
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Adopting E-Marketing Approaches to Strengthen the Competitive Edge of the Tourism Sector in Jordan

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| ABSTRACT

Jordan's tourism industry has experienced a decline in competitiveness despite strong heritage assets, as a result of a misperceived destination image, uneven development of infrastructure, and inadequate strategic application of e-marketing in a digital-first travel market. This study examines how the adoption of e-marketing strategies promotes competitiveness based on destination image, market reach, and customer engagement. It further seeks to identify which of these practices is the most effective. This mixed-method study integrated a descriptive analytical survey of tourism Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) (N=81) and semi-structured interviews (n=9). The results show a positive high correlation between the frequency of mobile marketing and the opinion that e-marketing is more important than traditional marketing ($r_{SP}=.31$, $p=.005$), Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and mobile marketing/giving the highest adoption and mean scores, and SEO as the highest across all measures of effectiveness. The recommendations of the study include focusing on SEO and mobile-first campaigns, specific cultural applications to specific segments, Key Performance Indicator KPI monitoring, and building capacity. Implications support digital policy and the competitiveness of SMEs.

| KEYWORDS

E-marketing; Tourism competitiveness; Search engine optimisation (SEO); Mobile marketing; Jordan

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Differentiation of destinations within digital environments has become a crucial factor in tourism competitiveness. In places in the world like Jordan, where tourism forms one of the major supports of economic strength and national income, tourism products are not just about the presence of world-class attractions, but also ensuring that such tourism products have the right packages, advertising, delivery, and consumption by tourists across the world. Irrespective of the rich archaeological nature of the place, the presence of religious sightseeing and attractions in Jordan, and comparative political stability whilst considering some neighbouring context, the industry has registered a decline in competitiveness, an incorrect image of the destination, and a lack of digitally-centred travellers. It is not that there are no tourism resources but rather how the strategic significance of the e-marketing strategies has been massively misused to develop greater market share, customer relationships, and competitive advantage in the fast-changing tourism industry.

In Jordan, tourism is an important economic activity which generates substantial income and job opportunities in the country. However, travel and tourism generated about 19.2 per cent of the gross domestic product in Jordan in

the year 2018, which is 8.4 billion dollars, which is quite a significant rise compared to 1.7 billion dollars in 1999 and an average annual growth rate of 9.25 per cent (Knoema, 2020, Megdadi et al., 2024). The industry is ranked the second largest employer in the country and has close connections to supporting industries like the food services industry, transportation industry, handicrafts and health, as well as entertainment (Al-Hajja, 2011; Aliqah and Al-Rfou, 2010). Tourism activities are controlled and encouraged by institutions like the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Jordan Tourism Board (JTB), and professional associations. Nevertheless, with these institutional structures, Jordanian tourism organisations are under growing stress from regional and international destinations, which are using enhanced digital marketing strategies to attract and maintain tourists.

Consecutive political crises and regional instability in the Middle East have affected the perceptions of tourists towards Jordan as an attractive and safe destination, though the country has had a history of internal stability (Alsarayreh and Salt, 2018). The uncertainties posed by the war in the neighbouring countries and global shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the need to manage destination image effectively using digital platforms. It was also found that tourists are more inclined to use information resources, reviews, and social media stories as sources of information, and these factors have become the most important in destination perception and travel choice (Castro et al., 2017; Chuang, 2018). Therefore, a destination that does not handle its online image risks losing its visibility, credibility, and competitiveness within the global tourism sector.

E-marketing has also emerged as a strategic instrument that has the potential to transform the nature of interaction of tourism destinations with potential visitors. The websites, social media, online booking systems, and electronic word-of-mouth enable tourism organisations to reach more markets, provide a more tailored experience, and connect directly with consumers throughout, during, and after the travelling process (Kaur, 2017; Xiang and Pan, 2009). Digital innovations in Jordan have slowly transformed the way tourism is marketed by service providers, who no longer need middlemen to penetrate the international tourists directly (Jordan Tourism Board, 2010). Yet, the empirical data indicate that the integration of e-marketing strategies by Jordanian tourism organisations is also asymmetrical, with a lack of strategic integration, digital skills, institutional coordination, and regulatory support (Shahateet and Partale, 2019; Al-Weshah, 2020).

The strength of the destination image, the quality of the services offered, and the ability to provide consistent experiences determine the competitiveness of a tourist destination. There are several major tourist attractions such as the Dead Sea, Mount Nebo, the Baptism Site, Petra and Jerash that are visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists and visitors annually (Al-Hajja, 2011). But studies have shown that improvements in the infrastructure of the destinations are significantly lower than what has been done in Amman, Aqaba and the Dead Sea; and what remains to be done in less visited destinations such as Um Qais and Jerash (Haddad et al., 2014; Jordan Tourism Board, 2009). This unbalanced infrastructure leads to the decreasing of the destination's competitiveness and highlights the need for new e-marketing activities which can help market both less-visited areas and diversify tourism products and enhance consumer involvement in areas other than mass tourism.

In reality, the Jordanian tourism businesses are characterized by low operating costs, poor marketing, and not having access to market intelligence, particularly the small and medium tourism enterprises (Basheer et al., 2020; Shahateet and Partale, 2019). E-marketing provides a cheap way for these companies to build their awareness, gain trust, and build maintainable relationships with consumers through interactive communication and customized content (Adwan and Aladwan, 2019; Rahahleh et al., 2020). Moreover, consumer behavior is much more trackable and can respond to feedback and adapt offerings on the fly in online platforms, which makes them more likely to enable the strengthening of customer involvement and loyalty (Chuang, 2018). But the literature has shown that there is no comprehensive empirical study to review the benefits that the practical e-marketing activities may provide to e-marketing's competitive advantage in the tourism environment in Jordan.

