



The impact of digitalisation on the business operations of tourism companies

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Abstract: Purpose of the article - this article examines how digitalisation influences business operations in tourism companies across multiple dimensions, including marketing, reservation management, customer communication, and internal information systems. The study addresses gaps in understanding the comprehensive implementation of digital technologies in tourism.

Research methodology - The research employed a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with eight tourism industry experts holding positions as hotel managers, sales and reservations managers, and marketing managers. Data was collected in January 2025 and analysed using thematic coding based on the theoretical framework.

Findings - reveal that digitalisation significantly enhances operational efficiency, enables precise audience targeting, facilitates personalised customer communication, and improves strategic decision-making through data analytics. While social media and online booking platforms are widely adopted, advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) face implementation barriers due to cost constraints and knowledge gaps.

Keywords: digitalisation, tourism management, digital marketing, reservation systems, tourism innovation

JEL classification: O30, M30, Z30

Vpliv digitalizacije na poslovanje turističnih podjetij

Povzetek: Namen članka - Članek preučuje, kako digitalizacija vpliva na poslovanje turističnih podjetij na več ravneh, vključno z marketingom, upravljanjem rezervacij, komuniciranjem s strankami in notranjimi informacijskimi sistemi. Raziskava naslavlja vrzeli v razumevanju celostne uvedbe digitalnih tehnologij v turizmu.

Raziskovalna metodologija - Raziskava je temeljila na kvalitativnem pristopu s polstrukturiranimi intervjuji z osmimi strokovnjaki iz turistične industrije, ki zasedajo položaje vodij hotelov, vodij prodaje in rezervacij ter vodij marketinga. Podatki so bili zbrani januarja 2025 in analizirani z uporabo tematskega kodiranja na podlagi teoretičnega okvira.

Ugotovitve - kažejo, da digitalizacija pomembno povečuje operativno učinkovitost, omogoča natančno ciljanje občinstva, spodbuja personalizirano komuniciranje s strankami ter izboljšuje strateško odločanje z uporabo podatkovne analitike. Čeprav so družbena omrežja in spletne platforme za rezervacije široko uporabljene, se naprednejše tehnologije, kot sta umetna inteligenca (UI) in navidezna resničnost (VR), srečujejo z ovirami pri uvedbi zaradi stroškovnih omejitev in pomanjkanja znanja.

Ključne besede: digitalizacija, upravljanje v turizmu, digitalni marketing, rezervacijski sistemi, inovacije v turizmu

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DOI 10.32015/JIBM.2025.17.1.1

Mednarodno inovativno
poslovanje =
Journal of Innovative Business
and Management

ISSN 1855-6175

1 INTRODUCTION

Digitalisation has manifested in the last few decades as a key driver for development and success across many sectors, including tourism. Digital technologies can effectively manage business processes, enhance customer communication, and improve advertising effectiveness (Barba-Sánchez, Meseguer-Martínez, Gouveia-Rodrigues & Raposo, 2024; Kamalaveni, Suriya, Sakthivel & Vignesh, 2021; Zupan Korže, 2019). However, digitalisation remains uneven in tourism, particularly between small and large enterprises or geographical regions, creating a digital divide that affects market dynamics and growth potential (Satiti & Udin, 2025).

Earlier studies have mainly focused on specific aspects of digitalisation, such as online booking systems (Vlahović, Rađenović, Perović, Vujačić & Davidović, 2024) or social media impacts (Negussie, Fekede & Gota, 2023). Research shows that digitalisation enables better strategic planning as data analysis helps tourism enterprises understand market trends and adjust strategies according to consumers' needs (Henok & Raj, 2025). Understanding how digital technologies affect operations provides small firms valuable insight into business processes (Barba-Sánchez et al., 2024), which is essential for policies and strategies at enterprise and state levels (Kamalaveni et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has hastened the need for digital solutions (Satiti & Udin, 2025), with tourism companies facing unprecedented pressure to adapt. This shifting landscape demands an examination of how digitalisation influences operational efficiency, customer engagement, and sustainability in tourism.

Several theoretical concepts explain digitalisation's effect on tourism businesses, including smart destinations that use data to optimise resources and increase competitiveness (Boes, Buhalis & Inversini, 2016), e-tourism involving Internet and digital technologies for planning and booking (Buhalis & Law, 2008), and digital transformation describing the shift to solutions like Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, and data management systems (Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Digitalisation in Tourism

Digitalisation has become essential in the modern tourist industry, accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic, as customers increasingly rely on digital means for finding and booking experiences (Bekele & Raj, 2024). Digital transformation has improved customer experience, offering more choice and flexibility (Zeqiri, Dahmani & Ben Youssef, 2020).

This transformation includes digital technology in all business processes, from marketing to user experience systems, moving from manual bookings and analogue advertising to online platforms, digital marketing, and personalised services (Bekele & Raj, 2024, Jagodič, 2021). That allows organisations to analyse customer information and offer tailor-made products (Zeqiri, Dahmani & Ben Youssef, 2020).

