

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF MARKETING: THE CASE OF DÜZCE PROVINCE HOTEL BUSINESSES¹

PAZARLAMANIN DİJİTAL DÖNÜŞÜMÜ: DÜZCE İLİ OTEL İŞLETMELERİ ÖRNEĞİ²

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Günümüzde her alanda olduğu gibi pazarlama alanında da dijital dönüşüm yaşanmaktadır. Bu dönüşüm işletmelerin iş yapma biçimlerini değiştirmekte ve çeşitli faydalar sağlamaktadır. Bu nedenle turizm sektörünün önemli bileşenlerinden olan otel işletmelerinde dijital pazarlamanın etkilerini incelemek önem arz etmektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın amacı Düzce ilindeki 3 yıldız ve üzeri otel işletmelerinin dijital pazarlama tekniklerinin kullanım düzeylerini ve bu işletmelerin dijital pazarlama faaliyetlerinin satış rakamlarına olan etkisini tespit etmektir. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemi uygulanmıştır. Araştırmaya ilişkin veriler Düzce’de ilgili kriterleri taşıyan 10 adet otel işletmesinin yöneticileriyle yüz yüze görüşmeler sonucu elde edilmiştir. Araştırma bulgularına göre; Düzce’de faaliyet gösteren otel işletmelerinin çoğunlukla dijital pazarlama yatırımlarının sınırlı olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Buna karşın otel yöneticilerinin dijital pazarlamanın potansiyeline yönelik farkındalık düzeyinin oldukça yüksek olduğu görülmüştür. Otel işletmelerinin sosyal medya ve arama motoru pazarlamasını etkin bir şekilde kullandığı ve genellikle dijital pazarlama faaliyetlerinin ön büro personelleri tarafından yürütüldüğü tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca otel işletmelerinin dijital pazarlama faaliyetleri ile satış rakamları arasında pozitif yönlü ve güçlü bir ilişkinin olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

ABSTRACT

Today, as in every field, digital transformation is experienced in marketing. This transformation changes the way businesses do business and provides various benefits. For this reason, examining the effects of digital marketing on hotel businesses, which play a vital role in the tourism sector, is crucial. In this context, the study aims to determine the level of use of digital marketing techniques of three-star and above hotel businesses in Düzce Province and the effect of digital marketing activities of these businesses on sales figures. The qualitative research method was applied in the study. The data related to the research were obtained through face-to-face interviews with the managers of 10 hotel businesses in Düzce that meet the relevant criteria. According to the research findings; some observe that hotel businesses operating in Düzce have limited digital marketing investments. However, it has been observed that hotel managers’ level of awareness of the potential of digital marketing is high. It has been determined that hotel businesses use social media and search engine marketing and that front-office personnel carry out digital marketing activities. It is also concluded that there is a positive and strong relationship between digital marketing activities and sales figures of hotel businesses.

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Introduction

Technological developments are rapidly changing the daily lives and purchasing behaviours of individuals. This change also attracts the attention of the business world. Businesses are achieving their goal of delivering the goods or services they produce to their consumers by using digital technologies and the Internet (Aliji, 2016). At this point, the concept of digital marketing emerges. To express the concept of digital marketing correctly, it is necessary to reveal what marketing is. Marketing can be explained as all the processes comprising the efforts of businesses to deliver the goods and services they produce to consumers through the right channels and to establish continuous communication with them (Altun, 2020; Bulunmaz, 2016). Digital marketing can be expressed as transferring these efforts to digital environments. The focus of digital marketing is to reach customers in digital environments. Digital marketing, which is sensitive to technological developments (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Yüksel and Tolon, 2019), is significant in increasing sales.

The concept of sales can be defined as the natural output of marketing processes (Altun, 2020). Businesses are to organize delivering the goods or services they produce to consumers in the right way. Because the production stages, quality, and marketing activities of the products cover a process. The realization of the sales transaction depends on the successful execution of this process. Businesses that reach the target sales figures will continue their activities, make new investments and contribute to employment. Achieving this goal directly affects the contribution of businesses to the national economy (Cha, 2009).

Tourism, digital marketing, and sales of hotel businesses are the main variables of this study. The main purpose of the study was to reveal the extent to which digital marketing activities affect sales performance in the tourism sector. In addition, another aim of the study is to evaluate the competitive advantage of digital marketing techniques for hotel businesses. While assessing the universe of the study, "Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism" was contacted and hotel businesses operating in the region were determined. 10 hotel businesses with three stars and above made up the sample of the study. The research is a qualitative study carried out within the framework of the "phenomenology (phenomenology)" design, and the data collection and analysis were carried out by the relevant research design. Since the subject of the study is a current issue and there are not enough studies on the subject in Düzce, the results obtained will both contribute to the literature and guide the practitioners. In this article, firstly, the literature about the study is given, then the purpose of the study, the population, and the data collection tool used are mentioned in the method section. Then, the findings of the study and the conclusions and recommendations are given in the last part.

