

E-Marketing Strategies and Their Role in Boosting Tourism Competitiveness: A Study of Jordan's Tourism Sector

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Abstract

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The tourism business in Jordan is still ranked among the most significant branches of the state economy, yet its competitiveness is increasingly constrained by using the traditional means of marketing and the absence of utilising the e-marketing resources, especially by Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). The study aims at discussing the extent to which the e-marketing strategies form part of the competitiveness of tourism in Jordan and the most effective ways of enhancing communication, destination image and tourist attraction. The study design used was a descriptive-analytical quantitative research study, which involved an online survey conducted among 81 tourism SMEs through semi-structured interviews with nine employees employed in three tourism firms. These findings suggest that the frequency of mobile marketing has a significant positive association with e-marketing being considered more important than traditional marketing ($r = 0.31, p = 0.005$), but no significant correlation was found in Return on Investment (ROI). It was the websites and content that enabled Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and mobile marketing to become the most potent strategy duo. Strategies involve the way to promote the combination of SEO and mobile, web renovation and strengthening of coordinated training and policy support to SMEs.

Keywords: E-marketing strategies, tourism competitiveness, search engine optimisation (SEO), mobile marketing, Jordan tourism sector.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most colourful industries that will always shape the economy of the country, cultural dialogue, and international relations. One of the sources of income and a strategic pillar to the economic resilience, development of job opportunities and international acclaim in Jordan is tourism. Despite the rich archaeological heritage and enormous religious value, despite the political stability in comparison with the neighbours, the biggest challenge that faces the country is what can be stated as the inability to maintain the tourism growth and competitiveness concerns in the face of an increasingly digital and saturated global tourism industry. The increasingly unstable situation in the region, changing the behaviour of the tourists and more competitiveness with the technologically advanced destinations have brought out the structural and strategic weakness of the Jordanian tourism marketing and positioning. The problems point to one major problem, and this is that the old modes of marketing were no longer effective in providing effective communication of

the tourism value offering of Jordan, attracting international tourists, and competing in a tourism economy that is digitally based.

Tourism has been a significant economic variable in Jordan because it has played a significant role in the national income and employment. In 2018, the travel and tourism contribution to Jordan's Gross Domestic Product constituted approximately 19.2% or nearly United States Dollar USD 8.4 billion, as opposed to USD 1.7 billion in 1999, and at an average growth rate of 9.25% per annum (Knoema, 2020). The industry is said to be the second-largest in both government and non-government sectors, and its influence is also strong on food services, transportation industry, handicrafts, health and sport industries, among others (Al-Haija, 2011; Hijazi *et al.*, 2021). The most important organisations, including the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Jordan Tourism Board, the Jordan Hotel Association, and various archaeological authorities, also control and promote Jordan Tourism activities. Jordanian

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government acknowledges the importance of tourism and to improve the performance of the industry, improve destination marketing, and strengthen long-term growth prospects, the government developed the National Tourism Strategy (2011-2015) (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2018).

Jordan Tourism Attraction Foundation is founded on the variety of its services and differentiated positioning as a boutique destination. Jordan Tourism Board has divided the tourism into six broad segments, namely: history and culture, religion and faith, leisure and wellness, ecology and nature, conferences and events and adventure tourism (Jordan Tourism Board, 2005; Al-Majali, 2012). The traditional attraction sites, which have so far attracted tourist numbers in large numbers of tourists, include archaeological, religious, and natural sites such as Petra, Jerash, the Dead Sea, Mount Nebo, and Madaba (Al-Haija, 2011). However, despite these benefits, the destination image of Jordan has suffered adversely due to political instabilities in the area as well as media images that mislead the international visitors on how to perceive the country as an extension of the conflict involving the neighbouring states, leading to perception errors among the international tourists (Alsarayreh and Salt, 2018). Besides, the absence of fair investments in the tourism infrastructure is another factor that has led to the gap between the major locations, such as Amman, Aqaba, and the Dead Sea, and the secondary ones, such as Jerash and Um Qais, which often lack adequate facilities and the quality of services (Haddad *et al.*, 2014; Alkhawaldeh *et al.*, 2024).

The world has been revolutionised by digital technologies that transform the nature of the tourism industry, where the nature of destination promotion, assessment and choice is redefined. The widespread use of the Internet and social media channels has allowed tourists to get a great amount of information, peer reviews, and travel choice models, and destination choice is becoming increasingly digital-dependent and reputation-driven online (Chuang, 2018). The digital innovations have digitally revolutionised the tourism value chain by providing direct communication between the service providers and the consumers, reducing intermediaries, and customised travel planning (Énalan and Soteriades, 2012). The marketing of tourism activities in Jordan is gradually adapting to technological change, online and social media, and websites are becoming a major source of accessing the international markets (Jordan Tourism Board, 2010). Online reviews, electronic word-of-mouth, and digital content left by other travellers have now become very powerful in shaping the decision that a tourist makes, thus proving that e-marketing is a critical instrument to destination image and competitiveness development (Castro *et al.*, 2017).