Slovenia's digital transformation strategy (2022-2026) aims to create a model for smart destinations with sustainable, boutique experiences (Bekele & Raj, 2024). Digital transformation enables data-supported decisions, increasing tourism's value, competitiveness, and resilience (Bekele & Raj, 2024). Virtual reality and artificial intelligence are crucial in tourism's digital transformation. VR provides interactive virtual travel experiences (Zeqiri, Dahmani & Ben Youssef, 2020), while smart tourism enhances the tourist experience through technology (Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang & Koo, 2015). AI personalises offers and improves customer service (Bekele & Raj, 2024), and the Internet of Things (IoT) creates personalised hotel experiences through smart rooms (Zeqiri, Dahmani & Ben Youssef, 2020).

2.2 Influence of Digitalization on Tourism Industry Operations

Digitalisation has transformed the tourism industry by augmenting business processes and improving user experience. It affects marketing, customer relationship management, operational processes, and strategic planning (Bekele & Raj, 2024). CRM systems help companies analyse customer data and tailor offerings to needs, enhancing satisfaction and loyalty (Zeqiri, Dahmani & Ben Youssef, 2020; Daqar & Smoudy, 2019).

IoT and AI technologies automate operations, reducing costs and increasing productivity (Phu Vinh, 2024). Smart hotels use IoT to control temperature and lighting, improving comfort while reducing

costs (Wu et al., 2024). Digitalisation enables better strategic planning through data analysis, helping businesses adjust to consumer needs (Henok & Raj, 2025) and optimise strategies (Bekele & Raj, 2024). Digital marketing connects businesses with broader audiences more effectively (Daqar & Smoudy, 2019), increasing brand recognition and sales (Zeqiri, Dahmani, & Ben Youssef, 2020). Despite challenges like data security and technology adaptation (Phu Vinh, 2024), digitalisation's benefits outweigh the risks (Wu et al., 2024). ERP systems integrate finance, human resources, and logistics processes, improving efficiency (Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022), while sustainable tourism focuses on using digital technologies to enhance resource management and promote sustainability (Jiang & Phoong, 2023).

2.3 Marketing and Promotion

Digital technologies allow tourist organisations to reach broader audiences and adapt marketing strategies to changing consumer needs (Florido-Benitez, 2022). Digital marketing enables precise audience targeting and interactive communication (Simões et al., 2024). Data analytics help identify specific consumer segments and customise advertising campaigns (Florido-Benitez, 2022), improving efficiency and customer experience (Simões et al., 2024).

Social media platforms enable companies to create engaging visuals and facilitate instant communication with customers (Florido-Benitez, 2022; Simões et al., 2024). VR provides interactive destination previews (Chorshanbiyeva, 2022), while AI personalises offers and optimises campaigns (Simões et al., 2024). Analytical tools help companies monitor campaigns in real-time and adjust strategies accordingly (Florido-Benitez, 2022), improving budget management and investment returns (Simões et al., 2024).

Content marketing establishes trust and brand authority through blogs, videos, and infographics (Florido-Benitez, 2022), increasing visibility and customer loyalty (Simões et al., 2024). Digital innovation enhances tourist experiences through blockchain, big data, and AI (Sigala, 2018; Zupan Korže, 2019; Povše & Vukasović, 2021), with an emphasis on adaptation for market competitiveness (Henok & Raj, 2025; Serruto-Perea & Cordova-Buiza, 2021; Seguí-Amortegui et al., 2019).

2.4 Reservations and contacts with customers

Digital reservation systems have transformed booking methods, automating processes to reduce costs and increase efficiency (Halkiopoulos et al., 2020). These systems gather customer data to customise services (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Platforms like Booking.com and Airbnb help tourism firms reach broader audiences (Florido-Benitez, 2022) and allow customers to compare options easily (Halkiopoulos et al., 2020).

Data analytics enables precise audience targeting (Florido-Benitez, 2022), improving reservation efficiency and customer experience (Simões et al., 2024). CRM systems help analyse customer data and tailor services (Buhalis & Law, 2008), increasing satisfaction and loyalty (Daqar & Smoudy, 2019). Analytical tools track campaign success in real-time (Florido-Benitez, 2022), optimising booking budgets for better returns (Simões et al., 2024).

Digitalisation has transformed customer contact through personalisation and effective communication (Pu, 2024). CRM systems analyse customer data to customise services (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Multiple communication channels, including email, social media, websites, and mobile applications, enable direct customer interaction (Yen, Pham Thi & Li, 2021).

Social media creates engaging content and allows real-time feedback monitoring (Florido-Benitez, 2022; Simões et al., 2024). AI and chatbots provide 24/7 customer support, increasing satisfaction while reducing costs (Daqar & Smoudy, 2019). AI systems predict customer needs for personalised communication (Pu, 2024). Analytical tools monitor communication campaign performance in real-time (Florido-Benitez, 2022), improving ROI (Simões et al., 2024). Despite challenges in data security and technology adaptation (Phu Vinh, 2024), digitalisation's advantages surpass the risks (Wu et al., 2024).

