

Travel agencies ' digital marketing content, customer equity and touristic destination choice. Case study**Harek Sabira**

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Received: 28/08/2024**Accepted:** 25/10/2024**Published:** 19/11/2024**Abstract:**

Our study carried out to explore how customer interaction with travel agencies' digital marketing content (DMC) via various digital technologies and social media communities influence customers' equity (satisfaction, loyalty and retention) and their decision-making regarding the choice of tourist destinations.

Data collection based on the survey research that was distributed on a sample of 241 customers of Guest Travel Services (GTS) that is an Algerian travel agency.

To test our hypotheses, we employed structural equation modeling (SEM). The empirical findings suggest that the interaction of customers with travel agencies DMC influences positively customer equity, which is a fundamental mediator that enhances the consumers' selection of tourist destinations offered by the studied travel agency.

The results were discussed, and the study concluded with recommendations that highlighted the necessity of DMC in promoting destinations. By enhancing customer equity, this content effectively influences tourists' decision-making when choosing their travel destinations.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Customer equity, touristic destination, Travel agencies.

JEL Classification: Z33 ,M31

1. Introduction:

Information and interaction technologies are expected to completely transform the tourism industry in the 21st century (Akhtar, et al., 2021). Currently, the exchange of thoughts and information is the essential component of tourism and the digital technologies are perfect medium of information interchange between tourism actors and their audience, this has highlighted significant differences between modern social networks and traditional marketing media (Pantano, 2013).

Within this context, the introduction of digital marketing has substantial impact on the marketing landscape and the tourists' perceived behavior, in today's technologically advanced world (Mathew & Soliman, 2020). For that reason, responsible for tourism marketing especially travel agencies (TAs) have a variety of online channels (e-channels) and tools to promote their tourist destinations and reach their audience within shorter period of time with the aim of developing their customer equity also to enhance the value of their business.

While, many travel agencies invest extensively on integrating the digital marketing according to its important role in creating an effective online presence and providing new approaches to improve their brand positioning strategies (Djemam & Boukeffa, 2016), its impact on customer equity is still a topic of discussion to know how these efforts can be transformed into concrete outcomes, moreover, there is limited knowledge of the potential impacts of customers interaction with digital content on customers' choice of tourist destinations offered by travel agencies (Ho & Chung, 2020).

It is from this perspective that the study seeks to inspect how digital marketing content influence customer equity elements including customer loyalty, customer satisfaction and customer retention and how those three variables impact the tourists' decision-making in choosing their tourist destinations.

In this study, we'll define the research problem according to the following main question:

How digital marketing content influences the equity of customers' choice of tourist destinations offered by travel agencies?

To answer this question, we will try to answer the following sub-questions:

- What are the theoretical conceptions of digital marketing in tourism industry?
- How does digital marketing content influence different dimensions of customer equity in the tourism industry?
- How does customer interaction with digital marketing content influence tourists' decision-making processes about touristic destination choice?

Research objectives

This paper aims to investigate the essential role of customer equity as a mediator between digital marketing content and the decision-making process of tourists when choosing a travel destination.

By analyzing the impact of well-designed digital marketing efforts - such as social media campaigns, email promotions, and website content- on customer equity, the study seeks to reveal how these efforts shape tourists' perceptions, preferences, and final choices.

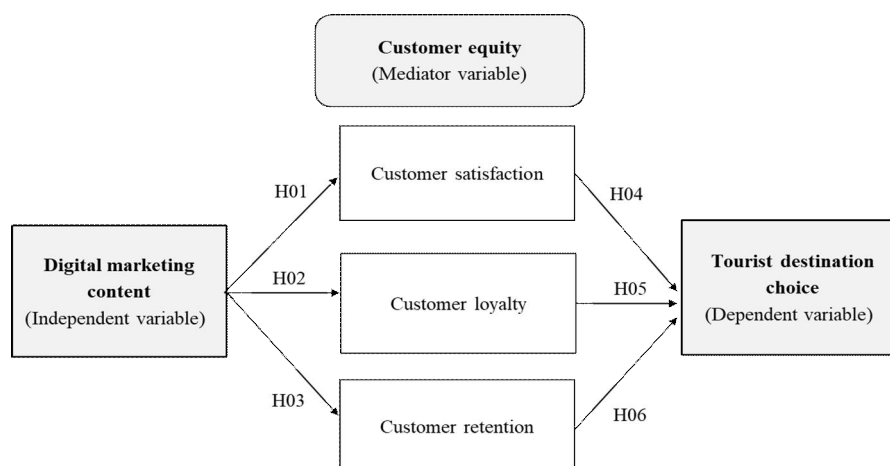
Furthermore, this research will offer valuable insights into how enhancing customer equity can serve as a pivotal mechanism for converting digital engagement into tangible decisions in the highly competitive tourism industry.

