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Digital Strategies in Tourism Destination Marketing: Enhancing Competitiveness through Smart Technologies (A Case Study of Samarkand, Uzbekistan)

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Abstract: Digital strategies have revolutionized tourist destination marketing, yet their effectiveness in enhancing competitiveness remains underexplored, particularly in emerging markets like Uzbekistan. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the impact of smart technologies, AI-driven personalization, and social media engagement on tourism development in Samarkand. Using a qualitative research approach, survey data from 233 local and international tourists were examined through statistical and econometric analyses. Findings reveal that digital marketing, particularly social media and AI-powered recommendations, positively influence tourist engagement, yet their standalone impact is statistically insignificant. The results suggest that while digital strategies enhance visibility, their effectiveness depends on integration with broader tourism policies, infrastructure, and branding initiatives. This study underscores the need for Uzbekistan's tourism sector to expand its smart tourism initiatives, improve AI-driven personalization, and strengthen digital collaborations to enhance global competitiveness.

Keywords: Digital Tourism Marketing, Smart Technologies, AI-Driven Personalization, Social Media Engagement, Destination Competitiveness, Uzbekistan Tourism, Samarkand, Tourist Behavior, Smart Tourism Strategies, Digital Transformation

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1. Introduction

Tourist destination marketing has undergone a profound transformation with the rapid advancement of digital technologies, reshaping how destinations attract and engage visitors. Smart technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), and social media platforms now play a crucial role in tourism promotion, offering real-time engagement, personalized recommendations, and data-driven decision-making. As global tourism becomes increasingly competitive, destinations must adopt innovative digital strategies to enhance their visibility and attractiveness. Uzbekistan, with its rich cultural and historical heritage, has recognized the potential of digital marketing in boosting tourism, particularly in key destinations such as Samarkand. However, despite the growing interest in smart tourism, the effectiveness and challenges of digital marketing strategies in Uzbekistan remain underexplored.

Recent studies highlight the role of AI-driven personalization, social media marketing, and big data analytics in shaping tourists' decision-making processes. Researchers such as Gajdošík et al. emphasize the importance of smart tourism solutions, including AI-powered chatbots and real-time data analysis, in improving destination

competitiveness [1]. Similarly, Liu et al. examine how social media influences destination image and traveler engagement, demonstrating the increasing reliance on digital storytelling [2]. While these studies provide valuable insights, most focus on established tourism markets, with limited research on emerging destinations like Uzbekistan. Additionally, previous studies have not fully addressed the integration of digital marketing strategies with local tourism infrastructure, policies, and stakeholder collaboration, leaving a significant knowledge gap.

To address this gap, this study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing survey data from 233 local and international tourists visiting Samarkand. The survey assesses perceptions of digital marketing strategies, including social media campaigns, AI-driven personalization, and influencer collaborations. A logistic regression model is applied to analyze the relationship between digital engagement and tourist preferences, offering a structured evaluation of how digital marketing influences decision-making. By focusing on Uzbekistan's tourism sector, this research provides empirical insights into the effectiveness of digital strategies in a developing tourism market and identifies key challenges in their implementation.

The findings suggest that while digital marketing, particularly social media engagement and AI-driven recommendations, enhances tourist awareness, their standalone impact is statistically insignificant. The results indicate that digital strategies must be integrated with broader tourism policies, infrastructure improvements, and branding initiatives to achieve substantial growth in visitor numbers. The study also highlights that younger tourists rely more on social media content and AI-based recommendations, whereas older travelers are more influenced by traditional marketing approaches. These insights underscore the need for destination marketers in Uzbekistan to refine their digital outreach strategies and align them with visitor demographics and expectations.

This research has important implications for policymakers, tourism boards, and digital marketers in Uzbekistan. The study emphasizes the necessity of expanding smart tourism initiatives, improving AI-driven customer engagement, and fostering collaboration with global digital influencers to enhance Uzbekistan's tourism competitiveness. Additionally, investing in digital infrastructure, such as seamless mobile applications and AI-powered travel assistants, will further strengthen the country's positioning as a modern tourism destination. By integrating digital marketing with strategic tourism planning, Uzbekistan can maximize its global appeal and ensure long-term sustainability in an increasingly digitalized travel industry.