Although previous studies have investigated e-marketing adoption and digital tourism on the regional and international level, there is scant support for the strategic role of e-marketing in enhancing competitiveness in terms of destination image, market reach, and customer engagement in Jordan. Several past researchers have been inclined to discuss the adoption of technology or the effectiveness of websites alone, without combining competitiveness results and considering the very competitive regional tourism context (Alsarayreh et al., 2011; El-

Gohary, 2012). This loophole highlights the importance of a comprehensive exploration of how e-marketing strategies can be exploited as strategic instruments, and not functional supplements in the tourism industry of Jordan.

In line with this, this research paper will seek to analyse how the competitive advantage of the tourism industry in Jordan can be reinforced through the adoption of e-marketing strategies that can enhance destination image, increase market penetration, and augment customer engagement. In particular, the research questions covered by the study include how e-marketing can help in increasing tourism competitiveness in Jordan, and what e-marketing practices are most effective in positioning Jordanian tourism organisations to operate in a highly competitive market regionally and globally. The study helps to fill the existing gap in the empirical research of the Jordanian context, as well as provide practical implications to policymakers and tourism organisations that are interested in sustainable development through strategic adoption of e-marketing (Chuang, 2018; Shahateet and Partale, 2019).

1.1 Significance of the Study

The study is targeting a national concern in the assessment of the competitiveness and sustainability of a national economic segment, the tourism sector in Jordan, as one of the key sectors of GDP and employment (Aliqah and Al-Rfou, 2010; Knoema Corporation, 2020). The study involves correlating e-marketing practices, destination image, market reach, and customer engagement, aspects which are the present digital tourism behaviour and online credibility dynamics (Xiang and Pan, 2009; Castro et al., 2017). In practice, it helps tourism organisations to allocate digital resources in a strategic way to create trust and differentiation (Adwan and Aladwan, 2019; Basheer et al., 2020). It educates evidence-based digital capability building at the policy level and influences contextualised e-marketing competitiveness models at the academic level (El-Gohary, 2012; Chuang, 2018).

2. Literature Review

The tourism industry in Jordan is a strategic element of the national economic development that plays a major role in the creation of job opportunities, foreign exchange earnings, and the development of the region. In a highly competitive local and international tourism industry, Jordan has been under sustained pressure to differentiate its tourism products, improve its destination image, and access the international market more easily. In this regard, the adoption of e-marketing strategies has become a critical strategic response. As it has been emphasised in the literature, the communication to a potential tourist, the perception generation, and the competition on a market share basis have been transformed by e-marketing, which is based on using digital channels, social media, websites, search engines, and email (Buhalis, 1998; Kaur, 2017; Velentza and Metaxas, 2023). This includes understanding both destination marketing attributes and knowledge about digital communication techniques, as well as knowledge of competitiveness research in the understanding of how to exploit competitiveness through e-marketing in the Jordanian tourism sector.

Tourism has been conceptualised broadly as a dynamic process whereby the resources of the destination, as well as the market opportunities, are matched to increase competitiveness (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Evans, Fox and Johnson, 1995). The tourism destinations are volatile with seasonality, political and consumer preferences that change fast. So, the marketing approach is increasingly based on digital tools which provide real-time communications, personalisation, and enable reaching the whole world. The institutional structure in Jordan has progressively mentioned digital transformation, which concerns the marketing of the numerous tourism resources that the country has to offer, including cultural heritage, religious tourism, medical tourism, and nature tourism (Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities, 2015; Shahateet and Partale, 2019). According to the literature, e-marketing could lead to improved destination competitiveness through the minimisation of information asymmetry, greater visibility, and allowing more targeted communication with potential tourists (Chuang, 2018; El-Gohary, 2012).

One of the themes in the literature is the formation of destination image, which is a determining factor in the intention of any tourist to visit a destination. The perception of a destination is formed largely by the data that are available online, such as official tourism websites, online content in social media, online reviews, and user-created narratives (Leung et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017). Studies indicate that e-marketing tools allow destinations to establish a positive and uniform image that promotes special cultural, historical, and natural characteristics and counter negative stereotypes about a place or its geographical location (Ketter, 2016; Marine-Roig, 2019). A study in

the Jordan market also revealed that effective tourism websites and online marketing campaigns have a significant impact on cognitive and affective destination perceptions among tourists, which enhances competitiveness by means of positive image differentiation (Alsarayreh et al., 2011; Basheer et al., 2020). This directly answers the first research question as it shows that e-marketing is one of the factors that make a destination competitive by creating a positive image (Alkhawaldeh et al., 2024).

Another dimension where e-marketing has a competitive advantage over tourism is in market reach. Conventional ways of marketing tend to be limited in their ability to be not only costly but also limited in geographical reach, and online ones allow tourism organisations to reach any market globally at a relatively low cost (Al-Weshah, 2020; Kaur, 2017). According to the literature, social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, also enable destinations to connect with a broad range of people in the world, niche tourism, and adapt the content to the specific cultural context (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Page, Hays, and Buhalis, 2013). In Jordan, tourism organisations (especially small and medium-sized enterprises) have been able to compete with larger regional competitors due to the adoption of e-marketing, which increases the level of online visibility and searchability (Alrousan and Jones, 2016; Rondović, 2019). Market reach is further enhanced through search engine optimisation (SEO), ensuring that Jordanian tourism content is visible on the first page of the information search of the travellers, which is important, given that tourists rarely go beyond the first page of the search results (Xiang and Pan, 2009; Pan et al., 2007).

