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The Role of Digital Marketing in Tourism Businesses: An Empirical Investigation in Greece

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Abstract: For the tourism industry, the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as an accelerator towards the 4th industrial revolution by creating new and innovative solutions, which have transformed management, finance, planning and opened new avenues for the introduction of innovative sales and marketing technologies. As the tourism industry in Greece faces significant challenges and opportunities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, additional needs have arisen for tourism businesses, as confirmed in this research, to adapt faster to digital operations and strengthen digital marketing through multi-channel distribution and use of digital assistants. This study aims to investigate the use of digital marketing tools by tourism companies as well as the overall satisfaction of the companies with its use and the areas of impact of digital marketing from the COVID-19 pandemic, and then to highlight all those features that stand out from those of their competitors, as well as the creation of an appropriate marketing strategy that will ensure the flow of new customers and increased revenue. To meet this purpose, an empirical survey was conducted in tourism companies in order to provide answers to research questions. As tourism businesses have not yet made sufficient use of digital media as a strategic marketing tool, this research is the basis for further research into the use of technology and digital tools to reach customers and create a more personalized experience for them.

Keywords: tourism industry; digital marketing; COVID-19; websites; social media; digital transformation

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry is a dynamic and competitive industry, with marketing assuming an increasingly important role given developments in global markets [1] as well as the COVID-19 pandemic [2–4]. Tourism marketing is the set of systematic and coordinated actions carried out by a tourism unit, with the aim of maximizing consumer satisfaction and tourism business profitability [5]. As is known, the most important marketing tool is the 4P marketing mix, which consists of four variables: product, price, place and promotion [6]. As marketing evolved, another three Ps were added: people, process and physical evidence [7]. From the 1990s onwards, marketing adapted to the digital age and also considered the four Cs that relate to customers, and are customer value, cost to the customer, convenience and communication [8].

Given the peculiarities of the tourism sector and modern marketing trends, the classic model of the 4P marketing mix for tourism enterprises has been modified to the 4P + E model [9]. This model, along with the four basic variables, also includes one more variable, emotions. The variables (emotions) include a set of tools, the use of which in the process of presenting and implementing the tourist product enhances the positive emotions and the pleasant mood of the consumer [10]. The positive impressions and emotions of the tourist experience contribute to the high evaluation of the tourist product, the tourist area and consequently, this promotes the tourist brand. This, in turn, is likely to lead the tourist to the desire to repeat his positive experience, as well as to share his impressions with friends and

acquaintances, who may also decide to purchase the tourist product. Therefore, tourism and service marketing and management consider the tourist as a partner, a "co-creator" of the tourism product and service delivery process [11].

In the tourism sector, the penetration of the internet and its use by millions of users worldwide, the advent of smartphones as well as the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to the more effective and efficient flow of information in the tourist circuit [4]. The way the tourism product is presented and promoted and the way consumers think and act as well as search for information has changed radically [12,13]. Technology has also revolutionized the way people book travel, characterized by multiple devices and channels [4].

The customer journey (consumer behavior) is the process that the consumer goes through during the purchase decision [14]. The online customer journey consists of online touchpoints, such as website visits, interaction between consumer and seller through online channels, online advertisements [15], reviews and comments from other users and experts, as well as editorials [16,17]. Digital marketing is applied at all points of the customer journey, and businesses that want to optimize their results plan strategies and tactics using various digital marketing techniques and tools [18].

Since the tourism industry in Greece is faced with significant challenges and opportunities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, additional needs have been created for faster adaptation of tourism businesses to digital operations and strengthening of digital marketing through multiple distribution channels as well as the use of digital assistants.

This research aims to investigate the use of digital marketing and internet advertising tools by Greek tourism businesses, the overall satisfaction of the business with the use of digital marketing, the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards as well as the problems faced by businesses from its use.

2. Literature Review

The marketing system for a tourism business includes elements such as sales promotion, analysis of prices and their changes, the use of advertising to attract, customer revenue growth forecast, customer needs study, planning of services and range of goods. To achieve its goals, a company chooses its own set of marketing tactics using digital tools and communication channels as each of them has a different function and achieves different goals. Digital marketing includes marketing through social media, video, mobile devices, search engines, e-mail, affiliate network, online advertising, word of mouth, SEO, website, google analytics, text and multimedia content creation. The success of online promotion depends on the strategy chosen by the tourism business [19–23].

The website is an effective digital marketing tool as it is the first impression of the business. For tourism businesses, creating a website is a powerful tool aimed at maintaining and increasing their online presence and competitiveness in the market [24]. In addition, it also functions as a communication channel with customers, making it an important part of marketing [25]. It is important that the content of the website is attractively studied and designed, updated and maintained regularly according to the modern needs of consumers—visitors [5]. The website must have quality features such as business description information, contact information, a complaint form, price availability, online booking availability, multilingual website provision, information about the surrounding area, website management and company profile [22,26]. The research questions posed in this research in relation to company websites are:

RQ 1a. *What are the main quality features of an improved business website for hotel and food and beverage businesses?*

RQ 1b. *Which method is most commonly used for booking by hotel and food and beverage businesses?*

One of the advantages of using digital marketing tools in tourism is the ability of users to influence each other. According to Yilmaz [27], the comments and opinions of

existing customers who share their experiences greatly influence the purchasing decisions of potential customers. In addition, the dynamic and two-way active exchange of information on digital platforms provides many benefits, such as building trust, business awareness and improving consumer brand perception. Tourists consult and search for information using many different sources of digital information on the internet and social media before making a trip. Facebook and YouTube prove to be the social networking sites most frequently used by tourists when planning their trips [28].

