

Original Research Article

Developing A Digital Marketing Model in The Tourism Industry (Case Study: Tehran)

Hero Isavi*

Assistant Professor of Business Administration, Department of Management, Faculty of Management, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran.

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Abstract | The present study aims to design a digital marketing model in the tourism industry, focusing on the case study of Tehran. This study is applied in terms of purpose, exploratory in terms of approach, and qualitative in terms of type. The subjects of this study included a group of experts comprising senior managers and officials in the tourism sector, as well as university professors in the fields of marketing management and tourism management. Using a purposive sampling method, 11 individuals were selected as the statistical sample and interviewed.

Based on the results, it was determined that the core element in institutionalizing digital marketing in the country's tourism industry is the serious commitment of management to utilizing digital marketing tools and increasing Iran's share of the tourism market. Factors such as emphasis on ethics in designing promotional messages, emphasizing competitive advantages in the promotional message, aligning the promotional message with the target community's culture, and the power of the promotional message to create a need in the customer are causal factors that are influential on the core of the model.

According to the proposed model in the study, the core of the model, through two main strategies—using specialized media to publish promotional messages and systematically and virally spreading promotional messages through social media—can lead to positive outcomes. Importantly, two contextual factors, including promoting the culture of using digital marketing in the tourism industry, allocating appropriate budgets, and allowing time for the implementation of digital marketing, as well as two intervening factors, such as benchmarking successful countries in tourism marketing and regional competition in attracting tourists, also impact the model's strategies. According to this model, if managers and stakeholders in the tourism sector can institutionalize digital marketing within their organizations, they will achieve significant outcomes such as fostering tourist loyalty to tourism centers, generating foreign exchange, improving the country's economy, and strengthening the tourism brand.

Keywords | *Tourism, Content Marketing, Theme Analysis, Tehran.*

Introduction | Today, technological advancements have facilitated various activities, one of which is marketing (Sembiring et al., 2022, 72). Marketing refers to all actions aimed at identifying and predicting customer needs and subsequently offering solutions to meet those needs (Saura et al., 2021). Marketing is essential and beneficial for supporting the economies of all partially developed countries (Paydar et al., 2023, 117). With the development of mobile software and the increase in digital literacy, digital marketing is becoming the dominant paradigm in the service industries, including tourism (Mason, 2020).

Digital marketing, also known as online or internet marketing, is the latest element of integrated marketing communications, specifically direct marketing, and it is growing the fastest. In this context, companies, destinations, and consumers generate and use a large amount of data to improve decision-making processes and create shared value (Mariani & Baggio, 2022).

Tourism companies are also leveraging this marketing tool and gradually integrating digital marketing into their services. This industry is undoubtedly one of the most competitive globally, and the more competitive the industry, the harder it is to stand out, requiring

* Corresponding Author: 0989149744684, Hero.isavi@iau.ac.ir

creativity and expertise. A high percentage of people access information via portable smart devices such as mobile phones and tablets, seeking online menus. For instance, location data of tourists tracked through positioning sensors embedded in smartphones can provide destination marketers with meaningful insights into the most popular routes and attractions (Mariani et al., 2019). Therefore, every tourism company should use strategies, tactics, and marketing tools to achieve and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage (Khosravi & Naderi, 2023, 175). Consequently, the expansion of smart tourism using data mining is more necessary than ever.

Experience from some countries shows that using social media and investing in this area has played a significant role in developing tourism (John et al., 2020). The practical application of this approach is also an inevitable necessity for the tourism industry in our country. Iran has a high potential for tourism development globally, especially in the region, but much of this potential remains untapped. One reason our country's tourism lags behind other countries is the inadequacy of marketing efforts, particularly digital marketing. Many of our country's tourist attractions, despite having suitable infrastructure, are not well promoted on social media in various languages. Meanwhile, today, there is a significant opportunity to introduce tourism capacities through digital marketing, potentially creating a substantial transformation in tourism development, the same as many regional countries that have successfully attracted numerous tourists through virtual space and digital marketing.

Tehran in particular, with its significant tourist attractions, especially historical sites, and suitable infrastructure, can effectively utilize this opportunity to develop its tourism capacities. All these statements indicate that a targeted and appropriate digital marketing plan will provide the necessary foundation for tourism development in Tehran. Nevertheless, contrary to reality and the limited use of digital and social media by travel agencies, there is no comprehensive and coherent program in this field within the country. Therefore, the first step is to have a targeted and appropriate plan through a specific model. Despite this, limited research has been conducted on digital marketing in the tourism industry, particularly in Iran and Tehran, and the impact of digital marketing in the tourism industry is not yet fully apparent. Therefore, given the importance of the subject, this study aims to gain a better understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and dimensions of value creation in digital marketing within the tourism industry through further study.

This study will attempt to design a digital marketing model in the tourism industry. This effort will identify the factors influencing digital marketing in this industry and reveal the outcomes of this approach. The main research question to be addressed is: What is the digital marketing model for the tourism industry?