Customer engagement is a third important mechanism that connects e-marketing and competitive advantage. It is not only one-way promotion but interaction, dialogue, and building a relationship with the tourists before their travel, throughout the travel, and after the travel (Weinberg, 2009; Brogan, 2010). In the literature, the role of social media and user-created content in establishing trust, authenticity, and emotional connections is particularly emphasized, with trust and authenticity being important factors in creating emotional connections to a tourism product, which is intangible (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan, 2008; Gretzel et al., 2011). From the Jordanian context, empirical studies have demonstrated the effect of online reviews, social media communication, and word of mouth formation intention on tourist satisfaction, their loyalty, and word of mouth intention and their important effect on long-term competitiveness (Rahahleh et al., 2020; Bazazo et al., 2017). The latter outcome is directly connected with the focus of the study, namely one of the instruments of improving the competitiveness of the tourism industry, namely through customer engagement.

On the subject of adoption of e-marketing in general, the literature shows that there are particular e-marketing practices that are especially effective in enhancing tourism competitiveness. One of the strategies that emerges is content marketing, which focuses on the creation and dissemination of useful, valuable, and emotional content instead of using direct promotion (Pulizzi, 2014; Rancati, 2014).

In the tourism context, high-quality content (visual and verbal) lowers perceived risk, contributes to increasing tangibility, and helps decision-making (Munar and Jacobsen, 2013; Berger and Milkman, 2012). The analysis reveals that the incorporation of content marketing in the online communication of strategically planned destinations results in better positioning and a higher level of engagement (Marine-Roig, 2019; Velentza and Metaxas, 2023). Cultural heritage tourism (whatever its name – including content marketing) with emphasis on attraction sites such as Petra, and as religious and wellness tourism, is particularly conducive to destination differentiation, in the case of Jordan (Harahsheh and Haddad, 2016; Al-Majali, 2012).

The advantages of low costing and, customer retention, and customer relationship management are pointed out as some of the key elements contributing to being competitive in a mature tourism market through email marketing (Stokes, 2012; Bawm & Nath, 2014).

Permission email campaigns also allow tourism organisations to offer personalised promotions, seasonal promotions and timely information, thus enhancing loyalty and repeat visits (Morgan and Chan, 2011; Ting, 2012). Although email marketing within the tourism industry of Jordan is not widely used as far as social media, there is potential to integrate email marketing as a part of a larger digital strategy to drive competitive positioning (Alikilic, 2008; Buhalis and Jun, 2011).

In terms of competitiveness, the literature on Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) highlights that marketing effectiveness, digital readiness, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure are the key factors influencing the competitiveness of national tourism (World Economic Forum (WEF), 2017). Jordan has a comparatively high level of ICT preparedness and a secure situation, which provides a strong foundation for the implementation of e-marketing strategies, and the gaps in branding performance and e-demand of cultural and natural tourism (Shahateet and Partale, 2019). The examined articles are also consistent in their claims that these gaps can be addressed with the help of certain e-marketing practices to enhance brand recognition, price disclosure, and the expansion in the global market (Chuang, 2018; Velentza and Metaxas, 2023).

Overall, the literature has provided strong theoretical and empirical support to the hypothesis that e-marketing strategies can be applied in order to significantly enhance the competitive advantage of the tourism industry in Jordan. Competitiveness: E-marketing helps to enhance destination image, broaden market presence, and engage customers, with certain elements of the practice (social media marketing, content marketing, SEO, and email marketing) found to be especially successful in a highly competitive tourism setting. Nevertheless, the literature also mentions that there exists a gap of context-specific empirical studies to determine how these practices have been integrated to have an overall effect in the tourism sector in Jordan, supporting the rationale of the current study.

2.1 Research Framework and Hypotheses

According to the relationships outlined in the literature, the research structure hypothesizes that the competitiveness of the tourism industry in Jordan corresponds to the e-marketing strategies. E-marketing strategies are the independent variable, and they are analysed in terms of social media marketing, search engine optimisation (SEO), mobile marketing, and managing websites. Tourism competitiveness is the dependent variable that is considered in terms of destination image, market reach, and customer engagement. The suggested associations between these variables are depicted in Figure 1 below:

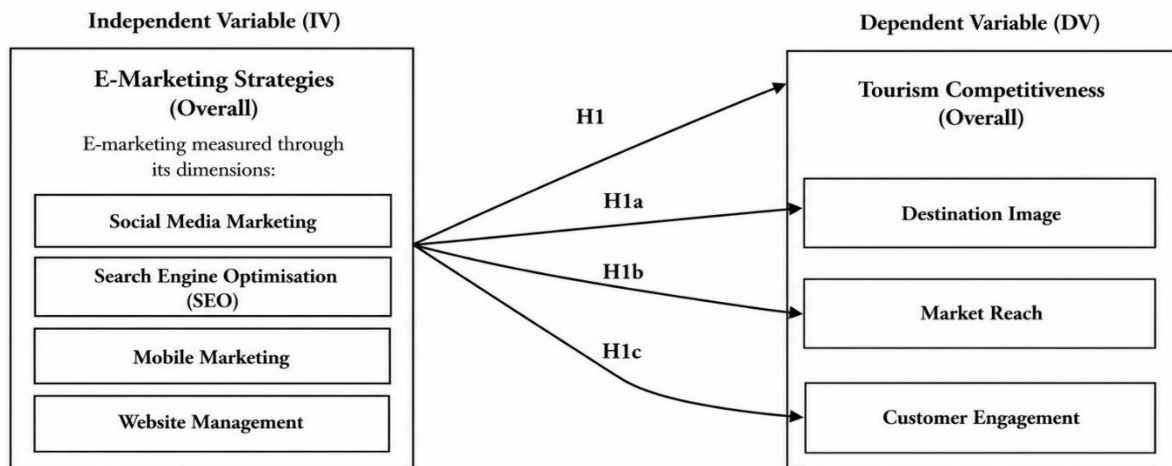


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

This framework (as shown in Figure 1) assumes that e-marketing has a positive correlation with overall tourism competitiveness. It also explores the role of e-marketing strategies for each factor of tourism competitiveness, such as destination image, market reach, etc. Based on this, a single hypothesis and three sub-hypotheses were formulated to test the proposed relationships.

