

The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behavior, Audience Engagement, and Reputation Management in Hotel Selection and Booking Decisions

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Abstract

Background: Social media has profoundly transformed consumer behavior and marketing practices within the hospitality industry. Understanding how these changes influence hotel selection and booking decisions, the effectiveness of social media strategies, and shifts in reputation management practices is crucial for hotels aiming to enhance their digital presence and customer engagement.

Objective: The study aims to analyze the influence of social media on consumer behavior, audience engagement, and reputation management in hotel selection and booking decisions as well as compare pre- and post-social media reputation management practices.

Methods: Data was collected through surveys and interviews with hotel guests and marketing professionals. The analysis included descriptive statistics and comparative assessments of pre- and post-social media reputation management practices. The effectiveness of various social media strategies was evaluated based on respondent feedback.

Results: The findings indicate that promotional offers, user reviews, and visual content significantly influence consumer behavior in hotel selection and booking decisions. Collaboration with influencers, user-generated content, live video content, and social media advertising are the most effective strategies for audience engagement and brand building, each with a 100% effectiveness rate. There is a notable shift in reputation management practices, with a decrease in promptly addressing issues and providing compensation, and an increase in seeking private resolutions through direct messages post-social media.

Conclusions: Social media plays a critical role in shaping consumer behavior and brand perception in the hotel industry. Effective social media strategies, particularly those involving influencers and user-generated content, are essential for engaging audiences and building brand identity. The transition to social media has also led to changes in reputation management, emphasizing the importance of balancing transparency with discreet conflict resolution. Hotels should prioritize comprehensive social media strategies that include collaboration with influencers, regular updates, and engaging content. Encouraging positive user-generated content and implementing robust monitoring and response systems are essential. Training staff on social media engagement and conflict resolution can further improve reputation management. Ongoing adaptation to emerging social media trends is crucial for maintaining effectiveness. This study provides valuable insights into the impact of social media on consumer behavior and marketing in the hospitality industry. By identifying effective social media strategies and examining changes in reputation management, it offers practical guidance for hotels seeking to enhance their digital presence and customer engagement. The findings underscore the importance of leveraging social media to achieve greater business success and maintain a positive brand reputation.

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The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behavior, Audience Engagement, and Reputation Management in Hotel Selection and Booking Decisions

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Abstract

Rationale: Social media has profoundly transformed consumer behavior and marketing practices within the hospitality industry. Understanding how these changes influence hotel selection and booking decisions, the effectiveness of social media strategies, and shifts in reputation management practices is crucial for hotels aiming to enhance their digital presence and customer engagement. **Objective:** The study aims to analyze the influence of social media on consumer behavior, audience engagement, and reputation management in hotel selection and booking decisions as well as compare pre- and post-social media reputation management practices. **Method:** Data was collected through surveys and interviews with hotel guests and marketing professionals. The analysis included descriptive statistics and comparative assessments of pre- and post-social media reputation management practices. The effectiveness of various social media strategies was evaluated based on respondent feedback. **Results:** The findings indicate that promotional offers, user reviews, and visual content significantly influence consumer behavior in hotel selection and booking decisions. Collaboration with influencers, user-generated content, live video content, and social media advertising are the most effective strategies for audience engagement and brand building, each with a 100% effectiveness rate. There is a notable shift in reputation management practices, with a decrease in promptly addressing issues and providing compensation, and an increase in seeking private resolutions through direct messages post-social media. **Conclusions:** Social media plays a critical role in shaping consumer behavior and brand perception in the hotel industry. Effective social media strategies, particularly those involving influencers and user-generated content, are essential for engaging audiences and building brand identity. The transition to social media has also led to changes in reputation management, emphasizing the importance of balancing transparency with discreet conflict resolution. **Recommendations:** Hotels should prioritize comprehensive social media strategies that include collaboration with influencers, regular updates, and engaging content. Encouraging positive user-generated content and implementing robust monitoring and response systems are essential. Training staff on social media engagement and conflict resolution can further improve reputation management. Ongoing adaptation to emerging social media trends is crucial for maintaining effectiveness. **Significance Statement:** This study provides valuable insights into the impact of social media on consumer behavior and marketing in the hospitality industry. By identifying effective social media strategies and examining changes in reputation management, it offers practical guidance for hotels seeking to enhance their digital presence and customer engagement. The findings underscore the importance of leveraging social media to achieve greater business success and maintain a positive brand reputation. **Keywords:** Social media; Consumer behavior; Hotel selection; Branding Strategies; Audience engagement; Reputation management; Digital marketing; Hospitality industry.

1. Introduction

Social media's influence on hotel marketing and branding strategies is of paramount importance in today's dynamic hospitality industry. As social media platforms continue to evolve, they significantly reshape traditional consumer decision-making processes and the ways hotels market their services (Ogoina *et al.*, 2024). This transformative potential highlights the necessity of a comprehensive exploration of social media's impact on hotel marketing strategies, especially given the increasing reliance on user-generated content and

peer recommendations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for hotels aiming to enhance their brand visibility and customer engagement in an increasingly competitive market (Ogoina *et al.*, 2024). Extensive research has documented the growing influence of social media on consumer behavior within the travel and hospitality sectors. For instance, studies by Xiang & Gretzel (2010) and Smith & Cooper (2021) illustrate how user-generated content and influencer endorsements are pivotal in shaping travel and accommodation choices. These findings indicate that consumers increasingly trust peer reviews and recommendations over traditional marketing messages. Consequently, hotels must adapt their marketing strategies to leverage these trends effectively. In addition to shaping consumer behavior, social media has also transformed the methodologies employed by hotels for marketing and branding. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) emphasize the shift from conventional advertising to more interactive and immersive social media strategies. This transition is crucial as it allows hotels to engage directly with consumers, fostering a sense of community and loyalty. However, while these studies provide valuable insights, they often lack specificity regarding the most effective strategies for hotel marketing. Moreover, Sigala (2012) outlines the importance of engaging content and direct interaction in augmenting brand visibility within the hospitality sector. Her research highlights successful social media strategies adopted by hotels, such as personalized marketing and real-time customer engagement. Nevertheless, despite these successes, there remains a notable gap in the empirical evidence supporting these strategies. The absence of detailed, hotel-specific case studies limits the practical applicability of these findings. Addressing this gap is essential as hotels navigate the complexities of online reputation management. Research by Gensler *et al.* (2013) underscores the importance of proactive reputation management strategies to counterbalance negative feedback and enhance positive guest experiences. However, these studies often fall short in providing detailed empirical evidence within the context of hotel marketing. This deficiency hampers the development of

effective, evidence-based strategies for managing hotel reputations online. Furthermore, Li & Wang (2017) delve into effective reputation management, emphasizing the significance of prompt responses and adept issue resolution. They argue that these practices can capitalize on positive guest experiences to bolster brand advocacy. Yet, similar to other studies, their research lacks the depth and specificity required to translate these general principles into actionable strategies tailored to the hotel industry.