Research hypothesis

On the basis of the research objectives and the review of prior studies we divided customer equity, which we considered as a mediator variable, into three dimensions

including customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer retention, by applying (Wang, Li, & Chen, 2020) conceptualization, thus, the hypothetical model can be presented as following:

Fig.1.The hypothetical model of the study



Source: Adapted from Ho & Chung (2020) and Wang, Li & Chen (2020)

According to the hypothetical model and in order to answer the presented problem, we formulated the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Digital marketing content (DMC) for travel agencies has a positive significant effect on customer satisfaction
- **H2:** DMC for travel agencies has a positive significant effect on customer loyalty
- **H3:** DMC for travel agencies has a positive significant effect on customer retention
- **H4:** Customer satisfaction has a positive significant effect on choosing touristic destination.
- **H5:** Customer loyalty has a positive significant effect on choosing touristic destination.
- **H6:** Customer retention has a positive significant effect on choosing touristic destination.

Previous studies

There exist many works in various websites and electronic journals as well, most of them are still at the exploitation and definition stage due to the nature and the modernity of digital marketing and tourism and the lack of academic research on the relation between this two subjects, particularly in Algerian travel agencies; so, on this study we tried to complement existing literature on our subject, we will present some of the studies that have analytically addressed the topic using structural modeling analytics:

- **Ho & Chung (2020)**, in their paper titled “Customer engagement, customer equity and repurchase intention in mobile apps”, studied how mobile apps’ customer engagement using different social media tools influences customer equity (brand, value and relationship equity) and repurchase intention. It was built on a survey that was distributed on a sample of 485 customers of an electric scooter organization. In order to test the hypotheses; the author used a structural equation modeling. The empirical results showed that the customer engagement with mobile apps impacts positively customer equity, which further improves the repurchase intention of existing customers.
- **The study by Mathew & Soliman (2020)** titled “Does digital content marketing affect tourism consumer behavior? An extension of technology acceptance model”, explores an extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to investigate and

compare the influence of digital content marketing (DCM) on travel and tourism consumer behavior in two distinct countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. A quantitative approach was adopted using PLS-structural equation modeling. The study concluded that the TAM major constructs were good elucidating the attitude and behavior toward using of DCM for tourism purposes.

- **Wang, Li & Chen (2020)**, in their study titled “Effects of product imitation on customer equity”, examined the differential effects of pure and innovative imitation on customer equity (customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer retention) and the moderating role of market emergency. The obtained results provide interesting implications for managers looking for implementing product imitation strategies in emerging economies.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Digital marketing

2.1.1. History and definition of digital marketing

Historically, the term digital marketing was first used in 1990 by the launch of the first “Archie” search engine. Three years later, the first interactive advertising was created. Later, Google, Yahoo and MSN introduced multinational corporations that began to show the importance of digital marketing. It was in 2001 that the first mobile phone marketing campaign was developed by Universal Music (Monkam, 2021, p. 15). Then, the world witnessed a great revolution in terms of social media (facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp...etc.) that were used in brand building and customer engagement. Today, digital marketing continues to evolve with modern marketing techniques and advancements in big data and artificial intelligence.

According to Mandal (2016), digital marketing is the process of promoting company’s products or services using all forms of advanced digital technologies that are available mainly on the internet, including also mobile phones, video advertising, social media and any other digital means. According to (Monkam, 2021, p. 13) it is all about the different strategies and technologies as well as their associated elements: consumer behavior, distribution and purchasing channels, emotions, experiences and, of course, platforms.

In this perspective, we are dealing with web 2.0, which represents a new kind of commercial relationships between companies to increase sales of their products whatever their sector of activity (Pantano & Pietro, 2013). Additionally, Web 3.0, often referred to as the “Semantic Web,” aims to create a more intelligent and interconnected online experience through the use of technologies like blockchain, artificial intelligence, and decentralized networks.

