

12. TOURISM AND DIGITAL MARKETING

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on how digital marketing has impacted the tourism industry, and how it will continue to evolve alongside mobile and personal technologies. It introduces a new traveler consumer journey based on digital touchpoints for consumers and the apropos digital marketing channels at each stage. The market segments that are specific to the travel and tourism industry are identified and the recommendation for niche marketing is recommended for best success based on various destination characteristics and desired audiences. Last, the future of digital marketing in tourism is addressed, with immersive realities as both a new type of destination product as well as a significant marketing channel of the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of communication has brought about a shift in marketing from a production-focused approach to one that prioritizes building relationships. This shift has been fuelled by technological advancements such as the Internet, information and communication technology (ICT) tools, and the Web revolution, which have enabled the digital marketing of products and services in the hospitality and tourism sectors (Kumar, 2021). With the tourism industry being information-intensive, consumers are now active co-creators of digital content across various media platforms. This has led to a shift in power from service providers to consumers, who can attract and influence others through shared experiences on digital platforms.

To reach these consumers, firms in the hospitality and tourism industries are adopting a digital marketing mix that includes strategies such as social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, influencer marketing, and affiliate marketing. These channels enable organizations to target and position their products and services in the highly segmented niche markets that exist within tourism (Sert, 2017).

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Lagiewski & Kesgin (2017) define digital marketing within tourism as the use of digital technologies such as the internet, mobile devices, and global positioning systems as key instruments in marketing visitor attractions. Digital marketing is crucial in the tourism and hospitality industry because it enables companies to reach and engage with customers in a cost-effective and personalized way (Huang et al., 2018). Digital marketing enables tourism and hospitality companies to leverage various digital channels, including social media, search engines, email, and mobile devices, to create targeted and measurable marketing campaigns.

In tourism, the ultimate goal for digital marketers is to provide information to potential tourists, allowing them to have a vicarious experience of the destination or attraction. This means that marketers aim for potential tourists to imagine themselves enjoying the destinations. Marketing in tourism can be difficult because of the *intangible* nature of the product. In the past, tourism had to rely on travel agencies and traditional print as marketing channels.

2. DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES IN TOURISM: WHAT AND WHY?

Digital marketing strategies refer to the various tactics and techniques that businesses employ to promote their products or services through digital channels such as the Internet, social media, search engines, mobile devices, and other digital technologies. Digital marketing strategies typically involve a combination of tactics, such as search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, social media marketing, email marketing, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and other forms of digital advertising. SEO involves optimizing a website to rank higher on search engine results pages (SERPs), while social media marketing involves using social media platforms to promote products and services. Content marketing involves creating and sharing valuable content such as blog posts, videos, and infographics to attract and engage customers, while email marketing involves sending targeted emails to customers to promote products and services which has proven to be an effective strategy with a high return on investment. Finally, online advertising involves placing ads on websites and social media platforms to reach a wider audience. Digital marketing is increasingly seen as more effective than traditional marketing, successfully allowing businesses to engage with their target audience, build brand awareness, drive website traffic, and achieve their marketing goals (Bala et al., 2018).

To use digital marketing effectively in the tourism industry, organizations must have a clear digital marketing strategy that aligns with their business goals and objectives. They should identify their target audience, create compelling content, optimize their website for search engines, and use social media to engage with customers. Organizations should also measure the effectiveness of their digital marketing campaigns regularly and use the data collected to optimize their strategies continuously. Organizations can use this information to tailor their products and services to meet customer expectations, ultimately leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty, and digital marketing allows organizations to collect and analyze customer data, which can help them to understand customer needs and preferences better.

Using digital marketing effectively can increase their brand awareness, enhance customer experience, and improve their competitive advantage. Tourism industries have realized the importance of delivering exceptional digital customer experiences to attract and retain customers in the competitive market. Digital marketing strategies have revolutionized the way tourism industries not only interact with their customers and improve customer

engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty (Sigala, 2020), but also reduce costs, and increase revenue (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

3. LEISURE TRAVEL MARKET SEGMENTS AND NICHE MARKETING

Segmenting the leisure travel markets is unique because of the highly diverse range of product offerings. This includes varied destinations from megacities like Tokyo all the way to extremely rural homestays in places like Peru or Papua New Guinea, along with a range of activities that can be done in every destination from gastronomy experiences, adventure sports, agricultural tourism, and cultural tours. Indeed, tourism is one of the world's largest industries and thus, there are significant opportunities to segment markets. The overall language of tourism contains a wide number of registers, each one of them addressing a certain type of potential tourist with specific interests (Dann, 1996). The types of special interest tourism are suitable for niche marketing (Sert, 2017).