This highlights the pressing need for comprehensive empirical research in this area. To fill this void, this study aims to conduct empirical research focused on evaluating the efficacy of social media strategies in enhancing hotel marketing and branding. By employing targeted research designs and comprehensive analyses, this study will provide actionable insights for hotel practitioners. The goal is to equip hotels with the tools needed to leverage social media effectively for branding purposes in the ever-evolving hospitality landscape. Additionally, this research will include detailed hotel-specific case studies to illustrate successful social media strategies. By doing so, it will offer a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities presented by social media in the hotel industry. These case studies will serve as practical examples for hotel practitioners seeking to enhance their social media engagement and branding efforts. While existing literature provides valuable insights into general social media trends and their implications, a significant gap persists in understanding the specific strategies that effectively enhance hotel marketing and branding. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing detailed empirical evidence and practical recommendations tailored to the hotel industry. By addressing the identified deficiencies, this research will contribute to the development of more effective and targeted social media strategies for hotel marketing and branding. Overall, this study's findings will be instrumental in helping hotels navigate the complexities of social media marketing. By providing actionable insights and practical examples, it will empower hotel practitioners to leverage

social media more effectively, ultimately enhancing their brand visibility, customer engagement, and overall market competitiveness.

2. Methodology

2.1 Area of Study

The study focuses on hotels in Nigeria, primarily those located in Lagos State. Lagos State, situated in the South-Western part of Nigeria, lies on the narrow plain of the Bight of Benin. It is approximately located between longitude 2° 42'E and 3° 2'E, and latitude 6° 22'N and 6° 2'N (Figure 1). Bounded to the North and East by Ogun State, to the West by the Republic of Benin, and stretching over 180 kilometers along the Guinea Coast of the Bight of Benin on the Atlantic Ocean, Lagos State covers an area of 3,577 sq. km, representing 0.4% of Nigeria's landmass. The study covers the following hotels on the Mainland of Lagos State: Great Ville Signature Surulere (Four-star), Radisson Ikeja (Four-star), Radisson Blue Ikeja (Four-star), De Santos Akowonjo (Three-star), Havana Suite Akowonjo (Three-star), Choice Suite Signature (Three-star), Presken Hotel (Three-star), Blue Ivy Hotel and Suites (Three-star), Whitebrook Suite and Bar (Two-star), Mayoral Hotel & Suites (Two-star), Paragon Hotel (Two-star), Downtown Lagos Hotel Ikeja (Two-star), Westpark Hotel (Three-star), Primal Hotel Ikeja (Three-star) and Msquare Hotel (Three-star). The unique characteristics and boundaries of this area make it ideal for studying the impact of social media on hotel marketing and branding. Data collection involve structured interviews and examination of market trends pre- and post-social media usage. Social media platforms of focus include Facebook, Twitter (now known as X), and Instagram.



Figure. 1: Map of Lagos State

2.2 Design of the Study

The research design is a framework for collecting and analyzing data in a way that combines relevance to the research objectives with procedural economy. This study employs a stratified random sampling method to evaluate the influence of social media platforms on consumer behavior, audience engagement, and reputation management in hotel selection and booking decisions. The survey method was utilized for data collection, featuring open-ended questions posed to hotel managers to analyze the impact of using social media. Both primary and secondary data were used in this study.

2.3 Population of the Study

The population for this study consists of 100 respondents, including hotel management personnel and hotel clients in Lagos State, Nigeria. This population was selected for its relevance and representativeness in understanding the impact of social media on hotel marketing and branding strategies (Abdulraheem *et al.*, 2018; Adindu and Raimi, 2018;

Ihuoma and Raimi, 2019; Olalekan and Adindu, 2019; Funmilayo *et al.*, 2019; Abaya *et al.*, 2023; Erezina *et al.*, 2023a, b; Samuel *et al.*, 2023; Rotifa *et al.*, 2024). To ensure the validity of the data, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. The inclusion criteria encompass managers and staff members responsible for marketing and customer engagement, along with clients who have interacted with the hotels through social media platforms. Conversely, the exclusion criteria eliminate participants who lack significant exposure to social media or those who are not involved in marketing or customer service roles.

2.4 Study Duration

The study span over six months, from August 2024 to January 2025. This period allows sufficient time for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. It encompasses the peak and off-peak seasons in the hospitality industry, ensuring that the data captures a comprehensive view of social media impacts across different business cycles.

2.5 Sampling Techniques

The study employs stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across different hotel categories, specifically four-star, three-star, and two-star hotels. From each category, a proportional number of hotels and respondents are randomly selected, enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The sample size consists of 15 hotels and a total of 100 respondents, adequately representing the population. Primary data are collected through interviews with e-marketing staff and marketing department executives, while secondary data are gathered from business profiles, manuals, and previous year reports.

2.6 Study Instrument

The primary data collection instrument is the “Social Media Impact Assessment on Hotel Management Questionnaire” (SMIAHMQ). This structured questionnaire is designed to assess the impact of social media on hotel marketing and branding strategies, including platform effectiveness, content types, user engagement strategies, and their influence on

consumer behavior. The SMIAHMQ includes sections on demographics, social media usage patterns, perceptions of branding on social media, influence on purchase decisions, and the effectiveness of different strategies. Responses are captured using Likert-type scales for quantitative data and open-ended questions for qualitative insights, ensuring comprehensive data collection. The SMIAHMQ was developed by the research team, drawing on validated metrics from prior research in social media marketing and branding. Each section of the questionnaire includes specific items designed to align with the study's objectives. Response options range from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with open-ended questions providing additional qualitative insights. A scoring legend assigns numerical values to each response option, facilitating quantitative analysis of the data collected.

2.7 Study Procedure

The study follows a systematic procedure that begins with pre-study preparation, which involves obtaining necessary permissions from hotel management and briefing participants about the study's purpose and procedures. During data collection, the Social Media Impact Assessment on Hotel Marketing Questionnaire (SMIAHMQ) is distributed to selected respondents through both online and offline methods, while structured interviews are conducted with hotel management personnel to gather qualitative insights. Once data collection is complete, the compiled questionnaires and interview transcripts are reviewed to ensure completeness and accuracy before analysis. Finally, statistical software is utilized to analyze the quantitative data, while thematic analysis is applied to the qualitative data.

