Creative Digital Marketing Campaigns for Hospitality and Tourism Organizations

By Tingting Zhang

Introduction

The world's technological climate has made digital marketing an absolute necessity to business success (De Pelsmacker, Van Tilburg, & Holthof, 2018). What was once a competitive edge is now a basic means of survival. The challenge for a company now is how to make itself heard in a very loud environment. Hospitality and tourism business face even greater challenges, as many markets are saturated with contenders for consumer attention. Social-media sites, direct marketing, and email blasts are a few ways to be creative in a digital world. User-friendly sites and readily available emails containing discounted products help companies stand out from the crowd. Also, companies using digital platforms to better serve their guests, such as Airbnb (Blal, Singal, & Templin, 2018), are achieving the highest level of creativity with digital marketing.

Companies must stay in the forefront of the consumer's mind by adapting to new, ever-evolving technologies. When one social platform falls in popularity, there are usually two to three others right behind to take its place in the limelight. The ability to keep pace and market successfully marks the difference between dynamic, evolving businesses and those that are old news. Some benefits of successful digital marketing campaigns (Kannan, 2017) are expected to include new channels to sell products or services, building a closer relationship with customers, using campaigns as customer-service channels, staying at the forefront of customer awareness, and launching new brands. Such campaigns have even been used to promote events or support social causes. The Internet is the window to a new world, full of possibilities and with almost no barriers (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014). Today, social media and user-generated content (UGC) are growing stronger every day and have become crucial elements of any digital campaign.

In light of the importance of digital marketing and the unique ability of creative digital marketing campaigns to promote hospitality and tourism organizations, this paper reviews the literature on digital marketing fundamentals as well as the essential elements of a successful digital marketing approach. It then analyzes and discusses selected creative digital marketing campaigns led by pioneering hospitality and tourism organizations. Finally, a discussion of these innovative adoptions and applications is offered to provide insights for teaching purposes.

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Theoretical Foundation

Digital Marketing Fundamentals

Digital marketing is crucial today. With so many people using smartphones, almost everything is done digitally (Morosan, 2014). It is vital for companies to have an online presence, as there are countless ways to use digital marketing to showcase products, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. Whether it's becoming an insta-brand, finding micro-influencers, paying more attention to Pinterest, or using customer-created Facebook ads, there is an approach for everyone. Having no digital marketing strategy will almost certainly hurt a company and its sales (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018).

Hospitality and tourism are among the industries most affected by digital development. The hospitality and tourism industry was among the first to adopt digital marketing to attract communities, ensuring that its customers found the best vacation destinations (Akbar & Tracogna, 2018). Hotels typically use digital marketing primarily to capture competitive markets. There are many types and modes of digital markets, but the dominant model is a social-media website (Chan & Guillet, 2011), for example, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media that keep hotels in the minds of their customers. Another method is hiring a digital marketing company to increase a hotel's exposure and revenue (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). These companies will do everything, including search-engine optimization, social-media marketing, and other strategies to cost-effectively attract potential new customers. With the help of various digital marketing platforms, increasing businesses provide online services via tablet devices and smartphones (Zhu, So, & Hudson, 2017). Through articles, audio, email, and video, online travel marketing can be disseminated to any audience. In order to perform well and gain a competitive advantage, travel industries look for the best and most distinctive way to reach their buyer role and tailor their products to their target audience. Today, everyone has desktop computers, laptops, mobile devices, and the like and can easily access all manner of tourism information, from accommodation and travel to food and activities. Effective digital marketing is the best and fastest way to attract a large audience at the lowest cost.

The number of customers who depend on online information for such things as destination and hotel searches and making reservations has dramatically increased (Cheng & Jin, 2019). In response, marketers must rethink their online dynamics. Travelers are likely to base

their decisions on what they find through social networks and search engines rather than offline tools. Therefore, digital marketing has become a prevalent way for network marketers to promote their businesses. Scholars report that tourism and hospitality have embraced technology for three decades (Kandampully, Bilgihan, & Zhang, 2016), from computerized reservation systems, instant communication with customers, interactivity, and massive data storage to big-data analytics and predictions to support interrelationship management.

