



# An Examination of Digital Marketing as a Tool to Enhance Customer Engagement in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of the Western Province, Sri Lanka

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** In the digital age, marketing strategies are crucial for engaging customers. This study aims to evaluate how digital marketing enhances customer engagement in the hotel industry, focusing on Western Province in Sri Lanka. This study's primary objective is to assess the impact of digital marketing to enhance customer engagement in the hotel industry in Western Province, Sri Lanka. The study focuses on the influence of social media marketing, content marketing, and mobile marketing on customer engagement.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This quantitative study analyzes digital marketing's impact on customer engagement using data collected through an online survey with a structured questionnaire. Multiple regression analysis was employed to test three hypotheses and identify key factors influencing customer engagement in the hotel industry.

**Findings:** According to the findings, this research shows the relationship between digital marketing and customer engagement in the hotel industry. Therefore, from this study, social media marketing and customer engagement has positive relationships, Content marketing and customer engagement has positive relationships and finally Mobile marketing, and customer engagement have positive relationships.

**Originality:** The findings offer valuable insights for Sri Lanka's hotel industry, aiding managerial decisions and optimizing digital marketing strategies. The study emphasizes effective marketing strategies, understanding local audience preferences, and the importance of feedback for continuous improvement.

**Implications:** This study offers valuable insights into Sri Lanka's hotel industry, aiding managerial decisions and providing essential tools for digital marketing. It highlights effective strategies and local audience preferences, supports customer segmentation for personalized marketing, and underscores the significance of feedback for ongoing improvement in digital marketing strategies.

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## **Introduction**

### ***Background of the Study***

In today's corporate environment, technology and online communities have become vital for building strong customer relationships. Many businesses, particularly in the service sector, use online communities as marketing platforms. Consumers' growing involvement in digital marketing reflects its critical role in online business. According to the American Marketing Association (Wilkie, 2009), digital marketing involves any electronic marketing method, utilizing websites, social networks, search engines, and blogs. Unlike traditional marketing, which is limited to tangible ads, digital marketing fosters dynamic, two-way communication between companies and customers.

Digital marketing plays a crucial role in business marketing, enhancing market share and promoting products and services (Storm, 2022). Successful marketing requires sales skills, advertising expertise, and effective delivery to consumers (Barone, 2023). Specialized marketers often collaborate with others, locally and internationally, to improve customer engagement (Baldwin, 2023). Digital marketing enhances organizational efficiency and positively impacts the economy (Islami, 2020). Industries with strong digital marketing strategies outperform others and benefit from its economic advantages (Desai, 2019).

In today's digital age, businesses must have a digital marketing plan, especially as customer engagement decreased during the pandemic (Dixon, 2023). Without online marketing, companies limit their growth potential. As businesses expand, they boost GDP and create jobs, contributing to economic growth (Dyan, 2018). Despite global inflation leading to budget cuts in digital marketing, companies are finding ways to maintain customer engagement and adapt, proving the ongoing importance of digital marketing for success (Akeel & Gubhaju, 2020; Sanders, 2022; Singade, 2022).

Advanced internet technology has enabled businesses to connect with target audiences through more effective channels, making digital marketing essential for organizations of all sizes. In the travel industry, where customers easily access deals and information, digital marketing is crucial for success. This essay explores key digital marketing elements and their importance for hotels in the tourism sector. The hotel industry includes various accommodations such as hostels and inns, closely tied to travel and tourism (Singh, 2019; Attila, 2016). Hotel marketing helps boost bookings and revenue by engaging potential customers, and many hotels globally use digital marketing to enhance customer engagement. According to a report by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, the number of tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka has been steadily increasing over the years, with a record 2.3 million tourists visiting the country in 2018 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2023). With this increase in tourist arrivals, the Sri Lankan hotel industry has become more competitive, and hotels are looking for ways to stand out from the competition. Digital marketing provides an opportunity for hotels in Sri Lanka to engage

customers and differentiate themselves from competitors. When considering the Sri Lankan hotel industry, it is a largest foreign exchange earning sector of the Sri Lankan economy (International Finance Corporation, 2013). After the cessation of the 30-year civil war in the Sri Lanka the country is experiencing considerable growth in the arrivals in the tourism industry.

After the 2009, the hotel industry becoming huge growth in the Sri Lanka (Kaluthanthri, 2020) and government also invests the growth of the hotel industry. But somehow the covid 19 pandemic situation spread among the globe, Sri Lankan hotel industry's also get down with this pandemic (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2023). In this period the Sri lankans get off from the hotels, therefor, in the 2019-2021 time period is not a good year for the hotel industry (Ranasinghe, 2020). After the covid 19 pandemic situation of the country the hotel industry growth decreased little by little. But badly in the present there is a huge economic and political instability and crisis have in the Sri Lanka and this crisis directly impacts to the hotel industry growth (Ranasinghe, 2020).

Hotel owners are using digital marketing as a strategic tool to regain customer engagement. Digital marketing enhances organizational efficiency and effectiveness, increasing engagement by providing customers with updates through various methods. This research aims to identify how digital marketing impacts customer engagement in the Sri Lankan hotel industry. Customer engagement, defined as the emotional connection between buyers and brands, is driven by marketing campaigns, website content, and social media (Clarence, 2021; Khairani, 2021).

### ***Problem Statement***

The Sri Lankan hotel industry is expanding rapidly due to the increasing number of tourists (Yin, 2022). Many hotels are still relying on traditional marketing methods, such as print ads, billboards, outdoor advertising and brochures, to attract customers. This approach may not be as effective in today's digital age, where customers rely heavily on digital platforms to research and book hotels (Wang, 2014). With the rise of social media, online travel agencies, and review sites, customers have more options than ever before to research and compare hotels. Digital marketing provides hotels with an opportunity to reach a wider audience and engage with customers on these digital platforms. By using social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, hotels can showcase their facilities, services, and amenities to potential customers, and engage with them in real-time (Kaur, 2017).