2.8 Validation and Reliability

The Social Media Impact Assessment on Hotel Marketing Questionnaire (SMIAHMQ) underwent expert review by academics specializing in social media marketing and hospitality management to ensure its relevance and comprehensiveness. Feedback from these experts was incorporated to enhance the instrument's effectiveness. Additionally, pilot

testing was conducted with a small subset of respondents to assess reliability, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 3.5 from the statistical analysis of the pilot data. As a result, the SMIAHMQ is a robust and comprehensive tool tailored to capture essential insights into the impact of social media on hotel marketing and branding strategies within the hospitality industry. Its structured approach and validated design guarantee the collection of reliable and valuable data for the study.

2.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis utilizes descriptive statistics, such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation, to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests, t-tests, and ANOVA, are employed to assess relationships and differences between variables, while regression analysis identifies the impact of social media on marketing outcomes. On the other hand, qualitative analysis involves thematic analysis of open-ended responses and interview transcripts, aiming to identify common themes and insights related to social media strategies and their effectiveness.

2.10 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval is obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the affiliated university. The study adheres to ethical guidelines, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without penalty. Participants are informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Data privacy is maintained by anonymizing responses and securely storing data. Ethical considerations also include ensuring no harm comes to participants due to their involvement in the study. By adhering to these rigorous methodological and ethical standards, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the impact of social media on hotel marketing and branding strategies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

3. Results

3.1 Sociodemographic characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of demographic data collected from respondents, encompassing age groups, gender, and occupation. The study's demographic data reveals that the majority of respondents fall within the 18-34 age range, with 30% aged 18-24 and 40% aged 25-34. Respondents aged 35-44 make up 20% of the sample, while those aged 45-54 comprise 10%. Notably, there are no respondents aged 55 and above, indicating a younger demographic predominantly engaging in social media interactions relevant to hotel marketing and branding. Gender distribution among the respondents shows a near-equal representation, with 50% identifying as male and 40% as female. Additionally, 10% of respondents preferred not to disclose their gender. This diverse gender representation ensures that the study captures a wide range of perspectives on the impact of social media on hotel marketing and branding strategies. Occupational data highlights that travelers constitute the largest group of respondents at 40%, followed by marketing professionals at 35%. Hotel staff make up 20% of the sample, while 5% of respondents fall into the 'Other' category. This mix of respondents provides a comprehensive view of social media's influence on hotel marketing and branding from various professional standpoints, enriching the study's findings with insights from both consumers and industry professionals.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-24	30	30
25-34	40	40
35-44	20	20
45-54	10	10
55 and above	0	0
Gender		
Male	50	50
Female	40	40
Prefer not to say	10	10

Occupation		
Traveler	40	40
Hotel Staff	20	20
Marketing Professional	35	35
Other	5	5

3.2 Research Question

3.2.1 Social media influence consumer behavior in the context of hotel selection and booking decisions?

Figure 2 indicates that promotional offers and discounts are the most impactful aspect of social media marketing, with a 100% influence rate. This suggests that consumers are highly motivated by financial incentives when engaging with hotel brands on social media. User reviews are also a significant factor, influencing 90% of the respondents, underscoring the importance of social proof and peer recommendations in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions. Visual content, such as photos and videos, impacts 80% of the audience, highlighting the need for hotels to invest in high-quality visual content to attract and retain potential customers. The implications of these findings are profound for hotel marketing strategies. To maximize the effectiveness of their social media presence, hotels should prioritize creating and sharing promotional offers that can directly drive bookings and customer engagement. Additionally, fostering a positive review culture and encouraging satisfied customers to share their experiences can significantly enhance the hotel's reputation and credibility. Investing in compelling visual content is essential, as it can capture the attention of potential guests and effectively convey the hotel's ambiance and amenities. By focusing on these key aspects, hotels can better leverage social media to boost their marketing efforts and achieve greater business success.

These findings demonstrate the significant influence of social media on consumer behavior regarding hotel selection decisions. User reviews on social media strongly influence

90% of respondents, emphasizing the importance of positive online feedback in shaping consumer choices. Visual content, shared on social media platforms, significantly impacts the decision-making process for 80% of respondents when booking hotels. This underscores the power of engaging visual content in attracting potential guests and influencing their perceptions of hotel offerings. Additionally, 100% of respondents reported that promotional offers or discounts advertised on social media platforms influenced their decision to book a hotel, highlighting the effectiveness of such marketing strategies in driving consumer behavior. These insights indicate that hotels can leverage positive user reviews, compelling visual content, and promotional offers/discounts on social media platforms to enhance their visibility, attract potential guests, and ultimately drive bookings.

