



Relationship of digital tourism strategies and performance of beach and water-themed resorts in MISAMIS ORIENTAL amidst the new normal

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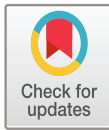
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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the industries hardest hit by COVID-19, and the Department of Tourism suggested digital tourism as one way of stimulating, at least, domestic travel. This study sought to determine the actions of resorts and the government interventions about it. The study applied mixed methods of research, total sampling population, and hybrid interview considering travel restrictions using a validated self-made questionnaire. The study was conducted in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. The respondents of the study were employees of beach and water-themed resorts and municipal tourism officers. The findings of the study revealed low usage of digital tourism strategies and poor tourism performance, a significant difference in digital tourism strategies of the resorts and their employees when grouped according to profile, and a significant relationship between digital tourism strategies and the tourism performance of the resorts. Policy gaps were also discovered. The study concludes that the level of usage of digital tourism strategies can only do so much given the status quo. Hence, recommendations for the enhancement of digital tourism strategies are suggested since they align with the state's existing medium- and long-term development plans.

Keywords: Digital Tourism, Public Policy, New Normal, Resorts, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

With tourism on the brink of collapse, DOT resorted to digital tourism – the integration of tourism and digitalization to create a new business and marketing model (Happ & Horváth, 2018). A study by Centeno and Marquez (2020) rejoined such a statement with an estimated earning loss of Php170.5 billion pesos for the tourism industry. It recommended the same steps DOT is pushing – allowing conditional domestic travel. With all the right reasons not to travel and partake in

tourism activities in times of an imminent health threat still lurking around and movement restrictions still enforced, digital tourism can influence purchase intentions (Shaof et al., 2016; Dhore & Goble, 2018), and eventually reinvigorate the economy (Anandasayanan, 2020). In Misamis Oriental, tourism resorts have already made steps in digital tourism. When the province was placed on Modified General Community Quarantine, the provincial tourism felt the resurgence of

advertisements as tourism resorts were making waves in social media and other online platforms. Although the power of social media in influencing consumers is well documented (Usman, 2021), the same is true for content creation like YouTube (Duffet, 2020) and other means of digitally promoting tourism products and services (Jarquin et al., 2016; Pogorelova, 2016; Camilleri, 2017), there are only a few studies conducted in the Philippines pertaining this research topic and the data gets rarer in the regional-local setting.

Objectives of the study

This study sought to determine the actions of both the resorts and the government during the pandemic. Specifically, it aimed to identify the resorts’ level of usage of digital tourism strategies, their tourism performance during the pandemic, and the relationship between the two. Also, the study intended to investigate the support and interventions that the Philippine government provided to resorts during the new normal – directly or indirectly related to digital tourism and the effectiveness of the said support and interventions vis-à-vis existing policy mandates.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the relationship between digital tourism strategies and the perfor-

mance of resorts in Misamis Oriental and tourism performance.

Specifically, it sought to answer the subsequent questions:

1. What is the profile of resorts?
2. What is the profile of resort employees?
3. What are the Digital Tourism Strategies used?
4. What is the tourism performance of resorts amidst the new normal?
5. Is there a significant difference in the digital tourism strategies used by the respondents according to their demographic characteristics?
6. Is there a significant difference between the digital tourism strategies and the resorts that implemented them when grouped according to profile?
7. Is there a significant relationship between digital tourism strategies and the tourism performance of resorts?
8. What are the government interventions and support towards tourism resorts, particularly during the pandemic?
9. What policy recommendations can be developed to reach the state of enhanced digital tourism strategies?

