

Digital marketing and tourism: opportunities for Africa

Digital
marketing and
tourism

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore digital marketing and tourism with a focus on opportunities with a case study of Africa, motivated by developments in tourism particularly the increase in tourist arrivals and the growth of digital statistics in the digital era.

Design/methodology/approach – Literature review as a research methodology was adopted in this study, and the integrative literature review was the method used as well as content analysis to review studies in digital marketing and tourism relating to Africa.

Findings – This paper reveals that digital media, content and mobile advertising are among the trends in digital marketing and, thus, affords Africa the opportunity to market its attractions to tourists in this digital era.

Research limitations/implications – Future studies can explore quantitative and qualitative methods to understand the phenomenon of digital marketing in relation to tourism.

Practical implications – Other countries within Africa to adopt similar digital marketing such as digital media and creative content in order to manage the digitization of marketing activities in the tourism sector.

Originality/value – This study explores digital marketing and tourism with a focus on opportunities for Africa as a case study by specifically examining social media marketing in relation to tourist arrivals using integrative literature review and content analysis methods.

Keywords Africa, Opportunities, Digital marketing, Tourism

Paper type Research paper

Received 4 September 2019

Revised 15 October 2019

Accepted 29 October 2019

Introduction

Digital marketing utilizes electronic media to promote products and services (Yasmin *et al.*, 2015). Digital marketing in Africa has been documented in reference to digital statistics such as internet users and usage in platforms like Facebook (Digital Statistics in South Africa, 2017; Internet World Stats, 2019). For example, digital statistics in South Africa show that 28.6m (52 percent) utilize the internet and 15m users make use of the social media platforms with a record of nearly 70 percent weekly activities on social media platforms and, therefore, this highlights how important social media marketing is (Digital Statistics in South Africa, 2017).

Tourism in Africa is growing with records indicating an increase in international tourist arrivals from 62.7m in 2017 to 67m in 2018 (UNWTO, 2018, 2019). In 2016, Africa's international tourism receipts recorded \$36.2bn (African Development Bank, 2018). In addition, reports from the African Travel and Tourism Association (Atta) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) indicated that tourism in Africa contributed \$194.2bn which is approximately 8.5 percent to gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018 (Atta, 2019; WTTC, 2018). Furthermore, in 2017, South Africa had 10.2m international tourist arrivals and Morocco had 11.3m while Comoros had 28,000 (UNWTO, 2018; Azeez, 2019). The WTTC (2019) indicated that African countries that led the world for travel and tourism GDP growth in 2018 were Ethiopia (+48.6 percent) and Egypt (+16.5 percent). The increasing numbers of international tourist arrivals provide opportunities for Africa to manage marketing strategies in the digital era including digital marketing.



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International Hospitality Review

Vol. 34 No. 1, 2020

pp. 5-12

Emerald Publishing Limited

25168142

DOI 10.1108/IHR-09-2019-0015

Due to this development in tourism particularly tourist arrivals as highlighted by UNWTO (2018), and WTTC (2018, 2019) as well as the growth of digital statistics in the digital era in Africa, this paper is motivated to expand knowledge on digital marketing by exploring digital marketing and tourism with a focus on opportunities for Africa as a case study by combining integrative literature review and content analysis as a research methodology approach.

Literature review

Digital marketing

Digital marketing refers to the utilization of electronic media by the marketers to promote products or services into the market with the main objective of attracting customers and allow them to interact with the brand through digital media (Yasmin *et al.*, 2015). One of the important techniques in digital marketing is social media marketing (Chaffey, 2011). Digital marketing is also referred to as marketing online whether via websites, online adverts, opt-in emails, interactive kiosks, interactive TV or mobiles (Chaffey and Smith, 2008). Mandal *et al.* (2016) defined digital marketing as promotion of brands using all available forms of digital advertising media to reach the target segment. For purposes of this study, digital marketing refers to promotion of products and services using digital advertising media such as social media like Facebook.

Tourism

Tourism is defined as the social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes (UNWTO, 2008). This study adopts the definition of tourism by UNWTO (2008).