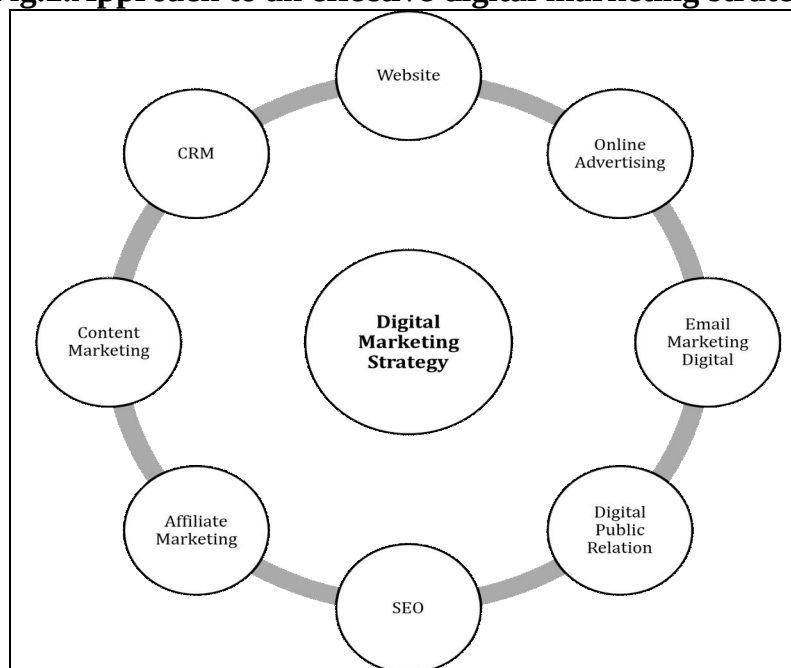
2.1.2. Emerging trends in tourism digital marketing

The marketing world has seen a remarkable evolution, and it is constantly evolving by technological advances; in fact, trends are born and then disappear, replaced by new ones. Indeed, Holliman & Rowley (2014) considered digital content as a pull marketing environment in which companies seek to capture customers attention to their brand websites by using current trends including (Preniqi, Sylaj, & Krasniqi, 2020): Storytelling, personalization, direct messaging, chat-bots, social media marketing, Influencers, E-mail marketing, video marketing trends, pay per click videos via different platforms and search engine optimization.

Nowadays, tourism professionals are focusing on integrating innovative technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) tours to enhance customer experiences. They are also prioritizing sustainable travel practices and leveraging digital marketing tools such as social media, Chatbots and mobile-friendly booking systems to better connect with modern travelers and meet their evolving expectations.

Some professionals outlined a set of digital technologies that, when combined, yield an effective strategy of digital marketing as shown in figure 02 (Mukhtar, Mohan, & Chandra, 2023):

Fig.2.Approach to an effective digital marketing strategy



Source: (Mukhtar, Mohan, & Chandra, 2023)

2.2 E-tourism, travelling behavior and customer equity

2.2.1. Digital tourism and traveler behavior

Due to the increasing diffusion of digital content marketing, the global tourism sector became more competitive by providing pre-trip information about tourism attractions, permitting tourists to contact vendors directly, obtain accurate information and get the lowest price (Chakravarty, 2024). E-tourism reflects the digitalization of all processes and value chains in tourism, travel, hospitality and catering industries. In particular, e-tourism can be considered as the integration of tourism activity and internet technology, thus it refers to the web-based business systems for tourism (Pantano & Pietro, 2013).

In parallel with this, consumer behavior refers to the process of obtaining and evaluating information by customers in order to make a purchase decision of products and services to satisfy their needs. Moutinho (1987) clarified that in tourism industry buying decision involves some unique aspects, simply, it is an investment that has no fixed rate of return, and the amount of money needed to make the purchase are often saved over a long period of time. Indeed, the travelling behavior of individuals plays a significant role in tourists' behavior, both in general and among specific tourist segments. Digital marketing strategies targeting travelling behavior aim to establish connections between available tourist destinations and specific tourists' groups using two main procedures of the digital technologies which are transactional e-commerce and the informative use via Web sites and social media (Djemam & Boukeffa, 2016).

Generally speaking, as tourists are already in search of information, advice, tourist destinations or services; the interest in the digital content marketing increased and customers actively seek out brands that provide engaging and valuable content which is relevant to their needs (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Accordingly, tourism agents must adapt their own strategies to still competitive by using digital marketing content to gather data on travel behavior, preferences and emerging trends, then taking advantage of this data and offer personalized experiences that are adapted with the evolving requirements of their customers.

2.2.2. Customer equity and its components in the tourism industry

Considering that tourists destination choice decisions are often influenced by emotional attachment to their or others' past experiences. The tourism agents are making considerable investments in internet infrastructure and exploiting the power of the word-of-mouth communication through the e-channels in order to attract more tourists and promote destinations qualifications and to influence customer equity which is defined as a customer's continuation of business relationship with a firm (Darzi & Bhat, 2018). In tourism sector it refers to the ability of tourism agents to keep their customers returning for future travel experiences and it contains three concepts (Wang, Li, & Chen, 2020):