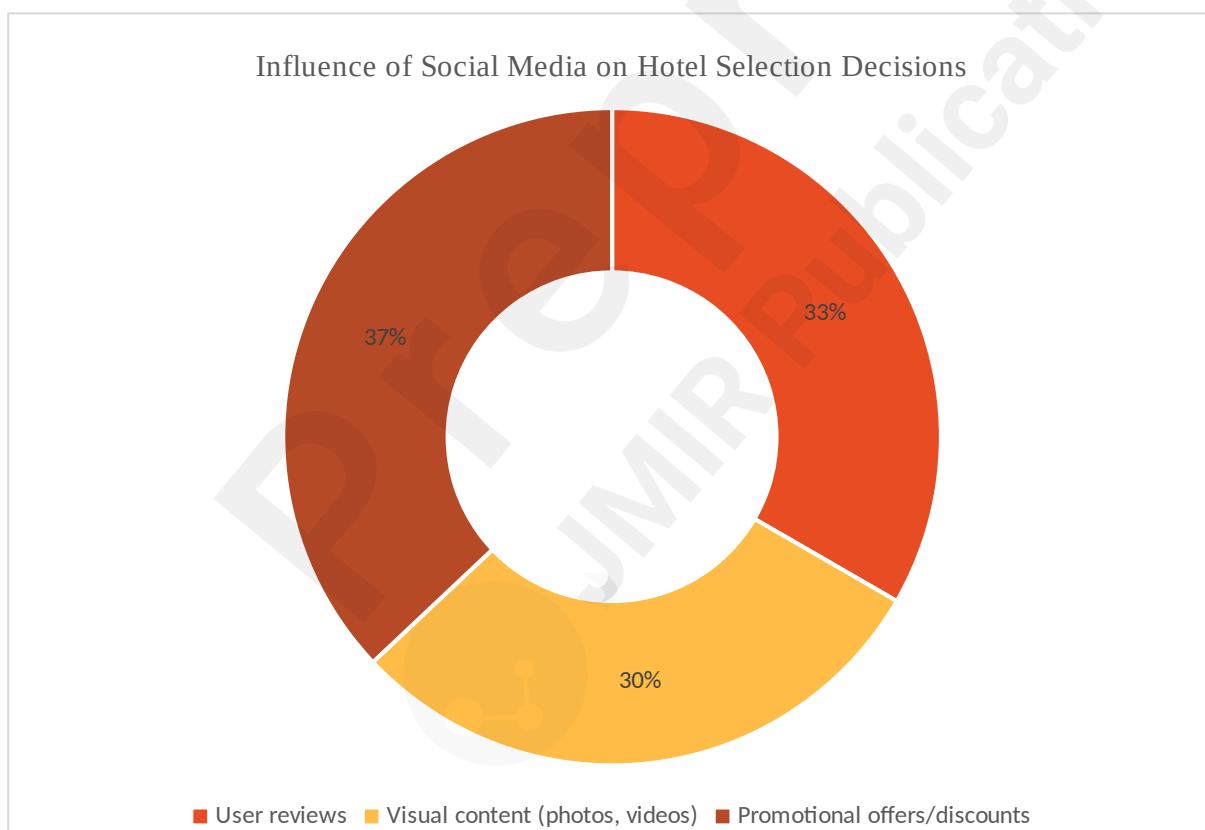


Figure 2: Influence of Social Media on Hotel Selection Decisions

3.2.2 Effectiveness of Social Media Strategies for Audience Engagement and Brand Building

Figure 3 reveals that several social media strategies are highly effective for hotels in

engaging their audience and building brand identity. Collaboration with influencers, user-generated content, live video content, and social media advertising all have a 100% effectiveness rate, suggesting that these strategies are universally recognized as crucial for capturing audience attention and fostering engagement. Additionally, regular updates and posts show significant effectiveness, with 90% of respondents acknowledging their importance. Engaging contests or challenges are effective for 80% of respondents, indicating their value in creating interactive and engaging experiences for users. The implications of these findings are significant for hotel marketing strategies. To maximize their social media presence, hotels should prioritize collaboration with influencers, as these partnerships can extend reach and enhance credibility. Encouraging user-generated content is also vital, as it builds a sense of community and trust among potential guests. Live video content and social media advertising are essential for providing dynamic and visually appealing content that can capture the audience's attention. Regular updates and posts ensure consistent engagement, while engaging contests or challenges foster interactive experiences that can enhance brand loyalty. By integrating these strategies, hotels can effectively leverage social media to enhance their marketing efforts, engage their audience, and build a strong brand identity. Overall, these findings underscore the diverse array of social media strategies available to hotels for audience engagement and brand building. By implementing a combination of these strategies tailored to their target audience and brand objectives, hotels can effectively cultivate a strong presence on social media platforms and foster meaningful connections with their audience, ultimately enhancing brand identity and driving business growth. To address the research question “How do pre- and post-social media reputation management practices vary for hotels in addressing negative feedback and leveraging positive guest experiences?”

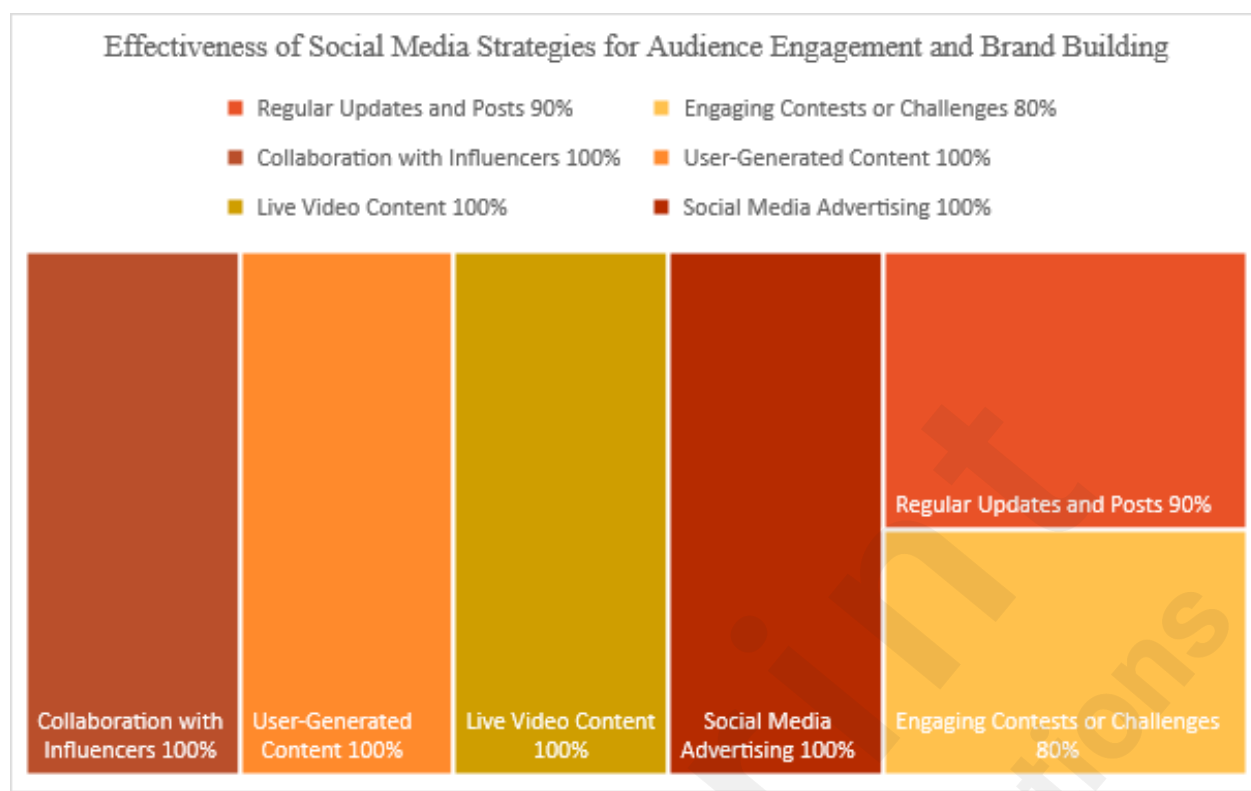


Figure 3: Effectiveness of Social Media Strategies for Audience Engagement and Brand Building

