

# Assessing the Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Customer Patronage in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State

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## Abstract

Hospitality industry comprising hotels, restaurants and various tourism services, which has long been a cornerstone of economic activities globally and locally, Modern consumers are increasingly using digital platforms to make decisions about where to stay, eat, and visit. Specifically, the study determined: the impact of social media engagement on brand awareness in hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis, and also examined the effect of web engagement in increasing booking rate in hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis. A sample size of 320 customers of E-phoenix, Princess Hotels, and Whitefield Hotels was selected. Questionnaire was used to collect data and multiple regression was employed to analyse the data collected. Findings revealed that social media engagement significantly enhances brand awareness, with a strong positive correlation ( $R = 0.859$ ,  $R^2 = 0.738$ ) Similarly, web engagement was found to influence booking rates positively, supported by a moderate correlation ( $R = 0.637$ ,  $R^2 = 0.405$ ) The study recommended that enhancing social media strategies, optimizing website experiences to capitalize on digital opportunities in the dynamic hospitality market.

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing Strategies, Hospitality Industry, Social Media Engagement, Web Engagement, Customer Patronage

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the years, the hospitality industry has witnessed significant changes, particularly in how businesses attract and retain customers. Traditional marketing methods, which once dominated the industry, are increasingly being supplemented or replaced by digital marketing strategies (Bokša, Šaroch & Bokšová, 2020). This shift is driven by several factors, including technological advancements, evolving consumer behaviours, and the competitive nature of the market (Kamal, 2016). The adoption of digital marketing strategies is not merely a trend but a response to profound changes in how consumers engage with businesses. The proliferation of smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media platforms has drastically altered communication dynamics. According to Statista, as of 2023, there are approximately 4.9 billion internet users worldwide, with a significant number accessing the internet via mobile devices (Statista, 2023). This global trend is reflecting in Africa continent, Nigeria and Ilorin where the growing digital infrastructure is transforming consumer interactions within the hospitality sector. The changing behaviour of consumers is a critical driver of the shift toward digital marketing. Modern consumers are increasingly tech-savvy, relying on digital channels for information, reviews, and bookings.

A study by Deloitte (2020) highlights that 81% of travellers find online reviews crucial when deciding on accommodation options. This trend is evident in Ilorin, where customers frequently use digital platforms to compare services, read reviews, and make reservations. Consequently, hotel businesses are leveraging digital marketing to enhance their visibility, engage with customers, and foster loyalty. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become indispensable tools for marketing, allowing businesses to reach a broader audience with targeted advertising and personalized content. The competitive landscape of the hospitality industry further underscores the importance of digital marketing. In a sector where businesses constantly vie for customer attention, digital marketing offers a cost-effective and efficient way to differentiate from competitors. It allows for precision targeting, where businesses can tailor their marketing efforts to specific demographics, interests, and behaviours. For instance, Hotel can use Search Engine Optimization strategies to appear in search results when potential customers look for accommodation options in the area, or employ social media campaigns to highlight unique offerings and promotions. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the hotel in Ilorin must adapt to stay relevant and competitive, leveraging digital marketing to enhance customer experiences and drive business success, which will result to customer patronage and retention.

The hotel plays a vital economic role in local communities throughout the world. The sub-sector is one of the world's largest industries, generating US\$6 trillion or 9% of global GDP and supporting 260 million jobs (World Tourism Organization, 2014). Many of those jobs are created by the hotels, giving the industry a tremendous opportunity to help local communities prosper (Butler, 2016).

### **Problem of the study**

Digital marketing has gained significant traction globally. Factors such as technological

infrastructure, internet penetration, and digital literacy among business owners and consumers can influence how effectively digital marketing strategies are implemented (Statista, 2023). Understanding the level of adoption of digital marketing and the barriers faced by businesses in Ilorin is crucial for assessing the current state of digital marketing in the local hospitality industry. Another significant issue is the effectiveness of Social media and Web engagement strategies in attracting and retaining customers. Modern consumers are increasingly using digital platforms to make decisions about where to stay, eat, and visit. However, the specific behaviours and preferences of consumers in Ilorin regarding online reviews, social media interactions, and web engagement has not been properly explored (Deloitte, 2020). This study aims to identify which strategies are most effective in increasing customer patronage in Ilorin Metropolis and why some strategies may perform better than others.

