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Digital Marketing Strategies and Performance of Tour Operators Supply Chain in the Tourism Industry

Boniface Emmanuel Mwalukasa[1*]

[1]*College of Business Education, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

**Corresponding author email: mwalukasabon@gmail.com*

Abstract

Digital marketing strategies are vital in enhancing the performance of tour operators' supply chains within the tourism sector, increasing visitor numbers, sales, and profit, indirectly affecting the economic growth of a community. The number of international visitors in Tanzania has remained constant at about one million since 2012. This study investigates the effects of digital marketing Strategies on the performance of tour operators' supply chains in Tanzania, guided by the Resource-Based View theory. Employing a convergent parallel mixed-method design, the study includes a sampling frame consisting of 543 tour operators with a sample size of 230 firms. Data collection involved the utilization of both structured questionnaires and interview guides, followed by analysis employing descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modelling. The findings demonstrate a positive significant relationship between digital marketing strategies and tour operators' supply chain performance. The results suggest the integration of Artificial Intelligence into the digital marketing strategies mix to facilitate personalized messaging and enhance analytics. Tour operators need to engage skilled information and communication technology experts and institute continuous training initiatives to increase the quality of their websites and social media platforms ensuring visitors receive updated content to capture the attention of visitors. Attentiveness to visitors' online feedback is crucial for enhancing product and service delivery and tour operators should focus on increasing website traffic. The results are useful to stakeholders in enhancing the promotion of tourism products and services leading to an increasing the number of visitors.

Keywords: Digital marketing strategies, Tourism promotion, Tour operators, Supply chain performance, Artificial Intelligence integration

1. Introduction

Digital marketing strategies play a crucial role in enhancing the performance of tour operators' supply chains within the tourism industry leading to improved efficiency, increasing customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, indirectly affecting the economic growth of a community (Adam et al., 2020). Digital marketing involves the use of information and communication channels (ICT) for marketing activities including creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers (Strauss and Frost, 2014). Digital marketing and supply chain management may help raise individual community awareness of tourism products, increase visibility, attract more customers, and drive business growth (Jermsittiparsert & Srisawat, 2019; Kerdpitak, 2022). Effective and efficient supply chain processes directly affect customer satisfaction, and lead to lower costs, increased customer trust, loyalty, and improved performance, (Wahyuddin et al., 2020). The tour operators supply chain involves various stakeholders involved in organizing and delivering travel packages to customers in the tourism industry including outbound tour operators and destination management companies collaborating to create unique travel packages (González-Torres et al., 2021). In addition, a positive customer experience throughout the supply chain journey, including factors like order fulfillment, transparency, delivery options (Camilleri, 2022), returns and refunds, product quality, communication, personalization, sustainability, inventory management, and continuous improvement, these plays a critical role in influencing customer loyalty and retention rates in e-commerce businesses (Jaiswal & Singh, 2020). The integration of digital marketing strategies into the supply chain operations of tour operators enhances the achievement of sustainable growth and success in the tourism industry (Adam et al., 2020). Scholars have identified various challenges in managing the tour operator supply chain including seasonal fluctuations and unpredictable demand patterns (González-Torres et al., 2021), and disruptions caused by factors such as natural disasters, and geopolitical events (Gössling et al., 2020).

Digital marketing strategies are crucial elements in the tourism industry as tourist destination online content (TDOC) perceptions directly affect the behavior intentions to visit a tourist destination (Mocanu & Szakal, 2024). The tourists' level of satisfaction with their first destination visit and digital marketing interaction channels through which they share experiences affect the repeats (Armutcu et al., 2023). Firms are adopting a digital marketing mix which is an online marketing strategy to position their products and services in the niche market including social media marketing, search engine optimization, content marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing, mobile marketing, and affiliate marketing as most sought after digital marketing strategies (Kumar, 2021). Mobile marketing strategies play an important role in the online advertising of companies by enabling reaching the targeted audience through mobile devices, requiring ongoing monitoring and updates for developing effective mobile websites that are compatible with mobile devices, with creative content (Efendioğlu, 2023; Tong et al., 2020).

The right mix of suitable mobile marketing channels is very essential to designing a successful mobile campaign to obtain an adequate return on investment as well as customer retention (V. Kumar & Mittal, 2020). (Dahiya and Gayatri, 2017) found that the use of search engine marketing increased visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs) through search engine optimization by ranking the tour operator's website higher than others and facilitating visitors in making an informed decision. Artificial intelligence systems (AI) like chatbots and virtual assistants support digital marketing strategies in data analysis, predictability, personalization, and automation help in delivering more tailored content to the targeted audience, enabling users to experience customized experiences based on their interests, and enhancing customer satisfaction (Khatri, 2021).