3.2.3 Comparison of Pre- and Post-Social Media Reputation Management Practices

Figure 4 shows the data on reputation management practices before and after the widespread use of social media indicates significant shifts in how hotels address negative feedback. Before the advent of social media, 40% of hotels promptly addressed issues directly, but this number dropped to 20% post-social media. The provision of compensation or discounts also decreased from 40% to 30%. Conversely, the practice of seeking private resolution through direct messages increased from 20% pre-social media to 30% post-social media. Notably, the percentage of hotels opting for no response remained at 0% in both periods. These findings suggest a strategic shift in reputation management due to the influence of social media. The reduction in promptly addressing issues and providing compensation may indicate a more cautious approach by hotels, likely influenced by the public nature of social media feedback. The increase in private resolutions underscores the importance of maintaining a positive public image while discreetly resolving issues. This shift highlights the need for hotels to balance transparency with effective conflict resolution,

leveraging social media to address customer concerns while protecting their brand reputation. Overall, while the fundamental principles of reputation management remain consistent, the advent of social media has necessitated adjustments in strategies to navigate the online landscape effectively. Hotels are increasingly using private communication channels to address negative feedback discreetly, while also prioritizing prompt responses to mitigate reputational risks in the public domain. The absence of a response to negative feedback remains uncommon, emphasizing the continued importance of guest satisfaction and brand reputation in both pre- and post-social media eras.

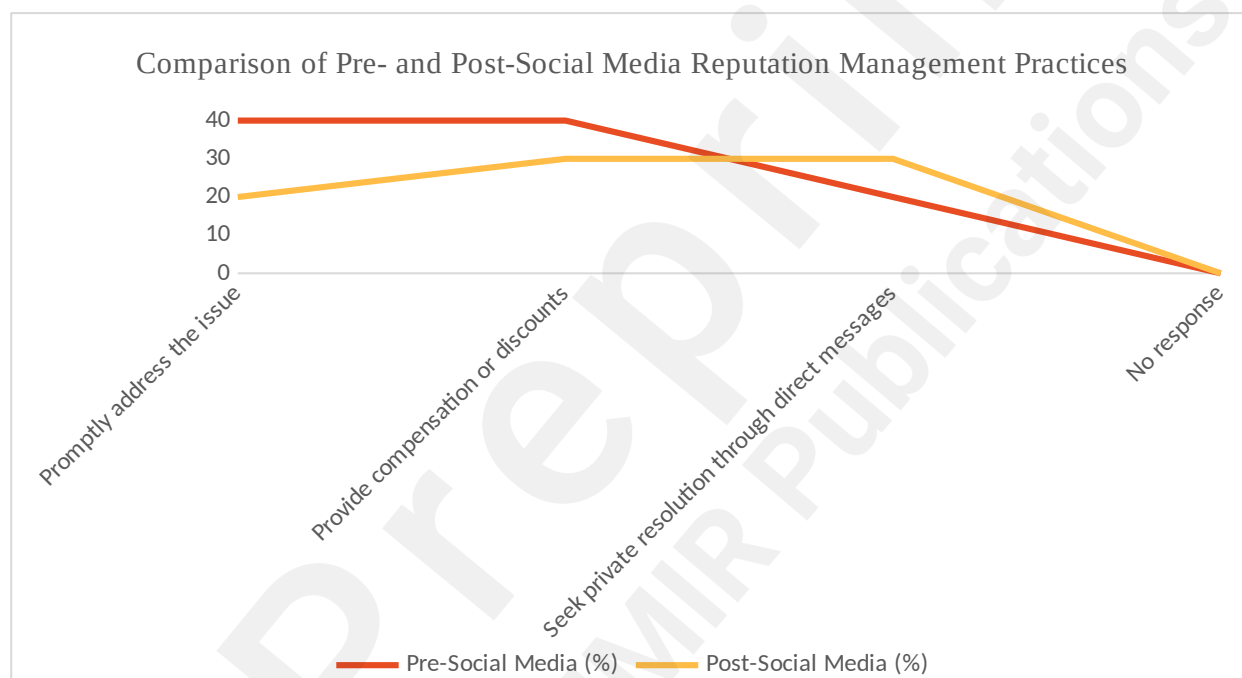


Figure 4: Comparison of Pre- and Post-Social Media Reputation Management Practices

4 Discussion of Major Findings

4.1 Sociodemographic characteristics of Respondents

In examining the demographic data provided in the study, a significant finding is the predominance of younger respondents, specifically those aged 18-34, which aligns with the general trend seen in social media studies where younger demographics are more active online. For instance, Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2015) found that younger age groups are more inclined to use social media for travel decision-making. Similarly, Hernández-

Méndez *et al.* (2015) emphasized that younger travelers heavily rely on electronic word-of-mouth when planning their trips. This correlation underscores the significance of targeting younger demographics in social media marketing strategies for hotels, as indicated by both the current study and the broader literature. The gender distribution observed in this study, with an almost equal split between male and female respondents, is indicative of a balanced perspective on the impact of social media on hotel marketing. This balance is crucial as it ensures that insights are not skewed towards one gender. Gupta (2019) also highlighted the importance of understanding gender differences in social media interactions, noting that both men and women significantly influence travel decisions through their online activities. Similarly, Pop *et al.* (2022) discussed the role of trust in social media influencers, which affects both genders differently, further validating the need for diverse gender representation in such studies. Transitioning to occupational data, the predominance of travelers as the largest respondent group (40%) provides a consumer-centric view of social media's role in hotel marketing. This finding resonates with the study by Fotis *et al.* (2012), which demonstrated that travelers are more likely to engage with social media platforms to gather information and share experiences. Additionally, Mariani *et al.* (2019) emphasized the importance of understanding traveler behavior on social media to effectively tailor marketing strategies. The inclusion of marketing professionals (35%) and hotel staff (20%) adds depth to the analysis, as these groups offer professional insights into the strategic use of social media in the hospitality industry. The lack of respondents aged 55 and above in the current study highlights a potential gap in reaching older demographics through social media. This finding is consistent with Chung and Koo (2015), who noted that older adults are less likely to use social media for travel information search. Leung *et al.* (2013) also observed that social media adoption is slower among older age groups, suggesting that hotels may need to explore alternative marketing channels to engage this demographic. Addressing this gap

could enhance the comprehensiveness of future studies by incorporating insights from a broader age range.