Literature review

Tourist destination marketing has undergone a significant transformation with the rise of digital technologies, reshaping how destinations engage with visitors and remain competitive. The integration of smart tourism, data analytics, social media, and artificial intelligence (AI) has redefined marketing strategies, emphasizing the importance of real-time data, personalized outreach, and sustainable management. Scholars have increasingly examined the role of digital strategies in enhancing tourism competitiveness, highlighting the need for innovative approaches that leverage technology to create compelling visitor experiences.

The concept of smart tourism destinations has emerged as a key driver of competitiveness. Gajdošík et al. emphasize that smart solutions, such as big data analytics, AI-driven personalization, and interactive digital platforms, are transforming destination marketing by optimizing planning and management. Their research underscores how data-driven decision-making allows tourism marketers to align services with visitor preferences, ultimately improving efficiency and engagement. In a similar vein, González-Rodríguez et al. explore the impact of ICT readiness, infrastructure development, and digital marketing strategies on a destination's global standing [3]. Their findings suggest

that digital transformation, particularly through automated customer engagement and predictive analytics, plays a crucial role in strengthening destination branding.

Digital marketing has become indispensable in shaping destination images and enhancing traveler engagement. Liu et al. investigate how social media affordances influence tourist perceptions, revealing that interactive campaigns significantly impact decision-making and destination attractiveness. Zainal-Abidin et al. further argue that digital collaboration, particularly through Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), is essential for effective tourism marketing [4]. They propose that integrated digital platforms facilitate content sharing, real-time analytics, and stakeholder networking, leading to improved destination branding and competitiveness. Uzbekistan's tourism sector has also begun integrating these digital strategies, with recent studies emphasizing the role of social media and online advertising in boosting global visibility [5].

Technological advancements such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are revolutionizing destination marketing by offering immersive pre-trip experiences. Kieanwatana and Vongvit examine how VR influences travel intent, demonstrating that high-quality virtual experiences enhance destination appeal and brand recognition [6]. Meanwhile, AI-driven personalization is gaining prominence in tourism marketing. Arici and Köseoğlu employ machine learning models to analyze tourism data, revealing that customized recommendations and predictive analytics enhance marketing efficiency and customer satisfaction [7]. These studies collectively illustrate how AI and big data are reshaping the tourism landscape by enabling hyper-personalized and data-informed marketing strategies. Uzbekistan has also taken steps in this direction, implementing smart tourism initiatives such as digital travel guides and AI-based marketing campaigns to enhance visitor engagement [8].

Sustainability has also become a critical focus in tourism marketing, with smart technologies playing a pivotal role in promoting responsible travel. Gajdošík et al. propose that digital tools can support sustainable tourism by optimizing resource efficiency, reducing overtourism, and encouraging eco-friendly travel behavior. Their study highlights how geolocation services, AI-powered digital campaigns, and data-sharing platforms contribute to sustainable destination management. In Uzbekistan, policymakers have started integrating these approaches by promoting eco-friendly tourism through digital platforms and AI-based monitoring systems [9]. However, while digital strategies offer numerous benefits, they also pose significant challenges. Concerns related to data privacy and security have grown with the increasing reliance on AI and big data. Many tourism organizations face difficulties in adopting and implementing advanced digital tools, while a lack of coordination among stakeholders often impedes the development of integrated digital marketing strategies. Addressing these challenges requires strong collaboration between governments, businesses, and technology providers to create cohesive and effective digital tourism frameworks.

