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HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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Chapter

Digital Marketing in Hospitality and Tourism

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SUMMARY
Advancements in communication have led to relationship era of marketing from production era. The internet, ICT tools, and the Web revolution have played a pivotal role resulting into digital marketing of products and services in hospitality and tourism. Tourism industry is considered to be an information intensive industry where consumers have become co-creators of digital content on different media. The industry has witnessed a power shift from service provider to the consumers who have ability to attract and influence others with their shared experiences on digital platforms. Firms are adopting a digital marketing mix which is an online marketing strategy prepared focusing on 7Ps for hospitality and tourism industries. It involves social media marketing, search engine optimization, content marketing, influencer marketing, and affiliate marketing as most sought after digital marketing strategies. Such marketing mix allows firms to position their products and services in the niche market which is deeply segmented and accurately targeted. Firms can communicate to large number of audience due to increasing users of digital media. Implementing digital marketing mix calls for consistent innovation in designing the content and selection of the digital media by a digital marketer. Dynamic and agile content will lead the way for digital marketers of hospitality and tourism industries.
Learning Objectives:
After completing this chapter, the student will be able to:

- Understand the digital marketing
- Understand the difference between digital marketing and traditional marketing
- Gain knowledge of digital marketing techniques useful for the hospitality and tourism sector
- Understand the importance of digital marketing
- Understand the role of the digital marketer in the hospital and tourism sector
Introduction

Between the trade era and the digital era of marketing, the product and services market has witnessed immense changes. The marketing of products and services has become digital, leaving behind the relationship and marketing era. The AMA (the American Marketing Association) (2017) defines marketing as ‘the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large’. Digital marketing can fulfil the requirements of marketing with the help of information and communication technology (ICT) tools such as the internet, Web 1.0 and 2.0, and digital platforms.

ICT tools and the internet have played a major role in bridging the gap between customers, clients, partners and society at large. The advent of the internet and its availability for all has given rise to digital media, which is now used for the marketing of products and services. Digital media platforms have changed the way in which consumers exchange information between themselves and producers. It has taken consumers’ buying behaviour and experience to the next level as they can become influencers by ‘spreading the word’ (electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM) in their digital network. Marketers have accepted the importance of digital media in online research, promotion and consumer relationship management.

The shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has helped marketing and promotion in the hospitality and tourism industry. Digital marketing offers access to a pool of information which is used by the marketers in several ways, such as service designing, destination management and consumer behaviour influence.

The hospitality and tourism industry is considered an information-based industry. It has grown taking advantage of Web 2.0, where ICTs offer fast and prompt communication between tourists and service providers at a destination. Social media platforms, which were created using, Web 2.0, are used to project the image of hospitality and tourism services. Be it a destination marketing organisation or service provider at a destination, digital platforms are used by everyone to promote their products. Digital platforms have also changed the role of consumers from target audience to co-creators. Along with the service provider, consumers become content creators whenever they share their experience, offer feedback and write reviews on digital media platforms. A global campaign by the Hotel Shangri-La group in 2019 targeted Instagram users uploading content about their time at their hotel. It was associated with rewards and loyalty programmes for different hotels, which resulted in more customer engagement and acquisition.

Marketing of Hospitality and Tourism

The marketing of services and tourism products has come a long way since the days of catalogues, vouchers, leaflets and photographs. Marketers have moved on to smart services and destinations by adopting digital marketing by using ICT hardware and software. Human actors play a pivotal role in the delivery of services, creating a positive feeling at the point of delivery. The tangible
offerings of a facility or destination creates a positive response where interaction takes place in a defined way. Thus, hospitality and tourism requires an efficient communication medium to showcase its people, services and physical environment as well its product, price, place and promotional activities.

**Difference from General Marketing**

The marketing mix (7Ps) used for hospitality and tourism focuses on larger aspects than the marketing of goods does. In contrast to the marketing mix for goods, the marketing of hospitality and tourism services takes into account people, process and physical environments. Hence, it requires a medium of communication that presents these three aspects accurately. In this context, digital marketing offers tools and platforms through which photos and videos can be shared with a large audience. Most importantly the display of people's emotions while offering services and the process involved in producing and delivering the services require in-depth detailing in marketing and promotion.

