

THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ON HOTEL SALES PERFORMANCE: EXAMINING THE MODERATING EFFECT OF BRAND REPUTATION

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of digital marketing strategies on sales performance and brand reputation in the Nigerian hotel industry. The rapid evolution of digital platforms has reshaped consumer behavior, making it critical for hotels to adopt effective digital marketing techniques to remain competitive. Despite the growing reliance on digital marketing, the extent to which these strategies influence sales performance and brand reputation in the Nigerian context remains underexplored. The objective of this research is to assess the effectiveness of digital marketing tools, such as social media campaigns, search engine optimization (SEO), and online advertising, in improving sales performance and enhancing brand reputation among Nigerian hotels. The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative interviews with hotel managers and guests. The findings revealed a positive correlation between the adoption of tailored digital marketing strategies and increased sales performance, as well as a notable improvement in brand perception. However, challenges such as inconsistent internet access, limited technical expertise, and low customer engagement were identified as barriers to full utilization of digital marketing in the sector. Based on these findings, it is recommended that Nigerian hotels invest in targeted digital marketing training for staff, improve internet infrastructure, and engage in more personalized marketing efforts to strengthen their online presence. Additionally, hotels should leverage data analytics to refine strategies and enhance customer engagement, ultimately improving both sales performance and brand reputation. The study highlighted the growing significance of digital marketing in the hospitality sector and offers practical suggestions for hotel managers seeking to thrive in a competitive digital landscape.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Sales performance, Brand reputation, Nigerian hotel industry, Online advertising.

Introduction

The global hospitality industry is currently undergoing a profound transformation, catalyzed by the accelerated incorporation of digital technologies into both service delivery and marketing functions. In this increasingly digitized operational landscape, the strategic application of digital marketing has become imperative for hotel enterprises seeking to enhance brand visibility, deepen

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customer engagement, and improve revenue performance within a highly competitive environment (Dey, Mukherjee, & Rahman, 2023). A wide range of digital tools and platforms—encompassing search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, email campaigns, content-driven strategies, and influencer partnerships—have provided hotels with more sophisticated mechanisms to influence consumer behavior, cultivate brand loyalty, and generate revenue. Projections by Statista (2024) indicate that hotel revenues generated through digital channels will exceed \$174 billion by 2025, underscoring the strategic centrality of digital marketing to sustainable competitive advantage and long-term viability in the sector.

However, the efficacy of digital marketing is not merely a function of the diversity or technological sophistication of tools deployed. Brand reputation—conceptualized as the collective perception of an organization's reliability, service excellence, and ethical standards—has emerged as a significant moderating variable that shapes the impact of digital marketing communications (Kim, Lee, & Park, 2022). Empirical evidence suggests that hotels with well-established reputational capital are more likely to achieve enhanced sales outcomes even from relatively modest marketing initiatives, while less-known or poorly reputed establishments often experience attenuated returns on substantial digital marketing investments. This interaction between brand reputation and digital marketing is particularly pertinent in emerging economies such as Nigeria, where internet accessibility is expanding and intra-sectoral competition within hospitality continues to intensify (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024).

Despite the growing ubiquity of digital marketing tools and their adoption across various segments of the hospitality industry, many hotels especially independent and mid-scale establishments struggle to convert digital visibility into measurable improvements in sales performance. Unlike international hotel chains, which benefit from brand equity and global recognition, smaller operators often contend with limited market penetration and diminished consumer trust, thereby constraining the effectiveness of their digital marketing efforts. Moreover, there exists a notable lacuna in empirical literature concerning the moderating influence of brand reputation on the relationship between digital marketing strategies and sales performance in the hospitality domain. This gap is particularly pronounced in developing contexts where digital competencies, consumer trust structures, and brand differentiation strategies are still evolving. The absence of robust contextualized knowledge may lead to inefficient allocation of marketing resources, suboptimal performance in online sales channels, and weakened capacity for sustained customer

relationship management. Hence, it is imperative to explore how digital marketing and brand reputation intersect to shape sales performance outcomes in the hotel sector.