Digital marketing platforms such as TripAdvisor, booking.com, Airbnb, and YouTube provide an opportunity for travelers and tourists who have reached their destination to share their testimonies or express feelings about the trip (Imani, 2021). Fotis, Buhalis, and Rossides (2008) noted that online travelers reviews allow instant feedback from travelers by sharing their experience after using the products or services. Pabel and Prideaux, (2016) added that online reviews in virtual communities provide consumer and travel partners with a global platform with rich consumer content, price comparison tools, online reservations, and related services for destinations, and experience based on the scores of those who previously visited a particular destination. The performance of tour operators can be affected by destination marketing using various digital marketing tools to attract customers (Velentza & Metaxas, 2023; Zaidan, 2017). In addition, quality and user-friendly accessibility of online information influence tourists' level of satisfaction, and the digital marketing interaction channels positively affect their repeat visits (Armutcu et al., 2023). Thus, the success of digital marketing strategies employed by tourism marketers depends on tourists' use and adoption of tourism digital marketing tools and platforms (Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2023). Choosing the right digital marketing tools helps to enhance the firm marketing efforts and spend less on advertisement costs (Angeloni & Rossi, 2020; Eleanor, Cranmer et al., 2020). As the tourism industry uses various online platforms, and the way tourists search and purchase tourism products and services tourism changes, tour operators need to understand how tourists find information (Almeida-santana & Moreno-gil, 2017) and to find effective marketing tools and strategies that contribute to the maximization of profit (Adam et al., 2020; Angeloni & Rossi, 2020). The identification and selection of appropriate digital marketing strategies are essential because not all strategies are universally suitable for every business. Some strategies may be costly in terms of time or financial resources while others may no longer provide significant benefit to the organization (Mocanu & Szakal, 2024)

World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index ranks Tanzania first in Africa and twelves in the worldwide for the quality of its nature-based tourism resources (IMF, 2023). However, the expected increase in the number of visitors has not been realized as more than one-third of visitors heard about Tanzania through friends and relatives (43.6%), followed by tour operators and travel agents (34.0%), travel advisory 2.0%, newspaper, magazines, brochures (1.8%), internet/websites (9.4%) and others (9.2%). (United Republic of Tanzania (URT), 2022). This raises the need for more efforts to promote tourism effectively utilizing digital marketing strategies to improve the performance of tour operators' supply chains by attracting more visitors, increasing sales, and improving profits (Bacsi et al., 2023).

The main objective of the study is to investigate the effects of digital marketing strategies on the performance of tour operators' supply chains.

The specific objectives of the study are:

i. To identify the digital marketing strategies used by tour operators in the tourism industry.
ii. To examine the effects of digital marketing strategies on the performance of tour operators' supply chains.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

Barney founded the Resource-based View (RBV) theory in 1991. Barney argued that sustainable competitive advantage could be achieved by developing and using resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non – substitutable (Barney, 1991). In the context of tour operators, digital marketing strategies are valuable intangible

resources that can improve operational efficiency and customer satisfaction, and ultimately lead to improved supply chain performance. The theory allows for the examination of how digital marketing capabilities, such as SEO, social media marketing, content marketing, and online reviews management, create competitive advantages for tour operators by enhancing their visibility, engagement with customers, overall brand image, and improved supply chain performance. Moreover, it provides a framework to understand how these digital resources interact with other tangible and intangible resources within the supply chain to deliver superior customer experiences, maximize operational efficiency, and achieve long-term profitability (Adam et al., 2020).

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Tour operators' supply chain is a complex network of relationships and processes aimed at delivering travel services efficiently and involves interaction with various entities such as dealing with accommodation, transportation providers, Catering and Food Services, and attractions to create comprehensive travel packages for consumers (Slusarczyk et al., 2016). The packages are then marketed and sold to travelers through different channels like online platforms (Tigu & Calareţu, 2013). Tour operators significantly influence and promote sustainable tourism development due to their central distribution role and capability to direct tourists to destinations and suppliers (Ariya et al., 2021; Sigala, 2008).

Digital marketing strategies are essential in the tourism industry by facilitating the delivery of promotional market information to visitors using various online marketing tools including social media marketing, mobile advertising, email marketing, and search engine marketing (Batinić, 2015; Bhandari and Bansal, 2018), and assists in increasing international tourists arrivals (Mkwizu, 2019). Social Media Marketing on platforms like Facebook and Instagram plays a crucial role in reaching a bigger audience, engaging with customers in real time, and sharing valuable information with followers (Amelia et al., 2023; Ming & Yazdanifard, 2014). Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017) established that social media plays a critical role in influencing the visitor's decision-making process. As (Duffett, 2015) points out, social media advertising using Facebook has a positive influence on behavioral attitudes which increases the customer's intention to purchase, and influences visitors' decision-making process, starting from recognition of the needs, searching for information, alternative evaluation, making the final buying decision, and post - buying behavior (Prasad et al., 2014; Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017). Social network platforms like Facebook and Twitter facilitate research in a more personalized way to develop products that enhance customer experience at low cost (Nuseir et al., 2023).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) enhances website visibility by making it easier for visitors to be able to locate the firm given the number of rivals (Almukhtar et al., 2021; Jermsittiparsert & Srisawat, 2019) and benefits in terms of advertisement, publicity, and sales (Almukhtar et al., 2021). Using an email marketing strategy enables tour operators to connect with customers by collecting email addresses, segmenting email lists, and sending personalized messages with special offers and travel updates (Thomas et al., 2022). Emails from tour operators can be promotional in nature, aimed at driving short-term procurement or relational, focusing on customer relationship management (CRM) and brand-building objectives. Emails are also sent when customers have opted in to receive alerts and notifications (Thomas et al., 2022). Utilization of content marketing aids in creating and sharing valuable content online, to attract and engage potential customers through various mediums such as blog posts, videos, infographics, and social media posts to build brand identity (Sunarso et al., 2023).

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) employs paid search results to get quick rankings on search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo (Toktaş, 2020). Dahiya and Gayatri (2017) point out that the usage of search engine marketing (SEM) increases visibility in search engine result pages (SERPs) through search engine optimization by ranking the tour operator's website higher than to others and facilitating visitors making an informed decision. Increased use of websites for smartphones and other mobile devices leads, to more frequent contact between the brands and consumers where interactions happen anytime, and anywhere (Kumar & Mittal, 2020). Velentza and Metaxas (2023) stated that the website should have a map with the location of the business and, a company profile on Google, compatible with all desktop and mobile devices. Creating a website with eye-catching designs, high-quality images, infographics, videos, act accommodation listings, travel guides, and informative content helps to attract visitors and keep their attention (Obednikovska et al., 2019).