The arrival of e-marketing is a significant tool that can be used by tourism organisations to improve communication, brand image and to reach international audiences. The tourism firms can promote the value propositions, customisation of services, and constant communication with the targeted tourists using websites, social media, email marketing, and online reservation systems (Basheer *et al.*, 2020). Simultaneously, the effective application of the e-marketing strategy in Jordan is disproportional, particularly among the small and medium-sized businesses, which are constrained by the cost aspect, the technical illiteracy, the need to negotiate between the different regulatory levels, and the incoherence with the state institutions (Shahateet and Partale, 2019). These issues are augmented by additional global institutional issues, inadequate vocational education, cost competitiveness, and the absence of accessible information to foster strategic decision-making (Al-Weshah, 2020). Consequently, the beneficial implications of e-marketing within the Jordanian setting have not been well researched, despite the immense potential it has on enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism industry.

Despite the generally recognised significance of e-marketing importance over the last few years, the literature on tourism in Jordan has been awash with studies on the development of destinations, infrastructures and policy issues in the tourism sector without much empirical evidence of the role played by the specific e-marketing strategy in tourism competitiveness. There is a felt gap in the knowledge of how much e-marketing strengthens the competitiveness dimensions, such as destination image, tourist attraction, and provider-consumer communication, in the Jordan tourism sector. In order to address this gap, this study aims to examine how e-marketing can be applied to enhance tourism competitiveness in Jordan. Specifically, it seeks to establish how much the e-marketing strategies can be applied in enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism industry and how the optimal e-marketing strategies can be employed in marketing communication, destination image and tourist attraction. The research may be of interest to both the academic community and the practitioners in the tourism industry and the government, since it will offer insights on how tourism business organisations and government stakeholders can exploit e-marketing as a viable competitive strategy in the Jordan tourism industry.

Problem Statement and Significance of the Study

The tourism industry in Jordan is one of the major economic growth drivers, and its competitiveness is becoming less and less due to structural, strategic and technological influences in the digital-first environment. Although it has attractive cultural and religious resources, most tourism organizations especially SMEs, are using conventional marketing and inconsistent e-marketing, which has poorly seen it on-line, poor tourist

participation and underexploitation of digital tools as they determine destination image and market penetration. This study discusses the gap in the empirical research in Jordan by focusing on the effectiveness of e-marketing strategies in promoting communication, destination image and attraction of tourists. The evidence is to facilitate the use of evidence-based decision-making, effective resource distribution, and policy-making that enhances sustainable tourism and long-term socio-economic growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

E-Marketing Strategies and Tourism Competitiveness in Jordan

This section summarises theoretical and empirical research on e-marketing strategies and tourism competitiveness in the context of the Jordanian tourism industry. It builds a conceptual basis of the role of digital marketing in destination competitiveness in terms of improving the communication, destination image, and tourism attractions through the incorporation of viewpoints of tourism marketing, digital transformation, institutional theory, and indicators of competitiveness.

The tourism industry in Jordan is based on a complicated institutional framework, with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) in charge of enhancing policies, regulating, and coordinating the stakeholders (MoTA, 2015). The National Tourism Council assists in the execution of national tourism strategies and partnerships between the state and companies. Although this is the structure, institutional fragmentation and poor coordination continue to limit tourism competitiveness (Shahateet & Partale, 2019). The strategies developed in the country in 2004-2010 and 2011-2015 focused on the development of the product, marketing, human resource capacity, and regulatory reform (MoTA, 2015). Even though these efforts drove up tourist development and investment, the lack of integration of digital marketing and technological innovation decreased their effectiveness over time, and so it is important to engage more in the adoption of e-marketing.

In theory, destination competitiveness is explained in close relation to strategic marketing and differentiation of worldwide markets. The ideas of Kotler and Gertner (2002) of tourism marketing as the dynamic process influenced by the tendencies of the market and the changing preferences of consumers, and the ideas by Evans, Fox, and Johnson (1995) of promoting the internal resources equal to the external opportunities are relevant. Multidimensional measures of competitiveness include brand image, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) readiness, quality of infrastructure, and safety (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2017). The outcomes of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index of Jordan are reflected in the strengths of security and the priority of the government, and the weaknesses

of branding, online demand and transport infrastructure (WEF, 2017), which may strengthen the strategic importance of e-marketing as a way to reinforce the digital presence and market position.