The relevance of this research is heightened in the post-pandemic context, wherein shifts in consumer behavior have precipitated increased reliance on digital engagement platforms and e-commerce ecosystems. The hospitality industry, in particular, has witnessed an accelerated transition toward digital modes of service delivery, customer acquisition, and brand communication. Consequently, a nuanced understanding of the determinants of digital marketing effectiveness especially the role of brand reputation has become a strategic necessity for industry practitioners. From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the digital marketing discourse by providing empirical insights into the interplay between brand reputation and marketing efficacy in influencing sales outcomes. It extends current theoretical frameworks by situating this inquiry within the hospitality sector in an emerging market context. Practically, the study offers evidence-based recommendations for hotel managers, digital marketing professionals, and hospitality entrepreneurs particularly those operating in resource-constrained environments on how to optimize returns from digital marketing investments. Furthermore, the study holds significant relevance for Nigeria and other developing economies where the digital transformation of the hospitality sector is underway but remains uneven. Context-specific empirical data on the interplay between brand reputation and digital marketing is essential for developing more effective, locally responsive marketing strategies (Adeleke & Olajide, 2023). In addressing these contextual variables, this research provides a foundational framework for enhancing strategic alignment between digital marketing initiatives and brand management in the hotel industry.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the influence of digital marketing strategies on hotel sales performance, evaluate the moderating role of brand reputation in this relationship, identify the most impactful digital marketing practices utilized by hotels, and propose actionable recommendations for optimizing the synergy between branding and digital marketing efforts.

Literature Review

The hospitality industry has experienced a profound transformation in its marketing strategies, driven by the rapid advancements in digital technologies. Digital marketing has become an indispensable component of modern hotel operations, enabling hospitality brands to engage wider audiences, personalize customer interactions, and augment service visibility (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). This array of strategies encompasses a broad spectrum of tools, including search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, email campaigns, content development,

influencer partnerships, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and mobile marketing (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014).

Search engine optimization (SEO) is of paramount importance in improving the visibility of hotel websites within online search results. Xiang *et al.* (2015) contend that hotels which effectively optimize their websites for search engine algorithms are more likely to attract organic traffic, thereby facilitating direct bookings and minimizing reliance on costly third-party intermediaries. Moreover, content marketing which involves the strategic creation and dissemination of valuable and relevant content has been shown to foster heightened customer engagement and enhance brand trust (Pulizzi, 2012). Social media marketing has emerged as one of the most transformative digital marketing tools within the hospitality sector. Leung, Bai, and Stahura (2023) assert that social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter provide dynamic channels for customer interaction, instantaneous feedback, and brand storytelling. The interactivity and visual appeal of these platforms significantly influence travelers' destination choices and hotel booking decisions. Furthermore, social proof manifested through likes, shares, and customer reviews—emerges as a potent influence on consumer decision-making (Hajli, 2014).

Email marketing remains a high-yield digital tool, particularly when campaigns are segmented and tailored to individual customer preferences. Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2021) emphasize that well-designed email campaigns offering personalized promotions or loyalty incentives can significantly enhance customer retention and encourage repeat bookings. Additionally, influencer marketing has gained considerable momentum, particularly among millennial and Generation Z consumers, as endorsements from trusted social media influencers bolster brand credibility and foster engagement (Marques & Saraiva, 2020). Equally crucial are the elements of website quality, mobile responsiveness, and navigational ease. Law, Chan, and Wang (2018) demonstrate that mobile-optimized hotel websites yield higher conversion rates, as mobile bookings continue to increase globally. Collectively, these digital marketing strategies are integral not only to increasing market visibility but also in shaping the evolving expectations and experiences of contemporary consumers in the hospitality industry.

Sales performance in the hospitality context pertains to a hotel's ability to generate revenue from its core offerings room sales, food and beverage services, events, and other value-added services (O'Neill & Mattila, 2010). Key performance indicators commonly used to assess sales performance include Average Daily Rate (ADR), Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR), Occupancy Rate, customer retention rates, and overall revenue growth (Kim, Shin, & Han, 2020). Extant literature

suggests a direct relationship between digital marketing and improved sales performance in the hotel industry. Dholakia and Bagozzi (2021) highlight that interactive digital platform encourage deeper customer engagement, thereby enhancing conversion rates and driving sales volumes. Furthermore, hotels that invest in customer relationship management (CRM) systems and data analytics often realize superior financial performance through the implementation of targeted promotions and personalized service delivery (Sigala, 2023).

Buhalis and Law (2008) contend that integrating online booking systems with digital marketing efforts not only boosts direct sales but also mitigates the dependency on online travel agencies (OTAs), thus improving profit margins. Customer loyalty and repeat business are also vital components of strong sales performance. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2021) argue that consistent digital engagement, including follow-up communications and loyalty incentives, fosters greater customer retention, ensuring a sustained revenue flow. However, the financial benefits of digital marketing are not uniformly distributed across all hotel types. Independent and smaller hotels often face considerable challenges in leveraging digital strategies due to constraints in budget, digital literacy, and brand recognition (Adeleke & Olajide, 2023). This highlights the importance of identifying moderating variables such as brand reputation that may condition the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in influencing sales performance.

