

Analyzation of Digital Marketing on Hotel Performance in Malaysia

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Abstract

Technology and innovation are pivotal in advancing the tourism sector and shaping tourist activities in Malaysia. In response to challenges such as social distancing and safety regulations following the COVID-19 pandemic, chain hotels are forced to find new ways to attract customers. Since digital tools greatly impact tourists' accommodation decisions, it's crucial for hotels to be adaptable in their digital marketing efforts. Hotels that do not leverage digital marketing are missing out on significant opportunities to grow their business and enhance their market presence. Tower Regency Hotel in Ipoh, Seri Malaysia and Syeun Hotel have seen a decrease in the number of guests checking in, which directly affects their business because they do not use digital marketing as much as other hotels that can survive over the long term, like Impiana Hotel Ipoh, MRoof Hotel, Weil Hotel and MH Hotel. Therefore, this study aims to identify the most effective digital marketing strategy to enhance hotel performance in Malaysia. Researchers use a systematic review method, taking into account potential articles published from January 2021 to May 2024 on encompassed renowned open-access journals and platforms, such as Wiley Online, Emerald, Google Scholar, Taylors and Francis Online, Elsevier and Springer Link, along with other relevant online articles retrieved via Google search. Variations in the terms used in this research include digital marketing strategies, service quality and hotel performance. Results indicate that the most impacted digital marketing strategies and services on hotel performance are user-friendly websites and apps, mobile check-in/check-out, digital keys and 24/7 customer service. Future research should improve studies on the benefits of digital marketing strategies on customer satisfaction and service quality.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; Quality Services; Hotel Performance; Digital Tools

Introduction

Malaysia, marked as one of the top global tourist destinations, features various destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, Penang and Terengganu, all of which play a vital role in sustaining the nation's economy and international reputation (Othman & Rosli, 2023). The advanced technology and innovation driving Malaysia's digital economy significantly enhance the competitiveness of its hospitality industry globally. Technology and innovation serve as key drivers propelling the tourism sector, with Kuala Lumpur emerging as a central hub for this dynamic tourist activity (Liu, 2023).

Despite facing challenging like social distancing and safety regulations, chain hotels are forced to find new ways to attract customers. Technological advancements, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, have pushed them to come up with innovative solutions (Chin et al., 2018). This shows how businesses in the travel industry adapt to changing circumstances. However, the pandemic has been tough for many sectors, including hospitality, leading hotels to rethink their promotion methods. Digital marketing has become crucial for reaching

potential guests and keeping hotels running smoothly during these difficult times (Zafik et al., 2024).

Zulkarnain et al. (2022) emphasised that hotels need to use digital marketing in today's tech-focused world. Having a solid strategy can boost bookings, improve brand reputation and enhance performance. Since digital tools and reviews greatly impact tourists' accommodation decisions, it's crucial for hotels to be adaptable in their digital marketing efforts. Digital marketing represents an evolution of traditional marketing concepts. It can be defined as achieving marketing goals through the application of the Internet and other digital technologies in a business (Kankam, 2023). This innovation enables many companies to gain a competitive edge in the market, especially in dynamic service sectors like tourism (Ong, 2022). According to Aicher et al. (2023), tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing industry sectors in Europe. The Internet has significantly expanded the opportunities and options available to consumers for travel and accommodation beyond their usual environment.

Wang et al. (2023) highlights that “the purpose of digital marketing is to use the Internet and other forms of electronic communication to communicate with the target market in the most cost-effective way and to ensure collaboration with partner organizations sharing common interests.” The tourism market is characterized by rapid change and global competition. In this context, companies must innovate to enhance services, increase perceived customer value, improve

operational efficiency and cultivate a positive corporate image. These goals can be achieved by better anticipating consumer needs and desires, strengthening customer loyalty through various applications, expanding the consumer base while minimizing excess capacity and boosting efficiency and productivity (Matiza & Slabbert, 2024).

Digital channels and media have transformed communication, allowing hotel companies to engage in direct, personalized interactions with customers at significantly lower costs by bypassing intermediaries. Recognizing these benefits, the tourism industry has integrated digital marketing alongside traditional offline marketing methods, which are still in use (Deb & Mallik, 2023). The impact of digital marketing on tourism is significant, primarily because it provides consumers with easier access to information about offers and services (Shahzady, 2023).