Theoretical Foundations

Information and communication technology has become a mainstream aspect of marketing interaction, rapidly transforming the operations of the hospitality and tourism industry into the next generation of electronic marketing and strategic electronic management. Marketing strategies serve as the roots and resources supporting electronic word-of-mouth advertising, information generation, and technology development to predict customer behavior and satisfaction (Liu et al., 2020). In the 21st century, marketing approaches have evolved to adopt digital forms. This transformation to a digital marketing mix in services has led to a greater focus on customers and new products, keeping the customer at the center of all marketing activities (Peter & Dalla Vecchia, 2021).

Digitalization has maintained significant growth across all markets, both large and small (Bhandari & Sin, 2023). On the other hand, tourism, being a dynamic industry with a very promising future, is a critical factor in economic vitality and sustainable development for any country. As such, various countries are seeking ways to develop their tourism sectors (Asadi & Zadvali Khajeh, 2021, 112). In a broad economic context, tourism represents a shift towards a service-information economy, processing all available fields for integration into the consumption cycle within an unstructured capitalist framework (Karimi et al., 2021, 134). Overall, digital technologies have brought significant changes to the tourism industry, its products, experiences, business activities, and destinations. These changes have created new opportunities and challenges for small tourism businesses as they strive to meet consumer demands and access new markets (Mahmodzadeh et al., 2023, 202).

Success in digital marketing requires a new combination of hardware and software. With the advent of widespread social media platforms, customers are no longer limited to a passive role in their relationship with a company (Lotfi Ashtiani et al., 2023). Clearly, the development and utilization of digital marketing offer numerous advantages, including greater market presence, cost reduction, result measurement, personalization, unrestricted access, and improved communication for companies (Nuseir, 2016, 231).

The tourism industry is undergoing a fundamental shift

towards digitalization, with more tourists searching online for the best travel agencies and related services. Additionally, knowing which social media sites they use is another key factor in ensuring the success of online marketing (Lotfi Ashtiani et al., 2023, 174). In this context, the tourism industry increasingly uses the homepage as a digital channel (Lacarcel & Huete, 2023). Tourism and tourism marketing, in general, focus on creating a pleasant experience for the customer at the destination, and creating this experience is the responsibility of marketing in the tourism sector (Hajjaliakbari & Moosavi, 2019, 39). According to the World Tourism Organization, countries lacking proper information and communication infrastructure will soon be excluded from tourism competition, as promoting destinations and tourism products and attracting tourists is impossible without information and communication technology (Ebrahimei et al., 2010, 161).

Tourism, as the third-largest socio-economic activity in the European Union, significantly contributes to its GDP and employment (Santos & Cincera, 2018, 167). In an overall economic context, tourism represents a shift towards a service-information economy in the present age. This new approach to geographical spaces within the framework of unorganized capitalism processes all existing fields for integration into the consumption cycle (Karimi et al., 2021, 134).

In the tourism industry, no option can replace marketing; advertising can capture attention, generate interest, persuade, and lead to action, turning potential tourists into actual ones (Eskandari et al., 2021, 172). As an appropriate message and tool for achieving tourism product marketing goals, it must follow a systematic and purposeful process and adhere to specific principles (Behboudi et al., 2017, 86). In this regard, Taiminen & Ranaweera (2019) believe that enhancing digital content marketing can positively impact brand engagement and valuable relationships in the tourism industry market. Research has also shown that appropriate content on official and digital bank channels (websites, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) is highly effective in attracting tourists. Moreover, creating educational and advisory content on health and wellness can significantly enhance the branding of tourism destinations and facilitate tourist attraction (Hashemi Baghi et al., 2018, 3).

Among the important factors in tourism marketing are credibility and trust. The credibility of an institution providing healthcare services is a crucial factor for both local and international medical tourists. Crooks et al. (2010) identified accreditation as the most commonly used message theme in tourism marketing documents. Another critical factor in tourism is the

quality of medical services. Conversely, the lack of quality healthcare services is recognized as one of the main obstacles to the development of medical tourism (Cavmak & Cavmak, 2020, 74). Marketing factors, along with the concept of tourism development, can influence tourism marketing. Generally, tourism marketing depends on the eight Ps, known as the marketing mix, which includes Price, Product, Place, Promotion, People, Process, Physical attractiveness, and Physician (Rahimi Zarchi et al., 2013, 106). Among the modern marketing tools is social media-based marketing (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019, 33).

