Digital Trends and Tools Driving Change in Marketing Free State Tourism Destinations: A Stakeholder's Perspective

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Abstract

This study sought to determine the key digital trends and tools driving change in tourism destinations from the perspectives of South African marketers, specifically, those in the Free State province. Based on semi-structured interviews conducted with tourism destination marketers, the findings highlight key digital trends and tools causing disruptions and crucial shifts in tourism marketing. The results confirm that, although at a slow pace, Free State tourism destination marketers have embraced digital transformation and that the accelerated growth in digital technologies has reshaped the marketing processes of tourism destinations. The study contributes to the existing literature on digital marketing, which needs to be constantly updated, due to the changes in the trends, to improve the visitor experience. The study has implications for businesses, destinations, and policymakers in identifying key considerations for sustainable technology use, creating an enabling environment for digital adoption and transformation.

Keywords: Digital technologies, artificial intelligence, digital marketing, tourism destinations, Free State, South Africa

Introduction

Digital technology has, over the years, revolutionised global markets (Mapeshoane & Pather, 2016) and removed territorial boundaries. Its adoption brings several benefits such as competitive advantage, increased market share, improved visitor experiences and brand awareness. Tourism destination marketers have increasingly been driven to understand how digital technology is reshaping the tourism industry because of the advantages associated with the adoption of digital technology and the increased usage of the internet. In addition, with the increasing popularity of digital technologies and the development of international trends, the tourism industry continuously experiences radical changes (Zhao, Zhou & Mu, 2021).

Tourism is big business and an important economic contributor to present-day nations and destinations' economic growth. In South Africa, tourism is an important economic sector and the livelihood of many. It creates job opportunities for many youths, men, and women (World Bank Group, 2020). Although South Africa is a developing country, before the Covid-19 pandemic, its tourism sector grew three times the global tourism growth average. It thus has been ranked among the top three countries in the world with more than 9 million tourist arrivals and was ranked 24th in terms of visitor arrivals (Pennington, 2019). Despite South Africa moving at a slower pace than developed nations in its technology adoption, it is paramount for

tourism destination marketers to understand the trends and tools affecting the marketing process.

Recent decades have seen increasing research on digital technologies. A systematic literature review (Al-Qaysi, Mohamad-Nordin & Al-Emran, 2020) analysed fifty-seven articles published between 2009 and 2018. Other scholars (Hausberg, Liere-Netheler, Packmohr, Pakura & Vogelsang, 2019), showed that 7980 articles dealing with digital transformation were cited more than once between 1997 and 2017. In the same vein, research on digital technologies has received fundamental attention from different scholars with a special interest in smart destinations (Lee, Zach & Chung, 2021), artificial intelligence (Buhalis, 2020; Jarrahi, 2018), digital marketing (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021; Alves, Sousa & Machado, 2020), e-commerce and e-distribution (Villa-espinosa & González-ladrón-de-guevara, 2018) as strategies for sustainability, to enter new markets, customer engagement (Zbuchea, 2018), branding and positioning.

It is important for tourism destinations to keep up with the latest digital technology trends and to incorporate the ongoing advances reshaping tourism in destination marketing processes (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2016). Keeping abreast with technology developments and trends will ensure sustainability and relevancy of tourism destinations, and that destination marketers capture the attention of visitors. As long as technology continues to advance at a relentless pace, and make innovations outdated almost as quickly as they arrive (Bowers, 2019), the study of digital trends will remain relevant. The present study sought to determine the key digital trends and tools driving change in tourism destinations from the marketers' perspectives. The discussion anchors around what and how digital technologies and artificial intelligence are adopted by tourism destination marketers as trends driving change in how tourism destinations operate and market themselves to create memorable visitor experiences.

Literature review

Technology continues to evolve at unprecedented speed, disrupting businesses' status quo and operations, even within tourism destinations. Technology has allowed emerging tourism destinations to gain a competitive advantage by enhancing customer experiences through innovative offerings (Palamarova, 2018). The new trends in digitalisation provide alternatives necessary for the investment, growth, efficiency, efficacy and positioning of tourism destinations within the framework of a globally competitive tourism environment (Villa-espinosa & González-ladrón-de-guevara, 2018). Thus, technology adoption redefines possibilities for tourism destinations through digital technologies and artificial intelligence. The term digital technology in this study refers to hardware or software that enable, support or provide communication and distribution channels for both consumers and suppliers (Sharma, Sharma & Chaudhary, 2020). Artificial intelligence is a domain broadly defined as intelligent systems that can augment human work and can think and learn (Jarrahi, 2018).