E-marketing is the use of internet-based technologies in marketing, customer relationship management and transactional processes (El-Gohary, 2012). Digital platforms in the tourism sector have changed the information power towards consumers through access to real-time information, peer-generated content and interactive communication channels, which influence destination perceptions (Buhalis, 1998; Gretzel *et al.*, 2011). Empirical research in Jordan shows that social media, websites, and email marketing are useful tools as they increase global presence, decrease the costs of promotion, and improve interaction with customers, especially among the SMEs (Alsarayreh and Salt, 2018; Al-Weshah, 2020).

One of the major mechanisms through which e-marketing can have an impact on tourism performance is communication effectiveness. The interaction is two-way, visual storytelling and word-of-mouth can be provided through social media and influence tourist trust, emotional responses, and destination choice greatly (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Hays *et al.*, 2013). Social media marketing in Jordan has been listed as an affordable marketing tool that can help smaller tourism organisations compete with larger firms, as it helps to increase the exposure and reach to the audience (Alrousan and Jones, 2016).

Online sources such as official websites, review websites/platforms, and social media are becoming more and more significant in destination image formation and affecting attitudes and decision-making of tourists (Ketter, 2016; Leung *et al.*, 2017). Studies indicate that even though the Jordanian tourism websites play a positive role in image formation, their effectiveness is limited by the poor search engine presence and poor quality of the content (Marine-Roig, 2019; Woeber, 2006). The optimisation of search engines has been proven to increase the ranking and traffic to the website, thus promoting the online presence (Cho, 2010; Pangirahi, 2016).

Content marketing and user-generated content are also other factors that enhance competitiveness, as they focus on storytelling and experiential representation, which are generally effective in intangible tourism products (Pulizzi, 2014; Munar and Jacobsen, 2013). Reviews and blogs done by users are viewed as valid and genuine, and they influence the trust and satisfaction of tourism (Gretzel *et al.*, 2011; Litvin *et al.*, 2008).

Even though empirical studies show that e-marketing adoption is positively related to tourism

performance and competitiveness (Mousavi, 2012; Jonathan and Tarigan, 2016), research in the Middle East and Jordan is limited and disjointed (Rondović, 2019). The current studies typically concentrate on individual tools or limited samples, especially in SMEs, and they fail to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of various e-marketing tools on each other in terms of their impact on competitiveness. This gap explains the necessity of systematic, empirical research that is the focus of the current study by incorporating institutional, strategic, and technological approaches to analyse the success of e-marketing strategies in promoting communication, destination image, and tourist attraction in Jordan.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The proposed study follows a descriptive-analytical quantitative study design that will have a complementary qualitative element. The quantitative design is particularly suitable to explore the extent to which the e-marketing activity can contribute to enhancing tourism competitiveness in Jordan (RQ1), as it is possible to undertake systematic measurements of the connections between the variables and generalise the results to the tourism industry. The goal of descriptive-analytical research is to identify the status quo, trends, and relationships among variables without necessarily controlling them. Therefore, it is important for researchers interested in organisational practices such as the adoption of e-marketing (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

In addition, there is also a qualitative exploratory component of the study, as semi-structured interviews are used to gain deeper insights into how the tourism companies view and implement e-marketing strategies, particularly with regard to their effectiveness in communicating with customers, the image of destinations and tourist attractions (RQ2). Such an ambivalent attitude to the methodology gives the work its explanatory power due to the triangulation of the numerical data with the practical outcomes of the industry participants (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Sample of the Study

The target population of the study is the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) in the tourism industry in the country of Jordan, which comprises travel agencies, tour operators, hotels, and tourism service providers. The selection of these companies was based on the fact that they have a considerable impact on the tourism competitiveness in Jordan and have increasingly grown reliant on digital marketing tools.

In the quantitative aspect, the sample was 81 tourism SMEs because data were collected through the use of a sample size due to its availability and applicability in meeting the research objectives. The respondents were required to be conversant with marketing activities and strategic decision-making in

their organisation. In the qualitative section, the number of employees sampled was nine, who were employed in three tourism companies. Such players have been selected with the consideration of providing specific information on e-marketing activities, issues and how they feel it has yielded. The sampling method resulted in breadth and depth in responding to research questions of the research (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019).

Instruments of the Study

Two significant approaches were employed to collect the data, which consisted of a semi-structured interview and a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to measure the extent of the application of e-marketing strategies and the perceived impact of the same on the competitiveness of a destination, the effectiveness of the communication, the destination image and the tourist attraction. It consisted of Likert scale questions in a 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) scale, and hence, one could measure the perceptions of the respondents numerically.

