
The Development and Strategies of Digital Marketing in Tourism Destinations: A Systematic Literature Review

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Article Information

Submission date :
4 February 2026

Revised date :
10 April 2026

Accepted date :
10 April 2026

Abstract

Research aim: This study aims to examine the development and strategies of digital marketing in tourism destinations through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The research focuses on identifying the evolution of digital marketing strategies applied in tourism destinations and analyzing how these strategies influence destination visibility, tourist engagement, and overall destination competitiveness.

Design/Method/Approach: This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach using data obtained from the Scopus database. The search was conducted using the keywords “digital marketing” AND “tourism destination.” The initial search identified 86 articles, which were then screened based on relevance, publication year (2020–2025), and document type. A total of 36 articles were selected and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

Research Finding: The findings indicate that the development of digital marketing strategies plays a significant role in improving tourism destination performance. The key strategies identified include social media marketing, content marketing through user-generated content (UGC), and integrated digital marketing strategies. These strategies contribute to enhancing destination visibility, strengthening customer engagement, and improving brand perception. Furthermore, the implementation of consistent and high-quality digital marketing practices is also associated with increased tourist satisfaction, revisit intentions, and positive online recommendations.

Theoretical contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature by integrating the perspectives of digital marketing development and strategic implementation within the context of tourism destinations. The novelty of this research lies in providing a comprehensive synthesis of digital marketing strategies and their evolution, as well as identifying key thematic clusters in tourism destination marketing research.

Practitioner/Policy implication: The findings provide practical insights for tourism destination managers and policymakers in developing effective digital marketing strategies to enhance destination visibility, engagement, and competitiveness. Strengthening digital engagement and adopting integrated and personalized marketing approaches can support long-term sustainability in the tourism sector.

Research limitation: This study is limited to articles indexed in the Scopus database and a specific time period (2020–2025), which may

limit the generalizability of the findings.

Keywords: Tourism Marketing; Digital Marketing; Customer Loyalty; Tourism Destination; Social Media Marketing; Systematic Literature Review.

1. Introduction

The tourism industry has become one of the most significant contributors to global economic growth, playing an essential role in generating employment, increasing regional income, and promoting cultural exchange. In recent years, the rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the way tourism destinations are managed and marketed. The integration of digital platforms into tourism management has enabled organizations to reach wider audiences and create more effective promotional strategies [1][9].

Digital marketing has emerged as a crucial component in tourism management, as it allows tourism stakeholders to engage directly with potential tourists through various online channels. Social media platforms, online travel agencies, and digital communication tools have become dominant instruments in influencing tourist behavior and decision-making processes [1][3][18]. Studies show that user-generated content, online reviews, and digital interactions significantly shape tourists' perceptions and destination choices [17][29].

In addition, the concept of destination branding has evolved alongside digital marketing strategies, allowing tourism destinations to build strong identities and competitive advantages in the global market. Effective branding strategies supported by digital technologies can enhance destination visibility, improve tourist engagement, and increase visitor loyalty [2][32]. The role of digital marketing is not only limited to promotion but also extends to creating meaningful tourism experiences through personalized and interactive content [5][15].

Furthermore, the development of smart tourism and digital ecosystems has reinforced the importance of technology-driven marketing approaches in tourism management. The use of big data, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms has enabled tourism organizations to better understand tourist preferences and optimize marketing strategies [22][36]. Digital transformation in tourism also supports sustainable tourism development by improving efficiency, accessibility, and service quality [33].

Despite the growing body of literature on digital marketing and tourism management, previous studies show considerable variation in research focus, methodologies, and findings. Some studies emphasize social media marketing, while others focus on digital branding, customer engagement, or smart tourism technologies [10][24]. This fragmentation highlights the need for a comprehensive review to synthesize existing knowledge and identify key research trends in the field.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the development and strategies of digital marketing in tourism destinations using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach based on articles indexed in the Scopus database during the period 2020–2025. By analyzing 36 selected articles, this study seeks to identify dominant strategies, key thematic areas, and research trends, as well as to examine the role of digital marketing in enhancing destination visibility, tourist engagement, and overall competitiveness.

1.1. Statement of Problem

The tourism industry has undergone significant transformation due to the rapid advancement of digital technologies, making digital marketing a key strategy for enhancing destination visibility, tourist engagement, and competitiveness. However, existing studies on digital marketing in tourism remain fragmented, focusing on different aspects such as social media marketing, destination branding, and tourist behavior, resulting in a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding its development and strategic implementation. Therefore, this study addresses the research problem of how digital marketing has developed in tourism destinations during the period 2020–2025, what strategies are most commonly applied in promoting tourism destinations, and how these strategies contribute to enhancing destination visibility, tourist engagement, and competitiveness.

