การประเมินช่องว่างทางทักษะของพนักงานฝ่ายขายและการตลาดของธุรกิจโรงแรมในจังหวัดภูเก็ต ประเทศไทย

ศรีประภา ง่วนสน[1*] *และ ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร.ตติยาพร จารุมณีรัตน์*[2]

[1*] คณะการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตภูเก็ต อีเมล mooksriprapha@hotmail.com

[2] คณะการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตภูเก็ต อีเมล tatiyaporn.j@Phuket.psu.ac.th

The Skill Gap Assessment of Sales and Marketing Personnel in Hotel Business, Phuket, Thailand

Sriprapha Nguanson[1*] and Asst. Prof. Tatiyaporn Jarumaneerat, Ph.D. [2]

[1*] Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus, E-mail: mooksriprapha@hotmail.com

[2] Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus, E-mail: tatiyaporn.j@Phuket.psu.ac.th

บทคัดย่อ

ปัจจุบันเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศมีบทบาทต่อรูปแบบการทำการขายและการตลาดมากขึ้นส่งผลให้อาชีพและทักษะด้านการตลาดออนไลน์เป็นที่ต้องการของธุรกิจต่างๆ เพราะฉะนั้นเพื่อประเมินว่าพนักงานขายและการตลาดของธุรกิจโรงแรมมีช่องว่างทางทักษะการขายและการตลาดออนไลน์หรือไม่ในการดำเนินธุรกิจในยุคดิจิทัลจึงมีเป็นเหตุสำคัญอันนำมาซึ่งการศึกษานี้ โดยการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณจากกลุ่มตัวอย่าง จำนวน 210 คน ด้วยวิธีการสุ่มแบบเจาะจง หลักสถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลได้แก่ สถิติพรรณนาและสถิติอ้างอิง paired sample T-test จากผลการศึกษาพบว่า ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามมีช่องว่างทางทักษะ 34 ทักษะ จากทั้งหมด 39 ทักษะ ซึ่งทักษะการขายและการตลาดออนไลน์มีระดับความสำคัญในการปฏิบัติงานในอนาคตแตกต่างจากระดับความสามารถในปัจจุบันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ จึงทำให้เกิดช่องว่างของทักษะของพนักงานที่ควรได้รับการพัฒนา โดยมีทักษะด้าน SEM (Search Engine Marketing) เป็นทักษะที่มีช่องว่างมากที่สุด จากการสรุปผลชี้ให้เห็นว่าบุคลากรงานขายและการตลาดของธุรกิจโรงแรมควรได้รับการพัฒนาเพื่อยกระดับศักยภาพในการแข่งขันในยุคเศรษฐกิจดิจิทัล

Abstract

Nowadays, information and communication technology (ICT) plays a significant role and has brought about changes in sales and marketing practices, resulting in a heightened demand for digital marketing skills and professionals across all sectors of business. Consequently, it becomes crucial to assess whether there exists a gap in sales and digital marketing skills among hotel sales and marketing personnel, in response to the evolving business landscape. The study employed a quantitative methodology, utilizing a purposive sampling technique. A total of 210 samples were collected, and the data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, including the application of a paired sample T-test. The findings revealed that out of the 39 skill gaps examined, 34 exhibited statistically significant differences between the currently acquired skill levels and the anticipated future skill requirements. Notably, the largest skill gap was observed in the domain of search engine marketing (SEM). As a result, the study indicated that hotel sales and marketing personnel require reskilling and upskilling initiatives to obtain a competitive advantage in the hotel industry within the context of the digital economy.

* Corresponding author: Sriprapha Nguanson

 E-mail address: mooksriprapha@hotmail.com

1. Introduction

The hospitality and tourism sector in the Kingdom of Thailand holds significant importance as a key contributor to the nation's overall economy, supporting over 7 million jobs across various employment sectors (Surawattananon et al., 2021). Phuket, being a renowned tourist destination, relies heavily on its hotel sector as a primary driver of its economy. Conventionally, hotels sell their rooms and services through a central reservation system and phone calls. However, the development of information technology has ushered in new avenues for marketing their products and services, including guests purchasing hotel rooms through the hotel's official website, social media platforms, or online travel agencies (OTAs) (UNWTO, 2021). Thus, sales and digital marketing skills are required for hotel businesses to effectively compete in the digital economy.