Literature Review

Digital Marketing Concept and Digital Transformation of Marketing

Technology has become an element that has taken place in almost every moment of our lives in recent years. Especially since the 2000s, it has affected our lives more and more. Technology, which is so involved in daily life, has undoubtedly changed the way of doing business significantly. In this context, technology is also used extensively in marketing (Zeren and Kaya, 2020). While digitalization dominates marketing processes, it also mediates the globalization of businesses. Nowadays, businesses can organize their marketing activities using technology and thus can easily reach large audiences and benefit from numerous opportunities (Yüksel and Tolon, 2019).

When national and international literature is examined, many definitions of digital marketing are encountered (Ansari, Ansari, Ghorri and Kazi, 2019; Glucksman, 2017; Alan, Kabadayı, and Erişke, 2018; Aliji, 2016; Atalay, 2022). However, the common point of all definitions is the intensive use of technology (Armstrong, 2008). In its simplest form, digital marketing can be defined as the digitalization of all processes carried out in marketing activities (Glucksman, 2017). In other words, it is the promotion of goods and services produced by businesses by using smartphones, computers, and internet facilities (Babu, 2021).

Digital marketing is often confused with concepts such as internet marketing and mobile marketing. All these marketing activities are an important part of digital marketing. Internet marketing is explained as the realization of promotional activities online. Mobile marketing is the execution of marketing processes using

mobile devices. Digital marketing is related to more comprehensive marketing activities that include both concepts. With digital marketing, very large masses can be reached in much shorter periods. To put it more clearly, digital marketing is a concept comprising more than these methods (Kapan and Üncel, 2020).

Digitalisation has significantly affected the way businesses do business, as well as the daily lives of consumers. The increasing digitalization phenomenon has also changed the consumption habits and purchasing behaviours of consumers (Arslan, 2014). Consumers, who can compare many similar products in a short time perform most of their purchasing behaviours online. In recent years, consumers' tendency to purchase through online channels has been increasing. Because, this method offers some advantages to businesses and consumers in terms of speed, time, and cost (Febrianti, Saudi, Kaniawati and Hermina, 2018). Another important factor that makes digital marketing is the opportunity to personalize products and appeal to small groups. In the process of digital marketing activities, businesses can create virtual communities for consumers with common interests. Thus, they can directly address their expectations and increase satisfaction (Kayın, 2017). Businesses that use the opportunities offered by digital marketing in the right way can easily measure their marketing activities. In other words, numerical data on the results of the studies carried out can be obtained. This situation benefits businesses in the new product development process (Çokal and Büyükkuru, 2018).

Creativity, being updatable, and being able to offer personalized services are some of the basic features that can be listed for digital marketing. Considering that technology is constantly changing and developing, these qualities make it clear how important digital marketing is for businesses. The rapid change in the demand level of consumers also makes these qualities extremely valuable (Ercan, 2020). Businesses can accurately determine the characteristics and expectations of consumers by using technology. In this way, businesses can use creative marketing applications that can easily reach different target audiences. This is recognised as an important feature of digital marketing (Alan, Kabadayı and Erişke, 2018). Achieving customer satisfaction and profit margin targeted by businesses depends on their success in the process of providing quality products or services to consumers (Drennan and Kenedy, 2003). This process, which is an important element of marketing, should be carried out according to the age. In today's conditions, digitalization in every field has made it compulsory for marketing to be digitalized as well. It will be much easier for businesses that benefit from the opportunities of digital marketing to achieve their goals in increasing competition conditions because of digitalization (Khan et al., 2020).

Techniques Used in Digital Marketing

Digital marketing emerges depending on technological developments and uses many up-to-date methods depending on these developments and changing consumer expectations (Li, Zhou and Huang, 2023; Çam, 2024). New digital marketing channels are emerging depending on digital transformation. To list the basic techniques used for digital marketing in the table below (Carlisle, Ivanov and Dijkmans, 2023; Akbar and Sinaga, 2023).

Table 1: Digital Marketing Techniques and Their Key Attributes

Digital Marketing Techniques	
Social Media Marketing	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube
Influencer Marketing	YouTuber profiles, social media profiles with a high number of followers
Content Marketing	Sustainable communication and up-to-date content
Email Marketing	Continuous communication via e-mail
Mobile Marketing	Efforts to reach consumers through tools such as SMS and MMS
Online Marketing Activities	Marketing efforts carried out simultaneously with consumers
Search Engine Marketing (SEM)	Paid advertising content through Google

Note. Obtained from studies prepared by Bilge and Kara, 2024; Kapan and Üncel, 2020; Zeren and Kaya, 2020; Carlisle, Ivanov and Dijkmans, 2023.

Sales Activities

Sales activities are the goal that businesses want to achieve because of various preparations and studies (Aliji, 2016). The concept of sales is a process that usually results in two parties, such as producers and sellers, coming together, with one party giving a product or service and the other party giving money or a valuable product in return. Today, the phenomenon of digitalization in every field has also transformed sales processes.

