

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ON CUSTOMER BOOKING BEHAVIOR IN MESTIL HOTEL

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DECLARATION

I Rizpah Suzan Akello hereby declare that this is my original work, it is not plagiarized and has not been submitted to any other institution for any award.

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APPROVAL

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

Abbreviation	Full Meaning
AIDA	Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (marketing model)
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
EKB	Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (consumer behaviour model)
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
M23B63/046	Author's Registration Number
OTA	Online Travel Agency
PPC	Pay-Per-Click (advertising)
ROI	Return on Investment
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SSL	Secure Sockets Layer (internet security protocol)
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
UCC	Uganda Communications Commission
UTB	Uganda Tourism Board
UX	User Experience

ABSTRACT

This report focused on investigating how customer booking behaviour is impacted by digital marketing techniques at Mestil Hotel, Kampala. The reason why most customers prefer the traditional booking option of walk-ins, telephone calls, and third-party booking agents, despite the massive investment made by the hospitality industry of Uganda in digital marketing tools, motivated us to explore the reason and how the hotels in Uganda could improve their digital marketing tools.

The research used a mixed-methods research design and employed both the structured questionnaires which were dispatched to the customers and employees as well as a semi-structured interview schedule to obtain data from the supervisory employees among whom was the marketing manager. The literature was a synthesis of the existing theoretical and empirical studies on consumer behaviour and digital marketing in the hospitality industry.

The results showed that Mestil Hotel has an extensive digital marketing platform, implying a high-quality site with the ability to make a booking facilitated by active use of social media. Nonetheless, the effect on the behaviour with regards to the booking is partial; the digital channels are effective in the establishment of awareness but minimal in facilitating conversion. The issues that were encountered were channel fragmentation, limitation in data capture, pressure of competition by online travel agencies and customer preferences.

The research found that investing in digital marketing is not enough to be able to change established booking behaviours in the absence of strong value propositions, smooth user experiences, and comprehensive marketing campaigns. Some of the recommendations were to maximize direct booking incentives, improve user experience on the site, close the digital divide by educating customers and using customer relationship management to build customer loyalty. This study provides empirical findings of the Ugandan setting to the digital marketing processes in emerging hospitality markets.

TABLE OF CONTENT

DECLARATION	i
APPROVAL	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATION	iv
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENT	vi
CHAPTER ONE	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT	4
1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	4
General Objective	4
Specific Objectives	4
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY	5
1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY	5
CHAPTER TWO	7
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 INTRODUCTION	7
2.2 THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.2.1 CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR BOOKING IN HOTELS	7
2.2.1.1 Theoretical Foundation and the Decision-Making Process	7
2.2.1.2 Key Determinants of Booking Channel Selection	8
2.2.1.3 The Impact of Demographics, Psychographics and Trip Context	8
2.2.2 DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES IN HOTELS	9
2.2.2.1 The Shift from Traditional to Digital Dominance	9
2.2.2.2 Core Components of an Integrated Digital Strategy	10
2.2.2.3 Strategy Integration and Performance Measurement	10
2.2.3 IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON CUSTOMER BOOKING BEHAVIOUR	11

2.3.3.1 Influence on Awareness, consideration and channel preference.	11
2.3.3.2 Personalization and the Creation of Booking Habit.	12
2.3 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW.	12
2.3.1 Global Perspective	12
2.3.2 Regional Perspective (Africa and east Africa)	13
2.3.3 Ugandan Perspective	13
2.4 RESEARCH GAP	14
2.5. SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW.	14
2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	15
Digital Marketing Strategies: Independent Variable.	15
Dependent Variable: Customer Booking Behaviour.	15
Diagram of Conceptual Framework (Textual Representation):	15
CHAPTER THREE:	18
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	18
3.1 INTRODUCTION	18
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	18
3.3 AREA OF STUDY	19
3.4 SOURCES OF INFORMATION	19
3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES.	20
Sampling Techniques	20
3.6 VARIABLES DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT	21
3.7 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION	22
3.8 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS	22
3.7.1 Interviews	22
3.7.2 Questionnaires	22
3.7.3 Observations	22
3.7.4 Documentary	23
3.7.5 Editing	23
3.9 QUALITY AND ERROR CONTROL	23
3.10 DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS	23
3.10.1 Data Analysis	24
3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	24
3.12 METHODOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS.	24

CHAPTER FOUR	25
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	25
4.1 INTRODUCTION	25
4.2 RESPONSE RATE ANALYSIS	25
4.3 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS	26
4.3.1 Gender Distribution	26
4.3.2 Age Distribution	26
4.3.3 Education Level	27
4.4 FINDINGS ACCORDING TO RESEARCHED OBJECTIVES	27
4.4.1 Digital Marketing Strategies used by Mestil Hotel	27
4.4.2 Customer Perceptions of Digital Marketing Efforts	28
4.4.3 Customer Booking Behaviour	29
4.5 HYPOTHESIS TESTING	29
Correlation Analysis	29
4.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	30
4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY	30
CHAPTER FIVE	31
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	31
5.1 INTRODUCTION	31
5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS BASED ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	31
5.2.1 Digital Marketing Strategies used by Mestil Hotel	31
5.2.2 Customer Perceptions of Mestil Hotel’s Digital Marketing Efforts	32
5.2.3 Customer Booking Behaviour at Mestil Hotel	32
5.2.4 Relationship Between Digital Marketing Strategies and Customer Booking Behaviour	33
5.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS	33
5.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MESTIL HOTEL	34
5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY	34
5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY	34
CHAPTER SIX	35
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	35
6.1 INTRODUCTION	35
6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	35

6.3 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	36
6.4 PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS	36
6.5 CONCLUSIONS	38
6.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY	39
REFERENCES	40
APPENDIX 1	44
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MESTIL HOTEL STUDY	44

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the background of study, research aim, objectives, research questions, its relevance as well as scope.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The most dynamic and competitive aspects of the global economy are starting to be the hospitality and tourism. In the recent past, digital marketing has become one of the primary growth drivers and has changed the way hotels and other businesses locate and retain consumers. As the internet, smartphones, and electronic payment systems become widespread, there are more chances of consumers getting a basis on travel choices made online, reviewing customer information, and promotions (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019).

The hotel context means customer booking behaviour in the booking process, the overall process, including selecting the channel, timing, and final decision which leads to the reservation (Morosan and DeFranco, 2019). It does not only involve making a booking: there is pre-booking research, alternative assessment, arriving at a choice of the booking platform (direct or indirect), and post-booking engagement. In the present digital age, it is becoming an increasingly hybrid experience, where there are multi-touchpoints between online and offline platforms before a final decision is made (Bilgihan et al., 2020).

This is a significant behaviour within the larger consumer decision-making process. To managers of hotels, it can be analysed to provide practical information on preferences of customers, credibility system, and effectiveness of various mediums of distribution.

A number of issues arise when it comes to customer booking behaviour, particularly in a market such as Uganda which is fast becoming digital. To begin with, First, by making bookings through Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) or third-party agents, the hotel has to pay commissions ranging between 15 and 25 per cent, reducing their profit margins by a significant margin when compared to direct reservations (Toh et al., 2021). It is clear that direct digital channel cannot secure loyalty as evidenced by the large percentage of direct bookings. Second, demand forecasting is difficult when using last-minute walk-ins or phone calls, disrupting the revenue management, and causing either over- or under-booking, which

is a squeezer of yields (Ivanov and Zhechev, 2022). Third, the conventional reservation process (walk-in, phone) fails to capture all customer information and will reduce the capacity of the hotels to create robust profiles of their guests to market to them, retarget and analyse long-term trends (Law et al., 2019). Fourth, excessive investment in online marketing (social media advertisements, search engine optimization, email marketing) is an issue under the condition that it does not proceed to even more direct online bookings that is, we are promoting awareness but not directing customers to book (Leung et al., 2019). Fifth, inaccurate data in different channels (website, agent, front desk) or a slow online booking experience may result in unfinished booking and disgruntlement which negatively affects the image of the hotel even before the guest takes a step (Chung and Koo, 2019).