The sales skill set, as coined by Rentz et al. (2002), encompasses interpersonal skills, salesmanship skills, and technical skills. Previous studies have examined sales skills within various industries, such as the automobile business (Kim & Jeon, 2019; Amor, 2019) creative industry (Asyhari & Yuwalliatin, 2020), pharmacy (Udayana, Farida, & Ardyan, 2019), and the beauty industry (Islam et al., 2016). However, information and technologies have reinforced the digital economy, digital marketing has become integral to business operations. Thus, digital marketing expertise is required across all industries, and its absence can be damaging (Day, 2011). Digital marketing capabilities are also studied by numerous businesses. Royle and Laing (2014) created a digital marketer model to solve the communication industry's digital marketing skills gap. Di Gregorio, Maggioni, Mauri, and Mazzucchelli (2019) also claimed that marketing graduates require knowledge of digital and technical marketing tools for employment. Additionally, Chachamonm, Peterm, and Davorin (2019) studied the new skill needed among communicators in the public relations industry with semi-structure interview and found out that search engine optimization (SEO) being identified as one of weak area. In the hotel industry, digital marketing strategies include search engine marketing (Mariia, 2017), search engine optimization, social media management (Parvez et al, 2018), and other digital channels such as online travel agencies (OTAs) (Tse, 2013). However, a recent study by Qian et al. (2022) revealed that one of the reasons for the absence of IT and digital marketing professionals in the hospitality industry is outdated course materials in hospitality education. Moreover, World Economic Forum (2020) stated that digital marketing professionals is in high demand across all sectors as well as Elhaijar (2021) revealed that recruiters seek professionals proficient in utilizing marketing standard tools such as Google Analytics.

As previously stated, the sales and digital marketing were studied in numerous fields however, the author found out that there is a notable lack of research addressing the sales and digital marketing skill gap within the hotel sector. Therefore, this study aims to shed light on this by examining the required sales and digital marketing skill sets within the hotel industry. The primary objective of this research was to assess whether there is a skill gap in sales and digital marketing among hotel sales and marketing personnel in response to the evolving business environment. The findings of this study will serve to guide prioritization efforts for reskilling and upskilling initiatives among workers, thereby ensuring their preparedness for the digital economy.

2. Literature review

2.1 Sales skill sets

Rentz et al. (2002) provided a definition of sales skills that encompasses three key components: interpersonal skills, salesmanship skills, and technical skills. Interpersonal skills refer to how a salesperson manages and deals with problems with clients (Rentz et al, 2002). According to Wachner, Plouffe, and Grégoire (2019), interpersonal skills include

verbal and nonverbal communication. Moreover, interpersonal skill is the ability to interact, understand, and effectively communicate with individuals or groups (Popescu et al., 2020). In addition, Rajan (2014) identified a positive correlation between the possession of interpersonal skills by sales forces and their overall effectiveness. Salesmanship skill pertains to the knowledge and techniques employed by salespersons to facilitate successful sales closures (Rentz et al, 2002). It is crucial to the effectiveness of salespeople, as it demonstrates a positive association with sales force performance (Futrell, 2006). Moreover, Rajan's (2014) study on sales effectiveness in the Indian pharmaceutical industry found that adaptability, negotiation skills, consultative skills, and communication styles – components falling under the umbrella of salesmanship skills - influence the performance of salespeople in the pharmaceutical industry and the Indian context. However, in this study focusing on the service business sector where human interaction in business processes is required more than in other types of business contexts, the author adopted only interpersonal and salesmanship skills to measure the skill gap among professionals in the hotel industry because these two skills are essential for driving sales closure and enhancing sales performance in a service business context.

