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DIGITAL MARKETING ROLES IN CREATING AWARENESS IN PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES

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Abstract:

Digital marketing is now an important tool for preserving and promoting cultural heritage sites. It helps increase global visibility and engagement using social media, content marketing and search engine optimization. However, cultural heritage sites frequently struggle to attract visitors, generate revenue, and adapt to modern management practices. Digital marketing has risen to the forefront of tourism promotion, while content marketing, social media and search engine optimization are critical for cultural heritage site preservation. Despite the increasing importance of digital platforms in modern communications, there remains a gap in knowledge regarding how these tools can be optimally utilized to raise awareness among visitors and foster a sense of responsibility towards cultural heritage preservation. This research aims to shed light on digital marketing roles in creating awareness in preserving cultural heritage sites in the context of content marketing, social media and search engine optimization. This study was

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conducted among Shah Alam and Kuala Lumpur population using online questionnaires. 385 students responded to the questionnaire. A quantitative approach is used for this research by distributing online questionnaires to collect data from respondents. The findings showed that there are significant relationships between content marketing, social media and search engine optimization in creating awareness in preservation of cultural heritage sites. These findings are hoped to help all the generations to preserve cultural heritage sites.

Keyword:

Cultural Heritage Sites, Preservation in Tourism, Search Engine Optimisation, Social Media, Tourism Digital Marketing



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Introduction

Cultural heritage sites are like windows to the past, reminding us of the traditions, values and achievements of old civilisations. However, in today's face paced digital world, these sites are facing huge challenges when it comes to staying relevant and visible. In the Malaysian context, heritage organisations are facing challenges with visitor engagements and attracting younger audiences who are increasingly drawn to digital platforms and online content (Ahmad & Idris, 2024). In addition to these, heritage institutions are limited in their digital adoption and technological readiness, which further makes it more challenging in their ability to effectively promote cultural assets and engage wider audiences (Fauzi et al., 2022).

This is a real concern, because if we do not find the solutions to make our cultural heritage sites more appealing and accessible, we risk losing touch with our past and the things that makes who we are. So, what can we do to change this? How can we use digital tools to bring the cultural heritage sites more attractive especially to the younger people. These are important concerns that needs attention if we are to preserve the cultural heritage sites for the future generations.

Using digital marketing is a great way to improve how we communicate and get people involved. We have seen that social media and online platforms can really affect how people travel, survey for information as well as choosing a destination for a vacation. Study by Ahmad and Idris in 2024, reveals that social media plays a big role in shaping travel behaviour. Furthermore, telling stories and using content made by users can help people feel more connected to cultural heritages sites (Chang et al., 2025; Sukiman et al.,2023).

Digital marketing can be the most effective tool in promoting cultural heritage and increasing audience engagement. This is due to so far, no exact research has been found that indicates the usefulness of digital marketing in creating awareness towards cultural heritage sites. Also, when the researchers look at heritage sites in Malaysia, no innovative digital strategies or interactive contents that was used to attract more people towards these sites. These make it even harder for the preservation effort to take place too since visitors' arrival to a site ensures maintenance of a place.

Previous studies also lack empirical research that differentiates the effects of specific digital marketing strategies, namely content marketing, social media and search engine optimisation (SEO) on awareness outcomes in the Malaysian context. Generally, the reviews found on social medias as well as contents posted by visitors to places are known to impact tourist destinations, but their specific roles in shaping awareness are yet to be researched on (Morrison et al., 2023). In an effort to fill this gap, the researchers this study looks at the role of digital marketing in creating awareness for the preservation of cultural heritage sites particularly aims to investigate the direct relationship between content marketing (H1), social media (H2) and search engine optimisation (SEO) (H3), and awareness in preserving cultural heritage sites.

Literature Review

Heritage places are important to sustain as the sites act as a storybook for the younger generation in letting them know their past. The existence of these sites too act as a promotional tool for the tourism industry as heritage tourism is a category of tourism in which tourist make a visit to a country. In other words, it also helps to boost the economics of a country which in return provides better lifestyle to the local community. However, despite having its benefits, these sites do face challenges such as urban development and environmental degradation that often leads to inadequate preservation efforts. Due to these, many efforts must be taken in preserving these sites. Academicians strongly believe that through direct community engagement, preservation efforts are more effective, because this creates the feeling of ownership, responsibility and pride in cultural identity.

Creating Awareness in Preserving Cultural Heritage Sites

Awareness act as a bridge between community involvement and effective preservation. Mohamad et al. (2021) define awareness as the ability of a person to realise on the importance of maintaining heritage sites as well as the responsibility of a person plays in ensuring this. Hu et al. (2022) argue to better ensure the heritage sites are preserved sustainably, local community have to be given the opportunity to manage the sites, while Nicolaides (2020) stresses that economic, cultural and environmental benefits need to be balanced in preserving a heritage sites. Alves et al. (2024) demonstrate that a site managed by a local community further encourages environmentally friendly behaviours and manages the site with greater sense of responsibility. The involvement of local communities in these awareness campaigns, mobilise communities, increase recognition of heritage significance and instil responsibility of conservation as a team.

