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Sustainability of Digital Marketing Strategies for Driving Consumer Behaviour in the Domestic Tourism Industry

Abstract. This study examines the effectiveness and sustainability of digital marketing strategies for driving consumer behaviour in the domestic tourism industry in South Africa. Using findings from 13 face-to-face interviews with tourism marketers and a questionnaire survey of 401 domestic tourists, the study analyses preferences of tourism marketers and tourists regarding digital marketing strategies and how they influence tourists' travel decisions and their use of digital platforms. Furthermore, digital marketing was found to affect tourists' decisions to engage in domestic tourism. For this reason, tourism stakeholders must constantly adapt their digital marketing strategies to stay abreast of the changing trends in the use of technology, while strategies of tourism destinations should be geared towards greater competitiveness, sustainability and long-term recovery.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, digital marketing, domestic tourism, sustainability, South Africa

Article history. Submitted 2023-05-13. Accepted 2023-06-02. Published 2023-07-27.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a major business and contributes significantly to the economic prosperity of many contemporary nations and destinations (Lekgau, Harilal & Feni, 2021; Lock, 2022). In South Africa, tourism has, over the years, been one of the key economic sectors. It has significantly contributed to the country's GDP, job creation, poverty alleviation (Stats SA, 2020; 2022), infrastructural development and heritage and culture preservation. International tourism in South Africa experienced a dramatic decline in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with foreign tourist

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arrivals falling by 33.7% from 1,301,855 in March 2019 to 863,232 in March 2020 (Stats SA, 2020).

Like most African countries, before the Covid-19 pandemic, South Africa relied more on international tourism than domestic tourism. Given the decline in international arrivals, Chamboko-Mpotaringa and Tichaawa (2021a) and Mzobe, Makoni & Nyikana (2022) suggest that domestic tourism should be encouraged to offset losses caused by the decline in international tourism. The popularity of domestic tourism has increased in recent years (Bama & Nyikana, 2021; Opute, Irene & Iwu, 2020). Latest studies show that more and more people are choosing to travel domestically for leisure, vacation, to visit friends and relatives and to explore different places (Dube-Xaba, 2021; Matiza & Kruger, 2022). Many other countries nations have relied on domestic tourism to mitigate the significant decline in international tourism (OECD, 2020).

Despite South Africa's potential as a tourist destination, because of its over-reliance on revenue from international tourists since it became a constitutional democracy in 1994, the country's domestic tourism has not been functioning at its best (Mzobe, Makoni & Nyikana, 2022). In order to change this situation, the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) was formulated to support a sustainable tourism economy, which sets out a strategy for domestic tourism growth (National Department of Tourism, 2021). As a result, South Africa has launched aggressive marketing strategies including campaigns like 'Sho't left', 'Buy now — travel later', 'Whatever you are looking for, it is here', 'We are open' and 'Live again' as strategies to promote its domestic tourism (Lekgau, Harilal & Feni, 2021; Mzobe, Makoni & Nyikana, 2022; National Department of Tourism, 2021). The campaigns encouraged all South Africans to participate in domestic tourism by stimulating local tourism activities (Lekgau, Harilal & Feni, 2021). In view of challenges facing domestic tourism, such as unemployment and inequality, the campaigns were designed to offer South Africans cheaper and more affordable travel options (Mzobe, Makoni & Nyikana, 2022). Additionally, tour operators offered flexible travel savings options like participation in travel stokvels¹ (Adinolfi, Harilal & Giddy, 2021).

Despite domestic tourism's contribution to the economy, environment and society, the industry has a long history of being overlooked compared to international tourism (Bama & Nyikana, 2021; Pratt et al., 2010). Previous studies on domestic tourism have been limited to investigating travel patterns, intentions and motivations (Bama & Nyikana, 2021; Matiza & Kruger, 2022; Mzobe, Makoni & Nyikana, 2022) and failed to address the critical issue of technology adoption and its related

¹ In South Africa, a stokvel is an invitation-only club of twelve or more people serving as a rotating credit union or saving scheme.

implications. In Woyo's discussion on the long-term viability of efforts to foster domestic tourism as a post-Covid-19 recovery strategy in a distressed destination, Woyo (2021) explored possibilities of implementing technology in tourism. Although some researchers have acknowledged the importance of technology in tourism, studies have focused on issues such as perceptions, intentions to adopt technology, trends and customer satisfaction (Briez, Ezzat & Abd Eljalil, 2022; Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2023; Garner & Kim, 2022; Vishwakarma, Mukherjee & Datta, 2020). Studies failed to explore the sustainability of using digital marketing strategies to influence consumer behaviour.

