

An Empirical Examination of the Relationship and Impact of Marketing Strategies on the Effectiveness of Dark Tourism Promotion

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ABSTRACT

Dark tourism has emerged as a distinct segment within the tourism industry, characterised by visitor interest in sites associated with death, tragedy, and historical suffering. In an increasingly competitive tourism environment, effective promotion of such destinations requires the strategic use of diverse marketing approaches. The present study empirically examines the relationship and predictive impact of selected marketing strategies on the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion. A quantitative, explanatory research design was adopted, and data were collected from 257 visitors to recognised dark tourism sites in Rajasthan through on site questionnaire administration. Digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, experiential marketing strategies, and promotional effectiveness were measured using structured Likert scale instruments. Pearson correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships between all three marketing strategies and the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion, with experiential marketing demonstrating the strongest association. Multiple linear regression analysis further indicated that digital, content, and experiential marketing strategies significantly predict promotional effectiveness, collectively explaining a substantial proportion of variance. The findings highlight the importance of experiential and content driven approaches alongside digital platforms in enhancing promotional outcomes. The study offers practical insights for destination marketers and contributes to a deeper understanding of marketing effectiveness within the dark tourism context

Keywords: Dark tourism, Marketing strategies, Promotional effectiveness, Tourism marketing

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations associated with death, tragedy, and historical suffering have increasingly attracted academic and managerial attention, giving rise to what is commonly referred to as dark tourism. Such destinations include battlefields, memorial sites, heritage locations, and abandoned settlements that evoke strong emotional and reflective responses among visitors. As interest in dark tourism continues to grow, destination managers face the challenge of promoting these sites in a manner that remains engaging while respecting their historical, cultural, and emotional sensitivity.

Marketing plays a central role in shaping awareness, perceptions, and visitor intentions within tourism contexts. Advancements in communication technologies have expanded the range of marketing strategies

available to destination managers, allowing them to reach potential visitors through multiple channels and formats. Within this environment, the effectiveness of tourism promotion increasingly depends on how marketing strategies are aligned with visitor expectations and the unique characteristics of the destination. Digital marketing strategies represent one such approach and broadly refer to the use of online platforms, websites, and digital communication channels to disseminate promotional messages and information to potential visitors. These strategies facilitate timely information sharing, interactive engagement, and broader visibility of tourism destinations. In the context of dark tourism, digital platforms may influence how destinations are discovered, interpreted, and evaluated by visitors prior to and during their visit.

Content marketing strategies constitute another important dimension of tourism promotion and focus on the development and dissemination of meaningful, informative, and narrative driven content. This form of marketing emphasises storytelling, historical narratives, and authenticity to communicate the significance of destinations. For dark tourism sites, content marketing may shape visitor understanding by providing context, background, and interpretative depth that support reflective engagement with the destination.

Experiential marketing strategies place emphasis on creating immersive, interactive, and emotionally engaging promotional experiences. Rather than relying solely on informational messages, experiential approaches seek to connect visitors with destinations through sensory and affective elements. Given the emotionally charged nature of dark tourism, experiential marketing strategies may play a particularly important role in influencing how promotional efforts are perceived.

Despite the growing relevance of these marketing strategies, empirical research examining their combined relationship with and impact on the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on visitor motivations and ethical considerations, offering comparatively less insight into how different marketing strategies operate together to shape promotional effectiveness. This gap is especially evident in emerging dark tourism destinations, where strategic marketing decisions may significantly influence destination image and visitor engagement.

1.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Christou et al., 2025) This review synthesises recent developments in digital tourism marketing, tracing the evolution from basic social media promotion to advanced data driven, personalised, and immersive digital engagement. The study highlights how digital platforms increasingly shape destination visibility, visitor interaction, and promotional reach. Its relevance to the present research lies in clarifying why digital marketing strategies are expected to influence perceptions of promotional effectiveness in tourism contexts.

(Phung et al., 2025) This study examines storytelling as a strategic content marketing practice within tourism branding, focusing on how narrative based communication on social media platforms enhances destination meaning and audience engagement. The findings indicate that carefully structured storytelling supports stronger brand resonance and promotional outcomes. This directly informs the current study by reinforcing the importance of content marketing strategies in shaping perceived promotional effectiveness.

(Zvanut & Zabukovec Baruca, 2025) Through a systematic literature review, this study analyses social media marketing strategy implementation in the tourism industry and identifies persistent gaps between strategic intent and execution. It emphasises the role of structured planning and performance measurement in determining promotional outcomes. The study supports the inclusion of digital marketing strategies as a measurable predictor of promotional effectiveness.

(Lin et al., 2024) Focusing on dark tourism specifically, this study explores how storytelling and flow experience contribute to meaning making and visitor interpretation. The findings suggest that narrative framing influences emotional engagement and perceived value of dark tourism encounters. This provides direct support for examining content marketing strategies within the dark tourism promotional context.