A wide variety of social media contribute to influencing how consumers engage in information search and hotel selection decisions. In addition, hotel businesses should be aware of the importance of comprehensive content published on social media so as to facilitate consumers in their choice decision. For SMEs in the hotel industry, social media engagement in terms of bookings and marketing has a positive and significant effect on the overall performance of the company, and this performance can be improved if companies develop and have marketing activities such as branding and innovation [29,30]. For the food service industry, social media engagement metrics, likes, shares, comments and conversation vary across different social media channels, but have a significantly positive impact on the performance of these businesses. The research findings of Li et al. [31] provide important information for marketers to evaluate and select the most effective social media in order to implement appropriate promotional activities given the limited marketing budget of small and medium-sized restaurants. It is also important to mention that there are significant differences in the frequency of use of social media by different generations as far as choosing a destination and planning a trip, controlling opinions for tourist places, holiday recommendation and reviews [32]. Therefore, the research questions raised in relation to social media are:

RQ 2a. *What is the main advertising channel on social media, how often do you use different social media to promote your business, and what channels do hotel and food and beverage businesses intend to use in the future?*

RQ 2b. *Does the use of social media have a positive effect on the business in relation to customers and in which areas?*

In addition to the creation and maintenance of the website and the use of social media, the use of various technological tools such as third-party websites, online advertising, e-mail marketing and mobile technologies has created a large audience in the tourism industry, as the their use has positive effects on businesses in the tourism sector [21]. The implementation of various e-marketing tools and strategies as well as the right mix of traditional and digital platforms offers multiplier benefits for the business [20]. The transition from traditional to digital marketing is a decade-long process, and hence one cannot replace traditional marketing with digital marketing. However, traditional one-way communication has been challenged by digital media, along with social media, which are considered the future of marketing. The new era of digital marketing has emerged and the blending of old and new (traditional and digital) with the fine art of convergence is the future of marketing [33]. The online platforms most used by hotel businesses are Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Google, LinkedIn and TripAdvisor, as they are an important source of guest reviews; LinkedIn is mainly used for employee engagement, recognition and recruitment talent [20]. The measurement procedures and techniques as well as the marketing strategy adopted by tourism businesses are also of decisive importance [34–36]. A very popular metric in social media is return on investment (ROI), which is used to evaluate the return on an investment or to compare the efficiency of different investments; that is, it measures how efficiently the company uses its capital to generate profit. Therefore, the research questions posed in relation to digital marketing formats and tools are:

RQ 3a. *What are the most popular digital marketing techniques and formats, and how much they are used by hotel and food and beverage businesses?*

RQ 3b. *Are tourism businesses using web analytics measurement platforms to collect, analyze and report web data to understand and optimize web and social media usage to shape their online strategy?*

RQ 3c. *If and to what extent is the direct and indirect value of customer comments on online platforms taken into account by food and beverage and accommodation businesses?*

The impact of digitization in the field of hospitality and tourism, the pace of response to digitization, as well as the need for the development of digital tools, which has been pushed by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitates a comprehensive strategy by tourism businesses with experts in the field of marketing. The purpose of the comprehensive strategy is the communication of the tourism product, the enhancement of the visitor experience, the correctness and authenticity of the information, the multilingual content, the ease of user navigation, the development of mobile applications, the understanding of the available tools and platforms [37].

More specifically, hotel businesses have been led towards the digitization of processes, such as pre-check-in, self-check-in/out, digital menus and online service reservations, as they are given the opportunity to have a higher performance both in public-facing functions as well as back-office functions [4]. For small and medium enterprises in the tourism industry, digitalization and e-marketing are now considered very necessary for the sustainable development of these enterprises so that their business activities continue to generate economic value as they have had multiple impacts from the advent of COVID-19 onwards [3].

An essential advantage of the digital economy, e-commerce and digital marketing is the high degree of measurement and analysis of consumer behavior in the tourism sector [36]. Companies can collect and process large amounts of data from the digital environment to provide useful information about customers, their behavior and about the effectiveness and efficiency of specific online channels. So in this way, tourism businesses can better plan and orient their marketing activities (data marketing orientation) [38]. According to Das [39], 72% of consumers currently connect with businesses through digital marketing channels, and businesses using digital marketing strategies increase revenue by 2.8 times and improve ROI by up to 300%. These are some of the challenges that digital marketing faces over traditional marketing. However, in said research, the problems from the use of digital marketing, such as data breaches, were also analyzed.

This survey examines the overall business satisfaction with the use of digital marketing, the areas of impact of digital marketing from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards, as well as the problems of businesses with the use of digital marketing. In this context, the research questions posed were the following:

RQ 4a. *Has the use of digital marketing since the COVID-19 pandemic affected revenue, customers and business image and to what extent?*

RQ 4b. *In which areas do businesses face the main obstacles/problems in using digital marketing?*

Businesses should now create innovative customer experiences and specific media strategies, and use various forms of digital marketing, so as to get the most out of digital marketing [19].

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire used in the present research combined variables of other previous research, modified so as to serve and fit the examination of the research questions. Two separate electronic questionnaires (survey research) written in Greek were used. Google Drive forms were used to collect question data from two random samples of the population and specifically from tourism businesses (natural or legal persons) active in the accommodation and food and beverage industries from all over Greece. The questionnaire was sent via e-mail to

hotel and food and beverage businesses, by Messenger message to businesses that had a Facebook page, and by personal message to hotel managers and restaurant managers that had profiles on the LinkedIn platform. The survey was carried out from October 2021 to March 2022 and a total of 270 questionnaires were collected, 143 from accommodation businesses and 127 from food and beverage businesses, fully completed and useful for processing.

Closed-ended questions were used, specifically mutually exclusive and dichotomous (Yes/No) and a 7-point Likert scale was used to measure each variable with the number 1 corresponding to the minimum and 7 to the maximum. Likert scales are arrangement scales; that is, their values present an arrangement-scaling from minimum to maximum and measure quality, importance, interest, satisfaction, frequency, etc. The 7-point Likert scale was chosen because, in marketing science research, the more value-level answers there are, the more some conditions are satisfied according to which the statistical analysis of the answers can be carried out in terms of quantitative variables [40,41]. In addition to the even-numbered scales, the respondent can choose the middle position (with a value of 4), which places them in a neutral/middle point, or choose a clear position towards one or the other direction of the scale [42–44]. On the other hand, reducing the categories beyond 7 or 5 levels makes the measurement less accurate, and increasing beyond 7 or 5 levels is considered pointless because it will not produce results [40]. Furthermore, according to Finstad [45], the 7-point Likert scale is considered more ideal for electronic questionnaires.

