Overcoming Barriers to Digital Marketing in Algeria's Tourism Sector: A Study of Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract:

This study examines the prospects and obstacles of implementing digital marketing within Algeria's tourism industry. It employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a thorough literature analysis, to identify substantial prospects for utilizing digital marketing in the industry, such as the rising utilization of mobile devices and social media by tourists and the expansion of e-commerce in Algeria.

The research identifies considerable obstacles, such as insufficient digital marketing expertise among tourism practitioners and inadequate internet connection and infrastructure. The study concludes with recommendations for governments and stakeholders to address difficulties and leverage possibilities in digital marketing adoption.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Tourism Sector, Opportunities, Challenges, Algeria.

Jel Classification Codes: L83, M31, O33.

1. INTRODUCTION

Algeria is endowed with a variety of high-quality natural and environmental tourism components, which qualify it to occupy the top positions as an excellent tourist destination. However, it has lagged behind development as an alternative sector supportive of a rent economy based on fuel in recent years, yet the Algerian State has recognized the vital role that the tourism sector currently plays in the economics of states; this is why it has resorted to its development and sought to qualify it so as to provide the best possibilities and opportunities to increase competitiveness and modernity. Today is characterized by the escalating spread of Internet and smartphone users in multiple fields. Algeria's internet penetration rate exceeded 60 percent in April 2022, the equivalent of 27 million users from different segments of society. This provides a market opportunity that must be acquired by moving towards a digital model and abandoning the physical nature of the public service, especially in the tourism sector. By applying new technologies for communication and interaction, it is using modern ways of trading, marketing, information transfer, and news, considering its importance to diverse groups of society, both personal and professional, by transmitting messages and information that contribute to a positive image to the target groups.

Digital marketing is a fundamental component of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution. It orchestrates a series of specialized functions that leverage optimal digital technologies to enhance organizational performance; in recent years, it has successfully advanced—through extensive efforts, marketing initiatives, and diverse activities—into contemporary trends aligned with current dynamics, employing an array of sophisticated tools and modern technologies to execute marketing operations and activities, particularly concerning marketing communications, product delivery, and the completion of marketing operations across multiple channels. Researchers have pointed out that digital marketing techniques include websites, digital mail, digital advertising, and social media platforms, in addition to other digital media.

Accordingly, the problem of this research was formulated through the following question:

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How does digital marketing contribute to revitalizing Algeria's tourism sector?

The Study Objectives: we seek to achieve a number of objectives, the most important of which are outlined below:

- Highlighting modern methods of marketing in the tourism field with digital transformation;
- To learn about the realities and prospects of the tourism sector in Algeria and the various challenges facing the digitization of the sector;
- Review successful experiences that have adopted digital tourism marketing.

Research methodology: This study was based on an **analytical descriptive approach**.

The study's section: this study was divided into three sections, as follows:

- Conceptual framework for digital marketing in tourism;
- Opportunities of adopting digital marketing in Algeria's tourism sector;
- Challenges of adopting digital marketing in Algeria's tourism sector.

2. Conceptual framework for digital marketing in tourism.
2.2. Definition of digital marketing:

There are many definitions, but we have chosen the following:

- "Digital marketing entails the promotion of items or brands through various forms of electronic media. It contrasts with conventional marketing by employing channels and techniques that allow a company to evaluate marketing initiatives and discern their effectiveness, often in real-time." (Ryan, 2016, p.7)

- "Digital marketing encompasses the utilization of digital media, including the Internet, social media, search engines, mobile devices, and several other channels, to advertise products and services. It uses digital platforms to engage consumers and provide customized, targeted marketing communications." (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 4)

- "Digital marketing encompasses a collection of methods and techniques employed to promote items or services through digital channels, including search engines, social media, email, and various websites."