With the advent of Web 2.0 (Chan & Guillet, 2011), tourism and hospitality 2.0 took shape as a business revolution by introducing online social platforms (Lim, 2010). This led to the reconstruction of businesses and destinations with the aid of networks to enhance communication, productivity, and the co-creation of value between companies and customers (Cabiddu, Lui, & Piccoli, 2013). Consequently, practitioners explore the potential of social networks, use dual communication tools, and exploit platforms' interactivity features to improve their customer relationships. The ability to affect customer purchase behaviors is the province of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Zhang et al., 2017), which is well known by many practitioners and scholars. The impact of eWOM has been significantly expanded by the ongoing development of social-network sites and online platforms (Sashi, 2012). Digital marketing campaigns benefit greatly from the support of sound online social platforms in optimizing their effects on customers and sustainable businesses.

Case Illustrations

Case I: Tourism Australia Dundee

This campaign was launched by Tourism Australia during Super Bowl LII in 2018 (Australia, 2018). It was unique in not being immediately identifiable as a tourism marketing campaign, instead disguising itself as a sequel to the popular Crocodile Dundee movie franchise. The "movie preview" showed Danny McBride and Chris Hemsworth exploring Australia, combining re-shot iconic scenes from the movies with subtle tourism offerings entitled "A Trip of a Lifetime," "Unforgettable Wineries," and "World-Class Restaurants." Linked social-media accounts and a website continued the story, and the campaign was able to grow its social and published media reach. Only after generating a huge buzz of excitement was it revealed to be a tourism ad for Australia. Within five months, the campaign had received over 102 million social-media views, generated 14,000 media articles, and won eight Cannes Lions awards, with a combined reach of 9.2 billion views (Australia, 2019). This resulted in a 30% increase in sales and an equivalent $85 million in advertising value (Australia, 2019). In October 2018, Tourism Australia followed up with an invitation to visit the set of Crocodile Dundee (Anonymous, 2018), including all the iconic locations and experiences shown in the initial campaign.

Case II: #FyreFestival Blitz

The Fyre Festival (Gaca, 2017) is now infamous for its poor execution and broken promises, as immortalized in Netflix and Hulu specials. Despite not being able to deliver on its promises, the festival had an incredibly successful social-media campaign that generated buzz and sold out its tickets in record time. Fyre made its announcement on YouTube with a video promising the best in food, art, music, and adventure. World-class models, beautiful scenery, and an energized soundtrack built excitement, followed at the end by an invitation to purchase limited tickets. As of the time of writing, the official Fyre Festival announcement video had received over 4.8 million views. To drive traffic to the YouTube announcement, the Fyre Festival's organizers partnered with Instagram influencers in an organized and targeted penetration of the platform. Influencers were offered accommodations at the festival and were paid up to $250,000 for a single post (Gaca, 2017). With these promises, the signature burnt orange of the Fyre Festival flooded top influencer posts and saturated the feeds of their Instagram followers. The promises of this marketing campaign went unfulfilled, and the festival is now known as the greatest party that never happened, providing a warning that great social-media marketing penetration can backfire if it is not supported by a solid product.

Case III: Travelocity's @RoamingGnome

The Travelocity Roaming Gnome (Gnome, 2017) was one of the original multi-platform online campaigns. It originated in 2004 as a comedic response to the UK-originated prank of stealing lawn gnomes from neighbors' lawns and sending pictures of the gnome on vacation (Gnome, 2017). As Travelocity is a vacation site, this concept represented a memorable trend to exploit with its advertising dollars. The campaign began with television commercials that showed the Roaming Gnome using Travelocity to go on interesting vacations. This was supported by a social-media push on Myspace, Chatroulette, Twitter, and Instagram. Over the years, the taglines and messages of the TV advertisements have changed while retaining the central character. The gnome still maintains its social-media accounts and continues to explore the world using Travelocity.

Case IV: Robarte un Beso

This campaign, an example of digital marketing power, featured two components (diariodemarketing, 2017):

1. A website was created to which all fans of Carlos Vives and Sebastian Yatra (Colombian singers) could easily subscribe, providing only their name, country, and cellphone number. As days passed, both artists randomly called people to tell them about their song and invite them to upload a video to Instagram that told their own story of wanting to kiss someone in order to show that person how much they cared. Those fans who did not receive a phone call got a voice message from the

famous singers with the same message. All the campaign's content included the hashtag #RobarteUnBeso. People went crazy. The videos and hashtag were everywhere on Instagram, and people continually tweeted about the campaign and posted videos after receiving the singers' phone calls. The singers then announced that they would pick the best uploaded videos and use them in the song's official video. Several elements of social media and digital commerce are reflected in this campaign's component toolkit: UGC, storytelling, and the video contest. Users were turned into content creators. (We include some screenshots of tweets and uploaded videos.)