Theoretical review

The competitive advantage theory is adopted as a guide in this study which explored digital marketing and tourism with a focus on opportunities for Africa. Competitive advantage theory was developed by Porter (1990) and assumes that a nation's prosperity is created by nation's firms that are successful in the world market and competitiveness depends on the capacity to innovate and upgrade (Porter, 1990; Gupta, 2015). Previous scholars mentioned the strategic importance of new technology as an opportunity to gain competitive advantages (Porter and Millar, 1985). Yasmin *et al.* (2015) stated that digital marketing refers to various promotional techniques deployed to reach customers via digital technologies and mainly use internet. In using internet platforms, businesses can create competitive advantages (Mandal *et al.*, 2016).

Past tourism studies have also used competitive advantage theory (Dirsehan, 2015; Elly and Boter, 2014; Jani and Minde, 2016). The study by Jani and Minde was conducted in Tanzania and Uganda to investigate East African tourism destination competitiveness. Guided by the competitive advantage theory, the study found that accommodation and visitor services were the competitive advantages for Uganda while for Tanzania it was transport system and travel motivation (Jani and Minde, 2016).

The registered digital growth in terms of internet and smartphone users indicates that innovations like digital marketing such as social media marketing through digital media platforms like Facebook can create competitive advantage in relation to not only nations and firms but can extend to tourism in terms of tourist arrival numbers. This paper applies competitive advantage theory to guide the main objective of exploring digital marketing and tourism by specifically examining social media marketing in relation to tourist arrivals.

Digital marketing and tourism

Digital marketing has been investigated by previous studies such as Chaffey (2011), Yasmin *et al.* (2015), Waghmare (2012), Gangeshwer (2013), Kumar and Jincy (2017) and Lies (2019).

Yasmin *et al.* (2015) conducted a research which was on the effectiveness of digital marketing in the challenging age. The study used correlation analysis and found that the elements of digital marketing such as online marketing and social media marketing are highly positively correlated to sales increase.

Yasmin *et al.* (2015) highlighted that there are many advantages that digital marketing can bring to customers which are: stay updated with products or services, greater engagement, clear information about products and services, easy comparison with others, 24/7 shopping, share content of the products or services, apparent pricing and enables instant purchase. According to Yasmin *et al.* (2015), digital marketing has seven elements which are online advertising, e-mail marketing, social media marketing, text messaging, affiliate marketing, search engine optimization and pay per click.

Bang and Roos (2014) examined digital marketing by concentrating on digital marketing strategy with manufacturing industries using a qualitative approach and found that small- and medium-sized companies mostly use homepage as a digital channel. This study concentrates on digital marketing with tourism particularly the tourist arrivals. Table I shows tourists arrival growth in 2000, 2014, 2017 and 2018 for Africa.

In 2018, Bala and Verma did a critical review of digital marketing to identify current and future trends in marketing for India. The study found that there is a radical change toward digitalization whereby consumers are looking and searching more on internet to find best deals. Furthermore, Bala and Verma (2018) argued that knowing which social media sites a company's target market utilizes is another key factor in guaranteeing that online marketing will be successful. Other scholars investigated social media marketing and found that in tourism particularly in winery, most owners recognize the social, economic and emotional benefits of social media but not using its full potential because of barriers like time-consuming nature of social media (Canovi and Pucciarelli, 2019).

The internet penetration rate (% population) in Africa by June 30, 2019 indicated 39.8 percent which is 525,148,631 users compared to 4,514,400 users in 2000 with Facebook subscription of 204,304,118 in December 2018 (Internet World Stats, 2019). In addition, 525,148,631 internet users in Africa represent 11.9 percent of the world's internet users. On the one hand, the world total average penetration rate is 57.3 percent which is 4,422,494,622 users and 2,199,428,570 Facebook subscribers in December 2018 (Internet World Stats, 2019).

Digital statistics by Digital Odyssey (2019) show that one of the top digital marketing trends in Nigeria for 2019 is 17m active mobile social users implying potential business opportunities to explore customers with mobile marketing using mobile advertising since 50 percent of Nigeria's population use smartphones. Past studies have mentioned that mobile technology allows consumers to access hotel websites in a variety of ways and through a variety of devices (Murphy *et al.*, 2016; Smith, 2017; Ukpabi and Karjaluo, 2017). In addition, Stringam and Gerdes (2019) emphasized on the need to improve load times to capture potential customers who access hotel websites so that the time to load hotel websites is not long. In general, 80 percent of Africans use mobile phones (The Global Digital Report, 2019). Tables II and III show the internet statistics in terms of penetration rate (% population) and Facebook subscription for selected countries in Africa.