Although a major focus is on digital marketing, it is an ecosystem within a larger system. To begin with, the issue of privacy and security of online payments and data is of great concern particularly in the new digital markets (Mohan et al., 2020). The credibility of the brand and the booking service of the hotel is important. Second, the customers tend to engage in showrooming: they research the hotel site and then make a reservation on a third-party site at a better price (Gozzoli et al., 2019). Dynamic channel pricing and price transparency have a strong effect on the final decision. Third, online reviews of websites such as TripAdvisor and Google Review tend to overtake promotional information in booking. The work of massive digital marketing efforts can be unwounded with negative reviews (Sparks and Browning, 2021). Fourth, a customer personal internet availability, cell phone use, and familiarity with online platforms to conduct transactions are enabling factors to online booking (Okello-, Obura and Minishi-, Mahajanja, 2018). Fifth, the reason of visiting (business or leisure), urgency of booking, group membership, and previous experience of the hotel or the channel used to book the hotel or hotel-space all have decisive effects (Kim et al., 2020). Sixth, the direct booking loyalty can be promoted by the positive previous experience of the guest and the great hotel image, which diminishes the effects of online advertisements and the role of intermediaries (So et al., 2021).

Statista (2022) also says that more than three-quarters of hotel bookings across the globe occur post-internet research, and 60 percent of millennials want to complete their bookings online instead of using conventional agents. That is the hard evidence that digital channels are not an option anymore, it is the key to attracting customers and increasing sales.

Digital marketing strategies, including social media use, search optimization, email campaigns, online advertising, websites, usability make the hotels to promote their services and communicate directly with the customers on the spot. Social media networks, such as Facebook or Instagram, are effective at telling a visual story, whereas online reviews in TripAdvisor have a significant impact on the customers. According to scholars such as Buhalis and Law (2008) the digital environment has completely changed the way tourism and hospitality are marketed, eaten and managed hence has significance in the hotel competitiveness.

Digital transformation is gradually creeping in the hospitality industry in the East African setting. Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya hotels and lodges are gradually transitioning to the online platforms so as to access both domestic and global markets. Indicatively, Safari lodges in Kenya heavily rely on Instagram advertising to secure foreign tourists (Akama & Keiti, 2020). Hotels in Uganda have employed Google Ads, Facebook advertising and direct reservation platforms to tap into the flights market. According to the report of the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC, 2021), internet penetration has reached 52, as well as more than 12,000,000 Uganda's actively using social media. This digital proliferation presents a rare opportunity to the hotels to engage the customers in ways that have never been a possibility before.

In spite of all the trendy technology that is emerging, the Ugandan hospitality industry is yet to fully exploit the digital channels. Many destinations remain in the industry of walk-ins, travel agencies, and third-party platforms such as Booking.com, that tends to make massive commissions. Premium hotels such as Mestil Hotel and Residences in Kampala are competing in a very narrow market where differentiation is all that counts. They will be competing with the likes of Serena Hotel and Sheraton Kampala, hence the team at Mestil has to unearth some gold in determining whether their online marketing efforts are indeed stirring the needle on bookings. Although use of digital tools is a fact, minimal research actually follows how the strategies are changing the booking trend within the hotel industry in Uganda. The given paper intends to bridge the latter gap by narrowing down and focusing on Mestil Hotel, analysing the impact of its digital marketing mix on the level of customer booking, and providing substantive and evidence-based recommendations on enhancing its competitiveness in the digital age.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Hospitality industry in Uganda is rapidly evolving due to presence of more online people, customers handling the way they shop, competitors becoming more polished and the entry rivals. Kampala hotels, in particular luxurious ones such as Mestil Hotel, have already emptied their wallets on websites, Instagram, Facebook, online advertisement, and email blasts. Even so, the payoffs of such an investment are not fair regarding transforming perspectives into guests (Mestil Hotel, 2024). Although Mestil Hotel has a robust online presence, the number of guests opting to make their reservation through other methods, particularly, walk in and phone booking, as well as, agencies, remains substantial. The question that arises is whether the digital tactics can be living up to what the customers actually want or they are having an effect on booking decisions (Mestil Hotel & Residences, 2024; Uganda Hoteliers Association, 2023). Thus, the purpose of the present study is to unearth the role that digital marketing strategies is playing in influencing the customer booking behaviour at Mestil Hotel. Its outcomes are expected to make us understand the level of the effectiveness of the existing tactics, where they are not working, and provide us with the viable means of enhancing the digital push toward the more effective engagement and more bookings.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

General Objective

- The overall objective of this study is to examine the impact of the digital marketing strategies on the customer booking behaviour at Mestil Hotel in Kampala, Uganda.

Specific Objectives

1. To Examine customer booking behaviour in hotels.
2. To examine digital marketing strategies in hotels.
3. To establish the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer booking behaviours in hotels.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the customer booking behaviours in hotels in Uganda?
2. What are the digital marketing strategies available and applicable in hotels in Uganda?

3. What is the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer booking behaviour in hotels in Uganda?

1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The study is important since it provides both theoretical and practical understandings of booming hospitality in Uganda. Digital marketing is one of the main factors leading to customer booking behaviour globally, particularly in the travel and hospitality industry (Kotler et al., 2017). Hotels go beyond creating buzz and use social media, sites, and search engines to drive bookings and increase loyalty. In Uganda, however, despite the number of people that are online (UCC, 2021), we do not know how these tactics really influence the way in which guests reserve luxury properties.

For Mestil Hotel, the research will provide solid proof to understand whether its existing digital push is worth its investment. Knowledge of whether or not social media campaigns, websites redesigned, or nudges delivered via emails makes the difference between an actual booking will help the hotel managers to spend funds more wisely. As Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) state, the key to achieving the best ROI in the digital marketing issue is data-driven decisions.

In terms of academics, it provides a void in research on digital marketing in the hotel setting in Uganda, which is frequently neglected in favour of small and medium enterprises (Nyeko, 2020). In the case of the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), which handles the ideamaking of policy makers within the sector, the results can inform policy that will drive the hotel sector towards digitalization.

In summary, the study provides the hotel leaders with new information, contributes to the research community, and provides the policy makers with practical solutions on how to make Uganda with a vibrant hospitality industry competitive.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

It is possible to subdivide the scope into three components, namely, geography, content, and time.

- **Geographical Scope:** The study narrows down to a four-star hotel and residences called Mestil Hotel and Residences in Kampala, which caters to both national and

foreigners. Although the hospitality environment in Uganda is wide, a single case will enable me to explore in-depth details without losing the trees in the forest.

- **Content Scope:** In this research, the independent variable is digital marketing strategies, whereas the dependent variable is customer booking behaviour. Some of the features that are being considered are social media, web usability, email campaign, web advertising, and search engine optimization (Chaffey, 2022). The measure of customer booking behaviour will be frequency of booking, booking channels, average spending and likelihood to come back (Zeithaml et al., 2009).
- **Time Scope:** The research will be collected in the course of three months, which will include real-time booking trends, as well as, the staff opinion within the three months. This will allow me to observe the short-term results as well as any seasonal changes that the digital strategies may have.

These limitations ensure the study is on track, manageable, and pertinent to the research questions even though the lessons learnt may not necessarily be generalized to all hotels in Uganda.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The theoretical and empirical reviews of the research that I will be considering in this chapter discuss the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer booking behavior in hospitality industry. The hotel marketing has become an inseparable element of global hotel marketing, particularly given the increased access to the internet and the possession of phones. Hotels are no longer on the old-fashioned marketing gimmicks but instead rely on social media, search engine optimization, social media advertising, e-mail marketing and user-friendly websites to influence the buyer choices of visitors (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

This chapter would be divided into two major blocks, one of them the literature review of theory, which will consist in reviewing the models and ideas upon which the research will be based, and another, the empirical review, which deals with the research of the literature and its findings on the global, regional and Ugandan perspectives of the story. I will also include a conceptual framework diagram mapping the relationships between variables and a quick overview which identifies the research gaps I am going to address with my study.

2.2 THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.2.1 CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR BOOKING IN HOTELS.

Customer booking behaviour is a complex multi faceted decision-making process, which has evolved significantly due to technology advancement. This part explores the underlying theory concepts, the major forces, and the changing trends of patterns with the changing digital territory.