User experience is critical in tourism digitalisation, with application quality influencing adoption (Palos-Sanchez, Saura & Correia, 2021). VR, augmented reality, and metaverse offer more immersive tourist experiences (Morales et al., 2024).

2.5 Internal information systems

Internal information systems facilitate the integration and automation of business processes through CRM, ERP, and data management systems (DMS), improving operational efficiency (Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022). CRM systems refine services to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty (Buhalis & Law, 2008), enabling personalised communication (Pu, 2024).

ERP systems integrate finance, human resources, and logistics processes, improving operational efficiency (Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022) and enabling strategic planning through data analysis (Sanju, 2023). DMS optimises data storage for better information management (Shikhzadeh et al., 2014) and supports real-time performance monitoring (Sanju, 2023).

Advanced security technologies protect customer data and reduce cyberattack risks (Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022). Internal systems also improve relationships between small and large enterprises through Global Distribution Systems and Computerized Reservation Systems (Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022), optimising processes and improving competitiveness (Sheikhzadeh, Moradzahipour, Mirzaei & Toulabi, 2014).

Data management is key to tourism digitalisation, with big data helping businesses improve processes and tailor services (Egger, 2022). Data analytics and AI improve governance (Oshriyeh, 2023), supporting e-tourism's emphasis on digital platforms for enhancing tourist experiences (Sigala, 2018).

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODS, AND SAMPLE

3.1 Research questions

The rapidly evolving digital landscape has transformed numerous industries, with tourism being significantly impacted by technological advancements. Despite the growing importance of digitalisation in tourism, comprehensive analyses exploring its multifaceted implementation in tourism companies remain limited. This research addresses this gap by providing an encompassing view of digital technologies in the tourism sector.

We formulated the following research questions for our investigation:

- RQ1: How does the use of digitalisation affect the business of tourism companies?
- RQ2: How has the use of digital tools and social networks in advertising affected the business of tourism companies?
- RQ3: How has using digital technologies and tools in reservation management affected tourism companies' businesses?

3.2 Methods

In this study, we applied a qualitative methodology to study the impact of digitalisation on the operations of tourism companies. Data were collected through semi-open interviews. We interviewed eight tourism company managers who hold the positions of hotel manager, sales and reservations manager or marketing manager. We asked the interviewees six questions about various contents of digitalisation and digital tools, their impact on work and the entire company's success, and questions about their position and experience in this or similar job. The questions were based on research and theoretical concepts discussed in the literature (Bekele & Raj, 2024; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Florido-Benítez, 2022; Gretzel et al., 2015; Henok & Raj, 2025; Phu Vinh, 2024; Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022; Pu, 2024; Sanju, 2023; Daqar & Smoudy, 2019). We recorded and transcribed the interviews. We then defined codes and used them to analyse the interviews. We used the collected data to answer the research questions and present the findings.

3.3 Collecting data and research ethics

Data were collected through interviews conducted live with some interviewees and remotely, with some using a videoconferencing system. With the permission of all interviewees, we recorded the interviews, which allowed us to obtain a more accurate transcript of the interviewees' responses. The interviews were conducted in January 2025. We adjusted the interviews to the interviewees' time capabilities. Individual interviews lasted from 44 to 58 minutes. The sample included three interviewees who hold the position of hotel manager, three who hold the position of sales and reservations manager, and two who hold the position of marketing manager. All interviewees have

over 10 years of work experience in this or similar positions. Detailed interviewee information is presented in Table 1 (we use I1 for interviewer one, I2 for interviewer two ...).

Table 1: Detailed information about the interviewees.

Label	Gender	Age	Position	Years of working experience
I1	Male	54	Hotel manager	29
I2	Female	55	Hotel manager	32
I3	Male	41	Hotel manager	16
I4	Female	39	Sales and reservations manager	14
I5	Female	47	Sales and reservations manager	26
I6	Male	34	Sales and reservations manager	12
I7	Female	36	Marketing manager	11
I8	Male	40	Marketing manager	15

When conducting the research, we considered the ethical principles of research. All interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. The data were collected by answering questions and were treated confidentially. Participants had the right to withdraw from the research without consequences.

4 ANALYSIS

The analysis of interviews with eight experts from the Slovenian tourism sector revealed essential insights into the current use of digital advertising tools and platforms. The diverse sample allowed for a multidimensional insight into the practices and challenges in the tourism industry. We have asked the interviewees six complex questions regarding various aspects of digitalisation. Analysis was done following the context of the question.

4.1 Analysis of the aspect of marketing and promotion

The first question was related to marketing and promotion, where all interviewees highlighted that digital advertising has become a key element of promotional activities, with social networks, especially Facebook, Instagram, and, to a lesser extent, LinkedIn, being the most frequently used tools. Marketing managers (I7 and I8) particularly emphasised the importance of visual content and interactivity, highlighting that *"in today's environment, customers expect more than just information - they want a story, an experience that attracts them."*

Seven out of eight interviewees (I2-I8) also highlighted precise audience targeting as one of the main advantages of digital advertising. With the help of data analytics, companies can better understand their customers and tailor campaigns based on age, interests, location, and behavioural patterns. In this context, sales managers highlighted the importance of tools such as Meta Ads Manager and Google Ads, which enable precise market segmentation and optimise advertising budgets. The marketing manager (I8) emphasised: *"With analytics, we can quickly see what works and what doesn't - this allows us to adapt strategies more agilely."*

In content marketing, interviewees emphasised the importance of authentic and locally based content that creates trust and connection with the target audience. Blogs, short video contributions and posts focusing on local experiences are key elements of brand building. Both marketing managers (I7 and I8) emphasised that content marketing is not just a sales tool but a long-term strategy for strengthening reputation and customer relationships.

