



The Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on hotel Performance

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of digital marketing strategies on hotel performance. This research is applied in terms of both descriptive and inferential purposes, and hypotheses were tested using the partial least squares (PLS) method.

The statistical population of this study consisted of 125 managers and administrative staff of hotels in the West of Iran. The main instrument for gathering data in this study was a standard questionnaire. Face validity was confirmed by 4 experts, and its reliability was obtained by Cronbach's alpha test, which showed a score above 0.7. The results indicated good validity of the reagents, as all had higher factor loadings for their structures.

The findings also show that email marketing has a positive and significant effect on performance dimensions, including financial perspective, learning and growth perspective, customer perspective, and internal processes perspective. Additionally, content marketing has a significant and positive impact on performance in terms of financial and customer perspectives. This suggests that content marketing has improved financial conditions and customer engagement, but has not impacted learning. Finally, the study did not confirm the impact of viral marketing on performance. Through a systematic review of current practices in hotel literature, critical methodological issues in selecting and using PLS were identified. These guidelines aim to enhance future PLS studies and provide recommendations for utilising recent methodological advancements.

Keywords: Viral marketing, Digital Marketing, Hotel Performance, Email marketing, Hotels in the West of Iran.

کاره‌ریه ستراتیژییه کانی به بازارکردنی دیجیتالی له سه‌ر ئه‌دای هۆتله‌کان

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پوخته

ئامانج له‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ لیکۆلینه‌وه‌یه‌ له‌ کاره‌ریه‌ ستراتیژییه‌ کانی به‌ بازارکردنی دیجیتالی له‌ سه‌ر ئه‌دای هۆتله‌کان. ئه‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ له‌ روی هه‌ردو مه‌به‌ستی وه‌سفکردن و ئامارییه‌وه‌ به‌کارده‌هێنرێت و گریمانه‌کان به‌ به‌کارهێنانی رێگه‌ی که‌مترین چوارگۆشه‌ی به‌شه‌کی (PLS) تاقیکراوه‌ته‌وه‌.

ژماره‌ی به‌شداریبوانی ئاماری ئه‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ له‌ ۱۲۵ به‌رپوه‌به‌ر و ستافی کارگێری هۆتله‌کانی رۆژئاوای ئێران پیکهاته‌وه‌. ئامرازی سه‌ره‌کی بۆ کۆکردنه‌وه‌ی زانیاری له‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ دا پرسیارنامه‌یه‌کی ستاندارد بو. راستگۆیی رۆکاری له‌لایه‌ن ۴ پسپۆره‌وه‌ پشتراسته‌تکرایه‌وه‌، و متمانه‌پیکراویه‌که‌ی به‌ تاقیکردنه‌وه‌ی ئه‌لفا کرۆنباخ به‌ده‌ست هات، که‌ نمره‌ی سه‌روی ۰.۷ ی نیشان دا. ئه‌نجامه‌کان راستگۆیی باشی پیکهاته‌کانیان نیشان دا، چونکه‌ هه‌مویان بارگرتنی فاکته‌ری به‌رزتریان هه‌بو بۆ پیکهاته‌کانیان.

هه‌روه‌ها ئه‌نجامه‌کان نیشان ده‌ده‌ن که‌ به‌ بازارکردنی ئیمه‌یل کاره‌گری ئه‌ری و به‌رچاوی له‌ سه‌ر په‌هه‌نده‌کانی ئه‌دای کارکردن هه‌یه، له‌وانه‌ دیدگی دارایی، روانگه‌ی فی‌ربون و گه‌شه‌کردن، روانگه‌ی کپیار و روانگه‌ی پرۆسه‌کانی ناوخۆیی. سه‌ره‌رای ئه‌وه‌ش، به‌ بازارکردنی ناوه‌رۆک کاره‌ریه‌یه‌کی به‌رچاو و ئه‌ری له‌ سه‌ر ئه‌دای کارکردن هه‌یه‌ له‌ روی دیدگی دارایی و کپیاره‌وه‌. ئه‌مه‌ش ئه‌وه‌ پیشان ده‌دات که‌ به‌ بازارکردنی ناوه‌رۆک بارودۆخی دارایی و به‌شداریکردنی کپیارانی باشت‌ر کردوه‌، به‌لام کاره‌گری له‌ سه‌ر فی‌ربون نه‌بوه‌. له‌ کۆتاییدا، توێژینه‌وه‌که‌ کاره‌گری به‌ بازارکردنی فایرۆسی له‌ سه‌ر ئه‌دای کارکردن پشتراست نه‌کرده‌وه‌. له‌ رێگه‌ی پێداچونه‌وه‌ی سیستماتیکی ئیستا پراکتیزه‌کان له‌ ئه‌ده‌بیاتی هۆتله‌کاندا، پرسه‌ میتۆدۆلۆژییه‌ گرنه‌کان له‌ هه‌لبژاردن و به‌کارهێنانی PLS ده‌ستنیشانکران. ئه‌م رێنماییانه‌ ئامانجیان به‌رزکردنه‌وه‌ی توێژینه‌وه‌کانی داها‌توی PLS و پێشکه‌شکردنی پێش‌نیاره‌کانه‌ بۆ به‌کارهێنانی پێشکه‌وتنه‌ میتۆدۆلۆژییه‌کانی ئه‌م دوا‌یه‌.

