

Digital Marketing in World Heritage for Tourism: Evidence From Vietnam

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ABSTRACT This paper aims to better understand digital marketing practices in Vietnamese heritage sites, focusing on practical research using digital marketing tools and critical obstacles in digital marketing implementation. Qualitative research methods (interviews and field surveys) have been applied in this research. It found that digital marketing activities have been initially used in heritage sites in Vietnam, and it has a positive impact on tourist attractions. However, this application is still minimal due to many financial, cognitive, human, and old technological infrastructure obstacles that need to be removed. The research results are considered a valuable reference for heritage managers in finding new marketing solutions to increase tourist attraction, create motivation for conservation, and promote heritage values in the context of digital transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, digital technology, big data analytics, information and communication technology, the Internet of Things (IoT), and other technological activities have a tremendous impact on economic and social aspects (Meneghello et al. 2019). The achievements of the fourth industrial revolution led to large amounts of data that can be easy to collect and analyse (Rüßmann et al. 2015). Digital technology has been supporting the transformation of economies, creating ecosystems in digital business, and promoting economic development towards prosperity (Matthess and Kunkel 2020). Therefore, digital transformation has received considerable attention in management, business, information technology systems, and marketing (Diener and Spacek 2021).

The rapid development of information technology and changes in social structure activated by generations X, Y, and Z (Duffett et al. 2019) have posed substantial challenges for tourism destinations. To survive in a digital transformation context, including tourists being valued co-creators (Duffett et al. 2019; D'Andrea et al. 2019), tourist destinations must have an overall marketing strategy with

modern marketing tools in the direction of increasing technology application, improving costs and business processes.

Digital marketing has been investigated by previous studies such as Gangeshwer (2013), Yasmin et al. (2015), Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016), Kumar and Jincy (2017), Lies (2019), and Shpak et al. (2020). Digital marketing refers to the utilisation of electronic media by marketers to promote products or services into the market with the primary objective of attracting customers and allowing them to interact with the brand through digital media (Yasmin et al. 2015). Kotler and Keller (2012, 2016) define digital marketing as the process of planning products, prices, distribution and promotion of products, services and ideas to meet the needs of organisations and individuals based on electronic media and the Internet. Digital marketing is a way of achieving marketing goals through digital technologies and media (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2016; Shpak et al. 2020).

Yasmin et al. (2015) highlighted that there are many advantages that digital marketing can bring to customers, which are staying updated with products or services, greater engagement, clear information about products and services, easy comparison with others, 24/7 shopping, sharing the content of the products or services, transparent pricing and enabling instant purchase. Meanwhile, digital

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marketing and the Internet can allow businesses to interact directly with customers, and help businesses bring ads to the right potential customers in the fastest and easiest way. Besides, digital marketing also helps organisations save costs and easily control changes in customer demand.

According to De Bruyn and Lilien (2008), Yasmin et al. (2015), and Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016), digital marketing tools are diverse and divided into:

- i. Digital Online Marketing: Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Content Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Pay Per Click (PPC), Affiliate Marketing, Native Advertising, Marketing Automation, Email Marketing, Online PR, Inbound Marketing, Sponsored Content
- ii. Digital Offline Marketing: Enhanced offline marketing, Radio marketing, Television marketing, Phone marketing

In this study, four digital marketing tools can be applied to heritage sites to manage, preserve and promote information and brands to attract visitors, that is, Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Social Media Optimisation (SMO), Customer Relation Manager (CRM), and Marketing on websites and mobile devices.

The Department of Heritage (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) statistics, Vietnam currently has more than 40,000 relics, of which 6 are relics and landscapes that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognised as cultural heritage, and 107 are unique national monuments. Vietnam has 61,669 heritages regarding intangible heritage, of which 301 have been included in the list of national intangible cultural heritage by the Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and 12 intangible cultural heritage accepted by UNESCO. According to UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme, 7 Vietnam Documentary Heritage sites have been listed by UNESCO (including 3 World Documentary, 4 Asia-Pacific Documentary) and 2 cultural heritages recognised by UNESCO as a natural heritage of the world. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, according to the General Department of Tourism statistics, 8 heritages (natural and cultural) of Vietnam welcomed more than 10,000 international visitors, and revenue from entrance fees and services was more than one 3 trillion VND.