2. In the second component of the campaign, famous YouTubers and micro-influencers from Latin America posted videos with the same hashtag that showed them stealing kisses from random people on the street. The link on the side provides an example. One of the YouTubers was arrested, and, after his release, he uploaded the video, giving more attention to the digital campaign. This component exemplifies one element of the social-commerce toolkit.

Case V: Amazon Treasure Truck

In 2015, the online shopping giant Amazon launched a campaign called the Treasure Truck (Amazon, n/a). Starting in Seattle, the truck would sell one randomly chosen item at a discounted price, but the only way to learn what the item was, what the price was, and where the Treasure Truck would stop was to subscribe to text messages and then arrange to go to one of the Treasure Truck's stops after purchasing the item at the discounted price on the Amazon website. This constituted an interesting blend in which digital marketing led to physical marketing when the customers physically met the truck to get their items. Occasionally, the campaign moved from physical to digital when people with no knowledge of the Treasure Truck would happen upon it and actually buy from the Treasure Truck or find the concept unique and cool and then subscribe to get the text messages. Now, Amazon Treasure Trucks can be found in 25 cities in the US and five cities in the UK (Eldredge, 2017), meaning that the service has increased its following and popularity to the point of expanding across two countries.

Case VI: Delta Dating Wall

The Delta Dating Wall (Nudd, 2017) emerged as a partnership between Delta Airlines and the social dating app Tinder. The partners painted a street-corner wall in Brooklyn with images of iconic world destinations at which people could take selfies. The wall was unveiled during a singles-centric event on 17 June 2017, and a professional photographer was onsite to take photos of guests for posting (Nudd, 2017). Included above the images on the wall (so that they did not intrude in the shots) were the taglines "World travelers are more likely to be swiped right" (which provided motivation for singles and awareness of

Tinder's unique swipe feature) and "Until you take the trip, we'll help you fake the trip," along with advertising and the Delta airlines logo.

This marketing promotion was created from research that found that a #worldtraveller has an increased chance of getting a match on Tinder (Romano, 2017). Among the findings:

- Sixty-two percent of men and 74% of women like a dating partner who have the same travel interests
- One in two singles says traveling is a favorite thing to do
- One in two singles says traveling to a new city (Barua, n/a) for a date meeting would be exciting
- One in three singles considered travel as a number one in their ranking in 2017
- Fifty-seven percent of singles take one or more vacations per year
- One in three singles tries to go somewhere different for every vacation

The wall brought positive responses from those who interacted with it, increasing brand awareness for both companies. Due to its nature, the marketing effort (and by extension its reach) was limited to those passing by its physical location in Brooklyn. To understand how its message was communicated outside this geographical location, the Delta Dating Wall was chosen as a survey topic.

Case VII: Loews – User Generated Campaigns

UGC is a great way to showcase brand promotion, so Loews Hotels and Resorts used it as the foundation of its first social advertising campaign (and accompanying microsites). Instead of using professional photos in the ad, Loews chose Instagram photos taken by hotel guests. The ad itself further encouraged users to generate content, requiring that they tag their photos with the #travelforreal tag (Barua, n/a). Subsequently, all the photos were placed on a miniature website, "Because no one can tell our story better than you." The campaign was designed to provide consumers with visual assurance (and general online reviews). At the same time, by sharing UGC, Loews makes its customers feel valued and recognized. My interviewee indicated that, when she browsed the Instagram account of Loews Hotel, she felt that the customers' photos were better than the ads that the hotel provided because they were more realistic. In addition to the source of the image and its associated appeal, the idea also links the Loews brand to satisfied guests through visual reviews.

Traditional advertising is one-sided and branded, but the people viewing these ads see the customer's point of view. UGC offers additional authenticity and reliability. People look for customer reviews rather than product descriptions when making purchasing decisions, so it is believed that UGC reviews represent the actual product or service's quality and durability. The simple comments or images of UGC provide "real" and detailed insights into a product or service, but user-generated campaigns still have drawbacks, especially in content review. This is

the biggest challenge to using UGC on websites, as websites are often victims of online abuse and offensive content. Users have the right to discuss and upload images that they deem appropriate and to express their views as they wish, making user-generated campaigns a great program, but content review is crucial. We can't stop users from trying to upload what they want to your platform, but we can prevent the uploading of offensive content. When users submit any comments or videos, we will undertake a review before publishing it.