Digital technologies

Digital technologies allow for data collection and data analytics (Hausberg et al. 2019), which can enhance visitor experiences. Platforms such as social media platforms, destination websites and metasearch engines used by tourists (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019), provide marketers with data that allows for the monitoring of and provides insights into visitor habits. Google is now a major role player on the internet. Besides having algorithms that calculate search engine optimisation (SEO) value of websites, Google AdWords and pay per click options (Stange, Brown, International, Hilbruner & Hawkins, 2007), Google has placed itself in the tourism market by offering travels suggestions for tourism destinations such as transportation, hotels,

maps and weather forecasts (Ray, Das & Kumar, 2018; Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Keeping Google features such as Google My Business updated and accurate, will foster business growth. Data from Google analytics allow tourism destination marketers to add new content to their websites. Tourists, such as the millennials, travel with a range of mobile devices and rely on diverse travel applications (Starcevic, 2018). During a tourist's decision-making journey, mobile applications are a constant reference tool. Thus, mobile applications have a wide reaching customer base. However, with the vast array of applications available at customers' disposal, only the popular and useful ones will remain on tourists' phones for a long time. Mobile applications that are not relevant during a customer's decision-making journey will be deleted to create space for useful mobile applications. In the same vein, mobile technologies coupled with artificial intelligence (AI) becomes useful at any stage of the tourist's travel journey the minute a mobile travel application change its operative system, interface, and relevancy. Mobile technology allows marketers and customers to engage with each other when they use social media platforms (Hanna, Font, Scarles, Weeden & Harrison, 2018; Digiorgio, 2016). In addition, customers have the opportunity to construct their own experiences (da Costa Liberato, Alén-González & de Azevedo Liberato, 2018). Thus, user-generated content provides marketers with ideas on what satisfies the customers (Cai, Richter & McKenna, 2019). Furthermore, tourists use social media before, during and after their travel journey. Digital technologies support tourists to make informed travel decisions (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

Artificial intelligence
Tourism destinations are faced with the increased connectedness of the world economies and tourists who are "tech-savvy", such that consistency and normalcy of daily operations do not exist anymore (Ryan, 2019). The delivery of tourism offerings has been fundamentally transformed by the deployment of digital technologies (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2017), such as virtual assistants and virtual reality (VR), which promotes real-time service delivery. Virtual assistants, such as chatbots, enhance the visitor experience because visitors are assisted faster. A chatbot is an AI software that can simulate a conversation (or a chat) with a user in natural language through messaging applications, websites, mobile applications or the telephone. VR facilitates virtual preliminary destination tours for tourists who might want to experience the destination first before committing to travel and eliminates multiple trips for tour operators who might be making group tours of destinations they have never visited. Thus, VR provides the tourists and the tour operators an opportunity to experience the destination and its services. Coupled with AI, VR and AR can result in customer satisfaction based on previous customer experiences.

The use of AI has been fundamental in destination marketing when it comes to content generation. Although similar to social media marketing, content marketing must tap into social media conversations to stay relevant (du Plessis, 2017). Digital content marketing encompasses using content to generate traffic for marketers to their websites or social channels (Pain, 2018). Content marketing creates and distributes relevant, valuable, and enticing content to the audience so that they are more involved and learn more about the destination (du Plessis, 2017). If marketers understand where people are interacting, how they are interacting, and when they are interacting, destination marketers can engage with the customers using the correct digital medium (Fan, Buhalis & Lin, 2019) and provide the correct information for customers.

AI provides marketers with an insight into customers marketing preferences. Thus, allowing marketers to use marketing strategies such as branded digital premiums. Branded premiums are not a new phenomenon in tourism marketing (Foubert, Breugelmans, Gedenk & Rolef, 2018; O'Connor, 2002). Branded premiums involve the use of non-monetary promotions given to customers as free merchandise to appreciate the brand. With branded

digital premiums, marketers use digital tools or digital consumables. Examples include, but is not limited to, smartwatches, Universal Serial Bus (USB), memory cards and mice. Branded digital promotions enhance customers appreciation of products on offer and make customers more prone to the deals when making purchase decisions (Boon, Pitt & Ofek, 2015). For the digital native tourists, digital branded premiums and promotional items are preferred to the traditional branded marketing items such as T-shirts, caps, or discounts. When customers are offered branded promotional materials that they appreciate, they respond favourably to the tourism destination. Casalo and Romero (2019) concur that when customers have a higher appreciation of promotional offers, they tend to respond more positively to the tourism packages on offer.