Reality shows that marketing activities at Vietnam's cultural heritage sites are mainly traditional (printing materials, posters, billboards, etc.). Digital marketing forms (such as Search Engine Optimisation, Content Marketing, Social, Media Marketing, Pay Per Click (PPC), Affiliate Marketing, Native Advertising, Marketing Automation, Email Marketing, Online PR, Inbound Marketing, Sponsored Content, Enhanced offline marketing, Radio marketing, Television marketing, Phone marketing) are not focused on developing tourism for heritage sites. At the same time, the activities of experiencing and co-creating the content of tourists are almost not implemented by the Heritage Management Boards. This situation shows that heritage sites need to have fundamental changes in marketing to exploit the maximum value.

Objectives

On the development of digital transformation, heritage sites should focus on enhancing visitor experience towards visitor centricity, building data analytics models, and transforming digital marketing. Marketing is one of the pillars of digital transformation (Dumitriu et al. 2019) at heritage sites through the visitor experience and digital marketing tools. Therefore, this research aims to:

- (i) Find out the current status of the application and the limitations in applying digital marketing for tourism activities at Vietnam heritage sites.
- (ii) Provide valuable solutions to enhance the application of digital marketing at heritage sites to effectively contribute to the conservation, exploitation, and promotion of heritage values and tourism products towards sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out from August to September 2021 at eight world cultural and natural heritage of Vietnam, including Complex of Hue Monuments, Ha Long Bay, My Son Monuments Area, Hoi An Ancient Town, Phong Nha-Ke Bang, Imperial Citadel of Thang Long, Ho Dynasty Citadel and Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex. The authors used field survey methods and tables. Research results have obtained 75 responses from staff and managing boards in heritage sites. The result

shows that eighteen percent of the surveys were answered managers, and women constituted 52.4 percent. Most of the respondents were aged 24 to 35 years, comprising 53.2 percent. The age group of 36 to 45 comprised 34.2 percent of the respondents, and only 12.6 percent were from over 45.

The interview method was also conducted on a sample of 10 people to find out the current situation and challenges in applying digital marketing for heritage tourism in Vietnam. They are experts from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Institute For Tourism Development Research, and Heritage Management Board with high professional qualifications, sufficient capacity for judgments and opinions to ensure transparency and objectivity about research content. The interviews were conducted online through Zoom due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview period took place in September 2021.

Survey results and interviews have provided data on the current status of digital marketing applications, visitors' evaluations of digital marketing tools and challenges in implementing digital marketing at heritage sites. These data are used in descriptive statistical methods to clarify the statements in the research.

RESULTS

Current Situation of Implementing Digital Marketing at Heritage Sites

The survey results from authors and the response of the Heritage Management Board show the application of digital marketing tools at the heritage sites is gradually being implemented. From the responses of the Management Board at eight heritage sites, the author made observations for frequency of use in each heritage site and count percent frequency of use for each one. The result shows the most frequent digital marketing tools were used in cultural heritage sites are social media (Facebook, Instagram), with eighty-three percent of respondents belonging to heritage management boards. The following popular form of communication between heritage sites and visitors is websites. Heritage site has used the website to provide information for visitors about the heritage. In addition, heritage sites often conduct promotion through tourism fairs, career fairs to deliver heritage sites' image to visitors. Outdoor

advertising, telemarketing and press ads, radio and TV commercials are rarely used by monuments. The outdoor advertising images are often used next to heritage sites (Table 1).

In heritages, digital marketing tools were used with low frequency. The heritages' social media platforms were used the most in promotion (58% used several times a week), followed by websites, leaflets, and corporate newsletters. Meanwhile, mobile marketing is the lowest using press ads, radio, and TV commercial tools. The unused frequency of press ads, radio and TV commercials, outdoor billboards, and mobile marketing are all over fifty percent. According to the interviews with experts, the biggest challenge is the limited use of digital marketing. "... Currently, some parts are not aware of the role of marketing activities. They think that heritage sites do not need to be communicated. They believe that the main responsibility of heritages sites is conservation, education is not a commercial activity." (Interviewer No. 8). The most crucial reason is lack of funding. The annual allowance is primarily for the restoration, embellishment, and protection of the monuments, and the budget for marketing activities has not been paid much attention.