Despite the positive experiences, the interviewees also pointed out the challenges. One of the main challenges is the rapid pace of change in the digital environment and the need for continuous employee training. All interviewees also pointed out that advertising campaigns' effectiveness requires good analytical tools, knowledge and understanding of various platforms' dynamics, which is challenging for smaller tourism providers with limited human and financial resources. Interestingly, virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) are not widely used in practice. Most interviewees (I1, I3, I4, I6, I7 and I8) recognise them as promising, but they are not currently including them in their advertising strategies, mainly due to high costs and lack of knowledge.

4.2 Analysis of the aspect of reservation systems used

The second question was related to reservation systems, where most interviewees highlighted that online booking platforms such as Booking.com, Expedia and Airbnb are indispensable to their business. These platforms allow for significantly greater exposure in the global market and represent a key channel for acquiring guests, especially from abroad. One hotel manager (I3) emphasised: *"Today, you can hardly imagine operating without Booking.com - almost 70% of our reservations come from there."*

In addition to greater accessibility to customers, digitalisation also brings greater efficiency and automation of processes. All sales and reservations managers (I4, I5 and I6) highlighted that digital systems allow for fewer errors, faster processing of reservations and easier coordination with internal information systems. They cited channel managers and property management systems (PMS) as essential tools that synchronise availability and prices across all sales channels. Marketing managers particularly emphasised the importance of collecting data through reservation systems and the possibility of analysing it to create personalised offers further. *"Every reservation tells us something about the user - from where they come from, what they are interested in when they travel. Based on this data, we adapt our campaigns and packages,"* explained one of the interviewees (I5).

All interviewees highlighted the importance of connecting reservation systems with CRM tools, as they enable comprehensive customer relationship management. Sales managers particularly emphasised that such an approach allows for creating targeted messages and promotions based on the guest's previous experiences. *"Guest loyalty is built on details - so that they know you remember them so that they get an offer that is truly for them,"* explained one of the sales managers (I7).

Despite the many advantages, interviewees also pointed out the challenges associated with high commissions from external platforms and dependence on global reservation systems, reducing their channels' profitability. There is also a need for continuous employee training, as digital systems require particular technical knowledge and the ability to adapt quickly to new developments. Some interviewees emphasised that they strive to increase direct reservations shared through their website, using SEO, email campaigns and social networks to reduce dependence on intermediaries. In measuring the success of reservation strategies, interviewees (I2, I3, I4, I5, I6 and I7) highlighted using analytical tools that enable the real-time monitoring of results and rapid response to market changes. Hotel managers highlighted using comparative analyses with competitors, tools for forecasting demand and adjusting prices in real-time.

4.3 Analysis of the aspect of contacting the customers

The third question was related to contact with customers. All interviewees (I1-I8) emphasised that connecting with customers through digital channels has become necessary and an opportunity to improve the user experience, increase satisfaction, and build long-term loyalty.

Hotel managers (I2 and I3) highlighted that digital communication is essential for daily operations, especially when providing information before guests arrive, during, and after their departure. One of the interviewees (I6) highlighted that a guest expects a response within minutes today, stating, *"If you can't provide that, they will go elsewhere."* That is why they mentioned using chatbots and automated responses via email or online forms, which enable 24/7 communication, as key tools.

Sales and reservations managers (I4 and I6) focused on personalised communication using CRM systems. These systems provide a comprehensive overview of customer history and help design more targeted communication. *"If we know that a guest has asked for a wellness offer in the past, we will also send them such an offer during the next campaign,"* explained one of the managers (I4). Both Marketing managers (I7 and I8) highlighted the key role of social media in maintaining contact with customers. They use platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to create interactive content, monitor comments, and respond to user feedback. *"Today, social media is essentially an extension of our front desk. This is where the relationship with the customer begins, even before they make a reservation,"* said one interviewee (I8). Communication through these channels enables real-time reputation management, especially by quickly responding to complaints or questions.

Several interviewees (I3, I4, I6, I7 and I8) pointed to the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in customer support. In addition to chatbots that answer the most frequently asked questions, AI helps analyse feedback, monitor behavioural patterns, and tailor content to individual customer

segments. From the perspective of measuring the effectiveness of communication strategies, the interlocutors were unanimous that digital tools such as Google Analytics, Meta Business Suite and CRM analytics are key to real-time assessment of customer responsiveness.