Research Background

Several studies have been conducted in this area. Khosravi & Naderi (2023) in their research titled "Proposing a Model for Data Driven Marketing in the Smart Tourism with a Meta-synthesis Approach" aimed to bridge the knowledge gap and link the relationships between big data and marketing strategy in various research contexts in tourism and hospitality literature. The results showed that the highest frequency in outcomes related to business values stems from the process category, while identifying consumer needs and behavioral patterns falls under the people/customer category, ranking second. Tourism experience and creating shared value fall under the physical evidence category, ranking third. In the circumstance section, data-driven skills had the highest frequency, while in the challenges section, ethical issues and privacy preservation were the most frequent. In the dimensions section, techniques and algorithms were the most frequent.

Lotfi Ashtiani et al. (2023) presented a digital marketing model in the Iranian medical tourism industry. According to the obtained paradigm model in this study, components related to digital marketing in the medical tourism industry were categorized into six groups: causal factors (application software marketing, social media marketing, social media environment, interactivity, perceptibility), phenomenon-centered (human-centered digital marketing, customer data analysis, market development), strategies (short-term and long-term strategies, functional value, expected value), intervening conditions (software and hardware indicators), and outcomes (tourist loyalty, tourist satisfaction, service quality, and social media content quality).

Mahmodzadeh et al. (2023) studied digital transformation and its impact on tourism business trends, concluding that digital transformation impacts all dimensions of tourism businesses. Additionally, findings indicate a significant difference between the average ranks of digital transformation components in the tourism sector, with

the greatest impact on improving education and human resource development. Therefore, more investment in attracting and nurturing human resources in line with these changes is essential.

Tahmasebpour et al. (2022) presented a digital marketing model for the development of the hospitality industry in Kish Island. The results showed that digital marketing elements influence tourism intentions through seven components: technical features of digital tools, relative advantage (value), cost (price), process management, promotion, service quality, and information quality.

Daneshpazhouh et al. (2022) designed a digital transformation model for ethical marketing in the tourism industry, concluding that given the Ministry of Health's goal concerning digital services, the tourism industry, as an information-based industry with extensive international and domestic communication, will be quickly influenced by digital technology.

Majedi & Shayegh (2021), in their study titled "Identify and Rank the Factors Affecting e-Marketing in Promoting the Brand of Health Tourism Destinations," found 13 factors influencing electronic marketing in enhancing the brand of health tourism destinations. In order of priority, they include user word-of-mouth advertising, website design with appropriate content, knowledge and expertise management, awareness and information about health tourism destinations, tourists' mental image of the destination, technology infrastructure, creating a sense of trust and confidence in tourists, tourists' loyalty to the destination, establishing interaction and communication, innovation in service delivery, use of educational videos on the web, organizational factors, and environmental factors.

Amin Ashayeri (2021) conducted a research titled "The spread of the Covid-19 virus on the digital marketing of the tourism industry in Iran". After the analysis, it was found that the spread of the Corona disease, the number of infected people in the country of origin and destination, and the real exchange rate of the country of origin have a negative effect on tourism income from digital marketing. Also, the real exchange rate of the destination country, together with the gross domestic product of the two countries of origin and destination, have a positive effect on tourism; But in spite of these investigated effects, the severity of the spread of the Corona pandemic is very high and overall tourism income from digital marketing has decreased in the country. Finally, it should be noted that the reason for the decrease in tourism income was the nature of tourism and banning people from traveling during this period.

Tahmasebpour et al. (2023) in a research entitled "Investigation of the impact of digital marketing on the development of the tourism industry (case study: Kish Island hotels)" concluded that environmental factors such as political-security, economic, cultural factors and tourism policies As intervening conditions and infrastructures such as transportation, accommodation and health services, food and restaurants and information and communication systems; As background factors, it has influenced the empowerment of Kish Island hotels. And finally, it leads to the development of tourism, or in other words economic, cultural-social, political and environmental development. Therefore, it can be acknowledged that the development of tourism is a complex process and is heavily influenced by the technical characteristics of digital tools, environmental factors and infrastructure.

Ahmadizad et al. (2015) studied the impact of electronic marketing on the tourism industry. The results showed that organizational factors, environmental factors, technological factors, and perceived ease of use had a positive and significant effect on the acceptance and application of electronic marketing. Perceived ease of use had the greatest effect, while technological factors had the least. Organizational and environmental factors significantly affected perceived ease of use, perceived compatibility, and perceived relative advantage, and technological factors significantly impacted perceived ease of use and perceived compatibility.

Maurer (2022) conducted a research titled "Digital Marketing in Tourism". Information and communication technology has contributed significantly to the development and growth of the tourism industry. Tourists use the Internet at all stages of the customer journey. In 2020, the average user spent an average of 6 hours and 43 minutes online each day, about 40% of their waking life. Mobile devices account for more than half of all online time, but most Internet users still use a combination of mobile phones and computers to access the Internet. Therefore, digital marketing provides great opportunities for tourism organizations and suppliers to promote and sell their offers and establish long-term relationships with their customers.