Global competition for consumers is a challenge for marketers in the tourism industry. Unless a destination has distinct features coupled with a strong image and brand positioning, it is unlikely to be successful in attracting visitors (Shi et al., 2022). Advances in digital technology and the growing accessibility of the internet globally have resulted in the emergence of digital platforms and new marketing avenues (Buhalis, O'Connor & Leung, 2023; Gupta, 2019), which have facilitated the development of digital marketing strategies that influence tourists' travel decisions. Additionally, digital marketing creates new dynamics between customers and marketers (Buhalis, O'Connor & Leung, 2023). Bozhenko, Polyakova & Dubinina (2023) emphasise the importance of customer experience and the creation of a value proposition when using digital marketing strategies.

However, promoting domestic tourism can be challenging. Many people may be unfamiliar with their country's diverse and unique tourism offerings and destinations. Despite studies reporting the growing use of digital marketing strategies in tourism (Kontis & Skoultos, 2022; Pereira, 2019; Wahyuningsih et al., 2022), thorough research on the effectiveness and sustainability of using digital marketing strategies to influence consumer behaviour is lacking. Increased optimism about the future of domestic tourism may be attributed to a confluence of technological advancements and shifts in consumer behaviour. The following study examines the effectiveness and sustainability of digital marketing strategies in promoting domestic tourism. In particular, the author's goal was (1) to investigate how effective digital marketing strategies are in encouraging consumers to engage in domestic tourism; (2) to identify factors that motivate tourists to use digital marketing tools and platforms; and (3) to analyse how sustainable digital marketing strategies are for the purpose of long-term promotion of domestic tourism.

2. Literature review

2.1. Digital marketing

Technology has become a vital factor in every aspect of doing business, including marketing. A number of arguments have been presented in favour of a shift away from traditional methods (such as print media) to digital marketing strategies (such as the use of websites, social media, search engines, and travel applications) to promote products and services (Ababneh, 2022). Scholars such as Deb, Nafi & Valeri (2022) and Nyatsambo, Phiri & Mashingaidze (2022) argue that digital marketing strategies are more sustainable than traditional marketing.

From a supplier's perspective, digital marketing strategies are sustainable because they are usually cheaper and more environmentally friendly than traditional methods. Digital marketing reduces the need for physical materials such as brochures, newspapers, flyers and billboards. Digital marketing allows businesses and tourism destinations to reach a wider audience at a relatively cheaper cost and target specific consumer groups by taking advantage of demographic, geographic and behavioural data (Anwar et al., 2021; Salehi et al., 2012). Targeting specific consumers makes it easier for businesses and tourism destinations to tailor their campaigns and reach them at the right time, which results in higher conversion rates and return on investments (Magano & Cunha, 2020). Digital marketing allows businesses to communicate personally with customers (Pai et al., 2020), which can lead to increased engagement and sales (Garner & Kim, 2022). Another advantage of digital marketing is the fact that the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns can be tracked and measured in real-time, allowing businesses to make data-driven decisions, improve the effectiveness of campaigns and optimise marketing efforts (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Customers' ability to post online reviews can help build and boost the reputation of tourism destinations and businesses and attract new customers.

Customers can also benefit from digital marketing. For example, social networking sites help them to participate in online communities, like and comment about products, post reviews and share their personal experiences (Fodranová, Labudová & Antalová, 2022). Studies indicate that consumers are highly likely to engage, like, comment and share content compatible with their tastes and needs (Wengel et al., 2022). Hashtags make it easier for customers to filter content. Digital marketing strategies are available 24/7 and enable instant and two-way communication, thus fulfilling modern consumers' need for instant gratification (Lou & Xie, 2021). Tourism is a service-oriented industry. Unlike product consumers, who may not need to constantly communicate with suppliers as they can evaluate

the product's performance before purchase, service consumers are more likely to engage in close interactions with service providers in the production and consumption phases of the service (Wengel et al., 2022).