In addition, some interviewees (I1, I2 and I6) also pointed out challenges such as personal data protection, ensuring compliance with legislation (e.g. GDPR) and the need for continuous staff training. *"Systems are advancing rapidly, and we must try to keep up with them - and at the same time, let's not forget about human contact, which is still essential,"* added one of the hotel managers (I3).

4.4 Analysis of the aspect of internal information systems

The fourth question was related to internal information systems, which is the key to tourism companies' efficient and competitive operation, according to the opinions of interviews. The findings of the interviews (I2, I4, I5 and I7) show that digital tools such as CRM, ERP, DMS and various reservation and distribution systems significantly contribute to better work organisation, improved decision-making and better service quality.

Hotel managers (I1 and I2) emphasised the importance of integrating different hotel departments using ERP systems. One of the interviewees (I1) said: *"Only with the introduction of the ERP system were we able to truly connect the reception, housekeeping and inventory management - everything is now transparent and faster accessible."* All three hotel managers (I1, I2 and I3) emphasised that the system allows them to control costs better and optimise resources. They also pointed out the challenges of implementing new systems, especially the need for staff training and high initial costs. Still, they agreed that the long-term benefits outweigh the initial obstacles. Sales and reservations managers (I4 and I6) focused most of their attention on CRM systems, allowing them to gain insight into past inquiries and guest behaviour patterns, thus creating more personalised sales communication. *"With CRM, we can immediately see whether a guest has stayed with us before, which packages they chose, and what their preferences were. That helps us adjust our offers,"* one of the managers emphasised (I4).

In addition, the managers (I3, I4 and I6) praised integrating reservation systems (CRS) with CRM, which automates most steps in the reservation process, including generating offers, tracking changes, and reporting on occupancy. In their opinion, this increases accuracy, reduces the need for manual entry, and enables greater time efficiency. The marketing managers (I7 and I8) highlighted the importance of data management (DMS) and real-time analytics. *"Our DMS system gives us access to documentation, campaign data, and responsiveness in one place - which is key to making quick decisions,"* one of the interviewees emphasised (I8). Both interviewees (I7 and I8) highlighted the ability to measure the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and precisely targeted advertising as a key advantage, which is also confirmed by Pu (2024). They also highlighted the importance of data security as they manage sensitive customer information. They pointed out the importance of data encryption and multifactor authentication, which enable compliance with legislation (e.g. GDPR) and strengthen guest trust.

4.5 Analysis of the aspect of the impact of digitalisation on operational processes

The fifth question was related to the impact of digitalisation on operational processes. Hotel managers highlighted that modern information systems, such as innovative room systems (IoT), digital reception, and automated inventory management systems, have significantly reduced the need for manual work and increased the reliability of operations. One manager said (I3): *"The system automatically alerts us when supplies are needed or when a room is ready - this reduces delays and errors."* Sales and reservations managers (I4, I5 and I6) paid the most attention to analysing customer data using CRM systems. That makes it easier to identify guest purchasing habits and plan targeted offers. *"Digital tools allow us to recognise what specific guests want - from room type to additional services,"* one of the interviewees emphasised (I6).

Regardless of their function, several interviewees emphasised that digitalisation provides access to quality data for strategic decision-making. One hotel manager emphasised (I1, I2, I5 and I8): *"Analytic tools help us understand which months are more profitable, which guest structure brings the most revenue, and how to optimise staffing."* The marketing managers specifically emphasised that digital marketing has become a significant tool for promotion. One interviewee emphasised (I7): *"We communicate directly with guests through social media, promote campaigns, and collect*

feedback. We can accurately monitor which content formats attract the most interest with analytics in the background."

4.6 Analysis of the aspect of data security and training for new technologies

The next question was related to data security and training for using new technology. All interviewees stressed that data security is no longer just a technical requirement but is becoming a core part of organisational strategy. All hotel and reservation managers (I4, I5 and I6) highlighted the risks associated with processing guests' personal and financial data in reservation systems, online platforms, and when communicating via email or social media. A common concern reservation managers (I4, I5 and I6) expressed was that employees lacked awareness of security risks, such as phishing emails, weak passwords, or mishandling of sensitive data. Some companies have implemented two-factor authentication, data encryption, and regular backups. One hotelier said (I2): *"We understand that a breach can be just a click away. That's why we have also implemented security protocols in the last year, which are no longer a recommendation but a requirement."* Marketing managers approached the topic from a different perspective - from the perspective of the security of consumer behaviour data obtained through digital campaigns. They pointed out the importance of compliance with the GDPR, especially when it comes to customer segmentation and the use of retargeting tools.

Almost all interviewees (except I5) unanimously emphasised that the successful use of digital tools does not begin with introducing the system but with employees understanding how to use these tools. Hotel and reservation managers repeatedly pointed out that despite the introduction of advanced systems (CRM, PMS, ERP), problems arose because employees were not adequately trained. Several interviewees (I1, I3, I4, I6 and I8) emphasised the need for continuous, structured training that covers the technical aspects of using the systems and digital competencies, understanding security practices and the basics of digital literacy. One sales manager (I4) warned: *"Having a system is not enough. People must understand its value and know how to work with it without fear of making a mistake."* A particular challenge exists in companies with high seasonal staff turnover, where new employees often do not have time for a thorough introduction. Therefore, some companies have started to develop e-learning platforms and digital manuals that enable fast and independent learning, independent of the presence of a mentor.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion about the use of digitalisation affecting the operations of tourism companies

Our first research question was RQ1: How does the use of digitalisation affect the operations of tourism companies?