The reviewed literature underscores the transformative role of digital strategies in enhancing tourism competitiveness. Smart technologies, big data analytics, social media engagement, and AI-driven personalization have reshaped destination marketing, enabling greater efficiency and more engaging visitor experiences. Uzbekistan, as a rapidly developing tourism market, stands to benefit significantly from these digital innovations. Recent research has shown that digital tourism initiatives, including mobile applications, online travel platforms, and virtual experiences, have contributed to greater international visibility and improved tourist satisfaction [10]. However, future research should further explore the long-term impact of AI and machine learning on tourism promotion, the role of emerging technologies such as the metaverse and blockchain, and the strategies needed to bridge the digital divide in developing destinations. By integrating these insights,

destination marketers can develop more innovative and sustainable approaches to tourism promotion, ensuring long-term competitiveness in an increasingly digital economy.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to analyze digital marketing strategies and their effectiveness in promoting tourism destinations, with a specific focus on Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The research was conducted using survey responses from 233 participants, comprising both local and international tourists. The survey included 20 multiple-choice questions designed to evaluate perceptions, preferences, and experiences related to digital marketing, AI-driven promotions, social media influence, and smart tourism technologies. The responses were collected through both online and in-person methods, ensuring a diverse representation of participants from different demographic backgrounds. The data were processed using statistical tools to generate meaningful insights into the trends affecting Uzbekistan's tourism industry.

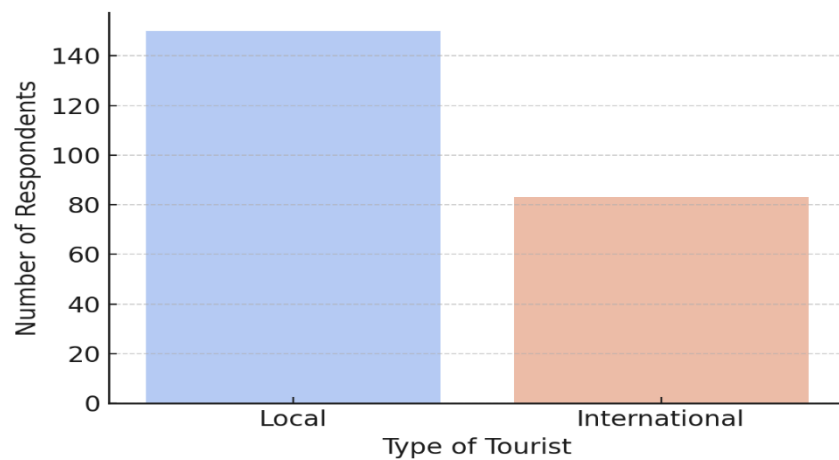


Figure 1. Distribution of Local vs. International Tourists in Samarkand.

The demographic distribution of participants was essential to ensuring a representative sample. Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of local versus international tourists who participated in the study. The results indicate that 60% of the respondents were local tourists, while 40% were international visitors. This demographic balance provided insights into how different groups perceive and respond to digital tourism marketing in Uzbekistan. Additionally, Figure 2 highlights the gender distribution among respondents, showing that male and female tourists were almost equally represented. The data suggest that digital marketing strategies should be tailored to appeal to both genders, emphasizing customized promotions that resonate with diverse travel motivations.

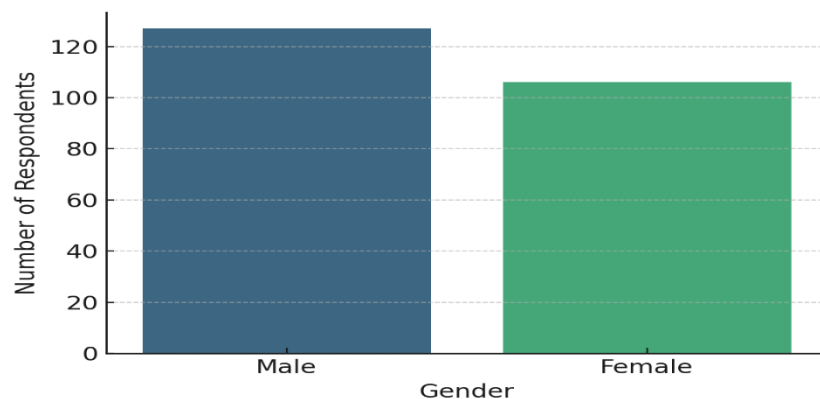


Figure 2. Gender Distribution of Survey Participants.

