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Tourist-Centric Framework to Align Digital Marketing Strategies in Tourism

Abstract

The study aimed to understand the influence of digital marketing strategy preferences, motivation, and tourists' perceptions of digital marketing tools and their overall satisfaction after using them. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, utilizing a sample of 13 tourism marketers and 401 domestic tourists. The findings led to the development of a framework that helps tourism stakeholders develop digital marketing strategies that align with tourists' needs and expectations and effectively promote tourism destinations. This study argues that by aligning digital marketing strategies with the needs and expectations of sustainable tourists, tourism stakeholders can enhance tourists' experiences, build resilience in the tourism industry, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of tourism. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this paper presents the first tourist-centric framework that aligns digital marketing strategies with the needs and expectations of sustainable tourists. The study enriches existing literature and offers practical guidance for marketers, managers, and policymakers, facilitating the development of effective and efficient digital marketing strategies. The paper suggests directions for future research.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, digital marketing, tourism, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), updated DeLone and McLean Information Systems (D and M IS) success model

1. Introduction

The tourism industry relies on new technologies to lay the foundations for creating sustainable, competitive, innovative, responsible, and inclusive business models. Utilizing technologies in tourism marketing plays a crucial role in developing sustainable pathways for tourism transformation, offering numerous possibilities. Recent macro-level changes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have accelerated innovation and the adoption of new digital technologies in the tourism industry (Shamsi et al., 2021). Likewise, tourism players are investing more time and energy in launching tourism-related platforms and leveraging their benefits to capitalize on the advantages of new technology (Loi & Wong, 2023).

Regarding tourism resilience, digital marketing strategies can enhance customer satisfaction and competitiveness (Ilham et al., 2023) if tourism businesses and destinations develop digital strategies that cater to the evolving needs of customers. Marketers can utilize websites to disseminate accurate and reliable information. The cookie settings on most websites allow marketers to collect travellers' information, which is then used to create personalized promotions. Integrating social networking sites amplifies the impact of websites, making them a flexible and cost-effective solution for delivering tourism information (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021b; Perakakis et al., 2016). However, due to the evolving digital trends impacting tourism, destination marketers must keep abreast with the changes (Loi & Wong, 2023; Miranda et al., 2023). This transformation is concurrent with the shifting needs, desires, preferences, and expectations of tourists.

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Previous studies have mainly focused on the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in influencing consumer behaviour (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2023), the emergence of new marketing paradigms (Pereira, 2019), and technology adoption (Mapeshoane & Pather, 2016; Naseri et al., 2023). Although studies have explored how marketing practices have evolved in response to technological advancements and changes in consumer behaviour, understanding the effects of tourists' digital marketing strategies, preferences, motivations, and perceptions of adopting digital marketing strategies is essential. In this study, we argue that it is also vital for marketers to understand the factors that affect tourists' overall satisfaction after using digital marketing tools and platforms. However, little has been done in this regard thus far.

Despite South Africa's visibility as a tourist destination and the Free State province's high potential to attract more tourists, the destination's online representation remains suboptimal due to challenges in utilizing digital marketing for tourist engagement. The study focuses on domestic tourists' digital preferences, motivations, and needs to bridge the gap between tourists' needs and marketing strategies, providing actionable insights into digital marketing strategies in tourism.

Furthermore, frameworks that advocate for aligning tourists' needs, expectations, and marketing strategies are scarce; hence, there is a need to develop insightful models that align digital marketing strategies with tourists' needs and expectations to build resilience in the tourism industry and contribute to its long-term sustainability. The theoretical foundation for the study is multi-dimensional, combining theories from marketing (Stimulus-Response Model of buyer behaviour) and information systems (Technology Acceptance Model and the updated DeLone and McLean Information System success model) to understand how tourists use digital marketing. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, utilizing a sample of tourism marketers and domestic tourists. The findings provide practical insights into digital marketing strategy preferences, motivations, perceptions, and tourists' satisfaction with digital tools and platforms in the tourism sector. The paper concludes by proposing a framework that can help tourism stakeholders develop digital marketing strategies tailored to meet tourists' needs and expectations and provide valuable insights to stakeholders, such as marketers, managers, and policymakers, on the implications of tourists' preferences, motivations, and perceptions regarding the use of digital marketing. Suggestions for future research are presented in the paper.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Theoretical background

This study adopts the Stimulus-Response Model (S-R-M) of buyer behavior, which is based on four interactive components: stimulus input, communication channels, buyer characteristics, decision process, and purchase outcomes. Different scholars have used the S-R-M to understand the buying behaviour of individual consumers (Kim et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2023). Stimulus input represents initial cues that prompt a consumer's decision-making process. Studies show that online advertisements, social media posts, and digital marketing tools and platforms promote organizations' offerings (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021a; Chang, 2022; Liu et al., 2023), contributing to what is known as "stimuli." As tourists engage with content online, their perceptions and emotions influence their willingness to use digital marketing tools and platforms (Clarence & Keni, 2022).

Previous studies have focused on buyer characteristics that influence how consumers perceive and respond to stimuli, including motivation (Miranda et al., 2023), perceptions (Soto et al., 2020), and needs and wants (Timoshenko & Hauser, 2019). The decision process and purchase outputs represent the steps consumers go through when purchasing, leading to the final purchase or non-purchase outcome, such as intention, purchase behaviour, and post-purchase behaviour. The confluence of the interactive components, underpinned by the S-R-M, forms the essence of effective digital marketing strategies in tourism. Despite S-R-M providing valuable insights into consumer behaviour, the model lacks technology-specific variables. Thus, the study adopts

the Technology Acceptance Model (hereafter referred to as TAM) and the updated DeLone and McLean Information System (M&D IS) success model.

The acceptance of technology by users has been a critical research subject for many years (Naseri et al., 2023). Understanding user acceptability can help businesses chart a course for future development. Initially proposed by Davis, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has been widely accepted (Davis, 1989) and utilized as a fundamental framework for numerous studies to predict consumers' acceptance of new information technologies. Examples include research on the acceptance of new technologies, such as mobile applications (Huang et al., 2019) and social media platforms (Al-Qaysi et al., 2020). This has been studied in various areas, including education (Lin & Yu, 2023), business (Ritz et al., 2019), and tourism (Mathew & Soliman, 2021; Singh & Srivastava, 2019). However, most previous studies focused on consumers' behavioural intention to use the applications. They neglected the structural relationships between customers' perceptions of information quality, system quality, service quality, and satisfaction, as well as the determinants of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). As a result, the updated M&D IS success model has gained traction.