Phumpa et al. (2022) notes that with the growth of the Internet and the increasing number of users, people now have access to a vast amount of information online. Improved social status has influenced the desire to travel and engage in tourism. Travelers are continuously seeking the latest updates and news about tourist offerings and digital marketing has made this content more accessible and easier to find (Farid et al., 2023). The tourism industry and brands actively engage in digital marketing to provide detailed information to attract and retain customers. To gain a competitive edge in the tourism market, hotels must have a website, promote their products and services through social networks and mobile applications, use email as a communication channel with business partners and guests and leverage all available information communication technologies (Khmiadashvili, 2019).

Digital Marketing Strategy

There's no denying the surge of digital marketing in recent years, largely due to marketers aiming to connect with the millions of people who use the internet daily. Statista.com reports that in 2024, more than 1.4 billion people were logging onto the internet every day. Additionally, as outlined by digital marketing specialists at Yaguara.co, the global count of online buyers reached 2.64 billion by 2023, constituting over 33% of the world's populace.

Digital marketers incorporate various strategies within the theoretical framework of digital marketing to effectively engage the online audience (Tarabasz, 2022). These strategies encompass email marketing, direct messaging targeting mobile users, video streaming and social media announcements (Yogesh et al., 2021). According to Eichinger et al. (2022), some marketers integrate offline marketing methods into their theoretical framework of digital marketing. These methods may involve newspaper advertisements, product flyers, street-level marketing

techniques and more.

The marketing landscape has witnessed the emergence of advanced, unconventional media. The internet, search engines, mobile devices and information and communications technology (ICT) form the interconnected foundation driving shifts in markets, enhancing marketing communications and fostering brand development. ICT and digital technologies are evolving rapidly, reshaping how individuals interact and communicate. In developing economies, digital marketing is gaining momentum, enticing consumers to engage in purchasing goods and services (Sivaraman et al., 2023).

Governments are currently grappling with two critical priorities: harnessing the benefits of digital transformation and ensuring sustainable hotel policies (Lei et al., 2022). Technologies are evolving swiftly, revolutionizing the landscape for policymakers and the tourism industry (Ong, 2022). Ong (2022) added that the digital sharing economy, mobile payment systems, virtual and augmented reality applications, blockchain technology and artificial intelligence are expected to influence tourism-related products, business models, services and traveler preferences. These developments may necessitate policy revisions, new regulations and proactive measures to capitalize on opportunities and safeguard consumers. Governments play a crucial role in fostering an enabling environment for all enterprises to participate in the digital transformation of hotel industry (Liu, 2023).

Hotel Performances

Performance generally refers to the level of achievement attained by individuals or organizations (Sobaih et al., 2021). Organizational performance, however, refers to the specific business outcomes established by the organization itself (Shin et al., 2021). Aharon et al. (2021) have highlighted that organizational performance is influenced by resources such as human resources, technology infrastructure and organizational capabilities. Moreover, Lui et al. (2018) have affirmed that strategic orientations such as market orientation and technology orientation significantly contribute to company performance. Salim and Rajput (2021) have underscored that organizational performance is bolstered by business strategies, knowledge-sharing capabilities, entrepreneurial skills, innovation and market orientation.

In the tourism and hospitality sector, researchers like Qodriah et al. (2021) have explored how employees influence performance. Most studies on company performance typically address two main perspectives: financial performance (Al-Sabi et al., 2023) and non-financial performance (Barney et al., 2021). However, Chen et al. (2020) have observed that many studies on performance encompass three

dimensions: financial performance, organizational effectiveness and business performance.

Phumpa et al. (2022) demonstrated that the hotel industry's business performance stemmed from systematic processes aimed at fulfilling the industry's business goals. The value derived from digital marketing, based on information systems and strategic digital marketing, was paramount. This value was also the core process for establishing perceived usefulness and entrepreneurial satisfaction in relation to the hotel's performance marketing, which encompasses marketing capability, technology and integration.

The performance of a hotel organization reflects its ability to leverage various strategic capabilities to achieve continuous growth. Profit illustrates the hotel's capacity to generate returns on investments, assets and resources. Growth highlights the expansion in terms of sales, employee skills and market share (Sharma & Singh, 2023). Together, profit and growth serve as common indicators of the company's success in achieving positive organizational performance (Zygiaris et al., 2022). The performance of the hotel organization is driven by strategic entrepreneurship and service resources, which collectively contribute to its steadily improving outcomes (Lei et al., 2022).