1.2. Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to analyze the development and strategies of digital marketing in tourism destinations using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Specifically, this study aims to examine the development of digital marketing in tourism destinations during the period 2020–2025, identify the most commonly applied digital marketing strategies in destination promotion, and analyze how these strategies contribute to enhancing destination visibility, tourist engagement, and competitiveness.

2. Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to analyze the development and strategies of digital marketing in tourism destinations. The SLR method is used to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant research in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution and implementation of digital marketing strategies in the management and promotion of tourism destinations. The data were obtained from the Scopus database, which is recognized as one of the most reputable sources of academic publications. The search was conducted using the keywords “digital marketing” AND “tourism destination” in the fields of article title, abstract, and keywords.

The initial search identified 86 articles. To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, several criteria were applied, including limiting the publication period to 2020–2025 and focusing only on journal articles. Articles that were not related to tourism or marketing, focused solely on hospitality or hotel management without discussing tourism destinations, or lacked a clear research methodology were excluded. After applying these criteria, 36 articles were selected for further analysis.

The article selection process followed the PRISMA flow procedure, which includes identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. The process of selecting relevant articles is illustrated in Figure 1.

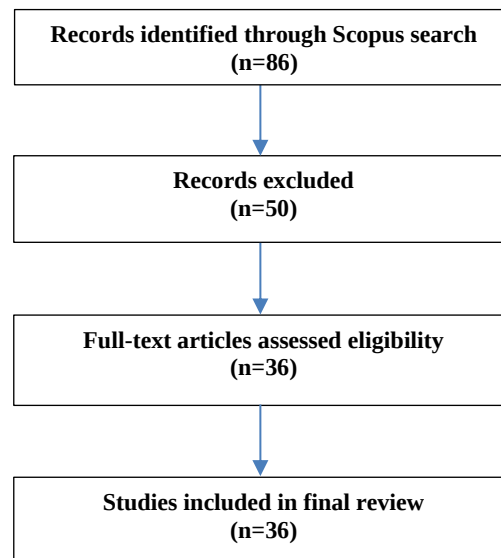


Figure 1. Prism diagram

The selected articles were then analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify research trends, commonly used digital marketing strategies, and research methods in tourism destination marketing. The findings were categorized into several themes, including social media marketing, destination branding, digital promotion strategies, and tourist engagement. Through this systematic analysis, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the development and implementation of digital marketing strategies in tourism destination management.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents a systematic analysis of 36 selected articles obtained from the Scopus database for the period 2020–2025.

Table 1. Processing of Scopus data (2020–2025)

No	Author	Year	Method	Focus of Study	Key Findings
1	Xiang & Gretzel	2020	Quantitative	Social media in tourism	Social media significantly influences tourist decision-making.
2	Hanna & Rowley	2021	Review	Destination branding	Branding improves destination image and competitiveness.
3	Leung et al.	2020	Qualitative	Social media marketing	Social media enhances tourist engagement.
4	Mariani & Borghi	2021	Quantitative	Online marketing tourism	Digital marketing increases destination visibility.
5	Sigala	2020	Conceptual	Smart tourism strategies	Technology improves marketing effectiveness.
6	Hudson et al.	2020	Survey	Customer engagement	Digital platforms enhance tourist engagement.
7	Kannan & Li	2021	Conceptual	Digital marketing framework	Integrated strategies improve marketing performance.
8	Li & Wang	2022	Quantitative	Digital promotion	Digital promotion increases tourist intention.
9	Gössling	2021	Review	Digitalization tourism	Digitalization transforms tourism marketing.