Sri Lanka has become a popular travel destination due to its scenic beauty and diverse geography (Fernando, 2016), leading to growth in the hotel industry. However, many hotels still rely on traditional marketing, and many potential customers use non-digital methods for hotel searches. This poses a challenge, as travelers seek assurance of comfort and quality in their accommodations (Clarence, 2021). Without digital marketing, customers must visit hotels in person to evaluate them. A thorough examination of digital

marketing's role in enhancing customer engagement in Sri Lanka's hotel industry is essential.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of factors of digital marketing tools to enhance customer engagement in Sri Lankan Hotel Industry. There for, this study focusses on the following research Objective,

1. To examine the impact of Social Media marketing on customer engagement in Sri Lankan Hotel Industry
2. To examine the impact of Content marketing on customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry
3. To examine the impact of Mobile marketing on customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry

### ***Research Questions***

Under this research study answering the following question which is relating to the hotel industry.

1. What is the impact of social media marketing on the customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry?
2. What is the impact of content marketing on the customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry?
3. What is the impact of Mobile marketing on the customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry?

### ***Significance of the Study***

This study is significant for various parties in Sri Lanka, as it examines how digital marketing enhances customer engagement in the hotel industry (Samarasekara, 2022). It focuses on customers, helping them understand which digital marketing platforms to use and their benefits. The government is also interested due to the hotel industry's contribution to the GDP, aiming to increase customer engagement through digital marketing. Additionally, hotel business owners need insights into how digital marketing impacts customer engagement to justify marketing costs and improve business outcomes (Yachou Aityassine, 2022; Mattila, 2011).

This research provides insights into the effectiveness of digital marketing in the hotel industry, helping managers and marketers engage customers and develop successful strategies. By analyzing successful hotels in Sri Lanka, it identifies best practices that can enhance customer engagement. Understanding digital marketing's impact offers a competitive advantage, allowing hotels to attract and retain customers, differentiate themselves from competitors, and drive industry growth (Premasinghe, 2021). In

summary, this study is crucial for identifying effective strategies, fostering competition, and contributing to the growth of Sri Lanka's hotel industry, particularly in the western province.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

The research studies on the hotel industry in Sri Lanka acknowledges its limitations, particularly concerning the exclusion of various types of hotels and the diverse range of customers seeking accommodations. As highlighted by Jamaluddin, Razalli, and Aziz (2018), the hotel industry in Sri Lanka caters to different market segments, including luxury, budget, and boutique hotels, each with distinct customer preferences and behaviors. By not considering this variability, the study's findings may not fully capture the entire landscape of customer needs and expectations.

Moreover, the research anticipates challenges in terms of time and cost during the data collection phase. As found in a study by Kock (2016), collecting data from multiple sources and regions can be resource-intensive and time-consuming, potentially affecting the study's scope and feasibility. To address this limitation, the research team could explore efficient data collection methods, such as online surveys and interviews, as suggested by Flick (2015), to optimize resources while still gathering valuable insights from a diverse range of participants.

Another limitation lies in the exclusion of customers from provinces beyond the western region of Sri Lanka. As pointed out by Thangarathinam, Jantan, and Harun (2020), regional differences in economic conditions, cultural influences, and travel preferences can significantly impact customer behaviors within the hotel industry. To enhance the study's applicability and representativeness, the research team should consider extending the research's geographical coverage to include customers from other provinces. By addressing these limitations and drawing on existing research, such as the works of Jamaluddin et al. (2018), Kock (2016), and Thangarathinam et al. (2020), the current study on the hotel industry in Sri Lanka can achieve greater depth and validity in its findings. Additionally, incorporating a diverse set of hotels and customers from various regions would enhance the study's ability to inform industry practices, marketing strategies, and policymaking for a more inclusive and well-rounded understanding of the hotel market in Sri Lanka.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Hotel Industry in Sri Lanka***

The Sri Lankan hotel industry has played a pivotal role in the country's burgeoning tourism sector. Sri Lanka had experienced a significant surge in tourist arrivals in the years leading up to that point, making tourism one of the fastest-growing industries in the country. The industry offers a diverse range of accommodations, catering to various traveler preferences, including luxury resorts, boutique hotels, budget-friendly lodges,

and charming guesthouses (Premasinghe, 2021). These establishments are scattered across the nation, catering to both domestic and international tourists who seek to explore the island's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and vibrant local cuisine. According to the Sri Lanka development authority annual statistic report, Sri Lanka has 484-star class hotels all around the country. As well as 82 classified small luxury hotels including Boutique hotels and Villa. 246 unclassified small luxury hotels. Further supplementary establishment 2535 in Sri Lanka. The success of the industry has not only boosted the country's economy but has also helped to position Sri Lanka as a prominent player on the global tourism map.

While the Sri Lankan hotel industry has witnessed remarkable growth, it has not been without its share of challenges. In the past, the industry faced periods of political instability that affected tourist arrivals. However, the industry has shown resilience and adaptability in navigating these challenges, with many establishments implementing rigorous health and safety protocols to ensure the well-being of guests and staff. Furthermore, sustainability and eco-conscious practices have gained prominence within the industry, with hotels increasingly focusing on responsible tourism, environmental conservation, and community engagement to ensure the long-term viability of Sri Lanka's tourism sector (Premasinghe, 2021).

