

Digital Marketing Initiative and Business Sustainability in The Hospitality Industry in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between digital marketing initiative and business sustainability of the hospitality industry in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two objectives, research questions and hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The population of 171 hospitality organisations with employees of 2514 participated in the study. The sample size of 345 was determined using Taro Yamane formula. A total of 345 questionnaires were distributed to the ten selected hospitality organisations in Rivers State. The descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted using SPSS version. 24. The findings revealed that there is positive and significant relationship between online marketing initiative and sustainability of hospitality business in Rivers State. It equally found that offline marketing initiative has positive and significant relationship with sustainability of hospitality industry. It was concluded that the need to stick to digital marketing of hospitality organisations using online and offline digital marketing strategies becomes the answer to the quest for business sustainability in the hospitality industry. It is recommended that the hospitality industry should employ the services of digital marketers so that incessant launching of new platform can be addressable according to market trends; that the hospitality industry should adopt various social channels for digital marketing of their products and that the hospitality industry should create a forum for customer interaction via online (internet, phone, Whatsapp, etc.)

Keywords: Digital marketing, Online marketing, Offline marketing, Sustainability, Hospitality organisations, Internet

Introduction

Digital marketing initiatives opens window for opportunities in the sustainability of hospitality industry globally. The sustainability of hospitality industry lies on how effective utilization of digital marketing initiative are involved. Digital marketing initiative is an idea or concept that adopts social media, radio, digital billboards in advertising its products. Digital marketing initiative is a broad term that covers all concepts and new idea of marketing channels used to promote hospitality products on the Internet and electronic devices such as TVs, mobile phones and electronic billboards. More than that, digital marketing has different channels (Khmiadashvili, 2019).

The sustainability of hospitality business depends on the type of marketing strategies the industry employed. Therefore, the need for sustainability of hospitality industry in this digitalization era requires the adoption of digital marketing initiative in order to survive the competitive business environment. Sustainability here is all about meeting the needs of all stakeholders of the company, including the company itself, employees, suppliers, customers, and society at large (Jones, & Comfort, 2020).

Meeting customers' needs is one of the basic marketing principles, meaning that marketing and sustainability can actually work in the same direction in a certain way. In this regard, Jones, Clarke-Hill, Comfort, & Hillier, (2008) have argued that sustainability and marketing might create synergies, as marketing can help in shaping sustainable consumer behavior and influencing consumers' attitudes and

beliefs, while commitment to sustainability can help companies to differentiate+ themselves from the competitors and gain competitive advantage by enhancing brand reputation and creating a strong brand image

The ability of the hospitality industry to be in business for long time requires the integration of digital marketing initiatives. This digital marketing initiatives entails planning on quality accommodation service delivery, quality catering service delivery, repackaging of structures, modern customer-and-employee relationship and employee enhances customer orientation initiatives. These initiatives are geared towards customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer incessant patronage which will translate to sustainability of the hospitality industry. This sustainability is indicated on the profitability ratio, market share dominance and customer loyalty.

The digital marketing techniques have changed drastically over the last couple of years and it continues to change even today to cater for the modern-day addressable market trends. Hence, hospitality need to stay up-to-date with all these changes; be it the launch of a new social media platform or a technology that would make a hospitality marketing effort more robust; so the hospitality need to remain on top of things to ensure their business does not lose out on possible conversions.

Hospitality industry must identify their target audience in the market. With the number of internet users increasing by the day and their needs changing almost every second, targeting the right audience has become one of the biggest challenges for marketers. Keeping in mind what your business has to offer and what kind of problems it would solve when put to use, create your value proposition. This will help you identify who or what demographics would resonate with it the most when targeted.

Therefore, this study was intended to determine the relationship between digital marketing initiative and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria. The specific objectives include:

- (i) To determine the relationship between online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria.
- (ii) To ascertain the relationship between offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Literature review

Conceptual Review

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing initiative hospitality industry is a profit-oriented method of sustaining in the face of market competitiveness in the industry. In the last decades, such as radio, TV and newspaper into online marketing channels have crept into the hospitality as an avenue for enhancing the sustainability of businesses in order to recruit more customers (competitive edge over competitors) and ideas of how to enhance customer satisfaction using new business strategies.