2.2 Application of digital marketing skills in the hotel industry

Digital marketing, as defined by Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwich (2016), refers to the achievement of marketing objectives through the utilization of digital technologies and media. WSI (2013) defined digital marketing as a practice to promote products and services in a timely, customer-centric, and cost-effective manner, leveraging data-driven distribution channels to reach the target market. In the context of the hotel industry, search engine optimization involves employing search engine techniques to enhance the visibility of hotel websites, aiming to secure higher rankings (Pete & Lanz, 2014). Search engine marketing refers to the process whereby hotels gain leads by purchasing advertisements on search engine platforms. Hotels are increasingly utilizing social media to communicate with their potential customers (Hashim & Fadhil, 2017). Abuhashesh et al. (2019) conducted a study revealing that Facebook exerts the most significant influence on hotel guests' decision to stay in Jordan. Additionally, for an effective online presence on social media platforms, hotel marketers need to use existing data to tailor specific campaigns that align with their target audiences and chosen social channels (Lanz, 2020). In attention, interest, desire, and action are the four segments of the lead funnels in digital marketing through raising awareness, generating interest, and cultivating desire and motivation, consumers are educated about a company's products and services. Ultimately, the target clients are prompted to take action, such as making a purchase (Gupta & Nimkar, 2020). Additionally, Lanz & Carmichael (2020) suggested that independent hotels can benefit from email marketing by incorporating dynamic content personalization, which can be achieved by utilizing data collected from potential guests' website usage. Given the amount of data in the hotel industry, it is imperative for a hotel's digital marketing plan to incorporate data analysis and review. Kantanantha and Awichanirost (2022) revealed that tour operators who use their websites as their primary communication channel with consumers can boost online bookings by utilizing data from Google Analytics. Duverger (2013) emphasized the importance of hotel management giving due consideration to Online Travel Agents (OTAs), as research indicates that consumers typically browse through seven to eight OTA websites before making a reservation. Furthermore, user-generated content on OTAs, where hotel marketers also manage the hotel's reviews and reputation, significantly influences hotel bookings. In addition, the performance of a hotel is positively correlated with the number of reviews discovered by the consumer (Viglia et al., 2016). In order to evaluate the digital marketing skill set, the author has adapted digital marketing strategies used in the hotel industry from previously published studies and incorporated them into a research instrument study item that encompasses search engine

optimization, search engine marketing, social media management, lead generation, data review, and other related digital channels.

2.3 Skill gap

The skill gap is the difference between the skills that companies seek in their employees and the skills possessed by individuals (Levesque, 2019). Previous studies have examined the skill gap in numerous fields, including the digital marketing skill gap in the communication industry (Royle & Laing, 2014; Ghotbifar et al., 2017), the public relations (PR) industry (Chachamon et al., 2019), and the fashion industry (Rathnayaka, 2018). Especially in developing nations where human capital is a key driver of development and growth in the economy, it is essential to investigate the skill gap among the workforces. Adepoju et al. (2021) evaluated the skill gap of Nigerian construction industry employees and determined that human machine communication, data analytics, and cyber security are the identified high skill gaps. In addition, Majunath, Shravan, and Dechakka (2019) found that the organization should initiate a program to enhance workforce skill because it influences employee performance. Furthermore, the hospitality industry relies more on employee skills and knowledge to drive the company's success, as demonstrated by Omar et al.'s (2020) correlation between training provided and service performance. In order to enhance service performance and boost Phuket's economy as a whole, it is essential to investigate skill gaps in the hotel industry's workforce.

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and sampling

The target population for this study comprised sales and marketing personnel working in the hotel industry in Phuket, Thailand. Considering the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of hotels operating during the pandemic was limited to those certified by the Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration (SHA hotel). To access the population, the database of SHA hotel was utilized (Thailandsha.com, 2021) and 443 hotels were contained in the database, which is considered a given population. The author presumed that the sales and marketing personnel of a single hotel represented a single hotel operation. In order to determine the reliable sample size, the study utilized the Taro Yamane formula with a 95% level of confidence (Yamane, 1973) with the shown formular below:

$$n = N/(1+N(e)2)$$

n signifies the sample size

N signifies the population under study

e signifies the margin error

In this study: $n = 443/(1+443(0.05)2)$

                        $n = 210$

Therefore, 210 samples were required. In addition, purposive sampling was employed to selectively choose personnel exclusively from the hotel industry in Phuket who held sales and marketing responsibilities, as they are the personnel who acquired the sales and digital marketing skills to perform their task, which enables them to assess their skill level and complete the questionnaire.

3.2 Research instrument design, reliability, and validity

The study employed a self-administered questionnaire consisting of four main sections: demographic information, hotel business characteristics, the current level of acquired sales and digital marketing skill set, and the importance level

of the required skill set possessed by the respondents. To rate the current level of acquired sales and digital marketing skill set, a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was utilized. The importance level of the required skill set was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (very low important) to 5 (most important). Additionally, to ensure the validity of the instrument, item objective congruence was employed, involving the feedback of three professors from the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism. Minor adjustments were made to improve the language and the necessary revisions were incorporated accordingly. To assess the reliability of the research instrument, Cronbach's alpha was utilized. A total of 11 hotel sales and marketing professionals were invited to complete the questionnaire. The results revealed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all items exceeded 0.90, indicating that the questionnaire served as an appropriate instrument (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011).

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The data collection took place from October to December 2021 utilizing the online platform Google Forms as it is given the convenience and cost-saving offered, therefore, the online questionnaire is the most attractive data collection method used in this study. A total of 210 questionnaires were returned and deemed usable. For data analysis, both descriptive statistics and the paired sample T-test technique were employed to investigate the skill gap as per the study objective. As a result of the study's objective to assess the same skill set at two distinct points in time, including the current situation and prospective perceptions, the paired sample T-test is deemed an appropriate statistical technique. Furthermore, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software program was utilized for conducting the analysis.