In today's competitive hospitality industry, digital marketing is crucial for attracting guests, increasing bookings and building brand reputation. Ahmed et al. (2022) opined that hotels that do not leverage digital marketing are missing out on significant opportunities to grow their business and enhance their market presence. A hotel that lacks a well-defined digital marketing strategy faces significant limitations in its ability to reach potential guests compared to its competitors who effectively utilize online channels for promotion (Fauziyah et al., 2023). In today's digital age, having an active and strategic online presence is crucial for any hotel aiming to thrive in a competitive market (Montoya et al., 2024). Without a comprehensive digital marketing plan, a hotel struggles to leverage key online platforms such as social media, search engines and travel review sites, which are essential tools for reaching a broad audience of potential customers (Susilo & Santos, 2023).

Garg and Kumar (2021) specified that the absence of a digital presence, the hotel's offerings are not visible to the large audience actively searching for accommodations or travel experiences online. As a result, the hotel's visibility is significantly diminished and fewer individuals are exposed to the hotel's services, amenities and special offers. This lack of exposure leads to a decrease in brand awareness, as the hotel fails to make a meaningful impact in the minds of potential guests. The diminished brand presence contributes to a reduced likelihood of the hotel being

considered as an option for travelers when they are searching for accommodations (Bhandari & Sin, 2023). Consequently, this translates into fewer bookings and a noticeable drop in overall revenue. For example, the fourth hotel to close as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak was the four-star Syeun Hotel in Ipoh. The four-star hotel is the fourth in Ipoh to close as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic's effects. The demand for hotel rooms and other services fell precipitously, which unavoidably led to a major reduction in sales turnover. It was announced that on April 30, 2020, the Tower Regency Hotel and the Kinta Riverfront Hotel and Suites would close as well (Arif, 2020).

Himki et al. (2022) stated that the hotel is missing out on targeted online advertising opportunities because it lacks a digital marketing strategy. Without using platforms like Google Ads and Facebook Ads, the hotel can't reach specific demographics, promote special deals, or drive traffic to their booking pages (Al-Hazmi, 2022). This leads to ineffective ad campaigns and misses chances to attract new customers, resulting in lower occupancy rates and reduced revenue. Overall, the hotel's absence of a digital marketing strategy puts it at a significant disadvantage compared to competitors who use digital channels to enhance their market reach, boost brand visibility and increase bookings (Rahmat et al, 2023).

The contributions of digital marketing and potentially transforms businesses and processes, in general, have been widely discussed in the literature (Hat et al., 2024). In contrast, there is limited research addressing how digital marketing impacts specific business functions and its resulting implications for hotel performance. For example, findings from Ong (2022) study mentioned that the digital sharing economy, mobile payment systems, virtual and augmented reality applications, block chain technology and artificial intelligence will influence tourism

industry but not directly impact the hotel performance. Therefore, this study is to explore and to find the most impacted digital marketing strategies, within the hotel sector as a subsection of tourism industry.

Method

This study utilized a systematic review approach, concentrating on potential articles published between January 2021 and May 2024. Electronic data gathering was encompassed renowned open-access journals and platforms, such as Wiley Online, Emerald, Google Scholar, Taylors and Francis Online, Elsevier and Springer Link, along with other relevant online articles retrieved via Google search. The search terms on digital marketing strategies on hotel performance included user-friendly websites, mobile check-in/check-out, digital keys and 24/7 customer service, selected to align with the research focus (Dimitrios et al., 2023).

Following the initial screening based on titles and abstracts, thirteen (13) studies met the predefined criteria and were further evaluated by reviewing their full texts (Pelsmacker et al, 2018). The central research question guiding this study was, "How does the use of digital marketing media enhance hotel performance?" The primary aim was to identify critical insights in this area. The findings from this research contribute to a deeper comprehension of the significant factors influencing hotel performance.

Finally, data extraction from each reviewed article included the publication date, authors, study types, institutions, methodologies employed and findings related to the effects of digital marketing on hotel performance (Khmiadashvili, 2019). The articles meeting the study's criteria are detailed in Table 1 below. Thirteen (13) studies were selected for this paper: 5 qualitative (interview and observation) and 8 quantitative (survey and content analysis).