**The Difference Between Digital and Traditional Marketing**

The first and foremost, the difference can be seen in the speed of communication using digital marketing. Other important differences include the growing volume of communication channels, knowledge about consumers’ preferences, the receiving of consumer feedback, and the tracking of market patterns. In traditional marketing, communication and interactivity was one-sided, whereas in digital marketing we see more interaction, engagement and conversation – both consumer-to-consumer and marketer-to-consumer. Digital marketing has empowered both marketers and consumers. Marketers gain an edge in communication by being able to send personalised messages, engage with consumers and use digital media for customer research. Consumers benefit by researching, comparing and validating products more quickly using digital media than with traditional marketing. A power shift can be seen from marketers to consumers on digital platforms where consumers have become content creators and influencers.

Personalisation is an important feature when comparing traditional and digital marketing. Personalised communication has taken over mass communication, which helps marketers in the segmenting, targeting and positioning of products and services in niche markets. Digital marketing allows faster and more cost-effective customised personal communications.

We can compare the benefits of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, Web 1.0 is mostly focused on read-only web search, resulting in transactional information retrieval. Web 2.0 allows relationship creation by offering read-write-and-publish features on digital media. Push strategies and mass marketing have been replaced by pull strategies and individual targeting. Customers have become content creators and collaborators on digital media platforms.
Digital Marketing

The concept of digital marketing is used as an umbrella term that includes both internet marketing and online marketing. It is used as a broad term that uses a bundle of marketing strategies implemented through digital channels for marketing and promotion. Digital marketing has a special feature that it is not limited to the web, making it distinct from internet and online marketing. Digital marketing also uses media such as TV ads, digital billboards, radio and SMS texts along with internet marketing strategies such as search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click, social media marketing, content marketing and others.

Figure 1. Digital Marketing
Source: Adobe Stock.

Bhatia (2017) proposes following digital marketing types:

a. Intent-based marketing (search marketing)
b. Brand marketing (display/digital advertising)
c. Content marketing (website, blog, native content)
d. Community-based marketing (social media, business communities)
e. Partner marketing (affiliate marketing, sponsorships, PR)
f. Communication channel marketing (e-mail, messaging, SMS)
g. Platform-based marketing (mobile, video, media platforms (surface), kiosks, in-apps)

What and Why

Digital marketing aims to introduce new technologies and integrate them with consumer data for more targeted marketing with help of highly customized content. This is possible when we prepare marketing plans based on consumers’ digital data with help of the web, email and traditional electronic media such as TV, Radio and electronic billboards. Therefore, digital marketing can be termed a function of online web platforms, electronic media, consumer data and content.
Digital marketing joins up the push and pull marketing strategies of hospitality and tourism industry. Information dissemination and consumer created content help both strategies. Using digital marketing, hospitality and tourism services organisations can amplify brand presence, develop customised content for consumption on social media and increase revenues after engaging with more consumers.

**What a Digital Marketer Does**

The primary role of a digital marketer in a business is to select digital platforms to generate leads, create brand awareness, along with using a firm’s website. Digital marketing is an umbrella term used for various designations such as SEO Manager, Content Marketing Specialist, Social Media Manager, Digital Marketing Copywriter, Analytics Manager, SEM Manager, and Digital Marketing Manager. People in these roles are also responsible for identifying the best media channels for segmenting, targeting and positioning a brand online. Using measurable analytics, they must also plan strategies to measure the results of marketing activities on digital platforms.

Important tools such as website optimisation, social media marketing, content marketing and email marketing are very helpful for the marketing in the tourism and hospitality sector. To attract more tourists, digital marketers transfer information about tourist destinations and related services, collect feedback from tourists, create fan pages and online communities, and run loyalty programs. They can also write blogs about destinations. Most importantly, a digital marketer engages the tourist on different digital platforms through innovative content and disseminates updated information to the tourist.

Digital marketers also invite original content from the tourist about their experiences of visiting a destination and using its services. Feedbacks about tourists’ experiences can be used for testimonial advertising, and original content from tourists can be shared on multiple digital platforms by the organisations. A digital marketer can also help in online research and use the results for service design and development.