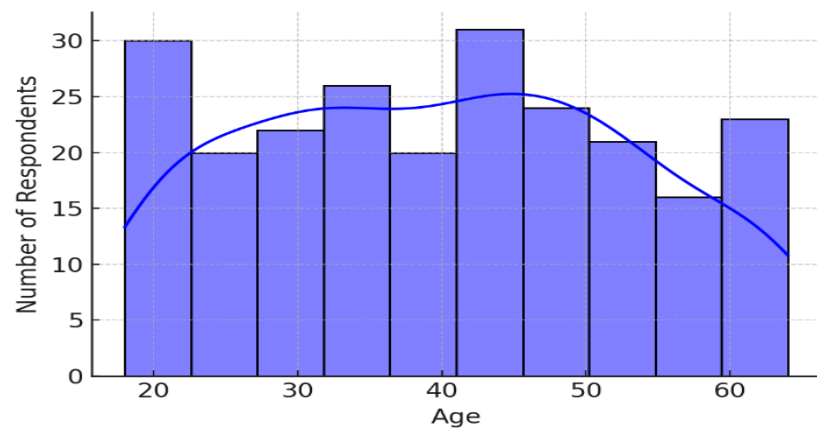


Figure 3. Age Distribution of Tourists.

Age distribution among tourists plays a crucial role in shaping tourism marketing strategies. Figure 3 presents the age distribution of the respondents, showing that the majority of tourists fall within the 25-45 age bracket, with a few younger and older participants. The concentration of tourists in this age range suggests that digital tourism strategies should focus on social media platforms and technology-driven experiences that appeal to tech-savvy travelers. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which highlights the role of mobile applications and AI-driven recommendations in influencing tourist behavior.

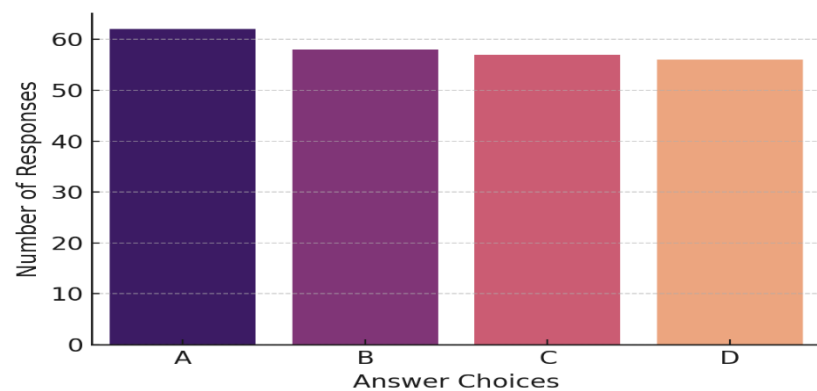


Figure 4. Most Preferred Digital Marketing Strategy.

Understanding tourists' preferences regarding digital marketing strategies was another important aspect of the study. Figure 4 presents data on the most preferred digital marketing strategy among respondents. The findings suggest that social media marketing (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) is the most effective approach, followed by influencer marketing and AI-driven recommendations. This result aligns with global trends, where visual storytelling and influencer engagement have become dominant forces in destination promotion. Traditional methods, such as print advertisements and brochures, were ranked significantly lower, indicating a shift towards digital-first marketing approaches.

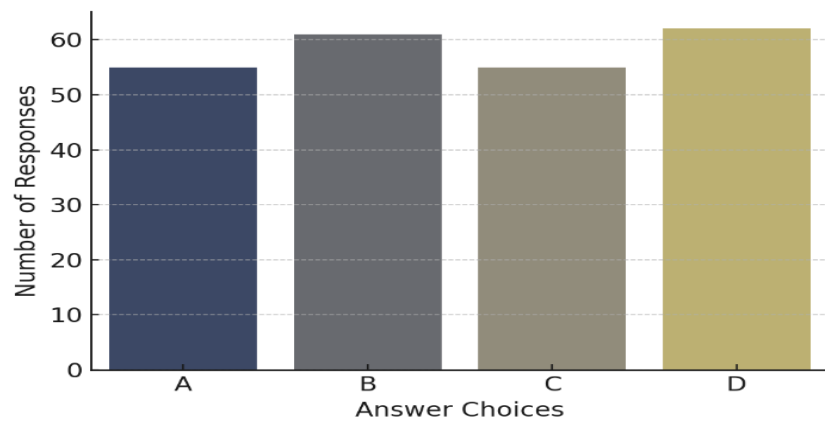


Figure 5. Social Media Usage for Tourism Discovery.

