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THE IMPACT OF DIGITIZATION ON TOURISM SERVICES MARKETING STRATEGIES (A FIELD STUDY ON TOURISM COMPANIES IN NAJAF GOVERNORATE)

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Abstract

The research aims to study the impact of digitization on marketing strategies for tourism services. Tourism companies use modern technology that depends on re-planning and enhancing the work of tourism and travel companies, such as online reservation services and even virtual mobile phones, using digitized devices enhanced with artificial intelligence. Digitization is the necessity of the era within the digital reality with its technical, economic, and human dimensions. It has opened new horizons for effective social networking for tourism companies dealing with their customers to speed up the process of providing tourism services to them by understanding their needs for those services. Adopting marketing strategies in delivering tourism services has become inevitable, so this research emphasized lowering costs, focusing on customers, and adopting a culture of innovation and creativity.

The research sample included 120 tourism and travel companies with managers at different levels and individuals working in them within the Holy Najaf Governorate. The questionnaire was used as a tool to collect primary data, which contains (35) questions. In light of this, primary data was obtained through the responses of 100 surveyed companies. Data analysis and tests of research hypotheses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

Keywords Marketing strategies, human dimensions, emphasized lowering costs, focusing on customers.

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of information and communications technology, tourism institutions face crucial challenges, especially in light of globalization and global blocs. However, this also presents a world of possibilities. The use of digitization in various industries, including the tourism industry, has opened up new avenues for development and service improvement. It has transformed social media into a virtual world, a main point of contact and an indispensable

reference tool. Tourism services, provided by companies, are now at the forefront of this digital revolution, enhancing the level of their services. (Zheng, 2023:11)

Digitization means using electronic media such as the web, e-mail, and interactive television. Therefore, the importance of social communication has increased, as reliance is placed on trained human cadres in this field, using marketing strategies and existing tourism service

offerings along with digital data about the customer's characteristics and behaviors, before managing innovative and creative tourism companies. The focus was on its customers because they have a central role in the tourism industry, as they are the ones who undertake organizational tasks and assemble their travel packages (Al-Sayed and Abdel-Rahim, 2021).

The effects of digitization on the tourism sector are not just about simplifying processes or improving user experience. They are transformative. Digitization has the power to create new business models, enhance global integration, and foster interaction between competitors in the tourism market. This is not just a technological shift, but a paradigm shift in the way we think about and operate in the tourism industry.(CHORNA, 2023:136)

The research problem emerged with the following question: How does digitization impact tourism services' marketing strategies?

Tourism companies in Najaf Governorate need to improve their use of digitization when providing their tourism services through their marketing strategies. Therefore, the importance of the research was embodied in tourism companies adopting digitization through various technical means. One of the most important goals of the study is the necessity of relying on digitization to provide tourism services. For the clients of the researched companies, the research topics were covered: the first topic, digitization, and the second topic, strategies for marketing tourism services, as well as the most important conclusions and the most critical recommendations.

Chapter One

Digitization

First, Definition and importance: We have entered an era that requires attention to effective digital devices, as they are the basis for the success of

tourism institutions within tourism activity.

Digitization first appeared in information technology, which helped to understand customer preferences and needs. Information constitutes an integral part of the strategies of tourism and travel companies when providing their various tourism services to their current and prospective customers.

1- Definition of digitization: Digitization is the process of converting (text, image, and sound) into an encrypted form that can be read by a computer and has already been released on different media. Therefore, it is considered a complex process that includes several processes that depend on each other. (Thomas & Other, 2019)

Digitization is also defined as every process through which information is transformed from its traditional form into a digital form, whether it is images, text data, audio files, or other forms (Hisham, 2022, p. 11).

Therefore, digitization can be defined as all the procedural processes that ensure the processing of information and its transformation into digital forms, enabling various people to benefit from its outputs by using the scientific Internet and computers and employing the electronic platforms designated for them.