The updated M&D IS success model has gained popularity in studies related to information systems because of its ability to predict information system value and efficacy (DeLone & McLean, 2003). By evaluating the quality dimensions (information, system, and service) that affect subsequent use, the model has successfully developed and evaluated the success of information systems (Çelik & Ayaz, 2022). According to the updated M&D IS success model, evaluating an information system's success requires a more comprehensive and holistic approach. Hence, the model acknowledges that the success of digital technologies is multidimensional and cannot be evaluated by a single factor and that relationships exist between the factors (Nugroho & Prasetyo, 2018). Several studies have found a relationship between quality factors and the intention to use digital technologies, revealing that information quality, system quality, and service quality significantly impact technology use (Albaom et al., 2022).

In previous studies, S-R-M, TAM, and the updated M&D IS success models were incorporated separately to analyze user intention to adopt or actual use of technology. Researchers have advocated for the blending of models, making them no longer a new concept (Liu et al., 2023; Mathew & Soliman, 2021). In response to the call of several scholars who have proposed modifications to the traditional Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), our study carefully integrates the TAM and the updated Model and Theories of IS Success (M&D IS) models as a foundation for developing a theoretical model used in the conceptual framework for aligning tourism-related digital marketing strategies with the needs and expectations of sustainable tourists.

2.2. Hypothesis and research model development

2.2.1. Digital marketing strategy preferences and motivation

Digital tools and platforms are essential to a successful marketing strategy in tourism. Digital marketing strategies act as guides, enticing and inspiring travellers with captivating content (Fu et al., 2024). Previous studies have shown that digital marketing strategy preferences can predict purchase intentions (Clarence & Keni, 2022; Dastane, 2020). Therefore, we hypothesize as follows:

H1: Digital marketing strategy preferences positively influence using (or intention to use) digital marketing tools and platforms.

H2: Motivation positively influences using (or intention to use) digital marketing tools and platforms.

2.2.2. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use

Perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) are key predictors of the adoption and use of new technology. The outcome variables were behavioural intention and technology usage (Scherer & Teo,

2019). Davis (1989) defined perceived usefulness as the degree to which a person believes using a particular system would enhance job performance. Thus, the construct determines whether individuals would perceive the technology as applicable to what they want to do. Perceived ease of use is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system is free from effort (Davis, 1989). The decision to include these variables in this study is based on the fact that previous studies have identified them as antecedents of the intention to use new technologies (Naseri et al., 2023; Ramos de Luna et al., 2023). This implies that a person may be inclined to use certain technologies, such as websites, travel applications, and social media if they are user-friendly. Furthermore, if the technologies are easy to use and navigate, tourists will find them helpful (Singh & Srivastava, 2019). Hence, this study hypothesizes the following:

H3: PU of digital marketing tools and platforms positively influences the use of (or intention to use) digital marketing tools and platforms.

H4: PEOU of digital marketing tools and platforms positively influences the use of (or intention to use) digital marketing tools and platforms.

2.2.3. Quality

This study presents three quality dimensions (information, system, and service quality) as antecedents of overall perceived quality. Information quality is a multifaceted construct encompassing various dimensions: information accuracy, precision, currency, timeliness, format, completeness, and reliability (Alves et al., 2020; Setia et al., 2013). These dimensions collectively define the attributes that shape the ideal outcomes of an information system, exemplified by aspects such as an easily comprehensible tourist itinerary and the provision of personalized information while maintaining data integrity and comprehensiveness (Çelik & Ayaz, 2022).

System quality encompasses an organization's technological system's design, development, maintenance, and infrastructure, focusing on performance and usability factors such as availability, accessibility, creativity, and ease of learning (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). Service quality refers to the support tourists receive from tourism businesses and destinations when utilizing digital marketing tools and platforms and is essential for meeting tourists' expectations (Hung et al., 2016; Tseng & Wei, 2020). To promote destinations while meeting the needs and expectations of tourists, tourism businesses and destinations adopt new technologies, thereby playing a critical role in enhancing the quality of services for tourists (Albaom et al., 2022). When the service quality is good, customers are happy.

Most studies focusing on the adoption and use of technology propose a positive relationship between quality and intention to use (Albaom et al., 2022). Scholars have successfully investigated the positive impact of information quality on the use and intention to use digital technologies in tourism (Lee, 2022), service quality (Dedeke, 2016), and system quality (Masri et al., 2020). Therefore, considering those above, it is feasible to believe that if tourists have the possibility of using digital marketing tools and platforms before, during, and after their travel, they receive updated, timely, and personalized information through platforms that are easily accessible, highly creative, and perceive it as such, they tourists are more prone to adopt digital marketing tools and platforms. Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

H5: Information quality of digital marketing tools and platforms positively influences the use of (or intention to use) digital marketing tools and platforms.

H6: System quality of digital marketing tools and platforms positively influences the use of (or intention to use) digital marketing tools and platforms.

H7: Service quality rendered when using digital marketing tools and platforms positively influences the use of (or intention to use) digital marketing tools and platforms.