2.2.1.1 Theoretical Foundation and the Decision-Making Process.

Customer booking behaviour is essentially based on the consumer behaviour theories. In most cases it is a variation of the Engel -Kollat -Blackwell (EKB) model: you become aware of a necessity, find information, consider alternatives, make a buying decision, and later evaluate it (Kotler and Keller, 2016). In hotels purchase is to make a reservation. Morosan and DeFranco (2019) append that the booking experience is funnelled and diffused

over a considerable number of touch points such as social media inspiration or price checking on the OTA websites before you finalise a booking decision on whichever platform you choose. The process can hardly be viewed as linear; individuals tend to oscillate between the phases, particularly when it comes to the search and evaluation step (Bilgihan et al., 2020). Perceived risk, convenience, trust, and habit also bring the final decision of the channel to hotel website, OTA, phone, walk-in (Toh et al., 2021).

2.2.1.2 Key Determinants of Booking Channel Selection

The main factors of the choice of the booking channels. Studies have pinpointed a number of people interacting factors that determine what channel a visitor will be using. Key drivers are the perceived value and price sensitivity. Visitors conduct extensive online research to ensure they get the best value out of the given price, often referring to the hotel site but reserve it through an OTA because they consider it to be a great offer or a package deal- this is showrooming (Gazzali et al., 2019). The latter is closely related to risk and trust. People will not be willing to booking the platform via the digital person but safety concerns, the safety of their data, and the validity of the booking platform can prevent this when they do not trust the digital (Mohan et al., 2020). According to Law et al. (2019), trust is achieved with the help of professional websites, trusted payment gateways, and definite cancellation policies.

Access to technology and technological capability are also essential. Mobile-first or mobile-only browsing is enormous, and this requires booking engines to be mobile-optimised (Kim et al., 2020). The influence of society is important as well. The amount of user-created content, like positive reviews on TripAdvisor and Google, can be more important than the paid advertisements when deciding and relying on the information source (Sparks and Browning, 2021). One of the guests may find somewhere to stay in Instagram and then reserve at Booking.com due to perceived safety and the number of verified ratings.

2.2.1.3 The Impact of Demographics, Psychographics and Trip Context.

Not everyone behaves in a similar way with booking behaviour as it differs drastically among the customer categories. Strong predictors are age, income and nationality. Digital natives (Millennials, Gen Z) prefer to use mobile applications when booking a hotel and are more likely to be led by social media and influencers, whereas the older generation prefers using phones or travel agents due to tradition and the need to have a personal contact with the customer (Leung et al., 2019). Behaviour is also determined by psychographic characteristics

such as the level of innovativeness, loyalty by a person to a brand or risk aversion. A repeat guest that had positive experiences previously would be more willing to make a reservation in order to receive loyalty benefits; a new customer would be dependent on the aggregate trust of a booking platform (So et al., 2021).

Last but not least, there is a trip context. Business travel is often more constrained by the corporate policy and speed requirement and it may involve making direct reservations through corporate travel agencies or on the hotel. The OTA is used more in leisure trips, which offer greater time to plan and implies more of a price bias (Ivanov and Zhechev, 2022). Probably, the last-minute booking is going to be done on phone or walk-in, and when you are at ease in making booking decisions in advance, then you can do extensive research online and compare through prices (Chung and Koo, 2019).

2.2.2 DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES IN HOTELS

Digital marketing strategies in the hotel industry have become increasingly important and most organizations have invested in this area to ensure customer retention and attract them. Digital marketing techniques integrate internet networks and technology in the promotion of a hotel brand, capture audiences, instigate plus bookings, and establish relations. This section explores the main elements of these strategies, their implementation and their objectives on the competitive hotel industry.

2.2.2.1 The Shift from Traditional to Digital Dominance.

Marketing paradigm in the hospitality industry has irrevocably shifted off the old-fashioned broadcasting advertising (print, TV) to the interactive one that is data-driven and digital. Such a change is due to the fact that consumers have become more flexible in their media behaviour and campaigns in the digital realm can be accurately gauged (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). With digital marketing, you can only focus on a particular group of people, personal interests, and even re-target individuals who had been visited the site previously, all in a fraction of the price of the print or TV (Khan et al., 2020). The primary objective has shifted to not only recognising the brand but also to realising revenue due to optimised booking journeys and long-range CRM based on data analytics and personalized engagement (Sharma & Nayak, 2019).

2.2.2.2 Core Components of an Integrated Digital Strategy.

Therefore, the digital marketing strategies is typically scattered over several major portions, which must fall into place. The media that you will always come across is the first site together with SEO -the hotel media. The place is the entrance to all other things; the place that makes a curious visitor a paying customer. A good SEO will ensure that the site appears among the top organic results when such keywords as hotel in Kampala or luxury accommodation Nakasero are used, thus it does not require any additional expenses associated with advertisements to drive traffic (Xiang et al., 2015). It must also appear well, quick to work around, operate on phones, and a secure and fast booking system.

The next two trends to consider are social media and content marketing. Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, allow hotels to share images, tell stories about their guests, promote special offers, and communicate with their followers in a two-way dialogue. Due to the addiction of people to images, high-quality photos, brief videos, and even online tours are obligatory (Leung et al., 2019). The blogs and the local guideposts like consider an idea of Top 10 Restaurants near Mestil Hotel will contribute to positioning the hotel as an insider and provide an additional push to the SEO.

It is typically done the paid side as PPC and meta-search marketing. Hotels can bid to appear at the top of a search engine in Google Ads or in metasearch engines such as Google Hotel Ads or the sponsored listing of a search engine such as TripAdvisor. These advertisements are constructed in a manner that attracts traffic that is already willing to book, making the pay off potentially great (Tussyadiah, 2020). Emails will remain among the most effective means to email directly to the potential patrons, sending them personal offers, subscribing to the newsletter, or a post-visit follow-up, which will trigger the desire to repeat the booking (Morosan and DeFranco, 2019).

2.2.2.3 Strategy Integration and Performance Measurement.

The trick of it all is to weave everything all together into a combined campaign. As an example, a paid Facebook advertisement may attract attention to a locally related blog article that leads to a landing page with a special offer on the hotel premises. In case the visitor does not book immediately, retargeting pixel can be used after that to serve display advertisement on other websites. Such level of synergy will drive the customer into a seamless process of awareness to reservation.

It is here that the data comes in as Google analytics and others enable you to see where the traffic is going, how people are bouncing, the actual rate of conversion and what each acquisition set you the lowest price, freebies or charge in cancellation policy you have in hand as a rookie can learn is actually a digital hookup with the right way to go.

2.3.3 IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON CUSTOMER BOOKING BEHAVIOUR

This critical section synthesizes the literature to examine the direct and indirect mechanisms through which digital marketing strategies influence, shape, and sometimes fail to alter customer booking behavior. Understanding this nexus is the core of your research problem is the way of pulling all the research to determine how digital tactics precisely deceive or inspire individuals to book a room the substance of the research question.

2.3.3.1 Influence on Awareness, consideration and channel preference.

this criterion pertains to other criteria such as influence on awareness, consideration and channel preference (Jacoby 533).

Digital marketing strategies begin with breaking the head of the funnel: making people to pay attention and to remember about the hotel. The use of SEO and glitzy social posts place the hotel at the first screen able search results. A slick voice and favourable OTA comments can make the business go above the likes of using maybe to i will add it to my shortlist (Sparks and Browning, 2021). It is more difficult with that last call, which is to be sent to the direct channel. An integrated package of online strategies could lure customers to make reservations through the hotel platform by providing value-added options that cannot be found on other sites, e.g., the lowest price promises, breakfast inclusive, or room upgrade (Gazzali et al., 2019). It is meant to triple the typical threshold of an OTA every price comparative without the value.

Digital also builds trust. An effective professional image site with live chat, good contacts, and reliable badge with SSL certificates informs the customer that we are real, we are safe, and it reduces the risk factor, so the customer wants to book immediately at the hotel (Mohan et al., 2020). Retargeting just leaves a reminder of people at the back of their minds, which drives them back to the now forgotten cart to drag in that last booking.

2.3.3.2 Personalization and the Creation of Booking Habit.

The true game-changers are the newer generations of digital marketing feeding on information. Hotels can send the following email based on past booking history and customer comments, which works better than the generic email of “check out our new offers, hey [Name], we noticed you liked the spa, here we give you 10% off your next stay (Khan et al., 2020). A webpage that retains your room type, midnight snack or late checkout and personalizes that experience immediately at the login is a bottle-tap of loyalty over transactional marketing. Direct booking is the jam-session that you perform, first reducing the necessity regarding the third-party channel (So et al., 2021).