On the other hand, some digital marketing strategies can be expensive to implement, especially for new entrants into the market. Examples include search engine optimisation, pay-per-click advertising, development of websites and travel applications, all of which require skilled personnel and subscriptions. Since such strategies are technology-dependent, technical glitches, load-shedding² and power cuts can affect the efficiency and effectiveness of digital marketing strategies (Jansson, 2022). With rapid technological changes, current digital marketing strategies can become obsolete if not adequately developed.

2.2. Consumer behaviour

With the rise of the internet and increased use of mobile devices, consumers are increasingly turning to digital marketing tools and platforms to search, evaluate and purchase products and services (Febrianti et al., 2022). This has led to a shift in the way consumers make decisions, with digital marketing playing a crucial role at the consideration and evaluation stages (Nguyen Phuc & Bui Thanh, 2022). Tourists frequently use various digital marketing tools and platforms to choose tourism services. For example, when planning a vacation, they may ask co-workers, friends, relatives, or other travellers on social media to recommend affordable holiday destinations. Alternatively, they can use search engines like Google to reach destination websites or review sites such as Trip Advisor (Pereira, 2019). Previous experience of using digital technologies have made tourists more experienced, more demanding, more active and more willing to adopt new technologies (Gajdošík, 2022).

Marketing to modern tourists is much more challenging than marketing to traditional tourists because characteristics of modern tourists keep changing, which has implications for the effectiveness and sustainability of marketing strategies (Önder, Gunter & Gindl, 2020). Modern-day tourists contribute to creating information rather than being passive tourists. Thanks to digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter, tourists can easily interact with each other by gossiping, uploading, sharing, liking, commenting and following photographs, videos, blogs, audio and online reviews (Mariani, Ek Styven & Aye, 2019). Mar-

² Loadshedding, or a rolling blackout, is an intentionally engineered electrical power shutdown in which electricity delivery is stopped for non-overlapping periods of time over different parts of the distribution region. In South Africa, load shedding is done to prevent a failure of the entire system when the demand for electricity strains the capacity of the power generating system.

keting in tourism is challenging also because the decision-making process regarding tourism services is much more complex, given that tourism is an experiential activity involving complex emotions (Hosaini & Rojhe, 2020; Tseng & Wei, 2020). It is, therefore, crucial for marketers to choose the right marketing strategy when promoting tourism products and services.

The study of consumer behaviour in various tourism contexts has generated a lot of research attention (Ballantyne, Moutinho & Rate, 2018; Mathew & Soliman, 2021; Mpotaringa & Hattingh, 2019). The findings of Magano and Cunha (2020) and Mathew and Soliman (2021) suggest that digital content marketing influences consumer behaviour. Setiawan et al. (2018) agree that tourists make travel decisions after being stimulated by online marketing strategies. It is worth noting that consumer behaviour is not static and can change for different reasons. Therefore, needs and expectations of the same tourist can change at different stages of their decision-making process. If digital marketing managers could identify common factors influencing the use of digital marketing platforms and understand what motivates consumers and consumer purchase behaviour, they could reach a large customer base and convert users into purchasers (Wang, Japutra & Molinillo, 2021; Wang, 2017).

3. Methodology

3.1. Study design

The study examined the sustainability of digital marketing strategies for the purpose of encouraging consumers to engage in domestic tourism. The study adopted a mixed research methodology to achieve its objectives and answer the following research questions: how effective are digital marketing strategies in encouraging consumers to engage in domestic tourism?; what factors motivate tourists to use digital marketing tools and platforms? How sustainable are digital marketing strategies for the purpose of long-term promotion of domestic tourism? Data for the study were collected in two stages. During the first one, which took place between June and July 2021, thirteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with tourism marketers from the Free State province. The respondents had more than five years of experience as tourism marketers. Interview data were taken into account when designing the questionnaire to be used in the second stage of the study.

The second stage, which took place in September and October 2021, involved a questionnaire survey of domestic tourists visiting the Free State province. To qualify as domestic tourists, respondents had to be visiting the Free State province

for leisure and recreation purposes for a period not exceeding 60 nights (Stats SA, 2020). A stratified, non-probability, purposive sample was selected from five municipalities of the Free State province, each representing one stratum (Díaz-Meneses, 2019). The Free State province is famous for its Big Five game animals³, geographically spread throughout its five municipalities: Mangaung — the district's metropolitan municipality, and four district municipalities — Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, Xhariep and Thabo Mofutsanyana.

