


Digital Marketing Strategies in Sustainable Tourism: The Role of the Metaverse

Pedro Álvaro Pereira Correia

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3886-2530>

University of Madeira, Portugal & CITUR, Portugal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter explores the transformative impact of the Metaverse on sustainable tourism through innovative digital marketing strategies. It delves into how immersive virtual environments revolutionize tourist experiences and destination marketing while enhancing sustainable tourism initiatives. The integration of Metaverse technologies offers both challenges and opportunities, encompassing technological, operational, regulatory, economic, and social dimensions. Central to the discussion are strategic recommendations for harnessing the Metaverse to develop environmentally friendly tourism solutions. The role of immersive storytelling and virtual tours is underscored, with real-world applications such as Nike's NIKELAND on Roblox illustrating the effective utilization of Metaverse technologies. The chapter is supported by a comprehensive literature review, which highlights the Metaverse's potential to foster new engagement pathways and promote sustainability within the tourism sector.

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1. ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

1.1 History and Business Context

The tourism industry is undergoing a significant transformation, catalyzed by rapid advancements in digital technologies, with the Metaverse emerging as a pivotal force. Historically, the sector has consistently been at the forefront of adopting innovative technologies that enhance user experiences and streamline operations. The introduction of computerized reservation systems in the 1960s marked a significant turning point, revolutionizing the global management and booking of services (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Buhalis, 2023). This trajectory of innovation continued with the rise of online travel agencies in the late 1990s, which democratized access to travel planning and expanded the marketplace (Gretzel et al., 2020, Loureiro, et.al., 2020)

Currently, the Metaverse is poised to represent the next evolutionary phase of the internet, merging physical and digital realms to create immersive, interactive experiences facilitated by virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), which are collectively referred to as extended reality (XR) (McKinsey, 2023). This new dimension offers immersive environments that radically transform consumer interactions with destinations, enhancing narrative depth and engagement through enriched storytelling. Such advancements are in alignment with ongoing industry objectives aimed at elevating customer satisfaction and improving operational efficiency (Correia, 2024).

Prominent companies such as Nike, Louis Vuitton, Disney, and Coca-Cola have already begun to exploit these virtual environments to deliver previously inconceivable experiences, thus blurring the boundaries between physical and digital interactions (Kubbco, 2022). For instance, Nike's creation of NIKELAND on Roblox introduces a dynamic platform where consumers can engage with the brand in a digital landscape. Similarly, Louis Vuitton's interactive game, "Louis the Game," and IKEA's recruitment and brand promotion game, 'The Co-Worker' on Roblox, represent strategic initiatives to captivate younger demographics and innovate in branding strategies (IKEA, 2024).

The integration of the Metaverse into tourism business strategies marks a substantial shift in the conception and delivery of tourism experiences. It enables tourism entities to craft immersive and interactive encounters, from virtual tours of exotic locales to guided explorations of museums and historical sites. This expansion not only extends the reach and accessibility of tourism offerings but also facilitates unprecedented levels of personalization and consumer engagement (Buhalis, Leung, & Lin, 2023; Özdemir Uçgun & Şahin, 2023; Navío-Marco et al., 2018).

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