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DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES OF FOUR AND FIVE-STAR HOTELS IN BISHKEK: A DESCRIPTIVE COMPARISON^{##}

BİŞKEK'TEKİ DÖRT VE BEŞ YILDIZLI OTELLERİN DİJİTAL PAZARLAMA UYGULAMALARI: BETİMSSEL BİR KARŞILAŞTIRMA

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ABSTRACT

This study descriptively compares the digital marketing practices of four- and five-star hotels in Bishkek identified through publicly accessible digital sources. The criterion-based analytic sample comprised 34 hotels: 28 four-star and 6 five-star properties. Data were collected between 1 January and 31 March 2026 from official hotel websites, social media accounts, and online travel agency profiles. The material was analyzed in MAXQDA Analytics Pro 24 through directed content analysis using literature-based, predefined categories. All six five-star hotels had both a corporate website and social media accounts, whereas 22 of the 28 four-star hotels (78.5%) had a corporate website and 27 (96.4%) had social media accounts. At the parent-code level, the analysis produced 187 website-related code occurrences, 170 social-media-

^{##} *The data used in this article is based solely on publicly available corporate data from hotel websites, social media accounts, and online travel agency profiles. No data was collected from human participants, no personal data was used, and no intervention or observation process was conducted. Therefore, the study does not require ethical committee approval.*

related occurrences, and 101 occurrences related to online travel agency visibility. Direct-sales and conversion tools accounted for 60 website-related occurrences, and multilingual options accounted for 49. Russian was available on 21 hotel websites and English on 20, while Kyrgyz was available on only one. Visual content appeared in the social media profiles of 25 hotels, whereas user-generated content and influencer collaboration were each observed in only two hotels. Within this analytic sample, the five-star hotels used the observed digital tools more consistently, while the four-star hotels displayed greater variation. Because the groups were small and unequal, however, these comparisons describe only the observed sample and do not provide inferential evidence of a hotel-category effect. The study provides a multi-channel assessment of digital visibility in Bishkek's hotel market and offers practical recommendations concerning direct booking, multilingual accessibility, online reputation, and social media engagement.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; Hotel Businesses; Social Media; Online Travel Agencies; Bishkek.

Jel Codes: L80, L83, L89.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Bişkek'te kamuya açık dijital kaynaklar üzerinden belirlenen dört ve beş yıldızlı otellerin dijital pazarlama uygulamalarını betimsel olarak karşılaştırmaktadır. Ölçüt örneklemeyle oluşturulan analitik örneklem, 28 dört yıldızlı ve 6 beş yıldızlı olmak üzere toplam 34 otelden oluşmaktadır. Veriler 1 Ocak-31 Mart 2026 tarihleri arasında otellerin resmî web siteleri, sosyal medya hesapları ve çevrimiçi seyahat acentesi profillerinden toplanmış; literatüre dayalı önceden tanımlanmış kategoriler kullanılarak yönlendirilmiş içerik analiziyle MAXQDA Analytics Pro 24 programında çözümlenmiştir. Altı beş yıldızlı otelin tamamında kurumsal web sitesi ve sosyal medya hesabı bulunurken, 28 dört yıldızlı otelde bu sayılar sırasıyla 22 (%78,5) ve 27'dir (%96,4). Üst kategori kod sıklıkları web sitesiyle ilişkili göstergelerde 187, sosyal medya göstergelerinde 170 ve çevrimiçi seyahat acentesi görünürlüğünde 101'dir. Web sitesi incelemesinde doğrudan satış ve dönüşüm araçları 60, çok dilli seçenekler 49 kod sıklığına ulaşmıştır. Rusça 21 ve İngilizce 20 otel web sitesinde yer alırken, Kırgızca seçeneği yalnızca bir otelde saptanmıştır. Sosyal medyada görsel içerik 25 otelde görülmüş; kullanıcı üretimi içerik ve influencer iş birlikleri yalnızca ikişer otelde belirlenmiştir. Bu analitik örneklem içinde beş yıldızlı oteller gözlenen dijital araçları daha tutarlı biçimde kullanırken, dört yıldızlı oteller daha değişken bir dağılım göstermiştir. Bununla birlikte, grupların küçük ve dengesiz olması nedeniyle karşılaştırmalar yalnızca örnekleme gözlenen dağılımları göstermekte; otel kategorisinin etkisine ilişkin çıkarımsal bir sonuç sunmamaktadır. Çalışma, Bişkek otel pazarındaki dijital görünürlüğü çok kanallı bir çerçevede ortaya koymakta ve doğrudan rezervasyon, çok dillilik, çevrimiçi itibar ve sosyal medya etkileşimine yönelik uygulama önerileri sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Pazarlama; Otel İşletmeleri; Sosyal Medya; Çevrimiçi Seyahat Acenteleri; Bişkek.