Website

Regarding digital marketing tools, at the time of the survey, 8 out of 8 of cultural and natural heritage sites in Vietnam had an official website. However, the Ho Dynasty Citadel and My Son Monuments Area websites are not accessible. Most websites

Table 1: Frequency of using digital marketing tools in Vietnam heritage sites (n =75) (Unit: Percent)

<i>Tool</i>	<i>Often (several times a week)</i>	<i>Mod- erately (several times a month)</i>	<i>Rarely (several times a year)</i>	<i>Not used</i>
Mobile marketing	4	11	22	63
Telemarketing	15	18	20	47
Outdoor billboard	12	17	20	51
Online banner of video content	18	27	40	15
Newsletters	10	20	45	25
Social media	58	25	12	5
Event marketing	20	26	28	26
Press ads, radio and TV commercials	10	20	20	50
Leaflets, corporate newsletters	22	21	20	37
Website and email	25	35	30	10

Source: Author

are designed with the following features, that is, introduction, news, and information for visitors (tourist information). Except for Ha Long Bay's, which has six language versions (Vietnamese, English, Korean, Chinese, French, Japanese), while the remaining websites have only two languages, namely, Vietnamese and English. In general, the performance measurement indicators, the rate of views of articles on the websites of the heritage sites is relatively low, averaging only 1000 times/post (except for some general introduction articles about the heritage). The remaining fan pages have a small number of posts, and the update level is not high, only about 2-7 posts/month (Table 2).

In general, the interface of some heritage websites is not attractive, and the posts are mainly to introduce activities and events. According to the actual survey through the Management Board, the current website system of the heritage sites has almost no professional management team. It means that digital marketing applications, and linkage with digital marketing tools has not been implemented. This is the fundamental reason tourists do not recognise the brand or realise the connection between communication channels of the heritage.

Search Engine

Due to limited funding sources and personnel in technology and communication, most Heritage Management Boards have not used Google Ads in search engines for the promotion to target potential visitors. "The current heritage sites have not focused

Table 2: The number of posts on the websites of the heritage sites (Unit: Posts)

S.No.	Heritage sites	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1	Complex of Hue Monuments	22	20	17	28	23
2	Ha Long Bay	0	0	0	13	71
3	My Son Monuments Area	0	25	38	102	78
4	Hoi An Ancient Town	56	43	30	36	52
5	Phong Nha - Ke Bang	330	112	90	76	88
6	Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long	55	56	63	86	64
7	Ho Dynasty Citadel	0	0	0	0	0
8	Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex	0	0	57	109	135

Source: Author

on promoting the image to visitors because they are still familiar with the old management methods and are confident with the popularity and search keywords. In addition, using Google Ads requires a large investment, while the allocation budget and revenue sources for the legacy are limited" (Interviewer No. 5).

Email Marketing and Mobile Apps

According to the survey, the Heritage Management Board has not used email marketing and developing applications on mobile devices. Email marketing can be seen as an effective, low-cost form of marketing that needs to be deployed by the Management Boards in the future. "Easy-to-use, user-friendly, cost-effective and downloadable mobile apps for a wide range of devices are a great choice for legacies in promoting and communicating with customers, so building legacy advertising applications on mobile devices will be an important solution to promote the application of digital heritage marketing" (Interviewer No.1).

Social Media

According to statistics, 7 out of 8 of the world's cultural and natural heritage sites have official fanpages made by the Heritage Management Board. Among these fanpages, Ha Long Bay's has the highest number of interactions with 29,164 likes and 29,792 followers, followed by Hoi An Ancient Town with 26,305 likes and 27,938 followers. Heritage Phong Nha Ke Bang has the lowest interactions with 153 likes and 153 followers. Regarding the number of heritage posts, Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex has the most frequent posts, with an average of 1-2 posts per day. The remaining fanpages have a small number of posts, and the update level is not high, at only about 2-7 posts/month (Table 3).

The content on the fanpages of the heritage sites mainly focuses on introducing events and activities of the Heritage Management Board and activities related to the heritage. However, the interaction is low, only about 50-100 interactions per post on average. Due to the unstable posting frequency, the post's content is not attractive, and many posts are too long to attract followers. "We have conducted a survey of visitors who frequently visit the heritage's fanpage, and they

Table 3: The number of posts on fanpages of the heritage sites (Unit: Posts)

S. No.	Heritage site	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1	Complex of Hue Monuments	0	0	0	0	0
2	Ha Long Bay	92	67	40	65	51
3	My Son Monuments Area	0	0	0	38	52
4	Hoi An Ancient Town	47	48	61	78	85
5	Phong Nha-Ke Bang	14	12	01	16	0
6	Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long	0	13	36	77	71
7	Ho Dynasty Citadel	0	01	10	05	18
8	Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex	0	310	350	367	470

Source: Author

want the heritage regularly updated with photos and videos related to tourism activities at the heritage, receive quick responses to visitor responses, posts should be shorter, and more engaging” (Interviewer No. 9).