The term "niche" is borrowed from marketing segmentation, and in tourism contexts, describes consumer-motivating factors that are driven by bespoke and specific experiences (Stone, 2005). Niche tourism marketing is especially conducive to economic development and for small to medium businesses to find customers in an intensely competitive environment. Therefore, destination marketers should advertise tourism types that will meet differentiated and high-level expectations, desires, and preferences to increase their share in the tourism market. For the most effective strategy, it is advised to identify areas that can be serviced in the best way by identifying the most appropriate market segment by destination and focusing marketing budgets directly on that particular segment (Sert, 2017).

Morgan et al. (2002) described the positioning of New Zealand as a niche marketing destination with the '100% Pure New Zealand' brand campaign. This campaign was launched to address the changes in the travel market as previously, New Zealand had been focused on domestic tourism and neighboring countries as inbound visitors. As the travel market became increasingly globalized, there was a demand for a shift in New Zealand's strategy to remain competitive on the world stage. Morgan et al. outline the first step in repositioning a destination brand as establishing '*durable, reputable and communicable core values*' (p. 344). Thus, aligning with New Zealand's objective to be seen as an undiscovered and untouched land, the '100% Pure' campaign was born to target potential visitors seeking adventure and unspoiled landscapes. The success of this campaign as one of the highest-ever performing travel campaigns (Murphy, 2020) is an indicator that destinations, especially those with limited marketing budgets, can squeeze the maximum value by relying on targeted and effective niche branding strategies.

4. DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATIONS

A seminal theory utilized in the context of destination marketing is destination image. Destination image is defined as the perceived image of a destination that a potential tourist holds in their mind. This image is constructed through the tourist's cognitive (what they know) and affective (how they feel) perceptions towards the destination. In other words, the image of the destination is made up of what a tourist thinks they know about the destination, as well as how they feel about the destination. These 2 constructs then influence the cognitive component of a destination's image – the individual's actual conduct or intention to (re)visit and recommend the destination to others (Agapito et al., 2013).

Considering a destination as a product, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) are usually the bodies mostly responsible for promoting the destination and upholding its optimal or desired image. Of course, DMOs also carry the ultimate intention to promote the destination towards economic benefits (Fyall & Garrod, 2019). It would be impossible to address tourism marketing without the context of a DMO.

Segmentation in tourism marketing can exist by considering marketing efforts from the destination side, in which many DMOs are responsible for attracting visitors and ensuring their brand is kept consistent. Corak and Zivoder (2017) point out that DMOs are also responsible not only for promoting a shared vision for a destination but also champions of digital conversion.

Digital tools can help to enhance DMOs' marketing efforts in these areas and to reduce marketing costs (Angeloni & Rossi, 2020; Magano & Cunha, 2020). The content available on DMO websites has improved in recent years and can therefore provide a useful and efficient experience for travel consumers when visiting DMO websites. This is not always applicable to every DMO, but the trend is increasing with the democratization of technology (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005). Notably, Morrison (2013) suggests that it can be difficult for DMOs to have direct control over the tourism product in their destination, and additionally, there can be a danger that tourism product stakeholders might launch their own marketing strategy that is inconsistent with the DMOs. Introducing easily accessible, straightforward, and inexpensive technological tools will facilitate business collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders which will eventually result in a more personalized experience on the visitor's side (Abidin et al., 2019).

5. THE TRAVELER CONSUMER JOURNEY

The consumer journey has always been prominent in travel and tourism. The traveler consumer journey, or consumer decision journey is defined as the dynamic customer experience with an organization over time through various touchpoints (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Generally, the consumer has three main phases - pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase; with the purchase and post-purchase phases then informing the pre-purchase phase in an ongoing cyclical process. In more specific detail, the traveler consumer journey can be broken down into four stages - consideration or inspiration; evaluation or information; booking; and experience & recommendation (Court et al., 2009; Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). As discussed through this chapter, Figure 1 illustrates the importance and prevalence of digital innovations across the traveler consumer journey.