- "Digital marketing includes all marketing activities that utilize electronic devices or the internet. Businesses utilize digital platforms, including search engines, social media, email, and various websites, to engage with existing and potential consumers." (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p.6)

A variety of digital marketing types can be encapsulated in the following illustration:

Fig.1. The most digital marketing type

Source: (Belabed, CHENAG, & Mokaddem, 2019, P.258)

The difference between traditional marketing and digital marketing can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Traditional Marketing vs Digital Marketing

Traditional Marketing	Digital Marketing
Traditional marketing involves methods such as print, broadcast, direct mail, and phone calls.	Digital marketing includes strategies like online ads, email campaigns, social media, viral marketing, and SEO.
No direct engagement with the audience.	Direct interaction with the audience is possible.
Measuring results is relatively simple.	Measuring results is, for the most part, straightforward.
Marketing campaigns are planned over extended periods.	Marketing campaigns are designed to be short-term.
It is costly and time-intensive.	It is a more cost-effective and quicker way to market products or

	services.
Limited customer reach due to the constraints of customer technology.	The use of diverse customer technologies enables greater customer reach.
Success in traditional marketing is often measured by reaching a broad local audience.	Success in digital marketing is often determined by targeting specific local audiences.
Year-round exposure is not achievable.	Continuous exposure is available 24/7 throughout the year.
A campaign tends to last for a long time.	Campaigns can be quickly adapted, and innovations can be integrated seamlessly.
It cannot go viral.	It has the potential to go viral.
Communication is one-way.	Communication is interactive and two-way.
Responses are typically limited to business hours.	Responses and feedback can occur at any time.

Source: (Mansouri & Bezgrari, 2022, p.860)
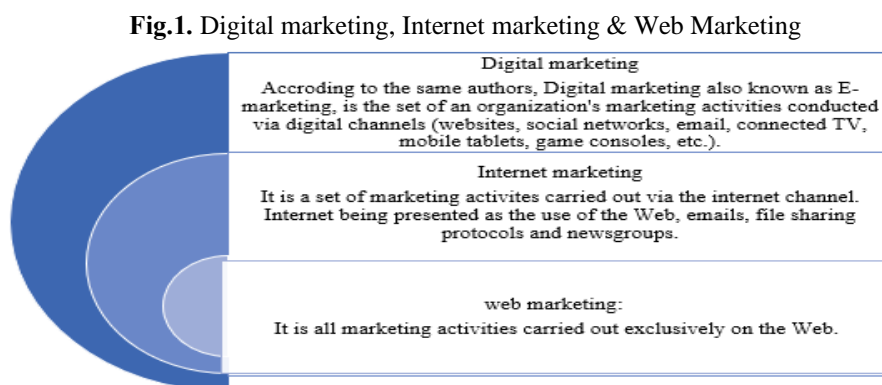
2.2. The evolution of digital marketing:

Digital marketing has significantly evolved since its inception. Technological improvements, evolving consumer behaviors, and the expansion of new platforms and channels influenced its trajectory. The initial manifestations of digital marketing originated in the 1990s when entities began utilizing email for contacts with customers and prospects. (Ryan, 2016, p.9)

Digital marketing began to take shape in the early 2000s, driven by improvements in search engines and pay-per-click advertising. This period witnessed the inception of Google AdWords and the implementation of algorithms for website ranking predicated on relevance and authority. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p.5)

The emergence of social media significantly influenced the progression of digital marketing. The inception of Facebook in 2004 prompted businesses to investigate novel methods for engaging customers and marketing their products and services. Social media platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram have evolved over the years, offering businesses novel avenues to engage their consumers and enhance brand recognition. (Holliman & Rowley, 2014)

This was succeeded by a significant advancement: the emergence of mobile devices and mobile marketing. With the increasing use of smartphones and tablets, businesses began creating mobile-optimized websites and applications to engage users. This era marked the inception of mobile advertising, as corporations directed real-time advertisements and push notifications at users. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning is the newest advancement in digital marketing. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p.5) With the increasing use of data analytics tools and predictive algorithms, businesses can analyze their customer data and behavior to create personalized marketing campaigns. (Hernandez, Jimenez-Zarco, & Martin-Santana, 2019) This has led to the development of chatbots, virtual assistants, and other AI-powered tools to enhance the customer experience and streamline marketing operations.

