
CREATIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF RESORTS IN NUEVA VIZCAYA

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ABSTRACT

Creative marketing strategies play an important role in business success, including the resort industry. Utilizing the descriptive-comparative design. This study aims to determine the level of creative marketing strategies implementation of resorts in Nueva Vizcaya and the challenges they encountered in adopting creative marketing strategies. Results show that most of the DOT-accredited resorts are located in Solano. The average number of guests per day is evenly spread across three categories. All resorts have been operating for 1 to 15 years, with most employing 11 or more workers and offering a full set of amenities. The resorts have a very high level of implementation of creative marketing strategies. Moreover, no significant difference was found in the level of implementation of creative marketing strategies in the different locations, as well as in the average number of guests per day, except for branding, where there is a difference in the level of implementation of those who have large and small guests. The common challenges encountered by the resorts are in the areas of branding, promotion, and customer experience, especially in terms of deficiency in creativity and uniqueness of strategies, effective positioning and promotion strategies, and issues on employees lacking means of behavioral, social, and emotional training and capacity. Furthermore, although DOT-Accredited resorts in Nueva Vizcaya implement creative marketing strategies at a very high level, there is still room for improvement in the operations.

Keywords: branding, customer experience, DOT-accreditation, implementation, promotion

INTRODUCTION

Creative marketing is the process of igniting the customers' desires, concerns, and aspirations using powerful executions to deliver fulfilling experiences and solutions that leave a lasting impression on clients. Spacey (2017) stated that there are 5 types of creative marketing strategies namely branding, products and services, promotion, customer experience, and visual merchandising.

Branding is the process of building and molding a brand in the eyes of consumers. It gives a specific organization, company, product, or service meaning (Schmidt, 2021). Within the tourism sector, this serves as a critical mechanism for destinations to articulate the rich diversity of experiences awaiting visitors (Almeyda-Ibáñez, 2017). Authentic branding can significantly enhance brand trust (Schallehn, 2014) and loyalty, as brand loyalty is strongly influenced by brand image and awareness (Bilgin, 2018).

Meanwhile, Jalan (2023) asserts that products and services are a company's lifeblood; therefore, their accurate representation is vital for attracting investment and proving market potential. Beyond mere representation, prioritizing strategic development is essential to fuel innovation, maximize profitability, and maintain a competitive edge in a crowded marketplace. However, because managing and forecasting innovation is inherently challenging, businesses need flexible tools to navigate the evolving landscape of digital innovation processes (Nylén, 2015). By using these tools to offer unique or innovative products and services, businesses can differentiate themselves and attract more customers.

One technique often used is promotion that aims to persuade consumers to purchase

goods or services. It is a critical business function that builds awareness through diverse marketing channels. In the tourism sector, leveraging a site's natural scenery as a promotional highlight is a proven method for boosting visibility (Lusariah, 2021). Without these efforts to lure and retain a customer base, a business faces the very real threat of closure (Ward, 2020).

Another critical focus is customer experience, which represents a customer's overall impression formed through every interaction with a brand (Bordeaux, 2021). It encompasses the entire customer journey, weaving together physical interactions and emotional connections. According to Bagdare and Jain (2013), this experience is defined by four key characteristics: leisure, joy, distinctiveness, and mood. By prioritizing these dimensions, businesses can foster deeper brand loyalty and encourage repeat purchases, making customer experience a primary driver of financial performance (Iwuozor, 2023). Ultimately, organizations that successfully integrate these experiential elements into their operations see measurable and quantifiable gains in profitability (Grønholdt, 2015).

Furthermore, visual merchandising, the act of presenting an establishment and its inventory, draws in potential customers. It entails furnishing the place while maintaining the promised intended presentation within (Keenan, 2021). A business can entice visitors to visit their place by using visual merchandising. As part of an innovative and creative marketing strategy which according to Miller (2020) is an exciting task, visual merchandising should be planned appropriately and creatively. As a result of this, visual aspects may raise the number of impulsive purchases and draw in additional customers (Gudonavičienė, 2015).