2.2 Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between e-marketing strategies and tourism competitiveness in the Jordanian tourism sector.

H1a: The relationship between e-marketing strategies and destination image is a statistically significant positive relationship in the Jordanian touristic field.

H1b: e-marketing strategy positively influences market reach in the Jordanian tourism industry at a significant level.

H1c: It can be stated that e-marketing strategies are positively related to customer engagement at a significant level in the Jordanian tourism sector.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

The proposed study employs a mixed-method research design with quantitative and qualitative research approaches to explore the importance of e-marketing towards improving the competitive edge of the Jordanian tourism sector. The descriptive analytical design forms the basis of the quantitative part to understand the tendencies and correlations of e-marketing practices and indicators of competitiveness, including destination image, market reach, and customer engagement, to be capable of assessing the current situation and determining the relationship between the variables in the real environment (Israr, 2016; El-Gohary, 2012). These findings are complemented by the qualitative part since they provide additional information about the views of tourism organisations on the e-marketing strategies and their implementation in practice. This triangulation reinforces the findings and the explanatory value of the same (Al-Weshah, 2020).

3.2 Sample of the Study

The target market is Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within the tourism industry in Jordan, as they were chosen because of their core position in destination marketing, service provision, and dealing with customers. The respondents were supposed to be well-informed on the topic of tourism marketing and also be conversant with the digital and e-marketing tools. The research instruments were matched using two samples. The quantitative stage consisted of 81 tourism-based SMEs, which constituted the questionnaire sample, which was obtained from tourism and SME development websites in Jordan. The qualitative stage involved nine employees of three touristic firms, who were selected on a purposeful basis because of their direct experience in marketing, digital communication, or strategic planning.

3.3 Instruments of the Study

Two instruments were used: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The e-marketing contribution to competitiveness on destination image, market reach, and customer engagement was measured using a five-point Likert scale as the quantitative scale to measure the practices of e-marketing, including social media marketing, search engine optimisation, mobile marketing, and management of websites (Maurer and Pierce, 1998). The interviews covered the experience of the organisation, benefits, challenges, and strategic issues of adopting e-marketing and created a contextual insight beyond the survey data. The analysis of qualitative responses was based on grounded theory and constant comparative analysis that revealed repetitive themes and patterns (Omrani, 2012).

3.4 Validity of the Instrument

The instrument validity was achieved through a number of steps. The questionnaire was reviewed based on the extensive literature on e-marketing and tourism competitiveness, and all of the relevant constructs were sufficiently covered and validated (Kaur, 2017; Xiang and Pan, 2009). Moreover, academic specialists in the field of tourism and marketing at Jordanian universities examined the questionnaire and interview guide. The feedback they gave concerned the wording of the questions and how relevant the questions were to the objectives of the research, and whether they were sufficient.

In the qualitative instrument, the issues of validity were dealt with using descriptive and theoretical approaches. The researcher was careful in the presentation of the views of the participants and the consistency of the empirical and theoretical interpretations. Such steps are in line with what Maxwell (1992) suggests to guarantee the integrity of a qualitative researcher.

3.5 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, which is a measure of consistency of items on the scale. The Cronbach's alpha value obtained as a result of the analysis was 0.951, which means that the reliability and internal consistency are very high. This finding supports the fact that the questionnaire items are always able to measure the constructs that are associated with e-marketing approaches and tourism competitiveness, and the results can be generalised to the study population.

3.6 Data Collection

Secondary and primary sources of data were used. Some of the secondary data were academic journals, books, and official tourism reports on e-marketing and tourism development in Jordan and other such backgrounds. Primary quantitative data were collected by using online questionnaires in the form of emails, WhatsApp, and social media, and qualitative data were collected by the methods of semi-structured face-to-face and online interviews, where the ethical principles of confidentiality and voluntary participation were followed.

3.7 Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse quantitative data to summarise demographic attributes and test relationships between e-marketing strategies and the indicators of competitiveness, such as destination image, market reach, and customer engagement in relation to the research questions. The thematic analysis based on coding and constant comparison was conducted on qualitative data to determine the major themes of e-marketing effectiveness, strategic implementation, and competitive advantage. The combination of the two data sets made it possible to comprehensively interpret the role that e-marketing plays in enhancing tourism competitiveness in Jordan (Chuang, 2018; Al-Weshah, 2020).

4. Findings

The results of this section synthesise the quantitative findings ($N = 81$) and the qualitative interview findings ($n = 9$) to answer the first two research questions. The analysis is based on the contribution of e-marketing to competitiveness in terms of destination image, market reach, and customer engagement, as well as on the e-marketing practices that are effective in a competitive tourism setting. All reported frequencies, percentages, means, and correlations are presented as obtained from the dataset.

4.1 Findings Related to RQ1: How do e-marketing approaches contribute to enhancing the competitive edge of the tourism sector in Jordan in terms of destination image, market reach, and customer engagement?