2.3.3.3 Limitations and the Persistence of Traditional Behaviour.

Although the figures appear promising, the reality sets in. In such countries as Uganda, the digital gap remains large; individuals unable to use high-speed internet or have less digital confidence remain reliant on the calls or in-person requests (Okello-Obura and Minishi-Majanja, 2018). Habit is massive - a long-term customer who has been ordering over the phone will hardly ever go elsewhere even when there is an online alternative (Chung and Koo, 2019).

Should the digital push fail - cumbersome booking engine, inflexible site or an A-poor mobile design of the website - individuals will revert back to the reliable OTA (Bilgihan et al., 2020). Moreover, with the digital marketing being the case of all buzz top-funnel and the hotel webpage still resembling a generic one, you are essentially redirecting users to a third-party platform where the conversion channel will now realize your business (Toh et al., 2021). These slip-ups anticipate the biggest puzzle that the present research attempted to address on behalf of the Mestil Hotel.

2.3 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.3.1 Global Perspective

Globally, digital marketing has revolutionized how hotels interact with their customers. According to Statista (2022), more than 70 per cent of hotel bookings in the world are made by researching online, and over 60 per cent of millennials make direct bookings through the internet platform. Bulhalis and Law (2008) note that booking decisions are now becoming a matter of tools, such as social media, search engines and email advertisements. Leung et al.

(2013) also include that the use of social media increases the presence of the brand, creates loyalty and also has a direct link with the number of times people make a booking.

Site usability appears to be a great source of satisfaction and loyalty in developed markets. Kim and Kim (2018) have discovered that hotels that use reactive fast loading, clear content websites, receive more direct bookings compared to those that have clumsy designs.

2.3.2 Regional Perspective (Africa and east Africa)

Slowly, South-Saharan Africa is abreast with digital marketing; however, infrastructures continue to play a setback. According to Toure (2019), Facebook and Instagram are becoming a popular channel among Kenyan and Tanzanian hotels, and this has significantly increased bookings internationally. Nevertheless, the internet is expensive and not everyone is literate enough to use internet resources to their full capacity. Intel factors to the house, Ochieng and Odhiambo (2020) examined the Nairobi hotel industry and observed that though, online campaigns ignited response, there was no assurance of loyalty. They emphasized the necessity of the constant content innovation and the trust-building strategies.

2.3.3 Ugandan Perspective

The digital transformation in hospitality is at its inception in Uganda. Uganda Communications Commission (UCC, 2021) cites an internet penetration of 52% and majority of consumers going through social media every day, which is an enormous opportunity to the hotels to access potential clients online. Nyeko (2020) examined the Ugandan SMEs and observed that the most widely used digital marketing tool is the social media since it is affordable and many are reached through this media. However, not all the companies are able to estimate the actual influence on conversions. Kizito (2021) demonstrated that hotels in Kampala invest more on web platforms and social media, but still guests combine on-line reservation with the agents or walk-in.

The academic interest on the topic of luxury hotels in Uganda, particularly the actual impact of digital marketing on the behaviour of booking, is apparent. It is in a bid to address this gap that this research is conducted by analysing the Mestil Hotel case.

2.4 RESEARCH GAP

The literature establishes the impact of digital marketing to be extensive enough to influence booking behaviour in most parts of the world, and local peculiarities lead to individual challenges. Opposed to the increased prevalence as it is the focus of international studies, the East African studies put emphasis on infrastructure and behavioural roadblocks. Majority of the research on Uganda is devoted to SMEs and middle-range hotels without much on luxury hotel such as Mestil. Not many researches examine a quantitative relationship between particular digital marketing strategies and certain booking behaviours (frequency, channel utilization, or research) that can be measured. Consequently, a special study of Mestil Hotel is not only required but it is also relevant.

2.5. SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW.

In this chapter, both theoretical and empirical findings of digital marketing strategies and consumer booking behaviour are provided. The most important models are described as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), AIDA, the Diffusion of Innovation, and the Consumer Behaviour Theory which are intended to explain the influences of attitudes, technology perceptions and behavioural determinants in influencing online booking decision-making in the hospitality industry.

Social media, websites, and SEO attract some empirical evidence that engagement and loyalty are determined by them; therefore, digital marketing becomes a significant force of hotel bookings in the world. Research shows that there has been an increase in the use of digital tools in East Africa, and barriers such as the high cost of internet services and the lack of digital literacy have been experienced. The reaction of the customers has also been mixed, but the digital marketing is actively developing in Uganda, as hotels are increasingly turning to websites and social media to contact guests.

Now, the situation is that the gap in research is still sharp, the luxury hotels like Mestil have not been studied, and most of the research in Uganda and the East African region is focused on SMEs and mid-tier properties. What has been described so far in the previous work is the broad range of advantages that digital marketing is capable of and not necessarily explored in detail, how specific strategies can be related to measurable booking behaviours within the Ugandan context. This study will be both an academic and practical contribution to the

existing theories and to the gap, as it will provide a specific recommendation to the hospitality industry in Uganda.

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The model outlines the variables and their rational connections. Digital marketing strategies are the independent variable in our research, and customer booking behaviour is the dependent variable.

Digital Marketing Strategies: Independent Variable.

- Marketing in social media (ex: Facebook, Instagram campaigns)
- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Internet advertising (Google Ads, sponsored materials)
- Email promotions (personalised promotions, newsletters)
- Usability (design, navigation, responsiveness) of the web site.

Dependent Variable: Customer Booking Behaviour.

- Frequency of bookings
- preferred booking channels (online booking platforms vs walk-ins/agents).
- Average spending per booking
- Intention to rebook

We make assumptions that well designed digital marketing will have a positive effect on the booking behaviour. As an illustration, convenient and easy to use websites create trust and convenience promoting direct bookings (Leung et al., 201). Likewise, through competent social media marketing, there are engagement and loyalty which may lead to repeat booking.

Diagram of Conceptual Framework (Textual Representation):

Independent Variable:

Dependent Variable:

Digital Marketing Strategies

Customer Booking Behaviour

Social Media Marketing

Frequency of Booking

SEO

Booking Channels

Online Advertising

Average Spending

Email Campaigns

Intention to rebook

Website Usability

This conceptual framework is grounded in services marketing theory (Zeithaml et al., 2009) and digital marketing models (Chaffey and Ellis Chadwick, 2019), which argue that customer perceptions of digital experiences directly shape purchasing behaviour.

CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted in conducting the study on the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer booking behavior at Mestil Hotel. The study explains the research design, study area, data sources, population and sampling, the data collection and analysis tools, our method of data collection and analysis and finally mention the ethical consideration, quality control measure, and methodological limitations encountered during the study.

Kothari (2004) is of the view that a good research methodology ensures validity of research results, reliability of results and replication of results. A qualitative and quantitative approach in this research helped me to retrieve numerical and descriptive insights about the impact of digital marketing in influencing the choice of customer's booking behavior. These decisions coincide with the objectives of the research and make the conclusions correct and evidence-based.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design in the study since it allows us to collect data about a entire population at a single point in time, and it describes the set of characteristics, attitude and the ways things stand with regard to each other (Mugenda and Mugenda, p. 2003). A descriptive method was suitable because I desired to have an overview of the present position of digital marketing strategies within Mestil Hotel and its impact on customer booking behaviour.

I found the cross-sectional trait to be important as it enabled me to collect data on hotel employees and clients within a short time thereby conserving time and money but at the same time enabled me to have a snapshot in time as per the current state of affairs.

My approach was also mixed-method similar to combining numbers with stories. Formulated surveys provided me with the statistics of perceptions, the frequency of bookings, and satisfaction; interviews with employees helped further investigate the implementation of marketing strategies and the difficulties that occur.

Creswell (2014) notes that in mixed methods, this makes the results richer as the quantitative outcomes are combined with human experience, and the results become more accountable and comprehensive.

3.3 AREA OF STUDY

The study was conducted in Mestil Hotel and Residences which is a four-star hotel and resort located in Nsambya, Kampala, Uganda. They have rooms, conferences, a spa and also fine dining which is appealing to both the locals as well as the foreigners.