Today, resorts increasingly extend their properties in multicultural markets due to the effect of globalization (Tiedekunta, 2020). To maintain their presence, companies should regularly incorporate new strategies into their marketing mix. Even well-established businesses with deep community roots must evolve their approach to keep pace with changing consumer expectations and industry trends. The study of Chon (1995) shows that only the resorts that recognize the changes occurring in the marketplace and "proactively" respond to these changes continue to be successful. Creative marketing strategies can boost direct reservations, attract new clients, and even increase customer loyalty (Hollander, 2023). Despite this, many establishments like resorts have yet to further generate creative marketing strategies to effectively communicate and interact with their clients (Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2018).

Through the years, several resorts, public or private, have started to operate in Nueva Vizcaya. Based on the data given by the Provincial Tourism Office of Nueva Vizcaya, most of the resorts have been merely operating with only a few being DOT-accredited. DOT-accreditation is a certificate of tourism enterprises given to tourist destinations that have complied with internationally recognized standards for the operation and maintenance of their tourism facilities and services as well as the minimum and progressive levels of operating quality (Ylagan, 2019). This suggests that most resorts in Nueva Vizcaya lack a strong understanding of marketing management and creative marketing strategies, which could potentially lead to business closure if not addressed.

With this context, this study was conducted to determine the level of implementation of creative marketing strategies of DOT-accredited resorts in Nueva Vizcaya so that recommendations can be made to improve their strategies. It also aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the industry to prepare aspiring business owners for potential challenges and equip them with creative marketing strategies to address them. The study is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals under SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, and SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure.

Specifically, this study aims to profile the resorts in terms of location, average number of customers/guests per day, number of years of operation, number of employees, and features and

amenities. Moreover, it determined the level of implementation of creative marketing strategies in branding, product and services, promotion, customer experience, and visual merchandising; and the challenges encountered by the respondents in adopting these strategies. Significant difference between the level of implementation of creative marketing strategies when grouped according to profile variables was also tested. Results of these were used to generate recommendations for enhanced creative marketing strategies.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers utilized the descriptive- comparative method as the design of the study. Descriptive methods were used to determine the creative marketing strategies such as branding, products and services, promotion, customer experience, and visual merchandising of the resorts in their business operations specifically through ocular visits, observations, survey questionnaires, and interviews. Comparative methods were further employed to identify significant differences in creative marketing strategies when grouped according to profile variables. The locale of the study was the top three first- class municipalities in Nueva Vizcaya with the most established resorts with DOT accreditation, based on the data given by the Nueva Vizcaya Provincial Tourism Office. First is Solano, consisting of three DOT-accredited resorts then Bayombong, with two DOT-accredited resorts and lastly, Bambang, with one DOT-accredited resort. There were a total of six respondents for each resort: (3) employees who are the owner/supervisor, marketing manager, and financial manager, and another (3) for the random guests. The overall number of respondents of this study was thirty-six respondents. The researchers utilized an adapted questionnaire from (Magboo et al., 2020) which was the primary tool in achieving the purpose of the study. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was also applied through a pilot test. Data were tallied, encoded and interpreted using frequency distribution, weighted mean, qualitative analysis, Mann Whitney U, T-test, Kruskal Wallis, and ANOVA.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section 1. Profile of the Resorts

Table 1
Profile of the Resorts

Resort	Location	Average no. of guests per day	Years of Operation	Number of Employees
A	Solano	31 and above	1-15 years	11 and above
B	Solano	21 - 30	1-15 years	11 and above
C	Solano	21 - 30	1-15 years	11 and above
D	Bayombong	31 and above	1-15 years	11 and above
E	Bayombong	1 – 10	1-15 years	6 - 10
F	Bambang	1 – 10	1-15 years	1 - 5

Table 1 displays that Solano has the highest number of resorts, making up 50% of the total. Bayombong has two of the resorts, while Bambang has one. Regarding the average number of guests per day, resorts are evenly spread across three categories; each category represents two of the resorts, showing a variety of resort sizes and capacities. All resorts have been operating for 1 to 15 years. Most resorts in the study show that they have 11 or more employees, pointing to a trend of larger operations while smaller resorts have 1 to 5 or 6 to 10 employees.