We note that digital marketing (e-marketing) encompasses all the actions carried out by internet marketing and web marketing, as shown in the following Figure:

Fig.1. Digital marketing, Internet marketing & Web Marketing

Digital marketing
Accroding to the same authors, Digital marketing also known as E-marketing, is the set of an organization's marketing activities conducted via digital channels (websites, social networks, email, connected TV, mobile tablets, game consoles, etc.).

Internet marketing
It is a set of marketing activites carried out via the internet channel. Internet being presented as the use of the Web, emails, file sharing protocols and newsgroups.

web marketing:
It is all marketing activities carried out exclusively on the Web.

Source: (ADNANI & HAMOU, 2020, pp.140-141)

2.3. Overview of the tourism sector in Algeria:

Algeria is a North African country with a rich history and cultural heritage, making it a popular tourist destination.

Algeria's tourism sector has great potential, with a diverse range of attractions for both domestic and international tourists. These encompass deserts, mountains, and beaches alongside a rich history and cultural legacy that date back several millennia. The nation encompasses multiple UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the ancient Roman ruins of Timgad and Djemila and the old Casbah of Algiers. (WTTC, 2021, p.4)

The tourism industry in Algeria confronts obstacles, including political instability, security issues, and insufficient infrastructure and investment. The widespread civil unrest and security issues in the region have significantly impacted tourism in Algeria, leading most foreign tourists to refrain from visiting. The nation's infrastructure is predominantly underdeveloped, characterized by insufficient interconnectivity across various regions and municipalities. (Mazouz & Asaad, 2017, p.255)

The Algerian government has acknowledged tourism as a crucial sector in recent years and has consequently formulated strategies for its promotion and growth. The department has implemented numerous projects to enhance infrastructure, including the construction of new airports and highways, the development of new trains, and the expansion of hotel and tourism facilities. The government has launched many programs to enhance tourism, including the "Explore Algeria" program, which seeks to highlight the country's cultural and natural attractions to international visitors. Despite numerous disadvantages, Algeria's tourist sector possesses significant potential for future growth and advancement. The strong governmental commitments to improving tourism, developing infrastructure, and the country's rich historical and cultural heritage will ultimately position Algeria as a significant contender in the global tourism market in the forthcoming years. Tourism in Algeria constitutes a significant sector, contributing approximately 3% to the nation's GDP. The sector also offers employment chances for numerous Algerians in the hospitality and tourism industries. This sector has yet to realize its full potential due to numerous challenges confronting the firm.

A significant challenge for the tourism sector in Algeria is security. Over the past decade, political instability and insecurity have undermined the economy. Instances of terrorism and abductions have also occurred, predominantly in isolated and border regions. This has led numerous foreign tourists, especially from developed Western nations, to eschew Algeria as a travel destination. (Mazouz & Asaad, 2017, p.257)

The state of Algeria's tourism industry is further aggravated by insufficient infrastructure and little investment. The nation's transportation infrastructure is predominantly inadequate, including a limited number of interconnected regions and urban centers. Traveling throughout the nation and visiting various tourist spots may continue to pose challenges for tourists. Furthermore, the nation possesses a restricted quantity of hotels and tourism amenities, which may dissuade guests from visiting the area. (UNWTO, 2019)

Notwithstanding obstacles, several significant advancements have occurred in Algeria's tourism sector in recent years. The government has implemented many initiatives to enhance business, including the construction of new airports, roadways, and railways. The government has undertaken numerous programs to enhance tourism; for instance, the "Explore Algeria" campaign aims to showcase the country's cultural and natural attributes to international visitors.