(Vlassi et al., 2024) This empirical evaluation of an online destination marketing campaign investigates how digital tools contribute to promotional effectiveness when integrated within broader strategic planning. The results demonstrate that coordinated digital marketing efforts can influence visitor awareness and decision processes. This reinforces the relevance of digital marketing strategies as determinants of promotional effectiveness.

(Zhang & Ramayah, 2024) This systematic review organises destination marketing storytelling research into thematic areas covering narrative structure, audience engagement, and outcome measurement. It highlights the fragmented nature of the field and the need for empirical studies that quantify storytelling effectiveness. The review strengthens the conceptual foundation for treating content marketing strategies as empirically testable constructs linked to promotional outcomes.

(Armutcu et al., 2023) This multi author study investigates the relationship between digital marketing, social media use, and tourist behaviour. The findings indicate that online marketing activities influence tourist attitudes and behavioural intentions. The study supports the assumption that digital marketing strategies are likely to demonstrate measurable associations with promotional effectiveness.

(Aziz et al., 2022) This experimental study analyses how visual and textual elements of destination advertising shape consumer responses. The results suggest that message design characteristics significantly influence promotional impact. Although not limited to dark tourism, the study provides evidence supporting the role of content marketing strategies in determining promotion effectiveness.

(Chen & Wu, 2022) Using survey data from an industrial heritage destination, this study examines experiential marketing and its relationship with visitor satisfaction and loyalty. The findings indicate that experiential elements play a key role in shaping visitor evaluations. This supports the inclusion of experiential marketing strategies as predictors of perceived promotional effectiveness.

(Chen et al., 2022) This study explores experiential marketing in cultural tourism cities and demonstrates that emotionally engaging experiences are associated with favourable post visit outcomes. The findings reinforce the relevance of experiential marketing strategies in influencing outcomes closely aligned with promotional effectiveness.

(Li et al., 2020) This foundational study conceptualises social media marketing strategy and validates a structured taxonomy distinguishing different strategic orientations. Although not tourism specific, the framework is widely applied and provides a theoretical basis for measuring digital and content marketing strategies as strategic drivers of promotional outcomes in tourism research.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Research Objective

To empirically examine the relationship and predictive impact of selected marketing strategies on the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion.

1.3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine the relationship and predictive impact of selected marketing strategies on the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion. This design was

considered appropriate as it enables systematic measurement of variables and statistical testing of relationships and impact in line with the stated research objectives.

1.3.3 Research Approach

A quantitative research approach was employed in the study. This approach was suitable because the research focused on measurable constructs and relied on numerical data derived from structured questionnaire responses. The use of correlation and regression techniques further justified the quantitative approach, as these methods require continuous data and allow objective assessment of relationships and predictive influence among variables. The research approach was distinct from the research design, as it guided the method of data collection and analysis rather than the overall study structure.

1.3.4 Population and Sample

The target population comprised individuals who had visited recognised dark tourism sites in Rajasthan, India. A non probability convenience sampling technique was used, as respondents were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate at the tourism sites during the data collection period. The final sample consisted of 257 respondents. This sample size was considered adequate for correlation and multiple regression analysis in behavioural and tourism research, as it allows reliable estimation of relationships and predictive effects among the study variables.

1.3.5 Research Variables

The independent variables in the study were digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, and experiential marketing strategies. Digital marketing strategies referred to online promotional activities such as social media presence, online advertising, and website communication related to dark tourism destinations. Content marketing strategies represented the use of informational, narrative, and visual content to promote dark tourism sites. Experiential marketing strategies referred to interactive, immersive, and emotionally engaging promotional elements associated with dark tourism experiences. The dependent variable was the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion, which reflected respondents’ perceptions of awareness, understanding, and overall promotional impact of dark tourism marketing efforts.

1.3.6 Instrument Development and Measurement

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed in accordance with the study objectives and hypotheses. Each construct was measured using five Likert scale statements, resulting in a total of twenty items.

*Table 1.1:
Opinion of the Respondent for the Construct - Digital Marketing Strategies*

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Social media platforms are an effective medium for promoting dark tourism destinations.	46	40	42	62	67
2	Online advertisements contribute to increased awareness of dark tourism sites.	43	56	45	59	54
3	The quality of destination websites influences interest in dark tourism destinations.	73	63	32	44	45

4	Search engine visibility enhances the discoverability of dark tourism destinations.	44	56	38	56	63
5	Digital campaigns communicate information about dark tourism destinations clearly.	34	34	41	55	93

Responses for digital marketing strategies revealed a general tendency towards agreement. Items related to social media promotion and clarity of digital campaigns recorded higher frequencies in the agree and strongly agree categories, indicating favourable perceptions of digital platforms as effective tools for promoting dark tourism destinations. However, responses related to website quality and online advertising displayed greater variation, suggesting moderate differences in respondent perceptions across specific digital elements.