Conceptual Framework

The focus of this study is illustrated using the sche-

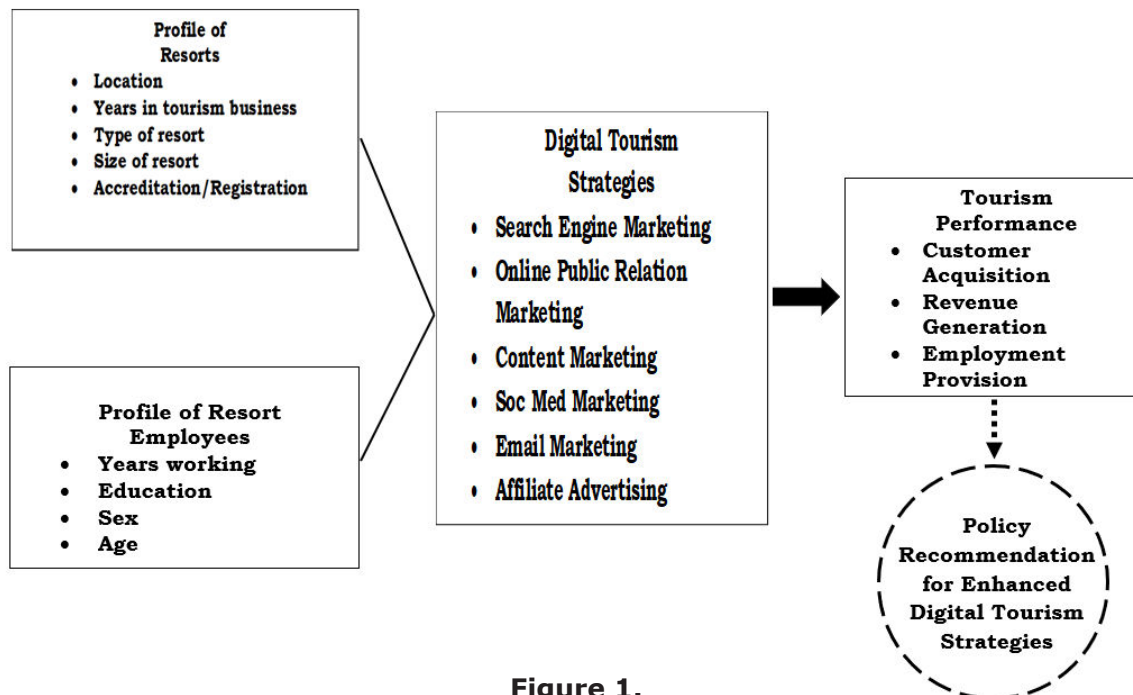


Figure 1.
Schematic diagram

matic diagram shown in Figure 1, which illustrates the interplay of four (4) variables used in the study: Profile of Resorts, Profile of Resort Employees, Digital Tourism Strategies, and Tourism Performance. The relationship of the four variables illustrates that tourism performance is affected by the digital tourism strategies used by the resorts which are also dependent on the profile of the resort and the profile of employees which are factors in the implementation of digital tourism strategies. The output of the study is policy recommendations for the enhancement of digital tourism strategies.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted during the re-opening of the tourism industry in the country after the nationwide lockdown and Misamis Oriental was consistently placed under MGCQ. The participants of the study are 38 beach and water-themed resorts and 12 municipal tourism officers. This study used mixed methods of descriptive and qualitative research. The study applied total population sampling in choosing its respondents. The study utilized primary data from beach and water-themed resorts and municipal tourism officers. For the resorts, a validated self-made questionnaire whose constructs are adopted from published studies that contain the Likert scale and interview questions. For the municipal tourism officers, a 4-set qualitative question was prepared for key informant interviews.

Lists of resorts in Misamis Oriental were obtained from DTI, DOT, and the Provincial Tourism Office for the main respondents of the study. Respondents were contacted in a hybrid approach; 38 resorts were able to respond from the 12 different municipalities of the province. Statistical techniques were employed such as descriptive statistics, particularly frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied using t-test analysis in order to test the differences of means among groups, and correlational analysis, particularly Pearson-R, was applied to measure significant relationships. Responses from key informant discussions were thematically interpreted, classified, and organized using studies and related literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis and interpretations of the data gathered in the study.

Profile of Resorts and Employees

The data exposed that half of the resorts that have been in the tourism industry were 0 to 5 years old when the pandemic hit, this implies that these resorts are still making a name for themselves and the pandemic severed their business venture. The data also revealed that 75% of the resorts operated partially during the pandemic. These two findings were similar to observations from a study in Pakistan by Nasar et al. (2021).

It observed that young businesses are more willing to take risks for survival amidst the pandemic and these resorts are more likely to adopt the call of digitalizing their marketing strategies. Meanwhile, to be partially operating is a way to trim down expenses while staying open for business, and trimming down expenses while in operation translates to a reduced number of employees which in turn could impact the performance of the resort. The study learned that the high-ranking officer or owner of the resort is also the digital marketing in charge, that is, if they have one. The study also learned that most of the resort employees had obtained a college education, and the majority of the resort employees were female.