In Africa, Adeleye (2015) did research on social media marketing with a case of Africa by examining challenges of social media marketing in Africa and proposed that marketers can utilize passive marketing tools as sources of marketing intelligence and as active marketing

| African | 2000 | 2014 | 2017 | 2018 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|-------|------|
| International tourist arrivals | 26m | 56m | 62.7m | 67m |

Source: Compiled from UWNTO (2015, 2018, 2019)

Table I.
Tourism: tourist arrivals to Africa in 2000, 2014, 2017 and 2018

Table II.
Internet Users
Statistics for Northern
and Eastern Africa
(2000-2019)

| African countries by region | Population (million) | Internet users in December 2000 | Internet users in June 2019 | Facebook subscribers |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Northern Africa</i> | | | | |
| Algeria | 42.6 | 50,000 | 21,000 | 19,000,000 |
| Egypt | 101.1 | 45,000 | 11,192,827 | 35,000,000 |
| Libya | 6.5 | 10,000 | 3,800,000 | 3,500,000 |
| Morocco | 36.6 | 100,000 | 22,625,872 | 15,000,000 |
| Tunisia | 11.7 | 100,000 | 7,898,534 | 6,400,000 |
| <i>Eastern Africa</i> | | | | |
| Burundi | 11.5 | 3,000 | 617,116 | 470,000 |
| Kenya | 52.2 | 200,000 | 43,329,434 | 7,000,000 |
| Ethiopia | 110.1 | 10,000 | 20,507,255 | 4,500,000 |
| Tanzania | 60.9 | 115,000 | 43,662,499 | 6,100,000 |
| Rwanda | 12.7 | 5,000 | 5,981,638 | 490,000 |
| Uganda | 45.7 | 40,000 | 18,502,166 | 2,600,000 |

Source: Compiled from Internet World Stats (2019)

Table III.
Internet Users
Statistics for Western,
Central and Southern
Africa (2000-2019)

| African countries by region | Population (million) | Internet users in December 2000 | Internet users in June 2019 | Facebook subscribers |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Western Africa</i> | | | | |
| Burkina Faso | 20.3 | 10,000 | 3,704,265 | 840,000 |
| Cote d'Ivoire | 25.5 | 40,000 | 11,192,827 | 3,800,000 |
| Ghana | 30.1 | 30,000 | 11,400,732 | 4,900,000 |
| Nigeria | 200.9 | 200,000 | 119,506,430 | 17,000,000 |
| <i>Central Africa</i> | | | | |
| Cameroon | 25.3 | 20,000 | 6,128,422 | 2,700,000 |
| Central Africa Republic | 4.8 | 1,500 | 256,432 | 96,000 |
| Chad | 15.8 | 1,000 | 1,027,932 | 260,000 |
| Congo Dem Republic | 86.7 | 500 | 5,301,224 | 2,100,000 |
| <i>Southern Africa</i> | | | | |
| Angola | 31.7 | 30,000 | 7,078,067 | 27,400,000 |
| South Africa | 58.1 | 2,400,000 | 32,615,165 | 16,000,000 |
| Zambia | 18.1 | 20,000 | 7,248,773 | 1,600,000 |
| Zimbabwe | 17.2 | 50,000 | 8,400,000 | 880,000 |

Source: Compiled from Internet World Stats (2019)

tools meaning as platforms of communication, promotion, brand awareness, consumer interaction and a feedback mechanism. Equally, Begho (2019) mentioned that five digital marketing predictions for African brands in 2019 is creative content, customer capital, integrated marketing and communications, user experience and block chain technology.

Similarly, further literature on digital marketing continues to be connected to the concept of SME in the study by Pradhan *et al.* (2018) which was done in India. Pradhan *et al.* (2018) advocated that there is a need to conduct research to investigate the opportunities created by digital marketing. Therefore, in view of the recommendations by Pradhan *et al.* (2018), this study contributes to expanding literature on digital marketing by exploring digital marketing in relation to tourism with a focus on opportunities for Africa. In exploring digital marketing in relation to tourism, this study specifically examined social media marketing in relation to tourist arrivals.