Table 1.2:
Opinion of the Respondent for the Construct - Content marketing strategies

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6	Storytelling-based content enhances interest in dark tourism destinations.	32	36	41	61	87
7	Historical narratives improve understanding of dark tourism sites.	24	34	35	60	104
8	Visual content increases engagement with dark tourism promotional materials.	69	53	35	48	52
9	Informative content enhances interest in visiting dark tourism destinations.	55	59	40	48	55
10	Authentic content strengthens the credibility of dark tourism promotion.	40	38	54	53	72

Findings for content marketing strategies indicated relatively high levels of agreement for items related to storytelling, historical narratives, and authenticity. Respondents expressed particularly strong agreement with statements emphasising the role of historical narratives and credible content, highlighting the perceived importance of meaningful and informative content in dark tourism promotion. Visual content and informative materials showed balanced responses, indicating moderate but positive engagement.

Table 1.3:
Opinion of the Respondent for the Construct - Experiential marketing strategies

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
11	Interactive promotional experiences enhance interest in dark tourism destinations.	20	37	35	53	112
12	Experiential elements shape perceptions of dark tourism destinations.	49	33	34	53	88

13	Emotional engagement contributes to positive evaluation of dark tourism promotion.	62	52	37	40	66
14	Immersive experiences increase the memorability of dark tourism visits.	81	49	41	35	51
15	Experiential marketing elements enhance satisfaction with dark tourism experiences.	39	53	31	40	94

Likert scale analysis of experiential marketing strategies revealed strong agreement patterns for items associated with interactive experiences and emotional engagement. Statements related to immersive experiences and satisfaction with experiential elements attracted high frequencies in the strongly agree category, underscoring the importance of experiential dimensions in shaping positive promotional perceptions. Some variation was observed in responses related to memorability, indicating that experiential impact may differ across individuals.

Table 1.4:
Opinion of the Respondent for the Construct - Effectiveness of Dark Tourism Promotion

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
16	Promotional activities increase awareness of dark tourism destinations.	49	42	35	52	79
17	Promotional efforts influence willingness to visit dark tourism sites.	41	47	24	55	90
18	Marketing communication shapes favourable perceptions of dark tourism destinations.	39	49	34	46	89
19	Promotional strategies enhance understanding of the value of dark tourism destinations.	37	42	36	47	95
20	Overall promotional efforts for dark tourism destinations are perceived as effective.	41	35	35	54	92

Responses for the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion indicated overall positive perceptions. Items measuring awareness, willingness to visit, and perceived effectiveness of promotional efforts showed higher concentrations of agreement and strong agreement, suggesting that respondents generally perceived dark tourism promotion to be effective across the examined dimensions.

1.3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through on site administration of the questionnaire at selected dark tourism locations in Rajasthan, namely Jauhar of Rajasthan, Haldighati, Longewala, Bhangarh Fort, and Kuldhara Village. The researcher personally approached visitors at these sites and requested their participation.

Respondents completed the questionnaire at the locations during the researcher’s visits. This approach ensured that data were obtained from individuals with direct and recent experience of dark tourism sites.

1.3.8 Reliability of the Instrument

Table 1.5: Reliability Testing

Construct	N of items	Cronbach Alpha
Digital Marketing Strategies	5	0.802
Content Marketing Strategies	5	0.838
Experiential Marketing Strategies	5	0.86
Effectiveness of Dark Tourism Promotion	5	0.852

The internal consistency of the measurement instrument was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. Reliability analysis was conducted separately for each construct. The obtained Cronbach’s alpha values exceeded accepted threshold levels, indicating satisfactory internal consistency among the items measuring digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, experiential marketing strategies, and effectiveness of dark tourism promotion.

1.3.9 Statistical Tools and Techniques

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data in terms of mean and standard deviation. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between marketing strategies and the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion in line with the first hypothesis. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to assess the predictive impact of digital, content, and experiential marketing strategies on promotional effectiveness, corresponding to the second hypothesis. All statistical analyses were conducted at a 5 per cent level of significance to ensure consistency with accepted practices in social science research.

1.4 HYPOTHESES

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, experiential marketing strategies, and the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion.

For the purpose of testing the above-mentioned hypothesis, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between selected marketing strategies and the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion, and it revealed the following results

Table 1.6: Correlations

		Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Effectiveness of Dark Tourism Promotion (Composite Mean Score)	Digital Marketing Strategies (Composite Mean Score)	.362	.000	257
	Content Marketing Strategies (Composite Mean Score)	.460	.000	257
	Experiential Marketing Strategies (Composite Mean Score)	.479	.000	257
	Effectiveness of Dark Tourism Promotion (Composite Mean Score)	1		257

The results indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between digital marketing strategies and the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion ($r = 0.362, p < .001$). This suggests that increased use of

digital marketing strategies is associated with improved promotional effectiveness of dark tourism destinations.

