DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY[1]

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry has been facing a tremendous change in services due to the fast developing digital and smart applications in technology. Digital marketing has been changing many types of operations and influencing many services. This research puts forward some of the trends and challenges for digital marketing for the tourism industry. It provides a broadened view over digital marketing in tourism basing on a qualitative research of semi-structured interviews with professionals from the sector. It is possible to conclude that trends in digital marketing from the aspect of tourism industry can be listed as changes in social media, future expectations, human touch, connected services, whereas challenges are the tremendous change, competitors and data management. Digital marketing is dependent on digital data which requires an integrated system and a high quality team to manage. Digital marketing is expected to uncover the tourism industry quite tremendously in a near future.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Trends, Challenges, Tourism.

DİJİTAL PAZARLAMA UYGULAMALARI: TURİZM ENDÜSTRİSİ İÇİN YÖNELİMLER VE ZORLUKLAR[3]

ÖZET

Turizm endüstrisi, teknolojideki hızlı gelişen dijital ve akıllı uygulamalar nedeniyle, sunulan hizmetlerde büyük bir değişiklikle karşı karşıyadır. Dijital pazarlama birçok operasyon türünü değiştirmekte ve birçok hizmeti etkilemektedir. Bu araştırma, turizm endüstrisi için dijital pazarlama ile ilgili bazı trendleri (yönelimleri) ve zorlukları ortaya koymaktadır. Sektördeki profesyonel yöneticilerle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler içeren nitel bir araştırmaya dayanarak, turizmde dijital pazarlama üzerine daha geniş bir bakış açısı sağlamaktadır. Turizm pazarlamasında, dijital pazarlama yönelimlerini, sosyal medya, gelecek beklentileri, insana dokunuş, bağlantılı hizmetlerdeki değişiklikler; zorlukları ise büyük değişim, rakipler ve veri yönetimi olarak ifade etmek mümkündür. Dijital pazarlama, bütüncül bir sistem ve yönetmek için yüksek kaliteli bir ekibi gerektiren dijital verilere bağlıdır. Dijital pazarlamanın yakın bir gelecekte turizm endüstrisine büyük ölçüde nüfuz etmesi beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital pazarlama, Yönelimler, Zorluklar, Turizm.

INTRODUCTION

Today's world is remarkable with an incredibly rapid and revolutionary change in technology. Technology has been reshaping the operation and structure of many sectors and industries globally. As Sadr (2013) mentions, the tourism industry is one of the first service industries to adapt and use information and communication technologies (ICT) for promoting its services. However, tourism is not a clear-cut sector but an all-embracing and pervasive domain of service and industrial activities (Wahab and Cooper, 2001, p.5). Marketing has been seriously affected and changed by technology. Named as digital marketing, almost all marketing facilities can be done by internet and digital technologies. This has created many changes. For example, digital marketing has changed the traditional marketing mentality as well as consumer perception; consumers are accepted as "co-creators" and new terms as "crowdsourcing" has emerged. In addition, digital marketing concentrates on the use of "data" coming from the customers or potential customers.

Digital sales in tourism has been increasing all over the world. The digital travel sales are expected to reach 140 billion dollars by 2018 (Hutchinson, 2018). As a result, digital marketing in tourism has been replacing the traditional marketing and changing the marketing understanding. However, there may be some challenges to be discussed as well as the trends that are expected. This research aims to find out the expected trends and challenges in digital marketing in tourism industry through in-depth interviews with professionals from the sector. After reviewing the content of digital marketing, the research and findings are demonstrated. The study ends with some recommendations for tourism industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital marketing is the marketing of products or services using digital technologies based on internet. Communication with the customers may be through mobile phones, computers, tablets or any other electronic device. Digital marketing covers all kinds of marketing actions with customers using search engines, social media, e-mailing, websites, mobile applications or any other digital medium. Social media is one of the most popular areas for digital marketing. As being an important component of digital marketing, social media plays an important role in decision making process (Expedia, 2017). Before the tourist activity, 55 % of people use social media pages related to travel they are planning (Carter, 2017). According to a research conducted with travelers from U.S., Australia, U.K. and Canada showed that 36 % of tourist use social media & blog sites, while 54 % of them use travel review sites (Expedia, 2017). Besides Facebook; TripAdvisor, Youtube, Twitter and LinkedIn are also used by tourists (Acar, 2017). Carter (2017) asserts that 29 % of travelers use Facebook, 14 % use TripAdvisor and 6 % use Twitter before the travel planning. Social media is used not only for the "before the vacation" stage but also "during" and "post-vacation" stages. 72 % of people post vacation photos on social media and 70 % update their Facebook status while they are still on vacation. In post-vacation process, 76 % post their vacation photos on social media; 55 % like Facebook pages specific to a vacation and 46 % post hotel reviews (Carter, 2017).