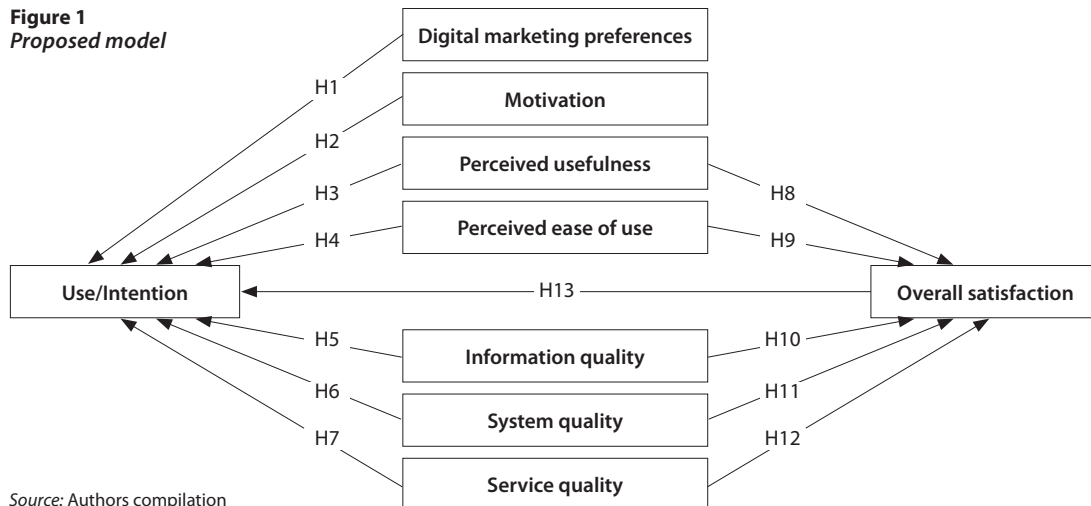
2.2.4. Satisfaction

Satisfaction has been operationalized as the extent to which an individual's IS usage experience fulfils their needs (Liang et al., 2018). Recognizing the importance of satisfaction, numerous studies (Pai et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2022; Soehardi & Thamrin, 2022) have examined its implications and found that usage satisfaction is crucial in predicting repeat purchase intentions, continuance usage intentions, and repurchase intentions. Furthermore, usage satisfaction correlated positively and significantly with usage behavior and was positively and significantly affected by repurchase intention (Ilham et al., 2023; Hung & Khoa, 2022). To ensure the tourism industry's resilience through digital marketing tools and platforms, tourists should be satisfied with their use. Thus, the study's hypotheses are as follows:

- H8:* PU has a significant impact on tourists' overall travel satisfaction after using digital marketing tools and platforms.
- H9:* PEOU has a significant impact on tourists' overall travel satisfaction after using digital marketing tools and platforms.
- H10:* The quality of information significantly affects tourists' overall travel satisfaction after using digital marketing tools and platforms.
- H11:* System quality has a significant impact on tourists' overall travel satisfaction after using digital marketing tools and platforms.
- H12:* Service quality has a significant impact on tourists' overall travel satisfaction after using digital marketing tools and platforms.
- H13:* Tourists' overall travel satisfaction after using digital marketing tools and platforms positively influences their use of (or intention to reuse) digital marketing tools and platforms.

Figure 1 illustrates the research model for predicting tourists' use and intention to use digital marketing tools and platforms, as well as their overall satisfaction after using these tools.

Figure 1
Proposed model



Source: Authors compilation

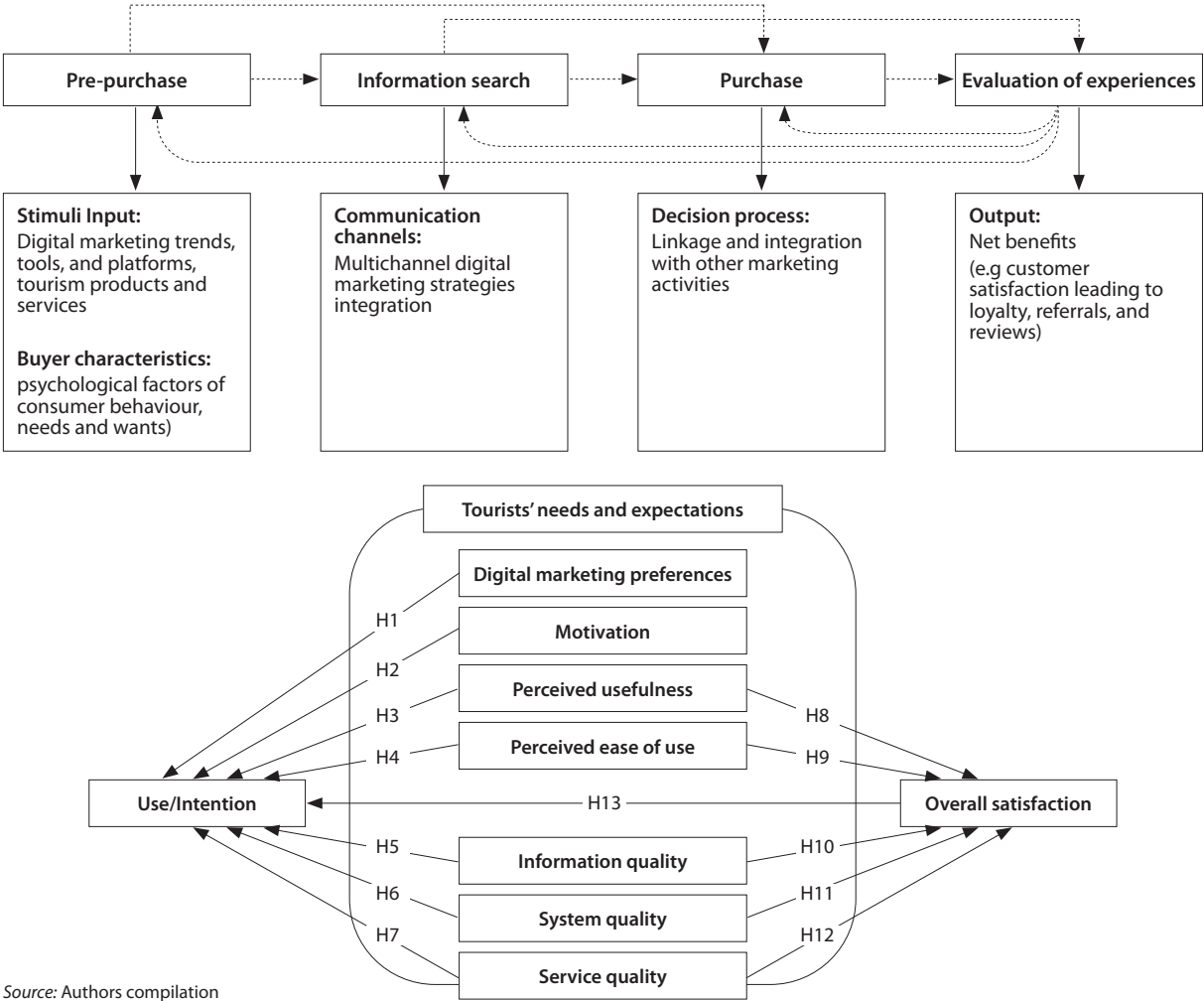
2.3. Conceptual model development

Tourists travel decision-making journey is typically divided into four stages: pre-purchase, information search, purchase, and post-consumption or evaluation of experiences. Traditionally, most information searches for