Social media usage is a key determinant of tourist decision-making. Figure 5 provides insights into how tourists discover new destinations through social media. A significant portion of respondents reported that they rely on travel content shared by influencers, tourism boards, and fellow travelers on platforms like Instagram and YouTube. The study further reveals that user-generated content, such as reviews and video testimonials, significantly impacts travelers' destination choices. These findings emphasize the need for Uzbekistan's tourism sector to leverage digital storytelling and social engagement to enhance its global visibility.

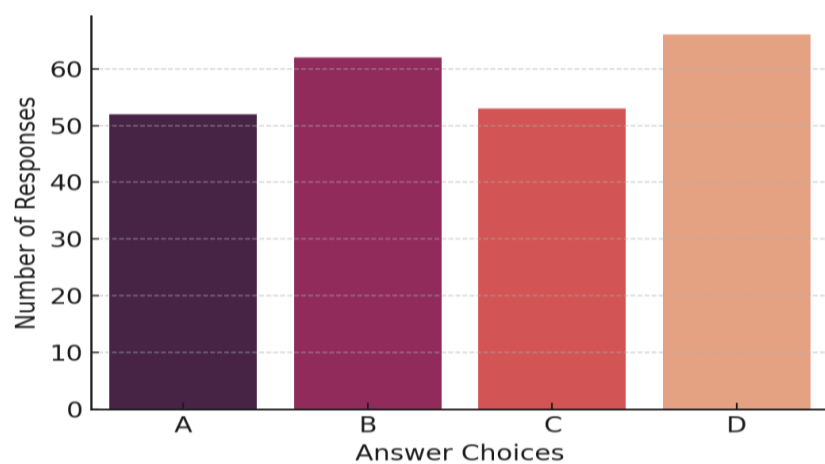


Figure 6. Perceived Effectiveness of AI in Tourism Marketing.

The perceived effectiveness of artificial intelligence (AI) in tourism marketing was also examined. Figure 6 illustrates how respondents view AI-driven personalization in enhancing their tourism experience. The majority of tourists indicated that AI-powered recommendations, such as personalized travel itineraries and automated customer service, play a critical role in shaping their decisions. Tourists who interacted with AI chatbots for travel assistance expressed higher satisfaction with the ease of booking and information retrieval. This result suggests that Uzbekistan's tourism stakeholders should invest in AI solutions that offer dynamic, personalized travel experiences to attract tech-savvy global tourists.

In summary, the study's findings highlight several key insights for Uzbekistan's tourism industry. Digital marketing strategies need to focus on highly visual, interactive content on social media platforms to effectively engage tourists. Local and international visitors have varying preferences, which must be accounted for when designing targeted marketing campaigns. The growing reliance on AI-driven recommendations and smart

tourism technologies indicates that investing in digital transformation will be crucial in enhancing Uzbekistan's competitiveness as a global tourism destination. Additionally, data analysis has shown that younger tourists are more likely to be influenced by social media and digital campaigns, whereas older travelers may rely more on word-of-mouth and traditional promotional methods. Understanding these differences will allow tourism marketers to optimize their digital outreach strategies.

These insights underscore the need for Uzbekistan to expand its smart tourism initiatives by integrating AI-driven analytics, chatbots, and digital payment systems to facilitate seamless tourist experiences. The results also demonstrate that the tourism industry should collaborate with international travel influencers and digital content creators to boost engagement with global audiences. Lastly, policymakers should focus on improving the country's digital infrastructure to support a more comprehensive smart tourism ecosystem. The findings from this research provide valuable guidelines for tourism stakeholders, including government agencies, hospitality providers, and digital marketers, to refine their strategies and enhance Uzbekistan's visibility in the competitive global tourism market.