The choice of respondents for the interviews was determined by their availability, ease of access and willingness to participate. They were selected based on who they are, what they do and their expected ability to answer interview questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The marketers were purposively selected because of their association with tourism marketing and marketing experience and to represent all municipalities of the Free State province. They had to be familiar with digital marketing tools and platforms used to influence consumer behaviour and have knowledge regarding their effectiveness. Domestic tourists for the questionnaire survey were approached at popular tourist attractions in each municipality. A screening question was used to ensure that only residents of South Africa travelling for leisure participated in the survey. According to official statistics, 410,000 domestic tourists arrived in the Free State province in 2019 (Stats SA, 2020). However, their distribution within the province is uneven, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Domestic tourist arrivals, interviews conducted and completed questionnaires by municipality

Municipality	Tourists arrivals (% of n=410000)	Conducted interviews (% of n=13)	Completed questionnaires (% of n=401)
Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality	168920 (41.2)	5 (38.5)	165 (41.2)
Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality	103730 (25.3)	3 (23.1)	102 (25.4)
Xhariep District Municipality	56580 (13.8)	2 (15.4)	55 (13.7)
Fezile Dabi District Municipality	45510 (11.1)	2 (15.4)	44 (11.0)
Lejweleputswa District Municipality	35260 (8.6)	1 (7.7)	35 (8.7)

Source: Authors based on fieldwork

The number of respondents from each municipality approximates the number of domestic tourist arrivals in 2019.

The interviews were based on a set of pre-determined open-ended questions created after analysing the relevant literature. Each interview lasted about 35 minutes. The survey questionnaire contained questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and those designed to measure the study variables.

³ The lion, leopard, black rhinoceros, African bush elephant, and African buffalo.

The study variables and indicators are shown in Table 2. The data collection instruments were tested (three pilot interviews and a pilot survey involving 20 domestic leisure tourists) to check for appropriateness, ease of administering, reliability and validity. Respondents who participated in the pilot phase were excluded from the actual study. The interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai. For consistency, data were coded by a single researcher. SPSS v27 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences software, version 27) was used to analyse quantitative data with the aid of a statistician. Data analysis included the calculation of descriptive statistics and the application of inferential statistics to test the reliability of the constructs.

Table 2: Variables and indicators

Variables	Indicators
Domestic tourists' preferences regarding digital marketing strategies	Image-based marketing strategies, text-based marketing strategies, video-based marketing strategies
Platforms that influenced travel choices	Blogs, consumer review sites, destinations and tourism businesses websites, specialised search engines, online sharing economy platforms, social network sites, travel applications
Motivational factors affecting the use of digital marketing platforms	Benefits derived from using digital marketing platforms, the ease of use, information quality, the quality of the digital marketing platforms, service quality received

Source: Adapted from Dedeke (2016), Dyk, Slabbert & Tkaczynski (2020), Labanauskaitė, Fiore & Stašys (2020), Pai et al. (2020) and Singh and Srivastava (2019)

3.2. Sample description

The characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the interviewees (n=13)

Characteristics	Category	Percentage of the total
Sex	Female	53.8
	Male	46.2
Age	31-40	53.8
	41-50	23.1
	51-60	23.1
Stakeholder	Provincial government	38.5
	Local government	23.0
	Private	38.5
Position	Marketing manager	46.2
	Marketing officer	53.8

Source: Authors based on fieldwork

Table 4: Demographic characteristics of survey respondents (n=401)

Characteristics	Category	Percentage of the total
Sex	Female	55.3
	Male	44.7
Age	18-30	35.9
	31-40	32.7
	41-50	16.7
	51-60	7.7
	Over 60	7.0
Monthly income	R1000 and below	23.3
	R1001-R5000	15.3
	R5001-R10000	10.7
	R10001-R15000	13.7
	R15001-R20000	12.9
	Above R20000	24.1
Province of permanent residence	Free State	33.2
	Gauteng	28.9
	Northern Cape	15.2
	Limpopo	6.2
	Eastern Cape	5.6
	North West	4.5
	Kwa-Zulu Natal	2.7
	Western Cape	2.7
	Mpumalanga	1.0