According to Vyas (2018), allocation of considerable budget allocation is a key success factor of the hotel digital marketing strategy. "The major marketing options available today are listed below: Social Media Marketing (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn) Email Marketing (own and 3rd party databases) Search Engine Marketing (Google AdWords or Display networks) Publisher Networks (Direct advertising campaigns on specific websites) Programmatic Networks (Using user-intent and contextual marketing targeting travellers) Review websites: (Sponsored content and advertising banners on platforms such as TripAdvisor)". (Vyas, 2018).

Accordingly, channels are separated based on online and offline marketing circumstances. Online marketing channels:

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): SEO is processual meaning, increasing organic (or free) website traffic, as well as, optimizing your website to "rank" higher in search engine results pages. Content Marketing Content Marketing known as the "king" is the fuel that drives your digital activities. It is a basic component of SEO and in social media.

Social Media Marketing: The channels that can be used in social media include: Facebook; Instagram; LinkedIn; Twitter; Snapchat; Google+, Pinterest

Pay-Per-Click (PPC): “PPC is an approach for driving traffic to your website by paying a publisher every time your ad is clicked. One of the most common types of PPC is Google AdWords, which allows you to pay for top slots on Google's search engine results pages at a price "per click" of the links you place. Other channels where you can use PPC include: Paid ads on Facebook; Promoted Tweets on Twitter; Sponsored Messages on LinkedIn”. (Alexander, 2019).

Email Marketing: Email marketing is a powerful marketing channel, a form of direct marketing as well as digital marketing, that uses email to promote your business's products or services. It can help make your customers aware of your latest items or offers by integrating it into your marketing automation efforts.

Offline Marketing Channels deals with traditional marketing, such as: TV Marketing; SMS Marketing; Radio Marketing and Billboard Marketing.

Marketing has always been about connecting with your audience in the right place and at the right time. Today, that means you need to meet them where they are already spending time: on the internet (Alexander, 2019). Digital marketing initiative affect indirectly on hospitality performance. Digital marketing initiative affect both the volume and valence of online reviews and, indirectly, hospitality performance (Pelsmacker, Tilburg, & Holthof, 2018). Online marketing channels goal must acronym “S.M.A.R.T.”

- Specific goals reflect the objectives of a marketer, when deciding what social media tools to use;
- Measurable goals are essential in order to be able to see if the objectives set have been achieved in the end. Goals that sound impossible to reach will not be taken seriously by anyone;
- Achievable goals should be chosen.
- Realistic goals refer to taking into consideration all the external factors that could influence the final result.

Finally, goals should be Time-based which means a specific target should be attained within a specific time period. Goals are a way to make people more persistent in what they are doing by putting more effort into their actions. As managers do not always have the ability to motivate their employees, setting goals is an alternative to this issue. They provide a vision of what has to be achieved in order to succeed” (Benea, 2014).

Hospitality industry

Louis, chevalier de Jaucourt describes hospitality in the Encyclopédie as “the virtue of a great soul that cares for the whole universe through the ties of humanity.” In other words, hospitality is defined as the link between customers (travellers, tourists, business travellers, and delegates, etc..) and a host, and the act of benevolence in welcoming and looking after the basic needs of customers and strangers, mainly concerning food, drink, and accommodation. In general, the hospitality industry is a broad group of businesses that provide services to customers and is one of the biggest and fastest-growing industries around the world. About 1350 Million is the number of international tourists last year based on the study presented by the World Tourism Organisation (Antonio 2019).

According to the WTCC report, the share of the Hospitality industry to the Global Economy in 2017 was approximate of \$8 Trillion in 2017, which is forecasted to exceed \$10 Trillion by 2025. Also, travel and tourism count for over 300 million jobs, that is close to 10% of total employment in 2017. When almost every society is fighting gender bias and the social obstacle, the hospitality, and travel industry employ 55% of the global workforces as a woman. The employment involvement of the hospitality sector is estimated to increase at a rate of 2.4% for the next decade. Thus, when other industries are facing job cuts, the hospitality industry is set to keep offering more jobs. Developing countries are going to have even more significant growth in the hospitality and tourism industry. Countries like India, Brazil, South Africa, etc. have eased norms to open up investment opportunities of the largest hospitality companies in the world. When all associated sectors of the industry are considered, the value of the industry becomes even higher (Antonio 2019).