2- The importance of digitization: The importance of digitization is highlighted in defining databases, user behaviors, customer preferences, and other things that help the parties in the relationship by facilitating their work with speed and high accuracy. There is a close relationship between digitization and the tourism industry. It is represented by the significant increase in booking applications on websites and travel vloggers. Thanks to digitization, tourism companies have gained the ability to ensure the rational use of natural resources through virtual reality or augmented reality applications. Thus, tourists can

be directed to places that are less known but no less interesting to tourists. (2023:137(CHORNA,).

3- Advantages of digitization: The rapid technical change and successive developments in the field of computers have led to a revolution in the internal operations of tourism institutions through good exploitation of the database to serve their customers better to be more efficient in making the right decisions to achieve the goals of those institutions to survive and grow. In the tourism market (Abdul Rahman, 2023, p. 408)

The advantages and tools of digitalization are various, and in particular, those digital technologies that facilitate communications and bring people, institutions, and resources together to facilitate essential interactions between tourism companies and their customers. They also enhance the efficiency of management and contribute to improving marketing strategies (Boiko, 2022: 25).

4- Dimensions of digitization: The main dimensions were relied upon:

A- The technical dimension: Information technology is essential in modern business institutions, including tourism companies of all types and sizes. Digitization represents more than just information and communications technology, mainly traditional digitally enabled technology, such as platforms for accommodation, transportation, and online financing services (Anderton & Others, 2021). Tourism institutions use various information technology means such as hardware and equipment, software, applications, communications, and human resources (Abdel Nabi, 2021, p. 11). However, the challenge facing those involved in tourism activity is how to use information technology as a strategic tool to confront the significant challenges and rapid progress characterized by technological change in an intensely competitive environment to ensure the success of these institutions (Al-Shibli, 2018). Therefore, digitization applications have greatly

influenced business management, especially tourism institutions, and traveler decisions by providing new ways to search for and evaluate information, discover trips, and know the tourist destination (Khalout, 2020, p. 80).

B- B- The economic dimension: The development of the economy in the modern world is linked to the digitization of all its activities. The difference between the digital economy and the traditional economy. The most critical resource in production is the exchange, consumption, and distribution of information and methods of managing it. Because information acquires the status of the organization's main assets (Natocheeva & others, 2020:2). The tourism sector was not excluded, which is the most active in applying digitization and its various technologies. Dealing digitally represents saving money, effort, and time at all levels. To save significant amounts of money spent while working on digitization (Sufyan & Djilali, 2020, p. 20).

C- T - The human dimension: Computers offer tremendous capabilities for preserving and storing data and processing it with high accuracy and analysis to enable tourism institutions to possess an extensive knowledge base by linking information to the personal experiences of individual workers and managers. This would improve the quality of strategic decision-making by tourism companies regarding their services. However, during the industrial revolution, the main impact of technology on that industry occurred, which was the formation of the tourism and travel system today.

D- Enter the Scientific Distribution System (GDS), which this system created. The reservation processes have been changed exclusively using computers and relying primarily on artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality, and robots (Shivekar, 2023: 245). Therefore, the company will rely on the capabilities and skills of tourism service

providers through their possession of information and awareness of customers' needs by developing their experiences, and increasing their awareness (Hannes & others, 2021: 5). Therefore, attracting skills and competencies to apply digitalization is linked to the extent of the organization's ability and skill in selecting human competencies and the existence of a plan to attract those competencies in order to use digitalization correctly (Al-Azmi, 2022: 2).

Chapter Two

Tourism Services Marketing Strategies

First: Definition and importance of tourism services marketing strategies:

Almost all business sectors in different countries have realized the importance of transforming marketing from traditional to digital marketing. The goal is to increase the sales of institutions of various types of production and service, giving them better chances of survival and better ability to compete. Better achievements can be achieved, especially in tourism institutions, including tourism and travel companies and agencies, through successful marketing strategies that can be applied and measured.