4. Results

Table 1

Demographic information of the respondents (N=210)

Items	Number (n=210)	%
Gender		
Male	54	25.7
Female	156	74.3
Age		
21-30	66	31.4
31-40	88	41.8
41-50	44	21.0
51-60	10	4.8
Over 61	2	1.0
Education		
High/secondary school	7	3.3
Diploma	8	3.8
Bachelor's degree	153	72.9
Master's degree	40	19.0
Ph.D.	1	0.5
Others	1	0.5
Degree major		
Arts-related major	1	0.5

Items	Number (n=210)	%
Science-related major	2	1.0
Environment-related major	1	0.5
Business-related major	144	68.6
Engineering and technology-related major	7	3.3
Literature, language, and social science-related major	49	23.2
Others	6	2.9
Level of hotel service		
Full-service	111	52.9
Luxury-service	58	27.6
Select-service	41	19.5
Type of hotel ownership		
Independent ownership	83	39.5
International chain	94	44.8
Local chain	33	15.7

Table 1 shows that 74.3 percent of the respondents were female and 25.7 percent were male. The largest age group among the respondents was between 31-40 years old, accounting for 41.9 percent of the sample. The age group of 21-30 years old represented 31.4 percent, while the age group of 41-50 years old represented 21 percent. In terms of education, the majority of them held a bachelor's degree (72.9 percent), followed by a master's degree (19 percent). The most common degree majors were business-related majors (68.6 percent), followed by literature, language, and social science-related majors (23.2 percent). Regarding the hotel business characteristics, the findings indicated that most of the participants were employed in hotels with full-service level (52.9 percent), followed by luxury-service (27.6 percent), and select-service (19.5 percent). In terms of ownership, the respondents were primarily working hotels with international chain ownership (44.8 percent), followed by independent ownership (39.5 percent), and local chain ownership (15.7 percent).

Table 2

The results of the paired sample T-test conducted on the sales and marketing personnel indicating the skill gap between the current acquired skills and the future required skills in sales and digital marketing

Sales and digital marketing skills	Current acquired		Future required		t-value	p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Interpersonal skill						
1.Ability to express myself nonverbally.	3.98	.847	4.10	.877	-2.07	.039*
2.Ability to deliver public speeches.	4.10	.803	4.18	.860	-1.30	.195
3.Ability to recognize and understand nonverbal cues from others.	4.06	.789	4.21	.827	-3.02	.003**
4.Ability to present myself socially.	4.20	.805	4.22	.802	-0.44	.656
5.Ability to manage conflicts and negotiate with different customers.	4.25	.724	4.39	.718	-2.90	.004**

Sales and digital marketing skills	Current acquired		Future required		t-value	p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Salesmanship skill						
6.Ability to identify potential customers.	4.25	.737	4.39	.732	-2.96	.003**
7.Ability to establish relationships with new customers.	4.44	.718	4.41	.722	0.54	.584
8.Ability to close the sale quickly.	3.93	.804	4.24	.814	-5.42	.000**
9.Ability to deliver effective sales messages.	4.22	.745	4.34	.821	-2.40	.017*
10.Ability to effectively manage customer accounts.	4.25	.798	4.30	.796	-1.02	.308
Core marketing skill						
11.Ability to create a marketing plan with effective time management.	3.86	.931	4.16	.896	-4.69	.000**
12.Ability to create content across different channels.	3.87	.942	4.10	.925	-3.34	.001**
13.Ability to think creatively.	4.00	.864	4.22	.802	-3.72	.000**
14.Ability to pay attention to details.	4.24	.778	4.30	.794	-0.91	.362
15.Ability to manage multiple marketing tasks.	4.09	.892	4.29	.803	-3.47	.001**
Search engine optimization						
16.Ability to implement on-site optimization techniques to improve rankings and attract relevant traffic.	3.59	1.037	3.92	1.046	-4.34	.000**
17.Ability to identify and analyze search terms used by users in search engines.	3.60	1.008	3.92	1.073	-4.28	.000**
18.Ability to develop content to attract customers.	3.72	.958	4.10	.959	-5.46	.000**
19.Ability to implement off-site SEO.	3.37	1.074	3.85	1.055	-6.49	.000**
Search engine marketing						
20.Ability to optimize the company's online presence and attract customers from relevant local search platforms, such as Google Maps.	3.50	1.077	3.89	1.070	-5.19	.000**
21.Ability to implement Google Ads Search campaigns.	3.29	1.151	3.91	1.082	-7.56	.000**
22.Ability to expand reach through Google Ads Display campaigns.	3.21	1.117	3.85	1.081	-7.52	.000**
23.Ability to understand Google Ads Re-Marketing strategies.	3.22	1.115	3.93	1.080	-8.56	.000**
24.Ability to expand reach through Google Shopping campaigns.	3.04	1.125	3.76	1.103	-8.75	.000**