Methodology
The study focuses on the Free State province, one of the nine provinces in South Africa. The province has been selected because of its rich, diverse tourist routes within its municipalities, designed to ensure tourists explore each of its municipal districts. The Free State province is also home to the Vredefort Dome, a world heritage site. Moreover, the province still suffers from uneven tourist arrivals when compared to other South African provinces and within its various districts, despite its abundant tourism features and growth potential. Thus, it is expected that the research participants will provide more pragmatic views and opinions based on their experiences.

Research participants in the study were selected based on convenience sampling. The South African government has jurisdiction and direct responsibility for tourism and is guided by the National Tourism Sector Strategy framework, which requires collaborative efforts from various stakeholders (OECD, 2021). The 1996 White Paper on the development and promotion of tourism confirmed South Africa's approach to tourism as one which is "government led, private sector driven and community based" (National Department of Tourism, 2018). Thus, the sampling frame consisted of tourism destination marketers from both the government and the tourism industry private sector. The tourism destination marketers were only invited to participate in the study if they have been in tourism marketing for more than five years. The criteria ensured that the marketers have an insight into the trends and tools reshaping the marketing of tourism destinations.

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology approach to achieve the objectives of the study. In-depth semi-structured interviews, averaging thirty-five minutes, were conducted using an interview schedule (or guiding list of questions). Semi-structured interviews allowed for probing into areas that needed clarity and to explore issues raised by the respondents. With online interviews becoming a standard method of data collection due to Covid-19 restrictions (Woyo, 2021), the interviews were conducted either online or face-to-face, depending on the preferred method of the interviewee. The online interviews were "virtually face-to-face". Also, they assisted in increasing the participation rate and overcoming the limitation of not having face-to-face physical interviews with interested respondents. For interviews that were conducted face-to-face, physical, health and safety regulations were adhered to. Out of the twenty tourism destination marketers that were approached, where the aim of the study was explained, thirteen interviews were conducted, thus a response rate of sixty-five per cent. At thirteen interviews, data saturation was reached because all the relevant municipal districts were represented. The representation of the various districts by the marketing experts further enriched the variety of opinions expressed.

The review of the literature guided the interview questions. Otter.ai was used to transcribe the interviews. Data was further transcribed by listening to the recordings and fully transcribing the data. Data analysis was done manually by repeatedly reading the transcribed

data, familiarising with the data, making notes, coding, and thematic analysis. To ensure consistency and to promote researcher familiarity with the data, a single researcher coded the data. Responses are coded by the letter M, which denotes marketer and a number that distinguish the interviewees. The letter and number have no significance to the marketer's affiliation but are used to protect the confidentiality of the respondents.

Findings

All five municipal districts of Free State province were represented. Mangaung (38.5%), Thabo Mofutsanyane (23%), both Fezile Dabi and Xhariep (15.4%) and Lejweleputswa (7.7%). A total of 53.8% of the interviewees were female, and 46.2% were male. A total of 46.2% of interviewees were marketing managers, and 53.8% were marketing officers. A total of 61.5% were stakeholders within the government, whose responsibility is to promote and regulate tourism in the province, and 38.5% were from the private sector, responsible for service delivery to the tourists. With regards to representations, some of the following responses were noted:

> I work for the government and some of our marketing objectives are guided by the National Tourism Sector Strategy (M1).

> Our objective is to allow visitors to discover and explore Free State (M3).

> Thaba Nchu and Botshabelo were incorporated to form the broader Mangaung municipality. In the process, we established a tourism policy that acted as a framework for the tourism stakeholders in the Mangaung area (M6).

> As provincial government….to promote the province as a preferred tourism destination. The aim is to put the province on the tourism map through destination marketing (M7).

> Being a marketer as a male can be challenging, but when you have the drive to take your company to greater heights, you become customer centric….. (M12).