Digital tourism strategies used

Table 1 presents the mean summary of all digital tourism strategies used by resorts amidst the new normal in Misamis Oriental. The overall mean was 1.88, which indicates that tourism resorts in Misamis Oriental had low usage of digital tourism strategies amidst the new normal. This finding of the study is indicative of the resorts' poor tourism performance amidst the new normal. High usage of digital tourism would really be beneficial to resorts (Shaouf et al., 2016 & Happ and Horvath, 2018), especially amidst the new normal, digital tourism will be very useful when everyone is stuck in their homes and with their mobile devices (Ruiz – Gomez et al., 2018). These findings did not align with the national tourism policy guidelines of the Philippines as well namely Ambisyon 2040 and National Reformulated Tourism Development Plan of 2022.

Digital Tourism Strategies	Mean	Interpretation
Search Engine Marketing	1.78	Low Usage of Digital Tourism Strategies
Content Marketing	2.05	Low Usage of Digital Tourism Strategies
Affiliate Advertising	1.61	Very Low Usage of Digital Tourism Strategies
Social Media Marketing	2.23	Low Usage of Digital Tourism Strategies
Online PR Marketing	2.01	Low Usage of Digital Tourism Strategies
E-mail marketing	1.57	Very Low Usage of Digital Tourism Strategies
Overall	1.88	Low Usage of Digital Tourism Strategies

Table 1.

Summary Table of Mean Distribution of all Digital Tourism Strategies Used by Resorts Amidst the New Normal in Misamis Oriental

Tourism Performance

Tourism Performance	Mean	Interpretation
Customer Acquisition	2.36	Poor Tourism Performance
Revenue Generation	2.42	Poor Tourism Performance
Employment Provision	2.04	Poor Tourism Performance
Overall	2.27	Poor Tourism Performance

Table 2.

Summary Table of Mean Distribution of Tourism Performance of Resorts Amidst the New Normal in Misamis Oriental

Table 2 presents the mean summary of all constructs that compose tourism performance amidst the new normal in Misamis Oriental. The overall mean was 2.27 which indicated that tourism resorts in Misamis Oriental had a poor tourism performance amidst the new normal. This is attributable to the low usage of digital tourism strategies. Tourism performance is heavily reliant on tourist receipts (Anandasayanan, 2020). Tourism works by enticing people to travel and drawing people, two studies suggested crucial factors: destination image (Ranasinghe, 2019) and brand identity (Putra and Razi, 2020). In relation to digital tourism strategies, Camilleri (2018) suggested that interactive com-

munication channels can enhance reputation. The data revealed that the years employed (p-value=.007) had a significant difference in email marketing and affiliate advertising (p-value=.047) which means that the number of years an employee has worked in the tourism industry can affect an employee's acceptance or adaptability to certain digital tourism strategies (Kolb, 2018). The level of education also had a significant difference in affiliate advertising (p-value=.027) and e-mail marketing (p-value=.004). Pogorelova (2016) pointed out that there are certain skills and competencies that can only be acquired through education, which can impact an employee's ability to understand and apply cer-

Significant differences in the digital tourism strategies used by the respondents according to their demographic characteristics

Respondent's Characteristics	Search Engine Marketing			Content Marketing			Affiliate Advertising			Social Media Marketing			Online PR Marketing			E-mail marketing		
	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho
Years Employed	1.02	.314	Failed to Reject	-.240	.812	Failed to Reject	2.05	.047	reject	-.338	.737	Failed to Reject	.000	1.00	Failed to Reject	2.84	.007	reject
Level of Education	1.26	.213	Failed to Reject	-.291	.772	Failed to Reject	2.29	.027	reject	-.424	.674	Failed to Reject	.000	1.00	Failed to Reject	3.06	.004	reject
Sex	-.197	.845	Failed to Reject	-.143	.160	Failed to Reject	1.16	.254	Failed to Reject	-.142	.162	Failed to Reject	-.113	.263	Failed to Reject	1.86	.070	Failed to Reject
Age	2.73	.009	reject	1.82	.076	Failed to Reject	3.21	.003	reject	1.66	.104	Failed to Reject	1.94	.059	Failed to Reject	3.73	.001	reject
Significant if P-value < 0.05																		
Legend: H ₀ is rejected if Significant H ₀ is Failed to Reject if Not Significant																		

Table 3.

Summary Table of Test Of Differences in the Digital Tourism Strategies Used By the Respondents According to their Demographic Characteristics

tain digital tourism strategies. Moreover, the age of the respondents had a significant difference in search engine marketing (p-value=.009), affiliate advertising (p-value=.003), and e-mail marketing

(p-value=.001). This aligns with Duffet's (2020) study about digital marketing, which shows that the likelihood of using certain digital tourism strategies can vary based on the age of the employee.