The integration of AI with marketing strategies enables the processing of massive amounts of information, identifies trends, predicts customer behavior (Khatri, 2021), leads to significant advancements in personalized messaging, enhances analytics, and more effective marketing strategies (Efendioğlu, 2023). Employing appropriate analytical techniques, online reviews play a crucial role in visitors' decision-making process and offer tour operators valuable strategic information about business performance (Oliveira et al., 2020). Similarly, Pabel and Prideaux (2016) underscore the significance of traveler's references and online reviews within virtual communities like TripAdvisor provide visitors and their partners with a global platform with a global platform with consumer generated-content, price comparison tools, online reservations, and related services, and access to reviews on local tourism attractions (Hasni et al., 2022).

Monitoring and responding to customer reviews and social media comments is essential to maintaining a positive online reputation, and retaining customers (Oliveira et al., 2020, 2022). Tichaawa et al. (2017) observed that tour operators have to utilize digital marketing systems strategically in the area of improving their company's image. Previous studies (Khan, 2016; Renu and Sharma, 2016) have shown that vulnerability to fraudulent activities as among the biggest challenges in digital marketing as hackers can steal visitors' money and confidential data. As stated by (Mwenegoha, 2016), the existing consumer protection laws are inadequate and insufficient to protect consumers and have not foreseen the problems brought about by advances in technology such as AI. Technological innovation enhances security and privacy mechanisms and improves tour operators' performance (Kumar & Mittal, 2020).

According to Neely *et al.*(2005), performance measurement is the process of measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of tour operators. It provides important information for monitoring progress in terms of profit and market shares by comparing firms in the same industry. As Moses (2015) states, the scale used to measure perceived firm performance correlates positively and has a strong association with objective performance measures such as financial indicators. Performance perceptual measurement was used in the current study to assess the performance of tour operators in terms of profitability. Strategic management of online presence, allows tour operators to reach targeted audience and attract customers, increase brand visibility, engage with their target audience effectively (Tichaawa et al., 2017), differentiate themselves in a competitive market, and ultimately increase sales and meet the evolving needs of modern tourists (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Nuseir et al., 2023).

2.3 Conceptual Framework

This study used the theoretical and empirical literature review to develop a conceptual framework. The independent variable digital marketing was measured using indicators of online advertisement through the website, social media marketing, and creative content marketing to increase international tourist arrivals (Armutcu et al., 2023; Mkwizu, 2019; Nguyen & Yang, 2016; Velentza & Metaxas, 2023). The dependent variable performance was measured by profitability, an increase in sales, and ROA.

Measurement: variables were captured by a 5-point Likert scale where: 1 = not used at all, 2 = least used, 3 = sometimes used, 4 = used, 5 = Most used. Adopted from (Moses, 2015).

The performance of tour operators was measured by an increase in profitability, an increase in sales revenue, and ROA using a 5-point Likert scale of 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = neutral, 4 = good, and 5 = very good.

Indicators for the identified constructs in the conceptual framework were adopted from literature (Mirkó Gáti, 2015; Mkwizu, 2019; Pervan et al., 2017) with modifications that fit the current study.

3. Materials and Methods

In this study, a convergent parallel mixed method design was employed, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, but analyzed separately and the overall results were obtained by integrating qualitative and quantitative results to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). Incorporating the survey design allows generalization from the sample and greater flexibility in terms of time and the economy in conducting the study (Hair *et al.*, 2003).

3.1 Study Location

Most of the areas in Tanzania have different tourist attractions and activities; thus, the study was conducted in Arusha, Dar es Salaam, and Zanzibar. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Tanzania's Mainland has more wildlife activities as compared to Zanzibar which has more beach activities (NBS, 2017). Also, both Arusha and Dar es Salaam have the largest number of tour operators (Tanzania Tourist Board [TTB], 2017).

3.2 The Population of the Study

The population consisted of 649 registered tour operators in Tanzania with experience of at least one year. According to the Tanzania Tourist Board, there are about 602 registered tour operators in Tanzania Mainland, and 47 in Zanzibar (TTB, 2017; Zanzibar Association of Tour Operators [ZATO], 2018). The sampling frame was comprised of 543 tour operator firms in Arusha, Dar es Salaam, and Zanzibar, with 401 tour operator enterprises in Arusha, 95 in Dar es Salaam, and 47 in Zanzibar.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

Stratified sampling was employed, where the sampling frame was divided into three strata: Arusha, Dar es Salaam, and Zanzibar. Proportionate stratified random sampling was calculated, and the sample was selected using simple random sampling in each stratum. The working sample size of 230 respondents was determined using the formula provided by Yamane, (1967), and proportional allocation was calculated. The selection of tour operator firms to participate in the current study was done by using a simple random sampling method. (Hair *et al.*, 2010) suggest a

sample size in the range of 100 and 400 as sufficient to provide sufficient statistical power for data analysis in the SEM approach.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The survey method used to capture quantitative data from the respondents, using the 5-point Likert scale; a structured questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions was used for the selected respondents in the sample size. Semi-structured interview method was used to collect qualitative data through an interview guide comprised of 15 open-ended questions.

