

DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES AND CULTURAL TOURIST LOYALTY IN SAMUT SONGKHRAM PROVINCE

Manon Arunkiri¹, Wilailuk Rakbumrung²

¹Manon Arunkiri, College of Innovation and Management, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University,
Bangkok, Thailand,
E-Mail: s65563829002@ssru.ac.th

²Wilailuk Rakbumrung, College of Innovation and Management, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University,
Bangkok, Thailand,
E-Mail: wilailuk.ra@ssru.ac.th

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of digital marketing strategies in fostering cultural tourist loyalty in Samut Songkhram Province, utilizing the 4E conceptual framework: Experience (the creation of memorable experiences), Exchange (perceived value in the exchange), Everywhere (ubiquitous access to information), and Evangelism (developing relationships that lead to positive word-of-mouth). Employing a quantitative research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 400 cultural tourists selected via convenience sampling. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis.

Findings reveal that all four dimensions of digital marketing strategy significantly influence tourist loyalty, with “Everywhere” (information accessibility) and “Exchange” (value perception) demonstrating particularly strong positive effects. These insights underscore the strategic importance of digital marketing in enhancing cultural tourism in Samut Songkhram. The results offer practical implications for tourism authorities in shaping targeted digital strategies that align with contemporary tourist behaviors in the digital era. Moreover, the study supports the advancement of sustainable tourism economically, culturally, and in terms of holistic destination management.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Cultural Tourism, Tourist Loyalty

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, characterized by the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies, consumer behavior has undergone significant transformation. Businesses across all sectors are compelled to adapt and embrace digital marketing strategies to enhance their competitive edge. This necessity is particularly pronounced in the tourism industry, which is inherently sensitive to shifts in consumer preferences and behavioral trends.

Cultural tourism has witnessed growing popularity in recent years, as it offers travelers deeply immersive experiences while simultaneously contributing to the preservation of local heritage. Samut Songkhram Province stands out as a unique cultural tourism destination in Thailand, known for its charming riverside communities, historic temples, floating markets, and traditional activities that vividly reflect authentic Thai ways of life. However, the province faces mounting challenges from competing destinations and the increasingly dynamic behavior of tourists in the digital age. These challenges present significant obstacles to building tourist loyalty and encouraging repeat visits.

To address these issues, the implementation of digital marketing strategies aimed at fostering engagement and enhancing destination image has become an essential tool. Drawing upon the 4E framework-comprising Experience (creating memorable experiences), Exchange (delivering value in exchange), Everywhere (ensuring convenient information access), and Evangelism (building relationships that lead to positive word-of-mouth) digital marketing presents a compelling approach to strengthen marketing communication and cultivate long-term relationships with tourists (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017).

Despite the widespread adoption of digital marketing within the tourism sector, limitations remain in evaluating its outcomes, particularly in the context of Samut Songkhram. Empirical studies specifically exploring the link between digital marketing strategies and tourist loyalty within this locale are still lacking. Prior research suggests that experiential factors and the ease of information access significantly influence tourist decision-making and are strongly associated with intentions to revisit and recommend destinations to others (Dejnirattisai, 2024).

Accordingly, this study seeks to address this research gap by examining the impact of digital marketing strategies, guided by the 4E framework, on cultural tourist loyalty in Samut Songkhram Province. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for designing more effective marketing strategies aligned with digital-era tourist behaviors. Furthermore, the data, derived from quantitative research involving tourists with firsthand experience in the region, will serve as a foundational resource for in-depth analysis. The ultimate goal is to support the development of sustainable cultural tourism promotion strategies, both at the policy-making and operational levels.

