STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING DIGITAL MARKETING ADOPTION IN VIETNAMESE TOURISM ENTERPRISES

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Abstract: ***The global marketplace, driven by the pervasive influence of the internet and information technology, has witnessed the rise of digital marketing as a dominant paradigm, further boosted by the advancements brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The tourism sector, characterized by its unique service-oriented nature, has experienced a profound impact from this technological shift, offering considerable potential for businesses adopting digital marketing practices. Although a growing number of Vietnamese tourism firms have integrated digital technologies into their business operations, especially in marketing activities, the implementation remains inconsistent, and many business leaders lack a comprehensive understanding of the vital role digital marketing plays in enhancing operational and marketing effectiveness. This paper addresses this gap by clarifying the role of digital marketing, analyzing key determinants of its adoption, and offering solutions to enhance its effective implementation by Vietnamese tourism enterprises.***

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Introduction

Driven by ongoing scientific and technological advancements, digital marketing has become an essential instrument for enterprises across various sectors, including tourism. Effective utilization of digital marketing, however, requires a thorough understanding of its role and a detailed analysis of the factors impacting its application within tourism businesses. This necessitates the development of tailored solutions to optimize its implementation.

1. The role of digital marketing for tourism businesses

Pride and Ferrell (2018) define digital marketing as "Digital Marketing uses all digital media, including the Internet, mobile and other interactive channels, to develop communication and exchanges with customers". This definition underscores the capacity of corporations to leverage a wide array of electronic devices and digital technologies in the execution of marketing activities, with a particular emphasis on customer communication and interaction.

Morrison (2022) offers a perspective on tourism marketing, characterizing it as "a continuous, sequential process through which tourism organizations plan, research, implement, control, and evaluate programs aimed at satisfying travelers' needs and wants as well as their visions, goals, and objectives. To be most effective, these marketing programs depend upon the efforts of many other organizations and individuals within and outside the destination."

Synthesizing the aforementioned definitions of digital marketing and tourism marketing, the concept of Tourism Digital Marketing can be articulated as follows:

Tourism Digital Marketing encompasses the marketing activities undertaken by tourism businesses utilizing the internet and digital technology platforms to achieve predetermined marketing objectives.

Considering the unique characteristics of the tourism sector, the role of digital marketing is further amplified within the context of globalization and the ongoing advancements in information and digital technologies. Specifically:

(1) Digital marketing enhances the effectiveness of advertising and marketing communications for tourism businesses

While traditional marketing communication tools such as events, print media, television, and mail often require substantial budgets, digital marketing campaigns are significantly lower in price. In the context of digital transformation, the rise of social media and search engines, promoting tourism through digital marketing (DM) facilitates rapid and highly effective customer outreach. DM offers numerous advantages, such as precision targeting, speed, cost-efficiency, ease of implementation, etc …. Tourism promotion via DM generates long-term benefits

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compared to traditional marketing approaches: The costs of DM campaigns are lower due to their ability to provide 24/7 access to customers; Information can be tailored to different stages of a campaign and easily measured using analytical tools. Moreover, DM eliminates the need for printed materials like posters and banners. Therefore, enterprises can allocate their budgets toward creating high-quality digital content, such as company details, destination highlights, and essential information for tourists, to display on their websites. This shift not only enhances content quality but is also cost-effective, as customers often discover tourism businesses through automated online search systems, significantly reducing marketing expenses.

Digital marketing enables tourism companies to direct information precisely to target audiences by leveraging existing customer data, user information systems, and other resources. This capability enables the delivery of tailored and optimized information to distinct customer groups, enhancing the precision and relevance of marketing efforts. Some of these data systems are developed internally by businesses, while a significant portion is provided by third-party platforms, including prominent social media networks such as Facebook and Google.

Furthermore, digital marketing facilitates the efficient dissemination of information across channels such as websites, emails, and social media platforms, ensuring rapid and effective communication with potential and existing customers.

(2) Digital marketing enables businesses to personalize customer relationships, thereby improving their customer responsiveness.