Strategy is considered the method that competitors cannot withstand. (Al-Maadawi & Abdel-Rahim, 2021).

So, strategy is defined as an action plan that ensures movement from one place to another in a specific direction. It oscillates between being straightforward and very complex.

In light of this definition, marketing strategy is how organizations seek to achieve long-term marketing goals.

As for services, the interest that tourism services of various types received was not the immediate moment but instead the growing role and importance of services in the lives of individuals,

business organizations, and the economy, characterized by continuity and permanence. (Sami, 2024: 4)

Services are defined as characteristics (intangible, interconnectedness, heterogeneity, perishability, and hospitality) (Ben et al., 2020, p. 18).

There are different types of tourist services, including (transportation, accommodation, food and drink), and special services for tourists such as reception services, currency exchange, complementary and entertainment services, and general social services.

The power of the marketing strategy increases by establishing alliances between tourism companies, resulting in many options that provide various tourism services, which contribute to supporting them in the tourism market (17: 2023, Dalal & Musa).

Second: The importance of marketing strategies: Their importance is highlighted in that they strengthen cooperation and coordination between the various activities of the tourism organization. It enables it to evaluate its primary objectives, helps it describe expected growth and predict its future, and develops the skills of its managers. (10: 2023, Al-Mawla & Hammad). So, marketing tourism services is a constant challenge that requires a long-term strategic vision. Therefore, companies and tourist destinations must be fully aware of market developments and constantly innovate to ensure their success and attractiveness in the diverse and dynamic world of tourism (Tavart et al., 2024, p. 3). For the marketing strategy's success, senior management must make the correct and rational decision regarding digitization in its various activities. This research will focus on three marketing strategies for tourism services:

1- Lowest cost strategy: The introduction of digital technologies is urgently necessary to improve the

ability to apply them to tourism activities, trends, applications, and solutions at low cost and high efficiency (4: Vinh & Thi Ly, 2021).

Reducing costs to a level enables tourism companies to sell their products at a lower price than other companies, with a level of profit. (Al-Sarn 104:2020). Companies deal with many agencies. It can flourish due to choosing its agents who provide logistics services. However, logistics costs are between 10-15% of the costs (Kotler, 1999: 101).

2—Focus strategy: Currently, modern marketing trends are based on meeting customers' needs and trying to attract them, deal with them, and maintain them for life. Focusing on the number of customers is done by providing more excellent value than tourism services so that tourism institutions can obtain their satisfaction and loyalty (Belkheir, 2020, p. 75).

3- Innovation culture strategy: A strong presence in the tourism market is crucial to staying relevant to the chain and keeping pace with the latest innovations in information technology. Adopting and applying information in the tourism industry is seen as a source of innovation in tourism companies. Tourism is one of the service industries that most need to apply innovation and creativity based on culture, representing the values and beliefs that members of one society believe in. Therefore, many products must be modified and adapted to make them acceptable in many cultures. (Nawara & Kulthum, 2022: 17). If the tourism company has an individual who shows interest in the organization's culture, it must encourage him and continue to support him to significantly succeed in achieving its digital goals. Implementing information technology (Jiang & Phoong, 2023, p. 4) and communications can increase the Profitability of tourism enterprises while also increasing organizational productivity.

The innovation strategy must be characterized by

high flexibility and the ability to change according to the nature of the institutions' work and their size. There are types of innovations, including:

These are related to technological industries and contribute to bringing about major changes in organizations (large and small), so employing them entails great risks. (191: Al-Qazwini, 2020).

Chapter Three

Practical analysis

First: Demographic characteristics of the research sample

It is clear from Table (1) that the characteristics of the research sample in terms of gender, age, educational level, profession, and years of service in tourist facilities are as follows:

It was found that the number of males reached (68 responses), accounting for 56.7%, while the number of females reached (52 responses only), accounting for 43.3%.