> This district is small, but our company dominates and strives to provide excellent service to our customers…. (M13)

In an attempt to determine marketers' perceptions on digital trends driving change in the marketing process, based on their views, opinions, knowledge and experiences, marketers were asked how they promote their destinations. The interviews confirmed the adoption of digital technologies and AI as a prevailing trend. In an interview, one marketer said:

> With emerging technologies, instead of using television, one can market on YouTube or Triller…also with emerging technologies, you use social media channels, and also websites. In tourism, as in any other business sector, we monitor marketing trends and technology (such as websites and social media channels) usages of the customers. (M10).

The results showed that Free State destination marketers have adopted digital technologies and AI to monitor tourists' behaviour and improve customer experiences. For example, a respondent had this to say:

> We know people spend some of their free time on their phones, right? But as marketers, it is important that firstly, we understand how people are spending their time and where exactly? Which platforms are popular? So our research department and communication department usually give us these statistics and we will post on those social platforms that are growing in popularity and that we have (M1).

The above denotes that marketers follow where the customers are and consequently emphasise on the importance of understanding where and how customers spend their time. One marketer mentioned that:

> We have analysed visitor behaviour. We know that tourists still want to travel and we also know that when people travel they need to take photos and because of that they also download apps like Snapchat which makes their pictures look nice. We are trying to maximise on that" (M10).

Another marketer concurs and maintains that "if we know that people make travel decisions based on what they see, for example, on Facebook, then it is important and only wise that we have a Facebook page. And if they use Google, then we also use search engine optimisation (M5).

Another trend highlighted was the use of social media channels and having "selfie-taking" hotspots.

> We have carefully selected three platforms, the website, Facebook and the WhatsApp that we use, because of their popularity. They are very popular, even among people of different age groups (M5).

> For marketing, we are using our Facebook page that we have as the entity (M9).

> The trend has been to turn towards the use of social media or the use of the internet instead of our traditional paper based adverts. On our website, we have hyperlinks to our Facebook page, Instagram, and Twitter handle, on our Facebook page, we have details of our website as well. We also have WhatsApp, we use WhatsApp business which is very useful for us as well (M10).

> I'm sure when you entered you saw that we have a selfie spot. The people take pictures there and when they are sharing those pictures with their friends, they are marketing us. Because on that frame is our name, our contact details, our websites, our Facebook page and our Twitter handle. So, when it comes to these things, you have to be clever in this game (M10).

> We have selfie hotspots in Free State, which are demarcated by the yellow frames mostly (M12).

Among the social media channels currently employed by destination marketers, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter appeared to be the most popular. All marketers using social media channels maintained that they use hashtags (#), mentions and geotagging to drive content to their channels and keep conversations with customers going. "We use hashtags because it helps to drive visitors to our digital platforms and improves engagement with our customers.

And even our conversion rates have improved" (M10). Some of the marketers confirmed that they would adopt the use of social media in the future. It is interesting to note that although all marketers use or plan to adopt social media, only a few are willing to use many social media channels. A key marketer noted:

> I think having two social media platforms, WhatsApp and Facebook at the moment are working fine for us. So I think, for now, that is fine. Because if we have too many of them, it might be a problem… (M5).

The marketers were familiar with the benefits of using social media. Common responses on the changes caused by social media in destination marketing were a quick response to customer enquiries, reaching a broader market base, improving customer satisfaction by understanding customers' past experiences and creating content based on customers' interests. Other responses highlighted were reduction in operational costs, direct interaction with customers and engaging in dialogue with the customers. Some responses noted were:

> It is faster for us to respond on WhatsApp…We have seen that it has helped us to improve our customer service because we can respond to the customers immediately and cut some of our operational costs (M2). It drives people to our website, increased the sharing of the content on Facebook and the liking of our page (M5).

It is interesting to note that many of the marketers highlighted that they have websites, but only a few use SEO and pay per click to boost the visibility of their websites. Marketers state that "Also the Pay Per Click adverts …whenever they type holiday in Free State, our details or website will also pop up"(M5) and "Our platforms promote user engagement interactions and we can monitor and track visitor behaviour by utilising the search engine optimisation" (M10). Some of the marketers indicated that they use metasearch engines, "…like your Trivago, there are some visitors who say they got the information from there" (M3), and only a few indicated that they have plans of adopting the trend of using metasearch engines. Of great significance was hyperlinking between the websites and social media platforms, "And these (Facebook and WhatsApp) are also linked to our website" (M5). Marketers highlighted that hyperlinks provides rapid access to information between different platforms and makes navigation through information easier for the customers.