Sales and digital marketing skills	Current acquired		Future required		t-value	p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Social media management						
25.Ability to create engaging content on Facebook to interact with customers.	3.71	1.033	4.08	.960	-4.88	.000**
26.Ability to utilize Facebook Lead Ads to get new customers' contact information.	3.58	1.139	3.97	1.023	-5.03	.000**
27.Ability to drive traffic to the company's website via Facebook Ads.	3.54	1.124	4.05	1.025	-6.74	.000**
28.Understanding of Facebook Re-Marketing strategies.	3.57	1.152	4.02	1.014	-5.76	.000**
29.Ability to sell products and services on Facebook Shopping.	3.52	1.125	3.98	1.014	-5.80	.000**
30.Understanding and ability to perform the above skills on Instagram.	3.47	1.166	3.99	1.054	-5.94	.000**
Lead generation						
31.Understanding of Lead Funnel (awareness, interest, decision, and action).	3.50	1.154	3.98	1.046	-5.53	.000**
32.Ability to apply Lead magnet practice to attract potential customers.	3.40	1.178	3.95	1.062	-6.74	.000**
33.Ability to conduct email marketing campaigns to achieve online marketing objectives, such as customer relationships and increasing sales conversions.	3.62	1.122	4.01	1.054	-4.90	.000**
Data review						
34.Ability to use tools to analyze the data collected from online marketing activities.	3.45	1.111	4.04	1.023	-7.29	.000**
35.Ability to use Google Analytics to make decisions related to online marketing objectives.	3.39	1.190	4.00	1.069	-7.59	.000**
36.Ability to use Facebook Insights to reach target audiences.	3.49	1.171	4.05	1.062	-6.68	.000**
Other digital channels						
37.Ability to use the Metasearch engine to reach target audiences and increase bookings.	3.33	1.187	3.99	1.056	-8.23	.000**
38.Ability to work effectively with OTAs (Online Travel Agencies) to increase bookings.	3.65	1.161	4.06	.998	-5.25	.000**
	3.65	1.166	4.08	1.023	-5.27	.000**

Sales and digital marketing skills	Current acquired		Future required		t-value	p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
39.Ability to manage the business's reviews and reputation on online platforms.						

*significant .05 level ** significant .01 level*

As shown in Table 2, the results of the paired samples T-test, which investigated the gap between the current level of acquired skills and the future importance level of required sales and digital marketing skill set, indicated significant differences in 34 out of 39 skill attributes. The respondents reported acquiring these 34 skills at a mean level ranging from 3.04 to 4.25 on the five-point Likert scale (with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree"). This suggested that the respondents were uncertain about possessing these 34 skills. However, when comparing the mean scores of the future importance level of the required skill set, there was an increase in the mean level ranging from 3.76 to 4.34 on the Likert scale (ranging from 1 representing "very low important" to 5 representing "most important"). This indicated that there was a sales and digital marketing skill gap among sales and marketing personnel working in the hotel industry.

Moreover, the results showed that there were only certain skill gaps within the interpersonal and salesmanship dimensions of the sales skill set. These skill gaps encompass the ability to express oneself nonverbally, the ability to comprehend and interpret nonverbal communications from others, the ability to manage conflicts and negotiate with different customers, the ability to identify potential customers, the ability to close sales quickly, and the ability to effectively present sales messages. However, when examining the digital marketing skill set dimension, which includes core marketing, search engine optimization, search engine marketing, social media management, lead generation, data review, and other digital channels, it became evident that hotel sales and marketing personnel lacked proficiency in all these areas. Furthermore, the t-values obtained from the analysis highlighted the prioritized skill gaps that require immediate reskilling and upskilling. These skills can be determined by looking at the ten largest t-values, which correspond to the first ten biggest skill gaps.