Table 2

Features and Amenities of the Resorts

Resort	Pavillion	Convenience store	Swimming pool	Parking area	Wifi Connection	Common Area	Airconditioned rooms	Cottages
A	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
B	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
C	/	X	/	/	/	/	/	/
D	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
E	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
F	X	X	/	/	/	/	/	/

Legend: (/) Available (X) Not Available

The table shows that a significant majority of the resorts have a pavilion, with 5 resorts offering this amenity. Similarly, 4 resorts have a convenience store, whereas 2 resorts lack this facility. Notably, all resorts provide the full range of amenities listed. The high presence of pavilions and convenience stores suggests that these amenities are considered essential for resort operations in the area, likely contributing to customer satisfaction and resort success. The fact that all resorts offer a full set of amenities underscores the competitive nature of the market, where comprehensive service provision might be a key differentiator. Marasigan and Borbon (2020) say that offering unique features and amenities can attract guests.

Section 2. Level of Implementation of Creative Marketing Strategies

Table 3

Summary of Level of Implementation of Creative Marketing Strategies of DOT-Accredited Resorts in Nueva Vizcaya

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Qualitative Descriptions
Branding	3.644	.3468	Very High level of Implementation
Product and Services	3.556	.3185	Very High level of Implementation
Promotion	3.711	.2494	Very High level of Implementation
Customer Experience	3.700	.3308	Very High level of Implementation
Visual Merchandising	3.5333	.47029	Very High level of Implementation
Overall	3.62886	.343158	Very High level of Implementation

Legend: 1.00-1.49 (Very Low level of Implementation), 1.50-2.49 (Low level of Implementation), 2.50-3.49 (High level of Implementation), 3.49-4.00 (Very High level of Implementation)

The data collected from the respondents reveals varying levels of implementation across five key areas: branding, product and services, promotion, customer service, and visual merchandising. The mean score for branding is 3.64, which indicates a generally positive perception of the resorts' branding elements. Roselin (2022) notes branding not only attracts guests but also shapes consumer perceptions, influences purchase decisions, and promotes brand loyalty.

The mean score for products and services is 3.55, reflecting a solid level of implementation with the amenities and services provided. Ernst et al. (2014) found that a business's capacity to create and introduce value innovations at a reasonable price is essential to its success in emerging markets. They further showed that a resort can profit financially from investing in low-cost value products and services for emerging markets. Moreover, when a business consistently aligns its products and services with customer expectations, it drives higher levels of guest satisfaction. As Bayad (2021) notes, there is a direct correlation between guest satisfaction and financial performance: the more satisfied the guest, the greater the resulting profit.

Promotion scored the highest mean of 3.71, showing that key employees of the resorts view the promotional strategies as highly effective in increasing sales and establishing trust. This suggests that the resorts' marketing and advertising strategies are well-received and contribute positively to the overall customer experience. This finding is supported by the study of Bakator (2018), which mentions that promotional activities are an important factor influencing customers' experiences.

Customer experience received a mean score of 3.70, which signifies a high level of implementation of service quality. Findings in the study of Jain et al. (2017) said that a good customer experience attracts, delights, and makes customers loyal. It enables the resorts to improve their brand image. According to Kriss (2014), businesses that deliver a high level of customer experience often make customers want to interact with them more and make recommendations to friends and family.

Visual merchandising has the lowest mean score of 3.53, which indicates that while key employees generally find the resort's strategy in visual appeal effective, there is significant room for improvement. When a place is visually appealing, it enhances the atmospheric vibe and mood of the guest (Basu, 2022). According to Othman (2021), visual merchandising is the process through which a business displays its products and services to become appealing, attractive, and enticing to the customer, not only as a stimulus to attract customers to enter the place, but to create an impression inside the customer's mind. This shows the importance of visual merchandising in implementing creative marketing strategies.

Section 3. Challenges Encountered by the Respondents in Adopting Creative Marketing Strategies

Results show the resorts' commonly distinct yet overlapping challenges. Regarding branding, most respondents face deficiencies in branding creativity and strategy uniqueness. Secondly, the customers lack clarity in perceiving the resorts' respective brands. Regarding products and services, the changing trends brought by globalization, issues in balancing product features and pricing strategies, shortage of employees and staff, new entrants of competitor/s' products and services, and the implementation of hotel and resort high-tech amenities are among the common challenges in the area.