Source: Authors based on fieldwork

4. Findings and discussion

To determine the effectiveness and sustainability of digital marketing strategies, it is essential to determine domestic tourists' preferences with respect to digital marketing strategies at different stages of their decision-making process. The effectiveness of digital marketing strategies is determined by the content and format of messages (Molina et al., 2020). Key factors include marketers' use of images, text and videos to relay messages when promoting their products and services. A closed-ended question was used to determine the respondents' preferences regarding digital marketing strategies. Results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Preferences regarding digital marketing strategies (n=401)

Digital marketing strategies	%
Image-based marketing strategies	26.2
Text-based marketing strategies	45.8
Video-based marketing strategies	28.0

Source:

The biggest group of respondents (45.8%) indicated that they prefer text-based digital marketing strategies, which may be indicative of their previous exposure to traditional marketing strategies such as print media. Although the literature reports a growing use of videos and images by marketers to showcase tourism destinations (Arreza, 2021; Vishwakarma, Mukherjee & Datta, 2020), the percentage of those who indicated a preference for this kind of marketing was much lower (28% and 26.2%).

This creates an opportunity that can ensure sustainability in the long run. Videos and pictures are a way of presenting less popular tourist destinations (Bama & Nyikana, 2021). Marketers could adopt differentiated marketing strategies in order to cater to different preferences and ensure long-term survival. During the interviews, some marketers said they were aware of these different preferences and were trying to accommodate them:

The youth are starting to communicate with us more and requesting more pictures. For our marketing, we use a few words, pictures, and sometimes videos as visuals to remain competitive (R7).

Now we are better. We had to study the customers, learn the importance of the content created and add some pictures. Instead of only having text, we now have videos and even a comment section (R13).

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements describing how digital marketing tools and platforms influenced their travel choices. The aim was to investigate the perceived effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in encouraging consumers to engage in domestic tourism and to identify factors that affected their use of digital platforms. Respondents were further probed on what motivated them to use digital marketing platforms. Twelve items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, which consisted of 'strongly disagree' (1-SD), 'disagree' (2-D), 'neutral' (3-N), 'agree' (4-A) and 'strongly agree' (5-SA) under two identified constructs (platforms that influenced travel choices and motivational factors for using digital marketing platforms).

The measurement tools used in the study were validated to ensure that they measured the target constructs by checking factor loading of the indicators for all the variables (Zollo et al., 2022). Cronbach's Alpha, commonly used for studies with Likert scales, was used to test the reliability of the indicators to ensure the results were valid and the study objectives were achieved (Kim & Hall, 2020).

The validity and reliability results are shown in Table 6. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability results were equal to 0.846 and 0.929, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability levels (Barween et al., 2022; Hair et al., 1998). All 12 items had reasonable factor loadings of 0.4 and above (Chen & Hsu, 2001), indicating convergent validity.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics, validity and reliability

Constructs	Items	Measurement scale results (% of n=401)					Mean	Std. Dev	FL	CA
		1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA				
Platforms that influenced travel choices	Destinations and tourism businesses websites	10.5	13.4	19.4	23.2	33.5	3.56	1.350	0.63	0.846
	Specialised search engines	9.6	11.8	12.6	21.4	44.6	3.80	1.367	0.40	
	Blogs	14.7	20.6	21.8	21.8	21.1	3.14	1.357	0.49	
	Consumer review sites	13.0	16.5	15.5	27.0	28.0	3.41	1.384	0.40	
	Online sharing economy platforms	17.9	18.4	18.3	23.2	22.2	3.13	1.416	0.63	
	Social network sites	8.7	8.2	13.8	26.5	42.8	3.86	1.291	0.57	
	Travel Applications	9.6	11.8	12.6	21.4	44.6	3.29	1.417	0.63	
Factors that motivate tourists to use digital marketing platforms	Benefits derived from using digital marketing platforms	4.8	6.5	13.0	26.5	49.3	4.09	1.142	0.77	0.929
	The ease of use	4.3	7.5	13.3	26.4	48.5	4.07	1.141	0.82	
	Information quality	4.8	8.0	13.0	31.8	42.5	3.99	1.143	0.83	
	The quality of the digital marketing platforms	5.0	9.5	15.5	29.3	40.6	3.91	1.178	0.75	
	Service quality received	6.3	9.6	14.9	22.9	46.3	3.93	1.250	0.80	

SD: Strongly disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly agree;
Std. Dev: Standard deviation; FL: Factor loading, CA: Cronbach's Alpha