These gaps include the ability to increase reach through the practice of Google Shopping within the dimension of search engine marketing (t-value=-8.75), the understanding of Google Ads Re-Marketing within the dimension of search engine marketing (t-value=-8.56), the utilization of Metasearch engine to reach target audiences and increase bookings within the dimension of other digital channels (t-value=-8.23), the application of Google Analytics to inform decision-making related to online marketing objectives wihtin the dimension of data review (t-value=-7.59), the proficiency in Google Ads Search within the dimension of search engine marketing (t-value=-7.56), the ability to increase reach through Google Ads Display in the dimension of search engine marketing (t-value=-7.52), the ability to utilize tools to analyze data collected from online marketing activities within the dimension of data review (t-value=-7.29), the ability to increase traffic to company's website through Facebook Ads within the dimension of social media management (t-value=-6.74), the implementation of Lead magnet practices to attract potential customers within the dimension of lead generation (t-value=-6.74), and the utilization of Facebook Insights to reach target audiences within the dimension of data review (t-value=-6.68).

5. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to assess whether there is a sales and digital marketing skill gap among professionals working in hote sales and marketing. The findings revealed the existence of such a gap, with 34 out of 39 skills demonstrating the gap. Specifically, the first 10 prioritized skills fall within the digital marketing skill set. Those includes the skill set of Google Shopping and Google Ads in part of search engine marketing, metasearch engine, Google analytics in part of data review, Facebook Ads in part of social media management as well as Facebook Insight tool. The results align with a report conducted by the World Economic Forum in 2020, which highlighted the rapid growth of digital marketing and strategy professionals in Thailand due to the increasing tech-savviness and online shopping habits of Thai consumers (World Economic Forum, 2020). The results are also consistent with the findings of a study by Elhajjar (2021) on "Digital marketing jobs: what are recruiters looking for?" which revealed that relevant technical abilities for digital marketing professions included the ability to execute and optimize marketing campaigns using marketing tools, such as Google Analytics, Google AdWords, and Facebook Business Manager. Moreover, Fuller et al.'s (2020) study on rethinking the on-demand workforce revealed that business executives prioritized the development of digital skills, including digital marketing competencies, to adapt to the future of work. This is consistent with the notion that sales and marketing personnel in the hotel industry recognize the indispensability of digital marketing skills for future employment (Siddoo et al., 2019). Furthermore, similar findings regarding the presence of a skill gap have been observed in Iran's communication industry. Ghotbifar, Marjani, and Ramazani (2017) discovered that employees lacked technical proficiency in employing digital marketing tools effectively to achieve marketing success. In another study conducted by Raghuraman (2017), it was found that entry-level digital marketers with less than three years of experience needed specific technical abilities in digital marketing, particularly in data analytics, along with other digital marketing tools available on the market such as SEO (Search Engine Optimization), Google Analytics, and Google AdWords. These skills were deemed essential and missing by the respondents in fulfilling their assigned tasks. Besides that, Chachamon, Peter, and Davorin's (2019) findings indicated that digital marketing has become a highly sought-after skill among communicators in the PR industry. They emphasized the importance of personalized approaches and digital marketing techniques and tools for effective brand building. Their research also highlighted deficiencies in SEO (Search Engine Optimization), code programming, and mobile marketing skills, which were identified as the weakest areas within the realm of digital marketing technical skills, aligning with the results of this study. Furthermore, similar to Rathnayaka's (2018) study titled "The Role of Digital Marketing in Retail Fashion Industry: A Synthesis of the Theory and the Practice," it was found that marketing professionals must develop digital technical skills that will allow brands to segment customers more effectively and establish sincere and emotional relationships between the company and customers. In the digital economy, digital marketing skills are crucial for all businesses and industries. They are in high demand, whether it's to bridge the gap in the communication industry or to meet the marketing requirements of the fashion industry, digital marketing skills were identified as vital for success. The investigation of the skill gap in sales and digital marketing among practitioners in the hotel industry confirmed that the digital marketing skill set is essential for the future of the hotel industry. Thus, both current and prospective sales and marketing professionals will need to reskill and upskill in order to fill these identified skill gaps.

6. Academic and managerial contribution

The findings of this study have contributed to the need for sales and digital marketing in the hospitality industry. As a result, hospitality education must revise its marketing for hospitality curriculum to adapt to an evolving business

environment that places greater emphasis on digital marketing adoption. According to the managerial contribution, hotel business management can use these findings to redesign sales and marketing professional training in order to equip sales and marketing professionals with the desired skill set to compete in the digital economy, such as providing training based on the reported largest skill gap, which is search engine marketing, as well as other reported skill gaps, such as social media management techniques.