Obstacles in the Application of Digital Marketing Tools in Heritage Sites in Vietnam

Digital marketing has initially been interested in heritage management levels from central to local groups and has been concretised through implementation decisions. However, the application of digital marketing tools still faces many obstacles. Statistical results (n = 75 responses) show that there are many causes of barriers to the application of digital marketing in heritage sites. With the question, “In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge in applying digital marketing tools at the heritage where you work?” The answers from respondents show that the reason is lack of budget (35.6%), followed by lack of assistive technology (30.3%), and then information, human resources, investment and route, respectively (Table 4).

The results of in-depth interviews with experts and members of the Heritage Management Board show that they are all aware of how crucial digital marketing is with heritage in promoting and attracting tourists, increasing revenue, and contributing to the sustainable development of heritage. However, the application of digital marketing tools faces the most significant barrier, that is, the lack of financial

resources for the process, technology, and investment in human resources. Limitation in the budget is a massive challenge for the application of digital marketing tools because investment in technology infrastructure, implementation of digitisation projects, and management of heritage information requires significant funding sources. “The financial source for heritage sites is mainly to support the implementation of international commitments on UNESCO-recognised heritage sites. These financial sources are mainly used for restoration and conservation, but there is no mechanism for the Heritage Management Board to call for funding from socialised sources. Public-private partnership models in conservation and promotion of heritage values have not been strongly promoted. Therefore, the financial resources for digital marketing to promote the heritage are minimal” (Interviewer No. 2).

The next obstacle leading to limitations in deploying digital marketing tools is inadequate technology infrastructure and lack of qualified human resources to meet the technical implementation of digital marketing. “Employees in the Management Board do not have in-depth expertise in the field of marketing and information technology to implement digital marketing activities... The income for technical staff as regulated is relatively low compared to the external labour market, so it is difficult to recruit qualified workers to meet the requirements of the job.” (Interviewer No. 10).

Traditional marketing and management thinking strategies are no longer suitable for heritage sites in the current context. According to the survey, about 6.0 percent of heritage sites confirm a comprehensive plan for digital transformation and legacy marketing. Inadequate awareness and lack of directional marketing strategies are the causes of obstacles to applying digital marketing in heritage sites.

Table 4: Frequency (%) of causes that hinder the implementation of digital marketing activities in cultural heritage sites (n=75)

S. No.	Causes	Frequency
1	Lack of conversion route	3.0
2	Too expensive to invest	4.8
3	Lack of digital human resources	8.1
4	Lack of information about visitors	18.2
5	Lack of assistive technology	30.3
6	Lack of budget	35.6

Source: Author

In addition to the fundamental reasons mentioned above, other causes leading to limitations and difficulties in digital transformation and marketing at heritage sites can be cited as the lack of a uniform policy mechanism to guide agencies to apply new digital technologies. At the same time, the national tourist information system and the tourist information system lack the linkage to support each other to draw up tourist portraits suitable for each specific heritage.

DISCUSSION

The fourth technological revolution not only approached technology and manufacturing products (Ziółkowska 2021) but also opened up a new approach in marketing products and services with a focus on people (marketing strategy with human values) (Vinh 2018). Traditional B2B and B2C marketing models change to the H2H (person-to-person) model based on personalised messages, building a reciprocal relationship, and communication protocols that create interaction, make friends and create a community that shares human values, responsibilities and common concerns (Vinh 2018).

Digital marketing opens up new business opportunities (Ziółkowska 2021) for economic sectors in general and the tourism industry in particular. In the era of information and communication technology with rapidly developing steps, the relationship between businesses and markets (with tourism, the relationship between destinations and visitors) evolves according to new trends. Information technology and digital tools influence marketing, facilitate relationship building with visitors (Zhang et al. 2020) and increase the value of each destination.

Facing rapid changes in communication technology (social media, mobile communications, and advanced connected devices) (Matosas-López 2021), Heritage management needs to approach trends Latest marketing trends. The latest trends in marketing include content marketing, video content, search engine activity (SEO iSEM), mobile, big data, and personalized (better targeted) news marketing message (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2016; Dash and Chakraborty 2021a). Research shows that management's recognition of digital transformation at heritage sites is key to increasing financial performance and is the basis for formulating a sustainable development strategy (Ukko et al. 2019). Therefore, the critical skills desired at the

World Heritage Management Board in Vietnam are the ability to identify new trends and technologies, good communication skills, and creativity.