Source:

The highest mean values can be observed for social networking sites had ($\bar{x} = 3.86$; $\sigma = 1.291$) specialised search engines ($\bar{x} = 3.80$; $\sigma = 1.367$) and websites ($\bar{x} = 3.56$; $\sigma = 1.350$) while the lowest — for blogs ($\bar{x} = 3.14$; $\sigma = 1.357$). By summing up percentages of “agree” (A) and “strongly agree” (SA) answers, one can obtain the share of respondents who thought that social networking sites (69.3%), specialised

search engines (66%) and websites had the most effect on their travel choices. According to data reported by Chaffey (2023), the global number of social media users in 2023 stood at 4.76 billion, accounting for 59.4% of the world's population and search engines are usually the starting point for any plans and decisions regarding tourism and travel (Velelo & Matenda, 2023). Websites have become authoritative sources of travel information (Deb, Nafi & Valeri, 2022). Social networking sites, specialised search engines and websites are among the most-used digital marketing platforms. This view was closely supported by the interviewees, who felt that social media had gained popularity. As one marketer noted:

On almost every phone nowadays, there is Facebook and WhatsApp. These are common because one can easily communicate and share audio and videos with friends, family, and even strangers (R12).

Furthermore, the interviewed marketers believe that social networking sites have gained popularity because they allow tourists to document their movements, hashtags (#), geotagging and mentions.

For social media users, if one does not post, either they are not there or lying (R12). We use hashtags because it helps customers to sift through information quickly and, thus it helps to drive visitors to our digital platforms (R10).

R1 expressed a need for markets to research their audience to understand on which platforms to capitalise.

We know people spend some of their free time on phones, right? However, as marketers, we must understand how and where people spend their time. We need to understand which platforms are popular.

On the other hand, one marketer noted that traditional maps and guides are being quickly replaced by interactive mobile applications (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021b; Zillinger, 2020):

People are constantly downloading apps they find valuable (R5).

Research findings show that technology and the use of smartphones have caused a radical shift in marketing and access to marketing information (Shen, Fan & Buhalis, 2022). It is therefore necessary to consider tourists' preferences regarding digital marketing in order to ensure that destinations and marketers

adopt effective digital marketing strategies that help destinations remain competitive in the long run.

The decision to engage in tourism is no longer guided by tour operators' brochures, flyers and catalogues but by digital marketing platforms, such as websites and social networking sites filled with photos of ordinary tourists (Fodranová, Labudová & Antalová, 2022). Tourists are motivated to use digital marketing tools and platforms by factors, such as content, the ability to share experiences, communicate and obtain useful information (Ababneh, 2022; Mathew & Soliman, 2021). Content provided on digital marketing tools and platforms, in particular, can be beneficial for tourists (Şengel et al., 2022). Understanding factors that motivate tourists to use digital marketing platforms allows marketers to align their marketing strategies with tourists' needs and expectations to ensure long-term survival.

As shown in Table 6, factors that motivate tourists to use digital marketing platforms had relatively high mean scores: benefits derived from using digital marketing platforms ($\bar{x} = 4.09$; $\sigma = 1.142$); the ease of use ($\bar{x} = 4.07$; $\sigma = 1.141$), information quality ($\bar{x} = 3.99$; $\sigma = 1.143$); service quality received ($\bar{x} = 3.93$; $\sigma = 1.250$) and the quality of the digital marketing platforms ($\bar{x} = 3.91$; $\sigma = 1.178$). For 75.8% of respondents (combined percentages of A and SA answers), the main motivation was the benefits derived from using digital marketing platforms. Relatively the smallest percentage of respondents agreed that they were motivated to use digital marketing platforms because of service quality received (69.2%). These findings are consistent with those presented by Sigala, Dimitrovski & Joukes (2023) and Soehardi and Thamrin (2022). It is clear that digital marketing is no longer merely an option but a necessary strategy for influencing consumer behaviour (Briez, Ezzat & Abd Eljalil, 2022). The same sentiments were echoed by some of the interviewed marketers:

We keep customers engaged by posting relevant content (R13).

We make travel recommendations to them (tourists). When we make these recommendations, they (tourists) should realise that the recommendations we are giving them are the best choices. When we have done that and have motivated them to choose the suggested package and want to travel to the destination, it means we have achieved our goal (R5).