### ***Digital Marketing in Hotel Industries***

Digital marketing has become a crucial aspect for the hotel industry, as it provides a platform for hotels to reach their potential customers and promote their services online. Over the last dictated hotel industry moved their traditional marketing methods (Khmiadashvili, 2019). Nowadays Hotel industry use new techniques and methods for marketing. There are various digital marketing techniques that can be utilized by hotels to create a strong online presence, engage with customers, and drive bookings. In this section give the understand about this technique use for the enhance customer engagement. digital marketing technique for the hotel industry is social media marketing. Hotels can leverage social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to showcase their services, interact with customers, and build brand awareness (Mukesh Agarwal, 2020). Through social media, hotels can share photos and videos of their facilities, offer promotions and deals, and respond to customer queries and feedback. Social media also allows hotels to engage with customers in real-time, creating a personalized experience and building long-term relationships. Content marketing is another important technique for hotels to attract and engage customers. By creating high-quality content such as blogs, videos, and infographics, hotels can provide valuable information to customers and establish themselves as industry experts. Content marketing also helps hotels improve their website's search engine ranking and attract more traffic. Hotels can also utilize email marketing to eep their customers informed of upcoming events, promotions, and news. Finally, mobile marketing has become increasingly important for the hotel industry. With more customers using mobile devices

to search for and book hotels, it is essential for hotels to have a mobile-friendly website and mobile app. By offering mobile-exclusive deals and promotions and providing a seamless mobile booking experience, hotels can improve customer engagement and drive more bookings.

### ***Customer Engagement***

The interaction between customers and brands that is emotionally charged and directly tied to product purchases is referred to as customer engagement. Additionally, customer engagement is a mentality that results in customers interacting with the primary object frequently because they are emotionally invested in it. It is possible to get the conclusion that customer engagement is consumer participation that can be emotionally felt and results in customer interaction with specific brands based on a number of definitions of the term. The concept of customer engagement related to the different type of field in different ways. In articles about marketing (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić, 2011) argue that it is a multidimensional, psychological state comprising customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement that occurs by interactive, creative customer experiences with a focal agent and/or object in a service relationship.

### ***Social Network Sites***

Social Networking Sites (SNS) are pools of information where content can be generated, circulated, shared, subscribed to, personalized and consumed by the independent users of social media (Kumar, 2018). In this process, one user can inform, educate and persuade fellow users about products and services (Chauhan & Pillai, 2013). Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010: 63) have defined the social networking sites as, "Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends, and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other.

These personal profiles can include any type of information including photos, video, audio files and blogs." Social networking sites have become an important tool for the hotel industry, allowing hotels to connect with customers, increase brand awareness, and improve customer satisfaction. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tripadvisor provide hotels with the ability to promote their services, showcase their amenities, and respond to customer inquiries and feedback in real-time (Lakha, 2021).

A study published in the International Journal of Hospitality Management found that social media has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the hotel industry (Majeed, 2021). The study also found that hotels that actively engage with customers on social media have higher levels of customer satisfaction and are more likely to receive positive reviews. In addition to improving customer satisfaction, social media can also be used as a tool for marketing and advertising. Hotels can use social media to

target specific demographics and promote special offers and discounts. Social media influencers and bloggers can also be used to promote hotels and their services to their followers (Halawani, 2019). However, social media also presents challenges for the hotel industry. Negative reviews and comments can quickly spread on social media and have a significant impact on a hotel's reputation. Hotels must carefully monitor their social media presence and respond promptly and professionally to negative feedback. Overall, social networking sites have become an important part of the hotel industry's marketing and customer service strategy. As technology continues to evolve and social media platforms continue to grow in popularity, hotels must adapt to stay competitive and effectively engage with customers on social media.

### ***Content Marketing***

Information about the products and services in question can be shared through content marketing (Swieczak, 2012). It is a strategy in digital marketing for producing and disseminating worthwhile, timely, educational, and visually appealing information to specific audiences. Text and audio-video content can be found on other websites and social media platforms. Additionally, it could be made for certain channels like podcasts, infographics, or blogs.

Online platforms that can be hired or owned can be used for content marketing. It is crucial to internet and digital marketing strategies since it allows a business to increase traffic using tactics created by marketers (Simsek, 2019). Social listening, which keeps an eye on consumer discussions, can be used to evaluate content marketing. It ought to be viewed as a long-term tactic that a company may employ to develop a dependable, worthwhile, and high-quality message that will help it cultivate a devoted clientele and establish close bonds with its clients.

The creation and sharing of helpful material with consumers are becoming a common practice in the hotel business, helping to raise brand recognition and encourage reservations. With the aim of acquiring and keeping consumers, content marketing entails producing and disseminating material that is pertinent to and helpful to the target audience. Hotels may communicate information about their services, facilities, and nearby attractions using a range of content forms, such as blog articles, videos, infographics, and social media postings. Hotels may improve their exposure and attract a larger audience by producing content that is educational, entertaining, and shareable. According to research in the *Journal of Travel Research*, content marketing boosts client engagement and loyalty in the hotel sector (Lexhagen, 2022). The study also discovered that using content marketing increases the likelihood of getting good ratings and repeat business for hotels. Content marketing may be utilized to boost search engine optimization (SEO), increase customer engagement and loyalty, and increase traffic to a hotel's website (Erdmann, 2022). Hotels may raise their search engine results and broaden their online presence by employing pertinent keywords and content



optimization. The hotel business faces difficulties from content marketing, though. It takes time and money to produce high quality, compelling content, and it may be challenging to gauge the success of content marketing. To make sure that their content marketing strategy is in line with their company objectives and appeals to their target audience, hotels must carefully plan and carry it out. Overall, content marketing has grown to be a significant component of the marketing plan for the hospitality sector. Hotels must adapt as industry rivalry intensifies and invest in content marketing to engage consumers and maintain a competitive edge.

### ***Mobile Marketing***

Any form of advertising that uses mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones, to advertise goods and services is known as mobile marketing (Kenton, 2023). It uses characteristics of contemporary mobile technology, such as location services, to customize marketing campaigns according on a person's location. Technology may be applied to mobile marketing to offer tailored promotions of products or services to a user who is always connected to a network.