Jel Kodu: L80, L83, L89.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digitalization has altered how tourism businesses market, distribute, and communicate their services. In hotels, digital transformation involves more than adopting individual technologies; it changes customer touchpoints, information flows, value creation, and competitive strategy (Troisi et al., 2023; Gutierrez et al., 2025). These changes have produced a multi-channel environment that includes corporate websites, social media, online travel agencies (OTAs), search visibility, online reviews, digital communication tools, and direct-booking systems (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018; Parvez et al., 2018).

Each channel serves a different function. Hotel websites provide information, represent the brand, build trust, and support direct bookings (Salameh et al., 2022; De Vries & Klein Poelhuis, 2024). Social media enables visual communication, campaign promotion, and interaction with potential guests (Cunha et al., 2021; Puspita et al., 2024). OTAs broaden market access but may also increase commission costs, platform dependence, and the mediation of customer relationships (Kontis & Skoultos, 2022; Yang & Kim, 2022).

A digital account alone does not demonstrate strategic capability. A hotel may have a website, an Instagram profile, or an OTA listing without maintaining current content, enabling direct conversion, responding to reviews, or coordinating information across channels. Digital marketing capacity therefore needs to be assessed through observable features such as website functionality, booking tools, user experience, social media activity, reputation management, SEO-related indicators, map integration, multilingual content, and communication options (Leite & Azevedo, 2017; Roumeliotis et al., 2022; Bilgihan & Ricci, 2024).

Previous research has often examined these elements separately. Website studies commonly address

quality, trust, perceived value, and booking intention (Amer, 2021; De Vries & Klein Poelhuis, 2024); social-media and eWOM studies focus on engagement, reviews, and reputation (Hernández-Maestro, 2020; Sánchez-González & González-Fernández, 2021); and distribution research examines OTAs, platform power, and direct-booking choices (Lee et al., 2022; Yang & Kim, 2022). Some studies connect several digital channels or relate them to hotel performance (Leite & Azevedo, 2017; De Pelsmacker et al., 2018; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018), but observational studies that assess websites, social media, OTA visibility, SEO-related features, direct-sales tools, online reputation, and multilingualism within one coding framework remain comparatively limited.

Bishkek provides a relevant setting for such an assessment. It is the capital and the principal urban accommodation market of Kyrgyzstan, serving international, regional, and domestic visitors. Official statistics for 2024 recorded 141,500 tourism-related entities in Kyrgyzstan, of which 29,000 (20.5%) were located in Bishkek. The city also accounted for 7,100 entities providing recreation and leisure services, or 38.7% of the national total (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2025). These figures support examining Bishkek not only as an under-researched context but also as a substantial concentration of tourism-related economic activity.

The city's multilingual market makes language accessibility especially important. Russian, English, and Kyrgyz may signal different target markets and forms of accessibility. Website language choice is therefore not treated here as a purely technical option; it is also related to localization, cultural adaptation, and the digital representation of the local language (Čermák, 2020; Qian & Law, 2021).

The study also draws on the technology-organization-environment (TOE) perspective and the concept of digital maturity. Digital maturity includes technological infrastructure, management orientation, human resources, digital skills, data use, and strategic alignment (Nikopoulou et al., 2023). Hotel category and organizational capacity may therefore be associated with differences in how consistently digital tools are adopted and coordinated, although descriptive digital traces cannot establish the internal causes of those differences (Cheng et al., 2023).

Against this background, the study examines whether higher-category hotels in Bishkek merely maintain a digital presence or use multiple digital touchpoints in a more systematic manner. Official websites, social media accounts, OTA profiles, SEO-related indicators, direct-sales and conversion tools, multilingual content, online reputation, and communication features are assessed together through content analysis.

The study addresses three research questions: RQ1: Which digital marketing channels and tools are used by four- and five-star hotels in Bishkek? RQ2: To what extent are website features, social media practices, OTA visibility, SEO-related indicators, direct-sales tools, online reputation management, and multilingual options adopted? RQ3: What descriptive differences are observed between four- and five-star hotels in the scope and consistency of these practices?