The first arm in hospitality is accommodations, which comprises hotels, bed and breakfast, motels, and other lodging businesses. The second arm is food and beverage, which includes restaurants, bars, fast-food chains, and other firms that provide food and drinks. The final of the regions comprises travel and tourism, which comprehends airlines, trains, and trip ships (Antonio 2019).

Even though various statistics show that the industry is growing with a positive rate, observing these statistics, one will figure out that the significant growth in the industry depends only in the chain operated hotels and corporations. The hotel sector, as the most visible sector in the hospitality industry, is facing serious risks for the attractiveness of potential investors. Besides, the level of competitions within the hotel industry has increased in the recent years, to the point that it represents a threat both to new entrants into the industry and also to those companies that have been in the industry for many years. Many hotels are working to keep up with the level of competition, but only a few of those can sustain the pressure and make a profit in the long run (Antonio 2019).

Business Sustainability

Business sustainability entails balancing the economic, social and environmental responsibilities of the organisation which is aimed at protecting the planet and the people or society. Another concept used in denoting business sustainability is regarded as the ‘triple bottom line’. It is a remarkable business concept deployed to emphasize measuring the financial and social performance of business organisations. The three dimensions of triple bottom line are as follows;

- **People:** Organisations have a social responsibility to ensure that their workers and their constituents are treated very well.
- **Planet:** The environmental responsibility of firms is to protect the planet and preserve its finite resources.
- **Profit:** Business produce and market goods and services to generate sufficient revenue which leads to profit making. The profit is used to create more jobs, expand the business and pay stockholders.

The current study is designed to determine the relationship between digital marketing and business sustainability in the context of profit making in the hospitality industry.

Empirical review

Ibukunoluwa, and Ijose, (2017) carried a study on “sustainable development practices: it’s implication for hospitality and tourism industry in Nigeria”. Their findings showed that the Hospitality and Tourism Industry is one of the largest industries in the world with enormous economic, environmental and social impacts. The various sustainable development practices that exists in the industry include sustainability education, sustainable consumption, promotion of sustainable travel, green lodging, green meetings and events, sustainability in the food and beverage sector, certifications of environmental friendly organizations, etc.

Khmiadashvili (2019) understudied digital marketing strategy based on hotel industry study in Tbilisi. The result showed that proper digital marketing campaigns are most vital for some business industries. One of those industries is the tourism sector of which the hotel business is a big component. Tourism industry is one of the successful and rapidly growing spheres in Georgia, where digital marketing channels play a huge role for finding customers. They also posited that the key determinant of the hotel business success is the proper digital marketing campaign, though inaccuracy and lack of knowledge of managing digital marketing channels negatively affect the hotels' sustainable development.

Prihanto, and Kurniasari, (2019) did a work on sustainable digital transformation in hospitality industry: study of the hotel industry in Indonesia. Their results showed that hospitality industry leaders must rethink the dimension of customer experience, internal operation, and new business model. They must have cohesive strategy in integrating digital and physical elements in order to be able to transform their business model and set direction for the entire industry. Hospitality industry leaders must also focus on two complementary activities: sharpening customer value proposition and transforming their operating models using digital technology to interact and collaborate with their customer. From the managerial aspect this study contributes that managers must focus on factors such as digital market capabilities, digital leadership

capabilities, and digital technology capabilities that determine the success of digital transformation in order to build and increase customer engagement.