Through digital marketing channels, tourism companies establish direct lines of communication with customers. This direct engagement enables the provision of personalized customer experiences, fostering a perception among customers that their individual preferences are understood and catered to through tailored product or service offerings. Consequently, customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty are cultivated, leading to the establishment of more robust and enduring customer relationships. Direct interaction also enables tourism businesses to gain deeper insights into customer desires. Based on this understanding, corporates can adjust their products, services, and other operations to better meet customer expectations. Digital marketing allows tourism businesses to effectively target pre-defined customer segments, focusing on specific activities, countries, or geographic regions they wish to target. Kumar (2014) also suggests that tourists often expect personalized recommendations when purchasing travel products online. Many are willing to share personal preferences to receive tailored product suggestions. He also argues that digital marketing enhances the tourist experience.

Mousavi (2012) provides a detailed analysis of customer personalization in digital marketing. The result shows that modern information technology, coupled with the application of social media, has significantly transformed tourism business marketing activities, particularly concerning interactions with international tourists. Digital marketing directs marketing efforts toward specific tourist segments and distributes diverse services to prospective visitors to a given destination.

(3) Digital Marketing Ensures Enhanced Sales Effectiveness for Tourism Businesses

The adoption of digital marketing strategies within tourism businesses streamlines online search and booking procedures for customers. Data from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (2020) indicates that in 2019, a substantial 70% of tourists utilized mobile devices to search for tour information, underscoring the importance of mobile-optimized digital platforms. Tourism business websites offer significant advantages in terms of time and cost savings for customers, as online information retrieval proves considerably more efficient than traditional visits to physical travel agencies.

The integration of advanced visualization technologies, such as 4D and 5D, into online tour design and presentation, ensures that tourists can easily identify and select tours that align with their specific needs and preferences. Furthermore, the ability to conduct online price comparisons across various businesses enables customers to optimize their travel expenditures, while access to reviews and feedback from previous travelers helps reduce potential costs by providing valuable insights and mitigating potential unforeseen expenses (Mousavi, 2012).

Beyond streamlining transactions, digital marketing also plays a crucial role in stimulating travel demand.

Through digital analytics and reporting tools, tourism enterprises gain the capacity to proactively monitor, measure, and evaluate the efficacy of their marketing campaigns. These tools also enable businesses to estimate, with reasonable accuracy, the level of interest within potential customer segments regarding specific advertisements or to determine the volume of website traffic and searches associated

with specific keywords. This data allows companies to flexibly adjust their digital marketing campaigns, ensuring alignment with budgetary constraints and defined strategic objectives.

The deployment of digital marketing campaigns expands the reach of tourism businesses, enabling them to connect with and engage tourists on a global scale, transcending geographical limitations and facilitating sales anywhere, even without a physical presence. With the application of Big Data, tourism enterprises readily access vast amounts of user data, including audio, text, images, and customer profiles collected by online advertising platforms (Facebook, Google). Through all online activities, user "digital footprints," such as cookies, browsing history, IP addresses, online behavior, devices used, and provided information, are captured.

Leveraging Big Data analytics grants tourism companies access to extensive repositories of user-generated data, encompassing audio, text, images, and comprehensive customer profiles collected by prominent online advertising platforms such as Facebook and Google. Through online activities, user digital traces, including cookies, browsing history, IP addresses, online behavior patterns, device usage data, and provided personal information, are captured and analyzed, providing valuable insights for corporates' targeted marketing efforts.

2. Factors influencing the adoption of digital marketing in vietnamese tourism businesses

To enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing implementation, Vietnamese tourism businesses must identify the influencing factors and accurately analyze the extent of each factor's impact on digital marketing performance. Both internal and external factors require careful consideration.

2.1. Internal factors

- *Infrastructure requirements and technological resources*: Digital marketing implementation requires tourism businesses to meet specific infrastructure and technological requirements, including computers, internet connectivity, and business applications such as tour sales software or online booking systems, …

- *Leaders' perception of digital marketing's role in tourism business*: The perception of digital marketing as a strategic marketing technology within a business largely depends on the mindset of its leaders. Recognizing the importance of applying digital technology in business operations, especially in digital marketing activities, is critical for the survival of tourism enterprises in the era of a digital economy and global internet connectivity. CEOs' ability to assess the benefits of investing in DM, accurately forecast opportunities, and identify potential risks and challenges from not adopting DM is essential to improving its effectiveness. Additionally, executive boards must also demonstrate strong commitment and persistence in implementing DM initiatives within their business operations.