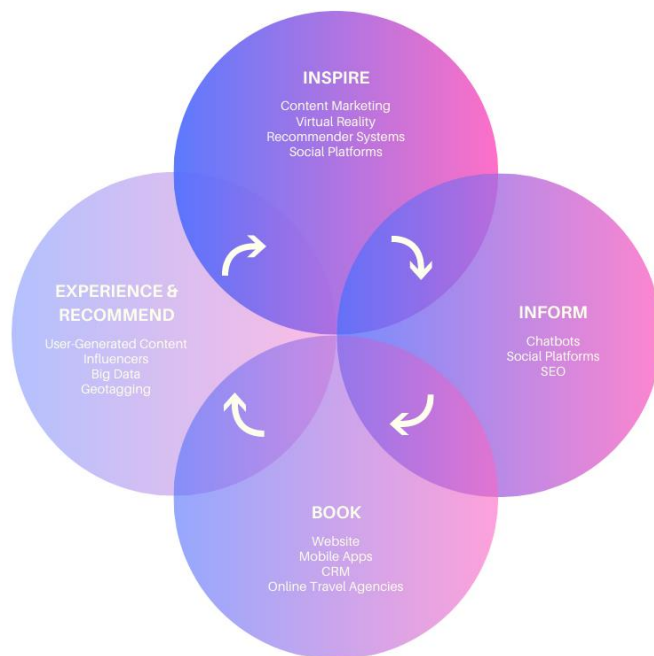


Figure 1. Digital touchpoints across the traveler consumer journey.

5.1. INSPIRE

The inspiration phase of the traveler consumer journey includes how travelers become *aware* of the travel destinations that they wish to visit. Technology has had a profound effect on this part of the process as in the past, most travel destinations were either widely circulated in the media or were shared among family and friends via word-of-mouth (McCabe & Stokoe, 2010). However, now with the advent and standardization of digital and social media, there is an exorbitant amount more information available to *inspire* the future travels of those connected with the traveler, before their search begins for more specific information to book.

5.2. INFORM

In the inform or evaluation stage, to decide on the final decision what to purchase, consumers add and subtract brands from a group of favorites under consideration. In this stage, consumers start to search for information, evaluating alternatives based on the information that they can obtain about the destination, attraction, or hotel (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). The perceived image of destinations or attractions continues to be formed in this stage, often now through the use of social platforms (i.e., reviews and vlogs), search engines, and increasingly chatbots.

5.3. BOOK

Once a trip is booked, many companies and organizations will now have access to the preliminary itineraries of many travelers. This presents a ripe opportunity to push notifications through various platforms like transactional emails or mobile applications to target specific activities onsite like tours or museums or “upselling” opportunities like accommodation or flight upgrades. The consumer journey for tourism is unique in this way.

5.4. EXPERIENCE & RECOMMEND

Once the travel experience has begun, modern travelers immediately will want to share their experience in real-time (Wang et al., 2016). Sharing is also a part of the post-trip experience (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). Travelers will also want to post reviews through User Generated Content (UGC) applications like Yelp and Tripadvisor to either recommend or (more often) give a bad review to a hospitality or tourism business that they utilized while on their trip (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). It has been cited that most tourists will rely on UGC to plan their travel itineraries, which then starts the traveler consumer journey again.

6. DELIVERING DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Effective digital customer experiences are crucial for companies seeking to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft (2010) define delivering digital customer experiences as providing customers with personalized, relevant, and timely information across all digital channels. To achieve this, companies must first understand their customers' needs, preferences, and behaviors by collecting and analyzing data from various digital channels, such as social media, websites, and mobile apps. Additionally, companies must ensure that their digital channels are user-friendly, accessible, and responsive, by designing websites and mobile apps that are easy to navigate and optimized for different devices and screen sizes (Manco, 2022). Finally, companies must provide customers with consistent and seamless experiences across all digital channels by integrating data and processes to ensure that customers receive the same level of service and support, regardless of the channel they use.

A number of studies have explored the impact of digital marketing strategy on delivering digital customer experiences. De Keyser, Lemon, and Klaus (2015) argue that companies that adopt a data-driven approach to digital marketing are more likely to deliver personalized and relevant digital customer experiences. They suggest that collecting and analyzing customer data from various digital channels can enable companies to create a more complete view of their customers, allowing them to deliver more targeted and effective digital marketing campaigns. Similarly, Ailawadi, Lehmann, and Neslin (2015) found that companies that prioritize customer needs and preferences in their digital marketing strategies are more likely to deliver experiences that meet or exceed customer expectations. In the context of the tourism and hospitality industry, digital marketing has become increasingly important for businesses to enhance their brand, increase customer engagement, and drive revenue growth. As technology continues to advance, the use of digital marketing in this industry is expected to continue to grow, providing new business models and opportunities for companies in the sector.