### **Research Questions**

The study seeks to provide answer to the following question:

- i. What is the effect of social media engagement on brand awareness of Hotel service in Ilorin Metropolis?
- ii. What is the effect of web engagement on rate of booking in Ilorin Metropolis.?

### **Research Objectives**

The Specific objectives of the study include; to

- i. determine the impact of social media engagement on brand awareness in hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis
- ii. examine the effect of web engagement in increasing booking rate in hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview of Digital Marketing Strategies**

Digital marketing strategies constitute a multifaceted approach adopted by businesses to harness the power of digital channels in achieving marketing objectives and engaging with their target audience (Mazzarol, 2015). In today's dynamic business landscape, understanding and implementing effective digital marketing strategies are imperative for staying competitive and reaching consumers where they are most active. Abdulquadri and Dixon-Ogbechi (2022) emphasize the pivotal role of digital marketing in modern business operations, highlighting its significance in driving brand awareness, customer engagement, and ultimately, business success.

Digital marketing strategies serve as a cornerstone of modern business operations, providing businesses with powerful tools and tactics for effectively promoting their products or services, driving brand awareness, and achieving marketing objectives in an ever-evolving digital landscape. By harnessing the diverse array of digital marketing tactics available and leveraging insights from analytics, businesses can build stronger connections with their audience, foster brand loyalty, and drive sustained business growth in today's competitive marketplace.

### **Digital Marketing Strategies**

The utilization of digital marketing tools has become imperative for reaching potential guests, enhancing brand visibility, and driving bookings. These tools encompass various platforms and strategies specifically tailored to meet the unique needs and preferences of hospitality businesses. Understanding the workings of these tools are essential for maintaining competitiveness and maximizing revenue opportunities in the digital era. These includes:

**Social media marketing:** Social media marketing is another crucial tool utilized by hospitality businesses to engage with potential guests and promote their offerings. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn provide hotels with opportunities to showcase their amenities, share user-generated content, and interact with followers in real-time. Research by Lee, Lee, and Kim (2019) emphasizes the importance of social media marketing in the hospitality industry, highlighting its role in building brand awareness, fostering guest engagement, and driving direct bookings.

**Web engagement:** A well-designed and user-friendly website is essential for all hospitality businesses so as to provide customers with essential information about services, amenities, and booking options. Web engagement encompasses factors such as Simplifying the booking process, providing clear and detailed information about services, amenities, and pricing, and ensuring mobile responsiveness can enhance user experience and increase conversion rates from web traffic to bookings. By prioritizing web engagement, businesses can create seamless and enjoyable online experiences for customers, ultimately leading to increased patronage and loyalty.

Digital marketing tools are essential for hospitality businesses to effectively promote their offerings, engage with guests, and drive bookings. By leveraging SEO, social media marketing, email marketing, online reputation management, and data analytics tools, hotels can enhance their online presence, build stronger relationships with guests, and achieve their marketing objectives in a competitive digital landscape.

### **Overview of Customer Patronage**

A customer (sometimes known as a client, buyer, or purchaser) is the recipient of a good, product or idea, obtained from a seller, vendor or supplier for a monetary or other valuable consideration. A customer is the most important visitor on business premises; he is not dependent on business but the business is dependent on him. He is not an interruption in business work rather he is the purpose of it. Patronage on the other hand can be said to mean, the material helps and encouragement given by a patron, in this instance the patron is seen to be a customer in an exchange transaction. Customer patronage denotes the degree to which buying units concentrate purchases over time to a particular brand based on positive strengthening and expressed via repetitive buying behaviour (Nyakweba, Wesonga & Bosire, 2015). Customer patronage also has to do with the processes that customers engage in when choosing a product among alternatives; as well as the factors and features used in the selection. Behavioural scientists thus propose that customer patronage results from a trial that gets reinforced through