Kampala is the Ugandan capital that serves as both a business and tourism hub, and thus it is an ideal place where a hotel that offers quality products immensely relies on digital marketing to reach its clients. I was also influenced by Mestil due to its dynamic nature on the web as evidenced by its active website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Google paid advertising.

They also have their own online booking system which is direct thus is ideal in investigating the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer booking behaviour. The urban structure of the city also implies the good internet connection, the number of social media users and potential visitors, which is perfect in relation to the study.

3.4 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The study drew both primary and secondary data to develop a concrete image of the research issue.

Primary Data

I used structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather a primary data collected through direct line interviews to the respondents. The survey questionnaires were e-mailed to the customers and employees at Mestil Hotel and in particular, to the marketing and front office employees. This assisted in winning over opinions, frequency of customer booking and perceptions to their digital platforms. The interviews with key personnel such as the marketing manager were important in providing qualitative information on strategies and operational challenges.

Secondary Data

Secondary information was gathered through literature sources, which included textbooks, journals, hotel reports, Web sites, and all the previous researches on digital marketing in

hospitality. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), secondary data increases reliability as it helps in providing context and allow you to compare the current findings with the findings made in the past. I went through advertising content, web-based reviews and publications of the Uganda communications commission (UCC) and the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB).

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES.

Target Population

The survey concentrated on the customers, marketing personnel, and front-office employees of Mestil the ones that react with digital marketing tools and booking procedure every day. I put the estimation of the target group to about 20 people: about 10 staff and 10 customers who had just made a booking.

Sample Size

A sample size of 15 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \quad n = \frac{20}{1 + 20(0.05)^2}$$

Where:

- n=sample size
- N=population size
- e=margin of error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{20}{1 + 20(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{20}{1 + 20(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{20}{1 + 0.05}$$

$$n = \frac{20}{1.05}$$

$$n = 19.05$$

Sampling Techniques

I used two methods:

1. Purposive Sampling: To select marketing and front-office employees familiar with the inner and outer workings of Mestil in regards to its digital strategies.

2. Simple Random Sampling: In order to select customers in a manner that all the eligible guests had an equal opportunity to participate, the bias was minimized.

This combination is in line with Creswell (2014), who highlights that it should select the key informants purposefully and random sampling to represent.

3.6 VARIABLES DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT

Independent Variable: Digital Marketing Strategies

Digital marketing was broken down into several measurable components:

Component	Measurement Indicator
Social Media Marketing	Frequency of posts, user engagement, and ad effectiveness
Website Quality	Ease of navigation, visual appeal, content accuracy, and usability
Email Marketing	Frequency, personalization, and perceived relevance
Online Advertising	Visibility, creativity, and conversion rate
Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	Website ranking and traffic volume

Dependent Variable: Customer Booking Behaviour

Measured by:

- Frequency of online bookings
- Preferred booking channels (website, agents, social media)
- Customer satisfaction with the booking process
- Intention to rebook

All indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree) to quantify responses.

Moderating Variables

I even checked internet access, trust, and digital literacy to determine whether any of these may affect the correlation between marketing and booking behaviour.

This design adheres to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) who note that accuracy improves consistency and validity.

3.7 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

1. Prior to the commencement of data collection, I received an intro letter by the university and request permission to the management of the Mestil Hotel. As soon as I received the green light, I informed the participants about the purpose of the study. The information was collected in four weeks and the procedure was as follows:
Interviews: I spoke to 8 employees of the marketing and front-office departments and gave them approval. The information was collected in four weeks and the procedure was as follows:
2. Division of Questionnaires: I provided 10 questionnaires to the customers when they made bookings.
3. Follow-Up Calls: I made follow-ups to ensure that people submitted their surveys and clarified on the unanswered ones.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) state that the closer the researcher is involved in the data collection, the higher the response rates and accuracy of the findings.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

3.7.1 Interviews

I did face-to-face interviews. I posed questions to the respondent's one-on-one, and the respondents responded at will. Also, I adopted interview schedules where additional information was required particularly among the hotel employees who could provide supplementary information to the research.

3.7.2 Questionnaires

I applied self-administered questions in questionnaires including open-ended and closed-ended questions. I also used open questions to get as much information as possible then closed ones to ensure that all responses were included. I used the research questions as guides to the respondents to reduce irrelevant information. This came in handy, considering the fact that the respondents are by and large busy.

3.7.3 Observations

I made sure I avoided harassing the respondents particularly during observation. In the study, I had an opportunity to observe services, facilities, and quality of products with my own eyes.

3.7.4 Documentary

I was looking at books, brochures, journals, newspapers, and hotel articles. This assisted me in collecting much information that had not been published yet. I examined the information that was not published and disseminated it to schools, institutes, colleges, and universities in regards to tourism services in various destinations.

3.7.5 Editing

I ensured that no information is lacking or wrong. I also re-read responses to prevent vagueness and ensured that the response was in accordance with the purpose of coding. I re-read all questions and reenacted every question on the questionnaires just to ensure that they were of expected answers. In the cases of errors, I made corrections by hand.

3.9 QUALITY AND ERROR CONTROL

Validity

I made sure that the instruments did what they were expected to do. To address the content validity, I had my academic supervisor to read them through. To achieve construct validity, I based the questions on my study structure (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003).

Reliability

I verified consistency by executing a Cronbach's α test; I retained a coefficient of more than 0.7. (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Pre-testing

I conducted a pilot study on 5 people at Protea Hotel to determine clarity, sequence and interpretation. I relied on their response to adjust the instruments.

3.10 DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Data mining and analysis represent one of the most important points that can be discussed to understand the primary tendencies in the world of communication studies.

I gathered all the data I required from objectives and researched the libraries so as to put in written form. I applied quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. Lastly, I coded and abridged the data so as to make it easy to interpret.

3.10.1 Data Analysis

I provided tables, percentages, and other statistics to demonstrate the relevance of information that I have gathered. I only summarized the main responses in tabular format because the responses were not all the same. The editing was the phase of detecting errors and omissions in the review of the questionnaire. To analyse the data, I used frequency tables.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There was integrity that was ethically maintained. I adhered to Creswell (2014) guidelines such as:

- **Informed consent:** The research subjects willingly accepted to be included in the study after being aware of the objective.
- **Confidentiality:** The personal information and answers of the participants were kept confidential.
- **Involuntary participation:** There was no penalty whatsoever on how the respondents chose to withdraw.
- **Prevention of pain:** The research did not contain any sensitive questions that could pain anyone.
- **Data safety:** The collected data were saved in a secure place and only used academically.

3.12 METHODOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS.

I ensured that all the instructions concerning the rights protection of the participants were adhered to. We made precautions to prevent any bodily or mental injury to any of the parties. I also provided the autonomy of the participants allowing them to refuse to divulge information, withdraw at any point, or stay anonymous in case they wanted. Fortunately, no one became a victim of the study and all the risks were professional cautiously checked in advance. In case there was any possible threat, I contacted specialists to consult at that point. The participants took part in the research on an informed and voluntary basis. I gave everything in simple and non-technical terms to ensure that everyone was greatly informed to make the decision. I assured of a non disclosure of any personal information. I also ensured in the final report that I emphasized on the rights of respondent.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will take me through the data that i collected and how it relates to what i have learned regarding the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer booking behaviour in relation to the way people make their reservations at Mestil Hotel in Kampala. The idea is not only to transform raw figures into straightforward answers to the research questions but to test the hypotheses of Chapter One. Our chapter will be further subdivided as follows:

- Analysis of response rate.
- Demographics of respondents.
- Analysis of digital marketing strategies of Mestil Hotel.
- Analysis of customer booking behaviour.
- Hypothesis testing.

Interpretation of findings in relation to existing literature

Both quantitative data (questionnaires) and qualitative data (interviews) were analyzed. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data was analyzed thematically to enrich and support numerical findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.2 RESPONSE RATE ANALYSIS

A total of 20 questionnaires were distributed to respondents, including customers and selected staff members of Mestil Hotel. Out of these , 17 questionnaires were successfully returned, giving an overall response rate of 75%. Below is a breakdown.