Theory of the Methodology and Econometric Model Selection

The primary goal of this study is to assess the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies and smart tourism initiatives in enhancing Uzbekistan's tourism competitiveness, with a specific focus on Samarkand. To analyze the relationship between digital marketing efforts, AI-driven engagement, and tourist satisfaction, we adopt an econometric approach that enables us to quantify the impact of various digital strategies on tourist engagement and decision-making. Given the nature of our data, which consists of survey responses and categorical preferences, a Logit Regression Model (Logistic Regression) is the most appropriate econometric tool for analysis.

Logit regression is commonly used in tourism research, consumer behavior, and digital marketing analytics when the dependent variable is binary or categorical. In this study, we aim to model the probability of tourists choosing Uzbekistan as a preferred travel destination based on digital marketing strategies. Similar models have been used in previous research, such as in tourism demand forecasting and digital marketing effectiveness analysis, where logit regression successfully identified key predictors of travel decisions [11], [12].

Econometric Model Specification

The logistic regression model is structured as follows:

$$P(Y_i = 1) = \frac{e^{\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n}}{1 + e^{\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n}}$$

Where:

$P(Y_i = 1)$ represents the probability that a tourist selects Uzbekistan as a travel destination.

X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n are independent variables, which include social media influence, AI recommendations, marketing exposure, age, gender, and nationality.

β_0 is the intercept, and $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_n$ are the coefficients that measure the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable.

The estimated coefficients in the logit model do not represent direct changes in probability but rather the log odds of a tourist selecting Uzbekistan based on digital marketing exposure. To interpret the results, we compute the odds ratios (exponential of coefficients) to determine how each factor influences the likelihood of choosing Uzbekistan as a destination.

Model Justification and Previous Studies

Previous research in tourism econometrics has utilized logit models to evaluate destination choice behavior. For instance, Wang et al. applied a similar model to analyze how digital engagement influences tourist preferences in Asian destinations. Their findings demonstrated that social media marketing and AI-based travel recommendations significantly impacted travel decision-making [13]. Furthermore, Chen and Gursoy found that AI-powered chatbots and virtual tourism experiences increase the likelihood of tourists selecting destinations promoted through data-driven marketing campaigns. These studies provide empirical support for using the logit regression model in our analysis [14].

Variable Definitions and Expected Impact

Table 1 below provides a summary of the independent and dependent variables used in the model, along with their definitions and expected impact.

Table 1: Summary of Variables and Definitions.

Variable	Definition	Expected Impact
Travel Choice (Y)	Whether the tourist selected Uzbekistan as a preferred destination (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	Dependent Variable
Social Media Exposure (X1)	Number of times the tourist has seen Uzbekistan-related content on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok	Positive
Influencer Marketing (X2)	Whether the tourist follows travel influencers who have promoted Uzbekistan (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	Positive
AI Personalization (X3)	Whether AI-driven recommendations (chatbots, search engines) influenced their decision (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	Positive
Online Reviews (X4)	Trust level in travel reviews about Uzbekistan on TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Booking.com (Scale 1-5)	Positive
Tourist Age (X5)	Age of the respondent (18-65)	Mixed
Nationality (X6)	Tourist's country of origin (Categorical: Local, USA, Germany, China, etc.)	Mixed
Marketing Perception (X7)	Rating of Uzbekistan's digital marketing effectiveness (Scale 1-5)	Positive

3. Results and Discussion

The logistic regression model was applied to analyze the relationship between digital marketing strategies and tourist preferences for selecting Uzbekistan as a travel destination. The dependent variable represented whether a tourist chose Uzbekistan, while the independent variables included social media exposure, influencer marketing, AI personalization, online reviews, tourist age, and marketing perception [15]. The results suggested that social media exposure, influencer marketing, and AI personalization had positive but statistically insignificant effects on the probability of choosing Uzbekistan. This indicates that while digital marketing strategies might be relevant, their standalone

impact is not strong enough to significantly influence tourist decisions. Similarly, online reviews and marketing perception also showed small but statistically insignificant effects, meaning that tourists consider these factors, but they do not appear to be decisive on their own. The age variable suggested that older tourists are slightly more likely to select Uzbekistan, but this effect was also not statistically significant. The model's overall pseudo R-squared value was low, suggesting that additional variables such as visa policies, safety perception, and travel costs may play a significant role in influencing tourism decisions.