The interview instrument was presented as open-ended questions aimed at exploring the experiences of the participants towards e-marketing methods, including the use of social media, search engine optimisation (SEO), mobile marketing and web management. This qualitative tool assisted the researcher in revealing nuanced information that could not be thoroughly examined through the lens of survey data alone, and thereby supported the RQ2 (Patton, 2015).

Validity of the Instrument

Instrument validity was achieved through several processes. The items in the questionnaire were phrased in a manner that meets content validity, meaning that they are in alignment with the conceptual framework of the study since they have been drafted based on an in-depth analysis of previous findings related to the subject of e-marketing and tourism competitiveness (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2017). The instrument was also reviewed by academic experts in the field of tourism and marketing in order to ascertain the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the items.

When it comes to qualitative instruments, methodological rigour was used to address the issue of validity, including the clarity of the interview procedure, the correspondence in the way in which the participants were questioned or the use of participants who had experienced the field of tourism marketing first-hand. These measures enhanced the reliability and authenticity of the collected information because it is aligned with the concepts of qualitative validity offered by Maxwell (1992).

Reliability of the Instrument

To evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach alpha coefficient, which is used to determine the internal consistency of the scale items, was

applied. The value obtained resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.951 that is a high degree of reliability. The values that are acceptable in social science research are values that exceed 0.70, and excellent consistency is represented by values that are more than 0.90 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). This confirms the fact that the questionnaire content can quantify the constructs of e-marketing strategies, as well as tourism competitiveness.

Data Collection

The participants were provided with the online questionnaire on the online platform (through emails, WhatsApp, social media, etc.) as primary data. The survey was implemented within the framework of an electronic data collection system, which was effective with regard to accessing the tourism SMEs in Jordan. It also adhered to the ethical standards of research by explaining an introductory section which explained the purpose of the research, assured confidentiality, and provided guidelines for completion.

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the workers of selected tourism firms. There were also open-ended questions on the subject of implementation of the e-marketing strategy, the effectiveness of e-marketing, and the challenges that the participants faced in an attempt to enhance the competitiveness of the tourism industry in the online market.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were used in analysing the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics in the form of means and standard deviations were used to summarise the perceptions of the respondents on e-marketing strategies. The relationship between e-marketing practices and tourism competitiveness was tested using inferential tests, with answers to RQ1 being checked on how far e-marketing strategies can assist in enhancing tourism competitiveness in Jordan.

The comparative and relational analysis in RQ2 would have been to establish which of the e-marketing strategies that incorporate social media marketing, SEO, mobile marketing, and web optimisation strategies is most effective in boosting communication, destination image, and tourist attraction. The information gathered in the qualitative interview was coded and analysed through constant comparison methods in a thematic approach to isolate the recurring patterns and themes that

would relate and interpret the quantitative information (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

FINDINGS

Findings Related to the First Research Question: To what extent do e-marketing strategies contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism sector in Jordan?

Overall, quantitative evidence of the contribution to competitiveness

The quantitative findings reveal that the implementation of e-marketing strategies plays a role in enhancing competitiveness in the tourism industry in Jordan due to two interrelated effects: enhancing the indicators of market performance of the firms (in particular, ROI) and effective reinforcement of competitiveness variables that determine the destination choice of the tourists (in particular, price-dependent variables). The statistical significance of the correlation between the use of mobile marketing and the perceived significance of e-marketing to traditional marketing is high and positive, which means that a bigger number of companies that apply Mobile Marketing are likely to feel that e-marketing is important as opposed to traditional marketing. As a result, the Spearman rho correlation displays that the frequency of use of Mobile Marketing is strongly correlated with the significance of E-marketing over Traditional Marketing at Spearman's (rank-order) correlation coefficient (rSP) (81) = .31, $p = .005$. This result implies the sense of the impact that the stronger the adoption, the stronger the linkage with the stronger the faith in the strategic value of the e-marketing as a primary channel of competitiveness emergence in the form of the long-term digital investment and implementation.

On the other hand, Mobile Marketing Frequency of Use has a positive but not significant relationship with Return on Investment at conventional levels. The difference in the rho between the two variables is borderline significant, positive rSP (81) = .18, $p = .107$, but the association direction is in the same direction as the study finding that more frequent use is likely to have a higher ROI. Taken together, the trend suggests that e-marketing adoption is consistently associated with the attitude of strategic significance and directionally linked to the performance outcomes, even though the relationship of ROI in this sample is not significant at the statistical level.