Digitalisation has become a key factor in strategic development in the modern tourism industry, going beyond the introduction of individual tools and affecting all aspects of tourism company operations - from internal organisation and customer relations to marketing, reservations, and strategic decision-making (Bekele & Raj, 2024; Zeqiri, Dahmani & Ben Youssef, 2020). Fundamental concepts such as e-tourism, smart destinations and digital transformation emphasise the importance of digital tools as drivers of digital innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability (Gretzel et al., 2015; Boes, Buhalis & Inversini, 2016). Among the key impacts of digitalisation on business, the following are theoretically highlighted: increased operational efficiency (e.g. through CRM systems), improved user experience through personalisation of offers (AI, analytics), faster and more reliable decision-making based on data (big data), and greater market flexibility based on digital marketing and online booking channels (Henok & Raj, 2025; Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022). In addition to the advantages, the theory also warns of risks, such as security challenges, lack of knowledge, and rapid obsolescence of technologies (Phu Vinh, 2024).

The interviews revealed that digitalisation contributes to improving tourism companies' operations. Interviewees who perform the functions of hotel managers, reservation managers and marketing managers emphasised several positive effects: automation of routine procedures, increased data processing speed, better resource management and improved communication with guests. Hotel managers highlighted modern information systems (ERP, PMS), which enable the connection of different departments (reception, kitchen, service, support staff, warehouse),

reduce errors and ensure greater transparency. Two managers highlighted that the system informs them when the room is ready or when cleaning supplies need to be ordered, reducing delays and increasing reliability and operational efficiency. IoT (e.g. smart rooms), which automates environmental settings and energy consumption, was also repeatedly emphasised. Reservation managers pointed out using CRM systems to analyse guest habits and develop targeted sales campaigns. That allows companies to precisely determine which guest structure brings in the most revenue and when the most profitable months are and adjust their operations accordingly. One of the sales managers said that with this data, they could predict needs, optimise staffing needs, and adjust prices in real-time. Marketing managers highlighted the importance of digital advertising and content marketing as the primary communication channels. Social networks are no longer just a support tool but a "digital extension of the reception", where the relationship with the guest begins even before the reservation. With digital tools, they can monitor the effectiveness of campaigns and adjust content almost in real time.

At the same time, all interviewees stressed that digitalisation is not without challenges. They exposed the need for continuous employee training as a key factor, mainly due to rapid tool changes, high seasonality, and staff turnover. They also pointed out the complexity of connecting different systems (CRM, ERP, CRS), especially in smaller companies with limited resources. All interviewees confirmed that digitalisation brings benefits to operational efficiency and strategic flexibility.

A comparison of theory and empirical findings shows unity in key points, meaning that digitalisation significantly contributes to greater efficiency, better user experience and greater strategic flexibility of tourism companies. Interviewees practically confirmed all the main theoretical assumptions - from the role of CRM in personalisation ERP in integrating business functions to the importance of big data for decision-making and AI for automating communication. Some discrepancies appear only in the level of integration of advanced technologies into their business. While theory highlights the use of artificial intelligence, virtual reality and IoT as key elements for the future of smart tourism (Zeqiri, Dahmani & Ben Youssef, 2020; Morales et al., 2024), in practice, they are not yet widely used. The reasons are often high costs, lack of knowledge and organisational unpreparedness, which raises important questions for the future: how to ensure wider accessibility of advanced technologies even to smaller companies and how to design supporting policies that will promote digital transformation at a systemic level.

Interviewees pointed out that successful digitalisation is also strongly conditioned by investments in human capital, as it is not only about technology but also about creating an organisational culture where digital literacy becomes an essential component of everyday business. Thus, it can be concluded that the digitalisation of tourism companies is not just a technological modernisation but a comprehensive business transformation that requires a long-term vision, coordination of systems and continuous investment in people.

5.2 Discussion about digital tools and social networks in marketing

Our second research question was RQ2: How has the use of digital tools and social networks in the field of advertising affected the business of tourism companies?

Digitalisation has fundamentally transformed the way advertising is done in the tourism industry. The theoretical framework emphasises that digital tools enable precise definitions of guest target groups, greater interactivity, higher personalisation, and better measurement of campaign effectiveness (Florido-Benítez, 2022; Simões et al., 2024). Analytical tools allow companies to closely monitor guest behavioural patterns and adapt content according to their interests and location (Bekele & Raj, 2024). Social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter allow tourism companies to create relevant, emotionally designed visual content, which increases guest engagement (Zeqiri, Dahmani & Ben Youssef, 2020; Simões et al., 2024). In addition, technologies such as AI and VR offer innovative approaches to digital promotion - AI enables personalisation of offers, while VR enables virtual tours of destinations before guests visit them (Chorshanbiyeva, 2022; Bekele & Raj, 2024). That significantly contributes to greater competitiveness of tourism companies and more efficient use of marketing budgets (Daqar & Smoudy, 2019).