6.1. DIGITAL MARKETING TOOLS AND STRATEGIES IN TOURISM

Digital marketing is an essential part of modern-day business, with companies increasingly using digital channels to reach wider audiences and improve their brand image. The meaning of "digital marketing" has evolved from referring solely to the promotion of goods and services through digital channels to encompassing the broader

process of utilizing digital technologies to attract and engage customers, enhance brand awareness, maintain customer loyalty, and boost sales (Kannan & Li, 2017).

Essentially, digital tourism marketers strive to disseminate rich information (cognitive) as well as content that evokes strong positive feelings (affective) from potential tourists towards their destinations or attractions. Innovations in technology, as well as a growing understanding of shifting cultural landscapes, have theoretically allowed destination marketers to expand the digital marketing process with tourism 4.0 techniques that would otherwise not be possible with traditional marketing approaches.

With the rising numbers of outgoing visitors in emerging regions like the MENA region, and East and Southeast Asia (Dodds & Butler, 2020), the ability for travel and tourism providers to be able to reach diverse audiences is crucial. Therefore, utilizing digital marketing methods creates greater access to notably hard-to-reach consumers in terms of finding, scrutinizing, and choosing the relevant content for decisive behavior (Mathew & Soliman, 2021).

Two main technologies have changed the scope of digital marketing in tourism: smartphones and social networking sites (SNSs). It is through these channels that users are now able to create their own travel content (images, videos, stories, recommendations, etc.) and upload it directly online to be shared as far-reaching as desired - instantly.

Social networking sites like Instagram, Facebook, WeChat, and TikTok have also had an immense impact on digital marketing in tourism. Social networking sites (SNSs) create innovative opportunities for marketers hoping to reach new and relevant audiences. Within travel and tourism, SNSs have become a source of inspiration, envy, electronic word-of-mouth, and social support (Boley et al., 2018; Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013; Hajli et al., 2017; Hudson & Thal, 2013).

6.2. BLOGGING/STORYTELLING

Digital age storytelling and blogging have become popular marketing tools and have significant implications for the tourism industry in the digital age. These tools enable tourism organizations to create engaging and personalized content that resonates with their tourists.

The use of digital technology has transformed the way tourists consume and share travel stories (Bassano et al., 2019). Tourists are looking for personalized and authentic experiences that they can relate to. Digital age storytelling enables tourism organizations to create content using various digital channels such as social media, websites, and mobile apps to tell stories that capture the essence of a destination and create emotional connections with their audience. By using immersive and interactive storytelling techniques, tourism organizations can transport their audience to the destination and create a desire to visit (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Blogging is also an effective way to increase search engine visibility and drive traffic to a tourism organization's website (Buhalis & Law, 2008). By creating relevant and high-quality content, tourism organizations can not only improve their search engine rankings and increase their visibility to potential tourists but also establish themselves as thought leaders and build brand credibility, increasing brand awareness and loyalty among tourists (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008).

Digital age storytelling and blogging can be used to enhance the overall customer experience and improve tourists' satisfaction with a destination and their intention to revisit (Xiang et al., 2010). Tourism organizations can foster customer loyalty and enrich the customer experience by offering helpful insights and insider tips. By effectively utilizing digital-age storytelling and blogging, tourism organizations can also engage with their target audience and drive tourism growth. It is important to not only consider the promotional message, but also the delivery of the message. *Storytelling* has been a successful method of connecting with audiences that may result in potential visitors. Through storytelling, people can be encouraged to tell their own stories and experiences. Across the centuries, people have always told each other stories about the places they are from, the places they live in, and the places they have visited (Bassano et al., 2019).

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6.3. TRAVEL INFLUENCERS

Although the influencer industry began in fashion marketing, it has become essential in many diverse industries including travel and tourism. Online influencers usually define themselves by a certain niche and differ from what is known as 'traditional celebrities' because they have created a somewhat organic following by posting content online or through their social networks. Research has shown that many users find influencers to be more relatable and trustworthy than traditional celebrities (Jin et al., 2018); therefore, acquiring their footprint in travel and tourism marketing is highly coveted.