A significant difference between the digital tourism strategies and the resorts that implemented them when grouped according to profile

Resorts Characteristics	Search Engine Marketing			Content Marketing			Affiliate Advertising			Social Media Marketing			Online PR Marketing			E-mail marketing		
	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho	T-Value	P-Value	Decision on Ho
Registration/Accreditation	-.372	.510	Failed to Reject	-.258	.106	Failed to Reject	-.199	.240	Failed to Reject	-.457	.320	Failed to Reject	-.312	.201	Failed to Reject	-.345	.109	Failed to Reject
Location	-.349	.729	Failed to Reject	-.157	.125	Failed to Reject	.961	.343	Failed to Reject	-.155	.129	Failed to Reject	-.124	.221	Failed to Reject	1.61	.115	Failed to Reject
Years in Tourism	.881	.384	Failed to Reject	-.110	.913	Failed to Reject	1.90	.064	Failed to Reject	-.215	.831	Failed to Reject	.112	.911	Failed to Reject	2.60	.013	reject
Type of Resort	.502	.619	Failed to Reject	-.882	.383	Failed to Reject	1.78	.083	Failed to Reject	-.394	.377	Failed to Reject	-.550	.586	Failed to Reject	2.57	.014	reject
Size of Resort	4.72	.000	reject	3.29	.002	reject	5.39	.000	reject	3.16	.003	reject	3.79	.001	reject	5.62	.000	reject
Significant if P-value < 0.05																		
Legend: H ₀ is rejected if Significant H ₀ is Failed to Reject if Not Significant																		

Table 4.

Summary Table of Test Of Differences in the Digital Tourism Strategies And The Resorts that Implemented them when grouped According to Resort Profile

The data revealed that years working in tourism had a significant difference in e-mail marketing (p-value=.013). The type of resort had a significant difference in e-mail marketing (p-value=.014). Moreover, the size of the resort had a significant difference in search engine marketing (p-value=.000), content marketing (p-value=.002), affiliate advertising (p-value=.000), social marketing media (p-value=.003), Online PR marketing (p-value=.001), and e-mail marketing (p-value=.000). Years in tourism business equates to the accumulation of tangible and intangible resources which by having many can be interpreted as more capable and more knowledgeable about trends. Also, the type of resort in this study pertains to its operational capability, the quantity and quality of human resource

argument that online advertising can have a significant on consumer purchase decisions, and Camilleri (2017) stressed the use of digital media as the tipping point for the engagement of stakeholders for better tourism performance.

Government interventions and support towards tourism resorts, particularly during the pandemic

Table 6 presents that the public and private tourism stakeholders agree that there were digital tourism-related interventions, organizational support, and food and cash assistance. However, both stakeholders also agree that there were policy gaps in every government intervention and support such as digital tourism strategies-related interventions by the government were under

Significant relationship between digital tourism strategies and the tourism performance of resorts

Tourism Performance	Search Engine Marketing			Content Marketing			Affiliate Advertising			Social Media Marketing			Online PR Marketing			E-mail marketing		
	Pearson R	P-Value	Decision on Ho	Pearson R	P-Value	Decision on Ho	Pearson R	P-Value	Decision on Ho	Pearson R	P-Value	Decision on Ho	Pearson R	P-Value	Decision on Ho	Pearson R	P-Value	Decision on Ho
Customer Acquisition	.482*	.002	reject	.552**	.000	reject	.489**	.002	reject	.574**	.000	reject	.573**	.000	reject	.459**	.004	reject
Revenue Generation	.368*	.023	reject	.569**	.000	reject	.496**	.002	reject	.444**	.005	reject	.524**	.001	reject	.523**	.001	reject
Employment Provision	.443*	.005	reject	.501**	.001	reject	.434**	.006	reject	.530**	.001	reject	.532**	.001	reject	.406*	.011	reject

Significant if P-value < 0.05
Legend: Ho is rejected if Significant
Ho is accepted if Not Significant

Table 5.

Test Of The Relationship Between the Digital Tourism Strategies And The Tourism Performance Of Resorts

es can have an impact on the usage of certain digital tourism strategies (Dwyer et al., 2020). The data revealed that all constructs of tourism performance had a significant relationship with all constructs of digital tourism strategies. This means that tourism performance is influenced by digital tourism strategies or that the level of tourism performance of resorts is affected by their level of usage of digital tourism strategies. As for tourism performance having a significant relationship with digital tourism strategies, several related studies align with this. Dhore and Godbole (2018) argued that promotional videos can have a positive influence on the destination image, Goenadhi and Rahadi (2020) share a par-

Government intervention and support	Policy gap
Digital tourism strategies related interventions	Poor Information Communication Technology
Organizational support	Disadvantageous organizational structure of local tourism offices
Food and cash assistance	Private and public sector misunderstanding

Table 6.