کلیله‌ وشه‌کان: به‌ بازارکردنی فایرۆسی، به‌ بازارکردنی دیجیتالی، ئه‌دای هۆتله‌کان، به‌ بازارکردنی ئیمه‌یل، هۆتله‌کانی رۆژئاوای ئێران.

1. Introduction

Today's companies are in dire need of effective communication with their customers in order to understand them better, leverage their ideas, learn from them, meet their needs, provide excellent service, and ultimately enhance their performance. One of the most effective ways to garner attention in today's market is through the use of the Internet. The

impact of the Internet and the younger generation's reliance on new IT-based technologies in the tourism industry has seen significant growth, particularly in Iran. Internet networks have revolutionized traditional business dynamics (Bresson et al., 2015). Given the significance of hotels, the competition with rivals, the necessity for close and efficient communication with tourists, and the importance of being present in the digital realm, having robust digital marketing has become essential in today's landscape. Utilizing it effectively can provide a competitive edge in the market, allowing for precise targeting of marketing objectives and reducing hotel expenses. Conversely, engaging in impactful social media activities can propel your website ahead in search engine rankings, playing a vital role in website presentation and ultimately enhancing the website's value and ranking. Digital marketing in the hotel industry can either attract or repel tourists from a hotel. Social media serves as a gateway to drive traffic to the website, introduce potential tourists to the hotel services, and showcase the value and quality of the hotel services. The key factor in utilizing social media effectively in the hotel business is selecting the right platforms that align with the business goals. In other words, choosing appropriate digital marketing strategies is essential for enhancing organizational performance. Furthermore, the capabilities of the Internet enable businesses to streamline value creation processes and cultivate valuable customer relationships (Cegara et al., 2018).

2. Literature review

In recent years, the increasing use of the Internet in businesses and by clients has made it an exceptional tool for customer engagement and marketing. This is where digital marketing comes in (Ferreira et al., 2014). Lovafan and Gandomkar (2019), in a study titled "Digital Transformation and Investigating Infrastructure Changes and Attitudes Based on Online Selling in Tourism (Case Study: Isfahan City)," classified and analysed data using SPSS software. The results of this study indicate that practitioners in the tourism industry believe in digital transformation and online sales for the future prosperity of tourism and accommodation centres in Isfahan. Vermaghani et al. (2017) conducted a study titled "Using Electronic Marketing Tools in the Tourism Industry (Case Study: Hotels and Travel Agencies in Kurdistan Province)." The study found that among the four marketing tools- social networks, email, websites, mobile, and intranet used in hotels and travel agencies in Kurdistan province, social networks had the highest percentage of usage, while intranet had the lowest percentage among respondents. In addition, the highest percentage of e-

marketing tools usage is associated with three specific tools. Among the different social networks utilised by hotels and travel agencies in Kurdistan province, three stand out: Telegram, Instagram, and Facebook. Telegram had the highest percentage of usage, while Facebook had the lowest. According to a study titled "Digital Marketing Strategies, Online Reviews, and Hotel Performance" by De Pelsmacker et al. (2018), it was concluded that digital marketing strategies and tactics have an impact on the quantity and reliability of online reviews, which in turn indirectly affects hotel performance. This trend is more prevalent in chain hotels than in standalone hotels, particularly in higher-end establishments compared to lower-end ones.

According to Kannan and Li (2017), hotels incorporate digital marketing tools into their communication and marketing strategies due to the belief that their target customers are increasingly utilising digital media. In digital marketing, companies emphasise the use of various techniques as opposed to traditional marketing methods, which often result in marketing messages being overlooked by viewers for various reasons (Chang et al., 2015). Designing and executing an internet marketing strategy is crucial for success in digital marketing. Organisations can leverage a digital marketing strategy to facilitate innovation within their organisation by digitally outsourcing their core services. This allows them to adapt to the fast-changing, dynamic environment, minimise risk, improve company control, and better manage customer experiences and knowledge (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Digital marketing is an umbrella term that includes SEO, email marketing, content marketing, public relations, social media, etc. Social media is just one of the many channels that make up a digital marketing campaign (Taleghani & Mehdi Zadeh, 2017). Therefore, digital marketing typically involves the use of multiple online marketing channels, with social media marketing being just one component of the broader digital marketing strategy. Most hotels need to enhance their use of digital marketing as a marketing and communications tool.