3.2. Survey Questionnaire Analysis

The two questionnaires used had exactly the same questions based on previous studies' analysis (see Appendix A), with only one additional question in the questionnaire aimed at hotel businesses and regarding the hotel's "stars". The questionnaires consisted of 3 structural parts (Group A, Group B, Group C).

Group A of the questionnaire was divided into two subgroups and the purpose of the questions was to clarify the demographic characteristics of the sample. *Group A1* included questions concerning the profile of the entrepreneur. *Group A2* included questions concerning the profile of the business. *Group B* included questions regarding the use of digital marketing practices, the degree of use and the company's satisfaction with the company's website, with social media and with digital marketing formats and tools. *Group C* included questions regarding the areas and degree of business satisfaction with the use of digital marketing, factors related to and their degree of impact from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards, and problems with the use of digital marketing.

4. Results

4.1. Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using the statistical programs IBM SPSS Statistics version 23.0 and MS Excel. Among the descriptive statistics, percentages, frequencies, average values and standard deviations were used to analyze all questions of the questionnaire. At the same time, the visualization of the results was carried out through tables created based on the results of the aforementioned programs.

4.2. Demographic Data

The most important demographic results of the sample for the 143 hotel companies (see Table 1) that responded to the questionnaire were as follows: 49.7% of respondents were the business owner, 66.4% were men and the largest percentage in the sample age groups was the 35% between 36–45 years, while the smallest was 1.4% over 65 years. With regard to the educational level of the sample, the participants mainly held a master's degree with a rate of 38.5%. Regarding type of business, 64.3% of the sample businesses were hotels, with the largest percentage of 21% having 4 stars. Of the 143 accommodation businesses that answered the questionnaire, there were 51 missing values; i.e., respondents did not answer the question regarding the stars of the hotel, as the business was not a hotel.

Table 1. Demographic results of the accommodation businesses sample.

Demographic Variable	Scale	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Position in the business	Owner	71	49.7	49.7	49.7
	Director/executive	62	43.3	43.3	93.0
	Other	10	7.0	7.0	100.0
Sex	Male	95	66.4	66.4	66.4
	Female	48	33.6	33.6	100.00
Age group	18–25	4	2.8	2.8	2.8
	26–35	29	20.3	20.3	23.1
	36–45	50	35.0	35.0	58.0
	46–55	33	23.1	23.1	81.1
	56–65	25	17.5	17.5	98.6
	>65	2	1.4	1.4	100.0
Education level	Primary school	3	2.1	2.1	2.1
	High school	20	14.0	14.0	16.1
	Bachelor's degree	50	35.0	35.0	51.0
	IVT—institute of vocational training	10	7.0	7.0	58.0
	Master's degree	55	38.5	38.5	96.5
	Doctoral degree	2	1.4	1.4	97.9
	Other	3	2.1	2.1	100.0
Profile of the accommodation company	Hotels	92	64.3	64.3	64.3
	Room rentals	43	30.1	30.1	94.4
	Airbnb	8	5.6	5.6	100.0
Hotel stars	2 stars	8	5.6	8.7	8.7
	3 stars	28	19.6	30.4	39.1
	4 stars	30	21.0	32.6	71.7
	5 stars	24	16.8	26.1	97.8
	other	2	1.4	2.2	100.0
	Missing system	51	35.7		
Location	Athens	10	7.0	7.0	7.0
	Eastern Attica	1	0.7	0.7	7.7
	Argolida	2	1.4	1.4	9.1
	Arta	2	1.4	1.4	10.5
	Achaia	1	0.7	0.7	11.2
	Grevena	1	0.7	0.7	11.9
	Drama	2	1.4	1.4	13.3
	Dodecanese	7	4.9	4.9	18.2
	Evia	4	2.8	2.8	21

Table 1. *Cont.*

Demographic Variable	Scale	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Evrytania	1	0.7	0.7	21.7
	Zakynthos	4	2.8	2.8	24.5
	Ileia	1	0.7	0.7	25.2
	Imathia	1	0.7	0.7	25.9
	Iraklio	2	1.4	1.4	27.3
	Thessaloniki	4	2.8	2.8	30.1
	Ioannina	5	3.5	3.5	33.6
	Kavala	3	2.1	2.1	35.7
	Karditsa	1	.7	.7	36.4
	Corfu	8	5.6	5.6	42.0
	Kefallonia	2	1.4	1.4	43.4
	Korinthia	3	2.1	2.1	45.5
	Cyclades	17	11.9	11.9	57.3
	Lakonia	1	0.7	0.7	58.0
	Larissa	2	1.4	1.4	59.4
	Lasithi	1	0.7	0.7	60.1
	Lefkada	1	0.7	0.7	60.8
	Magnesia	30	21.0	21.0	81.8
	Xanthi	1	0.7	0.7	82.5
	Pella	2	1.4	1.4	83.9
	Pieria	2	1.4	1.4	85.3
	Rethymno	3	2.1	2.1	87.4
	Rodopi	3	2.1	2.1	89.5
	Trikala	1	0.7	0.7	90.2
	Fthiotida	2	1.4	1.4	91.6
	Halkidiki	6	4.2	4.2	95.8
	Chania	5	3.5	3.5	99.3
	Chios	1	0.7	0.7	100.0
Years of business activity	<5 years	34	23.8	23.8	23.8
	5–10 years	22	15.4	15.4	39.2
	10–15 years	18	12.6	12.6	51.7
	>15 years	69	48.3	48.3	100.0
Chain/group	Yes	29	20.3	20.3	20.3
	No	114	79.7	79.7	100.0
Seasonality	Winter season	3	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Summer season	67	46.9	46.9	49.0
	All year	73	51.0	51.0	100.0
Digital marketing manager	owner with specialized knowledge	9	6.3	6.3	6.3
	owner with basic knowledge	48	33.6	33.6	39.9