Gupta (2018) investigated this issue in an article entitled "The comprehensive use of digital marketing in the tourism industry". Obviously, digital marketing is a potential component of any marketing plan that is incorporated by successful businesses to increase reach and achieve desired results. Customers have immediate access to a variety of information such as images and videos of destinations, thereby highlighting the USP of that product through visual appeal and influencing the

customer’s decision regarding the desired destination. By offering the best travel deals through various digital technologies, travel companies promote their brand and reach their potential customers, thus influencing the entire tourism industry.

A detailed review of the discussed topics and the literature on digital marketing in the country’s tourism industry indicates a lack of a model for digital marketing aimed at strengthening tourism. This study intends to develop an appropriate model for digital marketing to enhance tourism in the city of Tehran.

Research Methodology

The present study is applied in terms of its objective and exploratory as well as descriptive-analytical in nature. Data collection methods included documentary and field approaches, utilizing questionnaires and interviews as tools. The data analysis method was qualitative.

In this research, a group of experts consisting of senior tourism managers, university professors in the field of digital marketing, and PhD students in these two areas were considered the statistical population. The expertise criteria included proficiency in digital marketing, marketing in the tourism industry, and knowledge of tourism. A snowball sampling method was used to select the sample. The process of selecting samples and conducting interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. A total of 11 individuals were selected as samples and interviewed.

Since the grounded theory method was used, the primary data collection tool was in-depth and unstructured interviews with experts. In these interviews, the researcher attempted to introduce soft questions regarding the circumstances, contexts, and outcomes of digital marketing in the tourism industry to derive initial concepts for model design. To ensure the reliability of the interviews, after each interview, the extracted codes were shared with the interviewee to confirm that the codes inferred by the researcher aligned with the interviewee’s thoughts.

Finally, to analyze the interviews and achieve the conceptual model of the research, grounded theory and three-stage coding (open, axial, and selective) were employed. At the end, all indicators were categorized into a comprehensive table, presenting the research model. Therefore, the outcome of the present study was the identification of fundamental themes, constructs, and the research model.

Study Area

The city of Tehran covers an area of over 600 square kilometers and is located between 35 degrees 31

minutes to 35 degrees 57 minutes north latitude and 51 degrees 4 minutes to 51 degrees 47 minutes east longitude. It is bordered by the Alborz mountain range to the north, Lavasanat to the east, Karaj to the west, and Varamin to the south. Administratively, Tehran is divided into 22 districts, 123 sub-districts, and 353 neighborhoods (Fig. 1).

As the capital of the country, Tehran plays a significant role as an entry and exit gateway for many domestic and international tourists. This strategic position of Tehran provides an opportunity to link travel flows to tourism goals. Important tourism capacities of Tehran include museums, towers, halls, monuments, advanced medical facilities, theaters, sports stadiums, parks, historical attractions, large shopping centers, accommodation facilities, and areas with historical architecture.

Urban planners and managers can leverage these capacities by designing a comprehensive plan utilizing digital marketing. This approach can transform and introduce Tehran as a digital and smart tourism destination.

Research Findings

Initially, the codes derived from the conceptually similar interviews were grouped into one category, gradually forming the categories. In axial coding, subcategories are organized into causal relationships to explain the phenomenon under study.

• Step 1: Open coding

This stage of analysis was dedicated to identifying and extracting initial concepts from the interview content. Accordingly, after conducting each interview, the researcher repeatedly reviewed it to extract and code the concepts present in the interview text. A total of 11 interviews were conducted, resulting in the extraction of 130 initial concepts. After reviewing, grouping them,

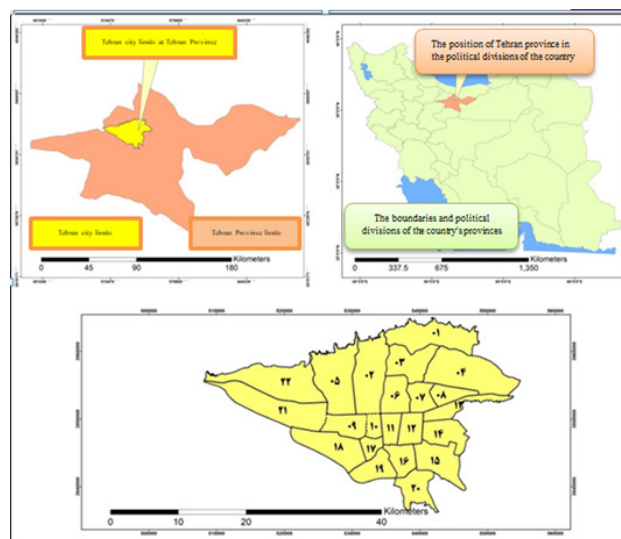


Fig. 1. Location of the study area. Source: Tourism map of Tehran, www.browse.ir

Table 1. Identification of Basic Themes. Source: Author.