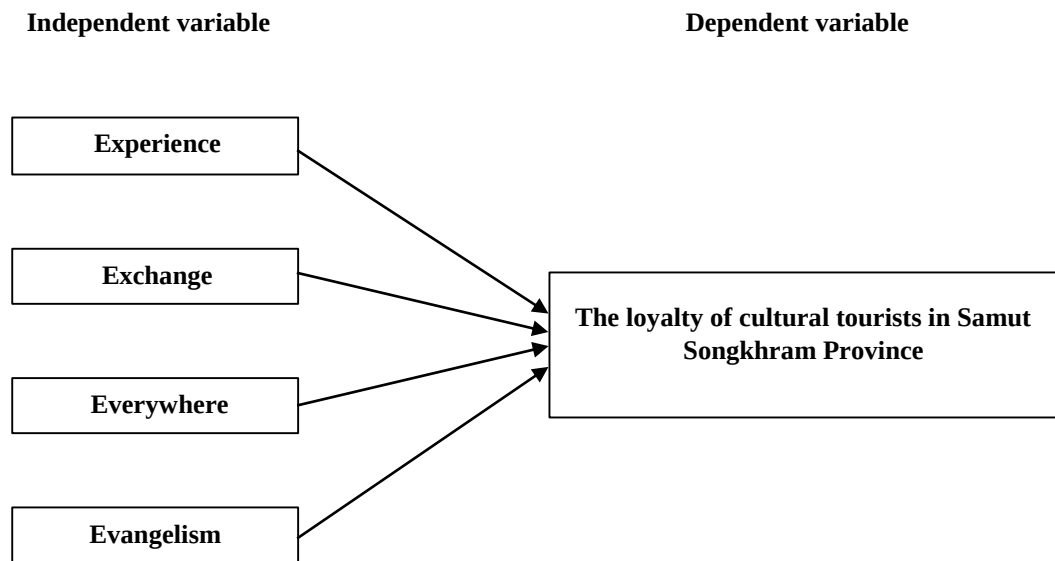
OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the level of perception regarding digital marketing strategies and the loyalty of cultural tourists in Samut Songkhram Province.
2. To investigate the influence of digital marketing strategies on the loyalty of cultural tourists in Samut Songkhram Province.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts the 4E framework of digital marketing as its conceptual foundation. The 4E model, developed as an evolution of the traditional 4Ps of marketing, reflects a more contemporary understanding of consumer behavior in the digital era-one that emphasizes immersive experiences, value exchange, ubiquitous access, and long-term relational engagement. The four components of this framework are described as follows:

Experience refers to the creation of emotional resonance, satisfaction, or lasting impressions through the active involvement of tourists, whether in physical or digital contexts. These experiences may include storytelling via videos, participation in community-based cultural events, or any form of meaningful engagement that reflects the identity of the local destination.



METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing a survey method to collect data through a structured questionnaire. A total of 400 participants were selected using convenience sampling, focusing on individuals who were easily accessible and met the inclusion criteria specifically, those who had visited Samut Songkhram Province within the past year and were able to access digital media for tourism-related information. A key limitation of the convenience sampling technique lies in its potential inability to provide a truly representative sample of the target population, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings. Nonetheless, scholars in methodological literature acknowledge that convenience sampling is appropriate for quantitative studies that face constraints in population accessibility and require flexibility in data collection. However, such limitations should be carefully considered when applying the findings to broader contexts.

Population and Sample: The population in this study consisted of tourists who had previously engaged in cultural tourism in Samut Songkhram Province. The sample was selected through convenience sampling, with a predetermined sample size of 400 individuals, calculated based on Cochran's (1977) formula, which is suitable for estimating population parameters in large populations of unknown size. Participants were required to meet specific criteria, including having traveled to Samut Songkhram within the past 12 months and possessing the ability to access digital media for tourism information.

Research Instrument: The primary instrument used in this research was a questionnaire, developed in accordance with the 4E conceptual framework. The questionnaire comprised three main sections

1. general demographic information of respondents.
2. Items measuring perceptions of digital marketing strategies across four dimensions: Experience, Exchange, Everywhere, and Evangelism
3. items assessing tourist loyalty.