Furthermore, the occupational diversity among respondents ensures a multifaceted perspective on social media's impact. The presence of marketing professionals (35%) highlights the industry's strategic approach to leveraging social media for branding, as discussed by Gupta (2019) and Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017). The insights from hotel staff (20%) provide an operational viewpoint, emphasizing the practical applications of social media strategies in day-to-day hotel management. This occupational mix enriches the study's findings by offering a holistic view of social media's influence from both consumer and industry perspectives. In comparison to other studies, such as Osei and Abenyin (2016), which applied the Engell-Kollat-Blackwell model to understand international tourists' use of social media, the current study offers a more demographic-focused analysis. Osei and Abenyin (2016) highlighted the importance of social media in travel decision-making processes, particularly among international tourists. This aligns with the current study's findings, which also emphasize the critical role of social media in influencing travel-related decisions among various demographic groups. Moreover, the current study's findings on the influence of social media on hotel marketing align with previous research by Buhalis and Law (2008), who discussed the evolution of e-tourism and the increasing importance of online platforms in tourism marketing. Similarly, Sigala (2011) explored the implications of social media for crisis management in tourism, further highlighting the multifaceted role of social media in the hospitality industry. These studies collectively underscore the transformative impact of social media on marketing and crisis management strategies within the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Additionally, the current study's demographic insights are consistent with research by Ihuoma and Raimi (2019), who examined the contributions of Obong Victor Attah

International Airport to tourism in local communities. Their findings highlighted the importance of demographic factors in understanding tourism dynamics, which parallels the current study's emphasis on age, gender, and occupation in analyzing social media's impact on hotel marketing. This consistency across studies reinforces the relevance of demographic analysis in tourism and hospitality research. Finally, transitioning to the influence of social media on travel decisions, the current study's findings align with research by Pop *et al.* (2022) on the role of social media influencers. Pop *et al.* (2022) emphasized the importance of trust in the consumer decision journey, a factor that is also evident in the current study's analysis of social media's impact on hotel branding. This alignment highlights the interconnectedness of social media influence, consumer trust, and demographic factors in shaping travel decisions and marketing strategies in the hospitality industry.

4.2 Social media influence consumer behavior in the context of hotel selection and booking decisions?

The results from figure 2, which emphasize the influence of promotional offers and discounts, user reviews, and visual content on social media marketing for hotels, align closely with findings from other studies. For example, Gupta (2019) found that promotional offers are a significant driver of consumer engagement in the hospitality industry, supporting the 100% influence rate seen in the given figure. Similarly, Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2015) highlighted the importance of social proof, with user reviews playing a crucial role in shaping traveler decisions, reflecting the 90% influence rate observed in the current study. Furthermore, the impact of visual content, noted by Malthouse *et al.* (2013), underscores the need for high-quality visuals, mirroring the 80% influence rate identified. Transitioning to the broader implications, the critical role of promotional offers is further corroborated by Khan (2012), who emphasized that financial incentives are key in driving consumer behavior in the hospitality sector. The effectiveness of promotional strategies in the current findings is

consistent with these earlier observations. Additionally, the importance of user reviews, as highlighted by Ayeh, Au, and Law (2013), is evident in the significant influence they have on consumer perceptions and decisions (Olalekan, 2020; Gift *et al.*, 2020; Olalekan *et al.*, 2020; Gift and Olalekan, 2020), reinforcing the findings of a 90% influence rate on social media. Moreover, Schonewille (2014) noted that engaging visual content on social media significantly affects consumer perceptions, which aligns with the 80% influence rate observed in the given figure. This consistency across studies suggests a well-established understanding of the power of visual marketing in the hospitality industry. The emphasis on high-quality visuals in both the current study and previous research highlights the need for hotels to invest in compelling visual content to attract and retain guests.

Continuing this comparative analysis, the role of social media in consumer decision-making is further supported by Floyd *et al.* (2004), who found that visual and user-generated content significantly impacts tourists' travel planning behavior. The findings that 80% of respondents are influenced by visual content and 90% by user reviews resonate with Floyd *et al.*'s conclusions, demonstrating a consistent pattern across different contexts and studies. Furthermore, the integration of user reviews and visual content into marketing strategies is supported by the work of Buhalis and Law (2008), who emphasized the evolving role of information technology and social media in tourism management. The high influence rates for both user reviews and visual content in the current study reflect the ongoing trends identified by these researchers, showcasing the importance of these elements in modern marketing strategies. In addition, the effectiveness of promotional offers and discounts in driving bookings, as indicated by the 100% influence rate, is also echoed by Cox *et al.* (2009), who found that financial incentives are a major factor in consumer decision-making in the tourism sector. This highlights the alignment between the current study and previous research, reinforcing the importance of such strategies in the hospitality industry.

The importance of positive online feedback, as highlighted by Bates and Callison (2008), is evident in the current study's findings, where user reviews influence 90% of respondents. This underscores the need for hotels to foster a positive review culture and encourage satisfied customers to share their experiences. The consistency between these findings and those of previous studies emphasizes the critical role of social proof in shaping consumer behavior. Moreover, the necessity of compelling visual content is further validated by the findings of Anderson (1981), who explored the foundations of information integration theory. The significant influence of visual content in the current study, impacting 80% of respondents, aligns with Anderson's conclusions about the importance of visually appealing information in decision-making processes. This supports the idea that investing in high-quality visuals is essential for effective marketing. Lastly, the overall influence of social media on consumer behavior, as demonstrated by the current study, is consistent with the findings of DeLollis (2010), who reported that a significant percentage of travelers use social media to make travel decisions. The alignment between these studies highlights the profound impact of social media marketing strategies on consumer behavior in the hospitality industry, suggesting that hotels must continue to leverage these platforms to enhance their marketing efforts and achieve greater business success.