2.4. The Importance of Digital Marketing in the Tourism Industry:

Digital marketing has become increasingly vital in the tourism sector, as it enables enterprises to reach broader audiences to promote their products and services. Consequently, digital marketing has undoubtedly become a crucial component of any tourism company's marketing strategy, considering the rapid expansion of online platforms and social media.

A primary benefit of digital marketing is that tourism enterprises may efficiently and precisely engage their consumers. Employing sophisticated data analytics technology, organizations can ascertain the age, interests, and behaviors of their target audience, subsequently generating content in a corresponding tone. (Al-Debei, Al-Lozi, & Papazafeiropoulou, 2013) This detailed marketing strategy will enable them to enhance conversion rates and produce additional leads, resulting in increased sales and revenue. Furthermore, digital marketing can enhance brand awareness and establish credibility in the marketplace.

Various social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, enable businesses to engage with customers, enhance online visibility, and showcase their products and services. By producing valuable and informative content, businesses can position themselves as industry thought leaders and cultivate customer trust and loyalty. (Tolentino, 2020)

A further advantage of digital marketing in the tourism sector is that it provides real-time feedback to enterprises regarding the efficacy of their marketing efforts. Tourism enterprises can utilize tools such as Google Analytics to monitor website traffic, customer behavior, and conversion rates, thereby enhancing their marketing strategy and optimizing their return on investment. (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017)

Furthermore, tourism enterprises can compete in the marketplace. The rise of online travel agents and reservation websites has rendered it challenging for entities that have not significantly engaged in e-marketing to retain consumers. Consequently, by investing in digital marketing, businesses may establish a level playing field to compete with any industry participant, including larger entities. (Buhalis & Law, 2008)

3. Opportunities of adopting digital marketing in Algeria's tourism sector

The World Bank's IFC reported that digital technologies will enable Algeria to expand its tourism sector and enhance the visitor experience. The survey indicates that digital marketing effectively targets younger passengers and individuals who make online travel reservations across diverse media channels.

The Algerian Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts emphasizes that internet marketing can enhance Algeria's tourist sector and attract potential foreign visitors, particularly in the context of existing travel restrictions and diminished international interchange. The ministry asserts that social media and other digital channels can effectively engage potential visitors and showcase the nation's assets.

The African Development Bank analysis indicates that integrating digital technology in Algeria's tourist sector can enhance its competitiveness and resilience. It emphasized that digital marketing possesses significant potential to improve client engagement and loyalty by providing individualized travel experiences. (African Development Bank, 2021, p.8)

3.1. Increasing use of mobile devices and social media by tourists

According to the Algerian Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, mobile devices and social media usage are on the rise among tourists in Algeria. Journeys that were earlier made to explore travel destinations, book hotels, or share experiences on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are now being made through mobile devices.

A study carried out by the African Development Bank revealed that 70% of the tourists who arrived in Algeria found information about their journeys using their mobile phones. In contrast, 55% used social media websites to find information about travel destinations in planning their journeys. (African Development Bank, 2021, p.8)

According to the UNWTO, mobile devices and social media continue to drive changes in traveler behavior about the planning and booking of travel. According to UNWTO, this means embedding digital technologies into enhancing the visitor experience and making tourism products available to a larger, global market.(UNWTO, 2021, p.5)

3.2. The growth of e-commerce

Algeria's e-commerce market has grown significantly from 2020 to 2024, with various projections indicating a robust upward trend in revenue and user engagement.

Revenue Growth: The e-commerce market is projected to reach approximately **$1,296 million** in revenue by 2024, with an expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of **9.62%** from 2024 to 2029, potentially reaching **$2,051 million** by 2029. Another source estimates that the revenue could be as high as **$2,240.5 million** by 2024, reflecting a growth rate of **12%** compared to 2023. This indicates a strong market potential, especially considering the estimated market potential of **$5 billion** as noted by local trade associations.

User Growth: The number of e-commerce users in Algeria is forecasted to increase significantly, with projections suggesting an increase of **2.3 million users** (+32.72%) from 2024 to 2029, reaching around **9.35 million users** by the end of that period. This growth reflects a rising trend in internet penetration and digital engagement among the population.