Consumers can now choose the most suitable one among countless alternative products in virtual environments without having to go to physical markets. Digital consumers turn into more conscious consumers thanks to the rich information sources they access in the virtual environment; they also affect sales processes by sharing their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with others (Marangoz, 2018). Businesses that can follow every step of consumers, thanks to digitalization, can offer the most suitable product for their needs by using digital sales channels (Güleryüz, 2019). Similarly, digital tools and environments that provide the opportunity to meet the various demands of consumers 24/7 enable businesses to maximize their profits. In tourism, booking and sales transactions have been moved to digital environments. Tourism businesses maximize their sales by constantly offering new services to consumers by using digital channels during the holiday process. (Kim and Kim, 2005).

Hotel businesses recognize the Internet as an important element of their marketing and communication strategies (Buhalis and Law, 2008: 611). The increasing use of mobile devices and the Internet because of technological developments has eliminated space and time limitations for hotel businesses and has provided the opportunity to interact with consumers continuously and offer new products to them. In this context, it can be said that digital marketing channels are the most effective way to achieve the goals of hotel businesses (Aktan and Koçyiğit, 2016). In today's conditions where digital marketing makes it easier to achieve sales targets, hotel businesses that strengthen their digital infrastructure and employ staff who can adapt to this transformation gain a competitive advantage (Baharoğlu, 2021). Digital marketing provides hotel businesses with the opportunity to save money in terms of cost and time (Bulunmaz, 2016), as well as achieve high sales figures. Digital platforms offer consumers the opportunity to choose between many holiday options offered by many hotels. Moreover, consumers can make suggestions and recommendations to guide other customers based on their experiences in the hotels they stay in. This sense of trust has a direct impact on sales figures, as potential consumers trust the opinions of others like them more (Armstrong, 2008).

Method

In this section, considering the literature research in the previous section, information about the research process carried out to evaluate the level of use of digital marketing activities of hotel businesses in Düzce Province is given. In addition, information on the purpose, scope, method, and data collection technique used in the research process is also discussed.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the research is to reveal the level of use of digital marketing techniques by three-star and above hotel businesses in Düzce Province, which has an important tourism potential with its natural beauties and proximity to big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara, and the effect of these digital marketing activities on sales figures. Besides this main purpose, the perspectives of hotel managers on digital marketing and technological developments were also tried to be observed in this process. Another sub-objective is to evaluate whether digital marketing techniques provide a competitive advantage to hotel businesses in terms of sales.

Research Methodology

Determining the research approach (design) correctly in academic studies ensures that the desired goal is achieved much more successfully. From this point of view, the "phenomenology" approach is preferred in this article. The phenomenology approach is preferred in studies carried out on cases and subjects where there is a

need to collect more in-depth information about existing information. In the relevant research design and analysis process; It uses techniques such as revealing the causes, classifying them, and making direct transfers (Çapar and Ceylan, 2022: 299).

In the article, the "qualitative" research method, which is frequently used in social sciences, was preferred by the phenomenology approach (Karataş, 2015). Literature review and face-to-face interviews were selected as data collection techniques. The universe of the study comprises three-star and above hotel businesses operating in Düzce. As a sample, 10 hotel businesses were determined. While determining the population and sample of the study, the "Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism" was contacted and numerical data about the hotels in the region was obtained. Interviews were determined by contacting the hotel managers in advance by e-mail or phone. During the interview, six interview questions were asked for the study. The direct transfer technique was used in the analysis process of the obtained data. In addition, the numerical data obtained were summarized using tables.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this research comprises three-star and above hotel businesses operating in the Düzce city centre and the Akçakoca district. In this context, ten hotel businesses that meet the desired criteria were determined. In the process of determining the hotel businesses, the development of the hotel businesses in Düzce Province in recent years and their accessible location have been significant factors. The information about the hotel businesses and the managers interviewed within the scope of the research is shared in the table below.

Table 2: Information on the Interviewed Hotel Organisations and Managers

Sequence	Information on Hotel Management			Information on the Interviewed Manager			
	Number	Location	Star	Gender	Mission	Experience	Education status
1	Hotel 1	Duzce-Centre	3	Male	Hotel Manager	5 Years	Bachelor
2	Hotel 2	Duzce-Centre	3	Woman	Front Office Manager	4 Months	Bachelor
3	Hotel 3	Duzce - Centre	3	Male	Administrative Supervisor	1.5 years	High School
4	Hotel 4	Duzce-Centre	3	Woman	Hotel Manager	4 Months	Bachelor
5	Hotel 5	Duzce-Centre	4	Male	General Manager	11 Years	Bachelor
6	Hotel 6	Duzce - Centre	3	Male	Hotel Manager	4 Years	Bachelor
7	Hotel 7	Düzce-Akçakoca	3	Male	Hotel Manager	35 Years	High School
8	Hotel 8	Düzce-Akçakoca	3	Male	Financial Affairs Manager	25 Years	Bachelor
9	Hotel 9	Duzce - Centre	3	Male	Hotel Manager	3 Years	Bachelor
10	Hotel 10	Duzce-Centre	3	Woman	Hotel Manager	10 Years	Master's Degree

Conducting Interviews

The interviews were conducted on the dates and times specified in the table below, in line with the appointments made with the hotel managers after contacting them beforehand. These interviews were conducted in the offices of the hotel managers themselves or in the hotel lobbies. Attention was paid to the appointment times set for the interviews. During the interview, measures were taken to ensure that the environment in which the interview was conducted was suitable for the purpose. Interview durations were planned to be between 15-30 minutes and interviews were conducted.