Correlation (as in Table 1) indicates that those companies that more often use mobile marketing are more inclined to consider e-marketing to be more significant than traditional marketing practices. The positive correlation between Mobile Marketing Frequency of Use and the perceived importance of e-marketing compared with traditional marketing ($r_{SP}(81) = .31$, $p = .005$) is significant and suggests that the more an individual depends on mobile-based communication, the more the strategy of the company is oriented toward digital marketing. Such a strategic change helps in better positioning in the market, increased visibility, and increased responsiveness in the tourism industry. Moreover, Table 1 indicates that there is also a positive and yet non-significant correlation between Mobile Marketing Frequency of Use and Return on Investment (ROI) ($r_{SP}(81) = .18$, $p = .107$). This relationship is not statistically significant on a conventional level, but its positive nature indicates that the more mobile marketing is used, the higher the returns, which supports the importance of using digital channels in supporting competitiveness.

Table 1. RQ1 quantitative relationships (from correlation results)

Relationship	N	Spearman's rho (rSP)	p-value	Interpretation aligned to RQ1
Mobile Marketing Frequency of Use ↔ Importance of E-marketing vs Traditional	81	.31	.005	Stronger use aligns with a stronger strategic emphasis on e-marketing
Mobile Marketing Frequency of Use ↔ Return on Investment ROI	81	.18	.107	Positive direction suggests potential ROI gains with more frequent use

Before displaying the specific pointers of customer involvement and market penetration, it should be put in the context of how e- marketing strategies help in enhancing the competitive advantage of the tourism industry in Jordan. Customer engagement and market penetration are two fundamental aspects of competitiveness since they indicate how well an organisation can communicate with potential tourists, sustain constant communication, and increase the reputation of a destination in the highly competitive regional and global tourism setting. In this regard, the following table presents the main descriptive indicators associated with the use of mobile marketing, search engine optimisation (SEO), and websites and the way the e-marketing tools facilitate engagement, visibility, and reach, hence help to answer Research Question 1.

Table 2. RQ1 customer engagement and market reach indicators (from Tables 14–21)

Strategy/item	Key statistic reported	What it contributes to in RQ1 terms
Mobile marketing (Table 14)	Mean = 3.74 (0.85)	Direct reach to tourists via phones; fast engagement
SEO (Table 14)	Mean = 3.70 (0.93)	Visibility in search results; discoverability and reach
Mobile marketing usage (Table 15)	Uses it a little bit = 44.4%; uses it a lot = 29.6%; uses it all the time = 23.5%	High adoption supports continuous customer engagement.
SEO usage (Table 18)	Uses it a little bit = 46.9%; uses it all the time = 25.9%; uses it a lot = 23.5%	Ongoing visibility improves destination exposure and market reach.
Websites (Table 19)	Does not use it = 28.4%; uses it a little bit = 29.6%	Indicates uneven website reliance compared to mobile/SEO

The descriptive indicators that were summarised in Table 2 also illustrate that mobile marketing and search engine optimisation (SEO) are the most dominant features that are being used by tourism organisations to improve customer engagement and increase market reach. The mean score of mobile marketing (Mean = 3.74, SD = 0.85) is the highest, followed by SEO (Mean = 3.70, SD = 0.93), which means that both of these strategies serve as the key tools in ensuring constant communication with potential tourists. The patterns of usage that have been indicated in Table 2 also indicate that there is widespread usage of these tools, with a significant number of firms being associated with frequent or prolonged usage. This validates the fact that mobile marketing and SEO are at the core of enhancing customer touchpoints, as well as visibility, of destinations in the competitive tourism markets, whereas the dependency on websites alone is less steady than it seems.

Destination image is also echoed in the preferences of tourists, as demonstrated in Table 2; the most common reason for visiting Jordan is indicated as visiting religious sites, which represents the coexistence of religions (45.7%). This demonstrates the significance of religious heritage, cultural identity, and coexistence as some of the main elements of tourism image in Jordan. This pattern is also supported by the results of the interview because most respondents discussed the necessity of targeting using e-marketing campaigns towards specific audiences like religious communities, older tourists, and British visitors, whereas others maintained the flexibility of targeting in accordance with the characteristics of the audience. When combined, the findings suggest that e-marketing can

help to improve competitiveness since digital marketing can effectively connect the strongest elements of the destination image of Jordan to well-explained market segments using digital communications.

4.2 Findings Related to RQ2: What e-marketing practices are most effective in improving the competitiveness of Jordanian tourism organisations within a highly competitive regional and global tourism market?

In response to RQ2, the interpretive frame that prompts the interpretation of the results is the focus on four interconnected indicators of effectiveness: (1) frequency and ranking of strategies, (2) value-for-money perceptions, (3) intention to continue using, and (4) practices of managing a campaign (success factors, measurement, budget, ROI).

Using various measures of effectiveness, search engine optimisation (SEO) is evidently the most prevalent e-marketing practice adopted by tourism organisations in Jordan. Table 5 indicates that SEO was the leading choice of strategy type of strategy, with 55 iterations, meaning that SEO is prioritized because it improves visibility in search results as their preferred method of e-marketing. This hegemony is further enforced in Table 6, in which SEO was again perceived as the most important and the most utilised mode of e-marketing, where the number of iterations (62) was the highest, indicating its centrality to the operational marketing of companies. Regarding the subjective value of money, Table 7 reflects that SEO would be considered the most economical manner of doing things, and it ranks in first place with a frequency of 34 responses, which means 42% of the total. Furthermore, future orientation on SEO can be seen in Table 8, which again was the first technique that the companies are planning to employ in their future e-marketing campaigns, with 31 iterations.