Market Composition: The most significant segments within the Algerian e-commerce market include Hobby & Leisure (24.3%), Electronics (22.3%), and Fashion (18.8%), indicating diverse consumer interests and spending patterns. (Statista, 2024)

Fig.2. E-commerce Growth in Algeria
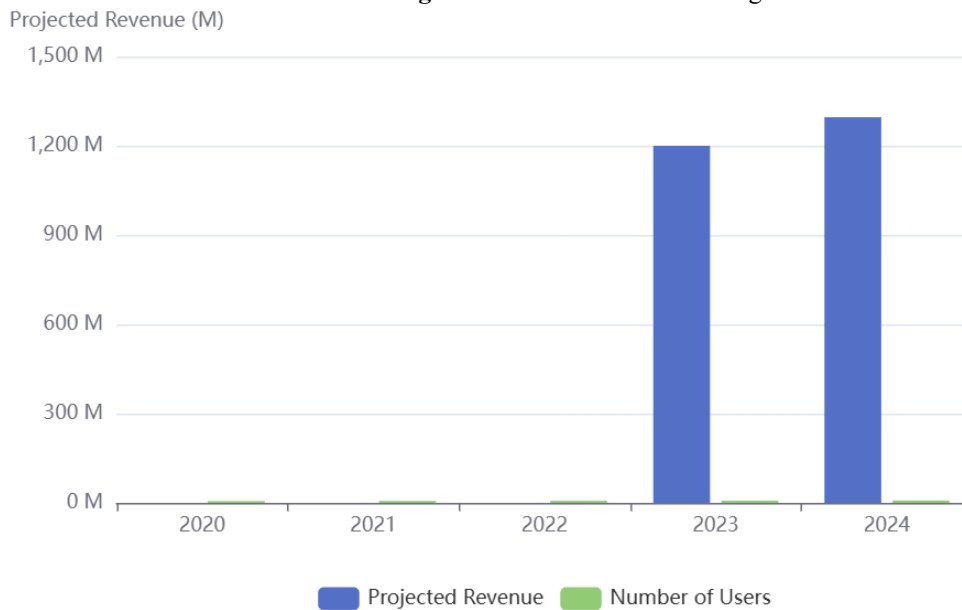
Source: (Statista, 2024)

Regulatory Environment: The Algerian government has implemented regulations to support e-commerce growth, including laws that require online markets to host their websites locally and register with the commercial registry. However, restrictions on international purchases for individuals may limit some aspects of market expansion. (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2024)

3.4.   Improved targeting of potential tourists:

The application of digital marketing methods could improve the targeting of potential tourists to Algeria. In this respect, tourism businesses in Algeria can more directly reach and engage with their target audiences through digital channels, increasing awareness, interest, and conversion. Some strategies for improving the targeting of potential tourists to Algeria through digital marketing include the following:

Fig.3. Improved targeting of potential tourists.
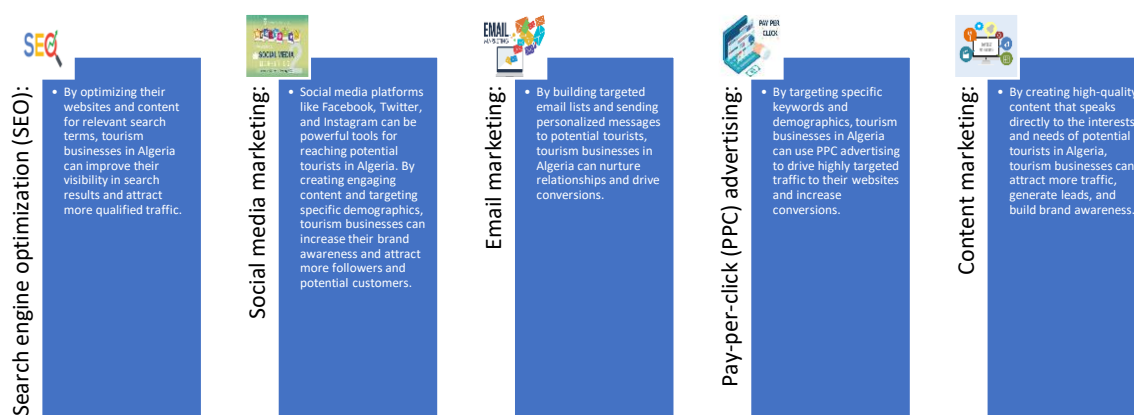
Source: Created by the researchers.