The contribution is threefold. First, the study uses a unified coding framework to examine several public digital touchpoints rather than a single platform. Second, it provides current evidence from Bishkek, a Central Asian urban destination with limited empirical coverage. Third, it compares four- and five-star hotels while avoiding causal claims about organizational capacity that cannot be established from public digital traces. The results are intended to inform both hotel digital-marketing research and practical decisions by hotels and destination stakeholders.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

1.1.1. Digital Transformation and Digital Maturity in Hotel Businesses

Digital transformation in tourism affects how firms create value, distribute services, interact with customers, and use data (Troisi et al., 2023; Gutierrez et al., 2025). For hotels, it creates a network of digital touchpoints that includes websites, social media, OTAs, online reviews, search visibility, and direct-booking tools (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018; Wynn & Jones, 2022). Findings from other markets are used in this study to define the analytical indicators, not as assumptions that Bishkek hotels will

display the same patterns.

The TOE framework explains technology adoption through technological conditions, organizational characteristics, and the external environment (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). Hospitality research similarly shows that technological readiness, organizational capacity, and environmental pressures shape digital transformation (Nikopoulou et al., 2023). In this study, the presence of a digital channel indicates availability, whereas regular use, functional depth, and cross-channel consistency are treated as observable signs associated with digital maturity.

Digital maturity is therefore not equated with technical infrastructure alone. It also concerns managerial orientation, digital skills, data use, review monitoring, and consistency across channels. Wynn & Jones (2022) warn that hotel digitalization can be ineffective when it is separated from information-technology strategy. Accordingly, the present study treats digital marketing as a management domain connected to technology, data, human resources, and platform relationships.

This framework guides the interpretation of differences between hotel categories. The comparison considers not only how many tools are visible but also whether accounts are active, whether websites support conversion, whether information is coordinated across platforms, and whether multilingual access is available. Because the data are observational, these patterns are discussed as indicators associated with digital maturity rather than direct measures of internal organizational capability.

1.1.2. Website, Direct Booking and User Experience

A hotel website is a digital touchpoint under the direct control of the business. It communicates room information, prices, location, services, images, promotions, contact details, and booking options, and can influence trust and direct-sales opportunities (Salameh et al., 2022; De Vries & Klein Poelhuis, 2024). Amer (2021) found that the e-servicescape, website trust, and perceived value are associated with online booking intention, illustrating why website assessment should include both information and functional features.

Most website research measures customer perceptions or booking intentions rather than the visible features of a local hotel market. In the present study, that literature is used to operationalize indicators such as information quality, payment options, direct booking, visual content, language options, and map integration. Cheng et al. (2023) also show that website information quality can vary by hotel category, providing a basis for a descriptive comparison while not implying that the same pattern must occur in Bishkek.

Direct booking connects website functionality to OTA dependence. Hotels may use price benefits, loyalty membership, and brand incentives to encourage direct reservations (Lee et al., 2022). At the same time, customers' channel choices also depend on travel purpose and familiarity with the destination or hotel (Yang & Kim, 2022). Direct-booking tools are therefore interpreted as evidence of a hotel's capacity to establish a direct customer relationship, not as proof of booking success.

1.1.3. Social Media, Online Reviews and Reputation Management

Social media is central to hotel marketing because accommodation services are visual and experiential. Hotel presence and activity vary by property category and platform (Cunha et al., 2021), while effective practice involves planning, implementation, and interaction rather than account ownership alone (Puspita et al., 2024). The present analysis therefore codes posting activity, visual content, calls to action, campaigns, dynamic formats, and engagement-oriented features.

Online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth are related to, but distinct from, social-media communication. Reviews make customer evaluations publicly visible, whereas reputation management concerns whether a business monitors and responds to them. Service quality shapes eWOM (Sánchez-González & González-Fernández, 2021), and managerial responses to negative reviews may improve subsequent evaluations (Hernández-Maestro, 2020). Reviews are consequently treated as part of a hotel's public digital reputation.

Digital-marketing tools and online reviews should not be interpreted independently. De Pelsmacker

et al. (2018) identified relationships among digital-marketing strategies, review volume, ratings, and hotel performance. Although those results cannot be transferred directly to Bishkek, they justify examining websites, social media, reviews, and reputation-management practices within the same digital ecosystem.

1.1.4. Online Travel Agencies, Platform Visibility and SEO

OTAs are major distribution and visibility channels for accommodation businesses. They create access to wider markets and booking demand but can also produce commission costs, platform dependence, and an indirect relationship with customers (Kontis & Skoultos, 2022). OTA presence is thus treated as both a visibility indicator and part of the hotel's relationship with the platform ecosystem.