Recent studies suggest that the tendency is expected to continue. Mobile marketing techniques have grown in importance for the hotel and travel industries over the past several years (Elsayed, 2015). Mobile has surpassed other media platforms as the world's use of mobile devices has soared. Consumers now use their mobile devices for many aspects of travel, including researching trip locations, vacation shopping, and hotel reservations. The efficiency of mobile to reach clients is quickly displacing traditional forms of digital advertising, according to hotel owners.

To enable companies to fully utilize the potential of effective mobile marketing techniques. Customers are depending more and more on mobile platforms to make reservations and obtain information due to the widespread use of smartphones and tablets. As a result, hotels must integrate and use mobile marketing strategies in order to stay competitive, engage a wider audience, and build trusting relationships with them. Through the utilization of mobile-friendly websites, focused mobile advertising campaigns, and additional mobile marketing channels, hotels may improve customer interaction, encourage reservations, and create enduring connections with their patrons in the ever-changing digital landscape.

### **Methodology**

#### ***Research Approach***

Since the present study aims to identify the consumer behaviour in engagement about the hotel industry, Digital Marketing effect the engagement of the consumer engagement in the industry. By forming hypotheses based Collected data and testing them over many samples. As well as Conduct research when there is not enough theory available to guide the development of a theoretical framework, there for using the market survey identify

the consumer engagement with the digital marketing. It explains the nature of effect and impact relationships between the variables. To achieve the research objectives, that represent the connection of the market funnel to the variables followed by the hypothesis.

### **Study Design**

As previously said, the objective of this paper is to research, evaluate, and create an online channel strategy to implement digital marketing for the hotel business. This study was created using a quantitative methodology. Consequently, a quantitative method was used in the study. According to the previous research to conduct the quantitative method of the research do the survey method data collection (Ospina, 2023). The Survey method is the best option to collect the data to this research, and it is the most popular one. Surveys for data gathering ask a specific set of people questions about their beliefs, habits, and level of expertise. Written questionnaires, in-person or phone interviews, focus groups, and electronic (email or internet) surveys are common 22 forms of sample surveys. Once the survey data has been gathered, it must be examined to make sure it advances the ultimate goal of the research.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The research framework of the research as follow.

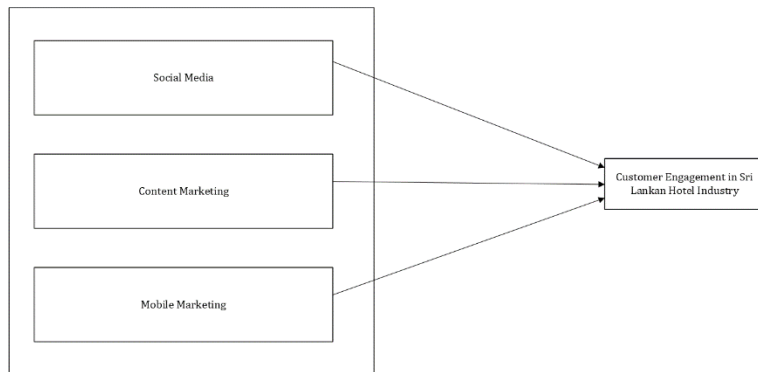


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### **Hypotheses**

In line with the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are developed.

*H1: Social media/ Network site effect to the enhance customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector.*

*H2: Content Marketing effect to the enhance customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector.*

*H3: Mobile Marketing effect to the enhance customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector.*

## Operationalization

To test the hypotheses, the measurement items for each dimension need to be identified. The measurement items of the study are based on established scales from the literature. Table 3.1 shows the measurement items of each of the variable of this study together with the relevant literature sources.

Table 1  
Operatiobalization of the Variables

Variable	Measurement Items	Source
Customer Engagement (Dependent Variable)	I can continue using this online digital marketing platform for very long periods at a time.	(Matthew K.O. Lee Na Shi, 2011)
	I feel strong and vigorous when I am using this online digital marketing platform.	
	This digital Marketing platform inspires me.	
	I found this digital marketing platform full of meaning and purpose.	
	I am interested in this digital marketing platform.	
Social Media/ Network site (Independent Variable 1)	The hotel's website can be adapted to meet a variety of needs.	Kuo-Chien Chang, Nien-Te Kuo, Chia-Lin Hsu, and Yi-Sung Cheng (2014)
	The hotel's website is reliable.	
	In terms of system quality, I would rate the hotel's website highly.	
	The hotel's website makes it easy to get anywhere on the site.	
Content Marketing (Independent Variable 2)	The hotel's website enables me to get on to it quickly.	Kuo-Chien Chang, Nien-Te Kuo, Chia-Lin Hsu, and Yi-Sung Cheng (2014)
	The information provided by the hotel's website is accurate.	
	The hotel's website provides me with all the information I need.	
Mobile Marketing (Independent Variable 3)	The hotel's website produces the most current information.	(Catherine Watsona, 2013)
	In general, the hotel's website provides me with high-quality information.	
	I prefer to receive mobile texts and calls from friends rather than from companies.	
	I consider most texts and mobile adverts from companies to be annoying.	
	I would tend to delete or ignore most text messages from companies.	
	I generally prefer my mobile phone to be for personal use only	

## Population and Sample

The scope of this study includes a customer who engage in hotel industry. The hotel industry is the largest contributed area to tourism. In western province of Sri Lanka has around 60-star class hotels (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2023). In the Sri Lanka Local customers engage with the hotel industry heavily, not only for the business or tourism purpose, but also fulfill for their own interest as some local travelers. The sample size for this given target population is 350. It includes local customers who engage in the hotel industry. To obtain the desired sample size, the proportionate Simple random sampling technique is employed.

Simple random sampling is a widely employed sampling technique in scientific research. It is typically chosen for populations that exhibit a high degree of homogeneity, where research participants are selected at random to take part in the study (Bhardwaj, 2019). Simple random sampling can be defined as the most straightforward and commonly used method for sample selection, where each unit in the sample has an equal and independent probability of being chosen at each drawing (Noor, 2022).