Codes	Basic Themes
A ₁ , E ₆ , J ₇ , K ₃	Digital marketing can serve as a powerful leverage for tourism branding.
A ₂ , B ₉ , G ₅	Professional competition among tourism service providers in the digital space benefits all.
B ₁ , F ₈ , J ₄	The use of digital marketing in the tourism industry is increasingly growing.
A ₃ , I ₇	Advertising policies must be ethical to maintain customer trust.
A ₄ , F ₂	Proper use of digital marketing in tourism can help tourists achieve their goals.
A ₅ , B ₁₄ , E ₄ , F ₁₇ , I ₃	The practical commitment of tourism managers to digital marketing is crucial to its success or failure.
B ₄ , G ₁₀ , J ₁	The penetration and spread of digital media and tools in Iranian society are very high.
A ₆ , I ₄	Tourism managers should provide the necessary infrastructure for implementing various digital marketing techniques.
B ₂ , D ₈	If tourism managers lack the knowledge and awareness of digital marketing, they may not understand its importance.
C ₁ , F ₉ , G ₄ , H ₄	Providing financial resources and spending on digital marketing facilitates the path to this approach.
A ₇ , D ₇ , G ₃	Advanced technologies like AI can easily place you at the top of search engines.
C ₈ , K ₁	Cultural promotion in the tourism industry makes the move towards digital marketing much easier.
A ₈ , C ₁₀ , E ₁₀ , F ₁₅ , H ₇	Digital marketing should directly and precisely target the audience.
B ₃ , J ₂	Ethical conduct in designing and producing advertising content can impact the success of this approach.
A ₉ , B ₁₅ , C ₁₁ , E ₁₄ , F ₁₄ , K ₄	The intention and purpose of travel are mental processes that can be strengthened through digital marketing.
A ₁₀ , G ₂ , H ₉	Tourism managers should view digital marketing as a profitable factor, not a cost, as this style of marketing brings an increase in market shares and more sales.
B ₅ , F ₄ , I ₆	The credibility of the advertising medium significantly impacts trust in the target community.
B ₆ , F ₆	Producing useful and specialized content by officials and managers in virtual space can attract tourists.
A ₁₁ , B ₁₂ , C ₁₆ , D ₅ , J ₆ , E ₁₃	The amount of foreign currency earned through attracting tourists is significant, with much potential still untapped.
C ₆ , D ₃ , E ₅ , F ₅ , G ₆	Social media platforms like Instagram and Telegram can deliver messages to numerous actual and potential customers at minimal cost and time.
D ₁₁ , E ₂ , F ₁₆ , I ₁ , J ₅	Advertising messages should avoid exaggeration and directly highlight the advantages of services compared to competitors.
A ₁₂ , B ₇ , E ₁₃	Hidden customer needs should be one of the targets of content marketing in the country's tourism.
D ₁ , E ₃ , F ₃	The advertising content must emphasize the quality of the country's tourism services.
A ₁₃ , C ₃ , G ₈ , F ₁₀	The alignment between the product/service and the media chosen for advertising is crucial.
C ₁₃ , E ₁₂ , G ₁₃ , K ₅ , H ₁	Viral marketing in tourism might be a necessity today rather than a competitive advantage.
A ₁₄ , B ₁₃ , D ₄ , E ₇ , K ₂	Sometimes advertising content is so smart that it creates a need in the customer.
A ₁₅ , B ₁₁ , D ₆	We shouldn't test everything ourselves; we should use others' experiences too.
A ₁₆ , C ₁₅ , G ₁ , F ₁ , J ₃	Although ethical considerations in the country's tourism marketing are in good shape, there's still much to be done.
A ₁₇ , E ₁ , G ₉	The content of advertising messages should focus on the competitive advantages of services or brands.
C ₉ , H ₃	Through content marketing, we should strive to make Iran the first name that comes to tourists' minds.
B ₈ , E ₈ , G ₁₁ , H ₂	Advertising on social media should highlight the country's modern and up-to-date facilities.
C ₂ , G ₇	A tourist who receives the desired services will reach a satisfactory level of loyalty.
B ₁₀ , C ₁₂ , E ₁₁ , F ₁₃	Proper advertising content should have the power to create and stimulate customer needs.
C ₇ , D ₁₀ , F ₁₂ , G ₁₂ , H ₈	Many tourism services can be advertised using viral marketing techniques.
C ₅ , F ₁₁ , I ₅	Digital social media is a powerful advertising tool in the tourism industry.
A ₁₈ , D ₉ , E ₉ , I ₂	Surely, with more tourists entering, stakeholders in this industry will be more motivated to develop services.
C ₄ , D ₂ , H ₆ , K ₆	Even in Iran, there are centers that can be considered as models of content marketing in tourism.
C ₁₄ , F ₇ , H ₅	Attention should be paid to the cultural context of the target audience when designing advertising content.
E ₁₂ , G ₁₃ , K ₅	One of the goals of attracting tourists globally is to earn foreign currency for the destination country.
B ₈ , E ₈ , G ₁₁	The power of the country's tourism brand can play a role in creating loyalty among tourists.

and eliminating duplicate concepts, 40 final concepts were identified, which are shown in [Table 1](#).