Table 1. *Cont.*

Demographic Variable	Scale	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	specialized executives/staff of the company	39	27.3	27.3	67.1
	non-specialized company staff	12	8.4	8.4	75.5
	specialized external partner	23	16.1	16.1	91.6
	none	8	5.6	5.6	97.2
	other	4	2.8	2.8	100.0

The largest percentages of the sample were businesses from Magnesia, 21%, the Cyclades, 11.9%, and Attica, 7%. Almost half (48.3%) were businesses that had been operating for more than 15 years; 79.7% did not belong to a chain and 51% operated year-round. Responsibility for the implementation of digital marketing for 33.6% was the owner of the business, who possessed basic knowledge, and the smallest percentage was 2.8% for other employees or partners.

Of the 127 who answered the questionnaire concerning food and beverage businesses (see Table 2), 68.5% were the owner of the business, 76.4% were men and the largest percentage in the age groups was the 38.6% between 36 and 45 years, while the smallest was 1.6%, over 65 years. The participants were mainly tertiary graduates (41.7%).

Table 2. Demographic results of the sample of food and beverage businesses.

Demographic Variable	Scale	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Position in the business	Owner	87	68.5	68.5	68.5
	Director/executive	27	21.3	21.3	89.8
	Other	13	10.2	10.2	100.0
Sex	Male	97	76.4	76.4	76.4
	Female	30	23.6	23.6	100.00
Age group	18–25	5	3.9	3.9	3.9
	26–35	24	18.9	18.9	22.8
	36–45	49	38.6	38.6	61.4
	46–55	39	30.7	30.7	92.1
	56–65	8	6.3	6.3	98.4
	>65	2	1.6	1.6	100.0
Education level	Primary school	2	1.6	1.6	1.6
	High school	25	19.7	19.7	21.3
	Bachelor's degree	53	41.7	41.7	63.0
	IVT—institute of vocational training	26	20.5	20.5	83.5
	Master's degree	13	10.2	10.2	93.7
	Doctoral degree	3	2.4	2.4	96.1
	Other	5	3.9	3.9	100.0
Profile of the food and beverage company	Restaurant	100	78.7	78.7	78.7
	Cafe bar	26	20.5	20.5	99.2

Table 2. *Cont.*

Demographic Variable	Scale	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
	Nightclub	1	0.8	0.8	100.0
Location	Athens	16	12.6	12.6	12.6
	Arcadia	1	0.8	0.8	13.4
	Viotia	3	2.4	2.4	15.7
	Dodecanese	5	3.9	3.9	19.7
	Evia	2	1.6	1.6	21.3
	Ileias	3	2.4	2.4	23.6
	Imathia	2	1.6	1.6	25.2
	Iraklio	1	0.8	0.8	26.0
	Thessaloniki	9	7.1	7.1	33.1
	Ioannina	1	0.8	0.8	33.9
	Kastoria	1	0.8	0.8	34.6
	Corfu	6	4.7	4.7	39.4
	Korinthia	4	3.1	3.1	42.5
	Cyclades	21	16.5	16.5	59.1
	Lakonia	1	0.8	0.8	59.8
	Larissa	3	2.4	2.4	62.2
	Lasithi	2	1.6	1.6	63.8
	Magnesia	28	22.0	22.0	85.5
	Piraeus	3	2.4	2.4	88.2
	Pella	2	1.6	1.6	89.8
	Pieria	2	1.6	1.6	91.3
	Preveza	1	0.8	0.8	92.1
	Rethymno	1	0.8	0.8	92.9
	Halkidiki	2	1.6	1.6	94.5
	Chania	7	5.5	5.5	100.0
Years of business activity	<5 years	31	24.4	24.4	24.4
	5–10 years	30	23.6	23.6	48.0
	10–15 years	13	10.2	10.2	58.3
	>15 years	53	41.7	41.7	100.0
Chain/group	Yes	17	13.4	13.4	13.4
	No	110	86.6	86.6	100.0
Seasonality	Winter season	1	0.8	0.8	0.8
	Summer season	51	40.2	40.2	40.9
	All year	75	59.1	59.1	100.0
Digital marketing manager	owner with specialized knowledge	9	7.1	7.1	7.1
	owner with basic knowledge	42	33.1	33.1	40.2
	specialized executives/staff of the company	14	11.0	11.0	51.2
	non-specialized company staff	22	17.3	17.3	68.5
	specialized external partner	19	15.0	15.0	83.5

Table 2. *Cont.*

Demographic Variable	Scale	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
	none	17	13.4	13.4	96.9
	other	4	3.1	3.1	100.0

Regarding the business profiles, 78.7% were restaurants. The largest percentages of the sample were businesses from Magnesia, 22%, the Cyclades, 16.5%, and Attica, 12.6%. In other findings, 41.7% were businesses that had been active for more than 15 years, 86.6% did not belong to any chain/group and 59.1% operated all year round. About a third (33.1%) of those responsible for the implementation of digital marketing were the business owners, who possessed basic knowledge, and the smallest percentage was 3.1%, other.

Comparing the results of the present research among hotel businesses and food and beverage businesses, as far as marketing management was concerned, a similar percentage of the biggest group was observed to be owners of the business who possessed basic knowledge. The second place was occupied by hotel businesses with specialized executives/staff of the business, in contrast to food and beverage businesses, which had non-specialized staff. The increase in the use of the internet has pushed people to organize their trips as well as manage it from wherever they are. Therefore, it is indisputable that the internet has significantly contributed to the increase in productivity and marketing effectiveness in the hotel industry [46]. The specific results of our research show that entrepreneurs should be trained in online marketing techniques and tools or attract suitable specialized personnel.

4.3. Measurement Model: Reliability and Validity

Once the picture of the sample profile had been established, the results of the questionnaire parameters were then analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework and the literature review of previous research, with the aim of answering the research questions.