Many destinations have chosen to capitalize on the trend and work with influencers or travel bloggers to promote their destinations. Indeed, travel influencers have been found to form a critical part of destination branding strategy (Glover, 2009). The online personalities will usually promote certain niche aspects of the destination that are cohesive with the influencers' personal brand image. Hence, it is important that destinations and DMOs choose to work with influencers whose personal brand characteristics align with that of the destination itself. Additionally considered when choosing with whom to work will include the number of followers, types of created content, communication style, and reliability (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014).

Influencers will share content with their following or online audiences across several platforms including both social networks like Instagram, TikTok, or WeChat, and their personal blog or website. Working with influencers can be a unique opportunity to appear on multiple channels to an otherwise hard-to-reach audience (Khamis et al., 2017).

There are several studied cases where influencers significantly helped to diversify the marketing of travel destinations. Femenia-Serra and Gretzel (2020) describe the use of influencers to "rebrand" the well-known party destination of Benidorm, Spain, to reflect a more sustainable and natural image. Their study demonstrates that influencer marketing can provide destinations with an opportunity to gain back control over their branding and promotion while taking advantage of the power of eWOM. The study also emphasizes the careful selection of appropriate influencers that reflect the destination's strategic vision and planning.

Chatzigeorgiou (2020) studied how influencers helped to promote more rural destinations to tourists visiting Greece. This was especially beneficial to the economies in these more rural areas as they are shifting away from agriculture to more diversified economies (Sigala, 2017). Furthermore, the factors that contribute to the success of social media marketing in travel and tourism are its flexibility and transience. The ability for influencers to create publishable content from virtually anywhere allows for the promotion of rural and overlooked places within

a destination. In this way, social media has been credited with helping to alleviate scenarios of overtourism by redistributing crowds (Gretzel, 2019).

6.4. USER GENERATED CONTENT

User-generated content (UGC) is described as creative content that is published on publicly accessible websites and is created without a direct link to monetary profit or commercial interest (Soylemez, 2021). UGC websites can vary from virtual communities (Lonely Planet), consumer reviews (Yelp), microblogging platforms (Tumblr), as well as social networks (Facebook), media sharing tools (YouTube), and wikis (Wikitravel; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). UGC is also widely used by consumers of hospitality and tourism services as a source for making decisions (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). This type of content, in a marketing context, can be used for the delivery of promotional materials, reaching new customers, information distribution, as well as inviting customer engagement, rather than for publishing user-relevant material and responding to comments of current and potential customers (Leung et al., 2013). Online consumer accounts are perceived as more likely to contain up-to-date, informative, and reliable information that is rich in detail and highly relevant (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008).

Recommendation systems are especially useful in tourism contexts. Because of the more recent global distribution of mobile devices, content can be created from virtually anywhere, and furthermore even as the experience is unfolding (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015).

6.5. GEOTAGGING

One of the aspects of social media promotion that is especially salient in promoting destinations is the act of “geotagging”. A geotag is an electronic tag that assigns a geographic location to a photograph or video posted to social media. This allows a very specific pinpointing of exact locations where the same experiences can be sought out by viewers. When considering that the experience is the product for consumption within travel and tourism contexts, it is significant when a potential consumer can be directed to an exact location wherein that same experience can be obtained and is available directly online where the inspiration to visit and take part in that experience happens. Siegel et al. (2022) refer to the “circle of self-presentation” that describes the circular nature of social media users who see travel images or videos circulating on social media and then travel to the same places as they’ve seen online to photograph themselves for their own eventual posts to social media. The geotag is a key element within this cycle.

6.6. PERSONALIZATION

A crucial aspect of digital marketing is the use of digital marketing strategies to create effective digital customer experiences that can improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Today consumers with an individualistic approach will demand individualized products and services because of intending to differentiate themselves (Sert, 2017). Digital marketing differs from traditional marketing in its speed of communication and offers a wider variety of communication channels, insights into consumer preferences, and the ability to receive feedback and track market patterns. Digital marketing is more interactive, engaging, and conversational than traditional marketing, empowering both consumers and marketers. Personalization is a significant advantage of digital marketing, allowing for faster and more cost-effective customization of personal communications. The shift from mass communication to personalized communication has enabled marketers to segment, target, and position their products in specific niche markets. Web 2.0 offers read-write-and-publish features on digital media, allowing for

the creation of relationships, and replacing push strategies and mass marketing with pull strategies and individual targeting. Consumers are now active participants on digital media platforms, creating content and collaborating rather than just being passive consumers.