In terms of promotion, lack of effective positioning and promotion strategy are the most common challenges encountered by the respondents, followed by issues with budget constraints, employee deficiencies in using digital publication materials and navigating platforms, and the usage of only one social media platform for promotional strategies.

Regarding customer experience, issues with employees lacking means of behavioral, social, and emotional training and capacity yielded the most response, followed by issues in mobility, such as establishments being hard to reach by means of transportation and geographic location, and issues in cultural differences.

On the aspect of visual merchandising, lacking landscape and designs are the most common challenges among resorts. Other challenges in the area are cultural and social sensitivity leading to conflict of interests, the issue of lighting and seasonal changes, and the lack of means in terms of audio/visual materials and music background. These challenges faced by the resorts imply that resorts in Nueva Vizcaya struggle with a lack of distinctive and clear branding, which may hinder customer loyalty and differentiation in a competitive market.

In products and services, the influence of globalization pressures resorts to adapt quickly, though many face challenges in pricing and maintaining adequate staffing levels.

Promotional activities are impeded by inadequate strategies and budgeting, restricting resorts' visibility and engagement with potential customers. Customer experience is affected by insufficient staff training in handling diverse customer interactions while accessibility issues may limit customer reach. Finally, visual merchandising, an essential factor in enhancing guest experience, is often under-resourced, particularly in landscape design and culturally sensitive decorations. Addressing these issues could improve customer satisfaction, enhance brand loyalty, and support resorts' market positioning.

So (2013) emphasizes that unique and clear branding is crucial for customer loyalty as it affects the long-term success of the resorts. Meanwhile, Gato (2022) highlights the essential role of creativity in crafting a distinct and appealing market identity for a resort. It is also important for resorts to adapt quickly to the effects of globalization as they balance providing quality services with maintaining profitability (Brey, 2010). In terms of promotion, the lack of targeted marketing campaigns and insufficient advertising resources hinder the resorts' ability to effectively reach and attract new customers (Chang, 2016). With regards to customer experience, Rosenbaum (2017) mentioned that the lack of staff training potentially hinders the resorts' ability to provide consistently high-quality experience. In the area of visual merchandising, there is a need for resorts to improve their visual aspects to better showcase their products and services to increase sales (Sipe, 2017).

Section 4. Significant Difference Between the Level of Implementation of Creative Marketing Strategies When Grouped According to Profile Variables

Table 4

Significant Difference Between the Level of Implementation of Creative Marketing Strategies When Grouped According to Location

	Location	n	Mean Rank/ Mn (Std Dev.) ^a
Branding	Solano	9	10.67
	Bambang/Bayombong	9	8.33
Product and Services	Solano	9	3.60 (.4) ^a
	Bambang/Bayombong	9	3.51 (.226) ^a
Promotion	Solano	9	3.64 (.296) ^a
	Bambang/Bayombong	9	3.78(.186) ^a
Customer Experience	Solano	9	10.67
	Bambang/Bayombong	9	8.33
Visual Merchandising	Solano	9	10.28
	Bambang/Bayombong	9	8.72

Data indicates that there is no significant difference in the implementation of creative marketing strategies between Solano and Bambang/Bayombong across various metrics. The mean rank of Solano for branding, customer experience, and visual merchandising is consistently higher than Bambang/Bayombong. However, U-test result shows that the differences are not significant. Similarly, in terms of product and services and promotion, the mean scores in Solano are also higher than Bambang/Bayombong but no significant difference is found. These findings suggest that the implementation of creative marketing strategies is consistent across the two locations, indicating that both Solano and Bambang/Bayombong apply similar approaches to branding, product and services, promotion, customer experience, and visual merchandising. This consistency implies that any variations in marketing effectiveness or customer outcomes are likely due to factors other than the specific strategies employed.