**Components of Digital Marketing**

At the initial stages of framing a digital marketing strategy, the components of digital marketing can be classified as the ICT tools and digital media and content. A good digital marketing includes planning for advertising, content marketing, email marketing, search engine optimisation, social media marketing, pay-per-click advertising, among other activities. When marketers pay for the content shown on online media on a priority basis, paid-for advertising is also an important component. These components can be divided into the three ‘funnel stages’ of Reach, Engage and Activate, as per Bhatia (2017).
The three funnel stages describe the role of digital channels, engage media and programs and focused activities to trigger action among the audience. Hospitality and tourism firms can create digital media to reach their target audience. This requires consideration of product and services features, the target audience, niche area, budget, and the desired results from the digital marketing. To create engaging programs, it is also necessary to know customers’ opinions and experience through feedback. Engaging customers for longer on digital media can help firms’ customer relationship management.

**Benefits for Hospitality and Tourism**

Buhalis and Law (2008) say that with the help of web 2.0 platforms, hospitality and tourism firms can build and strengthening their brands and gain knowledge about customer behaviour. Digital marketing differs from conventional marketing by offering new media platforms and ways of interacting and new models of information exchange for the fast changing-hospitality and tourism sector’s demands. It offers great interactivity, intelligence for business, integration of communications and individualisation for tailored communication.

In 2014, Hyatt Hotels Corporation turned to Lightbox Ads by Google in order to bring its brand to life with a rich media experience. It also ran YouTube TrueView video ads to an audience of female business travellers. The ad campaign reached 17 million potential business travellers showing a high engagement rate of 2.8% at relatively low cost investment.
Digital Marketing Mix introduces the use of digital platforms in the showcasing of the 7Ps for hospitality and tourism services. A digital marketing strategy for hospitality and tourism services starts with a firm selecting different media and platforms for digital marketing. The selection of digital media depends upon the type of product and service, type of customer or tourist, and the media’s features. It further helps in digital segmentation and the targeting and positioning of services which organisations do to create an image in the customer’s mind, in the marketplace and on online communities. This is done with the help of data available on online digital platforms.

Segmentation in online space can be done based on demographic, psychographic and behavioural profiles of users on online platforms. The geographic concern of traditional segmentation is replaced by online spaces. Next, selection of targets can be done on common grounds used for segmentation. Targeting narrows down the classes achieved by the segmentation of online communities or online users. According to Kotler et al. (2017), segmentation and targeting exemplify a vertical relationship between service providers and customers that takes place with little involvement by customers. On online platforms, the segments become communities that are already formed by clearly mentioned criteria.

Transparency and dynamism are two key aspects to be looked after by service providers in the hospitality and tourism industry. Services can create an image in the minds of consumers with a clear presentation of its people, processes and physical environments. Because of the shorter life cycle of a product, changing customer choices and increased transparency through online mediums, communication should be fast and dynamic. It will enable the firms to position their brand in the desired way.

The digital marketing mix basically reflects three key marketing aspects – search marketing, display advertising and social media marketing – which can be used for the positioning of products and services and for promotional activities.

**Social Media Marketing**

Social media is one of the most important and widely used communication tool of the 21st century. It is also known as ‘community-based marketing’ as it harnesses the consumer’s social need for
community interaction. Social media offers user interaction, idea collaboration, and the sharing of audio-visual content among users. It includes social networking sites, virtual social worlds, virtual game worlds, blogs, video content communities, and collaborative projects (Kumar, 2018). Hence, social media marketing is an act of boosting traffic through social media networking sites.

Research suggests that social media is a source of information in tourism and is useful in creating an image of destinations and make destinations more popular (Matloka & Buhalis, 2010; Sigala, 2010).

It is a vital for digital marketers to choose websites with features such as: a large user base; user-friendly features; content creation in form of text, audio and video; social recognition; and engaging and informative content. Users’ reviews and comments, or eWOM, play an important role in spreading the word in their network and online domain. It can be used to invite feedback, address criticism and respond to customers in much better way.

Social media also allows online research for communication and helps in creating a balance between users’ time and money. Based on the nature of the content created by the social media users, Social media marketing can be split into the following categories,

**Figure 4. Social Media Marketing**

*Source: Adobe Stock.*

**Social Networking Sites**

Social Networking Sites (SNS) are pools of information where content can be generated, circulated, shared, subscribed, personalised and consumed by the independent users of social media (Kumar, 2018). In this process, one user can inform, educate and persuade fellow users about products and services (Chauhan & Pillai, 2013). Research describe the role of social networking sites in marketing and advertising.

Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010: 63) have defined the social networking sites as:

“Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends, and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information including photos, video, audio files and blogs.”
Social networking sites can be used as channels for content marketing, using images and video alongside text-based content. Firms can use SNS to target young people because SNS are most used by them. SNS can also help with inviting feedback, communication with customers, and giving recognition to valued customers, who can become brand ambassadors, in particular SNS such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These ‘Big Three’ social networks have seen the word “travel” as the most shared word. They have the power for extensive word-of-mouth promotion and can attract more customers through their testimonial referrals.

**Microblogging**

This is social media platform like Twitter or Tumblr which allows users to create status updates in a limited number of words. These digital platforms allow users to create small bits of content in form of text, images, audio, and video. Microblogging channels have made their way into both personal use and professional use, which is why huge numbers of people have created a profile and joined with the various networks. Microblogging is important because of its high interaction rate thanks to instant publication. These platforms can be used by hospitality and tourism firms for sharing current developments, ongoing campaigns and for short messages using concise, quality content. Firms can create a profile and allow customers to chat on their pages. It is also a great platform to find suitable influencers for products and services.

**Photo Sharing**

Photo-sharing social media websites are more visually appealing then text-based websites. The important photo-sharing websites are Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest. These digital platforms allow users to create small pieces of content with the images. Firms can use a platform to quickly gain the attention of its users. Images can be used to present products and services, natural settings, cultural festivals and destination attractions to entice customer interest. Also, infographics can be used to tell customers about products and services.

**Video Sharing**

Video sharing platforms allow firms individuals to upload video content. Individual users do it for enjoyment, to tell other people about their experiences, and for when they work as influencers. Firms do it to market and promote their products and services, and to educate customers – for instance, when they upload a know-how video or a video containing information about destination, cuisines, services, and their operations. Prominent video-sharing platforms include YouTube, Facebook Live, and Instagram. Video-sharing platforms allow users to create and upload more interactive content and engage customers by inviting them to leave reviews and suggestions. Media users help firms whenever they upload videos of their own experiences on their channels. Firms can connect with users and offer them public recognition and rewards.
**Search Engine Marketing**

Search engine marketing (SEM) results in organic traffic in the form of listings on search engine results pages (SERPs). Organic traffic or results are not influenced or promoted results, hence they also known as “natural” search results.

SEM requires the use of specific keywords related to the hospitality and tourism industry. These keywords may be related to product or service features or destination attractions and facilitates. They allow potential customers to find out about them more easily.

SEM can be defined as the “structured set of marketing programs run by the specific search engine to put a price to a specific set of keywords and sell them to multiple businesses (web-marketers) is known as Search Engine Marketing (SEM) or Paid Per Click Marketing (PPC)” (Bhatia, 2017, pp 228). SEM and PPC work in the same way – namely search through keywords. However, PPC is paid for, while SEM attracts purely organic leads. Search engine optimisation is another way to maximise organically using keywords. Hence, success in attracting more organic traffic or more leads lie in finding the most suitable keywords.

The most important feature of SEM is that it enables us to show ads to people who use similar keywords and who are looking for relevant information. In the coming section we will see how SEO and PPC are two dimensions of search engine marketing.

**Search Engine Optimisation**

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is also known as organic or natural optimisation. It is basically a keyword approach used to optimise the content related to services on a service provider’s website. Optimised content enables a website to achieve higher ranks in search engine result pages (SERPs). It helps attract organic traffic and increases the visibility of the service provider. Higher rankings attract better quality leads when potential customers search for services related to hospitality and tourism. Hence, optimising web pages with suitable key words helps a lot. The selection of key words makes a huge difference in on-page SEO. Off-page SEO and technical SEO methods can be used to improve rankings and increase visibility in search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo.

On-Page SEO: Hospitality and tourism firms can adopt important on-page optimisation techniques such as search indexing, website navigation and creating quality content and keyword inclusion. Creating quality content that is focused on a target audience is an important aspect of SEO. Quality content can be created after detailed research of customers’ preferences and needs. It may include text, images and audio-video content. Keywords can be selected based on business-related topics and customer online conversations about hospitality and tourism.