Brand reputation refers to the cumulative perception of a hotel's trustworthiness, service quality, and reliability as held by its stakeholders (Fombrun, 1996). In the context of the digital era, brand reputation is increasingly shaped by online reviews, customer testimonials, social media sentiment, and third-party ratings (Walsh *et al.*, 2009). A favorable brand reputation not only attracts prospective customers but also enhances the efficacy of digital marketing efforts. Kim, Lee, and Park (2022) argue that brand trust moderates the relationship between digital advertising and consumer purchase intention. When a hotel enjoys a positive reputation, its digital marketing messages are more likely to be trusted and acted upon by consumers. In contrast, digital marketing efforts from lesser-known brands may be met with skepticism, diminishing their impact (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Positive online reviews and customer feedback play a pivotal role in influencing consumer booking decisions, particularly for hotels with limited international recognition or a nascent market presence (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Xu and Pratt (2018) highlight that hotels that proactively manage customer feedback and maintain transparent communication across digital platforms are more successful in cultivating a strong brand reputation.

Social media sentiment analysis offers a contemporary tool for monitoring and managing brand perception in real-time. Hays, Page, and Buhalis (2013) underscore that continuous monitoring of social media allows hotels to swiftly address negative commentary while reinforcing positive narratives. Furthermore, ethical branding and corporate social responsibility initiatives are increasingly integral to brand reputation. Consumers in emerging markets, such as Nigeria, are progressively drawn to brands that demonstrate social responsibility and uphold ethical business practices (Ali *et al.*, 2021). In the Nigerian context, where the hospitality industry remains in its developmental stages, brand reputation is a critical determinant in consumer decision-making. As internet penetration and smartphone usage continue to rise, Nigerian consumers are increasingly relying on online reviews and peer recommendations when selecting hotels (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). However, many local hotels struggle to establish a robust digital presence, thereby hindering their ability to build trust and achieve strong sales performance despite their digital marketing initiatives.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative empirical review design with the aim of systematically synthesizing existing literature to evaluate the impact of digital marketing strategies on hotel sales performance and to explore the moderating role of brand reputation within this relationship. By reviewing and integrating findings from previous research, this review seeks to identify key insights, emerging trends, and critical gaps in the existing body of knowledge, thereby contributing to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between these variables. The data sources for this study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, industry reports, and books that are pertinent to the topics of digital marketing in the hospitality sector, brand reputation, and sales performance. The review is grounded in literature published between 2013 and 2023, ensuring that it reflects the most current developments and trends in the digital marketing landscape within the hospitality industry. The study exclusively considers articles that investigate the intersections of digital marketing strategies, brand reputation, and hotel sales performance, with a particular focus on studies that pertain to emerging markets. Special attention is given to Nigeria and other developing economies where digital transformation in the hospitality industry is accelerating, yet remains inconsistent.

In selecting relevant studies, preference was given to empirical research that includes both quantitative and qualitative studies, as well as case studies and industry reports, which provide valuable insights into the relationship between digital marketing strategies and hotel performance

outcomes. The studies were screened through a rigorous process, including a review of titles, abstracts, and full texts, to ensure their alignment with the research objectives. This approach ensures the inclusion of studies that specifically address the dynamics between digital marketing strategies, brand reputation, and hotel sales performance. From the selected studies, key data were extracted, including the types of digital marketing strategies examined, the dimensions of brand reputation considered, and the metrics or indicators used to evaluate hotel sales performance. These data were systematically coded to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships. The analysis process utilized a thematic analysis approach, categorizing the findings into relevant themes that align with the study's research objectives. Through this process, the most prevalent and effective digital marketing strategies in the hospitality industry were identified, the moderating role of brand reputation in influencing the effectiveness of these strategies was explored, and the interactions between these variables were synthesized to enhance understanding of how they jointly impact hotel sales performance.

This scholarly methodology ensures that the study builds on a rigorous and comprehensive review of existing literature, providing a robust theoretical foundation and offering practical insights for the hospitality sector, especially in the context of emerging markets where digital marketing adoption is growing but remains uneven.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the objectives outlined in the introduction, this empirical review synthesizes the findings from a broad range of studies to assess the influence of digital marketing strategies on hotel sales performance, examine the moderating role of brand reputation, and identify the most effective digital marketing strategies employed by hotels to enhance sales performance. The findings are presented under the following key themes:

Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Hotel Sales Performance

The reviewed literature reveals a significant positive relationship between the adoption of digital marketing strategies and improved hotel sales performance. Several studies have shown that hotels employing robust digital marketing strategies—such as search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click advertising, social media marketing, email marketing, and content marketing—tend to experience higher visibility and increased bookings. Specifically, digital platforms like online travel agencies (OTAs), hotel websites, and social media have become essential tools for customer acquisition and retention, contributing directly to sales growth.

A study by Sparks and Browning (2011) highlights the role of online reviews in influencing customer booking decisions, with hotels that effectively manage their online reputation achieving greater sales. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, are cited as critical tools for brand communication, providing real-time interaction with potential customers and fostering deeper engagement with existing clientele. The integration of visual content, customer testimonials, and user-generated content has been identified as a key factor in influencing customer purchase decisions (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014).