An untapped potential on the use of websites was the embedding of chatbots in websites and virtual reality. Although marketers confirmed that they are aware of the potential benefits of using chatbots and VR, only a few of the marketers consider using VR technology. Some of the noted responses were "Also ensuring that our digital platform platforms have chatbots and can be VR enabled because now when you look at VR, it is no longer only for games. VR is being adopted even in the tourism industry, for virtual tours...We don't want to be left behind" (M10). None of the marketers highlighted that they have their own mobile travel applications. However, the majority of the marketers are collaborating with other stakeholders to develop a destination travel application for the region that has desktop and mobile viewing compatibility. "We want to have a collaboration and develop an app so that as soon as you cross and get into Free State, you will be able to see what's around you, what attractions and where to eat. In that way, we will have updated information because right now, it's difficult for us to have updated information from the private tourism stakeholders" (M1). These results show that destination marketers are aware of the digital trends and tools reshaping their marketing processes.

The other significant trend noted was the use of branded digital premiums. Some of the interviewed marketers indicated that they no longer use price discounts or branded promotional items such as T-shirts or bags but have instead adopted a trend of branding promotional items used with technology. Some responses that were noted are:

> When we have mall activations, we also give people something that we feel they will use. We used to give branded coffee mugs, especially towards the winter season. Now because of the move and use of digital devices by most people, we give branded wrist USBs and sometimes memory cards. For us, that is a cheaper option and this is a win-win situation (M1).

> Winners will get a bag of branded goodies such as mice, mice pads and cellphone covers. This has also improved the perception that tourists have of our establishment and its offerings (M2).

> Instead of price cut promotions or buy one get one free promotions, we give selfie ring lights. This is because for Instagramers, if you don't post it, you were not there and you are lying (M12).

Among the marketers who have adopted the trend of branded digital premiums or promotional items, most of them confirmed that they also offer branded hand sanitisers and face masks. Although this is not a branded digital promotional item, this shows that markers consider the information shared by customers about their health and safety concerns. Thus, by providing hand sanitisers and face masks, marketers attempt to ease health and safety concerns and restore travellers' confidence. When asked about future plans, one interviewee stated "We are in an era where we should be advocating for adopting digital marketing" (M6). This is followed by a general consensus of having an online presence. For example, "Without a website, without an online presence, we are nothing." (M8). Another stated that "Technology is here to stay. So we might as well adapt to the trends that are happening that we are identifying and also benefit from, such as online sharing platforms, developing travel applications, VR and chatbots so that we remain relevant in the tourism industry" (M10).

Discussion
Having all the five districts, different genders, ranks, government, and private stakeholders represented enabled the researchers to determine the key digital trends and tools driving change in tourism destinations from the marketers' perspectives based on their views, opinions, knowledge, and experiences when promoting their destinations. Summing up the results, digital technologies and AI in the twenty-first century have fundamentally transformed the marketing arena of tourism destinations. However, tourism destination marketers in the Free State have not fully embraced digital transformation as important cues for creating memorable visitor experiences. Results reveal that Free State province's tourism destination marketers are still cautious and stuck in their ways, and are using the most common applications, but not digging deeper. Hence, the common themes that emerged from the analysis are linked to digital technologies and AI and are discussed below.

Results show that social media is a trend that is likely to continue driving change in marketing tourism destinations. Tweets, likes, comments, and loves are a good reflection of customers' current interests, whilst reviews demonstrate their experiences. Photos and videos are powerful media to showcase tourism destinations on social media (Perakakis, Trihas, Venitourakis, Mastorakis & Kopanakis, 2016). Social media platforms such as Instagram use