To study the internal consistency and reliability of the research results, Cronbach's a was used. Cronbach's a indicates how closely the questions belonging to a measurement scale are correlated with each other [47]. If the coefficient falls outside the acceptable limits (−1 to +1), this means that the questions overlap and therefore some of them should be removed [48]. For values that are 0.70 and above and closer to unity, they reveal higher levels of reliability of the observations. The set of reliability control statistics of the present research for the measurement of the variables that used a Likert scale are shown in Table 3. As it turns out, the results from both questionnaires had high levels of reliability as the highest Cronbach's *a* value was *a* = 0.96 and the lowest *a* = 0.81. According to the literature, the Cronbach's *a* index is indicated for research in the social sciences which have followed the quantitative method and have largely used the Likert scale, as is the case in the present research [49,50].

Table 3. Reliability control statistics.

Reliability Statistics						
	Accommodation Businesses			Food and Beverage Businesses		
Research Question	Cronbach's *a*	Cronbach's a Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	Cronbach's *a*	Cronbach's a Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
2a	0.87	0.90	11	**0.81**	0.85	11
2b	0.93	0.93	7	0.93	0.93	7
3a	0.87	0.87	7	0.87	0.87	7
4a	0.95	0.95	15	**0.96**	0.96	15
4b	0.87	0.87	16	0.89	0.89	16

4.4. Results of Statistical Analysis

According to research and as mentioned in the literature review, in today's digital age, if a hotel does not have an online presence, it is not competitive compared to the rest that have an online presence [51]. The advantages that an internet presence offers to a business are advantages that can be exploited by businesses of all kinds [52]. The business website is an effective marketing tool, and it should have quality features and "excellence" factors.

From the results of the research and in response to RQ 1a, it is observed that the largest percentage featured Google Maps, with 71.3% for hotel businesses and 40.9% for food and beverage businesses. In second and third place were Google my Business and "responsive and mobile friendly", respectively. It is important to mention that for food and beverage businesses, the percentage (11.8%) that did not have any quality feature on their website was significantly higher than for hotel businesses (4.2%). The results are presented in detail in Table 4.

Table 4. Quality business website features.

	Accommodation Businesses		Food and Beverage Businesses	
Valid	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Newsletter	48	33.6	17	13.4
Google Maps	102	71.3	52	40.9
Blog	20	14	8	6.3
Responsive and mobile friendly	77	53.8	38	29.9
Google my business	87	60.8	49	38.6
No	6	4.2	15	11.8

Source: Velentza [53], (p. 102).

As observed by several studies [22,24,26] as well as in the results of this research, a map with the location of the business, information about the business in Google my Business and the compatibility of the website on all desktop and mobile devices are considered extremely important modern tools which should be taken into account during the web design and construction process. Companies investing in technology have helped simplify travel by easily connecting millions of travelers with multiple hotel and lodging options. This fact is also confirmed by the present research, with the results presented in Table 5 of answers to RQ 1b. The method most often used for reservations by hotel businesses was an online reservation system, 60.8% (87), while for food and beverage businesses most reservations were made without immediate reservation notification (29.9% or 38).

Table 5. Reservation method.

	Accommodation Businesses		Food and Beverage Businesses	
Valid	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Without any online booking	44	30.8	38	29.9
Online booking	87	60.8	29	22.8
Mobile application	23	16.1	12	9.4
None	4	2.8	16	12.6
Other	5	3.5	6	4.7

Source: Velentza [53], (p. 103).

The use of social media is a modern trend of the time which is gaining more and more ground due to the possibilities they offer. The results for RQ 2a are presented in Table 6. By far the most popular social media for hotel businesses was Facebook with a 5.24 mean value and standard deviation of 1.86, and Instagram with a 4.56 mean value and 2.29 standard

deviation. Then followed LinkedIn with an average value of 2.52 and YouTube with an average value of 2.18, while Snapchat had the lowest frequency of use with an average value of 1.27.

Table 6. Frequency of use of social media.

	Accommodation Businesses			Food and Beverage Businesses		
Valid	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
Facebook	5.24	1.86	143	5.41	1.71	127
Twitter	2.04	1.77	143	1.69	1.38	127
Instagram	4.56	2.29	143	5.01	2.08	127
LinkedIn	2.52	2.15	143	1.84	1.68	127
Tumblr	1.36	1.04	143	1.21	0.74	127
Pinterest	1.43	1.18	143	1.35	0.98	127
TikTok	1.37	1.00	143	1.22	0.75	127
Snapchat	1.27	0.83	143	1.14	0.50	127
Foursquare	1.41	1.15	143	1.68	1.29	127
YouTube	2.18	1.79	143	1.89	1.56	127
Vimeo	1.38	1.07	143	1.27	0.86	127

Source: Velentza [53], (p. 104).

For food and beverage businesses, the main advertising channels were Facebook with a mean of 5.41 and a standard deviation of 1.71, and Instagram with a mean of 5.01 and a standard deviation of 2.08. Third place was occupied by YouTube, with an average value of 1.89 and in fourth place was LinkedIn with an average value of 1.84. It was also observed that Facebook and Instagram showed quite a large difference in usage from the rest of the social media platforms, which were hardly used at all. As evidenced by the survey, all social media except for Facebook and Instagram were hardly used by hotel and restaurant businesses: their degree of use ranged from 2 and below on a 7-point Likert scale. For both types of businesses, Snapchat had the lowest frequency of use. The present research agrees with Phelan et al. [41], who mention that the tourism industry has embraced Facebook as the ideal platform through which consumers seek to learn about the experiences of others, review photos and reviews, and search for deals.

The social media that businesses intend to use in the future are presented in Table 7. Facebook, Instagram and YouTube occupy the top three positions for both categories of businesses.