Recent studies strengthen this perspective. Firew (2025) shows that heritage conservation initiatives help to instil the sense of belonging and pride among the local communities. Roosevelt Vanderbilt (2025) adds that awareness initiatives works better when local communities are accepted as a part of management team in a preservation effort. This in future

enhances the spirit of volunteerism among them. Collectively, these findings demonstrated that community involvement and awareness are parallelly enhancing drivers of heritage preservation which provides stronger foundation for integrating digital marketing strategies.

Content Marketing

The content in a website plays a crucial role in shaping tourist understanding and see a site as well as in sustaining heritage destinations. Zhang et al. (2019) highlight that tourists' behaviours are shaped by what they imagine in their mind about a site, while Desai (2019) emphasizes the content in a web and how it is being delivered plays a part in raising awareness and increasing visitors' numbers to a site. Li et al. (2020) further demonstrate that community-based strategies embedded in digital platforms strengthen the connection between socioeconomic growth, urban planning, and cultural heritage management. The latest studies further elaborate on this view: Anevlavis et al. (2025) argue that including intangible cultural heritage as part of marketing supports the originality and identity of a culture, whereby Ibrahim (2022) points out that the inclusiveness of variety digital marketing channels opens up passage to heritage sites to better endure relationships with the locals and visitors, as different generations prefers different digital methods. As a result, besides promoting awareness, reinforcement of cultural identity and long-term sustainability are also guaranteed. Thus, supporting the formulation of following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between content marketing and creating awareness in preserving cultural heritage sites.

Social Media

The existence of social media nowadays enhances two-way communication whereby transforming the way marketing is done in tourism industry. It is more towards interactive dialogue and immediate feedback. Kilipiri et al. (2023) stated that industry now have shifted towards influencer marketing to effectively promote sustainable tourism destinations, while Samarakoon et al. (2023) highlight, new media 's nature in encouraging voluntary participation in giving out feedback rather than previously practised one-way communication. Sharma (2021) identifies Facebook, Instagram, and review platforms such as TripAdvisor as highly effective tools for tourism promotion. Besides acting as promotional tool, Kasemsarn and Nickpour (2025) debated, the stories and postings shared in the social media tends to create emotional connections between visitors and heritage sites, which indirectly motivates others for a visit besides ensuring sustainability. Zins and Adamu (2024) further explained, a heritage site with a story shared in a social media creates better image towards the destination and positively stir engagements among visitors. Therefore, leading to the following hypothesis to be formulated:

H2: There is a significant relationship between social media and creating awareness in preserving cultural heritage sites.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

Search engine optimization (SEO) is another crucial strategy of a digital marketing strategy that many may have not realised on the effectiveness, but it very much contributes towards increasing the visibility of a heritage in the public eye which also later encourages engagement. Lewandowski and Schultheiß (2022) noted that as more people are aware on the existence of this SEO practices, the more online discovery of a site could be made. Mazzoli (2020)

emphasizes, in the practice of SEO, optimising the keywords and the content of a web further brings closer the public towards a search results. Kalappan and Tham (2025) highlight the role of promotional tools in digital media for strengthening brand resilience, suggesting that SEO can be adapted to heritage contexts to attract prospective visitors. By further improving and improvising the usage of relevant keyword and the content, the visibility of heritage sites at search rankings can be increased. This later can bring in a greater number of searches of the sites, which will also educate the public on the site, which in return can raise awareness in preserving these sites. Therefore, indirectly leading to the formulation of this hypothesis:

H3: There is a significant relationship between search engine optimization and creating awareness in preserving cultural heritage sites.