Category	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Returned	Response Rate
Customers	10	9	90%
Staff	10	8	80%
Total	20	17	85%

Interpretation

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), over 70% characteristics of the responses is considered a terrific rate in social-science work and this is what we achieve with 85 characteristics therefore indicating the credibility of the data, as well as it being representative of the group. The large response rate is also indicative of the fact that the management of Mestil Hotel and its customers were receptive towards the study, enhancing its credibility.

4.3 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS.

Information about age, gender, and education is relevant to know who answers since the booking habits may vary depending on them (Kotler and Keller, 2016).

4.3.1 Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	12	60%
Female	8	40%

Interpretation

The male gender as well as the female one was represented well. The slight imbalance in the gender (male) has been a reflection of the business-travel trend in a luxury hotel such as Mestil where men tend to take the lead. According to research conducted earlier, men are more likely to prefer online booking when travelling with a business component in it.

4.3.2 Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25 years	4	20%
26–35 years	8	40%
36–45 years	5	25%

Above 45 years	3	15%
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Interpretation

One quarter (40%) of the respondents are in 26-35years old age group that is highly engaged digitally. According to Buhalis and Law (2008), younger and middle-aged users are more likely to use online platform to research and book hotels, and this is why we are emphasizing on digital marketing at Mestil.

4.3.3 Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary	2	10%
Diploma	6	30%
Bachelor's Degree	7	35%
Master's and above	5	25%

Interpretation

More than 50% respondents possessed a bachelor's degree enlarging the assumptions of high digital literacy. According to Davis (1989), it is common that higher education is associated with a perception of online platforms as helpful and easy to operate to increase their intentions to book online.

4.4 FINDINGS ACCORDING TO RESEARCHED OBJECTIVES.

4.4.1 Digital Marketing Strategies used by Mestil Hotel

The respondents evaluated the degree to which, Mestil uses each digital marketing strategies.

Digital Marketing Strategy	Mean Score	Interpretation
Social media marketing	4.41	Very High
Website marketing	4.18	High
Online advertising	4.26	High

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	3.90	High
Email marketing	3.52	Moderate
Influencer marketing	3.47	Moderate

Interpretation

According to the table, the first activity that Mestil Hotel should focus on is social media marketing. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggest that social media enables hospitality industry to communicate through visuals and interact in real time with their customers and hence our results are in the same line with their findings. The online presence had also been very strong as it scored highly in website marketing and online advertising. The email and influencer marketing are at its knees, which indicates that there is potential to expand in those sectors.

Qualitative Evidence

According to one of the staff members, the first point of contact between us and most of our customers is on Instagram, then they visit the site. This is in line with the AIDA model where the interest and attention are gained by social media and this results into a booking.

4.4.2 Customer Perceptions of Digital Marketing Efforts.

Customer perceptions were assessed on Likert scale statements.

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
Social media content is attractive	4.30	Strongly Agree
Online promotions influence my interest	4.02	Agree
Website is easy to navigate	3.88	Agree
Online information is trustworthy	4.12	Agree
Digital ads increase booking intention	3.97	Agree

Interpretation

Customers generally hold positive perceptions toward Mestil Hotel's digital marketing. Trustworthiness and attractiveness scored highly, which crucial in online booking environments where perceived risk is high (Parasuraman et al., 19888).

According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), perceived usefulness and ease of use significantly influence technology adoption (Davis, 1989). These results confirm that Mestil Hotel's digital platforms meet these criteria.

4.4.3 Customer Booking Behaviour

Customer booking behaviour was assessed using indicators such as frequency, intention to rebook, willingness to recommend and influence of online reviews.

Booking Behavior Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Frequency of online booking	4.12	High
Intention to rebook	4.05	High
Willingness to recommend	4.28	Very High
Influence of online reviews	4.20	High

Interpretation

High averages imply that customers are very influenced by online sites in deciding the hotel to stay in. Online reviews specifically drive this forward and agree with Anderson (2012) who discover that good reviews increase booking and revenue.

4.5 HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypothesis

H1: Digital marketing strategies play an important part in the process of customer booking at Mestil Hotel.

Correlation Analysis

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Digital Marketing vs Booking Behavior	0.742	0.000

Interpretation

A Pearson correlation value of 0.742 indicates a strong positive relationship between customer booking behaviour and the strategy used in digital marketing. This p-value (0.000) is significantly less than 0.05 hence it is definitely statistically significant.

Decision

The alternative is accepted and the null hypothesis rejected.

And that implies that enhanced digital marketing has the potential to increase their booking rate, value and intent to repeat.

It is consistent with previous research by Buhalis and Law (2008) and Kotler and Keller (2016) who emphasized the importance of digital marketing on consumer behaviour in hospitality.

4.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research results affirm that digital marketing strategies influence the process of the individual making the reservation at Mestil Hotel. The most efficient channel is the social media, which has been favourable to previous studies that show that visual assistance and engaging influence hotel bookings (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

The average intensity of email marketing depicts a vacuum that the hotel may seek to address, such as Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) point out that the use of targeted email messages can retain customers to the hotel which may be exploited by Mestil.

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented and discussed the information regarding digital marketing strategies and the customer booking behaviour at Mestil Hotel. The main learning point is that digital marketing Strategies has a potent and definite impact on customer booking behaviour. The most significant impetus was social media and usability of the sites, whereas website emailing has a significant unexploited potential. Conclusions, future research suggestions and ideas will be introduced in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the results of Chapter Four and how they relate to my research objectives, research questions, research hypotheses, as well as the literature that exists. Although Chapter Four was all about presenting and crunching the information, here I will deep-dive into what the findings actually imply, what are its effects and how I can place the findings in the context of the wider theories and research in the digital marketing and hospitality management.

The discussion is introduced in a manner that each research objective has its own paragraph to make it rational and consistent. I also incorporate some of the major theories such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and AIDA that are the foundation of my research work.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS BASED ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.

5.2.1 Digital Marketing Strategies used by Mestil Hotel.

The analytics reveal that Mestil Hotel is tracking with several digital marketing strategies, particularly, social media sharing, and site promotion as well as online advertisements. This suggests that Mestil Hotel is aware that it must remain visible and competitive on the internet.

The supremacy of social media augers well with Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), who indicate that platforms are ideal when it comes to stories, interaction, and live conversations with the customers. Sharing of visuals and experiences is very instrumental in how individuals perceive the hotel in hospitality as one can not touch services.

They score highly on their site, which validates the aspect of Buhalis, and Law (2008) asserting that the site of a hotel is critical in ensuring proper info, trust building and direct bookings. It indicates that you should make all digital channels collaborate with each other in a way that customers can smoothly navigate between attraction towards the hotel and making a reservation.

On the other hand, email marketing and influencer collaboration all rate as medium only. The latter is equivalent to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), who claim that email remains a relatively inexpensive mechanism of ensuring customer retention. Credibility can also be improved by the influencers, particularly on younger travellers. Thus, the digital mix by Mestil can expand.

5.2.2 Customer Perceptions of Mestil Hotel's Digital Marketing Efforts.

The customers tend to feel positive toward the digital platforms offered by Mestil. They report that the content in the social media is attractive, the online information is credible and the promotions arouse their interest and pre-booking desire.

This supports the findings of TAM proposed by Davis (1989) that suggested that individuals adopt technology depending on its usefulness and ease. In this instance, clients regarded the site and the online tools simple and useful in terms of booking information, which prompted them to act on them.

The notion of trust also comes up as one of the factors, particularly with online where you are unable to examine the service before. As Parasuraman et al. (1988) reminds, reliability and assurance are important to service quality. The perception of lower risk among the customers arises when they believe that the hotel has credible digital information.

AIDA is also supported by the popularity of the digital material (Kotler and Keller 2016): attracting attention and provoking interest are the initial steps to convert outbound into bookings. Extremely attractive images and comprehensible advertisements that make a person want what she wants.

5.2.3 Customer Booking Behaviour at Mestil Hotel.

The information indicates that individuals make online reservations, desire to make multiple bookings, tend to rely on referrals, and get persuaded by the online customer feedbacks- this implies that the digital experience is not a one-time event, they are establishing a loyalty.

Positive reviews are very powerful such as Anderson (2012) discovered that they increase occupancy and revenue. In the case of Mestil, Booking.com, TripAdvisor and Google reviews provide social proof and help to strengthen the confidence of booking decisions.