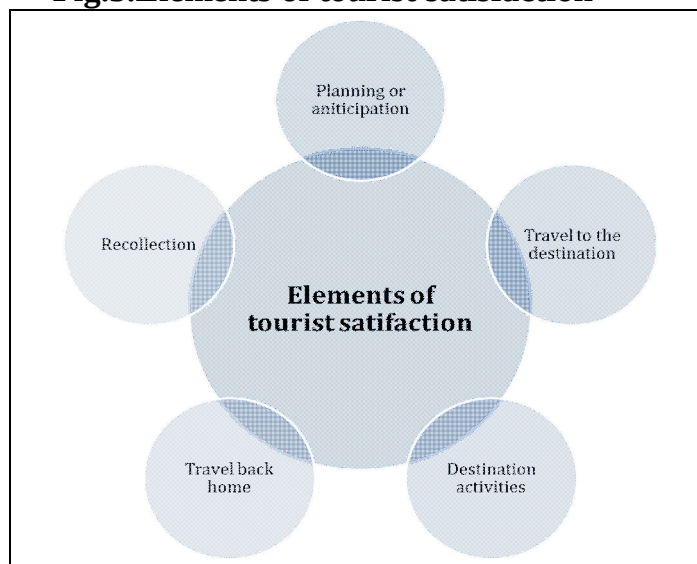
❖ Customer satisfaction in tourism industry

Customer satisfaction is an important determinant of long-term customer behavior. It is defined as the degree of pleasure and gladness felt by customers resulting in fulfillment of customer's desires, expectations and needs (Darzi & Bhat, 2018). Similar definition is proposed by Bae (2016) who considered that satisfaction is the gap between expected and perceived customer services or products

Pizam, Neumann, and Reichel (1978) define the concept of tourist satisfaction as "the result of the interaction between a tourist's experience at the destination area and the expectations ... about that destination" and explore the underlying factors of tourist satisfaction. Importantly, at the center of the concept of satisfaction stands the expectation that it is the result of promises made by the tourist destination, the tour operator, or travel agent, and the assessment of the degree to which this promise was kept.

During every particular trip, there is only small number of services available to tourists, at the same time, there are five phases, each of them requires its own specific set of services, which must be recognized to be present in all trips to varying degrees and contribute to the tourist satisfaction (Taylor, 1980). Figure below shows how this works in practice:

Fig.3.Elements of tourist satisfaction



Source: (Taylor, 1980)

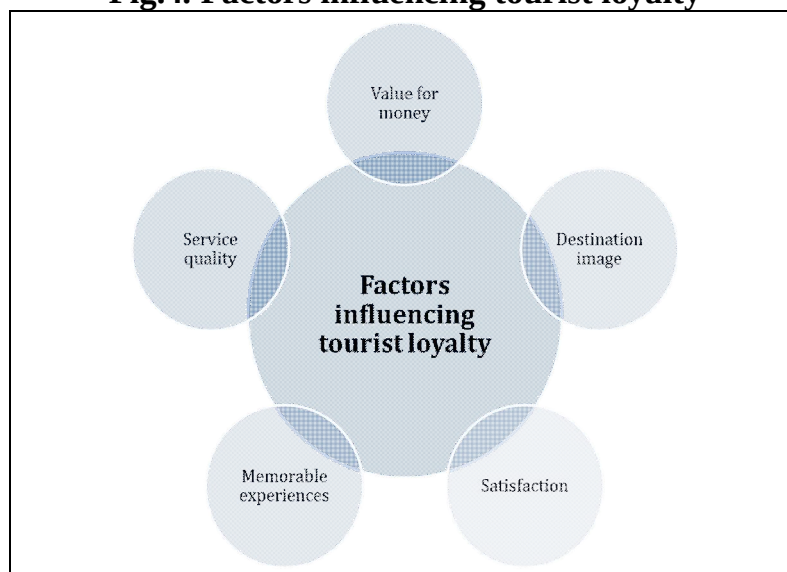
❖ Customer loyalty in tourism industry

In general, customer loyalty is a sustained usage and a friendly attitude of customers toward a product/service or a brand (Bae, 2016).

In tourism industry customer loyalty has a fundamental role; it refers to the commitment and repeated visitation or repurchases behavior based on tourists' highly positive attitude towards a particular destination, brand, or service. According to Djebbouri & Bousllah (2022) the combination between the two elements which are behavior and

attitude generates different degrees of customer loyalty towards the brand or firm in a purchase situation, these two elements are perceived as psychological disposition towards an object (Salman & Hong, 2017), thus, understanding and fostering tourist loyalty involves several factors which are summarized in the figure below:

Fig.4. Factors influencing tourist loyalty



Source: (Wang & Li, 2023)

❖ Customer retention in tourism industry

Overall, customer retention is defined as a customer's continuation of business relationship with a firm; in other words, it refers to repurchase intentions and is obtained by good service and good relationships (Darzi & Bhat, 2018).