Table 1: Correlation results relevant to competitiveness (N = 81)

Relationship tested	Statistical test	Coefficient	Significance
Mobile Marketing Frequency of Use $\times$ Importance of E-marketing versus Traditional Marketing	Spearman's rho	rSP (81) = .31	$p = .005$
Mobile Marketing Frequency of Use $\times$ Return on Investment (ROI)	Spearman's rho	rSP (81) = .18	$p = .107$

Competitiveness factors that support tourism growth

The competitiveness is also evident in the factors that support tourism and help to increase the number of tourists visiting Jordan. All the items within the competitiveness axis had a high rating, with hotel prices and service being ranked first. The mean of hotel prices and services was high (3.69 SD =.970) then Government policies of educational vocational training of SME (3.44 SD =1.294). The mean of the axis was 3.29, and the standard deviation was 1.23, which confirms that the respondents view competitiveness as being very mediated by the value of cost/service and supportive policies.

This is in accordance with the views of the respondents on the significance of the costs of trips. The perception of the cost of a tourism visit in Jordan against Egypt, Lebanon and Syria was rated as extremely important (40.7%), then very important (35.8%), then moderately important (22.2%), and slightly important (1.2%). The reported mean = 4.16 and (SD) =(0.813) indicates that price consideration is the primary factor in destination competitiveness, which consequently justifies the hypothesis that price is among the key competitive determinants that need to be considered whenever Jordan is considered as a destination.

Table 2: Competitiveness axis (key ranked items)

No.	Competitiveness factor	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
1	Hotel prices and service	3.69	.970	1	High
2	Government policies for educational and vocational training for SME	3.44	1.294	2	High
3	Jordan Tourism Board (JTB) Public-private partnership commitment to marketing strategies	3.26	1.181	3	High
4	Air access to attract low-cost carriers	3.23	1.197	4	High
5	Ticket taxes and airport charges for tourists	3.22	1.387	5	High
6	Jordan Hotel Association (JHA) is upgrading hotels to international standards	3.15	1.246	6	High
7	MOTA is responsible to design policies to develop tourism	3.025	1.3036	7	High

Campaign effectiveness indicators that reinforce competitiveness

The competitiveness gains are also reflected in the design of campaigns, measuring campaigns, and funding campaigns. In actual factors that one would consider important to a successful e-marketing campaign, alignment with the marketing strategy of the company (SEO, Mobile, etc.) at 43.2, ease of tracking and analysing results at 27.2, incentives for customers at 17.3, and engaging customers who will refer other people at 12.3 received the most responses. The orientation on performance is also supported by the measurement

practices: Number of visits to a site and Number of downloads are the most common types of measurement practices, with 38.3 and 34.6, respectively. Budget allocation indicates that 44.4% companies have 1 to 20% budget allocation, and 28.4% companies have 21-40% budget allocation, and 16.0 companies have 41-60 budget allocation, and 11.1 companies have 61-80 budget allocation. The distributive analysis of ROI over the past 5 years shows that most of the firms have recorded 5-10% increase (45.7), 10-20% increase (29.6), a decrease (13.6), then over 20% increase (6.2), then less than 5% increase (4.9).

Table 3: E-marketing campaign results (success factors, measurement, budget, ROI)

Dimension	Highest categories and percentages (N = 81)
Important factors for success	Align to marketing strategy (SEO, Mobile, etc.) 43.2%; Easiness to track and analysing results 27.2%
How results are measured	Number of visits to a website 38.3%; Number of downloads 34.6%
Annual e-marketing budget share	1-20%: 44.4%; 21-40%: 28.4%; 41-60%: 16.0%; 61-80%: 11.1%
ROI over the last 5 years	5-10% increase: 45.7%; 10-20% increase: 29.6%; Decrease: 13.6%

Findings Related to the Second Research Question: Which e-marketing strategies are most effective in improving communication, destination image, and tourist attraction in Jordan's tourism sector?

Most effective strategies by frequency, value for money, and future priority

Table 4 below demonstrates that the search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy is the most preferred in regard to type, approach, value of money, and further use purposes. As a type of e-marketing strategy, the number of iterations (55) and first place belong to SEO. SEO e-marketing has 62 iterations, and they are ranked first. SEO is ranked as the best, and when

it comes to value for money, it has a frequency 34%, 42%, and Rank 1. SEO has the highest number of (31) iterations in the future methods.

The sites come second in all the significant measurements, after the E-mail marketing and electronic banner advertising. This likeness of current practice, efficacy considerations, and strategies about the future demonstrates that SEO and websites can become the core of the most effective package of measures to enhance more appearances of the destination and tourist attraction.