Hotels are not necessarily passive in relation to platform power. Balsiger et al. (2023) show that hotels may optimize visibility or attempt to reduce dependence on digital intermediaries. Their study concerns the Swiss market, but it provides a conceptual basis for examining how Bishkek hotels combine OTA exposure with direct-booking tools.

SEO concerns technical and content practices that affect website discoverability. Studies of hotel websites emphasize the contribution of search optimization to web traffic and digital visibility (Sudiantara et al., 2025; Suwiti et al., 2025). The current study does not conduct a full technical SEO audit; it records observable local and technical SEO-related indicators, map integration, and links that can direct users to hotel-controlled channels.

1.2. Related Studies

1.2.1. Hotel Digital Marketing and Multilingualism in Kyrgyzstan

International research alone cannot explain the configuration of hotel digital marketing in Kyrgyzstan. The National Statistical Committee publishes annual tourism indicators and reports Bishkek as a major concentration of tourism-related activity (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2025). The present study therefore examines the city's hotel market through the digital touchpoints maintained by the businesses themselves.

Research on hotel digital marketing in Kyrgyzstan exists but is narrow in scope. Asanbekova and Maksudunov (2018) analyzed Instagram posts by four- and five-star hotels in Bishkek and found that visual and Russian-language content predominated. Their data covered 15 November 2017 to 15 May 2018 and only one platform. Given subsequent changes in social-media formats and online distribution, that study serves as a contextual baseline rather than a description of current practice.

The present study does not claim that hotel digital marketing is an entirely new topic in Kyrgyzstan. Its contribution lies in comparing websites, social media, OTA visibility, SEO-related indicators, reviews, direct-booking tools, and language options across the same set of hotels. This design provides a broader current account of publicly observable digital practices than a single-platform analysis.

Multilingualism deserves particular attention in Bishkek. Language strategy can shape relationships with potential customers and hotel image (Qian & Law, 2021), while culturally adapted website content may improve relevance across markets (Čermák, 2020). Russian, English, and Kyrgyz options are therefore interpreted in relation to target markets, accessibility, and local representation.

Overall, the literature identifies websites, social media, OTAs, SEO, reviews, direct booking, and multilingualism as interconnected dimensions of hotel digital marketing. Because much of the evidence comes from different geographic and organizational settings, this study applies the derived indicators to Bishkek through a clearly specified directed content-analysis procedure rather than assuming that earlier findings will be reproduced.

2. METHOD

2.1. Aim of the Study

The study aims to compare the publicly observable digital marketing practices of four- and five-star hotels in Bishkek. The objectives are aligned directly with the research questions:

1. To identify the digital marketing channels and tools used by the sampled hotels (RQ1).
2. To measure the adoption of website, social media, OTA, SEO-related, direct-sales, reputation-management, communication, and multilingual indicators (RQ2).
3. To compare the scope and consistency of these observable practices between four- and five-star hotels and derive evidence-based recommendations (RQ3).

2.2. Field Selection Process of the Study

Bishkek was selected because it is Kyrgyzstan's capital and principal urban accommodation market. Official 2024 statistics recorded 29,000 tourism-related entities in Bishkek, representing 20.5% of the national total, and 7,100 recreation and leisure service entities, representing 38.7% of the national total (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2025). The city serves international, regional, and domestic demand and allows digital visibility, platform presence, direct booking, and language accessibility to be examined within the same destination context.

2.3. Data Collection Tool of the Study

The data collection instrument was a structured codebook and checklist developed from the literature reviewed in Section 1. The hotel was the case unit, and an observable digital feature was the coding unit. The codebook contained eight main categories: (1) website presence and functionality, (2) social-media presence and activity, (3) OTA visibility, (4) local and technical SEO-related indicators, (5) direct-sales and conversion tools, (6) multilingual options, (7) online reputation management, and (8) digital communication channels. Each category included an operational definition, an inclusion rule, and observable sub-indicators. Examples included a functioning booking engine, special offers, map integration, mobile compatibility, active posting, Stories/Reels, calls to action, review-response evidence, payment options, and available website languages. Source links and coding decisions were recorded in MAXQDA Analytics Pro 24.