Our research also revealed a diverse range of responses based on age. The age group (18-30 years) was the most represented, with a rate of 52.5%, while the group under 18 years had the lowest representation, with only 3 responses at a rate of 2.5%. This variety of responses underscores the comprehensive nature of our study and the diverse perspectives it encompasses.

The answers to academic achievement varied according to the educational category, with the "baccalaureate" category recording 47 answers at a rate of 39.2% and the higher degree holders category recording only 15 answers at 12.5%.

The answers varied concerning the profession, with the (student) category ranked first with (75 answers) at a rate of 62.5%, and the housewife and retiree category ranked lowest with (only one answer each) at a rate of (0.8%).

As for the number of years of experience in tourist facilities, the percentages varied, as it was

recorded as (70 answers), which is the first place, with a percentage of (58.3%), while the category of more than 15 years was the least with (2 answers), with a percentage of (1.7%).

Table (1) Characteristics of the research sample (Gender, age, educational level, profession, and years of service in tourist facilities)

Percentage	Repetition	Properties	
56.7	68	Males	Gender
43.3	52	Females	
2.5	3	under 18 years old	Age
52.5	63	18 - 30 years old	
21.7	26	31 - 40 years old	
6.7	8	41 - 51 years old	
16.7	20	51 years and over	
18.3	22	Middle or middle school	Academic Achievement
30.0	36	diploma	
39.2	47	Bachelor's	
12.5	15	Master's Degree	
17.5	21	employee	Occupation
62.5	75	student	
18.3	22	Winner	
0.8	1	Housewife	
0.8	1	retired	
58.3	70	Less than one year	Number Of Years Of Experience In Tourism Facilities
30.8	37	1 - 5 years	
5.8	7	6 - 10 years	
3.3	4	11 - 15 years	
1.7	2	More than 15 years	

Second: Testing the normal distribution of the data of the research tool (questionnaire)

The normal distribution was tested using the Smirnov-Kolmogorov (Z) test to ensure that the questionnaire data to prove the research hypotheses followed a normal distribution.

The Z values showed non-significant values for both variables of the questionnaire, a significant finding that indicates a normal distribution of the questionnaire data, confirming its suitability for statistical analysis. See table (2).

Table 2: test results

Moral value	Value Z	Questionnaire variables
0.172	1.035	Digital transformation (digitization)
0.181	1.121	Tourism services marketing strategies

Third: Assessing the validity and reliability of the research tool (questionnaire)

The estimation of the honesty and reliability of the respondents' answers to the questionnaire's variables was meticulously conducted through the analysis of Cronbach's alpha and split-half coefficients.

The values of the reliability and validity

coefficients indicate the internal consistency of the respondents' answers, as all values were higher than 0.60, and the coefficient values ranged between 0.781 and 0.889. These values are considered reasonable and indicate the stability and validity of the questionnaire items, which means accepting the questionnaire statements and adopting them in analyzing the study results. As shown in Table (3).

Table (3) Estimates of validity and reliability in the respondents' answers to the questionnaire's variables

Guttman Coefficient	Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Cronbach's Alpha Values	Questionnaire variables
0.786	0.788	0.802	Digital transformation (digitization)
0.803	0.816	0.844	Tourism services marketing strategies
0.781	0.796	0.889	Total paragraphs

Fourth: Building a standard for levels of agreement

Weighting degrees were given to the five-point Likert scale options so that they could be treated statistically, as follows:

I am I am afraid I have to disagree with one degree

Two degrees disagree

Neutral three degrees

Agreed, four degrees

Strongly agree; five degrees

After calculating the arithmetic averages for the items (statements), a three-level criterion was used to indicate the extent of the sample members' agreement on the concept of the two variable statements, as follows:

Table (4) Compatibility evaluation criterion

Standard	SMA
Low	2.33-1
Middle	3.66-2.34
High	5 - 3.67

Considering that the range is $5-1=4$

The length of the category is $4/3 = 1.33$ range/number of categories

The relative importance of the paragraphs was calculated as follows:

