

**Research Article***Copyright © All rights are reserved by Evangelia D Parisi*

Digital Marketing as a Tool to Promote Boutique Tourism Units in the Greek Market

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This study critically examines the strategic role of digital marketing in enhancing the visibility and competitiveness of boutique tourism accommodations in the Greek context. Focusing on the integration of advanced digital platforms including social media channels, online booking systems, and user experience personalization technologies the research explores the efficacy of these digital tools in attracting and engaging targeted market segments. Employing a mixed-methods approach, which combines quantitative data analysis with semi-structured interviews of boutique hotel stakeholders, the study identifies key success factors and barriers to digital adoption. The findings highlight the necessity for comprehensive, innovative digital strategies, capacity-building in digital competencies among tourism actors, and the deployment of cutting-edge technological solutions to meet the evolving demands of the global tourism landscape. This research contributes to the broader discourse on digital transformation in tourism, offering theoretically informed and practically relevant insights for both scholars and industry practitioners.

Keywords: Digital marketing; boutique hotels; tourism competitiveness; digital transformation; Greece; smart tourism; sustainable tourism

Introduction

The digital transformation of the tourism sector has fundamentally reshaped the ways in which destinations and tourism enterprises engage with contemporary travelers. As consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms for information, booking, and experiential sharing, the strategic application of digital marketing has become essential for tourism businesses seeking to enhance their visibility and competitiveness in a highly dynamic and globalized market [1]. Boutique hotels, characterized by their distinctive personalized service and niche market appeal, represent a critical segment within the tourism industry that stands to benefit significantly from tailored digital marketing strategies. Greece, renowned for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, has traditionally relied on its intrinsic tourism assets. However, the

rapid evolution of traveler behavior and the proliferation of digital technologies demand a recalibration of marketing approaches, especially for boutique tourism accommodations striving to differentiate themselves in a competitive environment.

Despite the recognized potential, the adoption and effective utilization of digital marketing tools among Greek boutique hotels remain uneven, hindered by limitations in digital infrastructure, skills gaps, and fragmented strategic frameworks [2,3]. This study seeks to critically analyze the role of digital marketing in promoting boutique hotels within the Greek tourism landscape. By examining the adoption of contemporary digital tools - ranging from social media engagement to personalization technologies - and assessing their impact on market visibility and customer

acquisition, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by boutique tourism providers. The findings are expected to inform strategic decision-making and policy development, contributing to the sustainable advancement of boutique tourism in Greece amidst the broader digital transformation of the tourism sector.

Literature Review

The digital transformation of the tourism sector has emerged as a fundamental factor in enhancing destination competitiveness and improving visitor experiences. The adoption of advanced digital technologies, such as social media, big data analytics, and augmented reality (AR) applications, is reshaping marketing and management practices in tourism, leading to the emergence of smart destinations that focus on personalization and sustainability [4]. Boutique tourism accommodations, as specialized and personalized lodging forms, have the potential to fully exploit the capabilities of digital marketing to differentiate themselves and enhance their added value [5]. However, digital maturity and technology adoption within the Greek tourism sector reveal significant disparities, with limitations related to both infrastructure and human resources [2,3]. International literature highlights the necessity of a comprehensive and coherent digital strategy that combines the development of digital skills, the strengthening of collaboration among stakeholders, and the utilization of innovative tools for promoting and managing tourism services [6]. Within the Greek context, strengthening the digital presence of boutique hotels is a critical element for adapting to the contemporary trends of the digital traveler and achieving sustainable development in the sector [7].

Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist qualitative research design, aiming to explore how digital marketing practices are perceived, implemented, and adapted by boutique tourism accommodations in Greece in the context of digital transformation. Given the complexity of technological integration in tourism and the contextual nature of small-scale enterprises, a qualitative case study approach was deemed most appropriate [8]. The goal is to provide in-depth insights into the dynamics of digital marketing at the micro-level of boutique operations, within the broader macro-environment of the Greek tourism ecosystem.

Research Questions

The research is guided by the following key questions:

Q1: What forms of digital marketing strategies are currently employed by boutique tourism accommodations in Greece?

Q2: How do owners and managers of these accommodations perceive the effectiveness of digital tools in attracting and retaining visitors?

Q3: What are the key challenges and barriers to the adoption of innovative digital technologies in the Greek boutique tourism sector?

Q4: Under what conditions can a coherent and sustainable digital marketing strategy be effectively implemented in this segment of the Greek tourism industry?

Research Design and Data Collection

A multiple case study design was employed, focusing on boutique accommodations operating in three distinct Greek destinations (Cyclades, Ionian Islands, and the Peloponnese), selected based on criteria of digital visibility, destination diversity, and strategic orientation.

Data were collected through: Semi-structured interviews with 12 property owners and senior marketing professionals, conducted between February and April 2025. Interviews lasted 40–60 minutes, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Digital content analysis of official websites, social media channels, and user-generated content (e.g., TripAdvisor, Google reviews). Observational insights on the use of interactive features, responsiveness, and integration of booking technologies. All qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 14. The coding scheme followed a hybrid approach, combining theory-driven categories (e.g., digital engagement, innovation capacity and marketing orientation) with inductively emergent themes identified during the coding process [9].

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling technique was applied to identify cases that exhibit varying degrees of digital engagement. The inclusion criteria required that the accommodation:

- a) Had been in operation for at least three years,
- b) maintained an active online presence on two or more platforms,
- c) Demonstrated managerial interest in digital innovation.

This strategy ensured information-rich cases for understanding strategic and operational dimensions of digital marketing in boutique settings.