Search engine optimization (SEO):

• StatCounter Global Stats indicates that Google dominates the search engine market in Algeria, with a market share of over 97%. The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications asserts that improving website optimization to augment the digital visibility of tourism enterprises is a crucial strategy in Algeria.

• The International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning, or iJET, indicates that SEO can effectively enhance the exposure of tourism firms, hence drawing increased traffic at little expenses. (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2024)

Social media Marketing:

• According to a survey by Hootsuite, Algeria has more than 14 million social media users, representing over 34% penetration.

• The Algerian Ministry of Tourism asserts that social media is an effective tool for tourism enterprises to engage with customers and enhance brand visibility.

• The International Journal of Business and Management determined that social media marketing positively impacts tourism enterprises in Algeria, resulting in a higher influx of visitors and increased revenue. (Sari, Bouslama, & Dhibi, 2018, p. 139)

Email marketing:

• HubSpot reports that email marketing has an average return on investment of 3800%, establishing it as one of the most efficacious digital marketing channels currently available.

• The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications recognizes that email marketing could be an efficient method for tourism enterprises in Algeria to generate leads and enhance conversions.

• A study by the Journal of Applied Business Research found that personalized email messages can be highly effective at engaging potential customers and driving sales. (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2024)

Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising:

• According to an eMarketer report, search advertising accounts for the largest share of digital ad spending in Algeria, with a projected spending of over $52 million in 2021.

• The International Journal of Business and Management notes that PPC advertising can be an effective way for tourism businesses in Algeria to target specific demographics and increase conversions.

• A study by WordStream found that the average click-through rate for Google Ads in the travel and tourism industry is 3.55%. (Sari, Bouslama, & Dhibi, 2018)

Content marketing:

• According to a report by the Content Marketing Institute, 91% of B2B marketers use content marketing to reach customers, with blog posts and articles being the most famous content formats.

• The Ministry of Tourism notes that creating high-quality content that speaks directly to the interests and needs of potential customers can be an effective way for tourism businesses in Algeria to attract more traffic and build brand awareness.

• A study by the Journal of Destination Marketing & Management found that content marketing can be a valuable strategy for tourism businesses to differentiate themselves from competitors and attract more visitors. (Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019, p. 8)

3.5.   Enhanced customer engagement and satisfaction:

Personalization:

• A report by Accenture found that 91% of consumers are more likely to shop with brands that recognize, remember, and provide relevant offers and recommendations.

• The International Journal of Hospitality Management notes that personalization can be a valuable way for tourism businesses in Algeria to engage with customers and provide customized experiences.

• A study by the Journal of Travel Research found that personalized recommendations can significantly improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. (Statista, 2024)

Mobile optimization:

- According to a report by Statista, mobile devices account for over 52% of web traffic in Algeria, highlighting the importance of mobile optimization for tourism businesses.
- The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications notes that mobile optimization can help tourism businesses in Algeria to provide a seamless and user-friendly experience for customers. (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2024)
- A study by the Journal of Business Research found that mobile optimization can significantly improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. (Gupta, Kaur, & Gupta, 2020, p. 105)

Social media engagement:

- GlobalWebIndex reports that social media users in Algeria dedicate almost two hours daily to social media platforms, presenting a significant opportunity for tourism enterprises to interact with customers (GlobalWebIndex, 2021).
- The Ministry of Tourism of Algeria asserts that social media facilitates the engagement of tourism enterprises with clients, hence fostering successful community development.
- The Journal of Destination Marketing & Management indicated that social media involvement significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty levels.