Smartphones are widely used in the modern world where consumers can connect internet at any time and anywhere. Smartphones have brought many changes to the tourism industry (Kwon et al., 2013). The portable devices such as smartphones and tablets allow tourists to access all information and to easy purchase of touristic goods and services (Da Costa Liberato et al., 2018). Multiple studies have shown that an increasing number of consumers are booking travel arrangements on their mobile phones – a number that has been increasing. Sorrels (2018) claims that 37 % of consumers make shopping for flights and 43 % make a

booking via smartphones. Carter (2017) states that 35 % of travel booking activities via mobile devices by 2018.

Many hospitality companies have launched their mobile applications to customers (Kwon et al., 2013). Mobile apps allow the tourist to reach information (Koo et al., 2013) and to purchase products and services (Kwon et al., 2013) without the need of a web-browser (Tan et.al., 2017). Tourists can plan their travels or make room reservations thanks to mobile apps (Da Costa Liberato et al., 2018). Mobile apps provide several benefits to tourist. First, some websites are not suitable for mobile using and mobile apps can overcome this problem. Additionally, it can be personalized for each tourist. Secondly, tourists can access restaurants, transportations, local activities etc. using it (Tan et al., 2017). According to TripAdvisor, 60 percent of smartphone users have downloaded travel apps and 45 percent said that they plan to use the apps for travel planning (Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel, 2012).

Digital tourism is not only about being on the internet or using mobile apps but also using other digital resources such as a mobile payment that is receiving growing interest globally as an alternative to using cash, check or credit cards (Oliveira et al., 2016). Peng et al. (2012) describe the mobile payment as the use of a mobile device to conduct a tourism payment transaction in which money or funds are transferred from a payer to a receiver via an intermediary, or directly, without an intermediary in the tourist destination. The tourists make mobile payments using mobile wallet which comprises of mobile phone with consumer-specific information that allows guest to make payment (da Costa Liberato et al., 2018) via various wireless technologies (Oliveira et al., 2016) such as near field communication (NFC), radio frequency identification (RFID) and unstructured supplementary service data (USSD) (da Costa Liberato et al., 2018).

Digital marketing has been changing fastly however the literature has paid little attention to the concept how digital marketing is transforming the tourism industry (Haneef, 2017; Navio-Marco et al.,2018). Buhalis and Deimezi (2004) point out "main problems with online presence" as the insufficient financial resources and low use of e-commerce in the domestic market. Abou-Shouk et al. (2013) state that resource limitations, business internal environment and adopted technology attributes are the internal factors whereas business external environment and comprises aspects of the external business environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method is based on an interpretative paradigm with an exploratory qualitative research. It focuses on the trends and challenges in digital marketing basing on the assesments of professionals serving to tourism industry. The interview technique is considered appropriate for gathering data and is the most commonly used technique among qualitative researchers to gather information (Marshall and Rossman,1999). This qualitative research follows the qualitative sampling parameters, which are determined by four possible choices: setting, actors, events and social process (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Data Collection

The sample size for the in-depth interviews was limited to eleven professionals which is considered legitimate for an exploratory qualitative study. The criterion to determine sample size was based on the saturation of information (Glaser and Strauss,1967). In-depth interviews were recorded with the permission of the participant. The interviews lasted an average of 40 – 60 minutes. The in-depth interviews were conducted with a combination of open-ended and semi-structured formats. The researcher had clearly explained the aim of the research. Each participant was asked about his thoughts about trends and challenges in digital marketing basing on his experience from the hotel industry. As it is listed on table 1, the study group consists of

professionals who either work directly in the hotel industry or the ones who serve to the hotel industry in digital marketing or software production. The participants are coded as A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J and K. Two main questions were asked to the participants as:

1. What are the trends in digital marketing in the hotel industry basing on your experience?
2. What are the challenges in digital marketing in the hotel industry basing on your experience?