reels to showcase tourism destinations, harness the power of visual storytelling and digital technology. With destinations allowing customers to post content on their social media platforms and having "selfie-taking" hotspots demarcated by picture frames with the tourism destination's information, online photos, and videos sharing by customers after taking "selfies" helps to market tourism destinations and facilitates online relations. It also helps family and friends to share their travel experiences (Srinivaasan & Kabia, 2020). Hashtags and hyperlinks allow destination marketers to promote their own digital platforms and allow different tourism marketers to collaborate and reach a wider market (Perakakis et al., 2016). As much as tourism destination marketers can use historical interests from past travel behaviour, social media data better reflects the customers' current travel behaviour. Stakeholders collaborations on the development of digital technologies such as travel destination applications result in shared costs. Mobile travel applications for tourism destinations have maps that show places of interest, fuel stations, where to eat, and where to sleep. Making use of such digital technologies provides marketers with competitive advantages. Mobile technologies such as smartphones are another tool used by marketers to provide real-time experiences. Smartphones allow the integration of different digital tools and a seamless experience across different platforms. Having the correct data means marketers can correctly segment the market and provide hyper-personalised travel-related information. Websites allow markers to keep track of customers' online behaviour by providing time spent on a page, frequency of visits and interests. Also, the behaviour of tourists has changed such that they are more knowledgeable and prefer real-time responses in their enquiries. An understanding of customer interests by destination marketers allows marketers to be proactive in their planning. Thus, tourism destinations that use digital technologies and AI to foster customer interactions and engagements enhance customer experiences (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

Tourism destinations that can respond to their customers in real-time have a competitive advantage. Real-time service provides instant gratification to customers and helps to build loyalty and trust. The trend in tourism has been using AI tools such as chatbots embedded in websites to enhance customer services. This means that chatbots can respond to customers quickly, 24/7 and even in different languages. Customers do not have to wait until the business has opened or look for a dictionary to communicate with a consultant. If destination markets understand the interests of their customers, they can provide personalised offers and gifts. A key digital trend in destination marketing has been the influential impact of branded digital premiums to promote tourism destinations, products, or services. Due to the increased use of technology, destination marketers must provide customers with promotional items or premiums that they are likely to use. Tourists intention to visit the destination and tendency to remember the destination are greater if they appreciate the promotional premiums on offer or the promotional materials given than if they do not appreciate it (Wang, Japutra & Molinillo, 2021).

Conclusion, implications and limitations

Digital technologies and AI are gaining prominence in marketing tourism destinations. More and more destination marketers are no longer considering adopting and following prevailing digital trends as an option but as a key strategy for survival. The connectedness of the marketplace, the removal of territorial boundaries, and customers changing needs threaten the sustainability of tourism destinations. It is of importance that destination marketers keep abreast with the changes to remain competitive. However, the challenge is that although other scholars believe that technology has levelled the playing field for tourism destinations and brought opportunities to access new markets (Anwar, Carmody, Surborg and Corcoran, 2014), an uneven playing field still exists between technology-led destinations and slow-paced

technology adoption tourism destinations. Free State province remains a slow-paced technology adoption province as evidenced by the province's rate of adoption of new technologies and use of the most common digital applications. Tourism destinations failure to instantaneously adopt and adapt to new digital technologies can lead to dissatisfaction amongst the digitally abled customers who are also globally connected.

The implications of the study are threefold. Firstly, the study contributes to the existing body of literature. The study of adoption and trends in digital technology and AI remains an important area of study for as long as technology continues to advance, and customers' behaviour continues to change. Secondly, in terms of managerial implications, tourism is a highly competitive marketplace. This means that tourism destination marketers should adopt digital technologies that allow data analytics to understand the customers. By using digital technologies and analysing data, tourism destination marketers can differentiate themselves from their competitors by creating exceptional consumer experiences. Moreover, travel restrictions caused by Covid-19 redefined consumer behaviour. The increased exposure of tourists to digital technologies shifted tourists' expectations when visiting tourism destinations. It increased their knowledge of available resources to access information and new ways to engage with destinations. Destinations should adopt digital trends or tools that inspire and inform customers to ensure that the tourism destinations make it into and through the initial stages of travel consideration. Thirdly, the study contributes to the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Digital technologies promote inclusivity by enabling the environment for everyone to be part of tourism. Furthermore, for the tourism marketers of the Free State province, understanding the digital trends and tools driving change in tourism destinations can reduce the widening gap among tourism destinations. Free State businesses, tourism destinations, and policymakers must identify key considerations for sustainable technology use and create enabling environment for digital adoption. This study is based on the perceptions of destination marketers. Further studies can look at the surveys with the tourists.

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