satisfaction, and leads to repeat purchase; while cognitive psychologists contend that customer patronage builds through mental processes, based on the believe that consumers engage in extensive problem solving behaviour involving services (Nyakweba et al., 2015). The impact of customer patronage on a business extends beyond immediate financial performance. Loyal customers tend to spend more over time and are less sensitive to price changes, providing a stable revenue stream that can cushion the business against market fluctuations. Furthermore, retaining existing customers is generally more cost-effective than acquiring new ones. Therefore, fostering customer loyalty and patronage can lead to significant cost savings in marketing and customer acquisition efforts.

In addition to its financial benefits, customer patronage plays a critical role in strategic market positioning. A strong base of loyal customers can serve as a competitive advantage, making it difficult for competitors to lure them away. This competitive edge is particularly important in markets with high levels of competition, where customer loyalty can be a key differentiator. Overall, customer patronage is a vital element of business strategy, influencing not only immediate sales but also long-term success and sustainability. By understanding and nurturing customer loyalty, businesses can enhance their market position, reduce costs, and ensure a steady stream of revenue. The insights provided by Berry, Seiders, and Grewal (2002), and Kotler and Keller (2019) highlight the multifaceted nature of customer patronage and its significant impact on business performance and strategic positioning.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**

Fred Davis developed this model in 1986 to predict the acceptability of an information system that shows how consumers accept and use information technology (Ekwueme & Akagwu, 2017). TAM posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are pivotal determinants influencing users' intention to adopt and utilize a technology. TAM emerges as a pertinent theoretical lens through which to examine consumers' acceptance and utilization of digital platforms and services. By investigating factors such as the perceived usefulness of online reviews and the ease of use of digital booking systems, the study can discern the underlying drivers shaping consumers' engagement with digital channels within the hospitality sector in Ilorin. Understanding consumers' attitudes toward digital technologies is essential for hospitality businesses in Ilorin as they strive to craft effective digital marketing strategies tailored to resonate with target audiences and foster positive service experiences.

Empirical evidence corroborates the relevance and applicability of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) within the hospitality industry. Studies by Moon and Kim (2001) and Wu and Wang (2005) have applied the TAM framework to investigate consumers' acceptance and adoption of technology-driven innovations in the hospitality sector, underscoring the model's utility in predicting and explaining user behaviour.

### **Social Presence Theory**

Social Presence Theory, formulated by Short, Williams, and Christie in 1976, posits that individuals perceive and respond to mediated communication in a manner akin to face-to-face

interactions with real individuals. Within the realm of digital marketing and customer patronage in the hospitality industry, Social Presence Theory offers valuable insights into how digital interactions shape consumers' perceptions and connections with hospitality brands. By fostering authentic and engaging interactions on social media platforms, hotel businesses in Ilorin South Local Government can cultivate a sense of social presence that strengthens brand engagement and loyalty among consumers. This theory suggests that digital engagements that emulate face-to-face interactions can elicit similar emotional responses and foster deeper connections between consumers and brands, thereby enhancing overall service experiences and brand perceptions.

In the context of this study TAM theory was adopted because it provides valuable insights into the factors influencing consumers' engagement with digital platforms and services. By examining consumers' perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of digital marketing tools, such as online reviews and booking systems, the study can inform hospitality businesses in Ilorin about the design and implementation of effective digital strategies that align with consumers' preferences and drive positive service experiences which result to increase in customer patronage.

