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E Mail Marketing Platforms and Performance of Tour Operating Companies

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Abstract: E-mail marketing is a component of the worldwide digital trend that presents tour operating companies with new opportunities due to its ease of use, capacity to reach a wider audience, and capacity for customer involvement. The main objective of the study was to establish the effect of email marketing and performance of tour operating companies in Kenya. The study was anchored on use and gratification theory. Cross-sectional and correlational research design were utilized. The study used a target population of 212 general managers of tour operating companies. The study adopted census approach. Online questionnaire was used to collect primary data. The supervisors and experts were used to examine validity of the instrument while Cronbach Alpha were adopted to test reliability where a threshold of 0.7 and above was deemed reliable. Descriptive statistics consisting of mean and standard deviations were used to summarize data while inferential statistics was used to examine the relationship between email marketing platforms and performance of tour operating firms. The study found out that, email marketing platform was adopted mainly in sharing information and acquisition of new customers through referrals. However, there was low adoption of email in sending promotions messages and advertising the organization. Therefore, e-mail marketing platform had statistically significant effect on the performance of tour operating companies ($\beta=0.345$, $P=0.000<0.05$). The study concluded that e-mail marketing had a positive significant effect on performance of tour operating companies. The study recommended tour operating companies should involve content development for email in promotions.

Keywords: Correlation Design, Cross-sectional Design, E-mail marketing platform, Tour Operating Companies, Kenya.

1. Introduction

Technology adoption has revolutionized the business environment amidst stiff competition. This has changed the way human beings communicate, act, transact business and make decisions. Marketing activities cannot be separated from the influence of digital technology in the recent past (Sharma, Sharma, & Chaudhary, 2020). Firms have adopted e-mail marketing platforms in digital operations to remain relevant in this modern era where high competition, globalization and new cutting-edge are evident. The digital space has made it easy to market products and services through various platform such as; email marketing, social media, messenger marketing and search engine, content creation among others.

Email marketing platform utilizes emails as a marketing tool (Njau & Karugu, 2014). Email marketing has improved firm's performance as noted by Fariborzi & Zahedifard, (2012). Similarly, a study by Kiriroti (2015) which focused on social network marketing, website marketing, mobile phone marketing and email marketing found out that the adoption of email marketing helps firms to develop a corporate image leading to competitive advantage.

This is because email marketing provides interactive, active and personalized communication between the organization and the customer (Hartemo, 2016). Sharma, Sharma, & Chaudhary (2020) ascertained that, email and social media platforms were the most utilized digital marketing platforms in small travel agencies. Besides, small travel agencies have used email as a digital marketing platform in marketing and branding their services. Email remains an important tool for passing information to the customers. The use of email marketing campaigns requires a segment group of subscribers depending on customer interests. It has also been used by marketers from various organizations to brand and advertise their products. Therefore, Email marketing remains a crucial aspect to tour companies in Kenya.

As a result there has been low foreign exchange earnings from the tourism sector compromising the performance of tour operators (Ministry of Wildlife and Tourism, 2020). Therefore, there is need to examine the performance of tour operating companies in Kenya. This was rightly attributed to Covid-19 Pandemic, leading to layoff of employees, retrenchment, closure and loss of revenue (WHO, 2020). The tourism industry in Kenya due to Covid-19 requires adoption of email marketing strategies among other digital platforms to ensure the sector turnaround.

Tourism industry is one of the sources of revenue and a major driver of the Kenyan economy. The sector provides 10.4% gross domestic product and directly employs about 990,000 Kenyans. However, tourism industry just like any other organization has been having similar share of challenges resulting to fluctuation of tourist's arrival in Kenya. Some of these challenges range from post-election crisis, terror crisis and recently the Covid-19 pandemic. The worst of all was the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted into lockdown, travel restrictions, employee layoff and loss of revenue which adversely affected performance of the tourism sector. E-mail marketing platforms could create ease of customer engagement, collaboration and communication in various organizations. In Kenya there is little evidence of e-mail marketing platforms have improved the performance of the organization. There is need to establish e-mail marketing platforms on the performance of tour operating companies in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical framework

The theory was developed by Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz in 1974. Use and gratification theory proposes that people actively seek a specific media based on the special needs attached to the media of communication. The theory further hypothesizes that media is a highly available product and the audience are the same product consumers. Hence, media technology innovations have utilized this theory since it explains the importance of peoples' motivation while choosing a media and gratification achieved through making the choice (Menon, 2022).

