

Sharing Professional Viewpoint:
Digital Marketing Ethics in Tourism

Catthaleeya Rerkpichai
Faculty Creative Digital Marketing
Bansomdet Chaopraya Rajabhat University (BSRU)Thailand
Email: Catthaleeya.Re@bsru.ac.th

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is currently affecting economic conditions worldwide. As international countries have varied their lock-down measures to control the outbreak, Thailand's tourism and hotel businesses have been slowed down in generating the main revenue for the country (Marketing Association of Thailand, 2022). Tourism operators have been severely affected by the covid-19 pandemic for over two years. As known to the public, the landscape of tourism in the future would take more time to fully recover after the pandemic crisis.

Thailand's tourism conditions have become fragile and volatile in tourism sector income in the post COVID-19 world, as they rely on the number of foreign tourists. Meanwhile, the recovery period will witness fierce competition among tourism business operators via digital transformation processes and channels to win over potential customers. The entire digital functioning of the tourism business has accelerated technology-based services from those providers concerned—ranging from the widespread use of the Internet for information search and reservation to experience sharing models.

2. Digital Marketing Ethics in Tourism

Since the use of social media for travel planning over the Internet is common among tourists in scheduling itinerary, booking travel tickets and accommodation, and arranging for desired activities. As known, online booking businesses are growing rapidly in support of customers' selection of tourist attractions and tour programs on digital platforms without space and time constraints. In such a scenario, digital marketing via websites marketing is meant to increase the number of website viewers, as well as to encourage their transactions through website channels for access to tour products and markets online. Their main purpose is to add likes, shares, and chats to create “life” in an online image. Customer relationships are currently managed on digital media transactions—resulting in the creation of promotional advertising programs, which increases the potential to market and target customers by audio and video communication via smartphones. Creating a good customer experience or “brand experience,” primarily aims at strengthening customer relationships with target audiences. The most important thing for digital marketers is to build good relationships through attractive content for the target audience (Marketing Association of Thailand, 2022). Tourism businesses need to offer new marketing content that meets their customers' needs. Business operators are to create, mention, post and share contents accessible to recipients, particularly images or infographics and videos displayed to the public on various online media, especially Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.

The current problem facing Thai tourism—fragile because of the pandemic at the moment—appears to lie in over advertising expenses for those business operators who are

still not quick enough to switch to digital marketing on a full scale. For those who have already been in the arena need to observe digital marketing ethics in tourism business. That is to say, the credibility of the brand in providing tourism services relies on professional ethics (Marketing Association of Thailand, 2022). The service brand can be trusted with business operators' honesty and fairness in providing tour packages that support customers' desired itinerary with reasonable accommodation, food services and trip activities of good quality. Tour operators could provide vaccination and hygiene care for tourists, but not tricking them with "free" additional packages that charge extra fees later on. Tour packages advertised via online media need specific information that would not be subject to interpretation; this is to avoid complications in service provision that may arise and negatively affect the brand image or credibility of the service provider. These issues are sensitive to trust and credibility of service providers in the tourism industry.

3. Action on Digital Marketing Ethics

Digital marketing can be operated ethically with business operators' awareness of the messages and illustrated pictures in that they be legal and fulfill customers' needs as promised. Honor, honesty, truth, and morality need to be expressed in marketing contents reflecting social responsibility and the principles of fair competition that are generally accepted in the tourism industry. And under the enforcement of the law, business operators are not able to display advertisements that cause misleading significance in essence regarding goods, services, performances or otherwise, or exaggerate their properties to mislead consumers. Distractions about the product or service may bring a detriment to professional dignity, because ultimately, a business or career essentially requires "ethics" and "social responsibility" in all created contents for dissemination to the public. Digital and creative advertising has its essence in professional ethics in accordance with the principles stated in the Act of Tour & Guide Business B.E. 2551 (2008) and Code of Conduct of Advertising Professions, Advertising Association of Thailand, B.E. 2554 (2014) (Office of the Council of State Law, 2008; Marketing Association of Thailand, 2022). These documents certainly guide tourism entrepreneurs to operate ethically in providing good quality products and services for all customers concerned in the sustainable direction of the tourism industry.

4. The Author

Cattleeya Rerkpichai, D.I.Ed., is a full-time lecturer in the Business Administration Program, the Faculty of Creative Digital Marketing at Bansomdet Chaopraya Rajabhat University (BSRU), Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interest is in the areas of Product Innovations and Digital Marketing.

5. References

Marketing Association of Thailand. (2022). Marketer Ethics at the 40th Anniversary of the Marketing Association of Thailand. (Online). <http://business.east.spu.ac.th/>, 25 May, 2022.

Office of the Council of State Law. (2008). Tour & Guide Business. (Online). https://www.mots.go.th/download/article/article_20150303145715.pdf, June 2, 2022.