Likewise, Noble (1999) stated that there is no significant relationship between the level of implementation of marketing strategies and the location. Rather, it only differs when these are implemented by less competitive decision-makers. For decision-makers, this means that

focusing on refining strategies rather than changing them drastically could be more beneficial.

Table 5

Significant Difference Between the Level of Implementation of Creative Marketing Strategies When Grouped According to Average Number of Guests Per Day

	Average number of guests	n	Mean Rank/Mean (SD)a
Branding	1 to 10	6	5.58
	21 to 30	6	9.83
	31 and above	6	13.08
	Total	18	
Product and Services	1 to 10	6	3.47 (.273)a
	21 to 30	6	3.57 (.345)a
	31 and above	6	3.63 (.367)a
	Total	18	3.56 (.319)a
Promotion	1 to 10	6	8.75
	21 to 30	6	7.83
	31 and above	6	11.92
	Total	18	
Customer Experience	1 to 10	6	6.42
	21 to 30	6	11.58
	31 and above	6	10.50
	Total	18	
Visual Merchandising	1 to 10	6	7.58
	21 to 30	6	11.25
	31 and above	6	9.67
	Total	18	

The analysis of creative marketing strategies based on the average number of guests reveals some significant findings. For branding, there is a significant difference in implementation across different guest group sizes. This suggests that larger resorts may have more resources or a more refined approach to branding. In contrast, there is no significant difference in the implementation of product and service strategies, as indicated by an ANOVA test with a p-value of 0.686. This implies that the average number of guests does not significantly impact how product and service strategies are implemented, with mean scores remaining fairly consistent across different guest group sizes.

Similarly, for promotion, the Kruskal Wallis test results in a p-value of 0.589, showing no significant difference in promotional strategies based on guest numbers. This indicates that the average number of guests does not notably affect the implementation of promotional strategies. Finally, customer experience and visual merchandising also show no significant differences, with Kruskal Wallis test results of p-values 0.176 and 0.472, respectively. These findings suggest that variations in the average number of guests do not significantly influence how customer experience and visual merchandising strategies are applied.

Overall, while branding strategies vary significantly with guest size, product and services, promotion, customer experience, and visual merchandising strategies remain consistent across different guest groups. The findings suggest several implications for creative marketing strategies based on guest size. The significant difference in branding implementation indicates that larger establishments, with 31 or more guests, likely benefit from more developed and resource-intensive branding strategies. This could mean that smaller resorts need to invest more in branding to improve their market presence and competitiveness.

Table 6*Analysis of Variance in Product and Services*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.084	2	.042	.386	.686
Within Groups	1.640	15	.109		
Total	1.724	17			

The implementation of product and services strategies above reveals no significant differences across various guest size categories. With an F- statistic of 0.386 and a p-value of 0.686, which is well above the 0.05 significance level, the results indicate that guest size does not significantly impact the way product and services strategies are implemented. This implies that businesses apply similar product and service strategies regardless of whether they serve small, medium, or large groups of guests.

Section 5. Recommendations to be Forwarded to Enhance Creative Marketing Strategies

Results show that, in terms of branding strategy, resorts highly recommend enhancing creativity and innovative strategies, followed by recommendations to define a clearer vision and mission objective, and develop unique internal strategies. In terms of products and services, resorts suggest improving their existing products, services, and amenities, and creating a culture of innovation. With regards to promotion, it was highly recommended that they use all necessary social and public advertisements while enhancing designs for publicity materials by being simple yet effective. Another recommendation in promotion is to provide loyalty programs, join in local partnerships, and utilize e-mail marketing. On the aspect of customer experience, resorts recommend enhancing employee service in terms of behavioral, social, and emotional aspects and proactive service to customers, providing neat, clean, and more interactive facilities, and actively soliciting customer feedback. When it comes to visual merchandising, most of the respondents similarly recommended enhancing landscape and layout design while incorporating interactive elements, creating a signature resort scent, and enhancing the establishment's security and order.