10	Dwivedi & Ismagilova	2021	Review	Social media marketing	Social media is a key marketing tool.
11	Tuten & Solomon	2022	Conceptual	Digital marketing strategies	Content marketing improves visibility.
12	Kim & Ko	2020	Survey	Tourist behavior	Digital marketing influences tourist behavior.
13	Buhalis & Law	2020	Conceptual	Tourism technology	Technology drives innovation in tourism.
14	Chaffey	2021	Conceptual	Marketing strategy	Strategy improves competitiveness.
15	Neuhofer & Buhalis	2020	Conceptual	Tourist experience	Digital tools enhance experience.
16	Munar & Jacobsen	2020	Qualitative	Trust in social media	Trust affects travel decisions.
17	Yoo & Gretzel	2021	Quantitative	Online reviews	Reviews influence destination choice.
18	Hays & Page	2020	Survey	Tourism promotion	Social media increases awareness.
19	Buhalis	2020	Conceptual	eTourism	Digital tools improve marketing
20	Gretzel	2022	Conceptual	Digital ecosystem	Ecosystem supports tourism promotion.
21	Liang & Ekinci	2022	Quantitative	Social media strategy	Improves engagement and loyalty.
22	Park & Kim	2021	Quantitative	Marketing effectiveness	Digital campaigns increase visits.
23	Sigala	2021	Conceptual	Digital innovation	Innovation enhances competitiveness.
24	Gössling & Scott	2022	Review	Marketing trends	Digital marketing dominates tourism.
25	Mariani & Baggio	2022	Qualitative	Digital communication	Shapes destination image.
26	Hudson	2021	Survey	Marketing technology	Technology improves effectiveness.
27	Li & Law	2021	Quantitative	Online marketing	Increases tourism demand.
28	Dwivedi	2022	Conceptual	Digital ecosystem	Integration improves performance.
29	Gretzel & Yoo	2020	Quantitative	Online reviews	Reviews affect tourist decisions.
30	Buhalis & Amaranggana	2020	Conceptual	Smart destinations	Technology improves management.
31	Kim & Lee	2022	Survey	Digital branding	Enhances destination image.
32	Hanna & Rowley	2022	Review	Branding strategy	Builds destination identity.
33	Sigala & Gretzel	2021	Conceptual	Digital transformation	Improves tourism marketing.
34	Mariani & Borghi	2023	Quantitative	Digital strategy	Increases tourist loyalty.
35	Leung & Law	2021	Review	Tourism information	Influences tourist decisions.
36	Xiang & Buhalis	2021	Conceptual	Smart tourism	Enhances marketing efficiency.

Source: Authors' processing of Scopus data (2020–2025).

The discussion is organized into five main clusters in accordance with the research objectives.

1) Trends in Digital Tourism Marketing Publications (2020–2025)

Figure 2 illustrates the trend of digital tourism marketing publications over the period 2020–2025. The diagram presents both the annual number of articles and the cumulative trend, clearly indicating that the peak of publications occurred during 2021–2022.

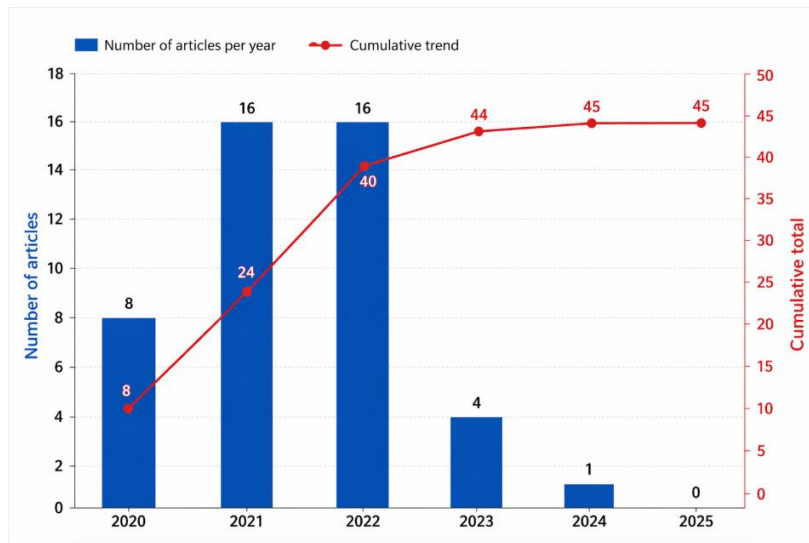


Figure 2. Digital marketing publication trends (2020-2025)

Based on the review of 36 articles, a consistent growth trend in publication output is observed. The peak of publications occurred during the period of 2021–2022 [9][24][33]. This trend indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a major catalyst for researchers to explore how digital technologies can support the recovery of the tourism sector. The focus of research has shifted from traditional promotional approaches toward comprehensive digital transformation [33] and the adaptation of digital platforms to sustain tourism destinations [9].