According to Hollebeek & Macky (2019) digital platform provide a channel of disseminating and creating valuable and relevant content of the brands to a customer through developing trust, engagement and relationship with the customer. Use and Gratification theory posits that a person's motivation, authentic, hedonic and functional characteristics are important indicators for a good digital marketing content. These factors assist in motivating social media content according to Plume & Slade (2018).

This supports email marketing platform as used by tour operating companies in Kenya. Use and gratification theory points out that the choice of e-mail marketing platform is based on the consumer reason for use and its efficiency in marketing. Therefore, the study examined the use of e-mail marketing while examining how appropriate platforms are to the performance of tour companies in Kenya

Empirical Literature Review

Bawm & Nath (2014) conceptualized a model for an effective email marketing. The broadcasting of commercial messages was done using email marketing platform. Despite, email marketing producing high return on investment, there is a challenge in searching the target customer after collecting subscriber information and sending emails. The paper examined the conceptual model that ensures effective email marketing system for higher performance. Email marketing consisted of collecting subscribers' active data as well as clustering and segmenting subscribers. The study conducted a market experiment using the model. Due to individual interest, the model's adoption resulted in an improvement in subscriber activity performance after email campaigns to segmented subscriber groups. On the other hand, the purpose of the current study was to evaluate the impact of email marketing on tour operating companies' performance.

A study by Păvăloaia, Anastasiei, & Fotache (2020) examined social media and e-mail marketing campaigns. This study aims to optimized marketing campaign on Facebook in synchrony with a regular e-mail campaign, it highlights the significance of service based interface technology for the long-term sustainable profitability of a company. The study began with a campaign on social media, identified a client portfolio, processed data, and used a variety of statistical techniques, including the index and the statistical significance (T-test), which later allowed the authors to validate their research hypotheses (RH) and resulted in important business decisions. The study outlines the preferences of the chosen group of organizations for how they conduct a marketing campaign on social media in synchronicity with a campaign conducted via email. The study's findings demonstrate that employing email and symmetrical unfolding (time and opportunity symmetry) of social media marketing campaigns can produce superior outcomes to running two independent marketing campaigns. Additionally, both campaigns' results indicated convergence on SBI platforms, which improved the management of campaign recipients' preferences in the insurance industry. The current study examined e-mail marketing in relation to tour operating companies in Kenya.

Performance of SMEs was examined by Njau & Karugu (2014) on e-marketing in manufacturing industry in Kenya. Online advertising, blog marketing, email marketing and search engine marketing were examined in relation to e-marketing. Survey research design was used where simple random sampling was adopted in selecting desired sample from target of five hundred SMEs. Online advertising, blog marketing, email marketing and searching engine marketing was found to have significant influence on business

performance. Therefore, eMarketing had significant effect on business performance. However, the current study examined email marketing platform on performance of organization.

Email marketing was examined by Fariborzi and Zahedifard (2012) to interrogate the disadvantages, advantages and enhancing the technique. E-Commerce enables the government of Iran to grow economically. The study used systematic review of disadvantage and advantage. Email marketing improved the Iranian marketing company. In the results there was no relationship between email marketing based on the synthesized literature. The current study used primary data rather than systematic review of data. This provided the real situation of tour operators in Kenya context.

Kiro (2015) in the study investigated effect of adoption of e-marketing practices and performance of mobile firms in Kenya. The study focused on social network marketing, website marketing, mobile phone marketing and email marketing. A cross-sectional design was adopted on 90 employees of Orange Telkom Kenya Limited, Airtel Kenya Limited and Safaricom Limited. The data was collected using questionnaires where descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to analyse primary data. Findings indicated that social network marketing had significant effect on performance of organization.

Mobile phone marketing has played an important role in messages to channel targeted text to customer. The firm used website marketing in enhancing consistent corporate image. Organization performance was also affected by e-mail marketing which is significant in development of corporate image. This study focused on e-marketing practice based on email and website marketing. On the contrary, the current study focused on email marketing among tour firms rather than performance of mobile firms.

Sharma, Sharma, & Chaudhary (2020) did a study on the readiness of small travel agencies for digital marketing. Internet has enhanced the adoption of digital marketing platform in communication and distribution channel for both suppliers and consumers of travel services. The study investigated the factors and challenges that affect application of digital marketing by travelling agencies. A qualitative approach was used in the study to explore on the most popular digital platforms used by travel agencies. E-mail and social media platforms were the most used digital marketing tool. Website and E-mail was rated as important platforms for communication and dissemination of information for marketing and branding purposes. However, social media platforms from Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, SMS, YouTube and blogs were used in that reducing order. The current study focused e-mail marketing rather than digital platform.