Heritage management boards need to increase the use of new communication tools intelligently to shorten the distance between attractions, sight-seeing routes, and visitors and, at the same time, expand the scope of visitor sources for the site. Digital marketing opens up new opportunities for tourist attractions, thereby bringing efficiency and sustainability to cultural heritage (Adie et al. 2017). Therefore, to fully exploit the benefits of digital transformation, digital marketing stakeholders in the management of cultural heritage need to change their marketing thinking, and enhance the visitor's experience with attractions based on modern new technologies towards co-creation of value in destinations (Ukko et al. 2019; D'Andrea et al. 2019; Dash and Chakraborty 2021b; Mitova et al. 2021).

The analysis of the current situation of using digital marketing tools at world heritage sites in Vietnam shows that both online and offline digital marketing tools are used to different degrees depending on physical management levels. Most management levels recognise digital marketing as the key to attracting tourists and creating conditions for sustainable heritage development. World Heritage Sites in Vietnam, which were analysed in the study, engage in digital marketing mainly through frequent (several times a week) marketing tools, such as a website, email, and social media. There are other tools that they use several times a month, for example, leaflets and newsletters, press ads, radio and TV commercials, and search engine activities. Event marketing is used much more rarely in digitalisation processes while sponsoring, outdoor billboards, and telemarketing are not used at all.

The factors affecting digital marketing tools at world heritage sites in Vietnam are diverse. However, the main reason is the lack of funding to invest in information infrastructure, data and human resources in charge of digital marketing activities. The funding source of the world heritage sites in Vietnam is mainly based on the state budget and entrance fees. Therefore, most of the heritages do not have the funds to carry out digital transformation and other activities of digital marketing for legacy. At the same time, the coordination among stakeholders is not high, and awareness of the role of digital marketing tools in heritage marketing is still

limited, which hinders the application of digital marketing tools.

CONCLUSION

The development of digital technology has changed how marketing and communication activities operate in the economic fields in general and the tourism industry in particular. Suppose heritage sites continue to manage according to the current mindset. In that case, it will be difficult to make sustainable changes due to a lack of financial resources to operate, embellish, and protect. In a dynamically changing environment, the access and needs of Generation Z have changed compared to the previous generations X and Y, so stakeholders in heritage management must change their approach and think to quickly adapt to the changes of the guest market both domestically and internationally. The present moment is considered the golden age of digital marketing. Digital marketing has allowed heritage sites to analyse the data collected from visitors more efficiently, thereby providing optimal solutions to reach out to visitors, expand the customer base, and exploit the hidden desires of visitors, offering the most reasonable approach strategies.

This study highlights the role of digital marketing for contemporary young consumers. The survey on the actual use of digital marketing tools at world heritage sites in Vietnam shows that the level of use of digital marketing tools is still limited. Tourism marketing activities at heritage sites are still mainly traditional marketing. The study also pointed out the causes leading to little influence on digital marketing tools. Therefore, stakeholders in the management of heritage sites in Vietnam need to actively use digital technology to personalise marketing messages and use multi-channel marketing to reach more customers. Generation X, Y and Z tourists are based on reasonable investment in finance, technology infrastructure, and human resources to exploit and sustainably develop heritages for today and future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey shows that the Heritage Management Board has been aware of the role of digital marketing and has initially used digital marketing tools. Some marketing tools are occasionally

used, such as websites, email, and social media. Other ones such as magazines, newspaper ads, radio are rarely used. Television, large outdoor billboard advertising forms, and mobile advertising have not even been used, so the result of attracting tourists is not high. The cause of this situation, as analysed above, is due to limitations in financial resources, technological infrastructure, human resources, and mechanisms and policies. Therefore, to successfully apply digital marketing tools for heritages, it is necessary to focus on implementing the following measures:

- (i) Creating a legal framework for digital transformation in tourism in general and heritage management in particular. The contents must focus on digital tools, creating a national heritage database, user data security, information security to create a safe and reliable digital system.
- (ii) Changing the marketing mindset of stakeholders in managing and exploiting heritage values. Heritage must consider a specific product that needs to be marketed methodically with modern tools to approach more visitors to increase revenue. At the same time, the management boards provide knowledge for visitors to understand the heritages. The visitors can contribute to their preservation and promotion of heritage values. On the other hand, heritage management boards need to have an overall strategy for digital marketing for heritage sites. Heritage management boards also must have reasonable investment strategies for funding to have enough financial resources to implement new technologies.
- (iii) Building synchronous technology infrastructure among stakeholders in managing and exploiting heritage values. Increase research in using new technologies to connect to visitors in a digital environment and create an environment for visitors to become co-creators of content in heritage marketing.
- (iv) Training the management staff and employees at heritage sites in IT and information security to operate the digital environment, meeting the requirements of digital marketing and digital transformation.

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