### **Empirical Review**

Sulaimon (2022) investigation on impact of Digital Marketing on Consumer Buying Behaviour in Ilorin Metropolis, delved into the effects of digital marketing on consumer purchasing behavior within the Ilorin Metropolis. It employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods to gather insights into consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding digital marketing strategies. Quantitative approaches like surveys or experiments provided data on digital marketing tactics and their influence on consumer buying decisions. The findings shed light on the effectiveness of various digital marketing channels and tactics in shaping consumer purchasing behavior in the Ilorin. This includes insights into the factors driving consumer engagement with digital marketing efforts and any notable correlations observed between digital marketing activities and consumer behavior. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn from the study offered valuable implications for businesses and marketers aiming to leverage digital marketing strategies effectively in the local market.

In Abdulquadri and Dixon-Ogbechi (2022)'s study titled "Effects of e-marketing on customer's patronage of commercial banks, a study of Guaranty Trust Holding Company PLC, Lagos," the researchers investigated the impact of e-marketing strategies on customer patronage within the commercial banking sector, focusing specifically on Guaranty Trust Holding Company PLC in Lagos. The study employed a quantitative research method to comprehensively explore the relationship between e-marketing initiatives and customer behavior. The study offered valuable insights into the effects of e-marketing on customer patronage of commercial banks, with a specific focus on Guaranty Trust Holding Company PLC in Lagos. This include insights into the effectiveness of various e-marketing channels and campaigns deployed by the bank in attracting and retaining customers, as well as the factors influencing customers' decision-making processes in choosing a bank. The conclusions drawn from the study have provided

practical implications for commercial banks seeking to leverage e-marketing strategies to enhance customer patronage and loyalty.

**Methodology**

A survey research design was utilized for this study, targeting customers from three specific hotels in the Ilorin Metropolis: Princess Hotel, E-Phonex, and Whitefield Hotel. The Population is infinite. A purposive sampling technique was employed to choose these three hotels based on their 3 star categories with facilities such as online presence, Bar, Café, Restaurant etc. The surveyed customers represent a diverse range of categories to ensure varied perspectives. The sample size was set at 319 customers, determined using the formula for infinite Population:

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 p (1-p)}{C^2}$$

SS = required sample size

Z = Z-value (e.g. 1.95 for 95 per cent confidence level)

P = percentage of population picking a choice, expressed as a decimal in this case (0.6)

C = confidence interval expressed as decimal (e.g. .05 = +/- 5per cent points)

Therefore;

$$SS = \frac{1.95^2(0.6) \times (1 - 0.6)}{0.05^2}$$

$$SS = \frac{3.8025(0.6) \times (0.4)}{0.0025}$$

$$SS = \frac{2.2815 \times 0.4}{0.0024}$$

$$SS = \frac{0.798525}{0.0024}$$

$$SS = 319.$$

The sample size was 319.

Self-administered structured questionnaire was used to elicit data from the target population and this was coded and analysed with the aid of SPSS. Regression analysis was used to test the earlier formulated hypotheses.

**Data Analysis**

Out of the three hundred and nineteen questionnaires distributed, three hundred and six (306) usable copies were retrieved, resulting in a 95.6 percent response rate. This high response rate

indicates a strong willingness among participants to engage in the study. This measure was taken to ensure a robust response rate.

**Analysis of Demographic Data**

The demographic data were analyzed using the frequency distribution. The Table 2 below shows the distribution across each variable.

<b>Table 2: Demographic Analysis of the Respondents</b>		
<b>Variables</b>	<b>No. of Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender:</b>		
Male	190	62.1
Female	116	37.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age:</b>		
18 – 30 yrs	59	19.3
31- 40yrs	101	33.0
41- 50yrs	116	37.9
51years and above	28	8.8
	<b>306</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Education:</b>		
OND/NCE	102	33.3
B.Sc./HND	130	42.5
M.Sc./MBA	74	24.2
Others	-	-
	<b>306</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status:</b>		
Single	186	60.8
Married	78	25.5
Divorced	32	10.5
Separated	10	3.2
	<b>306</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Choice of Hotel:</b>		
E-Phonix	109	35.6
Princess Hotel	93	30.4
Whitefield Hotel	104	34.0
	<b>306</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