planning purposes used to take place in the pre-purchase stage, using authoritatively managed physical means such as information visitor centers, travel guides, brochures, flyers, and maps. However, the emergence of the internet has changed tourists' stimuli and sources of travel information (Pemayun & Sunariani, 2022) and enabled tourists to shorten their trip planning lead times and perform ad hoc planning during trips (Loi & Wong, 2023). Tourists are more inclined to participate in sharing their trip experiences (information and advice) through digital marketing tools and platforms during all stages of their travel decision-making journey (Fu et al., 2024). Tourists contribute to the repertoire of information sources they benefit from, forming a sustainable ecosystem (Loi & Wong, 2023).

Tourists' travel decision-making journeys are no longer straightforward. Tourists may stop at any stage of the decision-making process, bypass one or more stages, or even switch back and forth during the decision-making journey. Similarly, after evaluating their experiences, new stimuli can arise, causing new information searches or purchases. This is mainly due to the constant engagement between businesses and customers, as well as customer-to-customer interactions through various digital channels, including emails, social media, websites, and online reviews. Guided by an empirical literature review and theoretical reasoning, this study proposes the conceptual model shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Proposed conceptual framework



Source: Authors compilation

2.4. Methods

2.4.1. Research design, sampling, and data collection

The study area, Free State Province in South Africa, was segregated geographically and according to municipality boundaries. Five strata were identified (Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, Thabo Mofutsanyane, Fezile Dabi, Xhariep, and Lejweleputswa). This study employed a sequential mixed-methods approach. The study utilized the insights gained from the qualitative phase to design the questionnaire for the second stage of the research and to provide further explanations of the quantitative findings.

The first data collection stage involved soliciting data from tourism marketers using semi-structured interviews using an interview guide. The need to gain an in-depth understanding of key digital marketing trends, tools affecting tourism, and digital marketing strategies that effectively influence consumer behaviour from the perspective of tourism marketers was a motivator for employing semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interview guide was formulated based on a literature review and aimed to cover specific topics related to digital marketing strategies and consumer behaviour. The questions were based on stakeholders' perceptions, and the interviewees were selected through stratified purposive sampling from the five municipalities to ensure heterogeneity of views (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) while targeting participants who were willing and likely to possess the required information to meet the study's objectives. All interviewees had more than five years of experience as tourism marketers. In South Africa, tourism requires collaboration among various stakeholders. The government, private sector, and community play a significant role and were represented in the study's interviewees (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). Data saturation was reached at 13 interviews. Table 1 summarizes the interviewees, illustrating the diversity of the sample.

Table 1
Summary of interviewees, n=13

Variable	Value	Frequency	%
Sex	Female	7	53.8
	Male	6	46.2
Age	31-40	7	53.8
	41-50	3	23.1
	51-60	3	23.1
Stakeholder	Provincial government	5	38.5
	Local government	3	23.0
	Private	5	38.5
Position	Marketing Manager	6	46.2
	Senior Marketing Officer	1	7.6
	Marketing Officer	6	46.2

In the second stage, data were collected using questionnaires. The questionnaire was developed based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with tourism marketing experts and a literature review. The survey questionnaire contained questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, as well as those designed to measure the study variables. Variable questions were based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree,' (2) 'disagree', (3) neutral, (4) 'agree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. Table 2 presents the variables and their corresponding indicators.

Table 2
Variables of the research and indicators

Variables	Indicators	Adapted from
Digital marketing strategy preferences	Image-based marketing strategies, text-based marketing strategies, and video-based marketing strategies.	(Breda et al., 2019)
Motivation	Benefits derived from using digital marketing platforms: ease of use, information quality, digital marketing platform quality, and service quality.	(Albayrak et al., 2018; Camilleri & Falzon, 2021)
Perceived usefulness (PU)	Enables convenient trips, enhances the quality of trips, is helpful during trips, allows for instant feedback, and provides ideas for possible next trips.	(Davis, 1989; Singh & Srivastava, 2019)
Perceived ease of use (PEOU)	User-friendly, easy to understand, content is readily and easily available, part of lifestyle, familiarity and flexibility	(Davis, 1989; Singh & Srivastava, 2019; Venkatesh et al., 2003)
Information quality	Comprehensive recommendations based on personal interests, updated, accurate, and reliable.	(Chen & Cheng, 2009; Dedeker, 2016)
System quality	Accessibility, easy to learn, available 24/7, and a high level of creativity.	(Chen & Cheng, 2009)
Service quality	Trustworthy, high chance of getting a response, involvement	(Chen & Cheng, 2009; Dedeker, 2016)
Overall satisfaction	Satisfied with the enhancement of the travel experience, satisfied with the trip, and exceeded expectations.	(Pai et al., 2020)
Use/Intent	Specialized search engines, websites, online sharing economy platforms, blogs, consumer review sites, social network sites, and travel applications.	(Al-Qaysi et al., 2020 ; Dedeker, 2016; Perakakis et al., 2016)

Using convenience sampling based on participants' availability, accessibility, and willingness to participate in the study, the study sample consisted of South Africans and permanent residents over 18 years of age who were travelling to the Free State Province for leisure and were familiar with digital marketing. To avoid missing data in analysis, the surveys were completed in the presence of the research team and immediately checked to ensure all questions were answered. This minimized the number of missing cases and ensured complete data accuracy. After data collection, 401 were validated for analysis. The sample size was deemed statistically and practically significant for the study, as it exceeded the required $n=384$ for a population of 410,000 domestic tourists who visited the Free State Province, according to 2020 tourist data (Stats SA, [Statistics South Africa], 2020). The Free State Province's domestic tourist arrival data and completed questionnaire counts per municipality are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Domestic tourist arrivals and completed questionnaires by municipality