Hotel businesses and food and beverage businesses have recognized the dynamics of social media and their utility in marketing strategies. In response to RQ 2b, it appears that for both hotel businesses and food and beverage businesses, the degree of impact of the use of social media in relation to customers was quite satisfactory as the average score on the 7-dimensional Likert scale was 5 and over for all areas.

More specifically, (see Table 8) for hotel businesses, the use of social media has had a great effect on creating/improving the business image, with a score 6.34 average and 1.16 standard deviation, while for food and beverage businesses the effect of providing information to customers scored 5.85 on average with a 1.54 standard deviation. In addition, no business considered the presence of social media pages insignificant.

Table 7. Which channels do businesses intend to use in the future?

	Accommodation Businesses		Food and Beverage Businesses	
Valid	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Facebook	118	82.5	98	77.2
Twitter	41	28.7	31	24.4
Instagram	111	77.6	94	74.0
LinkedIn	57	39.9	30	23.6
Tumblr	6	4.2	4	3.1
Pinterest	16	11.2	20	15.7
TikTok	22	15.4	30	23.6
Snapchat	4	2.8	3	2.4
Foursquare	8	5.6	15	11.8
YouTube	66	46.2	47	37.0
Vimeo	11	7.7	5	3.9
None	13	9.1	7	5.5

Source: Velentza [53], (p. 107).

Table 8. Areas of influence of social media use in relation to customers.

	Accommodation Businesses			Food and Beverage Businesses		
Valid	**Mean Std.**	**Deviation**	**N**	**Mean Std.**	**Deviation**	**N**
Attracting new customers	5.94	1.32	143	5.73	1.47	127
Receiving feedback from customers	5.98	1.46	143	5.85	1.54	127
Providing information to customers	6.34	1.10	143	6.13	1.28	127
Improving the image of the company	6.34	1.16	143	5.98	1.48	127
The interaction/communication	6.26	1.16	143	5.96	1.48	127
Strengthening customer confidence	6.15	1.19	143	5.85	1.49	127
Building stronger relationships	6.07	1.23	143	5.77	1.58	127

The rapid progress of information technology and high-speed broadband connection have increased access to digital media. Customers have become more up-to-date than ever, searching for information through different search engines to make their purchasing decisions. Therefore, various new digital marketing media have been developed that allow more effective sales through more effective channels. As a result, most businesses are encouraged to enter the digital space and are gradually adapting to new ways of communication and marketing [20]. The results of RQ 3a presents are shown in Table 9. As is observed, overall volumes ranged from "neutral" (4) to "no" (1) on the 7-grade Likert scale for hotel businesses, with food and beverage companies ranging from "slightly" (3) to "no" (1).

Table 9. Degree of use of digital marketing techniques and formats.

	Accommodation Businesses			Food and Beverage Businesses		
Valid	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
E-mail marketing	3.87	2.27	143	2.50	2.02	127
Mobile marketing	3.10	2.18	143	2.31	1.87	127
Search engine optimization	4.59	2.03	143	2.91	2.22	127
Paid marketing	3.48	2.25	143	2.83	2.12	127
Viral marketing	2.94	2.16	143	2.35	1.86	127
Affiliate marketing	4.94	2.25	143	3.00	2.25	127
Video marketing	3.03	2.09	143	2.23	1.88	127

Source: Velentza [53], (p. 110).

According to Yilmaz [27], the dynamics and cooperation of digital platforms provide many significant benefits. The results of this study show that the form of marketing most used by both types of businesses was affiliate marketing, with a 4.94 average score and 2.25 standard deviation for hotel businesses and with a 3.00 average score and 2.25 standard deviation for food and beverage businesses. The smallest average was found for hotel businesses in use of the viral marketing technique, with an average score of 2.94, and for food and beverage businesses on video marketing with an average score of 2.30.

As mentioned in the theoretical part, it is not enough to have only a website and presence on social media platforms without monitoring the activities carried out on them. Table 10 presents the results in relation to RQ 3b. As can be seen, the average score was at the neutral point (4) for both hotel businesses and food and beverage businesses. Specifically, hotel businesses had a 4.76 average score and 2.08 standard deviation and food and beverage businesses had a 4.20 average score and 2.22 standard deviation.

Table 10. Web analytics measurement platform usage rate.

	Accommodation Businesses			Food and Beverage Businesses		
Valid	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
Web analytics	4.76	2.08	143	4.20	2.22	127

Source: Velentza [53], (p. 112).

Anderl et al. [15] argue that due to the digital age, business communication with customers needs to be interactive, which means that the business should engage in dialogue and discussion with consumers on online platforms, and monitor and control customer feedback so as to create trusting relationships and build customer loyalty [27,28]. From the results of the research (see Table 11) related to RQ 3c, it turns out that businesses take into account customer comments, as the average score was over 5 on the 7-point Likert scale. Specifically, for hotel businesses the average score was 6.35 and for food and beverage businesses 5.63.

Table 11. Value of customer feedback on online platforms.

	Accommodation Businesses			Food and Beverage Businesses		
Valid	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
Value of customer comments on online platforms	6.35	1.11	143	5.63	1.67	127

Tourism was among the industries most affected during the pandemic and has suffered the biggest consequences of the pandemic [3]. Therefore, it is clear that the hospitality and tourism industry should reinvent its way of operation and form a digital strategy [37] so that businesses can quickly adapt to customer behavior on the internet to meet their daily

needs [36]. The results relating to RQ 4a are presented in Table 12. It is observed that the use of digital marketing from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards has had a great impact, as all results range from the neutral point (4) and upward on the 7-grade Likert scale for hotel businesses and for food and beverage businesses. The largest areas of significance are the increase in business readability with an average score of 6.17 for hotel businesses and 5.85 for food and beverage businesses, and to improve the company's image with an average score of 6.26 for hotel businesses and 5.72 for food and beverage businesses.

Table 12. The impact of using digital marketing from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards on revenue, customers and business image.