Table 1-Study Analysis

Author, Year, Country, Title and Methodology	Findings
Author: Tay et al., 2024 Country: Malaysia Title: Exploring the Views of Malaysian Hoteliers About Survival During The COVID-19 Pandemic. Method: Quantitative survey	Hotels are inclined to prioritize digital marketing in the initial phases of a crisis to reduce printing costs, staffing by hourly working rate and cost on traditional marketing. By conserving marketing budgets, hotels can then enhance their marketing efforts during the post-pandemic recovery stages.
Author: Yee et al., 2024 Country: Malaysia Title: The Effectiveness of Marketing Tools Usage in Promoting Malaysia Tourism Product Towards Young Adults. Method: Quantitative survey	The most effective marketing tool for promoting tourism products in Malaysia is digital marketing. With technological advancements, many young people now use online platforms such as social media to browse products and prefer the convenience of accessing information online rather than visiting physical stores. Digital marketing allows consumers to gather information about products and services they are interested in and provides companies with

	the opportunity to receive feedback and enhance customer relationships.
Author: Dzia-Uddin et al., 2023 Country: Malaysia Title: A Review Paper on Technological Innovation of Hotel Industry in Post-Pandemic. Method: A qualitative case study	This study underscored the significance of integrating digital marketing into the hotel industry. Hotels had actively embraced technological innovations that emphasize enhanced hygiene standards and contactless services. As a result, guest interactions are increasingly shifting towards contactless automation, mobile technology, robotics, artificial intelligence and virtual and augmented reality.
Author: Lebbe et al., 2023 Country: Malaysia Title: The Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Purchase Intention of University Students Towards Brands in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Method: Quantitative survey	This study emphasizes the crucial roles of electronic word-of-mouth and social media marketing in influencing purchase choices. It is suggested that companies proactively monitor online reviews and actively interact with customers on social media platforms to foster favourable attitudes and successfully impact consumer purchasing decisions.
Author: Naz et al., 2023 Country: Pakistan and Malaysia Title: Augmenting hotel performance in Malaysia through big data analytics capability and artificial intelligence capability. Method: Quantitative survey	The IT revolution heightens global competition, reshaping the strategic landscape of tourism firms from mere profitability to sustainable competitive advantage. This transformation necessitates managers to increase investments in digital marketing to enhance capabilities for deploying technological tools on hotel performance which moderated dynamically within Malaysia's hotel industry.
Author: Rahmat et al, 2023 Country: Malaysia Title: The Effect of Customer Engagement in Social Media and Purchase Intention in the Malaysia Hotel Industry. Method: Quantitative survey	Digital communication technologies have become deeply embedded in daily life including the hoteliers. Hoteliers had strategies in improving their social media marketing and able to attract and encourage more visitors.
Author: Sivaraman et al., 2023 Country: Malaysia Title: A study on the Factors that Impact the Future Trends of Marketing: Evidence from the Hospitality Industry in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Method: Quantitative survey	The research focusing on hotel digital marketing technology involved interviews with hotel managers and technology executives, revealing that data analytics, business intelligence, mobile technology, software applications and guest technology will significantly influence the industry in the foreseeable future. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital marketing in hospitality, making it a global trend practiced widely and effectively.
Author: Nair et al., 2022 Country: India and Malaysia Title: Marketing Strategies Implemented by Hotel Industry during COVID-19 in Malaysia. Method: Quantitative survey	This paper focuses on the digital marketing strategies implemented by the hotel industry during the Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research findings identified new strategies that include: 1) Displaying information on websites (hygiene and SOPs). 2) Connecting with customers using social media.