Even though websites are always listed as the second-priority e-marketing practice, which follows search engine optimisation (SEO) in all the effectiveness indicators, SEO has been by far the most evident and consistent leader in all the dimensions analysed, as summarised in Table 3. SEO tops the list in terms of strategies, methods of interaction, perception of money value, and intended use in the future. Such stable leadership shows that enhancing the presence in search engine listings is considered by tourism organisations as the best practice to enhance competitiveness. SEO can also help organisations compete more favourably in a competitive regional and global tourism industry by making the products and destinations of Jordanian tourism more discoverable and visible when prospective travellers search for a particular query by appearing high in the search results.

Table 3. RQ2: Top practices across effectiveness indicators

Practice	Type (Rank/iterations)	Ways (Rank/iterations)	Value for money (Rank / %)	Future (Rank/iterations)	technique
SEO	1 / 55	1 / 62	1 / 42%	1 / 31	
Websites	2 / 41	7 / 12	4 / 11.1%	2 / 29	
E-mail marketing	3 / 23	4 / 17	3 / 12.3%	5 / 14	
Electronic banner ad	(Banners) / 16	8 / 9	2 / 13.6%	3 / 25	

Beyond revealing the most effective e-marketing practices, the findings also show that high levels of tourists' price sensitivity shape competitive positioning in the tourism industry. The importance of cost-related factors on destination choice was stressed by the respondents all the time, and it means that tourism organisations need to be guided by marketing strategies that can provide them with extensive coverage at a relatively low cost. In this context, SEO and mobile marketing become especially appropriate tools, as they enable organisations to cover vast audiences at the same time, but keep persuasive communication with potential tourists.

The results also reveal that the competitiveness is not dictated by the selection of the e-marketing tools, but rather the competitiveness is dictated by the way these tools are implemented strategically and systematically. The successful e-marketing campaigns are both well-oriented towards the overall marketing strategy of the company and able to monitor and analyse the performance results. To measure the success of campaigns and make the right decisions, organisations are relying on such digital performance indicators as online visibility and user interaction

rates. This focus on measurability is an expression of a practical view of competition, in which constrained marketing budgets are allocated efficiently, and performance accountability is made a priority.

On the whole, the trend of findings indicated in Table 3 reveals that tourism institutions in Jordan are more inclined to e-marketing activities that are cost-effective, highly visible, and deliverable. SEO, especially, is the most efficient practice to increase the level of competitiveness, which is proven by the top ranking according to the type of strategies, engagement practices, value-for-money perception, and future adoption. When coupled with mobile-based communication, these practices can help tourism organisations enhance their competitive advantage by increasing the visibility of their destinations, the number of customers they reach, and the level at which potential tourists can be reached more efficiently in an overcrowded tourism marketplace in a region and globally.

5. Discussion

5.1 Discussion Related to RQ1: How do e-marketing approaches contribute to enhancing the competitive edge of the tourism sector in Jordan in terms of destination image, market reach, and customer engagement?

The study results are empirical evidence of the suggestion, presented in the literature, that e-marketing is an influential strategic tool, via which tourism organisations can improve their competitive positioning in unstable and highly competitive markets. The high positive correlation between the frequency of using mobile marketing and the perceived value of e-marketing as opposed to traditional marketing ($r_{SP}(81) = .31, p = .005$) is indicative of a greater strategic shift towards the use of digital communications tools. This trend is not out of line with the perception of tourism marketing as a process that is dynamic and tends to match the destination resources to the evolving market opportunities (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Evans et al., 1995). Investing in mobile-based and digital communication, Jordanian tourism organisations seem to be capitalising on the benefits of real-time communication, personalisation, and global coverage in the literature that highlights these aspects of e-marketing as the primary strengths in the reduction of the information asymmetry and enhanced responsiveness of the market (El-Gohary, 2012; Chuang, 2018).

Even though the relationship between the frequency of mobile marketing and the return on investment ($r_{SP}(81) = .18, p = .107$) is not statistically considered as significant as it should be, the positive direction of such correlation indicates a possible connection between digital intensity and performance. The given finding may be explained by previous studies, which suggest that the economic advantages of e-marketing in tourism can be frequently revealed over time as cumulative returns in terms of visibility, brand recognition, and customer loyalty instead of direct financial gains (Buhalis, 1998; Kaur, 2017). In the specific context of Jordanian tourism companies, where the majority are constituted by small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the borderline quality of this relation could reflect a lack of digital skills, resources, and/or integration of e-marketing into a wider strategy, as suggested by Alrousan and Jones (2016) and Shahateet and Partale (2019).

In terms of customer engagement and market reach, descriptive scores of high mean scores on mobile marketing (Mean = 3.74, SD = 0.85) and SEO (Mean = 3.70, SD = 0.93) with extensive adoption rates highlight the key position of the two tools in maintaining constant contact with potential tourists. These results are in line with what the literature points out in terms of engagement being a form of relationship process that goes beyond one-sided promotion to the process of dialogue, trust-building, and emotional connection (Weinberg, 2009; Brogan, 2010). The high dependence on mobile and search-based platforms is indicative of the increased significance of information search visibility and discoverability, especially with the possible evidence that search results rankings of the information search behaviour of tourists are largely concentrated on top-ranked search results (Xiang and Pan, 2009; Pan et al., 2007). This justifies the line of thought proposed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and Hays et al. (2013) that social and digital platforms help destinations access a wide range of international, as well as niche groups of people, at a relatively low cost, enhancing the reach of a destination and evening out the competitive playing field among smaller operators.

This comparatively uneven reliance on websites manifested in the decline in the percentages of lower and more fragmented use might also be the cause of the shift in strategies towards mobile and SEO-driven practices. Though the influence of the official tourist information sites on building the destination image is significant (Alsarayreh et

al., 2011; Basheer et al., 2020), such comments made in the above-mentioned studies are more restricted than the outcomes of the present research, which is more focused on the websites that provide instantaneous experience, communication, and UGC. The trend complies with the argument in the literature that social interactions and peer stories have been put in place to help contribute to engagement and credibility within a tourism setting, which helps in establishing trust and perceived authenticity in intangible service settings (Litvin et al., 2008; Gretzel et al., 2011).