Email marketing in consumer empowered era was studied by Hartemo (2016). Systematic literature from 95 studies was reviewed. The findings show that email provide interactive, active and personalized communication between the customer and the organization, also mail was found to be crucial in empowering consumers to share information since they are allowed to be participants in the communication process. The study recommends that new strategies need to be adopted by the organizations to achieve maximum benefit from this email marketing platform. This current study examined email marketing platform and performance of tour operating companies in Kenya.

3. Research Methodology

The study utilized positivism philosophy which incorporated cross-sectional and correlation design. The target population of 212 touring companies from Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Narumoro, Nanyuki, Malindi and Kilifi. Census method was used where all 212 tour operating companies were incorporated. However, the census excluded 7 tour operating companies that is Kisumu, Narumoro, Nanyuki, Malindi and Kilifi which were used for piloting. The study used primary data collected using online questionnaires and incorporated with physical questionnaires. Supervisors and experts were interrogated the instrument for validity. Cronbach alpha coefficient is the most appropriate analysis that is used in testing reliability of the instrument based on pilot test method. Descriptive statistics in terms of mean and standard deviation was used. This was presented in tables and charts. The study also utilized inferential statistics to test hypotheses. Simple linear regression model was used to test the hypotheses of direct relationship between e-mail marketing platform and performance. Confidentiality was upheld throughout data collection process since the participants were not allowed to write their names in the questionnaire and they were not coerced to respond.

4. Results and Discussions

E-Mail Marketing

E-mail marketing was assessed through descriptive analysis where mean and standard deviation were adopted. The results from the Likert scale were presented in frequency percentage in table 1.

Table 1: E-Mail Marketing

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
The firm uses Emails in sending newsletters to new and existing customer to solicit sales	0.0%	5.7%	13.4%	38.7%	42.3%	4.1753	.86988
Emails are also used to explain services that are provided by the organization, in relation to cost details.	0.0%	0.0%	9,8%	37.6%	52.6%	4.4278	.66555
We use Emails for acquisition of new customers through referrals which improves the company revenue.	0.0%	6.2%	11.9%	44.3%	37.6%	4.1340	.85326
The organization has sufficient database for customer emails and communicate to them often to get business.	0.0%	5.7%	21.6%	33.0%	39.7%	4.0670	.91654
The firm shares important information to clients continuously through emails to be able to retain them.	2.1%	2.1%	21.1%	24.7%	50.0%	4.1856	.97460
The organization provides discounted services for regular customers and informs them through promotion emails	0.0%	5.7%	20.1%	38.1%	36.1%	4.0464	.88915
Emails are used to advertise the organization through existing customers.	2.6%	4.1%	21.6%	39.7%	32.0%	3.9433	.96674
The company sends Promotion Emails to new customers using random email provider services.	7.7%	12.9%	24.2%	26.8%	28.4%	3.5515	1.24256
Average						4.0664	0.9223

Key: SD –Strong Disagree (1), D –Disagree (2), N –Neutral (3), A –Agree (4), SA –Strongly Agree (5), Std. Deviation – Standard deviation and N=194.

Table 1 showed that the 42.3% of tour operators used Emails in sending newsletters to new and existing customer to solicit sales. A mean of 4.1753 and standard deviation of 0.86988 reveals that E-mail were utilized in sending newsletter to both existing and new customers. There were 52.6% of respondents who strongly agreed to using Emails in explaining services that are provided by the organization, in relation to cost details. A mean of 4.4278 and standard deviation of 0.66555 showed that the email was utilized in provision of product information.

A response of 44.3% of tour operating agreed to using Emails for acquisition of new customers through referrals which improved the company revenue. A mean of 4.1340 and standard deviation of 0.85326, revealed that email was used across the tour companies through referrals. The findings, further revealed that 39.7% of tour operating companies had sufficient database for customers and could communicate to them often to get business. A mean of 4.0670 and standard deviation of 0.91654 confirmed that the tour companies used customer emails for communication purpose.

Half of the respondents strongly agreed to sharing important information to clients continuously through emails to be able to retain them. A mean of 4.1856 and standard deviation of 0.97460 revealed that tour operators shared information with customers using emails. The firms also provided discounted services for regular customers and informed them through promotion emails as revealed by 38.1% who agreed and 36.1% strongly agreed. The mean of 4.0464 and standard deviation of 0.88915 further confirmed that e-mails were used for sending promotion messages. Hence, email assist organization in sharing information and conducting promotions to reach out to customers.