Despite having a strong online presence, many hotels do not maximise the potential of digital marketing tools. Through analysis of online presence and interviews, it is evident that managers and marketers may not be fully aware of all the benefits that digital marketing can offer their business (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). It has also been noted that online reputation management, which was previously challenging, is now a top priority for managers and marketers (Kim & Ko, 2012). The majority of hotels utilize multiple digital

marketing tools. By implementing a digital strategy, the organization anticipates improved performance across its various sectors.

3. Theoretical Framework of Research

3.1 Performance

Performance, as defined in the dictionary, refers to the state or quality of how something is done. Organisational performance, therefore, is a broad concept that encompasses how operations within an organisation are carried out. It involves evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of past actions. In today's competitive business environment, companies are striving to succeed by improving their organisational performance and adapting to change to achieve sustainable success. While many previous studies have focused on financial performance as a key indicator, it is important to note that financial metrics may not always align with the long-term goals of a business. In highly competitive conditions, financial indicators may not provide a competitive advantage to organisations (Rahnavard et al., 2017). Organisational performance is the measure of how well an organisation accomplishes its objectives. It encompasses various aspects of an organisation's overall performance. In the traditional economy, fixed assets typically include buildings, manufacturing equipment, materials, and transportation machinery used in the production process. Current assets, such as raw materials and working capital, are considered commodities that are completely consumed or destroyed during production. This concept is based on the idea that assets are economic resources, represented by costs and inventory (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). Acquisition times can be measured and controlled. Asset value is often calculated based on comparing expected flows of costs and potential earnings. Some financial performance indicators presented by researchers include Total Asset Turnover, Sales to Equity Ratio, Current Ratio, Inventory Turnover, Total Return on Assets, and Return on Equity (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2018)

3.2 Digital Marketing

Advertising, promotion, sales, public relations, personal selling, and direct marketing are key elements in promoting and expanding the marketing mix. They are important tactics for convincing informed customers that they have the right to choose. Today, many direct marketing companies realise that the direct marketing method, which is customer-based, plays a much broader role than a product-only approach. They have found that this approach is one of the most effective tools for building long-term relationships with

customers. The advent of the Internet has streamlined direct marketing and provided the necessary facilities for establishing a productive relationship with the customer and vice versa (Mody, Suess, & Lehto, 2017). Customers can easily receive and interact with manufacturers' messages if they choose to do so. Terms like internet marketing, web marketing, and e-marketing are commonly used in e-commerce literature and are often used interchangeably (Taleghani & Mehdi Zadeh, 2017). With the rise of e-commerce, organisations are transforming their business practices. E-marketing is a subcategory of e-commerce. Some companies have not only been able to make huge profits by utilising this new marketing method but have also been able to outperform their competitors in both domestic and foreign markets (Daei & Bheem, 2016). Digital marketing, also known as online marketing or internet marketing, encompasses all marketing activities conducted using digital tools or on the internet. In recent years, businesses across various industries have utilised a range of digital channels such as search engines, social media platforms, websites, and email marketing to engage with their current and potential customers. It is worth noting that these methods have led to the development of businesses in various industries at a much faster rate than traditional and offline marketing. Digital marketing is the use of multiple digital communication tactics and channels to communicate with customers who spend most of their time online. In fact, everything from commercial websites to all kinds of digital advertising, online brochures, and so forth fall under the umbrella of digital marketing (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2019). Digital marketing strategies, such as careful monitoring and analysis of customer feedback, responding to customer feedback, creating a digital reputation management program, monitoring and studying social media, and integrating third-party review sites into hotel websites, have been shown to improve hotel performance. However, some researchers argue that further research is needed to fully understand how digital marketing strategies can impact the performance of organizations (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2018).

3.3 Social Media Marketing

Social media has transformed the way we interact and communicate with each other, and it has significantly impacted how consumers shop and conduct business. Social media marketing involves applying commercial marketing strategies in the social media realm to target the extended network of one's friends. The goal of this practice is to influence individuals to voluntarily change their behaviour and interests, ultimately benefiting all parties involved, whether they are the final buyer, seller, or service provider (Erdogmus &

Cicek, 2012). Social media is a web-based service that allows people to create a public or semi-public profile within a restricted system, interact with other users, and view pages and details that other users have created within the system (Baran & Stock, 2015). Social media consists of individuals (or organisations or other social entities) who interact through social relationships such as friendships, collaborations, or information sharing (Park et al., 2014). In other words, social media is a technology that focuses on promoting collective consciousness through social negotiation among a group of individuals who share a common goal or action (Lahiri & Moseley, 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis is tested:

H1: Social media marketing has a significant positive impact on financial performance, learning performance, growth, and customer performance.