Regarding the tourism sector, scientists consider that tourist retention refers to the ability of a destination or tourism service provider to encourage tourists to return for repeat visits or recommend the destination to others. It consists of offering a positive and memorable experience for tourists and visitors, ensuring high satisfaction levels, and creating tourist loyalty to the destination.

2.3. Travel agencies and tourists' choice of destination

2.3.1. Understanding travel agencies: Definition and functions

Tourism is a major economic activity for certain countries or territories where it may represent a fundamental or even unique share of currency inputs. Tourism industry accounts for 9% of global GDP and it represents 220 million direct jobs worldwide, these jobs, mostly local, contribute identifying the socio-economic composition in many territories (France, 2011, p. 12).

Travel agencies in turn contribute substantially to the promotion of tourism as a vital link that connects visitors and other tourism industry participants. A travel agency is considered as a commercial business for planning, organizing, and coordinating travel experiences and tourist trips for individuals or groups to various touristic attractions. In this context, travel agencies are essential to the tourism industry, providing a wide range of services that enhance the travel experience for their clients. They provide expert advice on destinations and itineraries, help with booking flights, and offer important information that simplifies trip planning for travelers (Kutty & Manu Melwin, 2020).

2.3.2. Tourists' destination decision-making

In tourism industry, the digital marketing applied by TAs contributes in destinations development. In fact, consumer behavior, in recent times, is mainly influenced by virtual environment that motivates tourists to travel and visit new tourist destinations. The field of destination marketing has been emerging since the 1990s and it deals with how a tourist

destination is perceived. Previous studies have concentrated on the field of destination image which mainly focused on examining the manner in which various customers recognize tourism destinations and identifying each of the factors that influence images perception (AVRAHAM & KETTER, 2013).

Tourist destination is considered as a final product that is characterized by intangibility. Taylor (1980) perceives a trip into a destination as “a satisfying experience” that can be distinguished by two elements which are the product (sought) and the distinct services required for its achievement (plant). He draws attention to use supply-demand matrix in order to know differences in tourists experiences and available resources so as to decide what kind of tourist destinations must be offered in order to satisfy market segments demand (Taylor, 1980).

3. Methodology and research context

3.1 Data collection and sampling

3.1.1. Data collection

On the basis of the conceptual model of the study and the kind of data required, we adopted a set of data collection tools as follows:

⇒ Secondary data collection

We used literature review of existing research papers, books and academic publications in addition we accessed to tourism statistics, reports and online databases to set key concepts of the study variables and interpret them to gather relevant information and achieve the intended objectives leading to useful results for the studied travel agency.

⇒ Primary data collection

The data were collected via a web-based survey that was used for two reasons. First, it was possible to reach a large number of potential subjects and give them instant access to the questionnaire, in turn, obtaining more representative results. Second, it offered an economical, reliable method for gathering empirical data (Chiu, Chang, & Cheng, 2008).

3.1.2. Sampling

To attain our objective, this study focuses on the relationship between digital marketing content and customers' decision-making in selecting the tourist destination offered by “**Guest Travel Services**” agency, through its impact on customer equity that contains three elements (satisfaction, loyalty and retention).

Founded in 2012, “GTS” as a venture-based travel agency, has profoundly changed the landscape of tourism industry by continually expanding its range of destinations suited to the specific needs of its target market that mainly comprises adults interested in cultural, gastronomic and adventure experiences.

Due to its successful digital marketing efforts and using modern technologies, “GTS” has strong presence on social networks and strategic partnerships; moreover, it has succeeded in increasing its tourist base and profits. It has an official fan page with 18000 followers that facilitate interaction with clients; also, it launched a recent marketing initiative to promote e-tourism destinations by creating user-friendly mobile applications and simple online reservation platforms to offer comfortable and personalized travel experiences. The agency offers a diverse range of services including:

- Selling national, international tickets for travel by various means of transportation.
- Organizing trips to various local and international destinations and hotel reservation.
- Planning and coordination for Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages.
- Organizing seminars, conferences and symposiums.

The target population of the survey research comprises customers who have interacted with the “GTS” agency at least once. This involves anyone who has used any of the agency's services, including making travels, participating in guided excursions... etc. In

particular, this study focused on gathering insights from individuals with firsthand experience of the travel agency's services.