As explained by Acharya (2013), in this approach, every individual within the population has an equal likelihood of being included in the sample (p. 330). Simple random sampling ensures that each person in the population has an equal chance of being selected as a study participant (Thomas, 2020). Additionally, when dealing with large sample sizes, researchers create a numeric list of all potential sample members and utilize computer programs to generate random numbers, thereby producing a population list for their research project (Rahi, 2017; Omair, 2014). When it comes to the hotel industry, it spread over Sri Lanka. As well, this study mainly focuses on the western province hotels in Sri Lanka. And the customer base is also considered to cover the western province of Sri Lanka. There is a focus on collecting data from the Colombo, Kaluthara, and Gampaha districts. Therefore, populations in this study exhibit a high degree of homogeneity, and research participants are selected at random to take part in the study. Because of the above reasons, to obtain the sample size, a simple random sampling method was used for this study.

### ***Data Collection Method***

The cross-sectional survey approach was adopted to gather primary data from a targeted sample. It is considered the most suitable method for efficiently collecting data from a large population, taking into account cost-effectiveness and timely data acquisition. To facilitate this, a structured questionnaire was developed, comprising a total of 25 questions. The items are measured on an itemised rating scale as well as collecting the direct answer from the sample.

### ***Data Analysis Methods***

There are three steps involved in data analysis, namely: measuring sample profile, testing the goodness of data and testing the hypotheses. Frequency analysis is used to measure the sample profile. The reliability and validity of the measurement items are administered to test the goodness of data. In here, factor analysis, construct reliability, average variance extracted, Cronbach's alpha values and discriminant validity are tested. In order to test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis is used. The multiple regression analysis is utilised to determine digital marketing how impact to customer engagement. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 21.0 will be utilised.

## **Data Analysis and Findings**

### ***Response and Sample Profile***

Electronic mail (e-mail) survey was used to collect information from customers engage with the hotel industry in western province in Sri Lanka. This survey collected 395 respondents. 11 responses were not completed properly therefore those 11 responses were rejected from statistical analysis. Finally, 384 questionnaires were taken to conduct a statistical analysis of this study.

The questionnaire consists of 11 questions. The first 7 questions were used to measure the demographic details of the respondents. 1st question was Age of the respondents. Gender was the 2nd question. Western province district was 3rd question and 4th question was how many hours per day spend in internet, 5th question was how many hotels industry related advertisement that see in internet, kind of devices that use to access to the digital platforms was 6th question and finally 7th question was kind of social media that use.

All the indicators of the questions from question 8 to 25 were measured on scales of five points. The scale which was used to measure customer engagement ranged from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. To measure social media marketing, its scale ranged from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. Also, the scale which was used to measure mobile marketing ranged from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. Also, the scale which was used to measure Content Marketing ranged from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. In summarizing the data, the scoring was as follows. The difference between each response within a scale was considered equal. The one point gave the lowest response, and five points gave the highest response. A 'Strongly disagree' response got one point and a 'Strongly agree' response got five points in measuring Customer engagement. In measuring social media marketing, a 'Strongly disagree' response received one point and a 'Strongly agree' response received five points. In measuring Mobile marketing, a 'Strongly disagree' response got one point and a 'Strongly agree' response got five points. Also, in measuring Content marketing, a 'Strongly disagree' response got one point and a 'Strongly agree' response got five points. In this chapter, the scores of all respondents with respect to each question were statistically summarized and the mean and standard deviation of responses for each question will be presented in the later sections of this chapter.

### ***Sample Profile***

The first part of the questionnaire gathered information about demographic variables such as gender, age, district, spending hours on the internet, number of advertisements see, device use to access the internet and social media platforms. For the data collection, 226 male and 158 female out of total of 384 respondents. The majority of respondents are aged between 21 – 25 years. When it comes to the district of western province most responses are from Colombo district. Further, people spend 2-4 hours per day on the

internet and they see hotel industry related advertisement 5-10 times on the internet. As well as majority of the responses are using Mobile phone to access to the internet and 123 responses use Facebook as a social media out of 7 social media platforms namely Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok.

**Factor Analysis**

In the context of academic research, validity refers to the degree of precision with which a measurement successfully captures the object of study. In the context of validating a measuring scale, researchers typically apply approaches such as factor analysis and construct validation to confirm that the components inside the scale accurately measure the intended construct. This is done to ensure that the scale is reliable. Using factor analysis, which includes evaluations such as the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity, is a typical technique for evaluating the adequacy of data for factor analysis, and this contributes to the validation of underlying constructs. Factor analysis also includes assessments such as the test of sphericity. The range of a KMO measure is 0 to 1, with values that are closer to 1 suggesting a greater degree of factor analysis appropriateness. In most contexts, a KMO score that is greater than 0.70 is deemed to be acceptable and indicates that the data are suitable for factor analysis. Nonetheless, more stringent validation might require a KMO value that is more than 0.80.

The sphericity test developed by Bartlett determines whether or not the correlations between variables are strong enough for factor analysis to be useful. It is possible that the data could be suitable for factor analysis if the outcome was statistically significant (usually expressed by a p-value of less than 0.05). The KMO test and Bartlett's test both work together to determine whether or not factor analysis is appropriate for the dataset, which ultimately helps to prove that the underlying constructs are legitimate. The following table provides a succinct summary of the test results that KMO and Bartlett obtained for both the overall data and the specific variables that were investigated in the study.