Emails were also used to advertise the organization through existing customers as agreed by 39.7% of respondents. Email advertisement was utilized by most of the tour operating companies as indicated by a mean of 3.9433 with standard deviation of 0.96674. The were 28.4% strongly agreed and 26.8% agreed that random email providers' services were used for promotion purpose. A mean of 3.5515 and standard deviation of 1.24256 revealed that promotion emails were adopted by tour operators, however, there was high variation on adoption of random email providers' service for promotion.

The results further, indicated that the overall average for e-mail marketing platform was 4.0664 which revealed high level of utilization the platform among the tour operating firm. Its variation was also slightly low with standard deviation of 0.9223 which implied that the application of e-mail marketing platform washomogenously adopted by the tour operating companies.

Organization Performance

The results of performance were examined based on five-point Likert scale. This included mean and standard deviation as revealed by Table 2.

Table 2: Email Marketing and Organization Performance

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
The tour operating companies have increased return on investments.	1.5%	2.1%	19.6%	48.5%	28.4%	4.0000	.83944
The return on investment have enabled the firm to expand in terms of size and operations.	1.5%	5.2%	25.8%	34.0%	33.5%	3.9278	.96839
The tour operating companies have improved in their revenue generation.	0.0%	5.7%	16.5%	54.6%	23.2%	3.9536	.79043
We have improved our revenue through introduction of digital platforms in the organization.	1.5%	3.6%	18.6%	43.8%	32.5%	4.0206	.89303
We are able to gain more customers and retain them through digital platforms interactions.	1.5%	4.1%	23.2%	36.1%	35.1%	3.9897	.94397
Customers have increased based on the experience, services and nature of destination provided by the organization.	2.1%	2.1%	7.2%	47.4%	41.2%	4.2371	.83664
There is high client retention where most tourists have returned to our firms for tour services.	0.0%	6.2%	5.7%	40.2%	47.9%	4.2990	.83530
There is an increase in new customers as result of digital marketing adoption in marketing destinations	0.0%	4.1%	13.9%	43.8%	38.1%	4.1598	.81453
Average						4.0735	0.8652

Key: SD –Strong Disagree (1), D –Disagree (2), N –Neutral (3), A –Agree (4), SA –Strongly Agree (5), Std. Deviation – Standard deviation and N=194.

The results in Table 2 revealed that 48.5% of respondents agreed that companies had increased return on investments. A mean of 4.0000 and standard deviation of 0.83944 affirms that the tour companies had improved in return-on-investment across the industry. 34.0% of respondents agreed while 33.5% strongly agreed to have expanded in terms of size and operation based on return on investment. A mean of 3.9278 and standard deviation of 0.96839 showed that, return on investment was significant on growth in terms of size and operation of the tour operating companies.

Subsequently, 54.6% of the tour operators had improved in their revenue generation. The mean of 3.9536 and standard deviation of 0.79043, also revealed that most the firms had moderately improved in revenue generation. There were 43.8% of the tour operators who agreed and 32.5% strongly agreed to have improved their revenue through introduction of digital platforms in the organization. The mean of 4.0206 and standard deviation of 0.89303 showed that companies revenue generation was moderately high across the industry. It was revealed that 36.1% and 35.15%, strongly agreed to gain more customers and retain them through digital platforms interactions. The adoption of digital platforms encouraged and increased customer share (mean of 3.9897 and standard deviation of 0.94397).

There were 47.4% respondents agree to have participated in the further assessment of consumer share in order to improve the destination's experience, services, and nature. A mean of 4.2371 and a standard deviation of 0.83664 indicated that the tour operators have raised customer share by improving the destination's quality, experience, and offerings.

A response of 47.9% tour operators strongly agreed there was high client retention where most tourists have returned back for the services. A mean of 4.2990 and standard deviation of 0.83530 revealed that there was high client retention resulting to repeated experience. There was also an increase in new customers as indicated by 43.8% of tour operators who adopted digital marketing in marketing destinations. The mean of 4.1598 and standard deviation of 0.81453 further showed that there is increase in customer was associated with digital marketing which is adopted to enable destination branding in the tourism industry.

An overall average of 4.0735 was obtained in organization performance which reveal that the tour operating companies' performance was above average. Its variation was 0.8652 which was low. This indicated that the performance of tour operating companies was homogenous across the industry.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between email marketing platform and performance of tour operating companies in Kenya.