Limitations and Delimitations

While the case study approach allows for rich, context-specific insights, it does not aim for statistical generalizability. Findings are representative of the selected cases rather than the entire sector. The subjectivity of interview data and the reliance on self-reported practices may introduce biases. However, triangulation across data sources and destinations enhances the credibility and transferability of the results [10].

Findings

The empirical data revealed four interrelated thematic clusters, corresponding to the research questions: the scope of digital marketing adoption, perceived efficacy of digital tools, key constraints to innovation, and enabling conditions for strategic transformation. These themes illuminate both the heterogeneity and commonalities within the digital practices of boutique tourism

operators in Greece.

Scope and Patterns of Digital Marketing Adoption

Digital marketing adoption across the sample displayed notable variation, both in technological sophistication and strategic integration. While all participating properties maintained a basic digital presence most frequently through a corporate website and social media channels the extent to which these platforms were used strategically differed considerably. Approximately one-third of participants had adopted a comprehensive digital strategy involving multichannel promotion, content marketing, dynamic pricing, and reputation management. These properties typically outsourced digital activities to external consultants or employed staff with specialized knowledge, enabling more consistent branding and targeted outreach. For example, properties investing in professional visual storytelling and user-generated content campaigns reported a greater sense of control over their market positioning. Conversely, smaller and family-run establishments largely relied on third-party booking platforms (OTAs) for visibility and reservations. In these cases, digital engagement was reactive rather than strategic, often limited to basic updates or seasonal promotional posts. Innovative tools such as virtual tours, AI chatbots, or customer segmentation analytics were largely absent, reflecting a cautious or resource-constrained approach to digitalization.

Perceived Effectiveness and Strategic Value

Most interviewees recognized the increasing necessity of digital marketing, particularly in light of changing traveler behavior and competitive pressures. Social media, and particularly Instagram, was described as a crucial space for brand expression and emotional resonance, especially among younger and experience-oriented clientele. However, the perceived effectiveness of digital marketing varied. While some participants highlighted measurable benefits such as increased direct bookings and improved customer loyalty, others expressed uncertainty about the impact of their efforts, citing a lack of clear performance indicators or in-house analytical capabilities. Several operators described decision-making processes based on intuition or anecdotal feedback rather than structured evaluation. This ambiguity suggests a broader gap between adoption and digital maturity. The recognition of digital tools as essential was nearly universal, but the capacity to fully leverage them as part of a coherent marketing strategy remained uneven.

Constraints to Digital Innovation

Three dominant barriers emerged from the data: limited digital literacy, financial constraints, and regional infrastructural disparities. Operators frequently referenced the lack of specialized knowledge and training opportunities as major impediments to progress. The seasonal nature of operations was also cited as a structural challenge that discourages long-term investment in digital tools or professional development. Moreover, several participants noted that access to high-quality digital services (e.g., web development, social media management) is unevenly distributed, with peripheral destinations facing limited availability

and inflated costs. One respondent articulated this concern by noting: "Out here, we are either doing it all ourselves, or paying city-level fees for services that don't always align with our brand or market." This digital divide underscores the importance of localized support mechanisms and capacity-building initiatives, particularly for rural or island destinations.

Enablers of Strategic Digital Transformation

Despite existing challenges, a strong willingness to evolve digitally was evident across the sample, contingent on certain enabling factors. These included access to targeted training programs tailored to small businesses, affordable consultancy services, improved connectivity infrastructure, and public sector initiatives to promote digital literacy and awareness. Importantly, participants emphasized that digital transformation in the boutique hospitality sector must be aligned with the values of authenticity, storytelling, and experiential differentiation. As such, technological tools were seen not as substitutes for personalized service, but as enhancers of it - when appropriately contextualized. The need for flexible, scalable, and culturally sensitive solutions was frequently stressed, reflecting the diversity of business models and destination contexts.

Conclusions

The empirical data analysis revealed four distinct themes, digital marketing adoption, perceived effectiveness, barriers to digital innovation, and conditions for strategic transition that correspond to research questions Q1-Q4. Boutique units exhibited a basic digital presence (website, social media), however, only one-third implemented a comprehensive digital strategy encompassing multichannel promotion, storytelling content, dynamic pricing, and reputation management. These cases were supported by external consultants or specialized staff and demonstrated a stronger market positioning (Q1). In contrast, smaller hotels predominantly relied on OTA platforms, without adopting innovative tools such as virtual tours, chatbots, or data-driven benchmarking (Q1).

Perceived effectiveness of digital marketing varied: some businesses reported increased direct bookings and enhanced customer loyalty, while the majority faced uncertainty due to the lack of measurable indicators and internal analytics structures, leading to decision-making processes based more on intuition than data-driven experience (Q2). Key barriers included limited digital literacy, financial constraints, seasonality, and geographical inequalities - particularly in island regions where cost and access to digital services are limited (Q3). These findings are corroborated by national studies linking the low digital maturity of Greek tourism SMEs to competitiveness loss and the European digital maturity index, where Greece ranks low.

Active willingness for digital transition was evident among participants, contingent upon targeted training, affordable consultancy support, improved connectivity, and government assistance (Q4). Additionally, it was emphasized that the digital strategy should respect and enhance the local cultural identity, storytelling, and authenticity of boutique units, serving as a

complement rather than a substitute for personalized experiences. This approach aligns with international research highlighting the importance of digital authenticity and engagement. In summary, despite widespread recognition of the importance of digital marketing, its implementation remains fragile and heterogeneous. Success requires a strategy combining skill development, appropriate infrastructure, analytical tools, and digital initiatives connected to the local identity and experience of boutique units.

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