3.4 Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a strategy that aims to generate interest and potential sales for a brand or product through messages that spread rapidly from person to person, much like a virus. The concept relies on users' choosing to share the content themselves. The term "viral marketing" was first used in a computer magazine in 2007 (Kirby & Marsden, 2006). In some studies, viral marketing is also referred to as propaganda. The primary focus of viral marketing is on word-of-mouth communication. Oral communication is a crucial tool for businesses as it greatly influences consumer behaviour and attitudes. Viral marketing involves spreading a company's message through partners to their family, friends, and acquaintances, creating a ripple effect that reaches a large audience of potential customers. Lahiri and Moseley (2015) define viral marketing as any online commentary about a company's products or services that is widely accessible to the public (Chan & Ngai, 2011). In any case, rapid growth, informal communication between customers, and online presence are common characteristics of viral marketing. The primary goal of viral marketing is to utilise person-to-person communication, rather than customer-to-company communication, to disseminate information about a product or service, leading to quicker, broader, and more impactful market adoption (Ho & Dempsey, 2010).

Users can effectively reach a wider audience by utilizing various platforms for viral marketing, such as e-mail, social networks, chat rooms, personal blogs, text messages, forums, multimedia messages, and posters. Even if users did not have the original creators of the content, lacked knowledge, or did not have the motivation, foresight, or passion to

create it, they can still attract a larger audience and increase their reach by sharing the message (Dobele et al., 2005).

H2: Viral marketing has a significant positive impact on: a) financial performance; b) learning performance and growth; c) customer performance; d) the performance of internal processes.

3.5 Content Marketing

Content marketing generates more leads than traditional marketing at a lower cost, and also helps to position your brand as an authority in your sector. In 1996, an article titled: "Content is King," Bill Gates stated that "Content is where I expect to make a lot of money on the Internet." Content marketing is one of the ways in the medium to long term that leads to creating value for someone's work or online store (Johannes & Fabian, 2019).

This demonstrates a significant percentage of marketers shifting towards content marketing. This type of marketing is a long-term strategy that focuses on developing a strong relationship with the target audience by delivering high-quality content. The goal is to attract audiences and ultimately convert them into profitable customers (Agapito, Pinto, & Mendes, 2017; Loureiro, 2014). When customers make a purchase, they consider various factors, with one of the most crucial being their perception of a brand (Mody, Suess, & Lehto, 2017).

Content marketing aims to influence customers' perceptions during a specific process, leading them to be more loyal to one brand over another (Li et al, 2010). While the internet and social media are key components of content marketing, this form of marketing is not confined to the digital world; some companies still engage in content marketing through the creation of offline materials. In a broad sense, content marketing involves sharing knowledge, advice, and entertainment in a variety of formats such as blog articles, videos, podcasts, social media posts, emails, webinars, infographics, cartoons, contests, assessments, programs and more (Kee, & Yazdanifard, 2015). Thus, content marketing encompasses a wide range of strategies and tactics to engage with customers and build brand loyalty. H3: Content marketing has a significant positive impact on: a) financial performance; b) learning performance and growth; c) customer performance; and d) the performance of internal processes.

3.6 Email Marketing

Year after year, email marketing remains one of the most powerful tools in a digital marketer's arsenal. It is ideal for direct communication with customers, which is cost-effective, and offers a spectacular return on investment. Email is a fast, inexpensive, and easy-to-use medium for internet communication, leading many businesses to utilise it to connect with consumers. However, consumers are often hesitant to be contacted indirectly via email, and they may not even respond when contacted. Researchers have identified these behaviours through a growing body of literature that focuses on consumer behaviour and responses to commercial email usage. For instance, studies have looked at the conversion rate of consumers clicking on links in email advertisements. The sequence and frequency of communication through email contact have been examined, as well as Freund's study on how consumers make decisions about engaging with email (Wilson et al., 2007). Email marketing is a crucial way to cultivate customer loyalty for a business and plays a vital role in selling products and services. Through email marketing, you can maintain a connection with your site's customers or users. In this digital marketing model, the first step is to collect emails from your site's users, and then you can send them targeted emails using bulk email services like Mailchimp. Email marketing is a double-edged sword. When done correctly, it can increase customer loyalty and naturally boost sales. However, if you send too many emails consecutively, you risk losing customers and damaging your brand reputation (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). Therefore, we adhere to the hypothesis:

H4: Email marketing has a significant positive impact on a) financial performance; b) learning performance and growth; c) customer performance; and d) the performance of internal processes.