Regarding destination image, the religious and cultural reasons to visit Jordan as the most popular types of motivations are employed, and the focus on religious sites and coexistence is a vivid example of e-marketing helping to promote a differentiated and cultural tourism image. To the extent that destination image has been conceptualised as largely informed by digitally mediated content, such as official campaigns and user-generated narratives that depict distinctive cultural and historical qualities, this finding is consistent with studies (Leung et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017). The emphasis of the interview, focusing on religious groups, senior tourists, and certain international markets, is yet another piece of evidence of the claim in the literature that e-marketing provides the capability of a more detailed market segmentation and culturally sensitive approaches to communication (Ketter, 2016; Marine-Roig, 2019). Linking the most iconic and heritage-related values of the country to the customised digital communication, it appears that tourism organisations are operationalising their competitiveness processes, as it is explained by Harahsheh and Haddad (2016) and Al-Majali (2012), who argue that the culturally resonant content plays a crucial role in the positioning of the Middle Eastern destinations.

The findings can also be framed in the bigger competitiveness framework in which ICT preparedness and marketing performance are mentioned as among the main drivers of national-level tourism performance (WEF, 2017). The high use of mobile marketing and SEO in this study shows that the tourism organisations in Jordan are capitalising on the relatively good digital infrastructure to advertise the presence of the country and make it more accessible to others. In the meantime, the problematized and low relationship with ROI is the structural and strategic problem of the literature, in particular, the need to establish more integrated, professionally run digital strategies that would transform the engagement and reach into long-term economic gains (Shahateet and Partale, 2019; Velentza and Metaxas, 2023).

Comprehensively, the combination of the quantitative and qualitative results verifies the theoretical and empirical arguments provided in the literature, asserting that the competitive advantage of the tourism industry can be enhanced by e-marketing that will concurrently influence destination image, broaden the market scope, and enhance the customer experience. The Jordanian case reflects the role of mobile marketing and SEO as the main channels of visibility and interaction, and culturally oriented content and targeted communication as the connection between the national heritage resources and particular segments of the market. These trends represent the overall strategic direction of digital competitiveness outlined by Buhalis (1998), Kotler and Gertner (2002) and Chuang (2018) and emphasise the need for a sustained investment in e-marketing competencies to cement the position of Jordan in an increasingly competitive regional and global tourism environment.

5.2 Discussion Related to RQ2: What e-marketing practices are most effective in improving the competitiveness of Jordanian tourism organisations within a highly competitive regional and global tourism market?

The results of this research indicate that Jordanian tourism organisations view search engine optimisation (SEO) as the most relevant e-marketing activity to achieve competitiveness, which is quite similar to the theoretical and empirical projections in the literature. Tourism marketing as a strategy is the conceptualisation of aligning the resources of the destination to the market opportunities in order to gain sustained competitive advantage in dynamic and extremely competitive markets (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Evans et al., 1995). In this context, the uninterrupted position of SEO at the first place among all effectiveness indicators: type of strategy, level of operational engagement, perceived value of money, and intention to use in the future implies that organizations consider visibility and discoverability as the key strategic assets in the global tourism markets where few consumers pay attention to the products and where the rivalry competition is high. Such a focus also mirrors the claims of the literature that the decrease in the level of information asymmetry and the growth of online presence are the most

significant mechanisms according to which e-marketing enhances the competitiveness of the destination (El-Gohary, 2012; Chuang, 2018).

The pre-eminence of SEO can further be elaborated by the fact that it allows reaching a broader market at a relatively low price, which the respondents linked with a high price sensitivity rate among tourists. It is a recurrent point of the literature that digital channels enable destinations to reach international markets more effectively than the old marketing channels, especially small and medium-sized tourism enterprises that have limited resources (Al-Weshah, 2020; Kaur, 2017; Alrousan and Jones, 2016). Existing evidence indicates that during the information search stage, tourists actively use the services of search engines and seldom move beyond the first page of results, which enhances the strategic importance of the search engine in the decision-making process of the destination (Pan et al., 2007; Xiang and Pan, 2009). In this regard, the research result, which reveals that SEO is considered the most cost-efficient exercise and is the most likely to be implemented in future campaigns, is the logical distribution of scarce marketing resources to the tools that can maximise the global reach and ensure the performance outcome can be measured.

The secondary ranking of the websites on a range of indicators supports the focus of the literature on the formation of destination images as a significant competitiveness pathway. Effective online tourism sites play the role of a central source of formal data and image display of the destination and framing of a story, straight into the cognition and affections of tourists (Leung et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017). The previous studies in Jordan have established that digital platforms are a significant determinant of the perception of the cultural heritage of the country, religious tourism, and the natural features by international tourists, which contributes to the positive image differentiation in an area where the discourse of general instability prevails (Alsarayreh et al., 2011; Basheer et al., 2020; Ketter, 2016). The results indicate that websites are still a strategically critical element in projecting a consistent image of a destination, but the effectiveness of the sites is directly related to the concept of SEO, which is the primary entry point of potential tourists to the sites.