The resorts' recommendations imply an extensive approach to improving the whole guest experience. To give guests a more memorable and engaging experience, resorts must concentrate on branding, product and service innovation, efficient advertising, customer-centric service, and aesthetically pleasing amenities. If strategies are successfully put into practice, these recommendations may boost customer satisfaction, and loyalty, and enhance reputation, which would ultimately boost the resorts' marketability and competitiveness. A strategic commitment to being relevant and satisfying the changing needs of today's consumers is seen by the focus placed on creativity, innovation, and attention to detail across every aspect of the company.

Brey (2008) stated that resorts should have a comprehensive strategy to enhance overall guest satisfaction and engagement as it has a direct impact on the success of the business. In another study, Brey (2010) noted that resorts should focus on developing a strong and distinct brand identity, introducing new and innovative offerings, optimizing their marketing and advertising strategies, prioritizing exceptional customer service, and investing in visually appealing facilities and design. If every strategy is well-implemented, it will greatly contribute to the success of the resort. In the long run, these changes could translate to substantial financial gains and a stronger market position for the resort (Aladag, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Most of the DOT-accredited resorts are located in Solano. All resorts have been operating for 1 to 15 years, with most employing 11 or more workers. The average number of guests is evenly spread across three categories. Most of the resorts provide the full range of amenities listed.

The creative marketing strategies of DOT-accredited resorts in Nueva Vizcaya are very highly implemented. Promotion strategies are effectively implemented, with high scores for social media impact and the role of promotion in building customer trust. Second is customer experience, where strategies in implementing customer experience are notably strong, with high ratings for cleanliness, ease of location, employee communication, and the overall guest journey. Third is branding, where elements such as the resorts' logo and name are effective in attracting customers, although there is room for improvement in promoting the resorts' unique features and competitive advantage. Fourth are products and services, which receive high scores for customer service and presentation of amenities, demonstrating strong customer satisfaction and loyalty. Lastly, is visual merchandising, where, in terms of visualities, the resorts' visual and sensory appeal received high ratings. However, there is potential to further refine aspects like lighting and music to elevate the overall customer experience.

However, there are distinct yet overlapping challenges encountered by the DOT-Accredited resorts in Nueva Vizcaya. Respondents have common challenges encountered when it comes to branding, promotion, and customer experience, especially in terms of deficiency in creativity and uniqueness of strategies, effective positioning and promotion strategies, and issues on employees lacking means of behavioral, social, and emotional training and capacity. Another challenge that needs to be mentioned is the attention to address the lack in landscape and design of the resorts.

The tests showed that there is no significant difference in the level of implementation of creative marketing strategies when grouped according to location. Similarly, when grouped according to average guests per day, there is no observed difference except for branding. There is a significant difference in branding implementation across different guest group sizes, where larger establishments with 31 or more guests have a higher mean rank for branding strategies, suggesting they benefit from more developed and resource-intensive branding approaches. Smaller resorts need to invest more in branding to improve market presence and competitiveness.

Based on these findings, a list of recommendations was forwarded to the resorts for them to enhance creative marketing strategies, most especially in branding, specifically in implementing creative and innovative strategies.

Recommendations

DOT-Accredited Resorts in Nueva Vizcaya can enhance their competitive advantage by focusing on promoting and improving the resort's unique features to better differentiate from competitors. They can also increase value and affordability of amenities through upgrades and more competitive pricing strategies. Next, they can refine advertising strategies by implementing more targeted and innovative advertising approaches to improve brand recall and strengthen customer preference. Improving visual merchandising can be done by refining aspects like lighting and music to further elevate the overall customer experience and meet varied customer expectations. Lastly, continuous improvement is needed maintaining high service standards and continuously seeking customer feedback to drive ongoing improvements and sustain customer loyalty.

For non-DOT accredited resorts, they may consider following the characteristics of DOT-Accredited resorts, including the establishment of features and amenities, especially a pavilion and convenience store. Furthermore, they need to follow the same standards implemented by the DOT-accredited resorts to have a chance of being accredited.

The Provincial Tourism Office and Department of Trade and Industry may conduct seminars and trainings, discussing advancement and proper implementation of creative marketing strategies to those current and non-current DOT-Accredited resorts.

Finally, future researchers may determine the level of implementation of creative marketing strategies of non-DOT-Accredited resorts, and the challenges they encounter.

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