Study Group

Table 1. Study Group's position and enterprise list

Code	Position	Enterprise
A	Management Information Systems Manager	5 Star Hotel Chain
B	General Manager	Digital Marketing Agency
C	Hotel Management Consultant	Free-lance , Self-employed
D	Vice General Manager	Software Company (Serving basicly to hotel industry)
E	Vice General Manager ,	5 Star Hotel Chain
F	Marketing Expert	5 Star Hotel Chain
G	Marketing Expert	Theme Park, 5 Star Hotel
H	Digital Marketing Consultant	Free-lance, Self-employed
I	Digital Marketing and Sales Manager	5 Star Hotel Chain
J	Hotel Management Consultant	Free-lance, Self-employed
K	General Manager	Software Company (Serving basicly to hotel industry)

Data Analysis

The tapes of interviews were transcribed into a written format prior to the analysis. The data were analysed using a qualitative-phenomenological approach. The interview responses were read and re-read, and analysed by drawing out the key themes and sub-themes by two different researchers. Data analysis points out the themes, sub-themes and contents which are listed on table 2.

FINDINGS

The findings of the research can mainly be classified as themes of *Social Media, Tremendous Change, Competitors, Expectations, Human Touch, Connected Services and Data Management* which cover the trends and challenges in digital marketing.

Social Media

Social media covers the great part of digital marketing according to the participants of the survey. The participants stress the importance for special (focused) messages. The messages sent to the target groups are supposed to be for their interest in the right timing and content. In addition sometimes hotels may get consultancy for producing special (focused) messages:

"We should send a message concerning the winter holiday if we are talking about a family with children" (C).

"Every social media has different target customers, you need consultancy for that"(B).

"We get the information from our CRM system and advertise accordingly. We do not advertise for whole Germany but focus on specific cities"(A).

Message frequencies are quite important and should be handled carefully. Very frequent messages may cause boredom:

"Many companies share messages 14 times a week, this may make the people get bored"(H).

"Customers may come across too much pressure as they are taken into e-mail lists willingly or unwillingly"(B).

Today's customers come across with too many messages and may disregard the messages sent by the hotels. However, if the hashtags are chosen with some kind of "smart" reasons, they may take attention:

"We need smart hashtags for our target customers. It is not enough to say "Belek Hotels", you should focus on the needs and interests of your target customers, you can even write "bikini diet""(D).

Social media management is very crucial for digital marketing. Digital marketing managers try to have contact with their target customers and want to inform them regularly. They get their feedback and define their social media strategies upon their reactions. Therefore, social media management means a kind of a "reputation management":

"Online reputation management is critical in social media management" (I).

One of the tough points in social media management is the production of messages. The contents of the messages are quite important. Customers do not want to see very usual and ordinary messages or news. The original contents are causing more interest and taking more attention:

"Generating original content is the utmost subject. If I can generate original content, I can come forward"(A).

Tremendous change:

The change in digital marketing is very fast. This change is basicly caused by the fast progress in social media and technology:

"Facebook changes something every week"(J).

This situation requires a continuous follow-up, because the managers who do not follow up very well, will not be able to catch up with the changes:

"You give an advertisement in social media and after 2 days, it may be rubbish, because the algorithm changes" (D).

"We follow up the changes in technology worldwide"(B).

Digitalization worldwide is very fast and effecting daily routines. We may not have any printed material in the near future:

"I think there will be no printed material in the very near future"(I).

Competitors:

Competitors are to be followed with higher concern as the sharing of information is very fast. Benchmarking is very important as every company may take very fast action in digital marketing, therefore competitors are followed carefully:

"You should find out your position in digital marketing. What is your competitor doing in Japan ?"(F).

"Competitor benchmarking is of high importance" (K).

"We follow not only our own hotels but also our competitors" (A).

Future Expectations:

Some changes in the tourism sector are expected. Tour operators may disappear as the customers have more availability and ability to organize their holidays and even there may be changes in the hotels using more digital technology:

"Tour operators will disappear, they will go through evolution and be online" (G).

"I don't think there will be any tour operators in 10 years' time" (K).

"There will be no receptions in the hotels in the near future"(C).

There may be an integration of systems and channels resulting in more efficient alternatives:

"Social media channels, google plus, blog in the web site are all connected to each other, which we call as kitlist"(D).

The integration of some services with each other may lead to more happy customers:

"If the online travel agents (OTA) may integrate with the hotels, everybody will be more happy" (H).