With digital marketing, businesses can tailor their messaging and content to the specific needs and preferences of their target audience. This level of personalization helps businesses build stronger relationships with customers, which is crucial in the tourism and hospitality industry.

6.7. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND BIG DATA

Driving toward personalization, user-generated content, recommendations, content marketing, and consumer behavior on digital platforms has resulted in the increasing importance of big data and artificial intelligence (AI). AI is defined by IBM (n.d.) as a field that encompasses machine learning and deep learning, leveraging computers and robust datasets, to enable problem-solving and decision-making capabilities like the human mind. AI and machine learning, forecasted to grow to 1.5 trillion USD by 2030 (Statista, 2022), are leveraged to analyze big data sources like social networking services, to then predict and recommend context-appropriate content or relevant information dynamically (del Carmen Rodríguez-Hernández & Ilarri, 2021). Its use in digital tourism marketing is no different. M Live by Marriott International (Marriott International News Center, 2016) tracks conversations, trends, global performance, marketing campaigns, and brand reputation across social platforms in real-time, identifying opportunities for Marriott to engage consumers with its 19 brands and nearly 4,500 properties worldwide. One example is the technology picking up a story about a New Zealand backpacker who was traveling the world with his favorite Lego figurines and documenting their adventures on social media. Marriott then hosted The Lego Backpacker, resulting in content for the brand that was then amplified through Lego's social channels. Through the use of geo-fencing M Live is also able to uncover untagged social conversations that guests are having at Marriott properties and identifies opportunities to create a better guest experience. For example, the M Live team discovered a tweet that a guest posted from the Domes of Elounda Autograph Collection Hotel in Greece. M Live created an on-property breakfast moment and also surprised the guest with Marriott Rewards points leading him to share his excitement on Twitter and create user-generated content for the Autograph Collection brand and hotel. As the capabilities of AI systems continue to improve, case studies like the above will become increasingly automated (Grundner & Neuhofer, 2021).

An increasingly ubiquitous utilization of AI systems in digital tourism marketing is the use of chatbots. Voice assistants and chatbots, powered by natural language processing, allow organizations to have 24/7 automated concierges readily available to assist with decision-making on flights, hotels, tour packages, opening hours, attractions, etc (Tussyadiah & Miller, 2019). When combined with the availability of user data, these chatbots will be able to leverage self-iterating recommender systems to personalize travel suggestions based on user interest, user sentiment, and temporal dynamics captured through their social media or mobile activity (Zheng et al., 2018). In other words, the entire consumer decision-making process could be automated by AI, leading to a theoretically seamless, efficient, convenient, and hyper-personalized implementation for tourists (Gupta et al., 2022). Recommender systems will inspire and prompt users at the right times, with the right potential products and services, using advertising and marketing material that is personalized for specific users. Self-iterating algorithms on social platforms like TikTok and Instagram are continually shaped through user engagement to increasingly push and recommend content based on existing and projected user interests. Chatbots will be able to interact with and inform users of any potential inquiries, before taking them through the booking process seamlessly. Potential for novels or surprises will be prompted to attractions or service providers, based on the user

profile (i.e., honeymoons, birthdays, anniversaries), to encourage user-generated earned content by tourists. Before the cycle starts again, as that information feeds into bigger databases, ready to start the next inspire phase.

7. FUTURE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN TOURISM

Extended Realities (XR) is an umbrella term for immersive technologies that allow users to introduce synthetic elements into their sensory experiences. Two commonly known examples are augmented reality and virtual reality. Augmented Reality (AR) allows users to overlay computer-generated graphics onto the real world (Rauschnabel, 2021). With AR, what the user sees is still largely corporeal, enhanced by digital assets often through the use of smartphone cameras and screens or projected holograms. Due to the nature of the technology, AR is often used on-site, usually through experiential marketing. Examples of this include multisensory experiences that can transform entire rooms into wine-tasting cellars (Martins et al., 2017). This allows DMOs to take entire experiences to travel and tourism trade shows, giving potential travelers a preview of what they can expect at the actual attractions. Increasing gamification of AR also allows destination marketers to introduce features that take advantage of geolocation and mobile marketing capabilities to offer experiences akin to Pokemon GO, with time-sensitive content marketing approaches.