Summary of Qualitative Responses on Government Support and Interventions with its Corresponding Policy Gap

-mined by connectivity issues by means of ICT infrastructure or info structure, organizational support interventions were undermined by ineffective and inefficient institutional infrastructure that is not supportive or compatible with the mandates of existing policies, and food and cash assistance were undermined by conflicting interests of the government and the resorts.

Policy recommendations

Policy gap	Policy Recommendations
Poor Information Communication Technology	Digital tourism strategies training on tourism officers
Disadvantageous organizational structure of local tourism offices	Inclusive participation of all tourism stakeholders
Private and public sector misunderstanding	

Table 7.

Policy Gaps and Policy Recommendations According to Resort Operators and Tourism Officers

Table 7 presents policy recommendations for the policy gaps to attain the state of enhanced digital tourism strategies. Digital tourism strategies training for municipal tourism officers was recommended to address the issue of poor information technology. Inclusive participation of all tourism stakeholders was recommended to address the issue of the disadvantageous organizational structure of local tourism offices and the issue of private and public sector misunderstanding. Digital tourism strategies training on tourism officers is premised on the principles of decentralization, deconcentration, and devolution which aims to replicate the huge success of Indonesia in responding to the pandemic (Aritenang, 2021). Being the first line of reach for resorts, it is also vital for tourism officers to keep up with the dynamic nature of technological changes (Durai and King, 2019). On the other hand, inclusive par-

ticipation of all tourism stakeholders is a policy recommendation drawn out from the responses of the resorts and the tourism officers which adheres to the findings of the study about Singapore's efforts to digitalize bureaucracy in which it has observed that increasing the political participation of people and different entities in the community is an important factor for the success of any government response (Abdou, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When tourism-related establishments in Misamis Oriental are permitted to operate despite the ongoing pandemic, how to stay operational is another thing. One of the government response interventions to combat the impact of COVID-19 on tourism is the re-emphasis on employing digital media in terms of marketing, which the Department of Tourism calls digital tourism. Vast literature before and during the pandemic supports this approach because the technological revolution is already happening and is changing the consumer landscape. The study concludes that the very medium that bridges the plan and the execution of the policy response, that is digital tourism, is problematic to start things with. The quality and access to technology and even the users have a lot to improve. Another is that the organizational dynamics of lo-

cal tourism offices cannot keep up with the mandates of public service. Any organization cannot transcend or provide anything close to what is expected if it's understaffed, underfinanced, and not empowered. Lastly, Filipinos are still politically immature. As observed, Filipinos are still incapable of political interactions that harness nation-building. Filipinos still have not understood how the government works, and, as a nation, it is inclined to seek privileges but less likely to get involved in duties and responsibilities. Based on the findings of the study, the following measures are recommended for future studies and for the beneficiaries of this subject matter: First, a larger sample size. The strict movement restrictions during this study rendered several resorts to be in partial operation or no operation at all. With the ease of movement restrictions, a larger sample can be attainable for future studies. Second, this study recommends that the local government units of Misamis Oriental assist and incentivize beach and water-themed resorts to form an association similar to Cagayan de Oro Hotels and Restaurants Association (COHARA) in order for resorts to have an efficient representation in policy making. Low usage of digital tourism strategies can be addressed by digital tourism strategies train-

ing on tourism officers as it is in line with the Tourism Response Recovery Plan (TRRP) and National Reformulated Tourism Development Plan (NRTDP) 2021 – 2022 in which domestic tourism can be stimulated by advancing the digital media or digital solutions. Misunderstanding between the public and private sector and the disadvantageous organizational structure of local tourism offices can be addressed by inclusive participation of all tourism stakeholders as it is in line with Ambition 2040, which stresses support to digital tourism by and through improving market linkages, innovation, and ICT literacy.

Assessment of policy recommendations

Policy Gap	Policy Recommendation	Status
Low usage of digital tourism strategies	Digital tourism strategies training for tourism officers	This is in line with TRRP and NRTDP 2021 – 2022.
Misunderstanding between the public and private sector	Inclusive participation of all tourism stakeholders	In line with <i>Ambisyon 2040</i> .
The disadvantageous organizational structure of local tourism offices		

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