7. Limitations and future research

Because this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, certain platforms experienced increased demand for business sales and marketing activities, as face-to-face interactions were limited, and businesses relied more heavily on online platforms to reach their target market. It is important to note that this research was specifically conducted in Phuket province of Thailand, and therefore the findings may not be directly applicable to other tourist destinations within Thailand or other international destinations. Differences in hotel business training and related management practice across different locations can affect the skill set and performance of hotel professionals. Furthermore, since the researcher selected specific characteristics for the study, not all hotel sales and marketing skills may have been included. While the study aimed to encompass a broader range of important industry skills, future research should consider employing qualitative methods to better understand the skill set that can be used to examine the importance and performance of hotel sales and marketing personnel. Future research could extend the scope of investigation to other tourist hotspots such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and others, as well as include other sectors within the tourism industry such as restaurants, travel agencies, and airlines, to further understand how skill sets differ among enterprises.

References

Abuhashesh, M., Al-Khasawneh, M., Al-Dmour, R., & Masa'Deh, R. (2019). The Impact of Facebook on Jordanian Consumers' Decision Process in the Hotel Selection. *IBIMA Business Review*, 928418. DOI : 10.5171/2019.928418

Adepoju, O. O., & Aigbavboa, C. O. (2021). Assessing Knowledge and Skills Gap for Construction 4.0 in a Developing Economy. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 21(3), e2264. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2264

Asyhari, A. and Yuwalliatin, S., (2020). Factors Affecting Salesperson Performance in SMES Creative industry of Central Java. *Jurnal Aplikasi Manajemen*, *18*(1), 168-180. DOI:10.21776/ub.jam.2020.018.01.17

Chachamon Smart, Peter De Maeyer, & Davorin Kralj. (2019). Competencies and Digital Marketing Skills – Thailand Case. *International Journal of Economics and Management Systems*, 4, 73-186. https://www.iaras.org/iaras/filedownloads/ijems/2019/007-0023(2019).pdf

Chaffey, D. and Ellis-Chadwick, f., (2016). *Digital Marketing*. 6th ed. United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited

Day, G. (2011). Closing the Marketing Capabilities Gap. *Journal of Marketing*, *75*(4), 183-195. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.75.4.183

Di Gregorio, A., Maggioni, I., Mauri, C. and Mazzucchelli, A., (2019). Employability Skills for Future Marketing Professionals. *European management journal*, *37*(3), 251-258. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2019.03.004

Duverger, P. (2013). Curvilinear Effects of User-Generated Content on Hotels 'Market Share. *Journal of Travel Research*, *52*(4), 465-478. Doi:10.1177/0047287513478498

Elhajjar, S. (2021). Digital Marketing Jobs: What are Recruiters Looking For?. *Journal of Education for Business*, *97*(1), 29-35. https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2021.1884520

Futrell, Charles M. (2006). *Fundamental of Selling: Customer for Liife through Services*. 9th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin.

Ghotbifar, F., Marjani, M. R., & Ramazani, A. (2017). Identifying and Assessing the Factors Affecting Skill Gap in Digital Marketing in Communication Industry Companies. *Independent Journal of Management & Production*, *8*(1), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.14807/ijmp.v8i1.507

Gupta, A., & Nimkar, N. (2020). Role of Content Marketing and it's Potential on Lead Generation. *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Public Health, 23*(17). DOI:10.36295/ASRO.2020.231710

Hashim, K. F., & Fadhil, N. A. (2017). Engaging with Customer Using Social Media Platform: A Case Study of Malaysia Hotels. *Procedia Computer Science*, *124*, 4-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2017.12.123

Islam, M., Nasira, S., Pritom, S. T., Paul, S. K., & Rabbi, R. (2016). Influence of Interpersonal Relationship Skills in Salespersons Service Performance: A Study on Hair Saloons & Beauty Parlors of Bangladesh. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management, 18*(2), 77-90. DOI: 10.9790/487X-18217790

Jawabreh, O., Mahmoud, R., & Hamasha, S. A. (2020). Factors Influencing the Employees Service Performances in Hospitality Industry Case Study AQBA Five Stars Hotel. *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites*, 29(2), 649-661. DOI: 10.30892/gtg.29221-496

Kantanantha, N., & Awichanirost, J. (2022). Analyzing and Forecasting Online tour Bookings Using Google Analytics Metrics. *Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management*, *21*(3), 354-365. DOI:10.1057/s41272-021-00338-7

Kim, M. H., & Jeon, K. S. (2019). Relationships between Personal Competence and Sales Performance of Sales Representatives: Focusing on Sales Representatives of Automobile Dealership, Asia-Pacific. *Journal of Business Venturing and Entrepreneurship*, *14*(1), 17-32 http://koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO201913457809018.pdf.