On the other end of the spectrum, is virtual reality (VR), which allows users to enter virtual experiences that are commonly fully computer generated, as well as fully interactive (Yung et al., 2021). Since COVID-19, VR destination marketing has gained exponential interest and adoption due to the technology's ability to allow users to visualize and experience spatial depth – crucial to enriching users' vicarious experiences. Users put on a head-mounted VR device and get an immersive, engaging preview of a destination or attraction. Accordingly, the 3-Dimensional nature of VR advances the richness of information that marketers can provide when compared to traditional mediums like video or images. Research has also shown that VR can positively influence emotional responses to marketing content (Yung et al., 2021). Unsurprisingly, tourism boards across the globe including Germany, Ireland, Maldives, and Japan have launched VR experiences; with Japan-based company First Air, which offers VR flight experiences, and have reported a 50% increase in bookings since the pandemic lockdowns (Debusmann Jr, 2020).

The next frontier for VR destination marketing is the impending onset of metaverses and virtual worlds. Metaverses combine multiple existing components from different platforms and contents to conceive a world beyond the real world. Metaverses often comprise virtual worlds with their own virtual goods, the use of VR, multi-user virtual spaces with avatars, forms of social media, self-contained virtual economies, and persistent network infrastructures where the virtual world continues to 'live' even after the user has exited (Joy et al., 2022; Kim, 2021). As of 2023, key metaverses that are available to the general population include Fortnite, Meta Horizons, Decentraland, Nvidia Omniverse, Roblox, VRChat, and Sansar. Metaverses will allow DMOs to create entire interactive virtual environments for potential tourists to immerse themselves in. Future research will continue to reveal if the metaverses themselves will start to become the primary attractions and experiences - the point at which VR marketing will reduce instead of increase tourists' intention to visit the corporeal attractions.

8. DEGROWTH, DEMARKETING & DEINFLUENCING

Although this chapter is arranged to review digital marketing and its intersections within tourism, it would be amiss to evade the importance of sustainable and responsible marketing efforts in this vein, and the importance of the aforementioned practices in the future of digital marketing for travel. Just before the covid-19 pandemic, there

was much attention turned to the issue of tourism reaching its limits in many destinations around the world (Higgins-Desboilles et al., 2019). Many residential communities were overwhelmed and there was a discernible deterioration in the quality of life for local people in tourist destinations (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Thus, the conversation shifted to consider how it has been the practice for many DMOs to focus on marketing over the proper management of the tourism subsystem. The terms, “degrowth”, “demarketing”, and more recently, “deinfluencing” emerged to describe the efforts to counteract this phenomenon (Higgins-Desboilles et al., 2019; Hall & Wood, 2021; Milano et al., 2019).

Many of the issues described throughout this chapter must also now be considered within this lens of responsibility and social duty, especially within the business of influencer marketing. Femenia-Serra et al. (2021) studied the use of social media influencers to set a new standard of practices and found that, indeed, influencers can have an impact in promoting increased awareness of sustainable tourism practices in destinations experiencing saturation. These standards emphasize damage control and more sustainable consumption patterns. Furthermore, many destinations are now employing fresh and unusual response strategies to attract more responsible visitors-as-consumers including campaigns that encourage visitors to put their phones away and see destinations in a digital-free manner, as well as marketing campaigns that exclusively target ‘responsible’ travelers (Siegel et al., 2023). Future marketing endeavors on behalf of DMOs will continue to gain importance in the coming years.

9. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, digital marketing is vital in the tourism and hospitality industry because it enables companies to reach and engage with customers effectively. Travel and tourism is especially conducive to digital marketing as it is inherently a hypermobile product. Therefore, mobile applications available through smartphones are one of the most salient marketing channels for travelers of various market segments.

A new traveler consumer journey due to advancements in technology has emerged wherein digital touchpoints are utilized during each stage of the travel process. Companies within the travel and tourism space can use various digital channels to create targeted and personalized marketing campaigns that improve customer experience and loyalty. By using digital marketing effectively, tourism and hospitality companies can increase their brand awareness, reduce costs, and improve their competitive advantage in the market. Furthermore, DMOs can help to facilitate business collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders for an optimized destination marketing strategy.

Finally, by harnessing technologies such as those described in this chapter, such as AI, personalization, UGC, and social networking platforms, will be essential to success as the nature of the consumer experience continues to evolve into a [sustainable and responsible] future.

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