Table 4: Top strategies across practice and effectiveness indicators

E-marketing element	Type (iterations)	Ways engaged (iterations)	Value for money (Per cent)	Future techniques (iterations)
Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)	55	62	42	31
Websites	41	12	11.1	29
E-mail marketing	23	17	12.3	14
Electronic banner ad / Banners	16	9	13.6	25

Strategies most effective for improving communication with customers

Table 5 below shows that the axis in communication between potential customers and tourism providers shows that Mobile Marketing (mean = 3.74, SD = 0.85) and SEO (mean = 3.70, SD = 0.93) are ranked at the top two positions respectively. The Content marketing and email marketing occupy the third place and have the scores of 3.23 (SD = 1.05) and 3.19 (SD = 1.06), respectively. According to the results, e-marketing via mobile phones and search engine optimisation are the

most popular and effective approaches in the promotion of the number of tourists visiting Jordan.

This is fortified by the frequency distributions, which are described. In mobile marketing, 44.4% report a little way (Uses it heavily 29.6 and uses it all the time 23.5), 53.1% and barely uses it and does not use it 2.5 and 0.0% respectively. This same trend is observed with SEO: A little bit is 46.9, A lot is 23.5, and all the time is 25.9, with a small non-use percentage.

Table 5: Communication axis: highest-rated strategies (N = 81)

Strategy item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
Mobile marketing to increase tourists	3.74	0.85	1	High
Search engine optimisation to increase tourists	3.70	0.93	2	High
Content marketing to increase tourists	3.23	1.05	3	High
E-mail marketing to increase tourists	3.19	1.06	4	High

Destination image and tourist attraction drivers (religion and heritage)

Respondents who reported destination image drivers are strongly related to tourist attractions. The most important sites that tourists desire to explore in Jordan are visiting religious places where people are coexisting with one another (45.7%), walking in the footsteps of the ancient civilisation (14.8), floating in the Dead Sea or visiting Petra and Jerash (13.6), experiencing culture, hospitality and food (12.3). The results are worth the strategic pertinence of SEO and mobile marketing: these are the channels that will enable the creation of Jordan's religious heritage and cultural peculiarity within global search and mobile discovery environments.

Qualitative evidence from interviews supporting strategy effectiveness

The findings of the interview are consistent with the findings of the quantitative study and justify the concept of strategy effectiveness in practice. The type of strategy is concerned, 9(9) at (100) concurred on the fact that companies use a combination of e-marketing strategies, social media marketing being the most common, followed by email and content marketing. The most collective knowledge that was agreed was SEO, with 7(9) insisting that the content, structure and keywords should be enhanced in order to improve rankings (77.7). On the effectiveness of SEO, 6(9) (66.6) tended to the significance of high ranking in the search results in terms of appealing to the actively searching visitors of the travel information, 3(9) (33.4) to the

steady increase of the visits and rankings of the keywords. On the query whether the additional investment was necessary in SEO, 6(9) (66.6) believed that an extra investment was required to maintain the competitiveness of the company, and 3(9) (33.4) believed that an acceptable investment was required, or an incremental one. The quality of websites was well rated with 7(9) (77.7%), 2(9) (22.3%), and (100) yea, and nay respectively.

In general, the results synthesised indicate that the strategic creation of communication, attraction, and long-term competitiveness should be made by SEO and mobile marketing, and it is possible to use websites, email marketing, content marketing, and electronic banner advertising as auxiliary tools with varying rates of money perceived and willingness to implement them.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Findings Related to Research Question One: To what extent do e-marketing strategies contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism sector in Jordan?

The findings of this study are practical empirically in supporting the findings that e-marketing solutions have the potential to promote the competitiveness of the Jordan tourism industry. Quantitatively, the results show that the firms with higher levels of mobile marketing application are more likely to discover that the e-marketing application is more relevant than the conventional marketing methods.

The significant positive correlation between the rate of mobile marketing and the perceived relevance of e-marketing is statistically significant, which means that the higher the exposure and experience to digital-based tools, the more confidence in the strategy competitiveness of the tools. This finding falls in line with Buhalis (1998) and El-Gohary (2012), who assert that tourism organisations that operate in information sensitive environment are increasingly developing digital marketing as a strategic resource rather than a support promotion tool.

The positive relationship between the use of mobile marketing and the return on investment (ROI) was statistically non-existent, yet the positive trend of the relationship demonstrates the gradual payoff in terms of the results concerning the adoption of e-marketing. It can be explained by the reality that the ROI realisations of digital marketing tend to be noticed in the later time horizon and have to be supported by other supporting attributes, such as analytics, quality of the content, and organisational learning. Another factor that Gretzel et al. (2011) state is that, despite the impact of e-marketing to raise visibility and engagement, financial payoffs are regulated by the ability of the companies to integrate digital tools within broader strategic contexts. The absence of high ROI impacts even in the short run is understandable in the Jordanian environment, where the majority of tourism business organisations, particularly SME, are constrained in terms of technical and resource base, and Shahateet and Partale (2019) and Al-Weshah (2020) have concluded that the digital levels of the industry are unequal.