The results of interviews with selected interviewees in Slovenian tourism companies confirm the importance of digital advertising in practice. All interviewees emphasised that social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and, to a lesser extent, LinkedIn have become an indispensable part of promotional activities. According to marketing managers, it is no longer enough to inform today - creating a story, an experience that attracts guests, is essential. They emphasised the importance

of authentic, locally focused content, such as blogs and short videos, which build trust and connection with the brand.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of accurately defining guest target groups using tools such as Meta Ads Manager and Google Ads, which optimise advertising budgets. One interviewee highlighted: "With analytics, we can quickly see what works and what doesn't - this allows us to adjust strategies quickly." Despite recognising the potential of artificial intelligence and virtual reality, most are not yet using them, mainly due to high costs and lack of knowledge. At the same time, interviewees highlight the challenges of rapid changes in the digital environment, lack of time and resources for continuous employee training, and the need to understand the dynamics of different platforms, which is especially difficult for smaller providers.

Our research findings closely coincide with previous results in the theoretical part of the authors' content mentioned above. That confirms that tourism companies in Slovenia are well aligned with modern digital marketing trends. The interviewees' statements directly confirmed theoretical assumptions about the importance of social networks, defining guest target groups and content marketing. Interestingly, despite the recognised potential of VR and AI, these tools have not yet been widely implemented in practice, indicating a gap between technological development and the ability or willingness of companies to implement them. That opens up opportunities for further research and development of support measures, such as more accessible education, incentives for digital investments, and broader integration of innovative technologies into marketing strategies. Interviewees specifically highlighted the need for structured knowledge and internal organisational support, which complements theoretical findings that view digitalisation not only as a technical solution but as a holistic business transformation (Henok & Raj, 2025; Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022). Digital tools can significantly contribute to success, but only if they are supported by adequate digital literacy of employees and a strategic approach of the company.

5.3 Discussion about the use of digital technologies and reservation management

The final research question was RQ3: How has the use of digital technologies and tools in reservation management affected the business of tourism companies?

The use of digital technologies in the reservation process has become a fundamental way of modern tourism companies' business. Digital platforms such as Booking.com, Expedia and Airbnb enable global presence and easy access to the offer and have established themselves as the primary channels for acquiring guests (Halkiopoulos et al., 2020; Florido-Benitez, 2022). Reservation systems are considered in the theoretical framework as part of the broader concept of e-tourism, where digital tools not only serve to automate procedures but also to collect and analyse data to create personalised offers (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Henok & Raj, 2025).

CRM systems and their connection to reservation platforms provide better insight into guests' habits and desires, allowing companies to develop targeted marketing strategies and strengthen guest loyalty (Daqar & Smoudy, 2019). In addition, such systems contribute to integrating reservations with other business functions, which increases efficiency and reduces costs (Labunska, Zyma & Sushchenko, 2022). The digitalisation of reservations does not only mean a technical upgrade but also a transformation of the relationship with the guest, as it includes monitoring behavioural patterns and using this information to improve services and strategically plan activities (Henok & Raj, 2025).

Interviews with leaders in tourism companies showed that digital reservation systems are an indispensable part of business today. Most interviewees pointed out that they receive the majority of reservations - up to 70% - through various platforms such as Booking.com and Airbnb. In addition to greater accessibility to guests, they cited automation of processes, reduced risk of errors and easier management of availability and prices as key advantages. Marketing managers emphasised the analytical aspect of digital reservations, as each reservation means obtaining data about the guest, which is then used to segment and adjust the offer. Several interviewees said that each reservation tells them essential information about where the guest is coming from, what they are interested in, and when they are travelling, which allows them to adjust their campaigns and packages based on this data. Integrating reservation systems with CRM tools is essential to enabling the comprehensive management of guest relationships. In this way, companies build loyalty and create personalised messages based on the guests' past experiences, as they know that guest loyalty is based on details related to personal attention and a personalised "tailor-made" offer.

Despite the numerous advantages, interviewees also pointed out challenges, among which they most often highlighted the high commissions of global booking platforms and dependence on these

channels, which reduces profitability. Therefore, Some are striving to increase the share of direct bookings through their websites, email campaigns and social networks. Another challenge they highlighted is the requirement for continuous employee education, as the systems require specific technical knowledge and rapid adaptation to new developments. When measuring the success of strategies, interviewees emphasised the use of analytical tools that enable real-time monitoring of results, comparison with competitors, demand forecasting and price adjustment. That allows for flexible responses to market changes and revenue optimisation.