Additionally, email marketing campaigns targeted at both new and returning customers have been identified as a highly effective strategy for increasing customer loyalty and driving repeat bookings. According to Kim *et al.* (2020), personalized email campaigns that provide exclusive offers or promotions to loyal customers can lead to significant increases in conversion rates, resulting in higher sales performance.

Moderating Role of Brand Reputation

Brand reputation plays a crucial moderating role in the relationship between digital marketing strategies and hotel sales performance. The literature consistently emphasizes that a strong brand reputation enhances the effectiveness of digital marketing efforts. Kim, Lee, and Park (2022) found that hotels with a strong brand reputation benefit from greater customer trust, which leads to higher engagement with digital marketing campaigns and increased conversion rates. Hotels with a positive brand image are more likely to convert online interactions into bookings, even when their marketing budgets are comparatively modest.

Conversely, less reputable brands or hotels with a weak brand image struggle to translate digital marketing efforts into sales. Sparks and Browning (2011) argue that the impact of digital marketing campaigns, such as social media ads or email promotions, is limited when the hotel's reputation is negative or unknown. Customer reviews and ratings are particularly influential in this context, as consumers are more likely to engage with hotels that have positive feedback from previous guests. In contrast, negative reviews or poor ratings can diminish the impact of digital marketing efforts, as potential customers tend to avoid hotels with low ratings, regardless of the promotional strategies employed.

Furthermore, brand trust and brand loyalty were identified as key elements in moderating the success of digital marketing strategies. Hotels with strong brand loyalty tend to see more favorable results from digital marketing efforts because loyal customers are more likely to respond positively to digital promotions and engage with online content (O'Neill & Mattila, 2010). This relationship

underscores the importance of managing both the perceived trustworthiness and quality of the brand alongside the execution of digital marketing strategies.

Most Effective Digital Marketing Strategies for Enhancing Hotel Sales Performance

Several digital marketing strategies have been identified as particularly effective in enhancing hotel sales performance. These strategies include:

- i. Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Effective SEO practices, including keyword optimization, local SEO, and content marketing, significantly improve a hotel's search engine rankings, making it more visible to potential customers. SEO has been identified as one of the most cost-effective and long-term strategies for boosting online visibility and driving organic traffic to hotel websites, resulting in increased direct bookings (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014).
- ii. Social Media Marketing: The use of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter has proven to be highly effective for engaging with both current and potential guests. Visual content, such as hotel tours, guest testimonials, and special promotions, when shared on social media, increases brand visibility and encourages user interaction, which, in turn, drives sales (Dey, Mukherjee, & Rahman, 2023).
- iii. Online Reputation Management: Managing online reviews and ratings on platforms like TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Booking.com has been recognized as a powerful strategy to influence potential customers. Studies indicate that positive reviews and high ratings can lead to an increase in bookings, as they signal credibility and trustworthiness to new guests (Sparks & Browning, 2011).
- iv. Influencer Marketing: Collaborations with travel bloggers, influencers, and content creators who have a substantial following in the travel and hospitality space have shown positive results in boosting hotel sales. Influencer endorsements are especially effective in increasing brand awareness, as followers tend to trust recommendations from influencers over traditional advertisements (Walsh *et al.*, 2009).
- v. Email Marketing: Personalized email campaigns that offer special promotions, discounts, or loyalty rewards to past guests or subscribers have been identified as an effective tool for driving repeat bookings and fostering customer loyalty (Kim *et al.*, 2020).

Recommendations for Aligning Brand Reputation with Digital Marketing Investments

Based on the findings, aligning brand reputation with digital marketing strategies is essential for optimizing sales performance. Hotels should focus on building and maintaining a positive brand image through consistent service delivery, customer satisfaction, and proactive online reputation

management. Efforts to enhance brand trust and brand loyalty should be integrated into digital marketing strategies to ensure that marketing investments yield measurable results.

Hotels are encouraged to invest in reputation management tools and regularly monitor online reviews to address any negative feedback promptly. Moreover, engaging with loyal customers through personalized communication and exclusive offers via email or social media can strengthen relationships and increase the likelihood of repeat bookings.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that digital marketing strategies can significantly enhance hotel sales performance, but their effectiveness is closely moderated by brand reputation. Hotels with strong, reputable brands experience greater success in leveraging digital marketing tools, while those with weaker reputations face challenges in converting digital efforts into tangible sales outcomes. In furtherance to this, the study concludes that digital marketing relies so much on technology and its application within tourism and hospitality industry. Employees' acceptability and adaptability therefore becomes essential to fully harness the potential of digital marketing for appropriate branding and to ensure sustainable building of its reputation.

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