Table 2  
Factor Analysis

Variable	KMO Value	Bartlett's Test Of Sphericity	Total Variance Explained	AVE	Factor Loading
Social media	0.777	725.002	58.171	0.57	<b>Component Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>
					Component
					1
					SM-NS1 .790
					SM-NS2 .548

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					SM-NS3	.745
					SM-NS4	.833
					SM-NS5	.858
Content marketing	0.715	520.101	61.188	0.64	<b>Component Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>	
					Component	
					1	
					CM1	.878
					CM2	.617
					CM3	.825
					CM4	.784
Mobile marketing	0.733	610.489	64.088	0.61	<b>Component Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>	
					Component	
					1	
					MM1	.869
					MM2	.742
					MM3	.908
					MM4	.659
Customer engagement	0.748	617.815	49.871	0.53	<b>Component Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>	
					Component	
					1	
					CE1	.878
					CE2	.754

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CE3	.472
CE4	.843
CE5	.567

**Reliability Analysis**

Reliability analysis is a statistical method used to assess the dependability and uniformity of research instruments. Evaluating how well a set of questions or items reliably captures a particular construct or characteristic is its primary concern. Cronbach's alpha is a popular reliability metric because it provides a numerical representation of a scale's internal coherence through the examination of the correlations between its individual components. A larger value for this coefficient, represented by, indicates greater internal consistency. When conducting research, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or higher is commonly accepted, as stated by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). However, the range of acceptability may change depending on the setting of the research. Particularly in investigations where exact measurement is of essential importance, researchers may aim for increased levels of dependability, such as 0.80 or higher. Cronbach's alpha values for the relevant variables are listed in the table that follows.

Table 3  
Reliability Analysis

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Item
Social media	.816	.813	5
Content marketing	.778	.783	4
Mobile marketing	.811	.807	4
Customer engagement	.743	.736	5

Cronbach's Alpha for all provided variables is close to 0.8, as shown by the reliability test results presented above. This number is significantly higher than the cutoff of 0.7, indicating that the variables contain questions with a high degree of internal consistency and dependability. Considering these results, it is safe to conclude that the data used in this study are reliable.

**Correlation Analysis**

A statistical technique known as correlation analysis measures the magnitude and direction of a relationship between two or more variables. It measures how strongly shifts in one variable are associated with shifts in another. The correlation coefficient (often denoted by "r") is used as the primary quantitative descriptor here.

As the value of one variable rises, so does the value of the other, as indicated by a positive correlation (0 r 1). The closer the value of "r" is near 1, the greater the positive connection. When the value of one variable rises, the value of the other usually falls; this is known as



a negative correlation (-1 r 0). The results of the correlation analysis are summarized in the table below.

Table 4  
Correlation Analysis

	Social media	Content marketing	Mobile marketing	Customer engagement
Social media	1			
Content marketing	.825**	1		
Mobile marketing	.643**	.636**	1	
Customer engagement	.764**	.769**	.792**	1

Based on the presented values, the correlation between each independent variable and the dependent variable is statistically significant with a p-value below 0.05 and the correlation coefficient for all the independent variables with the customer engagement is above 0.6 and thus revealing strong relationship. In all the cases the sign of the correlation coefficient is positive and thus it emphasizes that there is a strong positive relationship between Digital Marketing and customer engagement in the hotel industry.

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

A statistical method known as regression analysis is used to investigate the relationship between a set of independent factors and a dependent variable. This can be done by looking at the data in both directions. The formulation and comprehension of how changes in the independent variables correlate to variations in the dependent variable constitutes the primary objective of regression analysis. In the current investigation, the hypotheses were evaluated using multiple regression analysis, and the results of the model summary are reported in the following table.

Table 5  
Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.806a	.649	.646		.31097

The coefficient of determination, denoted by the symbol R squared, is determined to be 0.806 based on the table that is presented, which roughly corresponds to a percentage value of 64%. This indicates that the model holds an explanatory capability of 64%, which suggests that 64% of the variations in the dependent variable are accounted for by the independent variables contained within the study. A result for R squared that is greater than 60 is seen as being indicative of sufficient predictiveness, which is a positive sign for the study. The table that summarizes the results of the ANOVA is shown below.

Table 6  
ANOVA Table Summary

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	84.511	4	21.128	148.054	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	43.524	305	.143		
	Total	128.036	309			

a. Dependent Variable: Financial Reporting Quality

### Coefficient

Based on the beforementioned data, the calculated significance value is recorded as 0.000, which is much lower than the predetermined threshold of 0.05. As a result, the comprehensive model demonstrates statistical significance with a confidence level of 95%. The table below displays the summarized coefficients.

Table 7  
Regression Coefficient Table

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.612	.144	4.255	.000		
	Social media	.375	.057	6.572	.000	.295	3.388
	Content Marketing	.396	.055	7.238	.000	.300	3.331
	Mobile Marketing	.093	.038	2.457	.014	.552	1.812

Based on the previously presented figures, it can be observed that the significant values for all independent variables consistently exhibit values below the threshold of 0.05. The observed trend suggests that the competency of the social media, Content marketing, Mobile marketing all have a significant favorable impact on enhancing customer engagement.

### Hypothesis Testing and Discussion

Hypothesis testing relies on the values presented in the regression coefficients table. When the significance value is below 0.05, it indicates acceptance of the alternative hypothesis and rejection of the null hypothesis. social media a coefficient of 0.375 with a p-value of 0.000, Content marketing a coefficient of .396 with a p-value 0.000 and Mobile marketing of 0.093 with a p-value of 0.014. Analyzing the outcomes provided, it is clear that, " the alternative hypotheses have been accepted in all cases" as the p-values are below 0.05. The ensuing table offers a condensed overview of hypothesis acceptance.

Table 8  
Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses No	P-Value	Accepted/ Rejected
H1a: Social Medi/Network site effect to the enhancing customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector.	$\beta = .368$ $P = .000$ ( $P < 0.05$ )	Accepted
H2a: Content Marketing effect to the enhancing customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector	$\beta = .401$ $P = .000$ ( $P < 0.05$ )	Accepted
H3a: Mobile Marketing effect to the enhancing customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector.	$\beta = .101$ $P = .014$ ( $P < 0.05$ )	Accepted

Based on the table above, it is evident that as the p-values are below 0.05 all the alternate hypotheses are accepted.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Summary of Findings

The introduction section of An Examination of Digital Marketing as a tool enhance customer engagement in the hotel industry with special reference to hotel in western province of Sri Lanka serves to provide an overview of the research topic, its significance, and the research objectives. The following is a summary of the key elements presented in the introduction.