The codes next to the themes consist of a Latin letter and a number. The Latin letter (in alphabetical order) indicates the interviewee and the number next to this letter indicates the number of the basic theme extracted from that particular interview.

• Step 2: Axial coding

In this phase, an in-depth analysis of the identified concepts was conducted to determine their similarities and differences, resulting in broader categories. Related and aligned concepts were grouped into these broader categories. The outcome of this process was the identification of 17 main categories, along with their associated concepts, which are presented in [Table 2](#). Titles were chosen to ensure the greatest relevance and consistency with the data they represent. To validate the categories and codes, the results were sent to all interviewees, requesting their feedback on the codes and categories. Based on their feedback, some codes and categories were revised. This process helped the researcher categorize with greater confidence and create a sense of coherence among the concepts and categories at each stage, by revealing the selected codes and incorporating expert opinions.

• Step 3: Selective coding

- Identifying overarching themes

In the next step, for the identification of comprehensive themes, through an in-depth examination of the identified constructive themes and determining their similarities and differences, broader categories called “comprehensive themes” were created. This phase constitutes the main theoretical categories, which are presented in [Table 3](#).

After examining and consolidating the 134 initial concepts and removing duplicates, 40 basic themes were identified. However, according to the thematic analysis method, it was necessary to group the basic themes into categories based on their similarity, termed “constructive themes.” This process resulted in the formation of 15 constructive themes. Subsequently, by grouping these 15 constructive themes, 6 comprehensive themes were identified, which formed the basis of the conceptual model of the research. After the final coding, the Delphi method was used to establish consensus on the final indicators and components. The responses and the summary of the final components during the Delphi rounds are concisely presented in [Table 4](#).

Based on the results in [Table 4](#), in the first round of the Delphi process, the Kendall coefficient was calculated to be 0.862, indicating significant dimensions ($P < 0.05$) and a near-acceptable level of agreement. In the second

round, the Kendall coefficient was 0.807, demonstrating high expert consensus on the components ([Table 5](#)). Ultimately, questions with an average rating of less than 3 in any round were removed from the questionnaire. One question from the strategic factors questionnaire and one question from the primary outcomes questionnaire were eliminated. Therefore, in the final stage, a total of 76 indicators were confirmed by the experts.

Proposed Research Model

Based on the above findings, to illustrate the relationships between concepts, dimensions, and components obtained through selective coding and considering the analyzed concepts and categories, the proposed research model was structured and presented as shown below. The final step involved mapping the identified categories onto the paradigmatic model. [Fig. 2](#) shows the result of this process.

Discussion

Based on the research findings, it was determined that the core element in institutionalizing digital marketing in the country’s tourism industry is the firm commitment of management to utilize digital marketing tools and increase Iran’s share in the tourism market. In this process, several factors play a critical role. These include causal factors such as emphasizing ethics in designing promotional messages, highlighting competitive advantages in the promotional message, aligning the promotional message with the target society’s culture, and the promotional message’s ability to create customer needs, all of which impact the central model.

According to the model presented in the research, the core of the model can yield positive outcomes through two main strategies: utilizing specialized media for disseminating promotional messages and systematically and virally spreading the promotional message via social media. Importantly, two contextual factors—promoting a culture for using digital marketing in the tourism industry, and allocating appropriate budgets and time for implementing digital marketing—along with two intervening factors—benchmarking successful countries in tourism marketing and regional competition in attracting tourists—also influence the model’s strategies. Based on this model, if tourism managers and stakeholders can institutionalize digital marketing within their organizations, significant outcomes such as increasing tourist loyalty to tourism centers, generating foreign exchange and improving the country’s economy, and strengthening the tourism brand can be achieved.

Table 2. Identification of Constructive Themes. Source: Author.