	Accommodation Businesses			Food and Beverage Businesses		
Valid	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
Increase product life cycle	5.66	1.27	143	4.80	1.74	127
It increases the market share of the business	5.78	1.23	143	5.15	1.58	127
Expansion into new markets	5.78	1.37	143	4.99	1.88	127
It significantly improves the income of the business	5.63	1.34	143	4.81	1.74	127
Improves interactivity with customers	5.96	1.18	143	5.39	1.53	127
Just in time customer service	5.74	1.31	143	4.83	1.77	127
Better understanding of customer needs/preferences	5.64	1.31	143	5.02	1.62	127
Public relations and customer relationship development	5.86	1.27	143	5.34	1.56	127
Audience/customer research	5.64	1.35	143	5.18	1.61	127
Releases the company from intermediary agents (offices, travel agents, etc.)	5.52	1.48	143	4.69	1.90	127
It increases the readability of the business	6.17	1.01	143	5.85	1.32	127
Improving the image of the company	6.26	1.00	143	5.72	1.37	127
Measuring effectiveness	5.88	1.24	143	5.45	1.40	127
Increase in the search ranking of search engines	5.81	1.28	143	5.45	1.53	127
Cost reduction for marketing services	5.37	1.43	143	5.12	1.53	127

Knowledge of traditional marketing is essential for digital marketing to be effective. Like traditional marketing, digital marketing is about connecting the business/organization with the consumer in order to build relationships and increase sales. Through technology, businesses have access to new and existing platforms and connect with the customer in increasingly different ways. This new digital age defines a new marketing environment, which businesses are required to adapt to, and in which there are obstacles and problems that should not be ignored but taken into account by the business and solutions found during marketing planning [39,54,55].

The results of RQ 4b (see Table 13) indicate obstacles/problems in the use of digital marketing. The main problems faced by hotel businesses from the use of digital marketing were lack of knowledge and training in its use, with an average score of 5.10, and the lack of trained labor market with an average score of 4.98. For food and beverage businesses, the biggest issues were the lack of time with an average score of 5.06, and the existence of annoying ads and spam messages with an average score of 4.89. The smallest problem facing hotel businesses and food and beverage businesses was the existence of technophobia, with average scores of 3.77 and 3.42, respectively.

In the post-COVID era, in the new market environment, businesses are required to review their strategies, transform digitally and incorporate new elements to strengthen their competitiveness [23,31]. In conclusion, and as it emerges from the results of the research as a whole, tourism businesses do not implement a universal marketing strategy, as the finding of specialized human resources by businesses is considered one of the critical parameters for their development, to manage data and modern technologies.

Table 13. The main obstacles/problems in the use of digital marketing.

	Accommodation Businesses			Food and Beverage Businesses		
Valid	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
Monetary cost	4.50	1.67	143	4.17	1.54	127
Lack of time	4.76	1.73	143	5.06	1.49	127
Security of data, information and transactions	4.37	1.88	143	4.26	1.58	127
Lack of trained workforce	4.98	1.59	143	4.84	1.59	127
Lack of knowledge and training in its use	5.10	1.44	143	4.67	1.45	127
Access speed	3.84	1.96	143	4.07	1.84	127
Legal issues and limitations	4.25	1.78	143	3.83	1.70	127
Language	4.03	1.99	143	3.76	1.92	127
Regressive and outdated management mentality	4.26	2.21	143	3.87	1.87	127
Lack of vision for expansion	4.28	2.06	143	3.74	1.88	127
The existence of annoying advertisements and spam messages	4.84	2.02	143	4.89	1.83	127
Eliminating face-to-face contact	4.40	1.83	143	4.76	1.61	127
Existence of technophobia	3.77	1.86	143	3.42	1.92	127
Difficulty targeting certain market segments	4.62	1.66	143	4.77	1.80	127
The reliability of information on the internet	4.32	1.65	143	4.49	1.65	127
Increased competition in international markets	4.84	1.72	143	4.47	1.76	127

5. Conclusions

In the tourism market, the new digital environment and the prevalence and use of social media clearly show tourism businesses that they must adopt new approaches and establish new marketing and management strategies and activities.

Today, more and more consumers undertake the process of searching for the tourist product and making reservations online. As found in the present research, Greek tourism companies, realizing the trend towards the digital market for online bookings, have started to have a dynamic presence on the internet with websites and applications that facilitate consumers both with the publication and distribution of their product.

As evidenced by this survey, most Greek tourism businesses have quality features on their website, such as a map with the location of the business as well as a company profile on Google. In addition, the compatibility of websites with all desktop and mobile devices is considered an extremely important modern tool, and taken into account during the process of designing and building websites of tourism businesses.

Engagement with social media has had a positive and significant effect on the overall performance of the companies studied and this also agrees with the research of Tajvidi et al. As it turns out, businesses primarily use Facebook, over and above all other platforms, to create/improve their image, provide information to customers, attract new customers, interact, enhance customer trust and build stronger relationships. Furthermore, according to the findings of the study, which are in agreement with Yilmaz's research, customer feedback is highly taken into account by businesses as they use it to maintain an open dialogue

with their customers, boost website traffic, advertise their products, share information and build communities.

The success of tomorrow's business will also depend on its ability to handle data and integrate it into business decision-making. Nevertheless, this research shows that Greek entrepreneurs do not use enough predictive analysis (analytics) so that they can evaluate many factors related to the purchasing behavior of customers and design a more targeted and personalized approach to interacting with their customers.

It has been found that the use of various technological tools definitely has positive effects on business in the tourism sector. As can be seen from this research, businesses in the Greek tourism industry adopt digital marketing techniques that can be applied easily, quickly and without high costs, such as affiliate marketing, as well as the optimization of their websites in search engines (SEO, or search engine optimization), which leads to an increase in popularity and therefore an increase in sales. Important digital marketing techniques are the use of mobile marketing, which is not widely used, as well as video and viral marketing, which can be particularly effective and which are hardly used at all by Greek tourism businesses. Therefore, there is a need for further knowledge of such techniques as well as various combinations of strategies to attract customers.