The comparatively lower positioning of the email marketing and electronic banner advertising in the results, though still significant, can be understood in the context of the customer engagement and relationship management theories. Marketing in tourism is beyond one-sided marketing to a long-term interaction and communication that appreciates commitment, loyalty, and emotional attachment (Weinberg, 2009; Brogan, 2010). Email marketing is an inexpensive strategy that the literature acknowledges as useful in maintaining the relationship with past and potential visitors by getting in touch with them in a personal and timely way, therefore enabling repeated visitations and competitiveness in the long-term perspective (Stokes, 2012; Morgan and Chan, 2011; Ting, 2012). The medium score of email marketing in this study indicates that although organisations have realised the importance of email marketing, it has been adopted as a supporting strategy, more likely to represent the stronger focus of the sector towards visibility tools like SEO and mobile-based communication to capture the market at the very beginning.

The study on the measurability and accountability of performance of campaign management practices has a focus on larger competitiveness and digital readiness frameworks. The literature on Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index states that ICT infrastructure and marketing efficiency have been observed to determine the competitiveness of national tourism, particularly with reference to the strength of the national brand, price transparency, and the creation of international demand (WEF, 2017; Shahateet and Partale, 2019). The reliance on online visibility and metrics of user interaction as a measure of success is characteristic of a practical approach to these ideals, since the organisations are more concerned with the tools that are associated with a certain payoff and trust the data to make decisions. This approach is in line with the discussion in the literature that e-marketing can enhance competitiveness by increasing the reach of a communication channel and the optimization of the strategic resources given the conditions of resource constraint (Velentza & Metaxas, 2023; Chuang, 2018).

On the whole, the consistency between the results of the given study and the literature points to the hypothesis that SEO represents a key strategic tool that allows interconnecting the image of the destination, market penetration, and consumer interaction in a consistent competitive model. SEO facilitates the projection of a positive and differentiated destination image by making sure the destination has a high position in the information search of travellers; it helps to access global markets and further interaction with the destination via websites, content, and

personalised channels of communication. This combined role is based on the general theoretical approach that e-marketing practices make tourism competitiveness stronger by minimising asymmetry in information, increasing visibility, and facilitating specific interaction in a highly competitive regional and global tourism market (Buhalis, 1998; El-Gohary, 2012; Kotler and Gertner, 2002). The results thus not only affirm the efficiency of search engine optimisation as an overriding practice in the Jordanian setting but also demonstrate how the strategic utility of search engine optimisation is entrenched in the extant theoretical and empirical frameworks of tourism competitiveness.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how the use of e-marketing strategies. It further examines its role in increasing the competitive advantage of the Jordan tourism industry. It also examines its role in improving the destination image, market reach, and customer contact. It shows how e-marketing strategies are best suited to thrive in a highly competitive tourism market. For this purpose, a mixed-method design of the study has been used. It combines a quantitative descriptive analytical survey of the tourism SMEs ($N = 81$) and semi-structured interviews with marketing-related employees ($n = 9$) of three tourism companies. There was a high level of internal consistency in the questionnaire, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .951, and the qualitative strand gave contextual clarifications to the quantitative trends.

In general, the results verify that e-marketing can help a company achieve competitiveness based on visibility-based and mobile-first interaction systems. Often, the degree of mobile marketing usage was closely associated with the perception of e-marketing as more important than traditional marketing ($r_{SP} = .31$, $p = .005$). This can be described as a strategic change to digital solutions in order to reach and get into contact with people in real time. It aligns with the recognition that e-marketing helps to decrease the information imbalance and increase market responsiveness in tourism contexts (El-Gohary, 2012; Chuang, 2018). Mobile marketing ($M = 3.74$) and SEO ($M = 3.70$) were also strongly adopted with high mean scores. This illustrates that organisations rely on platforms that improve discoverability and how they interact with customers on an ongoing basis.

This coincides with findings that state that both search behaviour and digital visibility are effective factors that influence travel decisions (Xiang and Pan, 2009; Pan et al., 2007). Qualitative data confirmed that efficient e-marketing has to rely on the targeting of particular segments (e.g., religious audiences and older tourists). The manner in which such campaigns are related to the particular image resources of Jordan. This validates the body of research on the subject of destination image development due to digitally mediated content and segmentation (Leung et al., 2017; Ketter, 2016).

In terms of the most efficient ones, SEO became the best tool in terms of ranking of strategies, operational engagement, value-for-money perceptions, and intention to use. This follows previous research on the importance of search visibility and targeted online access as a strategic factor to competitiveness in tourism, especially among SMEs with limited resources (Al-Weshah, 2020; Kaur, 2017). The second-ranking was given to websites, which implies that they are still relevant to narrative framing and provision of information, but also demonstrates that their influence becomes more affected by the aspect of being found using SEO than working as an independent channel (Alsarayreh et al., 2011; Xiang and Pan, 2009).

Such results suggest that the competitiveness of Jordanian tourism can be reinforced by paying a stronger focus to quantifiable, cost-effective digital practices (in particular, SEO and mobile marketing), as well as culturally relatable content that supports destination image. The value of the study lies in empirically combining competitive results (image, reach, engagement) with certain e-marketing activities in the Jordanian setting beyond the individual debates on adoption or the effectiveness of the websites (El-Gohary, 2012; Chuang, 2018).

Nevertheless, it has weaknesses like dependence on self-reported perceptions, a small sample size that is focused on SMEs, and a cross-sectional design that is incapable of establishing a causal relationship and long-term ROI effects. To this end, longitudinal designs and objective performance indicators (e.g., web analytics, bookings, conversion rates) should be used in future research; regions and destination types should be compared in the framework of Jordan, and an attempt should be made to test integrated models based on which the

SEO/mobile/content strategy is combined with tangible indicators of competitiveness. In practice, suggestions are organised for digital skills education of the tourism SMEs, coordinating the institutions to harmonise the message and minimise the disintegrated online presence, and elaborating segment-oriented content strategies (religious, heritage, wellness) with the help of SEO and mobile marketing, and ongoing optimisation of Key Performance Indicators (s).

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