A five-point Likert scale was employed for all attitudinal items. The questionnaire was validated through content validity assessment by three academic experts. Reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha, with all dimensions demonstrating coefficients greater than 0.80, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Data Collection: Data were collected using an online questionnaire designed according to quantitative research principles, aiming to obtain responses aligned with the research framework. The questionnaire was systematically constructed to ensure comprehensive measurement of the designated variables. Close-ended questions were used to facilitate quantifiable statistical analysis. The questionnaire was distributed via electronic channels accessible to the target group, such as email, social media platforms, and widely used messaging applications. This approach was intended to enhance convenience and flexibility in data collection, particularly under constraints related to time and location.

Data Analysis: Before conducting the analysis, responses were reviewed for completeness and accuracy. Descriptive statistics including mean, percentage, and standard deviation were used to present an overview of the sample characteristics and the distribution of each variable. To examine the relationships between the four dimensions of digital marketing strategies and tourist loyalty, multiple regression analysis was employed. Hypothesis testing was conducted at a statistical significance level of 0.05, aiming to confirm the causal relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that digital marketing strategies framed through the 4E model encompassing Experience, Exchange, Everywhere, and Evangelism exert a positive influence on the loyalty of cultural tourists in Samut Songkhram Province. These results underscore the growing importance of consumer-centric marketing approaches, particularly in an era where information and communication technologies permeate every stage of travel planning and decision-making.

Among the four dimensions, Experience emerged as the most influential factor. This aligns closely with the seminal work of Pine and Gilmore (1999), who argued that experience constitutes the core value that modern consumers seek. In the context of cultural tourism, experiences are inherently immersive and participatory, often rooted in learning and interaction with local ways of life. When tourists encounter memorable and meaningful experiences, they are more likely to retain positive impressions, return for future visits, and share their experiences with others especially through digital platforms.

This finding reaffirms the critical role that experiential value plays in shaping tourist behavior. It also highlights the strategic potential of experience-driven marketing in fostering emotional engagement, building destination loyalty, and promoting organic advocacy through digital word-of-mouth. As cultural tourism increasingly relies on differentiated, authentic experiences, leveraging digital tools to enhance and communicate these experiences becomes essential for long-term destination competitiveness.

The researcher set the criteria for interpreting the level of scores or interpreting the mean (Boonchom Srisat, 2018) as follows

Mean	Meaning
Mean from 4.51-5.00	very high level
Mean from 3.51-4.50	high level
Mean from 2.51-3.50	moderate level
Mean from 1.51-2.50	low level
Mean from 1.00-1.50	very low level

The results of the analysis of the level of opinions on digital marketing strategies that affect tourist loyalty for cultural tourism in Samut Songkhram Province include creating experiences, exchange, everywhere, and evangelism.

Table of means and standard deviations of opinions on digital marketing strategies affecting tourist loyalty for cultural tourism in Samut Songkhram Province

Digital marketing strategy	Level of opinion			
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Interpretation	number
1. Experience	3.92	0.79	high level	4
2. Exchange	4.07	0.77	high level	2
3. Everywhere	4.09	0.75	high level	1
4. Evangelism	3.94	0.86	high level	3
Total	4.00	0.74	high level	

Based on the results presented in the analysis table, the overall level of respondents' opinions regarding digital marketing strategies influencing tourist loyalty in the context of cultural tourism in Samut Songkhram Province was rated as high ($\bar{x} = 4.00$). When examining individual components, the highest-rated dimension was Accessibility ($\bar{x} = 4.09$), followed by Value Exchange ($\bar{x} = 4.07$), both of which were also rated at a high level. The dimension that received the lowest rating, though still within the high range, was Experience Creation ($\bar{x} = 3.92$).

Regarding Everywhere, or the accessibility of information and services through digital channels, the ability of tourists to easily and quickly search for travel-related information plays a crucial role in enhancing their confidence and influencing their decision to travel. This finding is consistent with the study by Dejnirattisai (2024), which highlights that widespread access to information not only strengthens destination image but also significantly encourages repeat visits.