Based on the stated hypotheses, the research's conceptual model can be outlined:

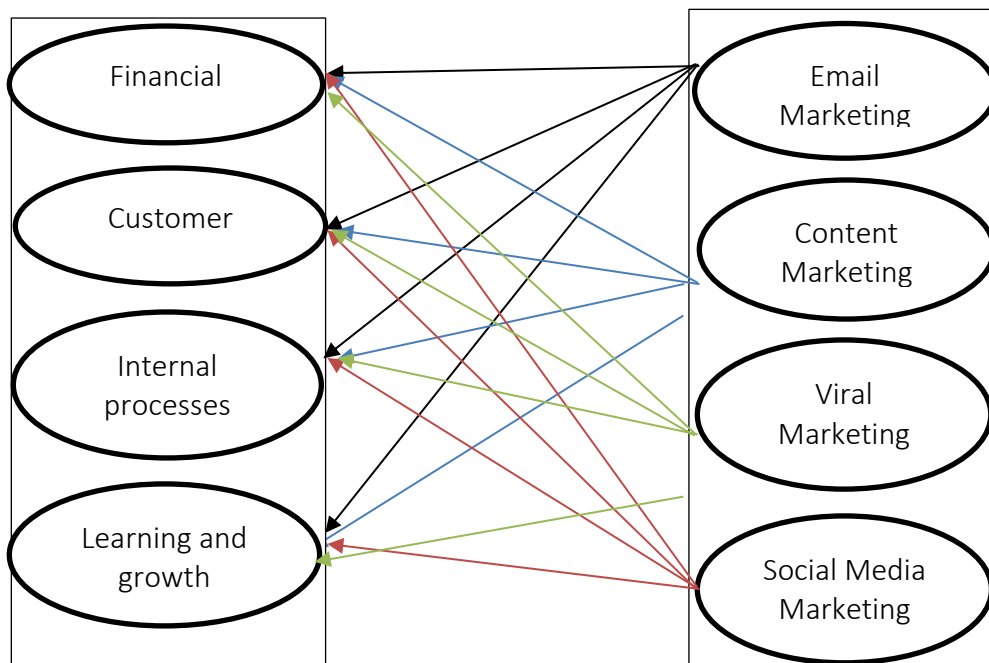


Figure 1: Conceptual model

4. Research Methodology

The research method was chosen based on knowledge of digital marketing strategies' impact on hotel performance. This research is applied in terms of purpose and description. The data were collected through a field survey using a standard questionnaire. The data set includes all managers and administrative staff of 4 and 5-star hotels in West Iran, totaling 190 people. Questionnaires were distributed to sample members in person and via email. In total, 125 completed and valid questionnaires were returned. Among them, 5 questionnaires were found to be heterogeneous and unreliable, so they were omitted. The Morgan table was used to determine a minimum sample size of 123. However, due to the size of the statistical population, this study required at least 125 samples. These samples were distributed to ensure the necessary number of questionnaires. The main instrument for data collection in this study was the standard questionnaire developed by De Palsmalcker et al (2018) and Abdul Alim Mohammad et al (2014). Finally, the questionnaires were analyzed, exceeding the required amount according to the aforementioned rules is more than required. The research questionnaires consisted of 2 closed-ended questions with a Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly

disagree. There were 2 questions related to the performance of the hotels in the areas of finance, customer satisfaction, internal processes, and learning and growth, as well as 5 questions related to the dimensions of digital marketing strategies. The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by standard measures, and we also sent the questionnaires to the professors of marketing and tourism, who were experts in the field. Discriminant validity is a measure of how distinct the metrics of different factors are. The Fornell-Larcker criterion for calculating discriminant validity in the structural equation model of least squares is only partial. The Cronbach's alpha test was utilised to determine reliability, with a total reliability value of 0.785 indicating good reliability of the questionnaire items. The research results were presented in two parts: descriptive and inferential. The software used in this study includes SPSS. 22 and Smart PLS. 2. The bootstrapping algorithm of partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to examine the proposed hypotheses.

5. Research Results

The sample results showed that 74.4% of respondents were women, with the highest age group being 25-35. The most common level of education was a master's degree, and the majority of participants had 1-5 years of work experience.

Table 1

Demographic information

Demographic items	Sample size by individual	Abundance	Frequency
Gender	Female	93	74/4
	Man	32	25/6
Age status	Under 25 years	11	8/8
	25-35	42	33/6
	36-45	38	30/4
	46-55	19	15/2
	56 years and more	15	12
Level of education	Diploma	8	6/4
	Associate	6	4/8

	Masters	81	64/8
	Masters and higher	30	24
Resume	Under 1 year	17	136
	1-5 years	29	23/2
	6-10 years	41	32/8
	More than 10 years	38	30/4

Source: Research data

The validity of the three tests of mean-variance extraction, the Fornell-Larcker correlation matrix test, and transverse loads should be utilised (Fazli et al., 2013). The minimum value to confirm the validity of the variables in the mean-variance test is 0.5. The results of this test can be seen in Table 2. The mean variance extracted value for all structures was greater than 0.5.