The results of the present study, which are in agreement with the research of Nelly et al. and Antonio et al., show that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected Greek tourism businesses in terms of the readability of the businesses and improving their image. In addition, it has influenced the way businesses communicate with customers as well as the way businesses promote their products or services, expanding into new markets and significantly increasing business revenue.

It is indisputable that in recent times there have been leaps in the familiarity of businesses with technology, and this is also proven by the present research, as the smallest problem that tourism businesses face when it comes to the use of digital marketing is the existence of technophobia. Beyond that, as was shown in the present research and also in Das's research, there are several problems for both hotel businesses and catering businesses, the main ones being the lack of knowledge and training in its use, the lack of a trained workforce in the labor market but also the lack of time, which can lead to loss of clients.

In conclusion, this research highlights that the tourism industry in Greece does not effectively use all the digital marketing techniques and tools that are currently available. For SMEs in particular, a multifaceted strategy is required to enable them to survive and find ways to restore stability in the changing business environment. For professionals in the Greek tourism industry, there is an opportunity to explore competitive advantages that will arise from the implementation of integrated digital strategies and therefore contribute to local and national economic development, as well as to understand how the role of the right human resources in a business is greater in importance than having high marketing budgets.

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Appendix A. Previous Studies

Authors	Research Subject	Method of Analysis	Variable Codes and Questionnaire Variables
Cojocea and Coros [22]	*The online performance of hotel websites.*	*Quality criteria for website excellence factors (world best enterprises, n.a)*	B1_3, main quality features of an improved business website
Salem [24]	*Evaluating the information provided by hotel websites and their performance.*	*Content analysis and quantitative measurement method, using a questionnaire*	B1_3, main quality features of an improved business website B1_4, reservation method
Zafiropoulos and Vrana [26]	*The characteristics, performance and evaluation of hotel websites, which aim to maintain and increase their online presence and their competitiveness in the market.*	*Comparison of websites of hotel units and use of questionnaire*	B1_3, main quality features of an improved business website B1_4, reservation method
Dabas et al. [34]	*The use of techniques and digital marketing tools from food and beverage businesses.*	*Qualitative research, semi-structured, in-depth interviews*	B1_3, main quality features of an improved business website
Mahmutović [36]	*Measuring digital marketing orientation in the hospitality industry.*	*Questionnaire, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)*	B1_15, use of web analytics measurement C1_3, impact of digital marketing usage from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards
Tajvidi and Karami [30]	*The impact of social media use and the role of marketing capabilities on SMEs in the hospitality industry.*	*A structural equation modeling method for data analysis, using a questionnaire*	B1_11, effect of social media use C1_3, impact of digital marketing usage from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards
Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil [28]	*New trends in the search for information on the Internet and social media, before the implementation of a trip and the behavior of tourists.*	*Questionnaire*	B1_9, main social media advertising channel and frequency of use B1_12, which social media they intend to use in the future B1_11, effect of social media use
Varkaris and Neuhofer [29]	*The influence of social media on consumer hotel decision-making behavior and implications for hospitality professionals.*	*Qualitative semi-structured in-depth interview*	B1_9, main social media advertising channel and frequency of use B1_12, which social media they intend to use in the future B1_11, effect of social media use
Kapoor and Kapoor [20]	*Analysis of the adoption and preference of digital marketing tools in the hotel industry.*	*Qualitative research*	B1_12, which social media they intend to use in the future B1_13, techniques and forms of digital marketing B1_9, main social media advertising channel and frequency of use
Li, Kim and Choi [31]	*The involvement and impact of social media on restaurant performance.*	*Hierarchical multiple regression analysis*	B1_9, main social media advertising channel and frequency of use B1_12, which social media they intend to use in the future B1_11, effect of social media use

Authors	Research Subject	Method of Analysis	Variable Codes and Questionnaire Variables
Hysa et al. [32]	*The use of social media by different generations and the extent of their use in planning a trip.*	*Questionnaire*	B1_9, main social media advertising channel and frequency of use B1_11, effect of social media use B1_12, which social media they intend to use in the future
Sinha et al. [21]	*Promotion strategies in the tourism industry with the adoption of technological tools and their influence on the business.*	*Structured questionnaire*	B1_13, techniques and forms of digital marketing
Yasmin et al. [19]	*The effectiveness and impact of digital marketing on business sales, the different forms of digital marketing and its impact on business.*	*Interview technique using structured questionnaire*	B1_13, techniques and forms of digital marketing C1_3, impact of digital marketing usage from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards
Yilmaz [27]	*The criteria that influence tourists' preferences when deciding on a hotel, through comments, opinions and suggestions.*	*Mathematical model panel, surveyed using data methods*	B1_14, value of customer feedback
Michopoulou and Moisa [35]	*The social media measurement processes and techniques adopted by hotel businesses.*	*Qualitative research, semi-structured, open-ended interviews*	B1_14, value of customer feedback B1_15, use of Web analytics measurement
Sakas et al. [38]	*Evaluating the impact of digital marketing using multiple channels, integrating websites, big data and social media in tourism businesses.*	*Fuzzy cognitive map and agent-based modeling*	B1_14, value of customer feedback B1_15, use of web analytics measurement
Antonio and Rita, [4]	*The impact areas of digital marketing usage from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards.*	*Questionnaire*	C1_3, impact of digital marketing usage from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards
Das [39]	*The challenges facing digital marketing and the problems of its use by businesses.*	*Qualitative data and descriptive analysis methods*	C1_4, obstacles/problems from the use of digital marketing
Nelly [3]	*The influence and effects of COVID-19 on SMEs in the tourism industry.*	*Qualitative research, descriptive analysis methods and contextual techniques.*	C1_3, impact of digital marketing usage from the COVID-19 pandemic onwards
Phelan et al. [40]	*The effectiveness of Facebook as a marketing tool by hotel businesses and consumer interaction with the business.*	*Content analysis*	B1_14, value of customer feedback B1_9, main social media advertising channel and frequency of use B1_11, effect of social media use B1_12, which social media they intend to use in the future

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