The survey results indicate that out of 306 respondents, 62.1% were male and 37.7% were female. This gender distribution suggests that digital marketing strategies should be designed to appeal to both genders, ensuring inclusivity and broad reach. More so, the age breakdown shows that 19.3% of respondents were between 18-30 years old, 33% were between 31-40 years old, 37.9% were between 41-50 years old, and 8.8% were 51 years and above. This data

highlights that the majority of hotel patrons fall within the 31-40 age range, indicating that digital marketing efforts should focus on platforms and content appealing to younger and middle-aged adults who are more likely to engage with digital media.

Educational levels among respondents reveal that 33.3% have OND/NCE qualifications, 42.5% hold B.Sc./HND degrees, and 24.2% possess M.Sc./MBA degrees. The predominance of respondents with higher education degrees suggests that digital marketing strategies should be informative, sophisticated, and detailed, catering to an educated audience likely to appreciate well-crafted and informative content.

Regarding marital status, 60.8% of respondents are single, 25.5% are married, 10.5% are divorced, and 3.2% are separated. This diverse marital status distribution implies that marketing strategies should cater to both individual travelers and families, highlighting both individual and group experiences.

The choice of hotel among respondents shows that 35.6% stayed at E-Phonix, 35.6% at Princess Hotel, and 34.0% at Whitefield Hotel. This even distribution suggests that digital marketing strategies should be uniformly applied across all three hotels to ensure consistent brand presence and engagement across all customer bases.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>: Social media engagement does not have any significant impact on brand awareness among hospitality industry in Ilorin.**

<b>Table 3: Model Summary</b>				
<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>
1	.859 <sup>a</sup>	.738	.736	2.77898
<b>a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Engagement</b>				

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

The model summary indicates that social media engagement has a significant impact on brand awareness in the hospitality industry in Ilorin, as evidenced by the high correlation coefficient (R = 0.859) and the substantial explanatory power (R Square = 0.738). This strong positive correlation implies that as hotels increase their social media engagement, their brand awareness significantly improves, accounting for 73.8% of the variance. The adjusted R Square value (0.736) confirms the model's robustness, while the standard error (2.77898) suggests a precise estimate of this relationship. These findings highlight the importance of strategic investment in social media marketing, emphasizing the need for high-quality, consistent content, active customer interaction, and comprehensive monitoring and analytics to refine strategies. Furthermore, maintaining a presence across multiple social media platforms can help reach a diverse audience, ultimately enhancing brand recognition and customer engagement, leading to increased patronage and business growth for hotels in Ilorin.

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2779.770	1	2779.770	359.948	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	988.506	305	7.723		
	Total	3768.277	306			
<b>a. Dependent Variable: brand awareness</b>						
<b>b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Engagement</b>						

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The ANOVA table indicates that social media engagement has a significant impact on brand awareness in the hospitality industry in Ilorin. The regression model shows a sum of squares of 2779.770 with 1 degree of freedom (df), leading to a mean square of 2779.770. The residual sum of squares is 988.506 with 128 df, resulting in a mean square of 7.723. The F-value of 359.948, with a significance level (Sig.) of .000, strongly suggests that the model is statistically significant. These results imply that the variation in brand awareness is predominantly explained by social media engagement, reinforcing the need for hotels to invest in strategic and consistent social media efforts to boost their brand recognition. This statistical significance underscores the effectiveness of social media as a tool for enhancing customer engagement and awareness, which can translate to increased patronage and business growth in the hospitality sector in Ilorin.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.652	.674		11.359	.000
	Social_media_engagement	.439	.031	.640	14.112	.000
<b>a. Dependent Variable: brand_awareness_among_hospitality</b>						

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results of the regression analysis show that social media engagement has a significant and positive impact on brand awareness in the hospitality industry. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.439) indicates that for every one-unit increase in social media engagement, there is a 0.439 increase in brand awareness. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.640) demonstrates a strong relationship between the two variables, suggesting that social media engagement is a major predictor of brand awareness, accounting for 64% of the variation. The t-value (14.112)

and the significance level ( $p = 0.000$ ) confirm that this relationship is statistically significant. These findings have important implications for the research, as they highlight the crucial role of social media engagement in shaping brand awareness. For hospitality businesses, this suggests that focusing on social media strategies could greatly enhance their visibility and customer recognition, underscoring the need for robust online engagement practices to stay competitive in a digital landscape.