Table 3: Data on Interview Dates and Interview Locations

Sequence	Number	Star Status	Role of the Authorised Officer	Interview Date	Interview Location
1	Hotel 1	3 Stars	Hotel Manager	04.07.2022	Hotel Lobby
2	Hotel 2	3 Stars	Front Office Manager	04.07.2022	Hotel Lobby
3	Hotel 3	3 Stars	Administrative Supervisor	05.07.2022	Executive Office
4	Hotel 4	3 Stars	Hotel Manager	05.07.2022	Hotel Lobby
5	Hotel 5	4 Stars	General Manager	05.07.2022	Executive Office
6	Hotel 6	3 Stars	Hotel Manager	06.07.2022	Hotel Lobby
7	Hotel 7	3 Stars	Hotel Manager	06.07.2022	Executive Office
8	Hotel 8	3 Stars	Financial Affairs Manager	07.07.2022	Executive Office
9	Hotel 9	3 Stars	Hotel Manager	07.07.2022	Hotel Lobby
10	Hotel 10	3 Stars	Hotel Manager	07.07.2022	Executive Office

Creating the Questionnaire Used in the Interview

The interview form used in the research process was prepared after a detailed literature study on the subject. Six questions were prepared to be directed to the hotel managers during the interview. During the interview, explanations were made to obtain more in-depth information, and a correct understanding of the questions was ensured. To ensure that the questions used in the interview technique are consistent, the studies in the literature have been examined. A framework was created for the questions and previous studies were taken as reference (Baharoğlu, 2021; Buhalis and Law, 2008; Aktan and Koçyiğit, 2016; Güteryüz, 2019; Ercan, 2020; Drennan and Kenedy, 2003). The interview questions created based on the relevant studies are organized in the following order.

- Does your business have a website? If yes, is it followed up to date and used as an opportunity to increase sales performance?
- Do you have a staff to carry out digital marketing activities, and do you think there is a link between the level of technology utilization of your staff and sales figures?
- Which digital marketing techniques do you use intensively to reach your sales targets and which one contributes the most to your sales?
- Do you use different social media according to the demographic status of your target audience?
- Do you believe that digital marketing activities impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty?
- Do you think that the digital marketing activities you implement provide your business with a competitive advantage in terms of sales performance?

Findings

In this part of the study, the data obtained because of the interviews conducted during the research process will be presented and the data will be analyzed. This research, which covers three-star and above hotel businesses operating in Düzce Province, was carried out to reveal the level of use of digital marketing techniques by hotel businesses and the impact of these techniques on sales figures. The table below shows the coding that will be used in the following sections and the code representing each hotel business.

Table 4: Coding of the Interviewed Hotel Organisations

Hotel Number	Hotel Management Code
Hotel 1	3DOTL1
Hotel 2	3DOTL2
Hotel 3	4DOTL1
Hotel 4	3DOTL3
Hotel 5	3DOTL4
Hotel 6	3DOTL5
Hotel 7	3DOTL6
Hotel 8	3DOTL7
Hotel 9	3DOTL8
Hotel 10	3DOTL9

Eight of these interviewed businesses carry out their activities in the Düzce city centre. Two of them are in the Akçakoca district. One of these businesses, which is the source of the research, has a four-star status and nine of them continue their activities in three-star status.

Findings on the Effect of the Level of Use of Web Sites of Hotel Businesses on Sales Performance

The first question at the starting point of the interview was asked to the hotel managers about the level of use of the websites of the hotel businesses and the effect of this use on sales. While asking this question to the managers, it was tried to reach sub-objectives such as whether the websites are a digital marketing tool, whether the websites are an opportunity to direct the target audience to purchase, and whether the websites are kept up to date.

During the interviews, it was determined that all hotel businesses use their websites actively and up-to-date, as can be seen in the table above. However, there are also business managers who think that this level of use does not affect sales-oriented studies and the power of websites to direct sales. The answers given by the managers to this question are explained in the table below.

Table 5: Data on the Level of Usage of Web Sites of Hotel Businesses

Data from websites			
Hotel managers	Relevance	Sales orientation	Power to direct sales
3DOTL1	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL2	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL3	✓	⊗	⊗
3DOTL4	✓	⊗	⊗
3DOTL5	✓	⊗	⊗
3DOTL6	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL7	✓	✓	✓
4DOTL1	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL8	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL9	✓	⊗	⊗

Findings on the Relationship between the Level of Technology Usage of the Employee Staff in Hotel Businesses and Sales Figures

Hotel managers were asked whether there is a link between the technological equipment of the staff and sales figures. From the answers of the managers, sub-objectives such as the level of use of social media by the staff, and the relationship between digital marketing and social media were tried to be reached.