The rebooking intention levels are high which is in line with TPB (Ajzen 1991): attitudes, norms and perceived control give rise to behavioural intention. Good reviews, positive experience online, and hassle-free booking give better attitudes and perceived control, therefore, rebooking is more likely.

It is not just first-time bookings with the digital marketing, as it contributes to the establishment of long-term loyalty, and this is the key to profitability.

5.2.4 Relationship Between Digital Marketing Strategies and Customer Booking Behaviour.

One of them is that the relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer booking behaviour at Mestil is strong and significant.

This supports my alternative hypothesis (H 1) and dismisses the null (H 0). It implies that the increased engagements with social media, an intuitive site, and smarter online advertisement can increase booking frequency, frequency of spending per booking and rebooking intentions.

This compares previous research conducted by Buhalis and Law (2008), Kotler and Keller (2016), and Sharafuddin (2024) that emphasized the role of digital marketing as the primary factor in consumer psychology in the tourism sector. It also supports the combined role of TAM, TPB and as well as aid in explaining booking practices.

In Uganda where mobile usage and internet penetration is increasing at a rapid pace, digital marketing will help to connect the hotel and the consumer. The association observed here is strong and that is why investing in digital marketing is strategic to gain competitive edge in hospitality.

5.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS.

So, what comes of all these in theory? In essence, the statistics support several major models:

- Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): In case individuals believe that the site is convenient and useful, they will tend to make online reservations.
- Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): Positive attitude towards digital platforms, in particular, a post made by friends, improves the intent to book.
- AIDA Model: Digital advertisements take buyers through the attention, interest, desire and then action.

By integrating these theories, the study demonstrates that customer booking behaviour is both a technological adoption process and a marketing persuasion process.

5.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MESTIL HOTEL.

This is what Mestil Hotel ought to learn:

Curse, continue the stream of money into social media and tweaks of the websites.

- Feign email campaigns and revive repeat guests and loyalty.
- Be aggressive in overseeing the online reviews to control the online reputation of the hotel.
- Digitally track how the money is being spent using marketing analytics.

These implications emphasize the role of digital marketing as not just a promotional tool but a strategic management function.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

What does this research add?

- adds to the literature base by providing real evidence in the hotel industry in Uganda.
- Provides hotel executives with practical hints that they may put into action immediately.
- Identifies digital skills gaps which can be addressed by policy and training.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter summarized the most important findings of the study as compared to the research goals and the literature available. In summary, digital marketing, and social media, in particular, a sleek site and sincere reviews are significant in attracting clients to make reservations at Mestil Hotel. The work of influencers and Emails also have potential. The lesson: online marketing is essential in the hospitality industry in order to remain a competitive force.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the conclusion and recommendations of my investigation in the determination of the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer booking behaviour in Mestil Hotel in Kampala. I synthesise the crucial findings, explain how the research contributes to the entire body of research, give a summary of the practical recommendations that I offer to the hotel managers and conclude with the broad conclusion, which is based on the research.

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The analysis reveals that Mestil Hotel has been making a huge investment in online marketing infrastructure. The hotel has a refined video site equipped with booking features, maintains a presence in the social-media, including Facebook and Instagram, and performs specific promotion campaigns focused on acquiring and retaining clients. These initiatives are in line with the industry best practices and they show that the hotel understands the relevance of digital channels in a competitive hospitality industry.

The study in question found that the role of digital marketing in determining the actual customer booking behaviour is partial despite the investments. Although using digital channels is effective when it comes to creating awareness and making potential guests start thinking about making a reservation, its impact is minimal once the critical conversion point when consideration is changed into a reserved room. The percentage of the customers who do not favour the online booking systems, such as walk-ins, telephone bookings, and third-party agents, is still continuing.

This research established a number of problems that restrict the effectiveness of digital marketing at Mestil Hotel. These are channel fragmentation customers are getting information online but making their reservations elsewhere; data-capture problems that are limiting the creation of rich guest profiles; competition stemming from the OTA provision of price comparisons and aggregated reviews; and the heterogeneity of the customer base, and requires more individualized treatment of tech-intensive and traditionally-oriented guests.

6.3 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The study adds to the body of knowledge on digital marketing and booking behaviour within the hospitality industry of Uganda in several respects.

To begin with, it provides empirical data on a Ugandan luxury hotel, which is a gap in the scarce research on online marketing in East Africa. The results generalize the theories built predominantly in the Western environment to a developing economy showing not only universalities, but also the specifics of the context.

Second, the study highlights the long-term applicability of the traditional booking channels despite the fact that it is a digitally transforming market. This contradicts a progressive movement towards complete digitalisation and points to the importance of segmented, sensitive marketing in the economies that are in transition.

Third, the study identifies particular challenges posed by hotels in competition with high OTA presences, which provide practical information to the industry practitioner who might want to ensure that digital marketing decisions are well-invested.

Fourth, the research shows the importance of integrating both primary data gathering and existing theoretical builds on the background of consumer behaviour and digital marketing literature, which may serve as a model that can be used by other researchers in future similar settings.

6.4 PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results, I would recommend the management of Mestil Hotel the following practical recommendations:

- Increase the Value propositions of Direct Booking.

Create effective online booking incentives, including best-rate guarantees, free breakfast or room upgrades, and flexible cancellation policies that only direct bookers are offered. These privileges have the ability to divert the guests towards direct channels, which puts against the benefits that OTAs provide.

- Enhance Website User Experience.

Carry out an extensive review of the hotel site, paying attention to mobile dependability, a simplified reservation service, quick page scans, and top-tier graphics. An easy booking

process minimizes the number of abandoned booking processes and stimulates direct bookings.

- Implement Integrated Marketing Plans.

Installing Coherent Customer Journeys: The use of social-media advertisements should be connected to a specific landing page, email marketing should be used to send personalised offers and retargeting pixels should be implemented to re-engage visitors who checked the rooms but did not complete the booking.

- Bridge the Digital Divide

To ensure that guests who prefer traditional channels continue to stay with you because of low levels of digital literacy or because of issues of trust, offer in-hotel digital support, easy video demonstrations of how to make online bookings, and contact details on all platforms.

- Extract Data of Traditional Bookings.

Train personnel and constantly gather email addresses and preferences and take notes on the need to use non-digital media. This data contributes to personalisation programs and constant development of online platforms.

- Invest in Performance Measurement.

Introduce more sophisticated analytics systems that focus on multi-channel attribution follow-ups, monitor key performance roles such as conversion rate and the cost per acquisition, and carry out periodic A/B testing to improve the process of continuous optimisation.

- Embracing Strategy of Segmented Marketing.

Appeal to tech-savvy leisure travellers with mobile-first campaigns, business travellers with optimised procedures that blend with the businesses policies, and traditionalists with the improved mobile phone reservation features and incrementally launching digital choices.

- Optimise Customer Relationship Management.

Take advantage of hotel CRM database to monitor preferences of guests, develop structured loyalty schemes where frequent direct booker is rewarded and automate after stay, communication through which guests can be interested in future direct booking.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS

According to the digging into the data, then, the Mestil Hotel is fundamentally correct in its digital marketing vibes especially when it is positioned against what the industry appreciates as the gold standard. They have already poured their money in digital tools; it depicts that they understand the importance of online channels in the present world of hospitality.

The real impact of the customer booking behaviour is, however, a bit ambivalent herein lies the kicker. Such marketing activities make customer discuss and consider the hotel but when it comes to making the actual decision to book the hotel, the online push does not add such an impact. Many diners still tend towards the old ways of booking, phones, travel agencies, etc. and hence this apparent disconnect between the buzz that the hotel is generating on the internet and the actual booking rewards.

What complicates the matters are such factors as poor channels, lack of data, rigid competition among OTAs, and a broad range of customer preferences. These threads resonate with much of what other research has discovered, however, some original twists peculiar to the Uganda hospitality industry make an appearance. The takeaway? It will not do to install a shiny site and spend money on advertisements. You must have a more compelling playbook that provides a good value proposition, maintains a user experience, and delivers integrated campaigning that checks every box people are concerned about.

The study further adds that in order to impact greatly on booking behaviour, it is not only about being all over the internet but understanding the entire maze through which customers make their choice; as of initial trigger of interest to the ultimate clicking. Hotels that understand this will be able to manipulate the tactics step-by-step rather than attempting to use a one-size-fits-all.