The findings based on interviews and comparison with theoretical aspects reveal a high level of consistency in understanding the importance of digitalising reservation processes. Theoretical assumptions about greater efficiency, automation, the use of CRM systems and the importance of data analytics are fully confirmed in practice. Interviewees demonstrated that digital reservation systems are no longer just tools for making reservations; they have become strategic tools for analysing user data, adapting the offer, and strengthening relationships with guests. Nevertheless, there are certain deviations or differences in practice, with interviewees highlighting a high dependence on intermediary platforms (e.g. Booking.com). In practice, the latter often outweighs the importance of a direct digital presence, which theory frequently considers a strategic weakness (Florido-Benítez, 2022). That indicates the need for additional digital sovereignty of companies, especially smaller ones, which could reduce their dependence on intermediaries by having a more significant presence and optimising their channels. In addition, the interviews reveal substantial challenges in human resources and training, which in practice proves to be a key element of the operation of tourism companies. Without the digital competencies of employees, even the most advanced reservation systems cannot provide the expected added value. Thus, the discussion confirms that the digitalisation of reservations is only effective in synergy with human resources, strategic management, and continuous investment in employees' knowledge and digital literacy.

6 CONCLUSION

Digitalisation is becoming an inseparable part of the modern tourism business. Research shows that digitalisation has a significant and multidimensional impact on tourism companies, expressed through increased operational efficiency, better user experience, greater marketing flexibility, and more accurate strategic decision-making. Digital tools enable tourism companies to achieve greater automation, rapid market adaptation, personalised guest experiences, better guest connections, targeted communication, optimised internal processes, reduced costs, and increased transparency—all key factors for competitiveness in the modern tourism environment.

Tourism experts understand digital advertising as necessary for modern tourism promotion, enabling targeted and measurable market communication. Digital transformation represents both a technical challenge and a deep organisational and human resource challenge. Successful implementation requires more than just technology adoption—it involves developing a digital culture, investing in human resources, integrating systems, and managing risks such as security incidents and skills gaps.

Key findings from expert interviews

The interviewed experts agree that digitalising customer contact complements rather than replaces traditional personal communication, offering advantages in speed, flexibility, and reach while requiring thoughtful strategy and technological competence. The digitalisation of reservations emerges as a key competitive factor, enabling efficient operations and better customer understanding, though requiring strategic management and digital literacy. Internal information systems increase competitiveness by facilitating strategic decision-making and efficient work planning, with many companies using multiple integrated platforms. Primary concerns include data protection, adaptation to rapidly changing technology, and security challenges, while emerging best practices involve regular training, knowledge testing, and inter-departmental exchange.

Limitations of the study

This research presents certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The study relied on a relatively small sample size of industry experts, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings across diverse tourism contexts. Additionally, the research was conducted within a single country, which may not fully reflect global digitalisation trends or challenges faced in markets with different technological infrastructures, regulatory environments, or cultural approaches to digital adoption. Despite these limitations, the in-depth interviews proved exceptionally content-rich, providing nuanced insights into the practical implementation of digital tools, organisational barriers, and

strategic considerations that tourism businesses face when pursuing digital transformation. The qualitative nature of the study allowed for a detailed exploration of complex issues that may not have been captured through quantitative methods.

Practical implications

The research findings offer essential guidelines for tourism industry practice. Digital advertising tools enable more targeted, interactive, and cost-effective communication with different tourist segments, allowing companies to increase brand recognition and improve promotional activity profitability when used appropriately. The digitalisation of reservation systems contributes to greater operational efficiency and reliability, reduces errors, and enables better resource management and strategic planning for capacity filling. The connection between reservation platforms and customer relationship management systems means more personalisation of services and, thus, greater guest loyalty. Tourism companies that want to exploit the full potential of digitalisation must invest in regular employee training, the development of internal digital competencies, and the establishment of integrated information systems. They must also strategically manage the risks associated with excessive dependence on external platforms and data security and privacy issues. The ability of companies to not only introduce digital tools but also integrate them into their culture, business processes, and strategy in the long term is becoming increasingly crucial.

Suggestions for further research

Based on the study's findings, numerous possibilities open up for further scientific study of the impact of digitalisation on tourism. One of the key directions should be an in-depth analysis of the differences between large and small tourism providers, as larger companies generally have better access to digital resources, human resources, and higher digital maturity levels. Conducting comparative studies between different countries or regions could reveal essential patterns and best practices transferable between environments with varying development potential. Longitudinal research would enable a better understanding of the long-term effects of digitalisation on business performance, resilience to change, and innovation capacity. Analysis of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, augmented and virtual reality, and machine learning represents another essential research direction, including technological, organisational, economic, and ethical aspects. Examining data management in tourism companies, especially regarding security, privacy, and legislation compliance, remains relevant as guest trust in digital services is crucial for long-term adoption. The effectiveness of different training models, the impact of digital culture on transformation success, and how organisational factors affect digital innovation implementation are additional areas warranting further investigation.

Tourism companies that successfully integrate digital tools into their core business models and organisational mindset will be better prepared for future market changes and crises. In the future, those who know how to use digital tools and strategically connect them with their company's values, knowledge, and vision will succeed in the industry.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the support provided by artificial intelligence tools during the development of this article. These tools assisted with improved grammatical accuracy and helped to organise the references. However, the authors retain full responsibility for the interpretations, conclusions, and any potential errors in the article.

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