"The guest may control many things in the hotel room with multimedia controller system also order some services in the hotel"(F).

The integration of systems and services may cause less personnel but more robots in service:

"Even, there may be virtual Human Resource Manager, virtual Marketing Manager, may be there will be no need for a Hotel Manager, however guests do not want to be served by robots for the time being"(G).

Participants assume more digitalization to happen in the near future:

"I think there will be no printed material in the very near future" (I).

Human touch:

Hospitality and tourism sector is known to be a human-touch sector. There is a direct relationship with the service provider and receiver. Human touch is especially very crucial to achieve guest satisfaction:

"We follow our guest after first day of arrival, if there is a problem, we solve it immediately; we want to put the happy guests to our web site, we ask them to write their impression from their own phones" (J).

"Our sector needs human touch"(A).

"We need human touch in the first line"(E).

Connected Services:

Hotel services are connected with the digital systems in order to achieve a higher customer satisfaction. Customers' information is transferred to the internal systems and mobile applications which may even be used to open their doors without a key:

"If you are a loyalty programme member, and have downloaded the application, you can open your room with your digital key" (B).

Customer Relations Systems (CRM) is quite important to keep the customer data. Customer data is kept, reviewed and analysed:

"We need CRM system to keep customer information among our hotels"(D).

Combined with digital marketing, CRM systems may provide more personalized services. However, hotels can get very limited customer information before their arrival. Therefore, they prefer to get more customer information even before they arrive. If they get more information about customers, this may cause a higher quality service upon pleasing the personal preferences:

"If I ask the guest, whether he would like to have his favourite drink, he will be delighted, this I can know through CRM, which leads to higher quality service"(J).

"Actually, CRM should not start in the hotel, it should start with the reservation of the customer" (I).

Today's hotel technology permits the use of personal technology preferences to be transferred to anywhere the individual may go. This may be also valid for hotel services:

" Today, we have hotels where customers can bring their own technology preferences like their Netflix choices and etc."(H).

"There should be a connection in services: tour operator, hotel and soft ware programmers" (G).

Data Management:

Digital marketing is based on customer data. In a way, it may also be called as "customer data management". From this point of view, data mining is very important for data management:

"There is a new concept as dataism. It is very important….If you can not manage your data with data mining, your data does not have a meaning"(F).

However, data management is successful if the data quality is high which may be provided by current and safe data:

"The most important thing is to get the data safely, to record and use it"(E).

"We are questioning the quality of data.Data may be fake so we have to make sure it is not"(D).

Security of the data and the system are quite important factors to consider:

"Is your server room secure ? Is your internet system secure ?"(A).

In addition, Search Engine Optimization is quite effective in digital marketing. Data is valuable when it is available and under the consideration of customers. With Search Engine Optimization, a hotel may be listed at the top. If the customers click the hotel more and are visiting the web page etc. more often, the hotel may get a higher rank to be listed and this may also affect the customers' preferences:

"Our goal is to get to higher ranks where our target customers are mainly interested, and finally to reach them"(B).

Table 2. Themes, subthemes and content

Themes	Sub themes	Content
Social Media	- Special (focused) messages - Message frequencies - Smart hashtags - Reputation management - Original content	Social media usage occupies a major segment in digital marketing. The channels, messages, frequencies, hashtags, reputation created, and original content are to be considered carefully. The messages need to focus on the target groups, frequency of the messages must neither be too much nor too less; hashtags should be interesting, messages create the reputation and contribute to the reputation of the company and the contents should reflect the reality as well as being interesting.
Tremendous change	- Rapid change in social media and technology - Continuous follow up	There is a tremendous change in digital marketing from the aspects of the changes in social media and technology basically. This rapid change must be followed up very closely and if it is not followed up, managers may have difficulty to adapt and manage.
Competitors	Higher concern about competitors	Competitor follow up and benchmarking is quite significant to adapt to the changes in every aspect related to the digital marketing.
Expectations	- Change in the tourism sector - Integration of systems and channels - Less personnel - More digitalization	Expectations cover the changes related to the actors in the system and their positions. As an example, participants think that there will not be tour operators or there will not be receptions, they think that the services will be more connected to each other and less personnel will be required. Digitalization will go on related to all possible applications in the sector.
Human touch	Guest satisfaction	Human touch is the direct relationship established with the customer considering his personal needs and well-being. Guest satisfaction is the basic aim of the industry and this can only be achieved by human touch.
Connected Services	- Hotel services connected with the digital systems - Customer Relations Systems (CRM) - Higher quality service - Transfer of personal preferences to other devices	Digital marketing is expected to be combined with CRM systems or any other hotel management systems in order to get more information about the customer which will lead to offer more personal services and higher quality of services. Customers can even transfer their personal choices for TV or film etc. to their hotel room.
Data management	- Data mining - Data quality	Data management is the critical issue to manage customer data, data quality and security are topics to be managed.