Constructive Themes	Basic Themes
Strengthening tourism brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital marketing can serve as a powerful leverage for tourism branding. - Advertising content must emphasize the quality of the country's tourism services.
Utilizing social media marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The penetration and spread of digital media and tools in Iranian society are very high. - The use of digital marketing in the tourism industry is increasingly growing.
Appropriate budgeting and opportunity provision for digital marketing execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing financial resources and spending on digital marketing facilitates the path to this approach. - If tourism managers lack the knowledge and awareness of digital marketing, they may not understand its importance. - The practical commitment of tourism managers to digital marketing is crucial to its success or failure.
Alignment of advertising message with target society's culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attention should be paid to the cultural context of the target audience when designing advertising content. - Digital marketing should directly and precisely target the audience.
Creating tourist loyalty to tourism centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The power of the country's tourism brand can play a role in creating loyalty among tourists. - Advertising policies must be ethical to maintain customer trust. - A tourist who receives the desired services will reach a satisfactory level of loyalty.
Promoting the use of digital marketing in the tourism industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural promotion in the tourism industry makes the move towards digital marketing much easier. - Proper use of digital marketing in tourism can help tourists achieve their goals.
Emphasizing ethics in advertising message design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethical conduct in designing and producing advertising content can impact the success of this approach. - Although ethical considerations in the country's tourism marketing are in good shape, there's still much to be done. - The credibility of the advertising medium significantly impacts trust in the target community.
Emphasizing the competitive advantages in the advertising message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional competition among tourism service providers in the digital space benefits all. - Tourism managers should provide the necessary infrastructure for implementing various digital marketing techniques. - Viral marketing in tourism might be a necessity today rather than a competitive advantage.
Increasing Iran's share of the tourism market by introducing it as a country with modern tourism services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through content marketing, we should strive to make Iran the first name that comes to tourists' minds. - Even in Iran, some centers can be considered as models of content marketing in tourism.
Utilizing specialized media to spread the advertising message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advertising on social media should highlight the country's modern and up-to-date facilities. - Many tourism services can be advertised using viral marketing techniques. - Social media platforms like Instagram and Telegram can deliver messages to numerous actual and potential customers at minimal cost and time. - The alignment between the product/service and the media chosen for advertising is crucial. - Advanced technologies like AI can easily place you at the top of search engines.
Learning from successful countries in tourism marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We shouldn't test everything ourselves; we should use others' experiences too.
Earning foreign currency and improving the country's economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One of the goals of attracting tourists globally is to earn foreign currency for the destination country. - The amount of foreign currency earned through attracting tourists is significant, with much potential still untapped. - Tourism managers should view digital marketing as a profitable factor, not a cost, as this style of marketing brings an increase in market shares and more sales.
The power of the advertising message to create customer needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital social media is a powerful advertising tool in the tourism industry. - The intention and purpose of travel are mental processes that can be strengthened through digital marketing. - Proper advertising content should have the power to create and stimulate customer needs. - Hidden customer needs should be one of the targets of content marketing in the country's tourism. - The content of advertising messages should focus on the competitive advantages of services or brands. - Sometimes advertising content is so smart that it creates a need in the customer.
Competition in the region to attract tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Producing useful and specialized content by officials and managers in virtual space can attract tourists. - Surely, with more tourists entering, stakeholders in this industry will be more motivated to develop services. - Advertising messages should avoid exaggeration and directly highlight the advantages of services compared to competitors.

Table 3. Identification of Comprehensive Themes. Source: Author.

Comprehensive Themes	Basic Themes
Strategic Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of specialized media for spreading promotional messages - Systematic and viral dissemination of promotional messages through social media
Intervening Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benchmarking from successful countries in tourism marketing - Regional competition in attracting tourists
Main Category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing Iran's share in the tourism market by presenting it as a country with modern facilities - Utilizing social media marketing
Causal Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethical emphasis in promotional message design - Emphasis on competitive advantages in promotional messages - Alignment of promotional messages with the culture of the target society - The power of promotional messages to create a need in customers
Contextual Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture promotion for the use of digital marketing in the tourism industry - Adequate budget and opportunities for implementing digital marketing
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building loyalty among tourists toward tourist centers - Foreign exchange earnings and improving the country's economy - Strengthening the tourism brand

Table 4. Delphi Results for Questionnaire Items and Research Components. Source: Author.

Comprehensive Themes	Constructive Themes	Stage Mean		Standard Deviation
		First	Second	
Strategic Factors	Use of specialized media for disseminating promotional messages	0.669	4.09	4.01
	Systematic and viral dissemination of promotional messages through social media	0.641	3.88	3.80
Intervening Factors	Benchmarking from successful countries in tourism marketing	0.669	3.36	3.20
	Regional competition in attracting tourists	0.641	3.77	3.65
Main Category	Increasing Iran's share of the tourism market by introducing it as a country with modern equipment in tourism services	0.509	3.99	3.91
	Utilizing social media marketing	0.588	3.87	3.79
Causal Factors	Emphasis on ethics in designing promotional messages	0.780	3.88	3.77
	Emphasis on competitive advantages in promotional messages	0.672	4.1	3.91
	Alignment of promotional messages with the target society's culture	-	-	-
	Power of promotional messages to create customer demand	0.451	4.11	3.92
Contextual Factors	Cultivating the use of digital marketing in the tourism industry	0.652	4.01	3.87
	Adequate budget and opportunity for implementing digital marketing	0.641	4.13	3.99
Outcomes	Creating loyalty among tourists to tourism centers	0.670	3.76	3.42
	Generating foreign exchange revenue and improving the country's economy	0.566	4.29	4.08
	Strengthening the tourism brand	0.551	3.79	3.51

Table 5. Results of the Kendall Test for the First and Second Rounds of the Delphi Process. Source: Author.