3.5 Pilot Test

To test for face validity managers or owners - managers of 10 tour operator firms were requested to complete the questionnaire and evaluate the clarity, length, and level of difficulty, wording, and any other problem. A minimum sample of 10 respondents is considered adequate to identify any weakness of the questionnaire (Fink, 2003). The questionnaire was corrected to make it simpler and clearer.

3.6 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Statistical Package for Social Sciences used to process the numerical data from the questionnaire items ready for interpretation.

SEM is a statistical approach that simultaneously estimates the multiple regression equations in a single framework (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Previous studies (Cunningham et al., 2017; Pervan et al., 2017) have used SEM as it allows precise estimation of direct and indirect effects of the exogenous variables (independent variables) on all endogenous variables (dependent variables). SEM SPSS-AMOS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences with Analysis of Moment Structure) was used to determine the factor relationships and correlations.

3.7 Qualitative Data Analysis

The analysis began with transforming recorded interviews into interview transcripts, which were then imported into NVivo 10 as sources. Coding was done by creating nodes to organize the materials according to specific themes. Data analysis and coding continued until reached saturation point, meaning no new themes emerged. The findings are summarized into two major themes describing the findings of qualitative data analysis in narratives. The main themes include digital marketing strategies usage and performance.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

Out of 230 questionnaires distributed to respondents, 213 were correctly filled, and returned, resulting in a response rate of 92.6 percent as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Response Rate

Region	Targeted Respondents	Successful Respondents	Response Rate (%)
Arusha	170	159	93.5
Dar es Salaam	40	37	92.5
Zanzibar	20	17	85.0
	230	213	92.6

As Rubin and Babbie (2008) stated, a response rate of at least 50 percent is considered adequate for analysis and reporting, while a response rate of at least 60 percent is considered good, and a response rate of 70 percent is very good. This implies that the achieved response rate was sufficient to facilitate the analysis and reporting.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted in Table 2, which shows 82 (38.5%) owners and 131 (61.5 %) managers. This suggests that the respondents were personnel directly involved in decision-making within their respective firms and were familiar with ICT issues in tourism. Moreover, the data indicate that 166 (77.9 %) of the respondents were males and 47 (22.1 %) were females. The results indicate male dominance in the tour operators' business, suggesting a need to encourage women to participate in the tour operator business.

In terms of age, the majority of respondents were aged between 31 to 60 (87.8%) years. On the other hand, tour operators' owners or managers of age above 60 years constituted only (0.9%), representing the smallest group of owners. The findings suggest that the majority of surveyed tour operators were owned, managed by middle - age adults, implying that they are capable of coping with ICT advancement.

The results further indicate that approximately a quarter, 58 (27.2 %), of the respondents had a Diploma. The rest, 56 (26.3 %), were undergraduate holders, 42 (19.7 %) certificate holders, 41 (19.0 %) had completed secondary and high school, while 15 (7.4 %) had completed postgraduate studies. These results demonstrate that the majority of the respondents had a reasonable education level to enable them to use ICTs and marketing strategies in their business (Al-Mamary, 2022). Scholars (Kusumaningtyas and Suwarto, 2015) found differences in ICT usage based on demographic factors such as age, and education level. According to (Aramide et al., 2015; Neves, 2011), age and education levels are the main predictors of ICT usage. Similarly, (Mokaya, 2012) noted that the level of education and knowledge significantly affect ICT adoption in small enterprises in Kenya.

The results also indicate that one-third of the respondents, 74 (34.7 %) had 6 to 10 years of experience in the tourism business. 49 (23 %) had 1 to 5 years of experience, 49 (23 %) had 11 to 15 years of experience, 23 (10.8 %) had more than 21 years of experience. However, only 18 (8.5 %) had 16 to 20 years of experience. These findings demonstrate that the majority of tour operator owners/managers had a considerable experience in the tourism business.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Item	**Frequency (N = 213)**	**Percent (%)**
Managerial Position		
Owners	82	38.5
Managers	131	61.5
Gender		
Male	166	77.9
Female	47	22.1
Age of Owner/Manager		
20 – 30	24	11.3
31 – 40	92	43.2
41 – 60	95	44.6
61 – above	2	0.9
Education Level		
Secondary/high school	42	19.7
Certificate	42	19.7
Diploma	58	27.4
Undergraduate	56	26.2
Postgraduate	15	7.0
Years of Experience in Business		
1 – 5	49	23.0
6 – 10	74	34.7
11 – 15	49	23.0
16 – 20	18	8.5
21 and above	23	10.8