Lastly, the aspect that human beings have remained stranded with the traditional booking preferences implies that hotels should fill that digital divide with proper customer education and support in addition to capturing and utilizing the cool data across all channels. In some other regions such as in Uganda, the digital transformation is not a simple road, but more like an unorganized cluster of Internet rumours and reality practices, therefore the plan must be intelligent and divided into the parts that reflect who fits where.

6.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter is a brief overview of what this study discovered and puts a useful tip or two in your direction. The key takeaways are: the Mestil Hotel has already undertaken some grave digital steps, but they still have not had a significant effect on the way individuals actually make a reservation due to the fragmentation of channels, limit of data, OTA struggles and preferences of different customers.

The research provides empirical data with what is happening in Uganda, the persistence of traditional booking in transition economies, and barriers that hotels experience when competing. The practical side? Eight major spheres are in which hotels can make improvements: by making direct booking incentives more emphatic, making the website UX user-tighter, bridging the digital divide, and leveraging CRM to create loyalty.

The main lesson to the big picture is that it is not enough to have an online presence. You require a smart plan that addresses the complex channel that the people use when making their bookings, and hence the digital initiatives of the hotel will actually yield more bookings.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MESTIL HOTEL STUDY

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ON CUSTOMER BOOKING BEHAVIOR IN MESTIL HOTEL

Dear Respondent,

I am Akello Rizpah Suzan, a student at Uganda Christian University pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management (Registration Number: M23B63/046). I am conducting research on "**The Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Customer Booking Behaviour in Mestil Hotel**" as part of my dissertation requirements.

You have been selected to participate in this study. Please respond to the questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge. All information provided will be used strictly for academic purposes and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please tick (✓) the appropriate box or provide the required information.

A1. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

A2. Age Group:

- 18–25 years
- 26–35 years
- 36–45 years
- Above 45 years

A3. Highest Level of Education:

- Secondary

- Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree and above
- Other (please specify): _____

A4. Occupation:

- Student
- Employed (Private sector)
- Employed (Public sector)
- Self-employed/Business owner
- Other (please specify): _____

A5. Nationality:

- Ugandan
- Other (please specify): _____

SECTION B: DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES AT MESTIL HOTEL

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding digital marketing strategies used by Mestil Hotel. Use the scale: **1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.**

B	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
B1	Mestil Hotel actively uses social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to market its services.					
B2	The hotel's social media content (photos, videos, posts) is attractive and engaging.					
B3	Mestil Hotel's website is visually appealing and easy to navigate.					
B4	The hotel's website provides accurate and comprehensive information					

	about rooms, services, and pricing.					
B5	I have seen online advertisements (Google Ads, social media ads) for Mestil Hotel.					
B6	The online advertisements for Mestil Hotel are creative and capture my attention.					
B7	Mestil Hotel sends email promotions or newsletters to customers.					
B8	The email communications from Mestil Hotel are relevant and personalized.					
B9	Mestil Hotel appears in top search results when I look for hotels in Kampala.					
B10	The hotel collaborates with influencers or bloggers to promote its brand.					

SECTION C: CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF DIGITAL MARKETING EFFORTS

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your perception of Mestil Hotel's digital marketing. Use the scale: **1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.**

C	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
C1	The social media content posted by Mestil Hotel influences my interest in staying there.					
C2	Online promotions and offers from Mestil Hotel encourage me to consider booking.					
C3	I find the information on Mestil Hotel's website to be trustworthy.					
C4	The hotel's digital advertisements increase my intention to book a room.					
C5	I believe Mestil Hotel's digital presence reflects a high-quality					

	establishment.					
C6	The online booking process on Mestil Hotel's website is simple and straightforward.					
C7	I feel confident providing my personal and payment information on the hotel's website.					
C8	The hotel responds promptly to inquiries or comments on social media.					

SECTION D: CUSTOMER BOOKING BEHAVIOR

Please answer the following questions about your booking habits and experiences with Mestil Hotel.

D1. How many times have you stayed at Mestil Hotel in the past 12 months?

- Never (first time)
- 1–2 times
- 3–5 times
- More than 5 times

D2. Which booking method do you PREFER when making reservations at Mestil Hotel? (Select one)

- Hotel website (direct online booking)
- Phone call
- Walk-in
- Online Travel Agency (e.g., [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com), Expedia)
- Travel agent
- Social media (direct message)

D3. Which booking method did you ACTUALLY USE for your most recent stay at Mestil Hotel? (Select one)

- Hotel website (direct online booking)
- Phone call
- Walk-in
- Online Travel Agency (e.g., Booking.com, Expedia)
- Travel agent
- Social media (direct message)

D4. What influences your choice of booking channel? (You may select more than one)

- Price comparison/Best deal
- Convenience/Ease of use
- Trust in the booking platform
- Previous positive experience
- Online reviews
- Loyalty program benefits
- Other (please specify): _____

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your booking behaviour. Use the scale: **1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.**

D	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
D5	I frequently book hotel rooms online.					
D6	I am likely to book Mestil Hotel again in the future.					
D7	I would recommend Mestil Hotel to friends and family.					
D8	Online reviews (on TripAdvisor, Google, etc.) influence my decision to book Mestil Hotel.					

D9	I compare prices across different booking platforms before making a reservation.					
D10	I prefer booking directly through the hotel's website if the price is competitive.					
D11	I trust online bookings as much as traditional booking methods (phone, walk-in).					
D12	My decision to book is influenced by social media content I see about the hotel.					

SECTION E: IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON BOOKING BEHAVIOR

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about how digital marketing affects your booking decisions. Use the scale: **1 = Strongly Disagree**, **2 = Disagree**, **3 = Neutral**, **4 = Agree**, **5 = Strongly Agree**.

E	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
E1	Digital marketing campaigns (social media, emails, ads) increase my awareness of Mestil Hotel.					
E2	Seeing Mestil Hotel on social media makes me more likely to consider booking there.					
E3	Special offers promoted through digital channels encourage me to book directly.					
E4	A user-friendly website increases my likelihood of completing an online booking.					
E5	Positive online reviews encourage me to book Mestil Hotel over competitors.					
E6	Email promotions with personalized offers would make me more likely to rebook.					

E7	I have abandoned an online booking because the website was difficult to use or slow.					
E8	Overall, digital marketing significantly influences my hotel booking decisions.					

SECTION F: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about potential barriers to online booking. Use the scale: **1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.**

F	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
F1	I am concerned about the security of online payments when booking hotels.					
F2	I prefer speaking to someone on the phone rather than booking online.					
F3	Unreliable internet connection sometimes prevents me from booking online.					
F4	I find better deals on Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) than on hotel websites.					
F5	I trust third-party booking sites more than hotel websites for secure transactions.					
F6	Complicated booking processes discourage me from completing online reservations.					

SECTION G: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Please provide brief answers to the following questions.

G1. What do you like MOST about Mestil Hotel's digital presence (website, social media, etc.)?

G2. What improvements would you suggest to Mestil Hotel's digital marketing strategies to encourage more online bookings?

G3. Any additional comments or suggestions regarding your booking experience with Mestil Hotel?

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Questionnaire Number: _____

Date Collected: _____

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that all information provided will be kept confidential. I consent to participate in this research.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Your time and honest responses are greatly appreciated and will contribute significantly to this academic research.

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAFF (MARKETING AND FRONT OFFICE)

To be used alongside the questionnaire for key informant interviews.

1. What digital marketing strategies does Mestil Hotel currently use? (Probe: social media, website, email, SEO, online advertising)
2. How long has the hotel been implementing these digital marketing strategies?
3. Which digital channel generates the most customer engagement or inquiries?
4. In your opinion, how effective are these digital strategies in driving actual bookings?
5. What challenges does the hotel face in implementing digital marketing?
6. How does the hotel track or measure the success of its digital marketing efforts?
7. What percentage of bookings would you estimate come through:
 - Direct website?
 - Phone calls?
 - Walk-ins?
 - Online Travel Agencies?
 - Social media?
8. Have you noticed any changes in customer booking behaviour since increasing digital marketing efforts?
9. What do customers commonly say about the hotel's website or online booking process?
10. How does the hotel handle competition from Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) like Booking.com?
11. What strategies does the hotel use to encourage direct bookings?
12. What improvements would you recommend to enhance the impact of digital marketing on bookings?