Table 2

Results of the validity of the variables

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Combined coefficient	Mean-variance extracted
Performance from the customer's perspective	./742	./836	./563
Performance from a financial perspective	./811	./870	./591
Performance from the perspective of internal processes	./819	./880	./647
Performance from a learning and growth perspective	./775	./853	./595
Content Marketing	./756	./859	./671
Email Marketing	./839	./886	./610
Social Media Marketing	./716	./841	./639
Viral Marketing	./862	./904	./702

Source: Research data

The validity of the reagents is tested using the transverse load test, where the factor load of each reagent for its structure must be greater than the factor load of that reagent for the other structures (Ghani et al., 2013). The results of this test are shown in Table 3. The results indicate good validity of the reagents, as all reagents have higher factor loadings for their structures than for other structures. For example, a factor loading representing CM 1 is 0.831, which is greater than the values of 0.505, 0.529, 0.554, 0.313, 0.357, 0.461, and 0.046, respectively.

Table 3

Factor loads and cross-loads of research reagents

Referrals	Content Marketing	Customer	Email Marketing	Financial	Internal processes	Learning and growth	Social Media Marketing	Viral Marketing
CM1	./831	./505	./529	./554	./313	./357	./461	./046
CM2	./829	./543	./492	./473	./243	./431	./396	./212
CM3	./798	./366	./453	./432	./261	./339	./355	./183
CP1	./493	./801	./537	./574	./353	./387	./563	./199
CP2	./521	./806	./539	./600	./262	./410	./521	./192
CP3	./341	./655	./303	./450	./187	./205	./355	./160
CP4	./360	./730	./330	./467	./286	./389	./474	./078
EM1	./555	./555	./805	./550	./410	./443	./497	./144
EM2	./481	./498	./850	./643	./374	./495	./572	./177
EM3	./461	./518	./759	./557	./416	./421	./473	./269
EM4	./403	./305	./709	./461	./314	./468	./372	./258
EM5	./443	./455	./778	./517	./393	./458	./426	./160
FP1	./296	./300	./384	./681	./285	./207	./356	./169
FP2	./532	./607	./561	./812	./318	./450	./559	./261
FP3	./435	./604	./558	./857	./338	./446	./510	./118
FP4	./483	./498	./561	./832	./385	./564	./560	./124
FP5	./506	./571	./602	./824	./453	./540	./550	./154
IP1	./221	./261	./340	./401	./773	./251	./385	./105
IP2	./212	./293	./282	./333	./806	./289	./389	./057
IP3	./258	./286	./415	./336	./814	./300	./371	./167
IP4	./358	./341	./505	./423	./826	./336	./372	./171

LP1	./513	./457	./495	./578	./354	./796	./486	./148
LP2	./363	./339	./478	./449	./254	./728	./391	./201
LP3	./151	./256	./283	./298	./160	./703	./303	./089
LP4	./305	./336	./484	./424	./318	./850	./403	./225
NM1	./437	./583	./468	./581	./365	./407	./846	./212
NM2	./339	./493	./544	./520	./425	./425	./777	./146
NM3	./416	./472	./437	./500	./335	./434	./731	./122
VM1	./116	./132	./286	./152	./217	./251	./184	./849
VM2	./148	./171	./214	./234	./134	./176	./2438	./826
VM3	./105	./121	./098	./091	././092	./036	./062	./815
VM4	./197	./262	./194	./195	./078	./203	./135	./860

Additionally, discriminant validity is achieved when the AVE value for each structure exceeds the common variance between that structure and the other structures in the model. The average variance extracted (AVE) is considered acceptable. The correlations between construct values (off-diagonal) are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Fornell-Larcker correlation matrix test

Variable	Content Marketing	Customer	Email Marketing	Financial perf.	Internal processes	Learning and growth	Net Marketing	Viral Marketing
Content Marketing	./819							
Customer perf.	./583	./750						
Email Marketing	./602	./601	./782					
Financial perf.	./597	./503	./502	./769				
Internal processes	./333	./369	./489	./466	./805			
Learning and growth	./460	./474	./582	./587	./367	./771		

Social Media Marketing	./496	./467	./604	./668	./469	./526	./779	
Viral Marketing	./175	./214	./253	./213	./161	./222	./297	./838

The second set of results focuses on testing the structural model and research hypotheses for the path coefficient and determination coefficient obtained by Smart PLS (partial least squares algorithm). The path coefficient indicates the contribution of the predictor variable in explaining the variance of the criterion variable (Hooshangi & Fazli, 2016). The values of the path coefficients, t-statistics, and the results of the hypotheses are presented in Figures 2 and 3.