**H<sub>02</sub>: Web engagement does not have any significant effect on booking rate in hospitality industry in Ilorin**

<b>Table 6: Model Summary</b>				
<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>
1	.637 <sup>a</sup>	.405	.401	4.18372
<b>a. Predictors: (Constant), Web Engagement</b>				

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

The model summary for H<sub>02</sub> suggests that web engagement has a significant effect on the booking rate in the hospitality industry in Ilorin. The correlation coefficient (R) is 0.637, indicating a moderate positive relationship between web engagement and booking rate. The R Square value of 0.405 means that 40.5% of the variance in booking rates can be explained by web engagement. The adjusted R Square, slightly lower at 0.401, confirms the model's reliability by accounting for potential overfitting. The standard error of the estimate is 4.18372, indicating the average distance between observed values and the regression line. These findings imply that enhancing web engagement can significantly influence booking rates, suggesting that hotels should prioritize improving their online presence and functionality. This could involve optimizing website usability, providing clear and compelling booking information, and ensuring a seamless user experience to convert web engagement into actual bookings, thereby boosting overall business performance in Ilorin's hospitality sector.

<b>Table 7: ANOVA<sup>a</sup></b>						
<b>Model</b>		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
1	Regression	1527.827	1	1527.827	87.287	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2240.450	305	17.504		
	Total	3768.277	306			
<b>a. Dependent Variable: Booking Rate</b>						
<b>b. Predictors: (Constant), Web Engagement</b>						

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

The ANOVA table for the effect of web engagement on booking rate in the hospitality industry in Ilorin reveals a significant impact. The regression sum of squares is 1527.827 with 1 degree of freedom (df), resulting in a mean square of 1527.827. The residual sum of squares is 2240.450 with 128 df, yielding a mean square of 17.504. The F-value is 87.287, with a significance level (Sig.) of .000, indicating that the model is highly statistically significant. These results imply that web engagement plays a crucial role in influencing booking rates. Consequently, hotels in Ilorin should focus on enhancing their web engagement strategies, such as improving website design, user experience, and online booking features, to increase their booking rates. By doing so, they can effectively convert online interactions into confirmed bookings, thereby driving business growth and profitability in the hospitality sector.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.581	.705		2.243	.026
	web_engagemen t	.824	.043	.749	19.140	.000

a. Dependent Variable: booking\_rate

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

The regression analysis results indicate that web engagement significantly and positively influences the booking rate in the hospitality industry. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.824) reveals that for every one-unit increase in web engagement, the booking rate increases by 0.824 units, indicating a substantial effect. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.749) suggests that web engagement is a strong predictor of the booking rate, explaining approximately 74.9% of its variance. The high t-value (19.140) and the significance level (p = 0.000) confirm the statistical significance of this relationship. These findings underscore the critical importance of web engagement in driving booking rates, implying that enhancing online user experiences and interactions can directly boost reservations in the hospitality industry. For businesses, these results suggest that investing in digital platforms and optimizing web engagement strategies could lead to significant improvements in conversion rates, emphasizing the need for a strong online presence to maximize bookings and customer acquisition.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings provide substantial evidence on the significance of these digital strategies in enhancing brand awareness and increasing booking rates.