Off-Page SEO: Among several Off-page optimisation techniques, link building, social reputation and the inclusion of personalised and localised identities are important and can be done at minimum cost by marketers.
Pay-Per Click Advertising

This works in the same way search engine marketing uses keywords. It is a paid-for form of advertising where marketers can bid on the keywords used in search engines, for instance when customers look for information related to the hospitality and tourism industry. Paid adverts can be positioned alongside the organic search results in the search engine based on select keywords. When a user clicks on such ads, it can become a lead to convert it into a potential customer. The formats of PPC advertisement can be small text-based ads, visual, or product-based listings which give more information to customers. Chaffey and Smith (2008) highlight two main advantages of PPC, which are:

a. The advertiser does not need to pay for the displayed ad since the cost will be incurred only when a visitor clicks on the ad and visits the website of advertiser.

b. PPC advertising is highly targeted towards the users of specific phrases or keywords. These advertisements will be shown to those users who are looking for the similar content by using specific keywords which match the advertisers’ keywords.

Further, PPC can be boosted by on-page SEO and off-page SEO methods to engage the leads on advertisers’ website. Here we notice that “keywords” play a vital role in different Search Engine Marketing methods. By finding and using matching keywords, organisations can attract more online traffic and convert them in customers. PPC advertisement can also benefit the hospitality and tourism industry in the following ways:

a. Good accountability
b. Good predictability
c. Technically simpler than SEO
d. High-speed PPC listings
e. Increased brand visibility

In SEO and PPC, “keywords” or “key phrases” used result in organic traffic or paid traffic, respectively. SEO can be used for long-term return on investment (ROI), while PPCs can be used for quick benefits. PPC advertising can be used in digital media such as search engines, display advertising, social networks and in mobile networks. Hospitality and tourism firms can choose the medium to place PPC advertising based upon their target group and their preferred media.

Content Marketing

Content marketing can be used for the dissemination of information about the products and services. It is a digital marketing approach for the creation and distribution of valuable, relevant, informative and attractive content for targeted customers.

Content may be in form of text and audio-video on social media platforms or other websites. It may also be created on specific platforms such as blogs, infographics or podcasts. Content marketing can be executed through online platforms that can be owned or hired. It plays an
important role in internet and digital marketing strategies because it enables a firm to boost traffic through methods designed by marketers.

Content marketing evaluation can be done with the help of social listening, which sees the conversations of customers monitored. It should be considered a long-term strategy which a firm can use to create a consistent, valuable, quality message with which to build a loyal customer base with a strong relationship with the business.

**Email Marketing**

Email marketing sees a business to send the content directly to interested leads. It is important to combine good informational content in the email and to abide by the mutual expectations, especially if it is permission-based communication. With its high cost-effectiveness, email marketing can be used by the hospitality and tourism sector to target customers of particular interest. With paid-for email programs, permission-based email marketing can create a good ROI.

Email marketing is considered cost-effective because of its low cost per contact, because it can be used for sending customised messages on a mass scale to highly targeted audiences, and because it is also measurable. In hospitality and tourism businesses, email marketing can be used for transactional emails, newsletters, promotional emails, and retention-based emails.

*Figure 5. Email Marketing*

Transactional emails are used for sending quotations or answers to enquiries. Newsletters are meant to keep customers informed and in regular contact with the brand. Repeat customers can be communicated with using promotional emails expecting an immediate action such as instant bookings or during discount offers. Retention-based emails in the form of newsletters carry additional promotional messages focused on creating value in addition to a business’s normal services, hoping for a long-term relationship with customers. Key indicators for measuring the success of email marketing are the number of emails delivered, bounces, unsubscribes, emails opened, click-through rates and conversion.

**Influencer Marketing**

Influencer marketing is an act of collaboration between brands and influencers. Hospitality and tourism businesses can use influencers to spreading the word around a network about their brand.
Content Marketing Institute (2014) defines influencers as:

“People who have an established credibility and audience; who can persuade others by virtue of their trustworthiness and authenticity. Influencers can come in a variety of forms such as bloggers, customers, industry experts and analytics and social media celebrities.”

Figure 6. Influence Marketing

Influencers have the power to affect the purchase decisions of their followers due to their dominant position in their online community or network. This power is derived from active engagement in their niche area, interest or hobby. Influencer marketing works in combination with social media and content marketing by acting as a communication channel and messenger respectively. Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu (2019) have found that, in case of influencer marketing on Instagram, consumers perceive it to be more trustworthy, they have more positive attitude toward the brand and feel a stronger social connection. In this context, the Content Marketing Institute (2014) describes the following advantages to collaborating with an influencer:

a. Influencers have a pre-established audience who are already receptive to their ideas and recommendations; they are valued by your consumers;

b. Influencers have a built-in level of trust with their readers, one that’s essentially impossible for a brand to build. So, they will forge these strong connections on your behalf and help you build credibility;

c. They can help you create the right content that really meets your consumers’ needs, because they have “on the ground” experience and perspective; and

d. By partnering with them, you’re able to get your brand messages out in the right way, at the right time, to the right people.