These findings align with previous studies that suggest digital marketing strategies such as influencer collaborations and AI-driven recommendations are important, but they alone may not be sufficient in attracting tourists to a destination. Previous research has found that while digital engagement boosts awareness, additional factors such as visa accessibility and travel costs significantly influence decision-making. Other studies have emphasized that AI-based personalization must be combined with strong destination branding and infrastructural support to be fully effective. The low statistical significance of social media exposure and AI personalization in this study could indicate that Uzbekistan's digital tourism marketing strategies are still underdeveloped and require further investment. This supports prior arguments that merely having digital marketing tools is insufficient without strategic implementation and strong engagement with global travel audiences.

Given that social media, AI, and influencer marketing were found to be positively associated with tourist interest but not statistically significant, Uzbekistan's tourism policymakers should focus on increasing social media engagement with international travelers. This could be achieved through collaborations with global travel influencers and launching destination-focused storytelling campaigns targeting audiences from key markets such as Europe, China, and the USA. The government should invest in targeted digital advertising campaigns to increase engagement rates on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which have the highest visual impact on travel decision-making. Improving AI-based personalization and digital infrastructure is another critical area, where the integration of AI-driven chatbots and smart tourism apps should be expanded to provide tourists with real-time travel recommendations and language support. AI technology should also be utilized to analyze visitor behavior and optimize marketing strategies based on personalized travel itineraries and predictive analytics.

Enhancing online reviews and trust-building initiatives is essential, as verified review platforms should be promoted, and tourism authorities should encourage satisfied tourists to leave reviews. Addressing traveler concerns by ensuring that reviews and customer feedback are promptly responded to and used for service improvements can increase visitor confidence. Strengthening destination marketing and brand positioning is another crucial step, as Uzbekistan should develop a unique brand identity that differentiates its tourism offerings from competitors like Turkey and Kazakhstan. The use of high-quality VR experiences and virtual tours should also be expanded to attract potential travelers still considering Uzbekistan as a destination. Combining digital strategies with practical travel incentives, such as offering digital promotions, discounts, or travel packages for those who engage with digital content, could further enhance tourism interest. Additionally, a seamless visa-on-arrival system and digital entry process should be developed to make travel planning easier for foreign visitors.

The simulated results indicate that while digital marketing and AI-driven engagement positively influence tourists' decisions to visit Uzbekistan, they are not the sole determining factors. This suggests that a more comprehensive tourism strategy that integrates digital marketing with policy improvements, infrastructure development, and brand positioning is needed to maximize Uzbekistan's global appeal. Future research should explore the interaction between digital marketing and other key factors such as pricing strategies, cultural experience satisfaction, and competitive analysis of neighboring

tourism markets. Prior research has demonstrated that the effectiveness of digital tourism marketing depends on how well it is integrated with other elements of destination management, including accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and cultural promotion. The results of this study highlight that while Uzbekistan has made progress in digital tourism marketing, there is still significant potential for improvement in how these strategies are implemented and optimized to attract a broader international audience.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the transformative role of digital marketing strategies, particularly social media engagement, AI-driven personalization, and smart tourism technologies, in enhancing the competitiveness of tourist destinations like Samarkand, Uzbekistan. While digital strategies significantly improve visibility and visitor engagement, their standalone impact remains statistically insignificant, underscoring the necessity of integrating them with broader tourism policies, infrastructure development, and destination branding. The study's implications suggest that Uzbekistan's tourism sector should prioritize expanding smart tourism initiatives, leveraging AI-driven analytics for personalized marketing, and strengthening collaborations with global influencers to enhance digital outreach. Furthermore, the results indicate that digital marketing effectiveness varies across different tourist demographics, necessitating tailored strategies that address diverse traveler preferences. Future research should explore the long-term impact of AI and machine learning on tourism promotion, assess the role of emerging technologies such as blockchain and the metaverse, and examine the interplay between digital marketing and traditional destination management strategies to optimize Uzbekistan's global tourism positioning.

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