4.3 Services Offered by Tour Operators

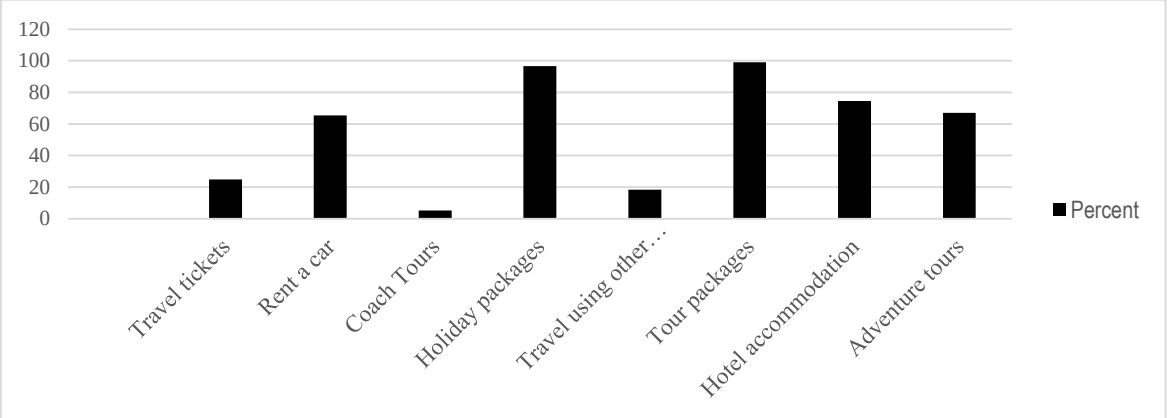

Figure 1: Services Offered by Tour Operators

Figure 1 illustrates that tour packages (99.1%) and holiday packages (96.7%) were the most commonly offered services by the majority of tour operators in the study area. Other services included hotel accommodation (74.6%), adventure tours (67.1 %), car rentals (65.3%), and travel tickets (24.9%). However, coach tours (5.2%) and travel using other modes (18.3%) were among the least provided services. This indicate that the majority of tour operators provide homogeneous products to their clients.

4.4 Types of Social Media Used

The respondents were asked whether they use the outlined types of social media and to rate the extent of usage in their organizations. The findings are shown in Figure 2.

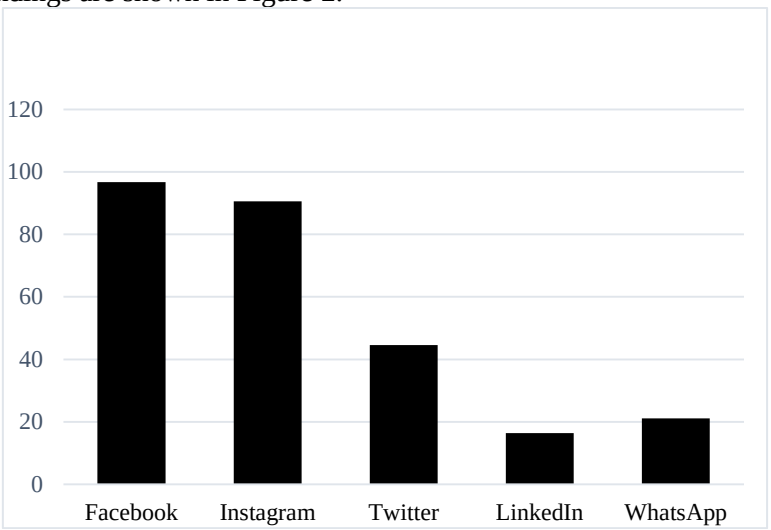

Figure 2: Types of social media used by tour operators

Figure 2 illustrates that Facebook (96.7% %) and Instagram (90.6 %) are the most commonly used social media platforms by tour operators. Others include Twitter (44.6 %), and WhatsApp (21.1 %), while LinkedIn (16.4 %) was the least preferred social media platform. The reasons for the majority of tour operators to use Facebook and Instagram may include ease of use, very low cost, availability of applications, and ease of access by visitors.

The results of Dehghani and Tumer (2015) showed that the usage of Facebook for advertising significantly affected the brand image and brand equity, contributing to a significant change in the purchasing intentions of consumers by offering interactivity to users. In another study, Ana and Istudor (2019) found that the young generation prefers looking at pictures and videos making Instagram popular among the youth. In addition, Masele and Magova, (2017) found that perceived usefulness, ease of use, and trustworthiness were the predictors of social media usage. Thus, effective utilization of social media can increase the sales of products and services and consequently increase in the profitability of tour operators.

4.5 Applications of Digital Marketing Strategies by Tour Operators

The tour operators were asked to state whether digital marketing strategies tools were practiced in any of the outlined activities and to what extent they are used.

The findings in Figure 3 illustrate that the social networking engagement strategy has a very high mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 4.42), suggesting that using social networks to expand business networks with visitors is perceived as highly effective in digital marketing. Email marketing is also rated very high ($\bar{x}$ = 3.98) implying that sending commercial communications via email to databases of potential customers is perceived as a very effective digital marketing strategy. Affiliate marketing strategies is rated relative high ($\bar{x}$ = 3.9) indicating that partnering with other companies that promote tourism products or services in exchange for a commission on sales is considered as effective digital marketing strategy. Mobile marketing is rated relatively high ($\bar{x}$ = 3.8), suggesting that engaging consumers on mobile devices is perceived as effective in digital marketing. Search engine optimization (SEO) is rated relatively high ($\bar{x}$ = 3.6), indicating that using SEO to promote the tour operators' website to be seen before others in search results is considered as effective. Content marketing is rated ($\bar{x}$ = 3.4) by respondents indicating that using content marketing to deliver high-quality content through blogs, websites, forums, and videos is considered effective in reaching consumers.

The findings in Figure 5.4 also revealed that paid advertising for web visibility has a moderate rating ($\bar{x}$ = 2.8), suggesting that promoting the website by increasing its visibility in search engine results pages (SERPS) through paid advertising is not very high effective as some tour operators don't use this strategy. The use of AI driven predictive analytics to influence visitors' decision-making and personalized experiences is low (($\bar{x}$ = 0.5), implying that AI is not perceived by responded as one of the very effective elements of digital marketing strategies, which could be due to

lack of training. In the tourism market, the new digital environment and the use of social media show that tour operators must adopt new approaches and establish new marketing strategies such as integrating AI in digital marketing strategies (Efendioğlu, 2023; Khatri, 2021; Velentza & Metaxas, 2023)