2) Analysis of Research Methodologies in Previous Studies

The methodologies employed in these 36 articles demonstrate a diversity of approaches; however, they are predominantly characterized by three main streams:

Table 2. Distribution of Research Methodologies in Selected Studies

Types of Methodology	Percentage (%)	Primary Focus of Use	Representative Authors
Conceptual and Review	44%	The development of new frameworks, digital ecosystem theories, and smart tourism trends.	Buhalis (2020); Sigala (2021); Dwivedi (2022); Gretzel (2022)
Quantitative and Survey	42%	Testing causal relationships between digital marketing variables and tourist loyalty and visit intentions.	Xiang & Gretzel (2020); Li & Law (2021); Mariani et al. (2023)
Qualitative	14%	In-depth exploration of tourist experiences, narrative analysis, and communication strategies.	Leung et al. (2020); Mariani & Borghi (2022); Munar (2020)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on selected articles (2020–2025).

The analysis of 36 selected articles (2020–2025) reveals the dominance of conceptual (44%) and quantitative (42%) approaches. The high proportion of conceptual studies indicates

that the field of digital tourism marketing is still undergoing theoretical reformulation, particularly in relation to the Smart Tourism ecosystem [13][23]. Meanwhile, quantitative approaches are widely used to empirically validate the impact of digital strategies on tourists' visit intentions and loyalty through statistical testing [1][34].

On the other hand, qualitative approaches (14%) are the least utilized and are generally limited to the exploration of narratives and communication strategies [3]. This imbalance highlights a research gap in understanding the emotional and subjective aspects of tourists in the digital environment. Overall, this trend reflects a transition in the literature from the development of theoretical frameworks toward more measurable empirical validation of strategy effectiveness in practice.

3) Dominant Digital Marketing Strategies

Based on the literature analysis, three main strategies have been identified as the most widely used by tourism destination managers:

1. Social Media Marketing

This is the most widely used strategy. The use of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook has been proven effective in increasing brand awareness [10][21]. These platforms enable tourism destinations to share visually engaging content, such as photos, videos, and short-form storytelling, which can capture the attention of potential tourists. In addition, interactive features such as comments, likes, shares, and live streaming facilitate direct communication between destination managers and audiences, enhancing engagement and trust. Social media also allows destinations to target specific market segments through algorithm-based advertising and data analytics, making promotional efforts more efficient and personalized. As a result, social media marketing not only increases visibility but also plays a crucial role in influencing tourists' perceptions and travel decisions.

2. Content Marketing and User-Generated Content (UGC)

The use of user-generated content, such as reviews from other tourists, is considered more credible than official advertising [17][29]. UGC provides authentic and experience-based information that helps potential tourists form realistic expectations about a destination. Platforms such as travel review websites, blogs, and social media play a crucial role in facilitating the sharing of personal travel experiences, which can significantly influence destination image and trust. Positive reviews, photos, and videos shared by other travelers often serve as social proof, encouraging prospective visitors to choose a particular destination. Moreover, content marketing strategies that integrate UGC can enhance engagement, foster a sense of community, and strengthen the emotional connection between tourists and destinations. As a result, UGC has become a powerful tool in shaping tourist perceptions and influencing travel decision-making processes.

3. Integrated Digital Strategy

The use of cross-platform strategies (such as SEO, email marketing, and mobile applications) in an integrated manner has become a new standard in modern tourism destination

management [7][28]. This approach enables tourism organizations to deliver consistent messages across multiple digital channels, ensuring a seamless customer experience throughout the entire travel journey, from information search to post-visit engagement. By integrating various platforms, destination managers can leverage data analytics to better understand tourist preferences and behavior, allowing for more targeted and personalized marketing efforts. In addition, the combination of search engine optimization (SEO), email campaigns, and mobile applications enhances visibility, improves communication efficiency, and strengthens customer relationships. As a result, integrated digital strategies not only increase marketing effectiveness but also contribute to building long-term tourist loyalty and sustainable destination competitiveness.

4) Emerging Key Themes

The analysis of the selected literature identifies several key thematic areas that characterize the development of digital marketing in tourism. For clarity and systematic presentation, these themes are grouped into four major clusters, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Key Themes

Cluster Name	Main Focus	Key Literature
Smart Technology	AI, IoT, and <i>Smart Experience</i>	Sigala (2020); Buhalis (2020)
Tourist Behavior	Decision-making and content influence	Xiang & Gretzel (2020); Munar (2020)
Branding and Image	Brand identity and digital perception	Hanna et al. (2021); Kim et al. (2022)
Innovation and Competitiveness	Competitive advantage and market adaptation	Sigala & Gretzel (2021)

Source: Authors' analysis based on selected literature (2020–2025).