Municipality	Tourist arrivals (N=410000)		Completed Questionnaires (n=401)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality	168920	41.2	165	41.2
Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality	103730	25.3	102	25.4
Xhariep District Municipality	56580	13.8	55	13.7
Fezile Dabi District Municipality	45510	11.1	44	11.0
Lejweleputswa District Municipality	35260	8.6	35	8.7

2.4.2. Assessment of the measurement models

The study examined the normality of all variables against the acceptable values of +3 and -3 for skewness and Kurtosis (Hair et al., 2014; Kline, 2015). As shown in Table 4, Skewness and Kurtosis values ranged from 0.10 to -1.47 and 1.40 to -1.15, indicating that the data in this study conforms to the threshold of the normal assumption. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed, and the results show factor loadings ≥ 0.7 (Table 4), indicating the items' consistency (Hair et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2023), except social network sites, which however was retained because removing it did not increase the reliability significantly (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 4
Descriptive, skewness, kurtosis and factor loadings for construct items

Construct	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Factor Loading (Component)	Factor Loadings
Digital marketing strategy preferences	Text-based marketing strategies	3.56	1.350	-0.523	-0.945	0.680	1.926
	Image-based marketing strategies	3.68	1.367	-0.755	-0.704	0.857	.707
	Video-based marketing strategies	3.63	1.340	-0.618	-0.849	0.854	.367
	Overall	10.87	3.23	-0.625	-0.404		
Motivation	Benefits derived from using digital marketing platforms	4.09	1.142	-1.211	0.617	0.865	3.902
	The ease with which I can use digital marketing platforms.	4.07	1.141	-1.145	0.420	0.901	.379
	The quality of information provided on digital marketing platforms	3.99	1.143	-1.079	0.341	0.909	.296
	The quality of the digital marketing platforms.	3.91	1.178	-0.917	-0.099	0.860	.258
	The quality of the service received when using digital marketing tools	3.93	1.250	-0.953	-0.217	0.882	.165
	Overall	4.00	1.03	-1.172	0.703		
Perceived usefulness	Digital marketing tools and platforms are useful on my trips	4.03	1.192	-1.206	0.516	0.914	3.946
	Digital marketing tools and platforms enhance the quality of my trips	3.94	1.218	-1.042	0.142	0.925	.435
	Digital marketing tools and platforms enable me to have more convenient trips	4.01	1.169	-1.043	0.114	0.919	.304
	Digital marketing tools and platforms allow for instant feedback	3.90	1.238	-0.926	-0.223	0.870	.176
	Digital marketing tools and platforms give me ideas about possible next trips	3.83	1.206	-0.881	-0.127	0.809	.140
	Overall	3.94	1.07	-1.115	0.477		
Perceived ease of use	Digital marketing tools are part of my lifestyle	3.89	1.292	-0.926	-0.926	0.888	4.157
	I find that digital marketing tools and platforms are user-friendly	4.00	1.179	-1.107	-1.107	0.922	.326
	I am familiar with using digital marketing platforms and tools	3.96	1.229	-1.111	-1.111	0.929	.202
	Content can be reached quickly and easily via digital marketing tools and platforms	4.02	1.188	-1.149	-1.149	0.907	.173
	Digital marketing tools and platforms are flexible	3.99	1.261	-1.125	-1.125	0.913	.143
	Overall	3.97	1.12	-1.109	0.213		
Information quality	The information provided is easy to understand	4.14	1.143	-1.471	1.404	0.877	3.834
	The information provided is updated	3.91	1.175	-0.958	0.007	0.871	.432
	The information provided is comprehensive	3.94	1.206	-1.043	0.091	0.921	.304
	The information provided is accurate and reliable	3.89	1.166	-0.947	0.090	0.886	.262
	The information about tourism destinations and services recommended is usually based on my interests	3.83	1.213	-0.895	-0.141	0.821	.167
	Overall	3.94	1.03	-1.230	0.883		
System quality	Digital marketing platforms are available 24/7	4.04	1.269	-1.168	0.177	0.894	3.118
	I can access the information on digital marketing platforms worldwide	4.07	1.247	-1.210	0.315	0.903	.458
	Digital marketing platforms have a high level of creativity	3.88	1.224	-0.921	-0.174	0.880	.257
	Learning to use digital marketing tools and platforms would be easy for me	4.09	1.239	-1.288	0.566	0.854	.167
	Overall	4.02	1.09	-1.251	0.628		

Table 4 (continued)

Construct	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Factor Loading (Component)	Factor Loadings
Service quality	I feel involved when using interactive digital marketing tools	3.90	1.236	-0.973	-0.097	0.880	2.456
	The information provided is trustworthy	3.80	1.233	-0.886	-0.147	0.919	.330
	There is a high chance of receiving a response to an inquiry	3.99	1.199	-1.104	0.251	0.915	.214
	Overall	3.90	1.10	-0.992	0.151		
Overall satisfaction	I am satisfied with my trip	4.10	1.250	-1.315	0.587	0.892	2.367
	I am satisfied that digital marketing tools and platforms helped enhance my travel experience.	3.91	1.224	-0.977	-0.086	0.902	.357
	My visit exceeded my expectations.	3.62	1.301	-0.523	-0.925	0.871	.275
	Overall	3.87	1.12	-1.005	0.089		
Use/Intent	Tourism destination websites and tourism business websites	3.56	1.350	-0.523	-0.945	0.729	3.337
	Specialised search engines (like www.google.com)	3.80	1.367	-0.812	-0.674	0.670	.998
	Blogs	3.14	1.357	-0.100	-1.199	0.747	.675
	Consumer review sites	3.41	1.384	-0.412	-1.125	0.783	.653
	Online-sharing economy platforms	3.13	1.416	-0.147	-1.293	0.713	.495
	Social network sites	3.87	1.291	-0.959	-0.214	0.501	.477
	Travel applications	3.29	1.417	-0.287	-1.273	0.652	.365
	Overall	3.50	0.92	-0.398	-0.487		