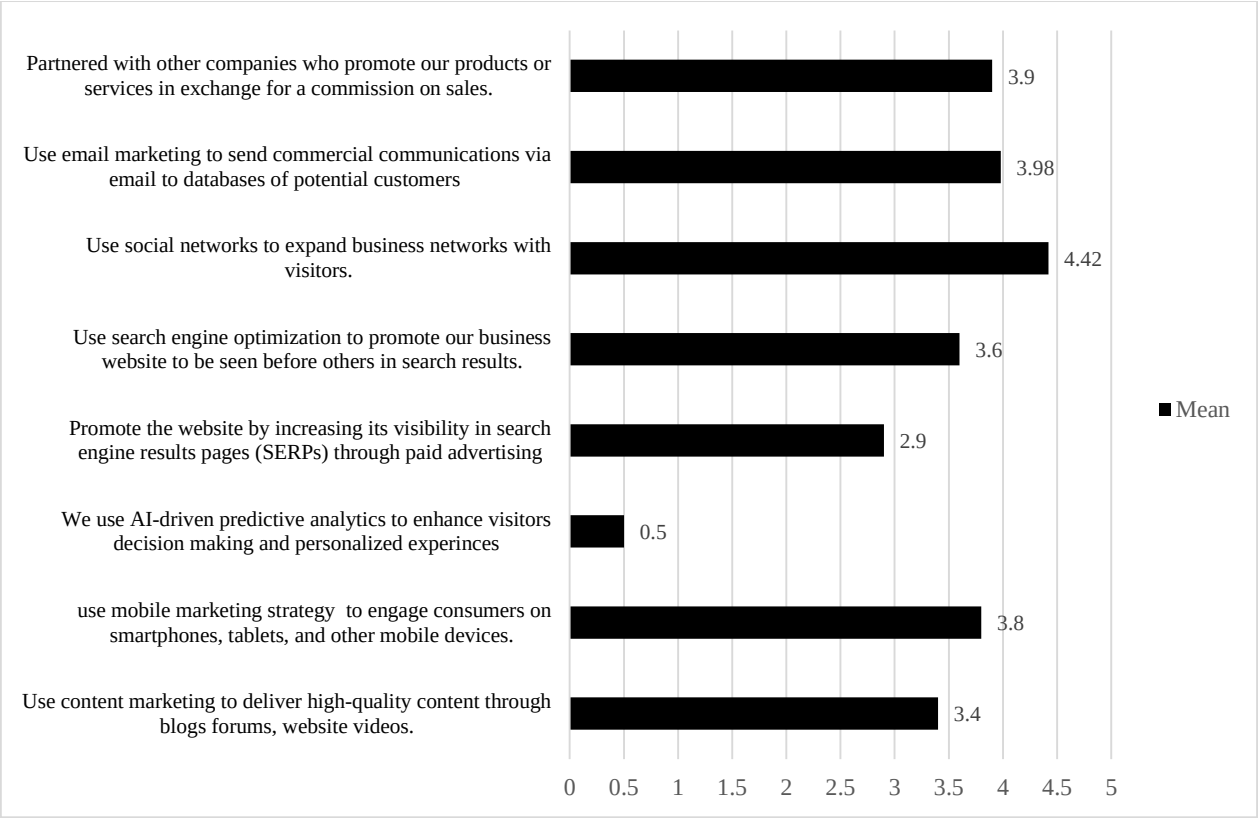

Figure 3: Applications of Marketing Strategies Tools by Tour Operators

4.6 Results of the Inferential Analysis

SEM is a confirmatory method providing a comprehensive means for validating the measurement model of latent constructs. The measurement model was used to assess the items' internal consistency, and reliability (Byrne, 2010; Hair *et al.*, 2010). In this study, CFA run using IBM SPSS Amos version 20.0 as indicated in Table 3.

The computed pooled measurement model fit indices indicate the chi-square=5.289, GFI=0.95892, and CFI = 0.972, which met the required threshold of 0.9 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). As the tests of goodness of fit indices (GOF) were above the recommended values, the current measurement model fit the sample data reasonably well.

Table 3: CFA Results on Composite Reliability (CR), (AVE)

Constructs	Factor loadings	AVE
Performance	0.924	
	0.956	
	0.813	0.809
Digital marketing strategies	0.722	
	0.731	
	0.78	0.563

4.7 Assessing the Validity and Reliability of a Measurement Model

The result as shown in Table 3 indicates that all AVE were greater than 0.5, which indicates good convergent validity. The Cronbach's alpha used to compute the internal reliability of each item of the performance and digital marketing constructs.

According to Hair et al. (2010), the alpha of 0.7 to 1.0 suggests a high level of internal reliability. The reliability test performed using SPSS version 20.0. The Cronbach's alpha values for the digital marketing and performance variables were 0.785 and 0.925 respectively, which were above 0.7 an acceptable level of internal reliability. The findings suggest that all the measures were internally consistent which means they measure the concepts well.

4.8 Testing the Structural Model

The statistical significance of the path coefficient was assessed using a bootstrap procedure with 1000 as suggested by (Moses, 2015; Silva, 2013). Therefore, multiple samples of the same size as the parent sample were drawn randomly, with replacement, from the population, and provided data for empirical investigations (Byrne, 2010). The model explained 20 percent of the variance in the performance of tour operators and was above the threshold of 10 percent for being meaningful as suggested by (Falk and Miller, 1992).

4.8.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS version 20 to identify and reducing the large into few numbers of measuring items that cluster together in measuring a variable (Hair et al., 2010).