Arithmetic mean/number of scale items x 100

Fifth: Descriptive analysis of data for the research variables:

The questionnaire included two variables, each variable containing 12 statements. The results of Table (4) indicate:

a. The average of the sample members' answers to the total statements of this variable amounted to 4.03 and falls within a high level of agreement according to the study standard. This confirms the agreement of the sample members that digital transformation contributes to the high marketing

of tourism services, and the standard deviation reached a value of 0.45, which indicates homogeneous agreement. In the respondents' responses to the concepts of the paragraphs of this variable, the relative importance was recorded at a high value (80.63), documenting the importance of digital transformation in increasing the marketing of tourism services.

B. All paragraphs of the variable (except paragraph 10) obtained high arithmetic means and high relative importance, and the level of agreement was high in all of them, which indicates that the majority of respondents agreed on the contents of the paragraphs that indicate the agreement of the sample members that digital transformation contributes to the high marketing of tourism services.

1- Digital transformation variable (digitization)

Table (4) Descriptive characteristics of the phrases for the digital transformation variable (digitization)

Level Of Agree - ment	Perce ntage	Stan dard-Dev- lation	SMA	Strongly Agree	Agree	Natural	Disa- gree	I Strongly Disagree	Paragraph	
High	79.80	0.855	3.99	33	63	14	10	0	Repetition	1
				27.5	52.5	11.7	8.3	0.0	%	
High	83.40	0.833	4.17	45	57	12	5	1	Repetition	2
				37.5	47.5	10.0	4.2	0.8	%	
High	83.40	0.823	4.17	47	51	17	5	0	Repetition	3
				39.2	42.5	14.2	4.2	0.0	%	
High	73.40	0.901	3.67	26	37	48	9	0	Repetition	4
				21.7	30.8	40.0	7.5	0.0	%	
High	76.40	0.860	3.82	27	52	33	8	0	Repetition	5
				22.5	43.3	27.5	6.7	0.0	%	
High	85.20	0.716	4.26	50	51	19	0	0	Repetition	6
				41.7	42.5	15.8	0.0	0.0	%	
High	80.60	0.874	4.03	39	53	20	8	0	Repetition	7
				32.5	44.2	16.7	6.7	0.0	%	
High	83.80	0.823	4.19	48	53	13	6	0	Repetition	8
				40.0	44.2	10.8	5.0	0.0	%	
High	82.80	0.714	4.14	40	57	23	0	0	Repetition	9
				33.3	47.5	19.2	0.0	0.0	%	
Middle	72.40	1.117	3.62	31	40	22	26	1	Repetition	10
				25.8	33.3	18.3	21.7	0.8	%	
High	81.40	0.786	4.07	40	49	30	1	0	Repetition	11
				33.3	40.8	25.0	0.8	0.0	%	
High	85.00	0.713	4.25	46	61	10	3	0	Repetition	12
				38.3	50.8	8.3	2.5	0.0	%	
High	80.63	0.45	4.03	Total						

2- Variable tourism services marketing strategies

The results in Table (5) indicate the following:

a. The average of the sample members' responses to the total statements of this variable amounted to 4.01 and falls within a high level of agreement according to the study standard. This confirms the sample members' agreement on marketing strategies for tourism services, and the standard deviation reached a value of 0.574, which indicates homogeneous agreement in the respondents' response to the concepts. In the paragraphs of this variable, the relative importance was recorded at a high value (80.20), which shows the agreement of most respondents on the tourism services provided by the company.

B. With the exception of paragraph 8, all

paragraphs of the variable obtained high arithmetic means and high relative importance, indicating a high level of agreement among the majority of respondents. This unanimous agreement on the contents of the paragraphs, which point to an agreement among the sample members on marketing strategies for tourism services, underscores the effectiveness of these strategies and their potential impact on the company's role in tourism services.

Table (5) provides a comprehensive overview of the descriptive characteristics of the phrases for the tourism services marketing strategies variable. This Table is a key component of our research, as it presents the data that underpins our findings and analysis.