- *Human Resources and Financial Resources*: Digital marketing personnel within tourism companies must possess expertise in both tourism marketing and information technology. This dual expertise is particularly important given the rapid pace of technological advancement and change. Therefore, employees within tourism businesses must engage in continuous learning and research to stay abreast of emerging marketing trends. Furthermore, the allocated budget for digital marketing activities influences the approach and execution of these activities. A stable financial resource sufficient to support digital marketing operations facilitates investment in physical infrastructure, equipment, and training for the digital marketing team.

2.2. External Factors

In addition to internal factors, the effective application of DM in tourism business operations requires a thorough analysis of external influences, including:

- *Tourists' Awareness of E-Commerce and Internet Usage Rates:* Tourists must have access to high-speed internet, a willingness to pay for internet services, and established habits of online shopping. These are essential conditions for tourism businesses to implement DM in online operations. Furthermore, the market size for such services must be sufficiently large and demonstrate a growing trend to ensure the feasibility of investing in DM. As aforementioned, the initial costs of adopting DM in tourism businesses are substantial, making market scalability critical for investment viability.

- *Advancements in Information Technology and the Internet*: Digital marketing applications and e-commerce business models are products of information technology advancements. Digital marketing applications can be employed in activities such as market research, new product research and development, digital technology application in communication program design, market segmentation, product promotion, sales, customer relationship management, and customer service, ….

- *Local and National Information Digital*

Infrastructure: The development of local and national information digital infrastructure provides a foundation, facilitates implementation, and creates impetus for the adoption of information technology in general and digital marketing in particular within tourism businesses. This development enhances tourists' access to information and visuals of destinations, attracting visitors, meeting their communication and other travel-related needs, and ultimately contributing to enhanced tourist satisfaction.

- *Government Policies on Information Technology Development*: The enactment of regulatory frameworks, policies, and strategies contributes to establishing a legal framework that attracts business investment in information technology and digital technology development. This creates a robust infrastructure for tourism businesses to implement digital marketing. Simultaneously, government policies provide a legal basis for tourism businesses to develop plans and implement solutions aligned with established strategic objectives. Furthermore, these policies provide a foundation for tourism businesses to mobilize resources for investment in information and communication technology infrastructure within their organizations.

3. Solutions for enhancing digital marketing implementation within vietnamese tourism businesses

3.1. Enhancing awareness of digital marketing applications among leadership and personnel

Empirical evidence from Vietnam indicates a gap in the comprehensive understanding among tourism enterprise leaders regarding the role of Digital Marketing (DM) and the efficacy of integrating Information Technology (IT) and digital technologies into marketing strategies. Consequently, investment in DM initiatives within these enterprises often lacks strategic focus and prioritization, resulting in suboptimal returns relative to its developmental potential. To maximize the effectiveness of DM activities within the Vietnamese tourism sector, it is imperative that CEOs and senior management of tourism enterprises proactively engage in research to develop a robust understanding of the fundamental nature and strategic role of DM in enhancing business performance within the evolving market landscape. When management teams possess a firm grasp of current technological trends and appreciate the significance of applying scientific and technological advancements to business development, a foundation for the successful implementation and expansion of DM is established. Such informed awareness will subsequently translate into increased allocation of both human and financial resources toward DM initiatives.

3.2. Enhancing investment in information technology infrastructure

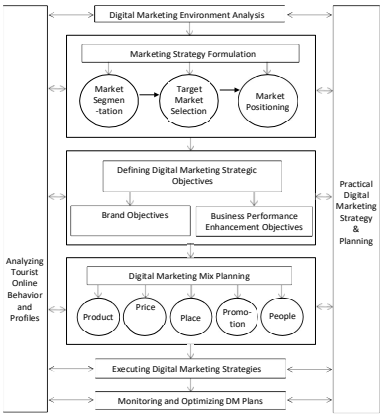
Effective DM strategies implementation within tourism enterprises are intrinsically linked to robust IT infrastructure. IT plays a crucial role not only in enhancing service quality and improving tourist satisfaction but also in enabling Vietnamese tourism enterprises to rapidly adapt to market dynamics. Customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by the accuracy and comprehensiveness of information regarding destination accessibility, facilities, attractions, and activities. Consequently, IT facilitates key drivers of consumer satisfaction. Proactive investment in and application of IT advancements within business operations will yield substantial benefits for Vietnamese tourism enterprises. To enhance competitiveness, these enterprises must embrace innovation in line with contemporary trends and societal advancements, thereby justifying substantial investment in IT. Of particular importance is the development of mobile-responsive websites that facilitate convenient access across various devices.