5. Conclusion and recommendations

For many countries, domestic tourism is an industry that can help to overcome excessive dependence on other traditional economic sectors and foster economic, environmental, and social growth. Therefore, domestic tourism needs to be strengthened (Mzobe, Makoni & Nyikana, 2022). With the growing popularity of digital marketing tools and platforms and the rising reliance of domestic tourists on technology in daily life, the use of technology in marketing will only grow. Technology in marketing has shown to be successful and efficient, opening up new avenues for organisations and consumers to connect and engage with one another. Findings confirm that the interactive nature of digital platforms provides tourists with easy access to information, usually created by marketers with content based on tourists' interests.

The tourism industry has been at the forefront of embracing digital technologies. Digital technologies such as e-commerce, travel automation, provision of travel information and digital marketing have revolutionised and resulted in incremental changes in domestic tourism and require marketers to follow new trends in marketing (Devasia, 2022). The study findings confirm that domestic tourists have embraced digital marketing tools and platforms when making travel decisions, as digital platforms influence their travel choices. Online presence has become the new face of the tourism industry (Devasia, 2022). With technology continuously developing, stakeholders should strengthen their digital presence. Marketers must develop sustainable digital marketing strategies that drive consumer behaviour in the domestic tourism industry.

Digital marketing strategies can potentially encourage consumers to engage in domestic tourism in the long term. However, to ensure that the adoption of digital marketing strategies is effective and sustainable, it is essential to understand tourists' preferences in this respect in order to choose strategies that effectively promote domestic tourism. Firstly, in light of the findings, marketers must develop differentiated marketing strategies incorporating text, videos and images. This will allow businesses to cater to the different needs of domestic tourists.

Secondly, domestic tourists' decisions to engage in tourism are influenced by their interactions and exposure to different digital tools and platforms. While digital marketing tools and platforms provide opportunities to address customer needs and effectively encourage consumers to engage in domestic tourism, there are some challenges associated with technology in tourism. These include marketers' loss of total control of content available to tourists. Another challenge is the changing needs of consumers. It is, therefore, necessary for tourism destinations, businesses and marketers to keep abreast of changes in customer preferences and technology to be able to reach tourists effectively and influence their behaviour.

Thirdly, South African domestic tourists are motivated to use digital marketing platforms mainly by their usefulness, ease of use, quality of the information provided, quality of service rendered and the quality of the digital marketing platforms. Digital marketing strategies should be designed to help customers make their travel decisions and to satisfy their needs and wants. If these expectations are satisfied, tourists will continue to use them. This means that businesses should consider implementing sustainable digital marketing practices to maximize the long-term benefits of increased domestic tourism.

Since the study sample was selected from one province, the results are not representative of the population of all domestic tourists in South Africa. Moreover, although data were collected once COVID-19 restrictions had been eased, travelling for most people was still a concern. Though several studies have been done on digital marketing, this phenomenon continues to develop, so there is a need for new studies, focusing on larger geographical areas and the influence of artificial intelligence on consumer behaviour.

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Zrównoważony rozwój cyfrowych strategii marketingowych w celu kształtowania zachowań konsumentów na krajowym rynku turystycznym

Streszczenie. W artykule przedstawiono badanie mające na celu ocenę skuteczności i długoterminowej użyteczności strategii marketingu cyfrowego do kształtowania zachowań konsumentów na krajowym rynku usług turystycznych w RPA. Na podstawie danych uzyskanych w trakcie wywiadów z 13 osobami zajmującymi się marketingiem turystycznym oraz ankiety przeprowadzonej wśród 401 turystów krajowych, autorzy analizują, w jaki sposób różne cyfrowe strategie marketingowe wpływają na wybór miejsc wyjazdów wakacyjnych przez turystów oraz ich sposoby korzystania z platform cyfrowych. Autorzy podkreślają, że podmioty działające w branży turystycznej muszą stale dostosowywać cyfrowe strategie marketingowe, aby być na bieżąco ze zmieniającymi się sposobami korzystania z technologii, natomiast obszary recepcji turystycznej powinny tworzyć strategie ukierunkowane na większą konkurencyjność i długoterminowy rozwój.

Słowa kluczowe: zachowania konsumentów, marketing cyfrowy, turystyka krajowa, zrównoważony rozwój, RPA



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