Online reviews and ratings:

- Tourist enterprises assert that internet evaluations and ratings are crucial, as evidenced by a TripAdvisor survey revealing that 95% of travelers consult reviews prior to making a reservation.
- Online review and rating management serves as an effective method for tourism enterprises in Algeria to monitor consumer input, aiming to enhance their services. Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2024
- According to study from the Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management, online reviews and ratings significantly influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty. (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2024)

4. Challenges of adopting digital marketing in Algeria's tourism sector:

4.1. Limited internet penetration:

- Internet usage in Algeria was at 42.6% as of 2020, according to a report from the International Telecommunication Union. This points toward the possible barrier to digital marketing attainment. (Statista, 2024)
- The Algerian Ministry of Post and Telecommunications comments that due to low internet penetration, online access might be challenging for the tourism business in Algeria. (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2021)
- There is limited internet access, which, according to the Journal of Travel Research, could be a huge challenge to tourism businesses in developing countries.

4.2. Limited digital skills:

- Notably, an analysis by the International Finance Corporation shows that among the main challenges of using digital technology is a lack of proper digital capability among SMEs in Algeria. Ministry of (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2024)
- The Ministry of Tourism in Algeria emphasizes that a lack of certain digital skills within the tourism business is a barrier to elaborating and implementing an effective digital marketing policy. (Gupta, Kaur, & Gupta, 2020)

4.3. Limited digital infrastructure:

- The International Finance Corporation indicates that inadequate digital infrastructure, characterized by a lack of reliable broadband internet and mobile networks, significantly hinders the advancement of digital technologies in Algeria.
- The Algerian Ministry of Post and Telecommunications indicates that a potential issue may arise from inadequate digital infrastructure in tourism firms. This simultaneously raises worries on the provision of trustworthy, user-friendly online services. (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2024)

4.4.   Limited awareness:

- The International Finance Corporation asserts that a primary obstacle to the adoption of digital technologies by SMEs in Algeria is a lack of awareness of their advantages.
- The Algerian Ministry of Tourism indicates that numerous tourism enterprises encounter a deficiency in understanding digital marketing methods and their advantages, rendering adoption difficult.
- Research from the Journal of Business Research demonstrates that an insufficient understanding of digital marketing and its potential benefits is a significant barrier to its adoption. (Gupta, Kaur, & Gupta, 2020)

5.   Conclusion:

The use of digital marketing in Algeria's tourism sector is crucial. The industry possesses significant potential for growth via the adoption of digital marketing tactics, propelled by the rising utilization of mobile devices and social networks among visitors and the advancement of e-commerce, which offers an opportunity to improve customer service and satisfaction.

Algerian tourism continues to encounter distinct challenges: insufficient internet connectivity and infrastructure, opposition to innovation, a lack of knowledge, and poor digital marketing proficiency among tourism professionals. These challenges necessitate investment in digital infrastructure and technology, training and development initiatives for tourism professionals, partnerships with digital marketing experts, and the implementation of government policies and incentives to promote digital adoption.

These include the advancement of digital infrastructure, the formulation and execution of digital marketing strategies, the improvement of consumer experiences through social media and mobile devices, and the education in digital marketing skills among stakeholders in Algeria. It has been proposed that government funding and support for the sector in Algeria be augmented, particularly for technology and digital infrastructure. This will facilitate the establishment of a conducive environment for the adoption of digital marketing methods and the expansion of the sector.

Ultimately, stakeholders must confront the imperative of adopting digital marketing to stimulate growth in Algeria's tourism sector. This approach will enable the industry to align with regional counterparts while precisely targeting potential tourists, hence fostering economic growth and development for the country.

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