In terms of Exchange, or perceived value, tourists' assessment of whether the overall travel experience justifies the investment of resources, such as money, time, and energy, has a direct impact on overall satisfaction and contributes to the development of long-term loyalty. Although the study identified Exchange as having slightly less influence than Experience and Everywhere, it remains a vital component, particularly in shaping tourists' perceptions of pricing and the value they receive in return.

For the Evangelism dimension, which pertains to word-of-mouth and advocacy behavior, the ability to foster relationships and motivate tourists to share positive experiences via digital media emerges as a powerful strategy for cultivating long-term loyalty. As modern travelers increasingly rely on peer recommendations over official sources, this research reaffirms the strategic value of experience-driven marketing and participatory engagement throughout the tourist journey.

In summary, the implementation of the 4E digital marketing framework serves as a highly effective tool in fostering tourist engagement and loyalty. It not only increases the likelihood of repeat visitation but also strengthens a broader network of destination awareness and positive dissemination

over the long term. The insights gained from this study offer practical applications for tourism organizations seeking to design strategic plans aligned with the behaviors and expectations of tourists in the digital era.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Although this study provides a systematic and comprehensive explanation of the relationship between digital marketing strategies based on the 4E framework and the loyalty of cultural tourists in Samut Songkhram Province, certain limitations remain. These limitations offer valuable directions for future research, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Future studies should consider expanding the scope of research to include other provinces with similar cultural tourism characteristics, such as Ratchaburi or Phetchaburi. Comparative research would allow for a deeper spatial understanding and help identify region-specific factors that influence tourist loyalty. This approach can enhance the applicability of findings and contribute to more context-sensitive tourism strategies.
2. The inclusion of qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews with tourists or local tourism operators, is recommended. These approaches can offer deeper insights into individual experiences, emotional responses, and personal motivations—elements that are often difficult to capture through quantitative data alone. A qualitative complement would thus enrich the understanding of tourist behavior from a more holistic perspective.
3. Future research should consider examining potential mediating or moderating variables, such as service satisfaction, perceived value, or destination image, that may play a critical role in explaining the mechanisms through which loyalty is formed. Including such variables would contribute to the development of a more nuanced and accurate marketing model.
4. Given the rapid evolution of technology, it is essential to investigate future trends in consumer behavior, particularly with the rise of emerging platforms such as the Metaverse, AI chatbots, or personalized marketing technologies. These innovations may significantly influence tourist loyalty and expectations. Understanding these dynamics will be invaluable for formulating long-term strategic directions within Thailand's tourism industry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for invaluable help throughout this research.

REFERENCES

- Chaffey, D., & Smith, P. R. (2017). *Digital marketing excellence: Planning, optimizing and integrating online marketing* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Chu, S. and Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of Consumer Engagement in Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in Social Networking Sites. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30, 47-75.
- Dejnirattisai, P. (2024). Influence of digital content on tourist loyalty: A case study of cultural tourism in Thailand. *Journal of Tourism and Digital Strategy*, 6(1), 45-62.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K.P., Walsh, G., et al. (2004). Electronic Word-of-Mouth via Consumer-Opinion Platforms: What Motivates Consumers to Articulate Themselves on the Internet. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18, 38-52.
- Hudson, S., & Hudson, L. (2013). Customer relationship management in the tourism industry: Practice and potential. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 6, 36-48.

- Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H., & Setiawan, I. (2017). *Marketing 4.0: Moving from traditional to digital*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy: Work is theatre & every business a stage*. Harvard Business Press.
- Sigala, M. (2018). Social media and customer engagement in the context of tourism marketing. In M. Sigala, E. Christou, & U. Gretzel (Eds.), *social media in travel, tourism and hospitality: Theory, practice and cases* (pp. 23-36). Routledge.
- Zhang, H., Fu, X., Cai, L. A., & Lu, L. (2014). Destination image and tourist loyalty: A meta-analysis. *Tourism Management*, 40, 213-223.