Simple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of e-mail marketing on organization performance. The simple regression was tested using 5% significant level.

Table 3: E-Mail Marketing and Organizational Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1					
	(Constant)	2.669	.316	8.458	.000
	E-Mail Marketing	.345	.077	.309	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

R = 0.309

R² = 0.095

F = 20.258

P = 0.000 < 0.05

N = 194

Source: Research Data (2023)

According to the results, e-mail marketing had a positive relationship with organization performance (R=0.309). E-mail marketing contributed to 9.5% variation in organization performance while other factors had 90.5% (R²=0.095). The e-mail marketing had significant relationship with organization performance (F=20.258, P=0.000<0.05).

The results revealed that e-mail marketing had positive significant relationship with organization performance ($\beta_3=0.345$, P=0.000<0.05). Therefore, there is statistically significant relationship between email marketing platform and performance of tour operating companies in Kenya.

Bawm & Nath (2014) introduced a conceptual model for effective email marketing, highlighting its potential for higher performance despite challenges in targeting the right customers. Their market experiment showed improved subscriber activity after implementing this model, indicating that personalized and segmented email campaigns based on individual interests can positively influence performance. This finding concurs with the current study in that email marketing platform provides an increase in personalized email campaigns that lead to positive influence on organization performance. The current study added the knowledge that such e-mail campaign can be enhanced through email newsletter, acquisition emails, retention emails and promotion emails.

Păvăloaia, Anastasiei, & Fotache (2020) explored the integration of social media and email marketing campaigns and emphasized the significance of Symmetrical Business Intelligence (SBI) technology for long-term sustainable profitability. Their findings revealed that deploying email marketing in synchrony with social media campaigns can yield superior results compared to running independent campaigns. The convergence of outcomes on SBI platforms improved the management of campaign recipients' preferences, underscoring the positive relationship between email marketing and firm performance. However, the findings concentrate in the application of Symmetrical Business Intelligence (SBI) technology where the current study shows that social media is crucial in the performance of tour operating firms.

In another study by Njau & Karugu (2014) which investigated e-marketing in the manufacturing industry in Kenya, including email marketing as one of the strategies. Their study found that online advertising, blog marketing, email marketing, and search engine marketing significantly influenced business performance.

However, email marketing was one of the variables of e-marketing whereas the current study revealed that e-mail marketing platform had positive significant influence on performance of tour operating companies.

In contrast, Fariborzi & Zahedifard (2012) examined email marketing within the context of e-commerce's impact on Iran's economic growth. While email marketing improved marketing companies in Iran, their systematic review did not establish a clear relationship between email marketing and performance based on synthesized literature. The current study established a clear positive significant relationship between email marketing and performance of tour operating companies in Kenya.

Kiriro (2015) studied the adoption of e-marketing practices in mobile firms in Kenya, including email marketing, and found that it had a significant effect on organization performance. Similarly, Sharma, Sharma, & Chaudhary (2020) investigated the readiness of small travel agencies for digital marketing and found that email, along with social media, played a crucial role in their digital marketing strategies. The study highlighted the importance of email for communication, information dissemination, marketing, and branding purposes. The current study reveals that e-mail was adopted in sending e-mail newsletter, acquisition of customer, retention of customer and promotions purposes.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The results revealed that e-mail marketing platform was used to explain services that were provided by the organization in relation to the cost. Therefore, the firms were able to share important information with the clients using the email marketing platform. The emails were used for acquisition of new customer through referrals since there were sufficient customer data base which facilitated easy communication. The results further, showed that the tour operating companies provided discounted services for regular customers based on existing promotions. The email marketing platforms allowed the tour operating companies to advertise the organization. However, there was high variation among firms on the use of e-mail in sending promotion messages to new customers using random email provider services, where there were slightly more tour operating companies who practiced it. The results revealed that e-mail marketing had positive significant relationship with organization performance.

Conclusions

The study concluded that e-mail marketing platform had statistically significant effect on the performance of tour firms. The e-mail platform was utilized in advertise and share information about the tour operators to their customers. The email platform allowed the tour operators to acquire new customers through referrals where sufficient database of customer emails enabled efficient communication. The email marketing platform were adopted by some firms to sending promotions, advertising the organization and a few tour operators used it for sending random emails to new customers.

Recommendations

The study recommends that firms should utilize the email platform for informing the customers on existing promotions. This will assist existing customers to create interest for revisiting the tour destination using the same tour operating companies.

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