From the foregoing, it was hypothesised that;

- (i) There is no significant relationship between online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria.
- (ii) There is no significant relationship between offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Methodology

The quasi-experimental research design was adopted. The population of this study are quoted 171 hospitality organisations with the population of 2514 employees of the hospitality industry in Rivers State. The sample size determination adopted Taro Yamane formula

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + N)(e)^2}$$

Where n= sample size required; N = number of people in the population e = allowable error (%)

Substituting the value of 2514 into the equation

$$\begin{aligned} &= \frac{2514}{(1 + 2514)(0.05)^2} \\ &= 345.09 \\ &\approx 345 \text{ sample size} \end{aligned}$$

Primary method of data collection was adopted; descriptive (frequency and percentage) and inferential statistics (linear regression) were employed to analysis the data and test the hypotheses at 5% significance level respectively.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Data presentation , N= 345

S/No	Tourist industries	Total questionnaire	Returned questionnaire	Unreturned questionnaire
1	Helena Haven Hotels	35(10.14%)	28(10.29%)	7(9.57%)
2	Larritel Hotels Ltd	35(10.14%)	26(9.56%)	9(12.33%)
3	Manorgove House Hotel	35(10.14%)	27(9.93%)	8(10.96%)
4	Crowngate Guest House	35(10.14%)	24(8.82%)	11(15.07%)
5	Pizzazz Suites	35(10.14%)	25(9.19%)	10(13.70%)
6	Spadob Hotel Ltd	34(9.86%)	29(10.66%)	5(6.85%)
7	Tropicana Hotel	34(9.86%)	28(10.29%)	6(8.22%)
8	Fortune Gate Hotels	34(9.86%)	27(9.93%)	7(9.57%)
9	Compass Hotel & Suite	34(9.86%)	30(11.03%)	4(5.48%)
10	Habitat Hotel	34(9.86%)	28(10.29%)	6(8.22%)
	Total	345(100%)	272(100%)	73(100%)

Table 1 identified the data presentation of the selected hospitality industries in Rivers state as specified. This table showed the distribution of questions amongst this selected hospitality industries in the state. It showed that 345 questionnaire were distributed and 272 of the questionnaire were retrieved and 73 were not retrieved.

Research question 1: What is the relationship between online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria?

Table 1: Online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry N=272

S/No	Statements	Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly
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		Agree			Disagree
1	Facebook products advertising enhances the sustainability of hospitality industry.	128 (47.06%)	61 (22.43%)	33 (12.13%)	50 (18.38%)
2	Phone text-messages help the sustainability of hospitality industry.	107 (39.34%)	68 (25%)	42 (15.44%)	55 (20.22%)
3	e-mail product marketing lead to hospitality industry sustainability.	111 (40.81%)	72 (26.47%)	54 (19.85%)	35 (12.87%)
4	Whatsapp placement of products advertise the hospitality industry.	127 (46.69%)	83 (30.51%)	41 (15.07%)	21 (7.72%)

Table 1 contains the result of research question one, revealing the relationship between online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry. Item 1 shows that 128(47.06%) and 61(22.43%) respondents strongly agree and agree that Facebook products advertising enhances the sustainability of hospitality industry while 33(12.13%) and 50(18.38%) respondents disagree and strongly disagree that Facebook product advertising does not enhance the sustainability of hospitality industry. Item 2 institutes that 107(39.34%) and 68(25%) respondents strongly agree and agree that phone text-messages help the sustainability of hospitality industry while 42(15.44%) and 55(20.22%) respondents disagree and strongly disagree that phone text-messages does not help the sustainability of hospitality industry. Item 3 reveals that 111(40.81%) and 72(26.47%) respondents strongly agree and agree that e-mail product marketing lead to hospitality industry sustainability while 54(19.85%) and 35(12.87%) respondents disagree and strongly disagree that e-mail product marketing does not lead to hospitality industry sustainability. Item 4 shows that 127(46.69%) and 83(30.51%) respondents strongly agree and agree that whatsapp advertising of products enhance the sustainability of hospitality industry while 41(15.07%) and 21(7.72%) respondents disagree and strongly disagree that whatsapp advertising of products does not enhance the sustainability of hospitality industry

Research question 2: What is the relationship between offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria?