4.8.2. Appropriateness of Data for Factor Analysis for Digital Marketing Strategies Usage Variables

Factor analysis requires an adequate sample size and sufficient correlation between variables. To meet the requirements two tests were performed namely Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) to determine whether the sample size for digital marketing strategies usage items was adequate and Bartlett's test to determine the existence of correlation among items measuring (see Table 4).

Table 4: Digital Marketing Strategy Usage - KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Results**.**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		**0.779**
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	866.492
	df	55
	Sig.	0.000

The findings in Table 4 show the results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling adequacy of 0.779 indicating that the sample size was adequate as it was above the threshold of 0.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2014). Bartlett's test of sphericity result gives a Chi-square = 866.492, with a degree of freedom df of 55, $p < .05$, which suggests that there are some correlations between the test variables of electronic payment usage.

4.8.3. Factor Extraction for Digital Marketing Usage Variables

Factor extraction was performed to determine the number of variables to be retained for rotation. The Eigenvalue rule used to give the number of factors that give the most interpretable solution. Variables with Eigenvalue higher than 1 as a rule of thumb are likely to represent a real variable. Other factors with less than 1 Eigenvalue are considered weak factors as they have low Eigenvalue quality scores.

The results presented in Table 5 revealed the presence of three components or variables with Eigenvalues exceeding 1 explaining 35.593%, 15.29%, and 11.03% of the variance, respectively. The final factor analysis results confirmed the presence of three digital marketing strategies variables: website digital marketing, social media marketing, and creative content marketing strategies.

Table 5: Total Variance Explained by the Factors of Digital Marketing Strategies Usage

Vari-	**Initial Eigenvalues**			**Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings**		
ables	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	3.915	35.593	35.593	2.677	24.336	24.336
2	1.682	15.291	50.884	2.426	22.055	46.390
3	1.213	11.031	61.915	1.708	15.524	61.915

4.8.4. Communalities after Extraction for Digital Marketing Strategies Usage Variables

Communalities give information on how much each indicator or item contributes to measuring the respective variables such as perceived security, transaction procedures and regulatory environment. A value of less than 0.3 indicates that the item does not contribute much in measuring a given variable, it is a useless item that needs to be removed (Pallant, 2007; Schütz, 2011).

Table 6: Communalities after Extraction for digital marketing strategies Usage

Items	**Initial**	**Extraction**
Website marketing strategy	1	0.801
Social media marketing strategy	1	0.533
Content marketing strategy	1	0.681

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 6 shows that all the items' contributions after extraction were between 0.374 and 0.802, that is all were above the threshold of 0.3. The findings suggest that the test items contribute well in measuring their respective variables and none of the variables needs to be excluded in further analysis.

4.8.5. Factor Rotation for Digital Marketing Strategies

The factor rotation component matrix shows the arrangement of items loading to their respective three variables or components. This helps in understanding which items measure which variable or factor.

Table 7: A Rotated Component Matrix for Electronic Payment Usage

	Component
Items	**Electronic payment**
Website marketing strategy	0.753
Social media marketing strategy	0.688
Content marketing strategy	0.619

The results in Table 7 indicate that all the factor loadings are greater than 0.5, thus each item measuring digital marketing strategies usage is strongly associated with its respective variable. A variable, factor, or component represents what its items have in common.

4.8.6. Appropriateness of Data for Factor Analysis for Performance of Variables

The suitability of the performance data for factor analysis was determined by assessing the adequacy of sample size, and the presence of sufficient correlations between performance variables. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) employed to assess the sampling adequacy for factor analysis. A KMO value greater than 0.6 indicates that the sample size was adequate and the data supports the use of factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). Additionally, Bartlett's for sphericity tested the existence of correlation among items measuring performance (see Table 8).

The results in Table 8 indicate that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.676 which exceeds the recommended value of 0.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2014) suggesting that the sample size is adequate for factor analysis. Therefore, the sample size was adequate and the data supports the use of factor analysis. Additionally, the results reveal that Bartlett's test of sphericity gave a chi-square value of 608.870, with df of 3, a p-value <.05, indicating sufficient correlations among the test variables of performance (Hair et al., 2010). The results affirm the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis

Table 8: KMO and Bartlett's Test for Performance Variables

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		**0.676**
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	608.870
	df	3
	Sig.	0.000

4.8.7. Factor Extraction for Performance Variable

The eigenvalues method was employed to determine the number of variables to extract as illustrated in Table 9. According to Hair et al. (2010) and Pallant (2007), factors with eigenvalues greater than one (E>1) should be considered for the extraction of factors.

Table 9: Total Variance Explained for Performance of Tour Operators

Component	**Initial Eigenvalues**			**Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings**		
	Total	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative%**	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	2.547	84.898	84.898	2.547	84.898	84.898
2	0.399	13.290	98.189			
3	0.054	1.811	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Principal components analysis revealed the presence of one component with an eigenvalue exceeding 1, explaining 84.898% of the variance, as shown in Table 9. The results suggest the retaining of one variable for further investigation as the variable contributes the most to the explanations of financial performance in the dataset.

4.8.8. Communalities after Extraction for Performance Variable

The contribution of each item to the respective variable was determined by using communality values (Byrne, 2010) (see Table 10). An item with a communality value less than 0.3 needs to be deleted as it does not sufficiently contribute to measuring the performance variable.

Table 10: Communalities

Items	Initial	Extraction
Increase in sales revenue	1	0.925
Increase of profit	1	0.714
Increase returns on Assets (ROA)	1	0.909

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

The findings in Table 10 reveal that the communalities after extraction ranged between 0.714 and 0.925, These values indicate that all items measuring performance were above the threshold of 0.3 suggesting that the items contribute effectively to measuring the performance variable (Hair et al., 2010).