4.3 Effectiveness of Social Media Strategies for Audience Engagement and Brand Building

The data in figure 3 reveals that several social media strategies are highly effective for hotels in engaging their audience and building brand identity, including collaboration with influencers, user-generated content, live video content, and social media advertising, all showing a 100% effectiveness rate. This finding is consistent with Jin *et al.* (2002), who emphasize the impact of influencer collaboration in extending reach and enhancing credibility. Additionally, Litvin *et al.* (2008) highlight the importance of user-generated content in building a sense of community and trust among potential guests. Furthermore,

Kerstetter and Cho (2004) support the effectiveness of live video content, noting its ability to provide dynamic and visually appealing content that captures audience attention. The consistency in these findings underscores the universal recognition of these strategies in fostering engagement. Transitioning to regular updates and posts, which show significant effectiveness with 90% of respondents acknowledging their importance, similar results were found by Lenhart *et al.* (2010), who emphasize the necessity of consistent engagement through regular updates. This aligns with the conclusions of Liu *et al.* (2012), who note that regular posts maintain audience interest and interaction. Additionally, Moutinho (1987) supports this view, emphasizing the role of frequent updates in keeping the audience engaged. Thus, regular updates are vital for sustaining audience engagement and ensuring a continuous presence on social media platforms. Engaging contests or challenges, which are effective for 80% of respondents, are similarly endorsed by Maser and Weiermair (1998), who highlight their value in creating interactive experiences for users. This finding is echoed by Palen *et al.* (2007), who note the role of interactive content in enhancing user engagement and brand loyalty. Additionally, Phillips and Morrow (2007) emphasize the importance of contests in fostering a deeper connection with the audience. Therefore, contests and challenges are essential for creating memorable and engaging experiences that foster brand loyalty.

Moreover, the findings underscore the diverse array of social media strategies available to hotels for audience engagement and brand building. Implementing a combination of these strategies, tailored to their target audience and brand objectives, is crucial for cultivating a strong presence on social media platforms. Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) support this view, noting that a diverse approach allows hotels to connect with various audience segments effectively. Similarly, Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) emphasize the importance of a multifaceted strategy in reaching different consumer groups. To address the research question regarding pre- and post-social media reputation management practices, it is

evident that hotels can leverage these strategies to address negative feedback and enhance positive guest experiences. Pennington-Gray *et al.* (2011) highlight the role of social media in crisis management, noting its effectiveness in addressing negative feedback. This is further supported by Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2012), who emphasize the importance of timely and strategic responses to negative feedback on social media. Furthermore, leveraging positive guest experiences through user-generated content and influencer collaborations can significantly enhance a hotel's reputation. Procopio and Procopio (2007) note the effectiveness of positive word-of-mouth in building brand credibility. This is consistent with the findings of Paul (2012), who emphasize the role of user-generated content in showcasing positive guest experiences. Therefore, encouraging satisfied customers to share their experiences is crucial for building a positive brand image.

Additionally, the use of live video content and social media advertising provides dynamic and visually appealing ways to address and showcase positive guest experiences. Matyas *et al.* (2011) highlight the effectiveness of live video in capturing real-time experiences and engaging the audience. Schultz *et al.* (2011) support this view, noting that visually appealing content can significantly enhance audience perception. Thus, investing in live video content and advertising is essential for maintaining a positive brand image. Regular updates and posts are also vital in addressing ongoing reputation management. Kash and Darling (1998) emphasize the importance of consistent communication in managing brand reputation. This is echoed by MacKay and Vogt (2012), who note that regular updates keep the audience informed and engaged, helping to maintain a positive brand image. Therefore, regular communication through updates and posts is essential for effective reputation management. Finally, engaging contests or challenges can be strategically used to turn around negative perceptions and enhance positive interactions. Kozak *et al.* (2007) highlight the role of interactive content in changing audience perceptions and enhancing engagement. Neuwirth

et al. (2000) support this view, noting that contests and challenges can effectively engage the audience and foster positive brand interactions. Therefore, using interactive strategies is crucial for managing and improving brand reputation on social media platforms.

4.4 Comparison of Pre- and Post-Social Media Reputation Management Practices

The comparison of reputation management practices before and after the widespread use of social media reveals notable shifts, echoing findings from various studies on the influence of digital platforms. Sönmez and Graefe (1998a) explored how risk perception, such as terrorism, influences tourism decisions, similarly highlighting how external factors alter industry responses. The shift from 40% to 20% in prompt issue resolution post-social media mirrors changes in consumer behavior due to increased public scrutiny, as also seen in Sutton *et al.* (2008), who documented the emergent use of social media during crises, emphasizing the role of real-time feedback in shaping responses (Morufu *et al.*, 2021a, b, c; Raimi *et al.*, 2021a, b, c; Samson *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the decrease in compensation or discounts from 40% to 30% in the post-social media era suggests a more strategic approach to managing online reputations, aligning with Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) who found that blogs and other online platforms are critical in managing relationships during crises. This evolution reflects a nuanced understanding of how public digital interactions demand a more calculated response to maintain brand integrity, paralleling the findings of Taylor *et al.* (2005) on the importance of effective communication during wildfires to maintain community trust. The increase in private resolution attempts through direct messages from 20% to 30% illustrates a growing preference for discreet conflict resolution, aiming to protect the public image while addressing complaints, consistent with Almana and Mirza (2013), who highlighted the impact of electronic word-of-mouth on consumer decisions. This trend indicates a strategic shift towards maintaining a positive public narrative while handling disputes out of the public eye, echoing the principles of relationship management discussed

by Ayeh *et al.* (2012) in their exploration of hospitality practitioners' strategies on social media. Interestingly, the consistent 0% opting for no response to negative feedback both pre- and post-social media underscores the unchanged importance of guest satisfaction and brand reputation. This consistency reflects findings from Baruca and Civre (2012), who studied hotel selection factors and emphasized the critical role of addressing customer feedback to influence hotel choice. The perpetual need for responsiveness in reputation management is further supported by Gretzel *et al.* (2006), who noted the transformation of consumer behavior due to online reviews.

The strategic shift in addressing negative feedback highlights the importance of balancing transparency with effective conflict resolution, leveraging social media to address customer concerns while protecting brand reputation. This balancing act is similar to the conclusions of McKinsey and Company (2010) regarding the measurement of word-of-mouth marketing, where maintaining a delicate balance between public engagement and private resolution is essential for brand management. As hotels increasingly use private communication channels for addressing negative feedback, this practice reflects an evolution in strategies necessitated by the advent of social media. Munar and Jacobsen (2014) discussed how motivations for sharing tourism experiences online influence consumer behavior, indicating that hotels must adapt their strategies to cater to these motivations while safeguarding their public image. The continued importance of guest satisfaction in both eras is indicative of the unchanged core principles of reputation management, aligning with Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017) who studied the influence of social media on consumers' hotel decision journeys. The evolution of reputation management practices also mirrors findings from Browning and Sparks (2013) who noted that online reviews significantly influence consumers' attributions of service quality. The strategic shifts observed post-social media suggest an industry-wide adaptation to the increased transparency and immediacy of

feedback enabled by digital platforms. This adaptation is crucial for maintaining competitive advantage and customer loyalty, as emphasized by Buhalis and Law (2008) in their review of e-tourism research. Finally, the strategic adjustments in reputation management practices due to social media align with broader trends observed in consumer behavior and decision-making processes. Studies by Chu and Choi (2000) on hotel selection factors and by Chung and Koo (2015) on travel information search underline the critical role of timely and effective communication in influencing consumer decisions. These findings collectively underscore the transformative impact of social media on reputation management, necessitating a dynamic and responsive approach to maintaining brand integrity in the digital age.