Hospitality and tourism marketers can integrate with those who have prominent social footprints. The primary goal of this integration is to connect to new communities and attract them to services or destinations with the help of trusted relationship of a particular influencer. Authentic, correct content for dissemination is a requisite for the influencer as well because followers value their content on digital media. Hence, firms should create quality content for suitable personalities who have good fan following that match the target firms’ target audience. Gretzel (2018) suggest that marketers in the hospitality and tourism industry can use influencers and their ability to connect to
a large audience. It can be made possible by creating engaging content and by building a mutually beneficial relationship with influencers whose personality matches the brand image.

**Affiliate Marketing**

The hospitality and tourism industry was an early adopter of affiliate marketing in digital space. Chaffey and Smith (2008) says that “Affiliate marketing is the ultimate form of marketing communications since it’s pay-per-performance – it’s a commission-based arrangement where the merchant only pays when they make the sale or get a lead.” Affiliate send traffic to the service providers’ website thorough links or URLs.

Affiliate marketing happens when someone promotes a company’s product or service and makes a sale through a link which is rewarded with a commission from the company. It can be used to promote the firm’s website, which affiliates are rewarded for depending upon number of visitors, subscribers and customers through their links. Affiliate marketing can also be called “performance marketing” as it is based on performance. Affiliates are also known as “publishers” since they market the product or services of a business and persuade people to purchase, sign up, or fill in a form.

Most affiliate marketers use search engines to market the business’s services via their own links and keywords. Affiliate marketing can be useful for hospitality and tourism services in following ways:

1. It can help increase visibility in search engine results.
2. It can help target different groups by appointing different affiliates.
3. It increases brand and campaign reach.
4. It increases awareness about new services and destinations.
5. It works on ground of pay-per-performance and hence the cost of employing affiliates can be controlled.

There are several examples of affiliate programs run by travel companies, such as Booking.com, TripAdvisor, Agoda, AirB&B referral program, MakeMy Trip, and Skyscanner. Coupon-focused marketing is an example of affiliate marketing in digital space. Firms can also use an affiliate network, a type of company which can find several affiliates for the products and services of the firm.

For affiliate marketing, first firms need to know about their competitors’ position, kind of affiliate selection, fees and their network. Banners and buttons are required from firms which give detailed information about products and services such as pictures, prices, features, locations and facilities at tourist destinations. Finally, a selection of affiliates or affiliate networks can be created that matches the brand image, service industry or destination image.
Mobile Marketing

The changing pattern of mobile usage and the availability of low-cost internet has propelled the growth of online users and customers in the hospitality and tourism industry. Mobile marketing opens up new opportunities as a growing number of travel reservations are being made through mobile devices. According to Travelport research conducted in 2019:

a. 61% of travellers have used a smartphone app to book flights.
b. 59% of business travellers have used social media to book a flight.
c. 81% of business travellers have used voice technology while traveling.
d. 56% of travellers expect to receive information on travel disruptions via push notifications.
e. 58% of leisure travellers and 85% of business travellers prefer to use apps to book flights.
f. 72% of travel brands feel they aren’t investing enough in mobile.

The availability of different apps and video advertising are growing areas where companies can prepare their digital marketing strategy. SEO marketing can also be practiced on mobile platforms where firms need to optimise the websites in a mobile-friendly layout. Firms also need to optimise the keyword as per mobile user and content feature to suit the mobile interface. As per wearemarketing and Socialhospitality the benefits of mobile marketing for the hospitality and tourism services are:

Figure 7. Mobile Marketing
Source: Adobe Stock.

a. Keeps you current and relevant
b. Increases the chances of your campaigns going viral
c. Enhances the customer experience
d. Reduces drop-off rates as customers can interact with your brand on the go

A report from CNBC in 2019 says that three-quarters of the world will use smartphones to access the internet by 2025. It creates a huge online space to market hospitality and tourism services as most of the time customers are connected through mobile phones and use it for social media immersion.
**Display Advertising**