The study verified the reliability and sampling adequacy of the measurement scales with the sample (n = 401). Cronbach's Alpha reliability results showed satisfactory internal consistency and reliability levels, with a minimum score of 0.72 (Table 5), indicating that the constructs are reliable. The average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the recommended value of 0.5, indicating excellent convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). The data (Table 6) reported statistically significant KMO (>.92) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (p < .001), hence confirming sample adequacy (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 5
Cronbach's Alpha and Average variance extracted results

Construct	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Digital marketing strategy preferences	3	0.716	0.797
Motivation	5	0.929	0.883
Perceived usefulness	5	0.932	0.726
Perceived ease of use	5	0.949	0.911
Information quality	5	0.923	0.875
System quality	4	0.906	0.882
Service quality	3	0.889	0.905
Overall satisfaction	3	0.869	0.888
Use/Intent	7	0.846	0.685

Table 6
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.907
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3133.937
	df	36
	Sig	<0.001

Results

Demographic characteristics of survey respondents

Table 7
Demographic characteristics of survey respondents (n=401)

Variable	Value	Frequency	%
Sex	Female	222	55.3
	Male	179	44.7
Age	18-30	144	35.9
	31-40	131	32.7
	41-50	67	16.7
	51-60	31	7.7
	Over 60	28	7.0
Monthly income	R1000 and below	85	23.3
	R1001-R5000	56	15.3
	R5001-R10000	39	10.7
	R10001-R15000	50	13.7
	R15001-R20000	47	12.9
	Above R20000	88	24.1
Province of permanent residence	Free State	133	33.2
	Gauteng	116	28.9
	Northern Cape	61	15.2
	Limpopo	25	6.2
	Eastern Cape	22	5.6
	North West	18	4.5
	Kwa-Zulu Natal	11	2.7
	Western Cape	11	2.7
	Mpumalanga	4	1.0

Source: Authors based on fieldwork

2.4.3. Assessment of the structural model

The statistical significance of the variables was examined through regression analysis. The choice was centered on ANOVA's ability to explain the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Balachandran & Tan, 2015). Two models were tested with two dependent and seven independent variables identified. To assess multicollinearity, we analyzed the collinearity statistics of the variables, notably the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance. The obtained tolerance values ranged from 0.219 to 0.624 (Table 8) and 0.237 to 0.324 (Table 9). Tolerance values of less than 0.7 are deemed acceptable, as they indicate no evidence of multicollinearity issues (Balachandran & Tan, 2015). The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value was below five, indicating no collinearity problems (Sohil et al., 2022).

The model (Table 8) explains 76.5% ($R^2=.76.5$) of the variance in tourists' use of/intention to use digital marketing tools and platforms for tourism purposes and is statistically significant ($p<0.001$), with all the eight variables positively influencing tourists' use of/intention to use digital marketing tools and platforms for tourism purposes: Digital marketing preferences have the most significant impact ($\beta=0.760$). In contrast, overall satisfaction has the lowest coefficient ($\beta = .010$).

Table 8
Model 1 results of hypothesis testing H1-H7 and H13

Dependent variable: Use of/Intention								
Goodness of fit: R=0.875, R ² =0.765,			Adjusted R ² =0.760,		Standard error of estimate= 0.445			
Analysis of variance			Df		Sum of squares		Mean square	
Regression			8		246.822		30.853	
Residual			384		75.883		0.198	
F static=156.128								
Significant F=.001								
Hypotheses	Collinearity statistics		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient Beta	t-Value	Sig.	Hypothesis supported?
	Tolerance	VIF	B	Standard error				
Constant: Use of/ Intention			0.611	0.106		5.790	.001	
H1:DMP → Use of/ Intention	0.624	1.602	0.214	0.009	0.760	24.283	.001	Yes
H2:M → Use of/Intention	0.303	3.300	0.101	0.040	0.114	2.538	.012	Yes
H3:PU → Use of/Intention	0.224	4.467	0.119	0.045	0.138	2.637	.009	Yes
H4:PEOU → Use of/Intention	0.249	4.024	0.097	0.040	0.119	2.406	.017	Yes
H5:IQ → Use of/Intention	0.219	4.565	0.079	0.047	0.089	1.691	.042	Yes
H6:SysQ → Use of/Intention	0.284	3.517	0.097	0.038	0.117	2.521	.012	Yes
H7:ServQ → Use of/Intention	0.307	3.254	0.048	0.037	0.058	1.311	.000	Yes
H13:OS → Use of/Intention	0.604	1.656	0.008	0.026	0.010	0.318	.001	Yes

(DMP: digital marketing preferences; M: motivation; PE-perceived usefulness; PEOU-perceived ease of use; IQ: information quality; SysQ: system quality; ServQ: service quality; OS: overall satisfaction)

These findings are consistent with the sentiments expressed by some marketers. Marketers identified three formats as popular in terms of digital marketing strategy preferences that influence tourists' use of digital marketing tools and platforms.

We have adopted differentiated marketing strategies, utilising text and video advertisements to cater to the diverse market and ensure long-term sustainability (Interviewee 8).

The youth are starting to communicate with us more and requesting more pictures. (Interviewee 7).

We had to study the customers and add some pictures. Instead of only having text, we now have videos and even a comment section (Interviewee 13).

When it comes to perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, marketers felt that:

Travel apps are convenient for tourists. They are easy to use and show them where attractions, fuel stations, restaurants, and guesthouses are at the click of a button. (Interviewee 7)

It is noteworthy that tourism marketers consider motivational factors when developing marketing strategies. Interviewees highlighted the importance of tailoring the content to sell the product or destination well:

We keep our customers engaged on our platforms by [means of] posting relevant content constantly. We do not want them to feel like we have ghosted them (Interviewee 5)

Another noted:

When creating content for customers to view or read, the information must be both helpful and engaging. It is not only about using websites, social media, or data analytics but also about creating content that inspires communication customer engagement, and encourages tourists to travel. (Interviewee 12)