3.2. Research measures

The questionnaire of our study was divided into two (02) parts, as detailed below:

Part one: It was directed to determine the demographic characteristics of our sample:

- The gender: which means (male or female), for further analysis we have attached (Male =1), (Female= 2).
- The age: we classified it into four (04) categories and for further analysis we attached each category to the values shown below:
[Under 20] = 1; [20-30] = 2; [30-40] = 3; [more than 40] = 4.
- Educational degree: we classified it into three (03) categories and for further analysis we attached each category to the values shown below:
Secondary school or less = 1; University= 2; Advanced degree= 3.
- Frequency of travel with GTS: Once = 1; 2 travels = 2; 3 travels or more=3.
- Times of interaction with GTS content on social media:
Never = 1; Once = 2; Twice or more=3

Part two: It was dedicated to determine respondents' answers about the variables of the study, using five-point Likert-scale (1 = strongly dis-agree; 5 = strongly agree) to examine the underlying measures of the proposed constructs.

In terms of independent variables on customers' interaction with digital marketing, that contains 8 items; it was devoted to know the level of consumer interaction with DMC of GTS travel agency in which the questions are mainly concerned with customer experience.

The mediating variable concerning customer equity construct, was selected according to (Ho & Chung, 2020) study, and was divided into three axes: customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer retention each of these sections comprises four (04) items.

The dependent variable examines the decision-making process for choosing tourist destinations, using a 6-item scale to assess the extent to which travelers are inclined to select destinations offered by GTS Travel Agency.

4. Empirical results analysis

4.1. Sample descriptive analysis

We have carefully explored the different demographic profile such as gender, age, educational qualifications obtained by customers of "GTS" travel agency. From the available data, we tried to summarize results of the respondents as shown in the table below:

Table 1. Respondents' demographic characteristics

<i>Description</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Frequency</i> <i>Note : n=241</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender	Male	131	54.36
	Female	110	45.64
Age	Under 20	36	14.94
	20-30	95	39.42
	30-40	70	29.04
	40+	40	16.6
Education degree	Secondary school or less	71	29.46
	University	143	59.34
	Advanced degree	27	11.2
Frequency of travel with GTS	Once	19	7.88
	2 times	95	39.41
	3 times or more	125	51.87
Times of interacting with GTS content on social	Never	20	8.3
	Once	97	40.25

media	Twice or more	124	51.45
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Source: The author based on SPSS 23

Based on research survey illustrated in Table 01, we found that 131 customers (54.36%) were males and 110 (45.64%) were females.

Regarding participants' ages, 36 (14.94%) were under 20 years, 95 (39.42%) were between 20 and 30 years, 70 (29.04%) were between 30 and 40 years, and 40 (16.6%) were 40 years or older.

While evaluating education levels of the respondents, 25 (10.37%) held a middle school degree, 46 (19.09%) had a secondary school degree, the majority, 143 (59.34%), possessed a university degree, and 27 (11.2%) had an advanced degree.

Interestingly, the data reveals that a small portion of respondents, 19 individuals (7.88%), have used GTS travel agency services only once. A larger segment, 95 respondents (39.41%), have traveled with GTS twice, indicating a moderate level of repeat usage. The majority of the sample, 125 respondents (51.87%), have traveled three or more times with GTS, suggesting a strong level of customer loyalty and satisfaction with the agency's services. This distribution highlights the agency's ability to retain customers and foster repeated engagement, which is important for success in the competitive tourism industry.

Notably, 97 respondents (40.25%) have engaged with GTS content on social media at least once, while a majority of 124 respondents (51.45%) have interacted two or more times, indicating a strong level of ongoing engagement with the brand's digital presence. Conversely, 20 respondents (8.3%) reported never interacting with GTS's social media content. This suggests that while GTS has successfully captured the attention of a significant portion of its audience, there is a small segment that remains either disengaged or possibly unaware of the agency's online presence. This insight highlights the importance of enhancing marketing communication strategies to engage the less active audience.

4.2. Measurement Model Analysis

4.2.1. Factor analysis

Factor analysis was employed in order to identify appropriate items related to each variable by analyzing factor loadings. These loadings reveal the strength of the relationship between each observed item and the underlying (unobserved) factor it is associated with, allowing for a clearer understanding of how well each item represents the intended construct.

For an item to be considered acceptable and to contribute meaningfully to the underlying factor, its loading coefficient should meet or exceed a benchmark of 0.5. This threshold ensures that the item has a sufficiently strong correlation with the underlying factor, indicating that the item has a sufficiently strong relationship with the factor, suggesting that it effectively measures the intended construct (ALTHONAYAN, ALHABIB, ALRASHEEDI, ALQAHTANI, & SALEH, 2015).

As shown in Table 02, the statistical analysis demonstrated strong composite reliability and convergent validity. This is evidenced by the fact that all measurement items showed significant factor loadings, with p-values less than 0.5, indicating a high level of correlation between the observed variables and their respective underlying constructs. These results affirm that the measures used in the study are both reliable and valid, ensuring the robustness of the constructs being evaluated.

Moreover, we employed a T-test to assess whether the means of our variables differ significantly, allowing us to determine if the observed differences are likely due to chance or indicate a true effect.