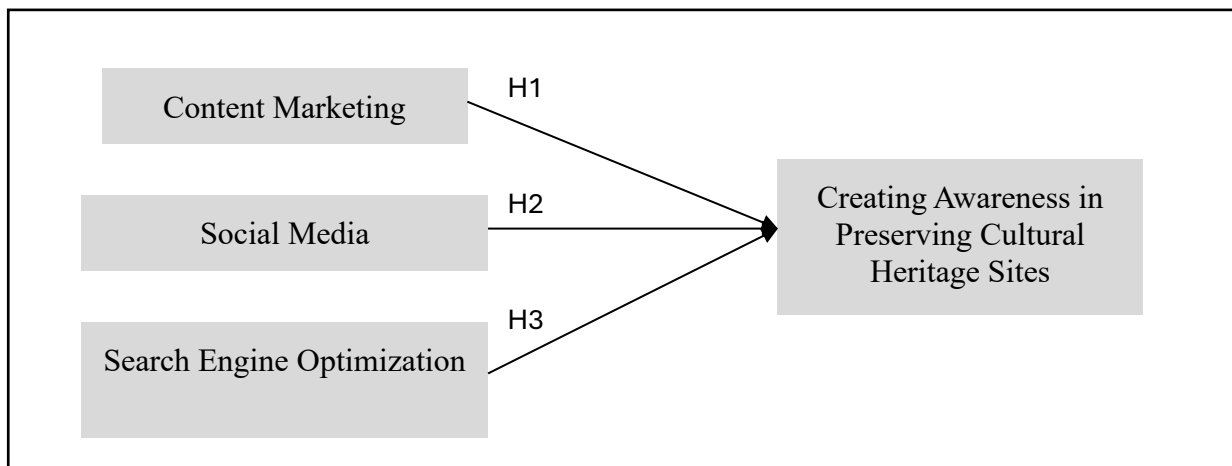


Figure 1: Framework

Methodology

This study used a quantitative research approach to investigate the relationship between the independent variables namely, content marketing, social media and SEO with the dependent variable, awareness in the preservation of cultural heritage sites. The population of this study are the residents of Kuala Lumpur and Shah Alam who are also actively involved in the usage of digital platforms. Sample size of 385 respondents are selected according to the table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The people were picked randomly to take part in this study. A special questionnaire was used to collect information, which was divided into five parts; demographic features, how they felt about content marketing, their use of social media in seeking information towards cultural heritage sites, what do they know about SEO and how aware are they of matters related to cultural heritage sites. A simple ratings system known as Likert Scale was used, whereby the scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to strongly agree (5). To ensure reliability of these questions to this study, a pilot test with 30 respondents were done in advance. the actual data collected was then run through SPSS. To get a sense of demographic information, descriptive statistics was used. Researcher also wanted to see how different variables were related to each other, so Pearson Correlation analysis was also done.

Table 1: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Findings	P Value	Strength	Result
H1: There is a significant relationship between content marketing and creating awareness in preserving cultural heritage sites.	.647	<.001	Moderate	Accepted
H2: There is a significant relationship between social media and creating awareness in preserving cultural heritage sites.	.735	<.001	Strong	Accepted
H3: There is a significant relationship between search engine optimization and creating awareness in preserving cultural heritage sites.	.622	<.001	Moderate	Accepted

From the table above, findings indicate all the independent variables respond positively towards the dependent variable. Therefore, all three hypotheses, H1, H2 and H3 are supported.

Discussion

From this study, researchers found that digital marketing strategies do play significant role in creating awareness among the public in the preservation of cultural heritage sites. The biggest contributor of this awareness from this study shows social media. Interactivity among users that makes the social media a user-content platform becomes an eye opening in engaging audiences, especially the younger generations as these younger generations are more prone into using social medias nowadays. Social medias too are one of the main tools of communicator among the younger generations, which does rely on the fact that social media does contribute to creating awareness in the preservation of cultural heritage sites.

Next is followed by content marketing in significantly boosting awareness. Structured, informative and valuable content makes the audience to be interested in getting to know more about a site. This helps to provide better understanding which in return instil the nature of appreciating of these cultural heritage sites through storytelling and genuine narrations. However, the researchers found that the effectiveness of this content marketing depends on the quality as well as relevance of the content offered. Therefore, it is the utmost importance that only relevant, informational, educational contents are to be posted to encourage this awareness.

Finally, SEO plays an equally important role in creating awareness in preservation of cultural heritage sites. Although the least result achieved compared to all the other two independent variables, SEO makes an important impression in creating a channel for visibility and

accessibility of a site. These visibility and accessibility ensure that users can find relevant content in this big book of knowledge known as internet. The existence of SEO also ensures the contents reaches the audiences. As the signboards on the roads gave clear visibility for the drivers on the directions they are heading into on a road so does SEO opens this visibility channels which can better enhance audience engagements with the cultural heritage sites.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings show digital marketing strategies do create awareness in several ways. From the discussions, the researchers found social media boosts engagement, content marketing builds knowledge, and SEO improves visibility. This indicate that a combined approach is essential for effective cultural heritage promotion.

This study adds to another digital marketing theory collection through its focus on awareness on preservation of cultural heritage sites. The researchers hoped that this study will be benefited by the heritage site managers, tourism agencies, policy makers and digital marketers in helping them to develop more effective strategies in future as to better increase the visibility of heritage sites to the public, which leads to the increase in visitors' numbers at these sites, resulting in the preservation of these sites especially the younger generations. Cultural heritage which are the recollections of the past, are to be remained in the industry forever as this heritage portrays the identities of a community. Therefore, the younger generations who are also known as the future leaders are responsible in prevention of extinction of these sites. Instilling the sense of responsibility in them, ensures the long-term sustainability of these cultural heritage sites.

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