For this research data was collected for this study by using an online questionnaire through google forms. The questionnaire included the indicators which supported to measure the main three variables which were social media marketing, mobile marketing, and content marketing. The sample was the customers who engage with the hotel industry in western province of Sri Lanka. These 384 respondents belonged to the age group of 16- 40 years old.

To investigate the above-mentioned relationships, four research objectives were developed For this study as follows.

In line with the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are developed.

*H1: Social media/ Network site effect to the enhance customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector.*

*H2: Content Marketing effect to the enhance customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector.*

*H3: Mobile Marketing effect to the enhance customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel sector.*

According to the finding of this research majority of the respondents belong to age 21-25 range and out of total respondent rate male responses are high. When it comes to the customers engaged in western province Colombo district engagement rate is 39.6%.

Referring to the per day spent time on the internet, the majority of the respondents 2-4 hour spend their time in internet which is 54.9%. As well as hotel industry related advertisements see majority of the respondents in 5 - 10 times. The majority of respondents use Smart phone access to the digital platforms. Withing many social media platforms most of the respondent use Face Book, as a percentage it was 32%.

As the result of the analyzing the data of this study social media marketing, Content Marketing and Mobile Marketing has positive impact with the customer engagement in Sri Lanka hotel industry and through that enhance the customer engagement.

### ***Discussion***

The primary goal of this investigation was An Examination of Digital Marketing as a tool enhance customer engagement in the hotel industry with special reference to hotel in western province of Sri Lanka. To better understand the relationship between the customer engagement and digital marketing, a conceptual framework was developed by linking the above variable customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry and digital marketing funnel segment including and Social media marketing, Content marketing, mobile marketing.

Based on the conceptual framework, three hypotheses were developed. These hypotheses were tested using the findings of the study, and some conclusions were drawn based on how they align with the findings of the prior chapter. These conclusions provide further evidence for the relationship between Digital marketing funnel segment and customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry.

### ***Hypothesis 01 - Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement***

The relationship between social media marketing and customer engagement is a subject of significant research and discussion within the field of digital marketing. Numerous studies have explored the multifaceted connection between these two components. Research findings consistently demonstrate that effective social media marketing strategies can substantially enhance customer engagement with a brand or business.

Firstly, social media platforms provide a direct and immediate channel for communication between brands and customers (Lin, 2016). Engaging content, such as posts, stories, and videos, allow businesses to convey their messages and offerings, while customers can respond, comment, and share their feedback in real-time. This dynamic interaction fosters a sense of connection and community, contributing to increased customer engagement (Lin, 2016).

Moreover, social media marketing enables personalized and targeted communication (Khanom, 2023). Through data analytics and customer segmentation, businesses can tailor their content to specific audience segments (Nadaraja, 2016). This personalization resonates with customers on a more individual level, increasing the likelihood of their engagement with the brand's content and offerings.

Additionally, the ability to share user-generated content, testimonials, and reviews on social media platforms empowers customers to become brand advocates. Research has shown that peer recommendations and endorsements from within the customer's social network carry significant weight, fostering trust and engagement.

Finally, the impact of social media marketing on customer engagement is measurable and can be optimized using various metrics and analytics tools. Research methodologies encompass the assessment of engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, click-through rates, and conversion rates to determine the effectiveness of social media marketing efforts.

### ***Hypothesis 02 - Relationship between Content Marketing and Customer Engagement***

The relationship between content marketing and customer engagement is a well-established focus of research within the digital marketing sphere. A wealth of studies and scholarly work underscores the pivotal role that content marketing plays in cultivating and sustaining high levels of customer engagement, offering empirical evidence and valuable insights in support of this connection.

Research consistently shows that high-quality, informative, and relevant content serves as a magnet for attracting and retaining the attention of a target audience. Content marketing, whether in the form of blog posts, articles, videos, infographics, or social media updates, has the power to educate, entertain, and inspire, ultimately piquing the interest of potential customers. As noted by Malthouse et al. (2013), content that is both engaging and valuable fosters longer online sessions and a deeper level of interaction with a brand, thereby enhancing customer engagement.

Furthermore, content marketing allows for the creation of a relationship between a brand and its customers. A study by Pulizzi and Barrett (2015) highlights how well-executed content marketing helps build trust and credibility. When customers perceive a brand as a reliable source of useful information and insights, they are more likely to engage with the brand on an ongoing basis.

Research has also delved into the impact of storytelling in content marketing. Effective storytelling, as emphasized by Smith (2017), not only captures the attention of the audience but also creates an emotional connection. Customers are more likely to engage with content that resonates with their personal experiences and values, reinforcing the connection between content marketing and customer engagement.

Additionally, the concept of content personalization, as examined by Li and Ma (2018), has gained prominence in research discussions. Tailoring content to individual preferences and needs significantly heightens customer engagement. Personalized content not only results in higher click-through rates but also demonstrates that the brand values its customers' unique requirements.

Moreover, the measurement and analysis of key performance indicators (KPIs) play a pivotal role in content marketing research. Metrics such as click-through rates, time spent on page, social shares, and conversion rates provide insights into the effectiveness of content marketing strategies, allowing for iterative improvements over time (Baltes, Van Heerde, & Morgan, 2017).

In summary, the extensive body of research in digital marketing highlights the symbiotic relationship between content marketing and customer engagement. Engaging, relevant, and personalized content acts as a conduit for attracting and retaining the interest of customers, fostering trust, and building relationships. The utilization of storytelling and the strategic analysis of performance metrics further solidify the link between content marketing and elevated customer engagement, underlining the enduring significance of this relationship in the digital marketing landscape.