UGC belongs primarily to the people who share the content. It is important to understand the legal issues that accompany UGC content, so we must make it clear that the content does not belong to us and mention the original creator of the content. UGC content may comprise spam or fake personal information gathered via the Internet and social media, thus creating the risk of obtaining information from unreliable sources. Therefore, in this project, we must send the invitations to people in the database or email list and provide them with "verified comments" to label them reliable sources of information.

Case VIII: Four Seasons Hotel and Resort – Online Magazine

Four Seasons Magazine (Four Seasons, n/a) is a premier luxury lifestyle magazine reflecting the global influence of the Four Seasons brand, and its guests' upscale, refined taste and its elegant ambiance are part of the Four Seasons experience. Online blogs and magazines are still one of the more effective ways to communicate content outside the booking process. The hotel can be displayed in a thought-provoking article combined with compelling images. After looking at the Four Seasons Magazine online (Four Seasons, n/a), another respondent provided the feedback that, as a leading brand, the Four Seasons' online publication provides a luxury travel blog that showcases the hotel destinations in a stylish way. The digital version expands the Four Seasons online experience, providing fun and evocative content about some of the world's most fascinating destinations. This magazine reflects the reader's lifestyle and attributes, so it talks about the world on the basis of those demographics, aiming to enhance the influence of the Four Seasons Hotel as a media brand while providing guests with value-added amenities. However, the link between the Four Seasons brand and the magazines are increasingly tenuous, as the magazine has begun to publish content that is not related to tourism and hotels, such as content about Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Prada, and other luxury products.

Case IX: The Atlantis Hotel in Dubai – Facebook-themed Fan Suite

With locations around the globe, the Atlantis hotels are second to none when it comes to world-class hospitality (Monga, 2018). Recently, the Atlantis Hotel in Dubai reached one million likes on Facebook (Monga, 2018). To celebrate that milestone, the Atlantis created a contest not only to give back and say thank you but also to continue the effort

of increasing its presence on Facebook. The contest involved liking its Facebook page, selecting a preferred date, and filling out a form on the website. The prize? A one-night stay in their brand-new Facebook-themed Fan Suite. The contest resulted in well over 85,000 new likes on its page (Paez, 2018) as well as multiple articles about the occasion.

Case X: Hyatt – Music Video

Celebrity endorsement deals are a very effective tool for businesses, allowing them to advertise with a more direct approach. Hyatt partnered with Dua Lipa to showcase its new line of hotels in her music video for New Rules (Stanley, 2017). The collaboration garnered a whopping 1.6 billion views for the music video, which led to a spike in visitors to Hyatt's website, with over 20 million views (Stanley, 2017). It's safe to say that this campaign was a success, even though some celebrity endorsements may be fake or unreliable.

Discussion Questions and Activities

Discussion questions that might be asked in regard to the case presentations above include:

- What benefits do hotels receive by launching a creative digital marketing campaign?
- What factors define a successful digital marketing campaign for hotels or travel entities?
- What factors could make a digital marketing campaign innovative?
- What are the roles of technologies in designing digital marketing campaigns?
- Are social media and eWOM important in promoting the effects of digital marketing campaigns on customer engagement and business competitiveness?

Activities that could be assigned to students in regard to the case presentations above include:

Out-of-classroom interviews: Students interview their peers and/or friends about their perspectives on the digital marketing campaigns introduced in the previous section. The students then summarize the interview results by critically analyzing the pros and cons of each digital marketing campaign case.

Group essay assignment: Students form in groups, and each group hosts several group discussions to critically analyze the pros and cons of each digital marketing campaign and then use the summary of pros and cons to draft a creative digital marketing campaign for one hospitality or tourism company of its choice.

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Student Evaluations of the Case Study

General summary: most students expressed great interest in the cases presented in the case study and indicated they gained the following learning objectives:

- Gain a deeper understanding of digital marketing for hospitality and tourism professionals
- Design an effective digital marketing campaign for a company/brand
- Analyze the critical factors among the pros and cons of digital marketing campaigns

Selective quotes from the student evaluations include:

"… gave me a whole new outlook on the practices of digital marketing. First of all, it was a refreshing experience because I was able to view digital marketing from a different perspective, from my group members perspective. This gave me an opportunity to see what and how different types of digital marketing campaigns attract different consumers…" (Victoria, 1st year master student).

"I enjoyed this assignment because I thought it was interesting to look up different companies and their creative marketing techniques. There were so many good ones, and sometimes you don't even realize they are marketing..." (Emily, 2nd year master student).

"…it was interesting to analyze different campaigns in regards to the hospitality and tourism industry…" (Rodrigo, 1st year Ph.D. student).