In addition, it has been tried to obtain data on whether the technology usage skills of the candidates are effective in labour preferences. In line with the answers given by the managers, the table below will be effective in explaining this question.

Table 6: Data on the Level of Technology Utilisation of Hotel Businesses

The effect of the level of technology use			
Hotel managers	Do you have staff for digital marketing	Does it affect your labor recruitment?	Will it positively affect sales figures?
3DOTL1	⊗	✓	✓
3DOTL2	⊗	✓	✓
3DOTL3	⊗	✓	✓
3DOTL4	⊗	⊗	✓
3DOTL5	⊗	⊗	✓
3DOTL6	⊗	⊗	✓
3DOTL7	⊗	⊗	✓
4DOTL1	⊗	⊗	✓
3DOTL8	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL9	⊗	✓	✓

The data obtained during the interview process were tried to be summarised in the table above as the opinions received from the managers. When we analyze the table, it is seen that the vast majority of hotel businesses do not have a professional team to carry out digital marketing activities. It is understood that these activities are mostly carried out through the front office. The common opinion of hotel managers is that technologically advanced personnel are positive for the business, but there is no digital marketing staff. Considering the data obtained, it is understood that digital marketing activities are carried out by people in managerial positions.

Findings on Digital Marketing Techniques Used and Digital Marketing Techniques with the Highest Contribution to Sales

Search engine marketing the activities of coming to the forefront in searches made through search engines are important to the vast majority of hotel businesses. Only two managers stated they did not consider this issue effective in sales. In the data obtained for e-mail marketing, it was determined that three hotel businesses do not use e-mail as a marketing tool. The data obtained because of the interviews are shared in the table below. When Table Six is analyzed, it is determined that only one of the hotel businesses uses social media channels at a low level.

Table 7: Digital Marketing Techniques Commonly Used in Hotel Businesses

Hotel managers	Digital marketing techniques used		
	Social media marketing	Search engine marketing	Email marketing
3DOTL1	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL2	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL3	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL4	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL5	✓	✓	⊗
3DOTL6	✓	✓	⊗
4DOTL1	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL7	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL8	✓	✓	⊗
3DOTL9	✓	✓	✓

When the opinions of hotel managers are evaluated, it is seen that Google comments and social media marketing are intensively preferred. Especially the positive comments to be obtained through Google are of great importance in creating demand from the consumer. In addition, sales activities in digital environments such as Odamax and Booking.com also appear in these opinions.

Findings Regarding the Digital Marketing Techniques Applied by Hotel Businesses According to the Age Groups of Their Target Audiences

In sales and marketing activities, it is crucial to recognize the target audience correctly and reach them through the right channels. In recent years, it has been seen that the use of social media has diversified according to the age groups of individuals. The data obtained in this question about whether hotel businesses shape their marketing activities according to the age categories of consumers are shared in the table below. In the fourth question, hotel managers were asked whether they carry out digital marketing activities suitable for the target audience. In the table below, it is discussed which social media are effectively used by the hotels in Düzce Province included in the research.

Table 8: Social Media Channels Commonly Used in Hotel Businesses

Effectively used social media channels			
Hotel managers	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
3DOTL1	✓	✓	⊗
3DOTL2	✓	✓	⊗
3DOTL3	✓	✓	⊗
3DOTL4	⊗	⊗	⊗
3DOTL5	✓	✓	⊗
3DOTL6	✓	✓	⊗
4DOTL1	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL7	⊗	⊗	⊗
3DOTL8	✓	✓	✓
3DOTL9	✓	✓	⊗

During the interview, it was determined that hotel businesses use Facebook to reach middle-aged and older target groups. The Instagram channel is being used more for young audiences. Twitter is not used as a marketing element. All hotel managers stated that they have the above social media accounts. In addition, it was tried to obtain data on the active use of social media channels by hotels. The opinions of the interviewed managers are mostly in the direction that sales performance needs to group consumers correctly, determine their needs, and reach them through the right channels.

Findings on the Relationship between Digital Marketing Activities and Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

Sales and marketing activities are of great importance for the hotel sector. One of the primary objectives of marketing activities is customer satisfaction and customer loyalty to be created based on this situation. (Parker, 2012). This question, which was directed to hotel managers during the interviews, aimed to reveal the effect of digital marketing techniques used by hotel businesses on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Based on the answers given by the managers, learning the effect of customer satisfaction and loyalty on sales activities has been determined as a hidden objective. In this study, in which the personal opinions of hotel managers were evaluated with importance, the following table clarified the answers given to the question.