Display advertising is a method to use graphical digital images on webpages of related businesses. Display advertising can be embedded in the website and shown alongside the related content. Advertisers choose webpages to position advert banners that attract target customers. These display adverts are generally put on the top of the webpage (a “banner ad”), on both sides of webpage as vertical ads (called a ‘Skyscraper’), or horizontal ads at bottom of the website (called a ‘Leaderboard’). Marketers in the hospitality and tourism industry can use four types of display advert formats:

- a. Text ads, which are simple textual information or promotional content.
- b. Advert banners, which can be placed above, below and on both side of content on any website.
- c. Rich media ads, which are meant for high-interaction purposes.
- d. Video ads, which include promotional video content.

Display advertising offers different levels of interactivity that build a bond with consumers and makes the brand memorable. The effectiveness can be measured with help of click through rates, which can be considered as the size of an audience responding to call for action.

![Display Advertising](image)

**Figure 8.** Display Advertising

*Source: Adobe Stock.*

**Maintaining the Digital Marketing**

The creation and maintenance of digital marketing programs requires web development in order to create a brand. It requires the recognition of visitor segments and their characteristics, based upon which planning for website development, media selection and content creation can be done. A thorough understanding of latest digital platforms and their metrics measurement will create an impact on digital media strategy.

The digital marketing strategies need to remain dynamic and agile, ties in with metrics that are considered at the early stages of strategy formulation and is essential for maintaining digital marketing campaigns. Web analytics can be helpful in audience and traffic management and can quantify the traffic based on indicators such as the number of unique visitors, page views, visits, and the average duration of visits.
Listing of the destinations and hospitality properties on Google, building a website, using SEO tools, using social media platforms, presence on video-streaming social networks, using influencer marketing and giving priority to user-generated content can help a digital marketer. Adding specific content, a targeted audience and social media tools will strengthen a digital marketing strategy. Organisations can also focus on the development of websites and applications which are friendly to multiple electronic devices and can be accessible even with a network with slow connectivity.

**Implications for digital marketers**

For digital marketers of tourism and hospitality businesses where the personalisation of services is highly sought after, there are the following implications. Organisations need to adopt multiple digital platforms and develop unique content to engage the media users. The length of content, time of posting on digital platforms and the frequency also is important, depending upon various socio-cultural aspects of the users. There are a few important steps that are common and which can be implemented for various tourism and hospitality businesses:

1. Implementing segmentation, targeting and positioning for the users’ profiling.
2. Selecting of user-friendly media.
3. Disseminating useful and engaging information about the product, destination and related services on media
4. Allowing tourists/users to become co-creators by involving them in content creation
5. Connecting online and offline platforms through events at tourism destinations
6. Giving recognition to the best content creators in online communities

**Conclusion**

The main objective of any digital marketing campaign is to spread awareness in the target audience. Awareness is defined as the ability of a potential customer to recognise and remember that a brand exists and belongs to a given product category and it is the basic foundation of a communication strategy. It is the first step in the creation of an online brand image in the hospitality and tourism industry.

The hospitality and tourism sector has been an early adopter of digital marketing trends. The increasing number of mobile users, social media users and online communities, customers’ collaboration in content generation, and less investment in digital marketing strategies are a few of reasons for its adoption. Digital consumption and the donation of customers has increased heavily, which has opened huge opportunities for the marketing of services. In fact, the tools of digital marketing have enabled businesses to showcase their people, services and physical environments in a more effective way. Using live demonstrations, 360-degree videos, virtual tours of destinations has become a part of the pull strategies of the firms. Digital marketing strategies can be useful in:

a. Increasing brand awareness
b. Enhancing customer engagement

c. Customer relationship management

d. Conducting product research

e. Customer feedback

f. Loyalty programs

g. Reaching international customers

h. More cost-effective investment

Future innovations in SEO could include the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and voice-enabled search and image optimisation. We may see an increase in the use of augmented Reality (AR), a type of virtual reality (VR) in creating 3D images around users to give them close-to-reality feeling of services, processes, physical environments and various features of a destination. The use of VR can be seen at InterContinental’s property in China, where visitors can enjoy a full immersive VR experience for a gaming and entertainment zone. And you can experience 360-degree VR for Holiday Inn Express Adelaide, Australia to experience the ambience of the hotel from anywhere. Chatbots help improve a customer’s experience from the time they book a service to the time they experience it.