As the obtained results indicate, for all items $T_{\text{Calculated}} > T_{\text{Tabulated}} = 3.29$ ($p < 0.001$) which means that the relationships and loadings are statistically significant so that we can

validate the theoretical model. Such significance suggests that the observed associations are unlikely to be due to chance, reinforcing the robustness of the model's constructs.

Table 2. Factor loadings and T-values of measured items

<i>Axes/Items</i>		<i>Factor loadings λ</i>	<i>T-value</i>
Interaction with GTS' digital marketing content			
IDM1	TAs promotional emails that I receive are useful	0.77	8.05
IDM2	The number of GTS promotional emails is acceptable.	0.81	9.45
IDM3	The GTS customer services are quick to respond	0.76	8.9
IDM4	I often get immediate promotional emails from GTS travel agency related to my interests on tourist destinations	0.72	10.45
IDM5	I follow GTS' content on social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp)	0.79	9.58
IDM6	GTS social media content is important and confidential	0.78	8.75
IDM7	GTS social media content and online recommendations affect my travel decision	0.76	7.95
IDM8	I enjoy passing my time on searching GTS content and travel recommendations on social media.	0.77	9.13
Customer satisfaction			
CS1	I'm satisfied with the travel services provided GTS	0.76	8.78
CS2	The travel experiences offered by GTS meet my expectations.	0.71	9.12
CS3	I'm happy with the customer service of GTS	0.80	8.25
CS4	Overall, I am satisfied with my travel experiences with GTS	0.74	7.86
Customer loyalty			
CL1	I'm likely to choose the same tourism agency for my travels	0.82	9.76
CL2	I would recommend GTS tourism agency to others.	0.75	10.67
CL3	I'm committed to using the services of GTS in the future.	0.82	9.23
CL4	I have a strong preference for GTS over others.	0.76	8.98
Customer retention			
CR1	I intend to continue using GTS services.	0.79	8.71
CR2	I will remain a customer of GTS for a long time	0.84	7.73
CR3	I feel valued as a customer of GTS services	0.78	8.67
CR4	I find it difficult to switch to another travel agency	0.72	8.54
Touristic destination choice decision-making			
TDC1	GTS digital marketing and content on social media makes destinations more attractive to me.	0.71	9.65
TDC2	I often choose touristic destinations promoted by GTS through digital marketing e-channels	0.84	10.12
TDC3	GTS destination guides help me in making travel decisions.	0.81	9.91
TDC4	I prefer destinations that I have seen advertised online by GTS	0.79	9.67
TDC5	GTS digital marketing influences my choice of tourist destinations.	0.80	9.13

Source: The author based on SPSS AMOS 23

4.2.2. Reliability and validity testing

In order to ensure construct validity, we employed standard scale development and factor analysis to adapt existing measures and to identify appropriate variables 'related items.

We employed internal stability method "Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient" and "composite reliability values (CR)" to test reliability and internal stability of items. We should mention that Cronbach's alpha and CR values are recommended to be equal or greater than 0.7 to reflect a good reliability (Atulkar, 2020).

As shown in table 3, Alpha coefficient values are ranging from 0.83 to 0.91, and the

CR values that we found for our study constructs are between 0.79 and 0.85 which are higher than 0.7.

In general, those values demonstrate that the reliability test of all five variables has an acceptable level. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) values are higher than 0.5 which represents the threshold value.

Table3. Reliability and AVE of variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>No. of items</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha (Reliability)</i>	<i>Composite Reliability (CR)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>average variance extracted (AVE)</i>
Digital marketing	08	0.91	0.85	3.95	1.17	0.60
Customer satisfaction	04	0.85	0.79	4.12	1.12	0.53
Customer loyalty	04	0.87	0.83	4.78	1.08	0.57
Customer retention	04	0.83	0.84	4.61	1.31	0.67
Touristic destination choice	05	0.89	0.81	4.16	1.14	0.62

Source: The author based on SPSS AMOS 23

4.2.3. Variables correlation

In order to examine the discriminant validity of each construct, this study compares the square root of the common variance of the AVE to its construct correlations; we should mention that the square roots of the AVEs should be higher than its construct's correlation to get valid results (Atulkar, 2020).

According to table 04, all the square roots of the AVEs, that we found, are greater than the inter-construct correlation, which approves the discriminant validity of our study scale.

Table 4. Construct correlations

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Digital marketing</i>	<i>Customer satisfaction</i>	<i>Customer loyalty</i>	<i>Customer retention</i>	<i>touristic destination choice</i>
Digital marketing	0.79				
Customer satisfaction	0.53	0.86			
Customer loyalty	0.47	0.63	0.75		
Customer retention	0.41	0.52	0.66	0.81	
Touristic destination choice	0.38	0.55	0.58	0.47	0.78

Source: The author based on SPSS AMOS 23

Note (s): Diagonal values (in bold) are square roots of the AVE for each construct; Off-diagonal terms are the inter-construct correlations.