Vietnamese tourism enterprises must prioritize and augment budgetary allocations for DM activities. The Fourth Industrial Revolution necessitates the personalization of consumer products, including tourism offerings. Achieving this requires a deeper understanding of tourist needs, facilitated by technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and Big Data. Digital transformation is imperative; however, some enterprises may encounter challenges due to varying levels of digital literacy. Digitalization often necessitates business restructuring and operational adjustments. Therefore, Vietnamese tourism enterprises must allocate additional budget for digitalization initiatives to accelerate this process.

3.3. Developing a digital marketing framework for Vietnamese tourism enterprises

To enhance the effectiveness of DM strategies implementation within Vietnamese tourism businesses, marketing practitioners must first establish a DM application framework tailored to the specific characteristics of both the industry and individual enterprises. Therefore, the research team proposes the following DM application process for Vietnamese tourism companies:

Digital Marketing Application Process for Vietnamese Tourism Enterprises



3.4. Solutions for digital marketing environment analysis

For effective DM strategies implementation in business operations, Vietnamese tourism enterprises (VTEs) must analyze the impact of environmental factors, with a primary focus on researching and analyzing internet environment factors. As tourist online behavior differs from traditional behavior, VTEs need to analyze emerging internet trends and examine environmental factors to identify opportunities and potential risks.

Examining internet environment factors provides VTEs with a holistic view and enables them to forecast future trends. The tourism industry is characterized by "on-the-spot export," with international tourists constituting a significant proportion of total arrivals in Vietnam. DM application combined with global internet connectivity facilitates VTEs in researching both international and domestic tourism markets. Analyzing foreign competitors enables VTEs to develop effective competitive strategies.

Key research areas for DM planning include:

(1) Researching Tourist Online Behavior: This is a crucial area for VTEs. Research should address the following questions: Who are the enterprise's customers? What are their online behaviors? What social, personal, or psychological factors influence their search and purchase of tourism products and accommodation online? What is their online purchase decision-making process? How does their behavior change with internet usage? Essentially, researching customer behavior involves analyzing big data related to online tourists. This analysis can leverage techniques such as web analytics, social listening, and customer journey mapping.

(2) Researching Digital Product Suppliers in the Market: VTEs need to understand the opportunities and challenges presented by major suppliers like Google and Facebook. Data from these digital product suppliers or their partners can be analyzed to support VTEs if needed. This involves understanding platform algorithms, advertising options, and data analytics capabilities offered by these suppliers.

(3) Researching Domestic and International Competitors and factors influencing DM application in different countries' online environments. Enterprises should utilize IT to gather information from various sources, design customer surveys, and employ software for customer behavior statistics. Competitive intelligence gathering, benchmarking, and cross-cultural analysis are relevant here.

(4) Customer Research: VTEs should use electronic research tools to monitor and regularly update customer feedback and reviews, organize online seminars, and conduct online surveys and interviews (using online survey tools like Google Forms and SurveyMonkey). Leveraging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) can provide deeper insights into customer online behavior. VTEs should maximize the use of data analytics tools to closely align with customer experiences and expectations. Sentiment analysis and predictive analytics can further enhance understanding of customer preferences.

By applying DM and IT in market opportunity research and analysis, VTEs can exploit vast, low-cost data resources from the internet through official websites of agencies, organizations, associations, research institutes, universities, companies, enterprises, ministries, and departments. This data can include market reports, industry statistics, and consumer trend analyses.

Conclusion: Digital Marketing is a crucial tool for Vietnamese tourism enterprises to enhance business efficiency and create new competitive advantages in the global market within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Technology application in tourism is an inevitable trend. To maintain competitiveness and position, even domestically, VTEs need to shift their thinking and approach to DM activities to fully leverage the benefits it offers.

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