### ***Hypothesis 03 - Relationship between Mobile Marketing and Customer Engagement***

The relationship between mobile marketing and customer engagement is a pivotal area of research within the domain of digital marketing, with a growing body of evidence supporting the integral connection between these two elements. Research has consistently demonstrated that mobile marketing initiatives have a profound impact on engaging customers in a highly personalized and immediate manner.

Studies have consistently reported the exponential growth in mobile device usage. The prevalence of smartphones and the increasing amount of time users spend on mobile apps and websites underscore the significance of mobile marketing. Mobile marketing leverages this trend by delivering content and offers directly to users' mobile devices, making it convenient and highly accessible.

Moreover, the effectiveness of location-based mobile marketing in enhancing customer engagement has been a focus of extensive research. Hwang and Lee (2017) found that personalized, location-based promotions and advertisements lead to increased engagement. These findings emphasize the power of mobile marketing in delivering contextually relevant content to customers, such as geographically targeted offers, which can significantly boost customer engagement.

Mobile marketing's impact on customer engagement is further strengthened by the utilization of push notifications and in-app messaging. Research by Zhang, Zhao, and Xu (2018) highlights that push notifications, when used judiciously and tailored to user

preferences, can result in higher engagement rates, as customers receive timely and relevant updates directly on their devices.

Furthermore, the integration of mobile marketing with augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies offers an exciting avenue for enhancing customer engagement. Lee, Han, and Kim (2017) emphasize the immersive and interactive experiences made possible by mobile AR and VR marketing, ultimately increasing customer engagement through gamification and enhanced visual experiences.

In addition to the research on mobile marketing techniques, studies have also delved into the measurement and analysis of customer engagement metrics in the mobile context. Metrics like app retention rates, click-through rates on mobile ads, and in-app purchase rates serve as valuable indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of mobile marketing strategies (Hann and Hui, 2015).

Mobile marketing leverages the ubiquity of mobile devices and offers a highly personalized and immediate means of communication. The localization, push notifications, and immersive experiences associated with mobile marketing techniques have been shown to significantly enhance customer engagement. The continuous growth of mobile device usage ensures the enduring relevance of this research area in the evolving landscape of digital marketing.

### ***Implications of Study***

According to the results of this study, mainly focuses on hotel industry, the findings of this study will mainly contribute to the managerial decisions in the hotel industry in Sri Lanka. They provide data-driven insights, allowing managers to make informed choices related to marketing, operations, customer service, sustainability, and more. Research is essential for staying competitive, meeting customer expectations, and adapting to the ever-changing landscape of the hospitality sector.

By this study found the positive impact of Social Media marketing on customer engagement in Sri Lankan Hotel Industry, positive impact of Content marketing on customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry as well as positive impact of mobile marketing on customer engagement in Sri Lankan hotel industry.

These were hypotheses of study. The managers can use these findings as the tool finding in digital marketing. Research findings help managers identify the most effective digital marketing tools for the Sri Lankan hotel industry. This includes understanding which platforms and strategies are preferred by the local target audience, whether it's social media, email marketing, content marketing, or others. As well as Customer Segmentation, Research findings can help managers segment the customer base in Sri Lanka effectively. This allows for personalized marketing efforts, tailored to the specific needs and preferences of different customer segments, increasing engagement. Feedback and Continuous Improvement, Research can uncover customer feedback and sentiment

related to digital marketing efforts. Managers can use this feedback to make ongoing improvements and refinements to their strategies, leading to enhanced customer engagement.

The results of study on An Examination of Digital Marketing as a tool enhance customer engagement in the hotel industry with special reference to hotel in western province of Sri Lanka offer Hotel managers critical insights that enable them to localize their plans, make data-driven decisions, and interact successfully with the local customers. In a country as varied and dynamic as Sri Lanka, where consumer interaction is crucial to the hotel sector's success, this research is especially significant.

### **Further Research Suggestions**

In this study, mainly examine the Digital marketing funnel on of the segment of the awareness component effect on the customer engagement. But further research can potentially expand on research regarding the other levels of the digital marketing funnel including consideration, remarketing, conversion and retention. In Next, this research considers the geographical area as western province of Sri Lanka, but according to the previous research Sri Lanka hotel industry spread in all over the country. Therefore future study can use other geographical areas to examine customer engagement. As well as customers who engage in the hotel industry all over the country. Therefore, the future studies can consider all the hotel customers in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, this study only considers the three variables in digital marketing. But in digital marketing there are many segments that can be used to evaluate customer engagement. Therefore in future research those segments can be used to examine customer engagement. Finally, Through this research study about the enhancement of customer engagement in hotel industry. Therefore future research studies can use industrial point of view. Like how hotel business impact to digital marketing.

In conclusion, the study has provided valuable insights into the impact of the awareness component of the digital marketing funnel on customer engagement within the Western Province of Sri Lanka's hotel industry. While this research has laid a foundation, several avenues for future studies can expand and deepen our understanding of digital marketing's role in enhancing customer engagement in the Sri Lankan hotel industry.

### **Conclusion**

The main objective of this study is to Examination of Digital Marketing as a tool enhance customer engagement in the hotel industry with special reference to hotel in western province of Sri Lanka.



Social Media marketing and Content marketing have a higher positive relationship with customer engagement compared to mobile marketing with the constant. Because the sig value of social media marketing and Content marketing is higher than mobile marketing. From the survey analysis found the higher correlation with social media marketing and Content marketing. And the lowest correlation with customer engagement is mobile marketing.

The results of the current study have not only fulfilled the objective of the study but also have reduced the research gap while enhancing customer engagement in the hotel industry. The findings obtained through this study are important for managers and policymakers because they could help to develop the organization as well as to protect the environment.

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