Lanz, L., & Carmichael, M. (2020). *Digital Marketing Budgets for Independent Hotels: Continuously Shifting to Remain Competitive in the Online World*. Boston: School of Hospitality Administration. https://www.bu.edu/bhr/2015/08/25/digital-marketing-budgets-for-independent-hotels-continuously-shifting-to-remain-competitive-in-the-online-world/

Lanz, L. (2020). *Hotel E-commerce: Navigating the Complex Hospitality Digital Marketing Landscape*. Boston: School of Hospitality Administration. https://www.bu.edu/bhr/2016/01/15/hotel-e-commerce-navigating-the-complex-hospitality-digital-marketing-landscape/

Elizabeth Mann, L. (2019, December 6). *REPORT Understanding the skills gap and what employers can do about it*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/research/understanding- the-skills-gap-and-what-employers-can-do-about-it/

Mariia, P. (2017). *Digital Marketing Strategy with the Help of Web Analytics: Case study: Best Western Plus Hotel Haaga* [Bachelor's degree thesis]. Haaga-Helia ammattikorkeakoulu. https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/131066

Parvez, S. J., Moyeenudin, H. M., Arun, S., Anandan, R.,& Janahan, S. K. (2018). Digital Marketing in Hotel Industry. International Journal of Engineering & Technology, 7(2.21), 288-290. DOI: 10.14419/ijet.v7i2.21.12383

Pete, L., & Lanz, L. (2014, February 1). *The Digital Direction: Hotel Marketing Budgets and a Digital 101 for Hotels*. Hospitalitynet. https://www.hospitalitynet.org/file/152005314.pdf

Popescu, L., Iancu, A., Avram, M., Avram, D., & Popescu, V. (2020). The Role of Managerial Skills in the Sustainable Development of SMEs in Mehedinti County, Romania. *Sustainability*, *12*(3), 1119. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12031119

Qian, J., Lin, P. M., Law, R., & Li, X. (2022). Lack of IT and Digital Marketing Professionals in Hospitality: is it Education's Fault?. *Heliyon*, *8*(12). e12002. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e12002

Siddoo, V., Sawattawee, J., Janchai, W., & Thinnukool, O. (2019). An Exploratory Study of Digital Workforce Competency in Thailand. *Heliyon*, *5*(5), 1723. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e01723

Surawattananon N., Reancharoen T., Prajongkan W., Chunanantatham S., Simakorn Y., and Gultawatvichai P. (2021, June 3). *Revitalising Thailand's tourism sector*. Bank of Thailand. https://www.bot.or.th/Thai/MonetaryPolicy/EconomicConditions/AAA/250624_WhitepaperVISA.pdf

Tavakol, M. and Dennick, R., (2011). Making Sense of Cronbach'salpha. *International journal of medical education*, *2*, 53-55. DOI: 10.5116/ijme.4dfb.8dfd

Tse, T. (2013). The Marketing Role of the Internet in Launching a Hotel: The Case of Hotel ICON. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, *22*(8), 895-908. https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2013.734224

Rajan, S. (2015, March 23). *Interpersonal Skills for Sales Force Effectiveness -- A Survey on Indian Pharmaceutical Industry*. SSRN. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2572826

Rentz, J. O., Shepherd, C. D., Tashchian, A., Dabholkar, P. A., & Ladd, R. T. (2002). A Measure of Selling Skill: Scale Development and Validation. *Journal of personal selling & sales management*, *22*(1), 13-21. DOI:10.1080/08853134.2002.10754289

Royle, J., & Laing, A. (2014). The Digital Marketing Skills Gap: Developing a Digital Marketer Model for the Communication Industries. *International Journal of Information Management*, *34*(2), 65-73. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.11.008

Udayana, I. B. N., Farida, N., & Ardyan, E. (2019). Selling Relationship Quality to Increase Salesperson Performance in the Pharmacy Industry. *International Journal of Services and Operations Management*, *33*(2), 262-285. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSOM.2019.100289

UNWTO. (2021). *Digital Transformation*. https://www.unwto.org/digital-transformation

Viglia, G., Minazzi, R., & Buhalis, D. (2016). The Influence of Eword-of-Mouth on Hotel Occupancy Rate. International *Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *28*(9), 2035-2051. DOI: 10.1108/ijchm-05-2015-0238

World Economic Forum (2020, October 20). *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf

WSI. (2013). *Digital Minds 12 Things Every Business Needs to Know About Digital Marketing*. 2nd ed. Canada: Friesn Press.

Yamanae, T. (1973). *Statistics: An Introductory Analysis*. London: John Weather Hill.