Digital marketers are suggested to focus on the content of long reads as much as 3,000-plus words which will attract more traffic and be shared among users. Social media platforms can be used as content distribution channels. This long-read content can be prepared with sub-headings, which is more suitable for mobile searches and search engines. Use of infographics and images will gain momentum in future. A report from Semrush.com found that SEO and content marketing will go hand-in-hand in the future. Content in different forms such as text, image, video and animation will play a vital role on social media platforms. Hospitality and tourism businesses need to focus on creating high-quality content and on customising it match their target audience.

Key Terms

Marketing: The activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.

Digital Platforms: Online websites and applications powered by ICT tools and Internet meant for exchanging content for various purposes (personal, common, social and business).

Digital Marketing: The process of creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging content among customers, clients, partners, and society with help of digital media.

Social Media: Internet-based applications which carry consumer and firm generated content created by consumers and firms typically created after relevant experience or shared online for informing other consumers and marketers.

Web 1.0: A term given for first stage World Wide Web pages which allowed users to read and use it as information portal.
Web 2.0: The second-generation of Internet-based services that allowed media users to collaborate and share information online by creating and disseminating online content.

Social Networking Sites: Digital platforms that enable users to connect to create a network by creating personal profiles, inviting friends, and colleagues to exchange and comment on ideas, texts, audio, and video content.

Discussion Questions

1. How Digital marketing is different from traditional marketing?
2. How Search Engine Marketing can increase brand visibility?
3. Discuss role of Social Media marketing in customer engagement.
4. Highlight the role of Mobile marketing in recent times.
5. How firms can optimize websites to get high rankings in search engine results?
6. What are the new age digital marketing techniques for hospitality and tourism firms?
7. What are the benefits to customers due to digital technologies?
8. How firms can adopt combination of digital platforms?
9. What is the Return of Investment (ROI) due to adoption of digital platforms?
10. What is the effect of digital marketing on customers’ search?
During this age of internet and social media, real-time connectivity is the buzzword for all industries, and especially the travel industry. With stiff competition from Online Travel Agents (OTAs), where a customer finds transparency for various products and their prices, it is important for the travel agency to equip themselves with advanced technology.

Customers as well as operators in the hospitality, travel and tourism industries have benefited due to emergence of different cost-effective and time-saving digital media platforms. Customers don’t need to visit multiple service providers to get quotations for a hotel, vacation or tour itinerary. Robust digital media platforms have made their work easy in the present day. Customers can take advantage of these platforms to search for services, compare them and make the decision to buy. We have witnessed changed buying behaviours solely due to the digital empowerment of the customer and their changed role from merely consumers to co-creators and brand ambassadors. Every customer has the potential to become a brand promoter through his/her digital connections, which are not limited to family, friends, and colleagues as they were earlier. The power to make decisions for bookings have shifted from operators to customers. Now, customers offer us advice and ask for particular properties, locations and type of hotels backed by their own online search through digital platforms.

In the present context, it has become imperative for hospitality and tourism organisations to adopt digital marketing strategies and make ourselves visible in different market segments by leveraging the digital marketing medium. At Hotel N Apartment, we work as a global accommodation solution provider focusing on short-term business accommodation as well as extended stays for relocation, global mobility or project-related travel since 2015. Within a span of 5 years, the supplier network has spread across 90 countries and an accommodation inventory of more than 2800. Today, Hotel N Apartment, a global accommodation solution provider has incorporated in the UK, UAE and India. This has been possible due to the adoption of different digital media platforms at various stages of operations.

Today’s business traveller, either on a short-term or long-term assignment, usually prefers furnished apartments with amenities such as kitchen and internet access. Budget apartments which are professionally managed within the legal framework are not easy to find. Online portals
or OTAs are not specialized in this space. At this juncture, we make use of digital technologies and platforms to surpass industry standards, time after time, to provide niche/top-notch solutions. These platforms help us deliver the finest cost-effective solutions for clients. We are able to evaluate each property before recommending it to our esteemed clientele.

We make use of search engine optimization, influencer marketing techniques and social media platforms at large. Digital platforms help us in our internal operations as well, in areas such as data-driven consulting, enhanced decision support, benchmarking and centralized view of spending data online. Digital technology enables exploration of pre-trip data to identify travel trends and workflow patterns for enhanced decision support.
References


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