Besides the firm level performance measure, the study evidence indicates that price-related and policy-related measures are highly determinant in the competitiveness within the Jordan tourism sector. The respondents placed the hotel prices and quality of service as the most influential factor of competitiveness, followed by the aspect of government policy, which facilitated vocational and educational training of the SMEs. The results show that e-marketing offers the most viable avenue of competitiveness when it expresses value-based offers and has the proper institutional structures. The given explanation is consistent with the competitiveness model proposed by the World Economic Forum (2017), which recognises price competitiveness and human capital development as the key conditions of destination performance, particularly in the up-and-coming tourism markets.

The comparative cost of the trips is also a crucial competitive force supported by the heavy weight placed on the price when travelling to the neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. The average cost of the trip is high, and it implies that decisions made by tourists regarding the destination are highly sensitive to perceived affordability. E-marketing strategy,

especially mobile marketing and online promotion, will ensure the tourism companies highlight the competitive pricing, discounts and packages in real time, and this will further position Jordan in the tourism markets of the region. This observation affirms the claim of Kotler and Gertner (2002) that the optimal tourism marketing approach must follow the key major criteria of tourists in decision-making (cost and perceived value).

The performance-based practices in e-marketing also reflect the effectiveness of its application in increasing companies' competitiveness based on the conclusions drawn on the effectiveness of the campaigns. The appropriateness of the marketing strategy in general and ease of tracking and results analysis were identified to be the most critical aspects of successful e-marketing campaigns, as deemed by the respondents. It represents the indicator of the shift to data-driven marketing and the measurable outcomes that will equip firms with the improved capability to facilitate campaigns and allocate resources efficiently. The same researchers as Leeftang et al. (2014) concentrate on the fact that the strategic value of digital marketing lies in its quantifiability and flexibility, which allows companies to alter their strategies with the help of real-time feedback.

The procedures employed in measuring web visits and downloads indicate that the Jordanian tourism firms focus more on visibility and engagement as medium indicators of competitiveness. Though they do not expressly quantify the conversions or revenue, they are, in general, regarded as the fundamental metrics of a digital market presence (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). The fact that the majority of the firms, particularly those with growth of 5 to 10, 10 to 20, have realised growth in ROI over the past five years is a pointer that the sustained investment in e-marketing is incremental in terms of financial performance. This gradual development is in keeping with the research findings by Mousavi (2012) that adoption of e-marketing gains profitability and customer awareness with time and no immediate outcomes.

Overall, the findings validate the previous empirical findings according to which e-marketing promotes tourism competitiveness by increasing the strategic orientation, the effectiveness of the communication process, and the improvement of value-based positioning (Alrousan and Jones, 2016; Basheer *et al.*, 2020). E-marketing in the Jordanian business appears to be an indirect revenue generator, as well as a strategy that improves the current competitiveness variables such as cost, service and institutional support. This role can be mentioned mildly in order to justify the fact that the perceptions of strategic importance are more attached to the adoption of using e-marketing than the ROI short-term results, which justifies the concept of digital marketing as a long-term competitiveness investment and not a tactical tool.

Discussion of Findings Related to Research Question Two

Theoretical and Empirical Review of E-Marketing Strategies and Tourism Competitiveness in Jordan

In this section, the theoretical and empirical literature on e-marketing strategies and tourism competitiveness is synthesised with particular reference to the Jordanian tourism industry. It builds a theoretical base on the essence of the role of digital marketing in destination competitiveness through increasing communication, destination image, and tourist attraction by incorporating the viewpoints of tourism marketing, digital transformation, institutional theory, and competitiveness indicators.

The tourism industry in Jordan exists in a complicated institutional environment, where the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) exists to control and coordinate policies and coordinate stakeholders (MoTA, 2015). The National Tourism Council assists in the execution of national tourism strategies and the cooperation of the state and business. Although this is the case, institutional fragmentation and poor coordination still limit tourism competitiveness (Shahateet & Partale, 2019). The 2004–2010 and 2011–2015 national strategies focused on the development of products, marketing, human resource capacity, and the regulatory reform (MoTA, 2015). Although such steps promoted tourist development and capital investment, the lack of integration of digital marketing and technological innovation minimised their effectiveness in the long term, which is why it is important to consider the complete adoption of e-marketing.