Methodology

This paper is a case study of Africa. The methodology deployed by this study is the literature review and content analysis. The literature review technique used is the integrative literature review approach. Literature review as a research methodology has been documented by previous and current scholars (Torraco, 2005, 2016; Snyder, 2019). The integrative literature reviewed in this study includes reports, conference papers, online publications and journals to explore digital marketing and tourism with a focus on opportunities for Africa. Torraco (2005) defined integrative literature review as a form of desktop research that reviews, critiques and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated. Furthermore, Torraco (2016) refers to integrative literature review as a distinctive form of research that uses existing literature to create new knowledge. Similarly, Snyder (2019) advocates on the use of literature review as a research methodology in business studies. Another scholar combined literature review approach and thematic content analysis to conduct research on role and place of content for massive open online courses (Babori *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this study uses integrative literature review methodology as well as content analysis to review studies in digital marketing and tourism relating to Africa with the main objective to explore digital marketing and tourism by focusing on opportunities for Africa, and specifically to examining social media marketing in relation to tourist arrivals.

Discussion

The reviewed literature and the analyzed content in the literature including Tables I–III reveal that there is growth in both digital marketing and tourism in Africa. The records of international tourist arrivals by UNWTO (2015, 2018, 2019) for Africa from 26m in 2000 to 67m in 2018 implies that there has been a steady growth in the number of tourist arrivals to Africa. On the other hand, the increase in digital marketing in terms of internet and mobile users as per studies by (Internet World Stats, 2019; The Global Digital Report, 2019) avail opportunities for African countries to engage in social media marketing as well as content and mobile advertising.

Tourism growth encompasses marketing in order to increase international tourist arrivals. The internet statistics by Internet World Stats (2019) imply that the top 5 African countries in terms of internet users are: Nigeria (119.5m), Egypt (49.2m), Tanzania (43.6m), Kenya (43.3m) and South Africa (32.6m). Equally, the top 5 African countries in terms of Facebook subscription are: Egypt (35m), Angola (27.6m), Algeria (19m), Nigeria (17m) and South Africa (16m). Furthermore, internet statistics by population of African countries suggest that the top 5 African countries in terms of population are: Nigeria (200.9m), Ethiopia (110.1m), Egypt (101.1m), Congo Dem. Republic (86.7m) and Tanzania (60.9m).

Conclusion

This study can conclude that in exploring digital marketing and tourism, there are opportunities for Africa as a case study. The opportunities in digital marketing exists in terms of social media marketing, content marketing and mobile marketing which are driven by population (e.g. 50 percent of Nigeria's population use smartphones), internet and mobile users as well as social media capacity as Facebook subscribers which implies that digital marketing like social media marketing, creative content and mobile advertising can act as digital marketing trends, hence, assist to increase international tourist arrivals for Africa.

Implications

Practical implication from the outcome of this paper is that stakeholders in the tourism sector should consider digital marketing like social media marketing, creative content and mobile advertising as digital marketing trends in African tourism marketing.

The theoretical implication from the competitive advantage point of view, the literature shows that Nigeria has the competitive advantage of population, smartphone users and internet users over other African countries. Hence, Nigeria has the capacity to utilize digital marketing through text messaging and mobile advertising to encourage internet users to share tourism content within and outside Africa to enhance tourism growth. Egypt has the Facebook subscriber competitive advantage over other African countries, hence, it has a better opportunity in digital marketing in terms of the capacity to utilize social media marketing through social media to boost tourism. Although Ethiopia is the second largest country in Africa by population, the number of internet users is not in the top 5 list of Africa countries for internet users which means that this study recommends for countries like Ethiopia to encourage the use of internet to take advantage of opportunities such as social media marketing to boost tourism. On the other hand, Tanzania is 5th in the population list of countries in Africa and ranks 3rd in terms of internet users which leads this study to imply that Tanzania has a competitive advantage in terms of population and internet users to enjoy opportunities in digital marketing compared to countries like Kenya, South Africa and Uganda.

Limitations of the study

The limitation of this study was on the use of literature review and content analysis method as a research methodology.

Suggestions for further studies

This study suggests that future research may use mixed methods approach of qualitative and quantitative so as to have a deeper understanding of the digital marketing phenomenon in managing tourism businesses.

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