

Virtual Reality (VR) for Experiential Marketing in Sri Lankan Hospitality Industry

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The notion of experiential marketing has been accelerated in the recent past since customers are increasingly focusing on emotions and experience more than the functional features of products and services. This phenomenon is mainly evidenced in the hospitality industry and it has been driven by the technological developments. Virtual Reality (VR) is one such technology which can be used for enhancing the customer experience. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how VR can be used for experiential marketing in hospitality industry in Sri Lanka.

This study was conducted using the qualitative research methodology by adopting the phenomenology as the research approach to capture the respondents' experiences regarding VR. Data collection was undertaken using in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight respondents and analysis of data was completed using the generic strategy.

As per the findings the experience of using VR is explained under two themes. First VR is seen as an innovative marketing medium and therefore it offers opportunities to attract prospective customers. Second VR provides an immersive user experience. So that, hotels can reach their customers with higher interactions. The motives for implementing VR are identified under four themes namely powerful digital experiential marketing strategy, ability to avoid seasonal factor, adapting to the dynamic business environment, and boost HR effectiveness. Therefore, the findings of this study is significant since this is the first attempt in explaining VR from the perspective of hoteliers and industry professionals which has multiple implications to enrich the hospitality industry in the future.

Keywords: *Digital experience, experiential marketing, hospitality industry, phenomenology, virtual reality*

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