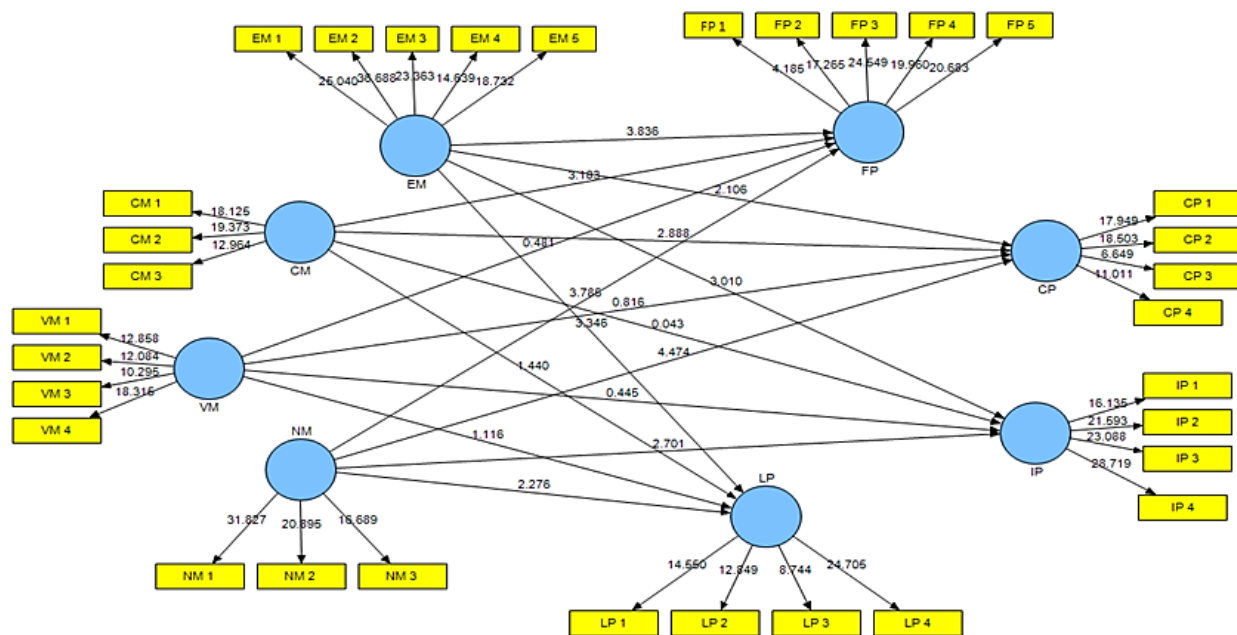


Figure2. Significance coefficient between research variables (Source: Research data)

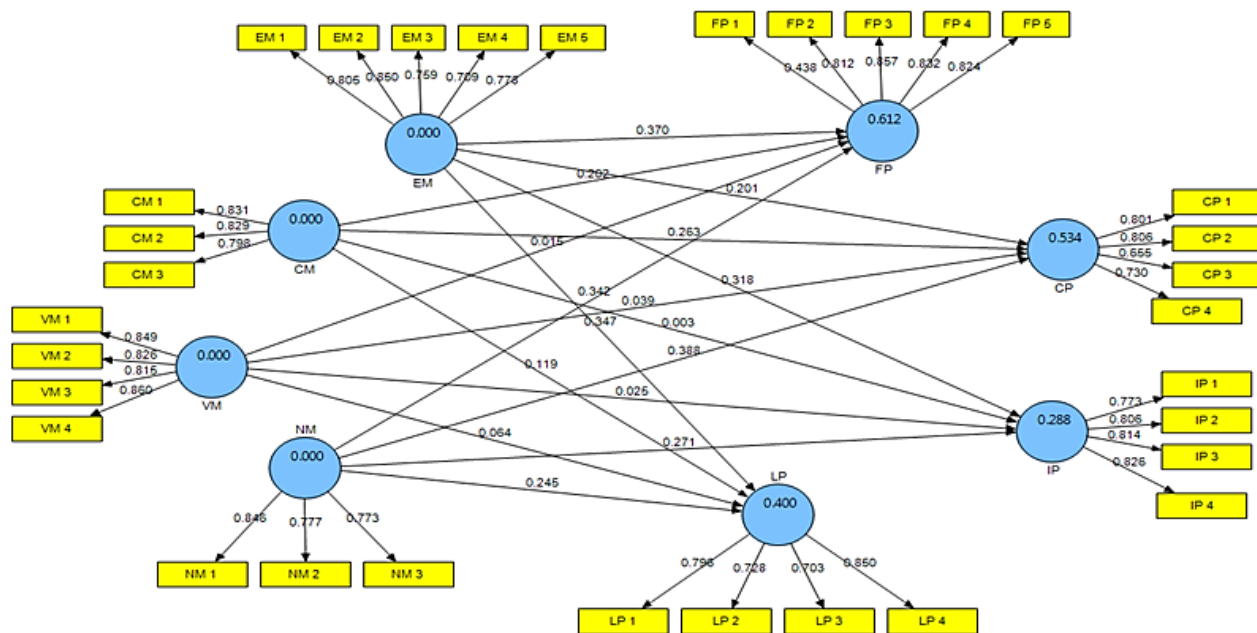


Figure3. Path coefficient between research variables (Source: Research data)

