businesses is that, regardless of their target market, location, or nature, these digital media are one of the most economical methods of generating publicity and connecting with consumers.

⁽³⁾

Del Aguila Llaque MG et al.⁽¹³⁾ found that when it comes to the social network or medium that tourists prefer to use to search for information, most prioritize Google. Likewise, a large proportion have a greater inclination towards Instagram, followed by Facebook. The authors emphasize that the use of tools such as SEO, SEM, and social media is an essential component, even the pinnacle, of an effective digital marketing strategy in the tourism sector. This statement applies to both hotels and other tourism-related activities, underscoring the importance of these techniques for improving visibility, attracting potential customers, and strengthening the digital presence of businesses.

In this sense, the digital *marketing* strategy related to the structuring of social media requires dedication and time on the part of designated officials, who must have the necessary training and knowledge to fulfill the purpose of this type of strategy and achieve competitive advantages over other companies.⁽¹⁾

Another tool is *email marketing*, defined as the mass sending of *emails* designed to send promotions to entice new customers to purchase the products or services offered. In addition, *email marketing* also acts as a means to encourage customer loyalty and improve customer relationships.⁽⁴⁾

The purpose of these *emails* can vary, such as providing promotional information or introducing new products or brands. Email has proven to be an effective *marketing* tool in recent years. As digital transformation accelerates and the number of messages we receive during the day increases, email is often the medium most likely to capture the consumer's attention.⁽⁹⁾

Simply sending an *email* to someone to promote a product or service can be considered *email marketing*, but *email marketing* is generally associated with the use of electronic newsletters or *e-newsletters*, sending *emails* to customers in order to maintain contact with them.⁽¹⁶⁾

Through *email marketing*, a company can communicate with people who want to hear from them, which means there is a greater likelihood that they will read their *emails* and therefore take the next step towards a possible purchase.⁽¹⁶⁾

The authors believe that digital tourism marketing is based on key tools such as websites, SEO, SEM, social media, and *email marketing*. These strategies improve visibility, strengthen customer relationships, and increase marketing opportunities.

Together, they represent a comprehensive system that, when executed well, contributes significantly to the competitive positioning of companies in the sector.

Among the main limitations of this study are its bibliographic review nature, the fact that only articles in English and Spanish were reviewed, and that priority was given to those published in the last 5 years. As a future projection, it is suggested that experimental studies be carried out to evaluate the application of these digital marketing tools in different tourism sectors in order to determine their impact.

CONCLUSIONS

Digital marketing strategies are essential for the tourism sector, as they increase visibility and improve customer interaction. The combined and strategic use of tools such as websites, SEO, SEM, social media, and email marketing allows you to effectively reach your target audience, strengthening promotion, recognition, and competitiveness in the market. In this way, digital marketing establishes itself as a key tool for enhancing positioning in the tourism and hotel sector.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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