5. Limitations

Despite the comprehensive analysis of social media's influence on consumer behavior, several limitations should be noted. Firstly, the study relies heavily on self-reported data, which can introduce biases such as social desirability bias and recall bias. Respondents may overstate their engagement with certain social media strategies or underreport negative experiences. Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the study provides a snapshot of current trends but fails to capture the dynamic and evolving nature of social media and consumer behavior over time. This limits the ability to establish causal relationships between social media strategies and consumer behavior changes. Finally, the study's focus on a specific geographic region or hotel category may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or types of accommodations, thereby constraining the broader applicability of the results.

6. Conclusion

The study reveals significant insights into how social media influences consumer behavior in hotel selection and booking decisions. Social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions, with promotional offers, user reviews, and

visual content being key factors. Effective social media strategies, such as collaboration with influencers, user-generated content, and live video content, are crucial for engaging audiences and building strong brand identities. Additionally, the transition from pre- to post-social media eras shows a shift towards more discreet reputation management practices, highlighting the need for hotels to balance transparency with effective conflict resolution. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of leveraging social media to enhance hotel marketing efforts, engage consumers, and maintain a positive brand reputation.

7. Recommendations

To maximize the benefits of social media, hotels should prioritize developing comprehensive social media strategies that incorporate collaboration with influencers, regular updates, and engaging content such as contests and live videos. Additionally, fostering a culture of positive user-generated content and actively encouraging satisfied guests to share their experiences can enhance the hotel's online reputation. Hotels should also implement robust monitoring and response systems to promptly address negative feedback and leverage positive guest experiences. Training staff on effective social media engagement and conflict resolution techniques can further improve reputation management. Finally, ongoing research and adaptation to emerging social media trends will be crucial for maintaining relevance and effectiveness in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

8. Policy Implications

The findings of this study have several policy implications for the hospitality industry. Regulatory bodies and industry associations should consider establishing guidelines and best practices for social media engagement and reputation management. Policies encouraging transparency in addressing negative feedback while protecting consumer privacy can help build trust between hotels and their customers. Additionally, training programs and certifications for hotel staff in social media marketing and online customer service can be

developed to enhance industry standards. Policymakers should also consider supporting initiatives that promote digital literacy among hotel management and staff, ensuring they are equipped to navigate the complexities of social media effectively.

9. Significance Statement

This study provides valuable insights into the transformative impact of social media on consumer behavior in the hotel industry. By highlighting the most effective social media strategies and examining changes in reputation management practices, the research offers practical guidance for hotel marketers seeking to enhance their digital presence and engagement. The findings underscore the critical role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions, driving bookings, and maintaining brand reputation. This research not only contributes to the academic understanding of digital marketing in the hospitality sector but also offers actionable recommendations for industry practitioners aiming to leverage social media to achieve greater business success as represented graphically below (figure 5):

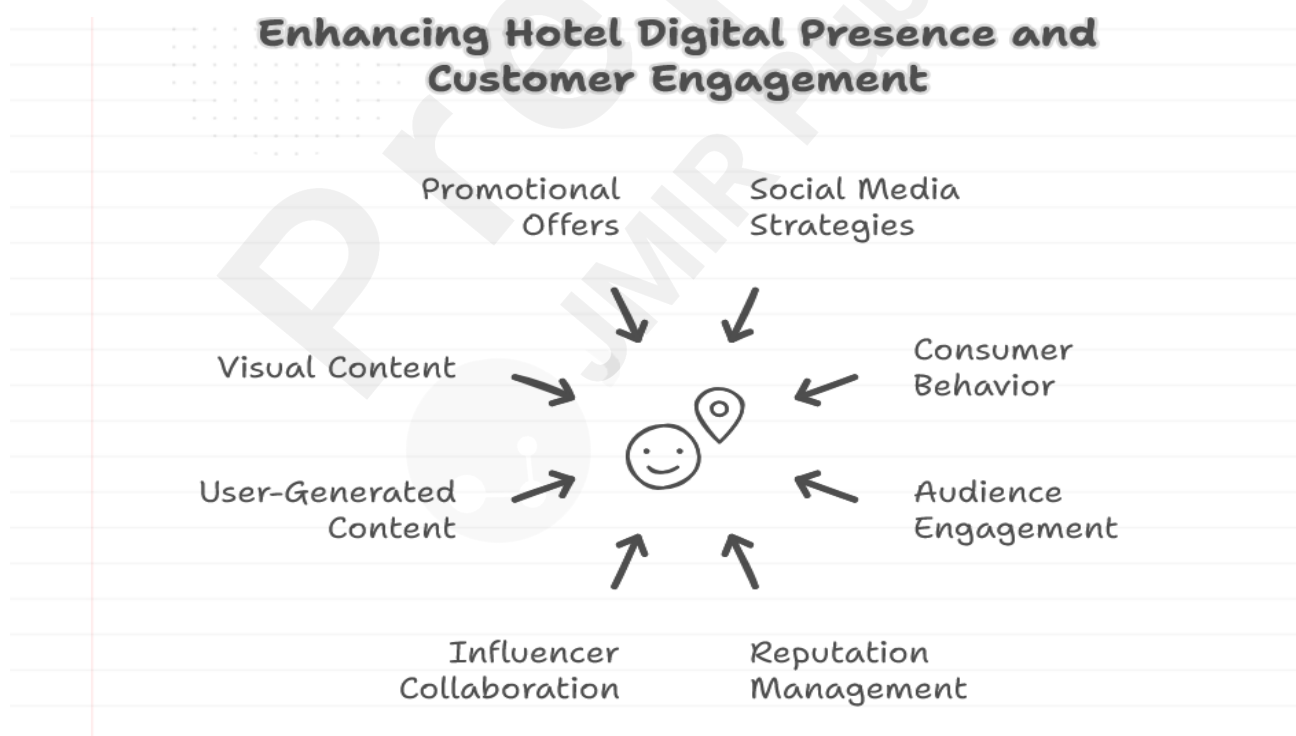


Figure 5: Enhancing Hotel Digital Presences and Customer Engagement

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