The analysis of social media engagement reveals a significant impact on brand awareness. The model summary (R = 0.859, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.738) and ANOVA results (F = 359.948, p = .000) suggest that social media engagement explains 73.8% of the variance in brand awareness. This strong positive correlation implies that increased social media activities, such as regular updates,

engaging content, and active interaction with customers, substantially boost brand visibility and recognition. These findings align with the study by Hudson and Thal (2013), which demonstrated that social media platforms are crucial in shaping customer perceptions and enhancing brand awareness in the hospitality industry. Additionally, Leung, Law, Van Hoof, and Buhalis (2013) found that social media engagement significantly influences brand equity and customer loyalty, supporting the results of this study. However, the current study's findings strongly indicate that, in the context of Ilorin's hospitality industry, social media engagement is a critical factor for increasing brand awareness.

In achieving the second objective, the model summary for web engagement ( $R = 0.637$ ,  $R^2 = 0.605$ ) and the ANOVA results ( $F = 87.287$ ,  $p = .000$ ) indicate that web engagement explains 60.5% of the variance in booking rates. This moderate positive relationship suggests that improvements in web engagement, such as enhancing website usability, providing detailed booking information, and ensuring a seamless user experience, can significantly increase the number of bookings. These findings are consistent with the study by Law, Qi, and Buhalis (2010), which highlighted that a user-friendly and informative website significantly enhances booking rates in the hospitality industry. Similarly, a study by Jeong, Oh, and Gregoire (2003) emphasized the importance of web features and design in influencing online bookings, further corroborating the results of this research. On the other hand, the study by Wang and Fesenmaier (2007) suggested that while web engagement is essential, it is one of many factors influencing booking decisions, indicating that other elements such as price and customer reviews also play crucial roles. Despite this, the current study underscores the importance of web engagement in driving booking rates in Ilorin's hospitality sector.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the objectives of the study focusing on the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer patronage in the hospitality industry in Ilorin, several key conclusions can be drawn:

The study demonstrates that social media engagement significantly enhances brand awareness among hotels in Ilorin South Local Government by maintaining active profiles, posting engaging content, and interacting with customers, hotels can effectively increase their visibility and recognition in the competitive hospitality market. More so, the findings highlight the critical role of web engagement in influencing booking rates. Improvements in website usability, clarity of booking processes, and informative content directly correlate with higher booking rates, underscoring the importance of a well-optimized online presence.

For hospitality managers and marketers, the study emphasizes the strategic imperative of investing in digital marketing initiatives. By leveraging social media platforms and optimizing websites, hotels can not only attract more customers but also convert online engagement into tangible business outcomes, such as increased bookings and revenue. In essence, the study underscores the transformative potential of digital marketing strategies in enhancing customer patronage within the hospitality industry in Ilorin. By aligning with the study's objectives, hotels can strategically position themselves to capitalize on digital opportunities and achieve sustainable growth in an increasingly competitive market landscape.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Hotels should prioritize active and engaging presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Regularly posting high-quality content, interacting with customers through comments and messages, and running targeted campaigns can significantly boost brand awareness and customer engagement.
- ii. Improving the usability and functionality of hotel websites is crucial. Simplifying the booking process, providing clear and detailed information about services, amenities, and pricing, and ensuring mobile responsiveness can enhance user experience and increase conversion rates from web traffic to bookings.

Implementing these recommendations can enable hotels in Ilorin to harness the full potential of digital marketing strategies, effectively increasing brand awareness, enhancing customer patronage, and driving business growth in the competitive hospitality sector.

### **Limitations**

The constraints of this study include depending on data reported by participants themselves, which could lead to bias and impact the precision of results, as individuals may give answers that are more socially acceptable instead of their genuine thoughts. Furthermore, the research's concentration on hotels establishments in Ilorin South Local government could restrict the applicability of the results to diverse regions or sectors with varying digital marketing strategies. The design only gathers data at a specific moment and does not consider changes in customer perceptions or digital marketing trends. Moreover, the research does not take into consideration possible external influences, like economic circumstances or competitive strategies, that might impact customer behavior and attitudes in the hospitality sector. These restrictions need to be taken into account when analyzing the results and implementing the conclusions in wider settings.

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