Variable	Kendall's Concordance Coefficient	Chi-Square Coefficient	Error Rate (α)	p-value
First-round Questionnaire	0.862	683.243	0.01	0.000
Second-round Questionnaire	0.807	670.109	0.001	0.000

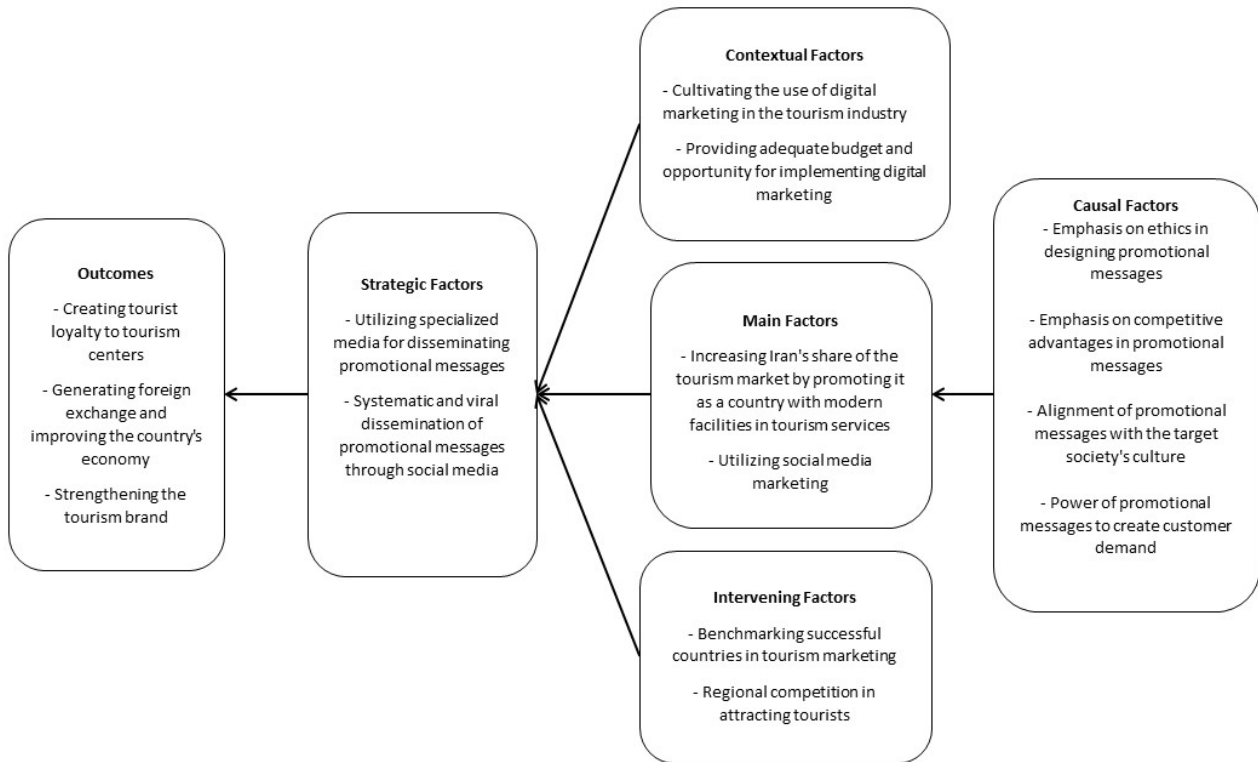


Fig. 2. Proposed Research Model. Source: Author.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that digital marketing has taken over the world of marketing, demonstrating its effectiveness in capturing markets. To succeed in this approach within sectors like the tourism industry, it is essential to utilize correct content production, accurate advertisements, and reliable information and statistics.

Attention to marketing and access to content for tourists play a significant role in the development and enhancement of tourism. In some countries that have well understood this concept, marketing, particularly in the tourism sector, has seen considerable growth. Our country is also among the destinations with high potential in tourism. This research aimed to present a model of digital marketing and its role in tourism development, focusing on identifying basic and constructive themes.

To achieve the primary goal of this research, which is to provide an optimal model of digital marketing for enhancing tourism, secondary objectives were addressed using thematic analysis techniques.

The results and findings of this study are significant in several ways. The proposed model examines the relationship between content marketing and tourism enhancement based on the requirements and characteristics of the city of Tehran. The findings indicate that the most critical issue in tourism and its marketing is the limitation in utilizing digital marketing tools and identifying the audience. Understanding the audience and their expectations correctly, and using digital tools that facilitate meeting their needs have a direct impact on tourism development and consequently the success of digital marketing. Therefore, it is essential to determine an appropriate approach for this aspect of tourism. With the advent of information and communication technologies, it has become possible to identify audiences and understand their needs online. Content can be produced accordingly, allowing each individual to receive preferred content based on their location and time. Specialized media, online tools, and artificial intelligence can aid in this process.

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