In theory, destination competitiveness is directly connected to strategic marketing and differentiation in the global markets. Kotler and Gertner (2002) also define tourism marketing as an active process that is influenced by the market trends and shifts in the tastes of the consumers, whereas Evans, Fox, and Johnson (1995) underline the matching of the internal opportunities with the external ones. Multidimensional measures of competitiveness are often represented as brand image, ICT readiness, the quality of infrastructure and safety (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2017). The results of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index of Jordan are characterised by the strong security and prioritisation of the government, with low scores in the branding, online demand, and transport infrastructure (WEF, 2017), which underscores the importance of e-marketing as a strategic tool to gain digital presence and popularity.

E-marketing is the use of the internet based technologies in marketing, customer relationship management and transactions (El-Gohary, 2012). Digital platforms have also created information power in the hands of the consumer in the tourism sector by enhancing

real-time information, peer-generated content and interactive communications channels available, which influence destination perceptions (Buhalis, 1998; Gretzel *et al.*, 2011). There is empirical evidence on the use of social media, websites, and email marketing in Jordan, which suggests that the tools are useful in terms of global accessibility, low promotional expenses, and effective client interaction, especially with SMEs (Alsarayreh and Salt, 2018; Al-Weshah, 2020).

The effectiveness of communication is one of the primary processes where e-marketing has an impact on tourism performance. The social media sites are known to promote two-way contact, visual storytelling and electronic word-of-mouth, which play key roles in influencing trust levels among the tourists, feelings and the selection of the destination (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Hays *et al.*, 2013). Social media marketing is named as an inexpensive option in Jordan that allows smaller tourism companies to compete with larger ones by increasing their awareness and interactions (Alrousan and Jones, 2016).

Official websites, review websites, and social media offer online information and are increasingly significant in shaping destination images, which influence tourist attitudes and decision-making (Ketter, 2016; Leung *et al.*, 2017). According to research, although the role of the Jordanian tourism websites in image creation is positive, it is limited by the low search engine ranking and inadequate content quality (Marine-Roig, 2019; Woeber, 2006). It is proven that search engine optimisation can enhance ranking and traffic of the webpage, increasing online representation (Cho, 2010; Pangirahi, 2016).

Another more competitiveness booster is the focus on storytelling and experiential representation, which can better be achieved in practice in intangible tourism products, through content marketing and user-generated content (Pulizzi, 2014; Munar and Jacobsen, 2013). Reviews and blogs left by the users are viewed as valid and genuine, which influences the satisfaction and confidence in tourists (Gretzel *et al.*, 2011; Litvin *et al.*, 2008).

Though empirical research indicates that there is a positive relationship between e-marketing adoption and tourism performance and competitiveness (Mousavi, 2012; Jonathan and Tarigan, 2016), Middle Eastern and Jordan-specific studies are minimal and random (Rondović, 2019). The available literature tends to concentrate on individual tools or limited sample sizes, especially in the case of SMEs, and does not provide a comprehensive evaluation of the cumulative effect of a combination of e-marketing instruments on competitiveness. This area of gap highlights the necessity of systematic and empirical research, which is satisfied by the present study by combining institutional,

strategic, and technological viewpoints to determine the effectiveness of e-marketing strategies in promoting communication, destination image, and tourist attraction in Jordan.

CONCLUSION

The study has examined the role of e-marketing strategies in enhancing tourism competitiveness in Jordan, with particular emphasis on the effectiveness of the customer communication, destination image and tourist attraction. Using the descriptive-analytical quantitative research design complemented by semi-structured interviews, the results of 81 tourism SMEs and 9 tourism practitioners regarding the dimensions of competitiveness show that e-marketing is likely to contribute to competitiveness in terms of better strategic marketing orientation, visibility, and digital visibility. The findings indicate that SEO is the most suitable and cost-effective strategy, and it has the highest current and future value. This underscores the critical role of search engines as a primary channel for travel information search and destination selection. The most effective method of communication was mobile marketing, which showed effectiveness by enabling interactive, two-way communication across the tourist journey. These findings indicate the strategic value of the use of SEO and mobile marketing in high-quality and content-rich websites to increase discoverability, trust, and engagement.

Practically, the tourism SMEs in Jordan can treat SEO and mobile marketing as core strategic assets rather than secondary tools and refine keyword strategies to the key tourist attractions of Jordan and leverage mobile channels for real-time customer communication and service delivery. On the policy level, the coordinated action of the different stakeholders in the industry, in this case, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, as well as the Jordan Tourism Board, is needed to improve digital quality standards, expand capacity-building programs, and facilitate the adoption process. Theoretically, the study supports the view that e-marketing increases competitiveness by facilitating the improvement of visibility and a feedback loop of engagement and shows that outcomes depend on organisational capabilities (e.g., analytics, content quality, and skills). Limitations of the study are related to SME concentration, self-reported measures and cross-sectional designs that suggest that the potential future research may use longitudinal research designs that include objective digital measures, which can strengthen causal inference over time.

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