Table 9: The Relationship between Digital Marketing and Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Do digital marketing activities have an impact?		
Hotel managers	Customer Satisfaction	Customer Loyalty
3DOTL1	✓	✓
3DOTL2	✓	⊗
3DOTL3	✓	⊗
3DOTL4	✓	⊗
3DOTL5	⊗	⊗
3DOTL6	✓	✓
4DOTL1	✓	✓
3DOTL7	⊗	⊗
3DOTL8	✓	✓
3DOTL9	✓	✓

Because of the interviews, it was determined that the hotels in Düzce attach importance to the concepts of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. To achieve this goal, it is understood that managers see digital marketing activities as a highly effective opportunity. It was reflected in the interviews that most of the hotel managers think that the level of loyalty of a satisfied guest will be high. In this way, sales figures will be better put forward in all interviews. Another important issue is the concept of branding.

A digital marketing organization will ensure customer satisfaction. This is an important step towards becoming a strong brand in the sector. It has been learned from the responses that the sector representatives are also aware of this potential.

Findings on the Relationship between Digital Marketing and Competitive Advantage

The tourism and hospitality sector is a sector whose investment volume is expanding day by day and whose level of competition is increasing. Within the scope of the research, it was aimed to evaluate the contribution of digital marketing at this point. The interviewed hotel managers were asked whether digital marketing activities provide them with a competitive advantage in terms of sales performance.

The personal opinions of the managers were taken into consideration and considered in the evaluation process. The extent to which the possible superiority to be provided to rival businesses affects the sales figures was determined as the sub-aim of the question and information in this direction was tried to be obtained during the interview. The opinions of the managers are explained in the table below.

Table 10: Digital Marketing and Competitive Opportunities

Do digital marketing activities have an impact?		
Hotel Managers	Provides Competitive Advantage	Direct Impact on Sales Figures
3DOTL1	✓	✓
3DOTL2	✓	✓
3DOTL3	⊗	⊗
3DOTL4	⊗	⊗
3DOTL5	✓	✓
3DOTL6	✓	✓
4DOTL1	✓	✓
3DOTL7	⊗	⊗
3DOTL8	✓	✓
3DOTL9	✓	⊗

In the table above, in line with the data obtained from the managers interviewed, it is discussed whether digital marketing provides a competitive advantage and whether it impacts sales. The opinion of seven of the managers is that it creates a high competitive advantage. Three hotel managers stated they do not see digital marketing as providing a competitive advantage. In addition, six hotel managers evaluated digital marketing as both a tool for competitive advantage and a strong sales opportunity, while four of them expressed the opposite opinion. One of these four hotel managers stated that digital marketing only provides a competitive advantage, while the remaining three stated that digital marketing does not affect competitive advantage or sales figures.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It has been tried to reveal the effect of these digital marketing activities on the sales figures of three-star and above hotel businesses operating in Düzce Province using digital marketing techniques. In this context, interviews were conducted with ten hotel businesses comprising three-star and above hotel businesses operating in the Düzce city centre and Akçakoca district. During the interviews conducted in this context, hotel managers were asked questions about the impact of digital marketing on the sales figures of hotel businesses. Sub-question titles aimed at achieving sub-objectives, such as whether digitalization impacts staff employment and whether there is a staff for digital marketing, are included in the study.

In the question prepared for the level of use of websites by hotel businesses, it was tried to reach the data on whether websites are included in sales processes. Five hotel managers emphasized the importance of websites in this context and stated that they see them as an opportunity for sales processes. Five hotel managers stated websites do not have any relationship with sales performance. Kurt (2021) emphasized in his study that websites emphasize the need for digital marketing in the way businesses become brands. In the same study, it was found that businesses that can use the website effectively will create a sense of trust in consumers. The findings obtained within the framework of this study are like the literature.

Hotel businesses that use digital tools well gain a competitive advantage in providing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Fidan, 2021). In the study's content, based on this information, the opinions of the managers on the subject were consulted. Six hotel managers stated the opportunities offered by digital marketing develop a sense of loyalty in consumers. At the point of customer satisfaction, eight managers expressed positive opinions. In his master's thesis, Atalay (2022) emphasized the importance of customer loyalty for businesses and revealed the need for customer-satisfied masses for customer loyalty. Similarly, Babu (2021) revealed the positive relationship between customer satisfaction and digital marketing. The results in the relevant study support the findings of this study.

It has been determined that e-mail marketing and mobile marketing methods are also used by hotel managers. Nine hotel managers stated they prefer marketing via Google as a priority. One hotel organization prioritized social media marketing at this point. In addition, online sales channels such as Booking.com, Expedia, and Hotels.com are considered an opportunity for consumers. The ease and favourable conditions of the purchasing process of consumers play an important role in their satisfaction level. Some observe that the level of awareness of hotel managers is high at this point. Erdoğan (2020) stated that these marketing channels are efficient sales channels for small and medium-sized hotel businesses. The findings of Erdoğan (2020) support the results of this study.

In summary, the findings of this study clearly show that there is a positive and strong relationship between digital marketing activities and sales performance. In this context, the results are like the findings of similar studies (Erdoğan, 2020; Atalay, 2022; Babu, 2021; Alan, Kabadayı, and Erişke, 2018) on digital marketing activities in the tourism sector or hotel businesses.