	• Security • Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	In addition, Search Engine Optimization is one of the important points so that data will be more accessible.

CONCLUSION

The research has brought to light the trends and challenges of digital marketing practices in the tourism industry. Digitilazition in tourism industry is fast and has been influencing the industry in various ways.

First of all, social media in general, covers some trends and changes as well as challenges to be handled. Participants view social media as the basic digital marketing tool, however the usage of social media channels should match with the target market and services. All kinds of channels are not efficient to reach target groups, messages need to focus on the target groups and be specialized. Message frequencies are significant so that customers are interested and not disinterested. As there are enourmous amount of data offered in social media, smart hastags are required to take attention. Large amount of information is available on the Internet and this enables tourists to easily find the products that are best adapted to their budget and needs (Oklobdžija and Popesku, 2017). All kinds of social media messages reflect the reputation of the company as well as establishing the reputation and contributing to the reputation. Individuals easily contribute their thoughts, opinions and creations to the Internet via social media (Hays et al., 2012). Therefore, all messages should be carefully chosen and cultural differences need to be considered. The message content would be quite effective if it is original and produced by people who know the customers and the services one by one. Narangajavana et al. (2017) state that social media are not only useful for the dissemination of information, but can also have an influence on tourists' expectations.

Tremendous change in digital marketing and technology associated with digital marketing may be seen as a challenge as it is too fast. Digital marketing managers need to follow up the changes very fastly and adapt them. They need continuous training for their teams. Competitors can also be another challenge as the digital marketing managers need to follow them very closely, the speed of adaptation to changes may be an important competitive advantage. Competitors use of digital marketing may be different and may be more effective, therefore, competitors are one of the important stakeholders to be followed up compared to traditional marketing as they are also always online and accessible. Future expectations of the participants can be viewed as the trends in digital marketing. The changes in the industry are expected to influence digital marketing and vice versa. Participants assume that the traditional way of service will be changed and services will be more customer oriented, as an example tour operators may diminish, services and systems may be more connected and more digitalization may prevail. These changes may lead less personnel in the long run. However, tourism industry is a service based industry where one to one human contact is essential. From this point of view, human touch is expected to exist in order to have higher guest satisfaction. In addition, technological developments create perfect conditions for tourist companies to develop an intimate relationship with tourists and ensure their loyalty (Oklobdžija and Popesku, 2017).

Another trend in digital marketing is the expectation for having more connected services. Digital Marketing is based on data management and data comes from various management systems. Therefore, hotel management systems are expected to be connected with customer data and related information which may lead to higher quality service as the service is more personalized. Hotels may offer technological availability for customers to transfer their personal preferences to their TVs in hotel rooms etc., which may lead to higher customer satisfaction.

The participants of the study put forward that the main challenge in digital marketing is data management. Digital marketing produces customer data or is based on customer data. However, data must be managed in a secure way and data quality is important so that right data is received. Data mining can be one of the options to manage data effectively. However, it is mentioned that there are very limited number of managers or officers to handle data. Styvén and Wallström (2019) research results show that having staff with work time specifically reserved for working with digital channels, rather than trying to manage this alongside other tasks, increases the perceived benefits and decreases barriers related to ICT use. Another important issue is search engine optimization (SEO) where messages need to be managed with a high probability to be watched by target customers. SEO may also be accepted as another challenge in data management and needs to be handled efficiently and carefully.

In today's world, tourists seek high quality digital resources to lead to a better decision (Haneef, 2017). It is possible to conclude that trends in digital marketing from the aspect of tourism industry can be listed as changes in social media, future expectations, human touch, connected services, whereas challenges can be the tremendous change, competitors and data management.

The study has some limitations. Although the number of the sample is small, data was collected by face-to-face interviews. Future research may involve more participants with various different research methods. The study can be expanded by examining tourists' perceptions as well. Results may be compared within different destinations. Trends and challenges in digital marketing should be followed with a specific care.

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