

The Impact of Digital Marketing and Digital Public Relations on Empowering Tourism in Sri Lanka

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Tourism is a key component of Sri Lankan economy, contributing to foreign exchange earnings, employment, and cultural exchange. Digital marketing uses digital channels and technologies to promote brands while Digital Public Relations (DPR) builds its brand awareness, reputation, and goodwill using online platforms. Both involve creating a positive impact digitally through increasing reach, engagement, and reputation. It supports promotion of tourism destinations and traveler engagement. In recent years, Sri Lankan tourism has used Digital Marketing and DPR as a high usage of mobile penetration, internet, and social media usage in the country. The research examines how Digital Marketing and DPR influence the empowerment of the tourism sector in Sri Lanka. Research objectives are to evaluate the impact of digital marketing strategies on empowering Sri Lanka's tourism, to examine the role of DPR in enhancing Sri Lanka's tourism, and to identify the barriers of Digital Marketing and DPR implementation in Sri Lanka's tourism. The research was qualitative; under the content analysis, the study analyzed a range of online resources like websites, social media pages, news articles, annual reports, etc. Preliminary findings indicated that Digital Marketing initiatives, such as targeted social media campaigns and influencer marketing, had significantly increased global visibility of Sri Lanka's tourism offerings. DPR efforts had played a crucial role in reputation management and crisis management, particularly in the Covid-19 impact, Easter attack, and economic crisis in Sri Lanka. The study highlights implementation barriers in Digital Marketing and DPR, including digital literacy gaps among rural tourism providers and lack of communication infrastructure. Conducting training programs for small and medium tourism enterprises, developing internet infrastructure, digital literacy awareness are the actionable recommendations for barriers to implementation. The research outlines how developing tourism economies can leverage Digital Marketing and DPR not merely as promotional tools but as mechanisms for empowering the tourism sector in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Digital marketing; Digital public relations; Empowering tourism; Social media; Sri Lankan tourism*