Author: Rakesh & Ying, 2022 Country: Malaysia Title: The Impact of Viral Marketing in the Tourism Industry in Malaysia Post Covid-19 Pandemic. Method: A qualitative case study	The Internet has revolutionized marketing strategies within the hotel industry that offerings new options. Among these, viral marketing stands out as an exceptional resource, capitalizing on the Internet's vast capabilities. It harnesses the power of digital connectivity to extend reach, enhance accessibility and amplify exposure in ways that traditional offline marketing methods simply cannot achieve.
Author: Razli et al., 2022 Country: Malaysia Title: An Ethnography Examination of Tripadvisor Reviews: A Case Study of The St Regis Hotel Kuala Lumpur. Method: A qualitative case study	This study highlights the significance of online hotel reviews as a crucial channel for gathering customer feedback from a managerial standpoint. By systematically examining and monitoring the attributes highlighted in online customer reviews, hotels can effectively capture the voice of each guest. This approach allows hotels to gain a comprehensive understanding of customer perspectives and pinpoint key attributes that contribute to both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Neglecting to solicit input from guests could adversely impact hotels.
Author: Ahmad & Scott, 2021 Country: Malaysia Title: Social media marketing influence on Boutique Hotel customers' purchase intention in Malaysia. Method: A qualitative case study	The primary reason for adopting information technology was to boost productivity and efficiency. Factors such as a hotel's customer demographics, organizational needs and available technology on budgeting has significantly influenced the success of technological innovations. Implementing a digital strategy has directly enhanced the hotel's revenue.
Author: Garg & Kumar, 2021 Country: Malaysia Title: Social media marketing influence on Boutique Hotel customers' purchase intention in Malaysia. Method: Quantitative survey	Based on the research results, digital marketing platform had influences consumer purchase intentions in Malaysian boutique hotels by mediating variables such as perceived usefulness and perceived trust. Overall, consumer perceptions play a crucial role in shaping their purchase intentions.
Author: Muhamad Nor et al., 2021 Country: Malaysia Title: Knowledge Management Capabilities and Hotel Performance in Malaysia: The Role of Market Orientation. Method: Quantitative survey	Based on the findings, the presence of advanced technologies and organizational infrastructure in hotels is crucial for guest satisfaction. Guests prioritize receiving adequate service and knowledge of the digital platform. Besides that, knowledge on infrastructure is required to regularly updated. This approach enables management and staff to effectively deliver services and enhance hotel performance.

Discussion

Results shows that the most significant digital marketing strategies and services affecting hotel performance include user-friendly websites and apps, mobile check-in/check-out options, digital keys and round-the-clock customer support. For successful digital transformation in the hospitality sector, it is essential to align technology with the customer journey to ensure a seamless and consistent experience across all interactions with the hotel brand. Digital technology is revolutionizing the hospitality industry by reshaping the entire ecosystem. Hotel digital transformation involves integrating and leveraging digital tools and technologies to enhance guest experiences, streamline operational efficiency and refine business processes. The adoption of digital technologies has enhanced

organizational and management practices, leading to increased labour productivity and cost-effectiveness. This digital transformation has enabled hotels to utilize smart technologies and analyse data to improve guest experiences and meet their expectations.

The trend towards digitalization has been progressing for a while, but the pandemic has significantly accelerated this change for many hoteliers. The recent McKinsey (2023) study indicates that the COVID-19 crisis has advanced the global digitalization of customer interactions, supply-chain management and internal operations by three to four years. The hotel industry must adapt its strategies and practices to keep up with changing consumer demands and maintain profitability.

Moreover, this review provides valuable insights for scholars and academicians, serving as a foundation for future research. It recommends exploring specific technological innovations to enhance guest experiences and operational efficiency in hotels. Additionally, examining long-term effects, performing comparative studies across different regions and analysing guest perceptions will help build a thorough understanding of technological innovation in the hotel industry. The study overall suggests that the hotel industry, including in Malaysia, should embrace sustainable marketing practices, especially by utilizing social media. The research reveals a significant link between customer engagement on hotel social media platforms and their purchasing intentions, emphasizing the rising importance of effective social media marketing strategies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this review paper underscores the importance of technological innovation in the hotel industry post-pandemic. The research highlights how COVID-19 has significantly impacted hospitality, necessitating the adoption of technology for future success. Traditionally, luxury hotels valued personal interactions, but the pandemic has disrupted this norm, prompted a re-evaluation and emphasized the integration of technological advancements. Moving forward, hotels must adopt innovations that focus on hygiene and contactless services in order to remain competitive and regain consumer trust. Embracing these advancements will be essential for meeting the evolving expectations of guests in a post-pandemic world. By prioritizing cleanliness and minimizing physical interactions, hotels can ensure a safer environment, enhance the guest experience and foster loyalty. This strategic movement not only addresses current health concerns but also positions hotels to better compete in an industry that increasingly values safety and convenience.

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