Level Of Agree- ment	Perc- entage	Stan- dard Devi- ation	SMA	Stro- ngly Agree	Agree	Natural	Disa- gree	I Strongly Disagree	Paragraph	
High	84.40	0.769	4.22	49	50	19	2	0	Repetition	1
				40.8	41.7	15.8	1.7	0	%	
High	81.40	0.742	4.07	35	60	23	2	0	Repetition	2
				29.2	50.0	19.2	1.7	0	%	
High	80.20	0.966	4.01	43	46	22	7	2	Repetition	3
				35.8	38.3	18.3	5.8	1.7	%	
High	75.80	1.020	3.79	32	48	26	11	3	Repetition	4
				26.7	40.0	21.7	9.2	2.5	%	
High	86.00	0.805	4.30	55	52	8	4	1	Repetition	5
				45.8	43.3	6.7	3.3	0.8	%	
High	78.60	0.871	3.93	34	50	29	7	0	Repetition	6
				28.3	41.7	24.2	5.8	0	%	
High	76.80	0.961	3.84	36	38	39	5	2	Repetition	7
				30.0	31.7	32.5	4.2	1.7	%	
Middle	65.00	1.292	3.25	29	25	19	41	6	Repetition	8
				24.2	20.8	15.8	34.2	5.0	%	
High	75.60	1.041	3.78	37	36	30	17	0	Repetition	9
				30.8	30.0	25.0	14.2	0	%	
High	86.60	0.665	4.33	51	60	7	2	0	Repetition	10
				42.5	50.0	5.8	1.7	0	%	
High	87.40	0.673	4.37	57	50	13	0	0	Repetition	11
				47.5	41.7	10.8	0	0	%	
High	84.20	0.916	4.21	51	54	7	5	3	Repetition	12
				42.5	45.0	5.8	4.2	2.5	%	
High	80.20	0.574	4.01	Total						

Fifth: Testing the research hypothesis

In keeping with the aim of the research, which indicates the impact of digitization on marketing strategies for tourism services, to ensure the validity of the hypothesis emanating from the study's literature, the study data was processed, and the following are the results of the simple

regression analysis test: Table (6). The results of the statistical study were as follows:

Table (6): A comprehensive overview of the statistical outputs from the simple regression analysis, providing a clear demonstration of the correlation and impact of digital transformation in marketing strategies for tourism services

Statistical Values	Outputs
0.661	Correlation Coefficient
9.562	Calculated T Value
2.358	Tabular T Value
0.437	(Degrees Of Freedom 118, A=0.01)
91.616	The Coefficient Of Determination
<0.01	Calculated F Value
6.85	Significance Level
0.854	Tabular F Value

The research findings on the theoretical aspect underscore the significance of digitization in the tourism industry:

1. Digitization is one of the most important modern technologies that have contributed to keeping pace with the technological development of tourism activity.
2. Digitization has contributed significantly to tourism services, helping tourism companies achieve their goals of survival and growth.
3. Adopting digitization saves the traveler time, effort, and cost.

4. Digitization enhances trust between institutions and customers, increasing the importance of information technology and virtual reality for marketing tourism services.

The practical implications of the research findings are as follows:

- 1-The calculated t value (9.562) has a positive correlation and a high significance level, as it is greater than the tabulated t value of (2.358), which has a degree of freedom of 118 and a significance level of 0.01.
- 2-There is a statistically significant effect at the level of (0.01) for digital transformation in tourism

services marketing strategies. The calculated F values were (91.616), which is higher than the tabulated F value (6.85), indicating that the significance of the regression is proven.

3- The value of the coefficient of determination was (0.437), meaning that digital transformation alone explains 43.7% of the variation in tourism services marketing strategies.

4- The degree of impact was (0.854), which means that a one-unit increase in the value of digital transformation leads to an increase in tourism services marketing strategies by 0.854.

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