An important limitation of this study is that the universe is only Düzce Province and the number of hotel businesses with an institutional structure making up the sample is small. Another limitation of the study is that the research was conducted with only one manager in each business and the responses were based on the personal perceptions of those managers. In addition, some observe that there was a lack of professional staff and managers specialised in digital marketing. It was determined that the interviewed managers mostly identified the digital marketing process with the concept of social media. To say that this perception of managers makes up a limitation of the study. It is essential for the literature that academic studies are a source for new studies that are likely to be carried out. Based on the findings obtained and the observations made during the interviews, it is recommended to pay attention to topics such as evaluation of the effect of digitalization on employee productivity, evaluation of the impact of digital marketing techniques on customer acquisition and retention in hotel businesses, evaluation of digital marketing activities in other businesses in the tourism sector other than hotel businesses for new studies. In addition, to say that similar studies for provinces such as Istanbul, Antalya, and Muğla, which have wider opportunities in terms of universe and sample and are pioneers in the tourism sector, will make significant contributions to the literature.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Dijital pazarlama, teknolojiye bağılı olarak hızla gelişen güncel bir konu olarak literatürde yerini almıştır. Üzerine farklı tanımlar ve görüşler bulunan dijital pazarlama kısaca “pazarlama etkinliklerin planlı, programlı bir şekilde dijital ortamlara taşınması” şeklinde açıklanmaktadır. Ulusal ve uluslararası literatür incelendiğinde dijital pazarlama ile ilgili birçok tanım yapıldığı görülmektedir (Ansari, Ansari, Ghorı, ve Kazi, 2019; Glucksman, 2017; Gobble, 2018; Alan, Kabadayı, ve Erişke, 2018; Aliji, 2016; Atalay, 2022). Ancak tüm tanımların ortak noktası yoğun teknoloji kullanımınıdır (Armstrong, 2008). Dijital pazarlama, en basit haliyle, pazarlama faaliyetlerinde yürütülen tüm süreçlerin dijitalleştirilmesi olarak tanımlanabilir (Glucksman, 2017). Başka bir deyişle, işletmelerin akıllı telefon, bilgisayar ve internet olanaklarını kullanarak ürettikleri mal ve hizmetlerin tanıtımıdır (Babu, 2021).

Dijitalleşme, işletmelerin iş yapış şekillerini ve tüketicilerin günlük yaşamlarını önemli ölçüde etkilemektedir. Artan dijitalleşme olgusu, tüketicilerin tüketim alışkanlıklarını ve satın alma davranışlarını da değiştirmiştir (Arslan, 2014). Kısa sürede birçok benzer ürünü karşılaştırabilen tüketiciler, satın alma davranışlarının büyük bir kısmını internet üzerinden gerçekleştirmektedir. Son yıllarda hızla artan tüketicilerin çevrimiçi kanallardan satın alma eğilimi, işletmelere ve tüketicilere hız, zaman ve maliyet açısından da kolaylıklar sağlamaktadır (Febrianti, Saudi, Kaniawati, ve Hermina, 2018). Dijital pazarlamayı önemli kılan bir diğer faktör de ürünleri kişiselleştirme ve küçük gruplara hitap etme fırsatı sunmasıdır. Dijital pazarlama faaliyetleri sürecinde işletmeler, ortak ilgi alanlarına sahip tüketiciler için sanal topluluklar oluşturabilir. Böylece beklentilerini doğrudan karşılayabilir ve memnuniyet düzeyini artırabilirler (Kayın, 2017). Dijital pazarlamanın sunduğu fırsatları doğru şekilde kullanan işletmeler, pazarlama faaliyetlerini kolayca ölçümleyebilirler. Yani yapılan çalışmaların sonuçlarına ilişkin sayısal veriler elde edilebilmektedir. Bu durum yeni ürün geliştirme sürecinde işletmelere fayda sağlamaktadır (Çokal ve Büyükkuru, 2018).

Satış kavramı ise pazarlama süreçlerinin doğal çıktısı olarak tanımlanabilir. İşletmeler ürettikleri mal veya hizmetlerin tüketicilere ulaştırılması sürecini, doğru bir şekilde organize etme çabası içerisinde (Babu, 2021). Çünkü ürünlerin üretim safhaları, kalitesi ve pazarlama etkinlikleri bir süreci kapsamaktadır. Ancak satış, tüm bu süreçlerin nihai amacı ve sonucudur. İşletmelerin faaliyetlerini sürdürebilmeleri, yeni yatırımlar yapabilmeleri ve istihdama katkı sağlamaları doğrudan satış rakamları ile ilişkilidir. Aynı zamanda bu hedefe ulaşmak işletmelerin ülke ekonomisine sunacağı katkırı da doğrudan etkilemektedir. Dijital satış, gerek tüketici gerekse işletmeler için pek çok kolaylığı beraberinde getirmiştir. Tüketiciler; ihtiyaç duydukları ürün çeşitlerini kolayca satın alma fırsatını, satış süreçlerinin sanal ortama taşınması ile elde etmiştir. Aynı zamanda tüketiciler eş değer kalitede olan ve bütçelerine daha uygun ürün ve hizmetlere de kolayca ulaşabilmişlerdir. Fiyat ve kalite ilişkisi hakkında bilgi edinme ve karşılaştırma yapılabilmesi de satışın dijitalleşmesinin tüketicilere sağladığı avantajlardandır (Armstrong, 2008).