The results can be interpreted according to the normal PLS path coefficients and the t-statistic. The value of the t-statistic is the main criterion for confirming or rejecting hypotheses. If the t-value is greater than 1.96, we conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed at the 95% confidence level. Based on the results of the hypothesis test, it was found that all hypotheses related to email marketing strategies were accepted at a 95% confidence level. For example, email marketing has a positive and significant effect on financial performance by 0.37. All hypotheses related to content marketing are rejected, except for the hypothesis regarding the impact of content marketing on financial performance ($p = 0.202$, $t = 3.103$). Additionally, all hypotheses related to viral marketing were rejected as the t-value is less than 1.96. The hypothesis concerning the impact of social marketing on financial performance and customer performance dimensions is accepted, while the hypotheses regarding the impact of social marketing on learning and growth, and internal processes' dimensions are rejected.

Table 5

Model path coefficient

Variable	Path coefficient	Determinant coefficient	t-state	p-value
Content Marketing-(CM)	.671	----	2.44	0.01
Customer-(CP)	.563	.534	2.98	0.02
Email Marketing-(EM)	.610	----	1.98	0.011
Financial-(FP)	.591	.612	3.01	0.032
Internal processes-(IP)	.647	.278	7.56	0.024
Learning and growth-(LP)	.595	.400	4.52	0.025
Social Media Marketing-(NM)	.639	-----	3.24	0.03
Viral Marketing-(VM)	.702	-----	2.61	0.041

Source: Research data

Based on the results, it can be concluded that email marketing and social media strategies are the most effective strategies. However, content marketing has minimal impact on hotel performance, and viral marketing does not significantly affect hotel performance. Therefore, hotels should focus on utilising email marketing and social media strategies more effectively.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The impact of the Internet on tourist buying behaviours has resulted in a greater emphasis on digital marketing tools. The Internet plays a crucial role in tourism by sparking people's interest in travel, exposing them to different cultures and locations, and enabling them to search for and purchase all necessary travel services and products. Additionally, the utilisation of information technology, specifically Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and digital marketing tools, is essential for the hotel industry's success. These tools play a significant role in enhancing customer relationships and ultimately improving the performance of the hotel industry. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of digital marketing strategies on the performance of 4 and 5-star hotels in West Iran. The results of statistical analysis of the research data and hypothesis testing have shown that email marketing has a positive and significant effect on the performance dimensions,

including financial perspective, learning and growth perspective, customer perspective, and internal processes' perspective. This result indicates that email marketing has received more attention from hotels in West Iran, and, on the other hand, this method is more effective in influencing customer behaviour.

The results of this hypothesis align with the findings of Vermaghan et al. (2017) and De Pelsmacker et al. (2018). Additionally, the results demonstrate that content marketing has a significant positive impact on performance from both financial and customer perspectives, consistent with the results of De Pelsmacker et al. (2018). However, the impact of content marketing on performance related to learning and growth, as well as internal processes, was not confirmed. This suggests that while content marketing has improved financial conditions and customer engagement, it has not shown improvement in learning or internal organisational processes. Further testing of the research hypotheses has revealed that viral marketing does not have a significant effect on hotel performance across various perspectives, such as financial, learning and growth, customer, and internal processes. This finding contradicts the results of De Pelsmacker et al. (2018). This hypothesis implies that there is a lack of emphasis on word-of-mouth and viral advertising within the industry, leading to diminished customer relationships. Finally, research has shown that social media marketing has a positive and significant impact on various performance dimensions within the hotel industry. Studies by Lovafan and Gandomkar (2019), Varmaghani et al. (2017), and De Pelsmacker et al. (2018) have all demonstrated this effect across financial, learning and growth, customer, and internal processes' perspectives. This suggests that utilising social media for marketing purposes is beneficial for hotels, as evidenced that by the increased visibility of travel tours and hotel introduction programs on social media platforms. Based on the research results, the following practical suggestions are proposed. The marketing department should prioritise creating diverse, creative, and engaging content to differentiate the hotel. This is crucial for the future of digital marketing. By producing content on the Internet, the hotel can attract customers effectively. It is advisable to establish a content production team and integrate their ideas into internal processes. Hotel owners should also implement a multi-channel distribution management system across devices and ensure consistent communication on all digital platforms where the hotel is present. This proactive approach will benefit the hotel in the long run.

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