Table 9
Model 2 results of hypothesis testing H8-H12

Dependent variable: Overall satisfaction								
Goodness of fit: R=0.627, R ² =0.393,			Adjusted R ² =0.386,		Standard error of estimate= 0.881			
Analysis of variance			Df		Sum of squares		Mean square	
Regression			5		197.042		39.408	
Residual			384		303.703		0.777	
F static=50.736								
Significant F=.001								
Hypotheses	Collinearity statistics		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient Beta	t-Value	Sig.	Hypothesis supported?
	Tolerance	VIF	B	Standard error				
Constant:	Overall		1.112	0.186		5.995	.001	
H8: PU → OS	0.264	3.787	0.145	0.081	0.137	1.787	.075	No
H9: PEOU → OS	0.261	3.833	0.027	0.077	0.027	0.349	.727	No
H10: IQ → OS	0.237	4.212	0.482	0.088	0.444	5.498	.001	Yes
H11: SysQ → OS	0.296	3.380	0.240	0.074	0.235	3.242	.001	Yes
H12: ServQ → OS	0.324	3.082	0.145	0.070	0.143	2.062	.040	Yes

(PU-perceived usefulness; PEOU-perceived ease of use; IQ: information quality; SysQ: system quality; ServQ: service quality; OS: overall satisfaction)

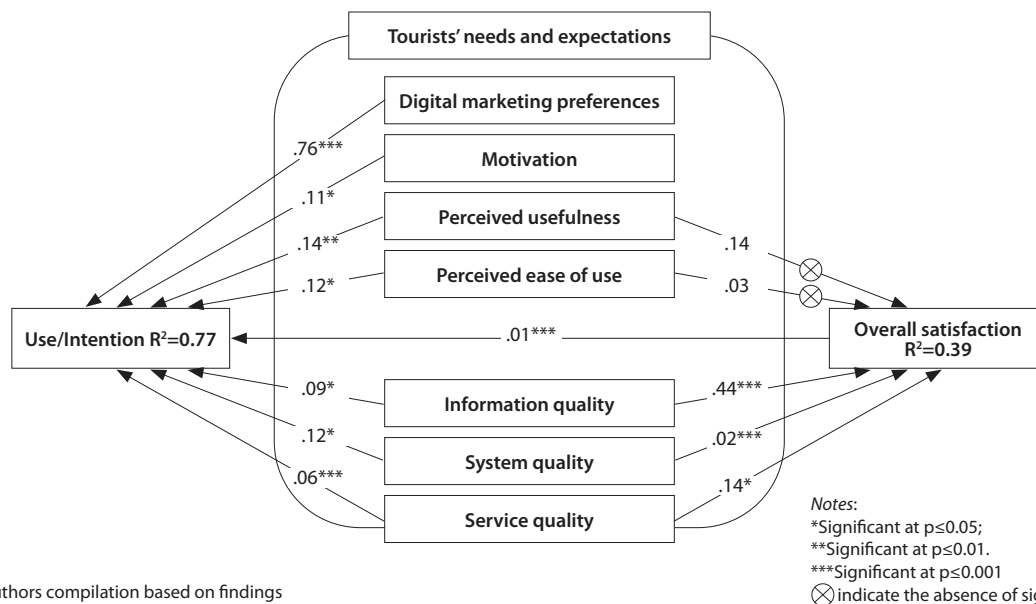
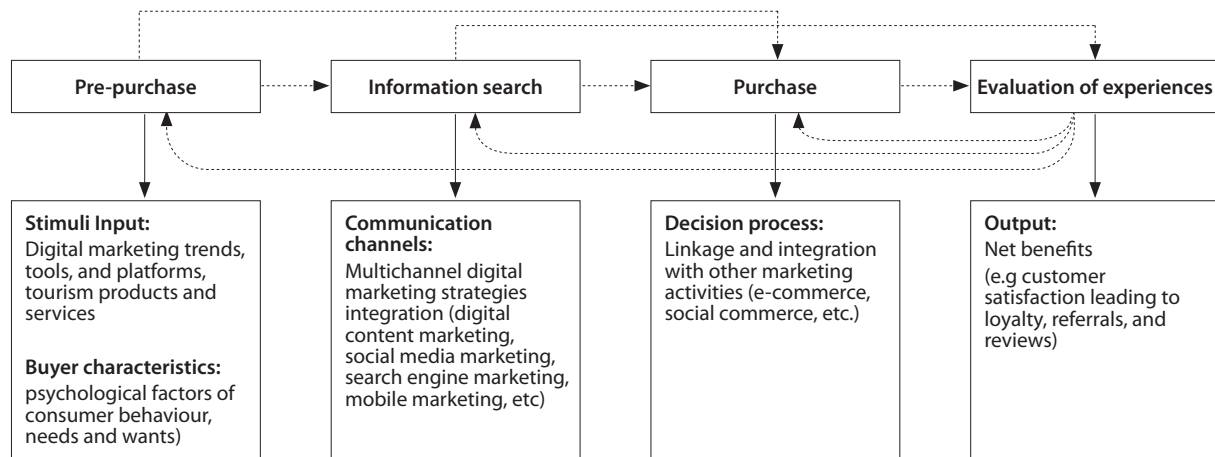
In model 2 (Table 9), five variables were regressed to determine their influence on overall tourist satisfaction. The model explains that 39% (R² = .39) of the variance in tourists' overall satisfaction is accounted for after using digital marketing tools and platforms for tourism purposes. Quality variables that are related to tourists' use or intention to use digital marketing tools and platforms for tourism purposes have shown statistical significance: Information quality ($\beta=0.444$; $t=5.498$; $p<.001$); System quality ($\beta=.023$; $t=3.242$; $p=.001$) and Service quality ($\beta=0.143$; $t=2.062$; $p<.040$).

Regarding quality constructs, one interviewee recommended paying attention to the quality of content, platforms, and services provided to tourists using e-platforms to enhance overall tourist satisfaction.

I also advise my product owners to be cautious about what they post. They want to see their product. When you have a picture, consider five different ways people might view the image.
 (Interviewee 1)

Based on the results of models 1 and 2, hypotheses H1-H7 and H10-H13 were supported, and the paths had positive associations. Although hypotheses H8 and H9 paths had positive associations, they were not statistically significant and could not be supported.

Figure 3
Conceptual framework with tested models



Source: Authors compilation based on findings

Figure 3 shows the developed framework with the tested hypothesis, which advocates for marketers to understand consumer decision-making, stimuli, digital marketing strategies that are effective in influencing consumer behaviour, the psychological factors influencing consumer behaviour and consumer characteristics, the needs and expectations of tourists that destination marketers want to attract and satisfy or preferably, exceed. The developed framework aligns tourism digital marketing strategies with the needs and expectations of tourists.