İşletmeler ise satış işlemlerini güvenilir bir şekilde çevrimiçi ortamda yapabilmektedir. Bu işletmeler için tüketici tatmini sağlama noktasında onlara önemli bir değer katmıştır. Elde edilen bu değer yüksek kâr olarak işletmelere dönmektedir. Bir diğer önemli avantaj ise satış sonuçlarının hızlı bir şekilde sayısal verilerle listelenebilir olmasıdır. Geleneksel satış çabalarında bu fırsat yoktur. Satış çalışmaları dijital ortama aktarıldıkça işletmeler bu noktaya ayıracakları kaynaklardan da tasarruf sağlamaktadır. Zira dijital imkânlar sayesinde satış için depo tutma ve seyahat etme gibi maliyetler minimum düzeye çekilebilmektedir. Ayrıca işgören ihtiyacı azalmakta, süreçlerde yapılacak ekstra harcamalar minimum düzeyde tutulabilmektedir (Bulunmaz, 2016).

Araştırmanın en temel amacı, doğal güzellikleriyle, İstanbul ve Ankara gibi büyük illere yakınlığı ile önemli bir turizm potansiyeline sahip olan Düzce ilindeki 3 yıldız ve üzeri otel işletmelerinin dijital pazarlama tekniklerini kullanım düzeylerini ve bu işletmelerin dijital pazarlama faaliyetlerinin satış rakamlarına olan etkisini tespit etmektir. Bu temel amacın yanında otel yöneticilerinin dijital pazarlamaya ve teknolojik gelişmelere bakış açıları da bu süreçte gözlemlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Bir diğer alt amaç ise otel işletmelerinin teknolojik alt yapısını ve sosyal mecralar üzerinden tüketicilerle kurduğu ilişkileri ortaya koymak olarak belirlenmiştir. Araştırmanın özünde ise hangi dijital pazarlama tekniklerinin ne derece etkili kullanıldığı ve kullanılan bu tekniklerin satış rakamlarına etkisi ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır.

Bu araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Bilimsel araştırmalarda gerçekleştirilirken veri toplama ve elde edilen verilerin doğru ve güvenilir olması oldukça önemlidir (Karataş, 2015). Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinde yaygın olarak kullanılan görüşme tekniği de bu bağlamda oldukça etkili bir yöntemdir. En doğru

ve güvenilir verilere ulaşabilmek amacıyla, araştırma gerçekleştirilirken görüşme tekniği tercih edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda Düzce’de faaliyet gösteren 14 otel işletmesi ile iletişime geçilmiş ve araştırmanın kapsamına uygun olan 10 işletme ile planlanan tarihlerde görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmeler neticesinde elde edilen verilerin analizi için ise genel bilgilerden spesifik verilere doğru ilerleyen bir süreç izlenmiştir. Verilerin analizi sürecinde, görüşülen yöneticilerin görüşme anındaki tutum ve davranışları da dikkate alınarak en güvenilir sonuçlar elde edilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Araştırmada elde edilen verilerin analizi neticesinde şu sonuçlar elde edilmiştir: Düzce’de faaliyet gösteren otel işletmelerinin çoğunlukla küçük ölçekli işletmeler olmaları sebebiyle dijital pazarlama yatırımları sınırlı miktarlardadır. Buna karşın otel yöneticilerinin dijital pazarlamanın potansiyeline yönelik farkındalık düzeyi oldukça yüksektir. Otel işletmeleri tarafından sosyal medya pazarlaması ve Google üzerinden gerçekleştirilen pazarlama faaliyetleri etkin bir şekilde kullanılmaktadır. Dijital pazarlama faaliyetleri çoğunlukla ön büro personeli tarafından yürütülmektedir. Bu bilgilerden hareketle ulaşılan temel sonuç ise şu şekildedir; dijital pazarlama faaliyetleri ile otel işletmelerinin satış rakamları arasında pozitif yönlü ve güçlü bir ilişki bulunmaktadır.

Akademik çalışmaların taşınması gereken temel niteliklerden birisi gerçekleştirilecek yeni çalışmalara kaynaklık etmesidir. Bu bağlamda müşteri memnuniyeti ile dijital pazarlama ilişkisinin, otel işletmelerinde dijitalleşmenin işgören verimliliğine etkisinin ve otel yöneticilerinin dijital pazarlama tekniklerini kullanım düzeylerinin değerlendirilmesi gibi konular araştırmacılar için yeni konu başlıkları olarak önerilmektedir.