4.3. Structural Parameter Estimations and the Indices of Model Fit

In order to test the hypotheses of this study, we used structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses. Table 5 summarizes the goodness-of-fit indicators of the model and the parameter estimations.

An acceptable fit is attained with a low enough ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 1.27$ which is less than 3). In addition, the chi-square statistic is significant ($\chi^2=110.8$, $df = 87$; $p\text{-value}<0.05$).

Furthermore, a satisfactory fit for the structural model is defined by the overall goodness-of-fit indices (GFI = 0.94; CFI = 0.96; IFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.064). So, the model fit indices allow as concluding that the available data correspond well the measurement model.

In order to test the significance of the mediating variables effect in the structural model, we employed Shrout and Bolger (2002) mediation analysis method (Koopman,

Howe, & Sin, 2015) which studies the indirect effects and mechanisms by which independent variables (digital marketing interaction) influences dependent variables (touristic destination choice) via mediator variables (customer equity) after bootstrapping 5000 resamples using SPSS AMOS 23. All taking together, the proposed model provides acceptable explanation of the data.

The parameter estimations that are shown in Table 5 indicate that customer interaction with GTS' digital marketing and content in social media is positively correlated with customer equity outcomes in terms of customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention. Moreover, the insignificant statistical correlation between customer interaction with TAs' digital marketing and content in social media and touristic destination choice validates the positive, complete mediation impact of customer equity outcomes across the aspects of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer retention. Thus, these findings confirm the hypothesis H1, H2 and H3.

As a final point, our research results demonstrate that touristic destination choice is positively and strongly impacted with customer equity outcomes. As a result, our findings confirm hypothesis H4, H5 and H6.

In summary, the results we obtained indicate that even though customer interaction with GTS' digital marketing and content in social media does not directly affect the tourists and travelers' choice of their destination, it is an important determinant of customer equity, which influences the touristic destination choice of tourists and travelers.

Table 5. Structural Parameter Estimations and the Indices of Model Fit

<i>Paths</i>	<i>Standard coefficient</i>	<i>T-value</i>	
Digital marketing Content → Customer satisfaction (H1)	0.37*	10.75	Confirmed
Digital marketing Content → Customer loyalty (H2)	0.21*	11.12	Confirmed
Digital marketing Content → Customer retention (H3)	0.28*	10.45	Confirmed
Digital marketing engagement → touristic destination choice	0.09	1.21	/
Customer satisfaction → touristic destination choice (H4)	0.23**	9.68	Confirmed
Customer loyalty → touristic destination choice (H5)	0.26**	10.09	Confirmed
Customer retention → touristic destination choice (H6)	0.39*	11.21	Confirmed

Source: The author based on SPSS AMOS 23

*: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$

Note: All factor loadings are significant.

Measurement of our model fit indices:

$\chi^2 (140) = 367.42$, $p < .05$; CFI = 0.96, GFI = .94, RMSEA = 0.064.

5. Conclusion

Our research integrates the customer equity in the tourism sector including three dimensions (satisfaction, loyalty and retention) to explain how tourists make destination choices in the era of DMC used by travel agencies. The results of our study have multiple implications including the following:

- We extended previous studies that have mostly focused on the DMC, tourists' destination decision-making and customer equity.
- We highlighted the role of DMC in enhancing customer equity, initially influencing the choice of destinations promoted by TAs, and we found that customers' interaction with DMC is a suitable clarifying factor for customer equity and it has a positive effect on its elements, which in turn influences tourists' destination decision-making.
- The elements of digital marketing content, customer equity and tourists' destination

decision-making need to be integrated together so that their composite effect can be obtained in the travel agencies sector. As a result, TAs may better manage their digital marketing efforts to build stronger client relationships and improve their performance by understanding and employing them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study can be crowned by the following recommendations:

- Travel agencies require preparing well for the challenges of the transition to digital marketing by training their employees to enhance the use of modern digital technologies, particularly in the field of reservation and promoting tourist destinations.
- Develop visually attractive websites that are easy to navigate and use social media platforms to engage with customers through regular posts, stories, and interactive content such as live videos and email marketing in order to send personalized offers and updates to customers.
- Provide exceptional online customer service, including live chat support and quick responses to complaints.
- Analyze customer data to identify trends and consumer preferences in order to offer personalized recommendations for destinations, activities, and promotions.
- Engage with customers by responding to their comments, messages, and reviews in order to build a strong online community.

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