2.5. Discussion and implications

2.5.1. Discussion

The success of digital marketing strategies relies on tourists adopting digital marketing tools and platforms. With marketers' growing use of videos and images in showcasing tourism destinations (Deng et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023), the study, as illustrated in Figure 3 and Table 8, shows that digital marketing strategy preferences influence the use of and intent to use e-platforms. This aligns with existing studies (Clarence & Keni,

2022; Dastane, 2020) that have found a positive relationship between digital marketing preferences and the use (or intention to use) of digital marketing strategies. Regarding motivation, the study findings support and align with existing literature. Albayrak et al. (2018) and Camilleri and Falzon (2021) suggest that tourists are motivated to use digital marketing due to its convenience, personalized services, information, and services rendered.

The study conducted by Ngoc Su et al. (2023) did not establish a connection between perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use with adoption intention. However, the current study found that PU and PEOU have a positive correlation with the utilization of digital marketing tools and platforms, as noted by other scholars (Davis, 1989; X. Wang & Xu, 2022). In terms of overall satisfaction, the study could not establish a relationship with PU and PEOU, unlike Pai et al. (2020). Possible reasons could be tourists' varying levels of technology adoption and familiarity with digital tools, as well as cultural preferences, which may lead tourists to prefer more localized content.

The findings state that information, system, and service quality affect digital marketing tools and platforms' usage (and intention). This finding aligns with other studies (Dedeke, 2016; Masri et al., 2020), which suggest that information, system, and service quality have a positive relationship with usage and intention. Faced with a proliferation of digital marketing technologies, the study established a positive correlation between tourists' overall satisfaction and the use of (intention to use) digital marketing tools and platforms. The study findings are consistent with those of Acharya et al. (2023) and Pai et al. (2020), who also found a relationship between satisfaction and intention.

2.5.2. Theoretical implications

To the author's knowledge, this study may be one of the first to develop a conceptual framework that aligns digital marketing strategies with tourists' needs and expectations. Consequently, this study advances knowledge and provides insight into consumer behaviour, digital marketing, and technology adoption. By employing a theoretical synthesis approach that combines three distinct theories from marketing (S-R-M) and information systems (TAM and updated M&D IS), the study extends the scope of the S-R-M, the TAM, and the updated M&D IS model better to understand tourists' adoption of digital marketing strategies. Study findings validate the need for cross-disciplinary integration of the multifaceted relationship between tourists, technology, and tourism. The empirical evidence suggests a symbiotic relationship exists between the theoretical constructs of S-R-M, TAM, and the updated M&D IS in the context of digital marketing for domestic tourism in a developing nation.

The study validated two models. The high value ($R^2 = .76$) of Model 1 suggests that the model has high predictive power and can be used to reasonably accurately predict tourists' behavior concerning the adoption of digital marketing tools for tourism purposes. The high R^2 also suggests that the model's independent variables effectively explain a substantial portion of tourists' behaviour, thus contributing to the theoretical understanding of the factors that drive tourists to adopt and use digital marketing tools and platforms for tourism-related activities. The low value ($R^2 = .39$) of model 2 suggests that some missing factors influence tourists' overall satisfaction and require further exploration. This highlights the need for ongoing research to refine the model and delve deeper into the intricacies of tourists' digital tool adoption.

2.5.3. Managerial implications

The study's findings have relevance for academics, tourism marketers, managers, and policymakers. Consumer behaviour is evolving rapidly, with an increasing number of people relying on digital channels for information, communication, and transactions. Several researchers (Arreza, 2021; Mathew & Soliman, 2021; Molinillo et al., 2018) have suggested that destination marketers can utilize the digital arena to personalize information and directly engage with tourists. Visuals are key to catching the attention of digital marketing tools users;

however, basic visuals can lose their appeal over time (Fu et al., 2024). The study acknowledges that tourists' preferences, motivations, and perceptions reflect tourists' expectations of digital marketing strategies. Understanding how strategy preferences resonate with travellers and how these preferences inspire actions, businesses, and destinations can foster deeper connections with potential tourists, ultimately nurturing their desire to explore, engage, and share their experiences.

The findings highlight the impact of digital marketing preferences, motivation, perceptions, and tourist satisfaction on shaping experiences with digital marketing strategies. Tourism businesses and destinations can leverage the study findings to identify trends and adjust their digital marketing strategies to address emerging challenges. The use of digital marketing strategies by organizations in domestic tourism contributes to resilience through enhanced customer engagement and satisfaction. This can reduce dependence on traditional sectors and promote economic, environmental, and social growth, making it a valuable industry for many countries (Mzobe et al., 2022).

Businesses can utilize digital marketing strategies to enhance their resilience and adaptability in the face of unexpected disruptions. The world is experiencing a rapid digital transformation across industries. This transformation has been accelerated by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and global uncertainty stemming from geopolitical tensions, underscoring the need for businesses and organizations to adapt rapidly to changing circumstances. In conclusion, the study's framework has the potential to assist organizations and policymakers in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) by promoting positive contributions such as enhancing tourism resilience (SDG8), fostering innovation (SDG9), promoting sustainable practices in communities (SDG11), and encouraging partnerships for broader sustainability (SDG17).

6. Conclusion

Digital marketing technologies are prevalent across businesses, as technology has revolutionized the field through tools such as AI, data analytics, and automation. The study proposes a tourist-centric framework that aligns tourism-related digital marketing strategies with the needs and expectations of sustainable tourists to build resilience in tourism. Although the study makes some significant empirical findings, it has some limitations that must be acknowledged. Data was collected when, for most people, travelling was still a concern, even though COVID-19 restrictions had been eased. The scope of the study only considered domestic tourists. While the current study was conducted in a developing country, technologies eliminate boundaries for tourists. Moreover, studying digital marketing and consumer behaviour is an ongoing phenomenon. The proposed framework has been empirically validated and can help guide future research, ensuring it builds on existing knowledge. As a result, future research could be extended to include international tourists, helping tourism stakeholders understand the global market and develop effective digital marketing strategies to attract tourists worldwide.

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