4.8.9. Factor Rotational Matrix for Performance Variable

The results presented in Table 11 indicate that all the items to financial performance such as an increase in return on assets (ROA), increase in profit, and increase in revenue were loaded in a component or variable 1 above 0.5. This value is considered an acceptable limit as suggested by Hair et al (2010), signifying a strong association of each item with the performance variable. Since all the items were employed in estimating financial performance, the component or variable was named financial performance (Krej et al., 2015).

Table 11: Performance of Tour Operators - Component Matrix

	Financial performance
Increase returns on assets (ROA)	0.962
Increase of profit	0.845
Increase in sales revenue	0.953

Hypothesis Testing (H_o): There is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategies and the performance of tour operators' supply chains.

Table: 4: Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis				β	P-value	Reject / Not Reject
H_0	Digital marketing strategies	→	Supply chain Performance	0.44	<0.001	Rejected

At an alpha significance level of .05 ($p < .05$)

Three indicators that measured the construct of digital marketing strategies were online advertisements using content marketing, social media marketing, and Search engine marketing. Table 4 presents the results on digital marketing strategies with a coefficient $\beta = 0.44$ at p-value < .001.

The results confirm that a positive relationship exists between digital marketing and the performance of tour operators. Based on the findings, the null hypothesis was rejected meaning that digital marketing usage can enhance the performance of tour operators' supply chain by increasing ROA, sales revenue, and profitability. Digital marketing strategies correlated positively with tour operators' supply performance.

The findings are consistent with the findings of qualitative data that the majority of the respondents admitted to having been using, social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Google ad, and websites to reach the global market and create awareness of products and services, which help to obtain cost saving in the advertisement, improve the relationship with customers, and increase revenue. For instance, during interviews, respondents (RP) 6, and RP10 remarked,

"We ensure that our website and social media appeal to our customers because about 80 percent of our visitors originate from our online presence. .....most of the youth prefer to use the internet than old people."

Thus, the website and social media should be informative, interactive, easy, relevant, and timesaving.

Furthermore, RP11, RP13, RP5 responded that,

"I use Facebook and Instagram to post pictures and facilitate the sharing of visitors' experience. ……. I have also been advertising our website through Google (SEO) to increase visibility in search engine pages"

However, RP9, RP14 explained that,

"Not all the visitors come from online sources; some come straight to the office and make bookings and payment in cash. We are dealing with both online and offline customers".

RP1, RP3, RP8 narrated that;

"The majority of tourists use Online Consumer Reviews (OCRs) such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, and safaribooking.com when making decisions about tourism-related products."

Similarly RP2, R4, RP7 stated that,

"The majority of tour operators sell their products and services via platforms like TripAdvisor and safari booking".

In addition, the respondents RP1 and RP12 reported that,

"I use TripAdvisor to explore Expedia and safari.com due to very high online business competition as most of the tour operators rely on online agents to obtain customers."

The result of the hypothesis was consistent with the findings of the study by Ainin *et al.*, (2015) who found that digital marketing using Facebook had a strong positive impact on the financial and non-financial performance of tour operators in terms of cost reduction in marketing and customer service, improve customer relations, and increase accessibility to information to visitors. Another study (Ráthonyi, 2016) demonstrates that travelers use social media during the planning process to collect information, confirm their selection of holiday destination, and share experiences and photos or write reviews using mobile technologies and Apps such as TripAdvisor.

Most of the visitors (V) stated that they use the Google search engine to obtain the information. For instance, participants (V2), (V8) (V6) stated,

"I search through Google search engine, and use booking.com, and trip advisor to obtain opinion of other travelers."

Other visitors V3, V4, and V7, said,

"We obtain information through agents in our country and the internet."

Visitors V5 andV9 narrated that,

"I obtained information about tourism attractions through our school, the internet, my relatives, and friends who visited Tanzania."

Furthermore, visitor V1, V8, V10 said,

"I use Trip Advisor because I trust and I can read recommendations from other people's experiences as well."

Similarly, visitor V12, V2, V6, V11 commented that,

"I use TripAdvisor because I don't trust companies' websites as they manipulate information."

5. Conclusions

The findings of the current study contribute to the existing body of knowledge by illustrating the effects of various digital marketing strategies on the performance of tour operators' supply chains. The theoretical contribution of the study is in its exploration of the relationship between digital marketing strategies and the performance of tour operators' supply chains within the context of the tourism sector, with a specific focus on Tanzania. The study employs the Resource-Based View theory as a guiding framework to analyze how digital marketing strategies can affect tour operators' supply chains, consequently influencing performance in terms of visitor numbers, sales, and profitability. The study has several implications for the effective utilization of digital marketing strategies as follows:

i. The use of skilled ICT experts and continuous training is essential in enhancing the quality of websites and social media, thereby reducing the risks of hacking and helping in developing websites with valuable updated content is crucial for capturing the attention of visitors.
ii. During the website and social media design process, tour operators need to ensure compatibility with all desktop and mobile devices to maximize user accessibility.
iii. Tour operators should consider visitors' online feedback concerning their trip experience, to maintain an open dialogue with visitors to improve products and service delivery.
iv. Tour operators need to focus on increasing website traffic, advertising their products, sharing information, and building communities to enhance engagement with potential customers.
v. The current study highlights the underutilization of AI predictive analysis by tour operators to evaluate various factors related to customer purchasing behavior. This hinders their ability to design a more targeted and personalized approach to effective customer interaction.

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