Content marketing strategies also demonstrated a significant positive correlation with the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion ($r = 0.460, p < .001$), indicating that informative, narrative-driven, and authentic content contributes substantially to enhancing promotional outcomes.

Experiential marketing strategies showed the strongest positive relationship with the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion ($r = 0.479, p < .001$), highlighting the importance of immersive and emotionally engaging promotional approaches in influencing audience perception and interest.

The magnitude and significance of these correlations indicate that all three marketing strategies play an important role in enhancing the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion.

Since the p-values for all relationships are less than .001, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected.

The findings confirm that digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, and experiential marketing strategies are significantly and positively related to the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion. Among the strategies examined, experiential marketing exhibits the strongest association, followed by content marketing and digital marketing strategies.

H_{02} : Digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, and experiential marketing strategies do not have a significant predictive impact on the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion.

For the purpose of testing the above mentioned hypothesis, Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to assess the predictive impact of digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, and experiential marketing strategies on the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion.

Table 1.7: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df	p
0.61	0.37	0.36	49.44	3	<.001

The overall regression model was found to be statistically significant, $F(3, 253) = 49.44, p < .001$, indicating that the set of marketing strategies significantly predicts the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion. The model explained 37% of the variance in promotional effectiveness.

Table 1.8: Coefficient

Model	Unstan dard. Coef. B	Standar d. Coef. Beta	Std. Error	t	p
Constant	0.60		0.24	2.46	.014
Digital Marketing Strategies (Composite Mean Score)	0.22	0.20	0.06	3.72	<.001
Content Marketing Strategies (Composite Mean Score)	0.30	0.29	0.06	5.23	<.001
Experiential Marketing Strategies (Composite Mean Score)	0.35	0.35	0.05	6.55	<.001

<i>Effectiveness of Dark Tourism Promotion</i>	<i>= 0.60</i>	<i>+ 0.22</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>0.30</i>	<i>+ 0.35</i>
		<i>Digital Marketing Strategies</i>	<i>Content Marketing Strategies</i>		<i>Experiential Marketing Strategies</i>

As the overall model and all predictor variables were statistically significant at $p < .001$, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected.

The findings establish that digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, and experiential marketing strategies significantly predict the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion. Experiential marketing strategies exert the strongest predictive influence, followed by content marketing and digital marketing strategies, underscoring the critical role of immersive and experience-driven marketing approaches in promoting dark tourism destinations

1.5 OVERALL CONCLUSION

The study provides empirical evidence that digital marketing strategies, content marketing strategies, and experiential marketing strategies are significantly related to and predictive of the effectiveness of dark tourism promotion. Both hypotheses were rejected based on statistically significant correlation and regression results. Among the strategies examined, experiential marketing emerged as the most influential predictor, followed by content marketing and digital marketing strategies. These findings collectively demonstrate the importance of adopting a multi-dimensional marketing approach to enhance the perceived effectiveness of dark tourism promotion.

1.6 SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions were derived from the findings of the present study

1. Destination managers may consider placing greater emphasis on experiential elements when designing promotional strategies for dark tourism sites, given their stronger association with perceived promotional effectiveness.
2. Marketing practitioners could explore ways to incorporate emotionally engaging and immersive features within promotional communication to align with visitor perceptions identified in the study.
3. Content development efforts may focus on authentic storytelling and historical narratives, as content marketing strategies demonstrated a meaningful relationship with promotional effectiveness.
4. Tourism marketers might consider strengthening the informational depth and credibility of promotional materials to support visitor understanding of dark tourism destinations.
5. Digital marketing platforms can be utilised as supportive channels to disseminate experiential and content driven messages more effectively.
6. Consistency across digital communication channels may help reinforce promotional messaging perceived by visitors.
7. Destination websites could be reviewed periodically to ensure clarity, usability, and alignment with the experiential themes highlighted in promotional strategies.
8. Interactive digital content may be considered as a means of enhancing visitor engagement with promotional material.
9. Visual elements that complement historical and experiential narratives might support positive perceptions of dark tourism promotion.

10. Promotional campaigns may benefit from aligning emotional tone with the sensitive and reflective nature of dark tourism sites.
11. Destination managers could consider visitor feedback mechanisms to better understand how promotional strategies are perceived.
12. Training initiatives for tourism marketers may emphasise the role of experiential and narrative based promotion in dark tourism contexts.
13. Marketing strategies may be periodically evaluated to assess their alignment with visitor expectations identified in the study.
14. Collaborative efforts between site managers and marketing teams could help ensure promotional strategies remain contextually appropriate.
15. Future promotional planning may take into account the relative contribution of different marketing strategies as indicated by the study findings.

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