Table 2: Offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry N=272

S/No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	Radio media facilitates the sustainability of hospitality industry.	122 (44.85%)	81 (29.78%)	35 (12.87%)	34 (12.50%)
6	Television media improves the sustainability of hospitality industry.	137 (50.37%)	89 (32.72%)	28 (10.29%)	18 (6.62%)
7	Billboard helps for sustainability of hospitality industry.	102 (37.50%)	77 (28.31%)	57 (20.96%)	36 (13.24%)
8	Signpost enhances the sustainability of hospitality industry.	153 (56.25%)	53 (19.49%)	41 (15.07%)	25 (9.19%)

Table 2 revealed the descriptive analysis of research question two, indicating that offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State have relationship. Item 5 states that 122(44.85%) and 81(29.78%) respondents strongly agree and agree that radio media facilitates the sustainability of hospitality industry while 35(12.87%) and 34(12.50%) respondents disagree and strongly that radio media does not facilitate the sustainability of hospitality industry. Item 6 maintains that 137(50.37%) and 89(32.72%) respondents strongly agree and agree that television media improves the sustainability of hospitality industry while 28(10.29%) and 18(6.62%) respondents disagree and strongly disagree that television media does not improve the sustainability of hospitality industry. Item 7 reveals that 102(37.50%) and 77(28.31%) respondents strongly agree and agree that billboard helps for sustainability of hospitality industry while 57(20.96%) and 36(13.24%) respondents disagree and strongly disagree that billboard does not help for sustainability of hospitality industry. Item 8 indicates that 153(56.25%) and 53(19.49%)

respondents strongly agree and agree that signpost enhances the sustainability of hospitality industry while 41(15.07%) and 25(9.19%) respondents disagree and strongly disagree that signpost does not enhance the sustainability of hospitality industry.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Table 3: Linear regression output online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.898 ^a	.871	.886	3.65210	.871	333.541	1	6	.000	2.458

- a. Predictors: (Constant), online_digital_marketing
- b. Dependent Variable: sustainability_of_hospitality_industry

Table 3 reveals the linear regression output of hypothesis one indicating that there is significant relationship between online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State at correlation coefficient r, .898. The decision rule states that we accept the null hypothesis if p-value is lesser than 0.05% significant while greater than the 0.05% we uphold the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, the pv of .000 implies that online digital marketing positively and significantly relates with sustainability of hospitality business in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Table 4: Linear regression output of offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry

Mode l	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.941 ^a	.928	.932	3.40268	.928	314.611	1	6	.000	2.424

- a. Predictors: (Constant), offline_digital_marketing
- b. Dependent Variable: sustainability_of_hospitality_industry

Table 4 indicates the linear regression output of hypothesis two showing that there is significant relationship between offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State at correlation coefficient r, .941. The decision rule states that we accept the null hypothesis if p-value is lesser than 0.05% significant while greater than the 0.05% we uphold the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, the pv of .000 implies that offline digital marketing positively and significantly relates with sustainability of hospitality in Rivers State.

Discussion of findings

The study on digital marketing initiative and sustainability of hospitality industry contained two objectives, two research questions and two hypotheses. The analysis was undertaken by the aid of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The findings showed that:

- (i) there is positive and significant relationship between online digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State.
- (ii) there is positive and significant relationship between offline digital marketing and sustainability of hospitality industry in Rivers State.

They results showed that consideration on the ingredient of digital marketing will enhance the sustainability of hospitality industry in the study area. This showed that the profit, market share and the growth of the hospitality organisations will be sustained. The result is consistent with the findings of Ibukunoluwa and Ijose (2017) and Khmiadashvili.

Conclusion

The digital marketing of hospitality industry have enhanced the sustainability in the face of stiff competition in the market. The advertising of hospitality products digitally via the internet, Facebook, whatsapp page, instagram, goggle and other social media have added advantage on the profitability, market share dominance, and growth ratio of the industry. The sustainability of customer patronage is geared toward digital marketing of the hospitality industry. Therefore, the concludes that the need to stick to digital marketing of hospitality organisations using online and offline digital marketing strategies becomes the answer to the quest for business sustainability in the hospitality industry.

Recommendations

From the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- (i) that the hospitality organisations should employ the services of digital marketers so that incessant launching of new platform can be addressable according to market trends.
- (ii) that the hospitality organisations should adopt various social channels for digital marketing of their products.
- (iii) that the hospitality organisations should create a forum for customer interaction via online (internet, phone, WhatsApp, etc.)

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