The synthesis of the 36 selected articles identifies four major thematic clusters that dominate the digital tourism marketing literature during the 2020–2025 period. The Smart Technology cluster focuses on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) to create personalized tourism experiences, while the Tourist Behavior cluster examines how digital content influences decision-making processes [5][30]. Meanwhile, the Branding and Image cluster emphasizes strengthening destination identity in the digital space, which is complemented by the Innovation and Competitiveness cluster that explores adaptive market strategies to compete globally [2][33]. Overall, this mapping demonstrates that digital marketing has evolved from merely a promotional tool into a strategic ecosystem that determines the success of modern tourism destination management.

5) The Role of Digital Marketing in Enhancing Competitiveness, Visibility, and Customer Loyalty

The final analysis indicates that digital marketing has a multifaceted impact on tourism destinations:

1. Visibility

The use of digital channels such as online advertising and search engine optimization (SEO) significantly expands market reach and enhances the presence of destinations in the digital space [14][27]. These tools enable tourism organizations to improve their ranking on search engines, making it easier for potential tourists to find relevant information about destinations. Online advertising, including display ads, paid search, and social media promotions, allows destinations to target specific audiences based on demographics, interests, and online behavior, thereby increasing the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. Furthermore, consistent digital visibility helps build brand recognition and reinforces the destination's image in the minds of potential visitors. As a result, improved visibility not only attracts a larger audience but also increases the likelihood of converting interest into actual visits.

2. Engagement

Interactive technologies and social media enable two-way communication, enhancing tourists' emotional connection even before they arrive at the destination [4][15]. These platforms allow tourism organizations to interact directly with potential visitors through comments, messages, live streaming, and personalized content, fostering a sense of involvement and belonging. Features such as storytelling, virtual tours, and user interactions help create immersive pre-travel experiences that influence tourists' expectations and perceptions. Moreover, continuous engagement through social media and digital platforms helps maintain communication even after the visit, encouraging tourists to share their experiences and remain connected with the destination. As a result, strong engagement not only strengthens emotional bonds but also increases the likelihood of repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth promotion.

3. Competitiveness and Loyalty

Digital innovation has become a key differentiator in gaining a competitive advantage [13]. Furthermore, consistent and high-quality digital marketing strategies directly contribute to the development of tourist loyalty, as reflected in repeat visit intentions and positive online recommendations [34]. Digital tools enable tourism destinations to continuously adapt to changing market demands, personalize services, and deliver more meaningful and memorable experiences for visitors. By leveraging data analytics and customer insights, destination managers can design targeted marketing campaigns that strengthen relationships with tourists and enhance satisfaction levels. In addition, strong digital presence and consistent brand communication help build trust and long-term engagement with customers. As a result, destinations that effectively implement digital marketing strategies are better positioned to achieve sustainable competitiveness while fostering long-term tourist loyalty.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzes the development of digital marketing in tourism destination management through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 36 articles published in the Scopus database between 2020 and 2025. The findings reveal a consistent increase in research publications, particularly during 2021–2022, indicating the growing importance of digital technologies in addressing challenges in the tourism sector, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature shows a clear shift from traditional marketing approaches toward integrated, technology-driven strategies.

In terms of methodology, the results indicate the dominance of conceptual and quantitative approaches, while qualitative studies remain limited. This suggests a research gap in understanding tourists' emotional and experiential perspectives within digital environments. Additionally, the study identifies three dominant digital marketing strategies: social media marketing, content marketing through user-generated content (UGC), and integrated digital strategies. These approaches play a significant role in enhancing destination visibility, strengthening branding, and increasing tourist engagement.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis highlights four major clusters: smart technology, tourist behavior, branding and image, and innovation and competitiveness. These findings demonstrate that digital marketing has evolved from a simple promotional tool into a strategic ecosystem that supports data-driven decision-making and sustainable competitive advantage. Future research is encouraged to incorporate qualitative perspectives, explore emerging technologies, and develop more adaptive and personalized marketing strategies in tourism.

Content Attribution:

The author declares that the use of ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.3) was employed as a supporting tool in the research and writing process of this study, particularly in assisting with idea development, synthesis of relevant literature, and improving clarity of presentation. The use of AI was limited to a supportive role and was not utilized as a primary source for generating the research content.

All outputs generated with the assistance of AI have undergone thorough review, editing, and validation by the author to ensure the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the information presented. The author also played an active role in critically evaluating and refining the AI-generated outputs. Therefore, the final content of this study reflects the author's original work, with AI serving solely as an assistive tool.

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