2.4. Population and Sample of the Study

The target population was limited to four- and five-star hotels operating in Bishkek during the data-collection period. Because no complete, current official registry combining operating status and star category could be verified, the accessible sampling frame was constructed from properties identifiable through official hotel websites and public listings on Booking.com, TripAdvisor, and Ostrovok. Criterion-based purposive sampling was then applied. A property was eligible when it operated in Bishkek, was consistently presented as four- or five-star across at least two public sources, and had at least one publicly accessible digital touchpoint. Duplicate, closed, and inconsistently classified properties were excluded. The final analytic sample comprised 34 hotels: 28 four-star and 6 five-star properties. This source-defined sample is neither a probability sample nor an official census; consequently, the findings are confined to the included hotels and should not be generalized to all accommodation establishments in Bishkek.

2.5. Analyses of the Study

The study used directed content analysis, an approach in which concepts and prior research guide the initial coding categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2018). This approach was appropriate because the checklist contained predefined indicators derived from hotel digital-marketing research. The purpose was to record and compare observable practices, not to generate an entirely inductive thematic structure.

Data were collected between 1 January and 31 March 2026 from official hotel websites, Instagram

and Facebook accounts, and public profiles on Booking.com, TripAdvisor, and Ostrovok. The following rules were applied consistently:

The hotel was treated as the case unit. Platform presence, account activity, website functionality, and other observable features were coded at the indicator level.

Only properties meeting the location, category-consistency, operating-status, and public-access criteria described in Section 2.4 were included.

The predefined categories covered website features, social media, OTA visibility, SEO-related indicators, direct sales and conversion, language options, reputation management, and communication channels.

Most sub-indicators were coded as present (1) or absent (0) for each eligible hotel and platform. A hotel could meet several sub-indicators within the same parent category. Consequently, parent-code totals such as 187 website-related occurrences are sums of coded features and may exceed the sample size of 34. Where a result refers to hotels rather than code occurrences, the text explicitly reports the number or percentage of hotels.

Only publicly available institutional information was recorded. No private communication, user-level personal data, or human-participant data were collected.

Coding was conducted by one researcher using the same codebook throughout the dataset. A second independent coder was not used, and the dataset was not recoded at a separate time point; therefore, neither an inter-coder nor an intra-coder reliability coefficient is reported. Procedural consistency was supported through explicit operational definitions, uniform binary decision rules, triangulation across hotel-controlled and platform sources, and retention of source links and coding records in MAXQDA (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). These procedures support dependability but do not substitute for an empirical reliability test; the absence of such a test is acknowledged as a limitation.

The analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. Data Preparation and Source Organization

Hotel names and star-category information were cross-checked across the selected public sources. Duplicate and inactive properties were removed, and each eligible hotel was created as a case in MAXQDA with links to the relevant website, social-media, and OTA pages.

2. Directed Coding

The predefined codebook was applied deductively to each case. Observable features were coded according to the same inclusion rules, and ambiguous observations were resolved by returning to the operational definition and the original source. No unrestricted inductive coding stage was used.

3. Aggregation and Descriptive Comparison

Code frequencies, case counts, percentages, code matrices, and MaxMaps were used to summarize the data. RQ1 was addressed through channel and platform presence; RQ2 through the adoption frequencies of the predefined indicators; and RQ3 through within-sample descriptive comparisons between the 28 four-star and 6 five-star hotels. Because the five-star group contained only six cases and the groups were unequal, no inferential significance tests, category-effect estimates, or causal claims were made.

Source triangulation across hotel websites, social-media accounts, and OTA listings strengthened the consistency of the observations. Transparent reporting of the codebook, decision rules, data period, sampling criteria, and the distinction between code occurrences and hotel counts supports confirmability and transferability. As the study used only publicly accessible institutional data and no human participants or personal data, informed consent was not applicable.

3. RESULTS

The results are organized by research question. RQ1 concerns channel and platform presence, RQ2 concerns the adoption of specific digital-marketing indicators, and RQ3 concerns descriptive differences between hotel categories. In the following text, “code occurrences” refers to the summed presence of sub-indicators and may exceed 34; “hotels” refers to the number of sampled properties meeting a criterion.

To address RQ1, Figure 1 summarizes the principal digital channels used by the sampled hotels. All six five-star hotels had both a corporate website and at least one social-media account. Among the 28 four-star hotels, 22 (78.5%) had a corporate website and 27 (96.4%) had a social-media account.

At the parent-code level, website-related features produced 187 code occurrences, social-media features 170, and OTA visibility 101. Local and technical SEO-related indicators produced 56 occurrences, and online reputation-management indicators produced 35. These totals represent aggregated coded features rather than numbers of hotels. The fact that social-media accounts were present in 33 hotels, compared with websites in 28, also shows that social-media presence was more widespread at the case level.

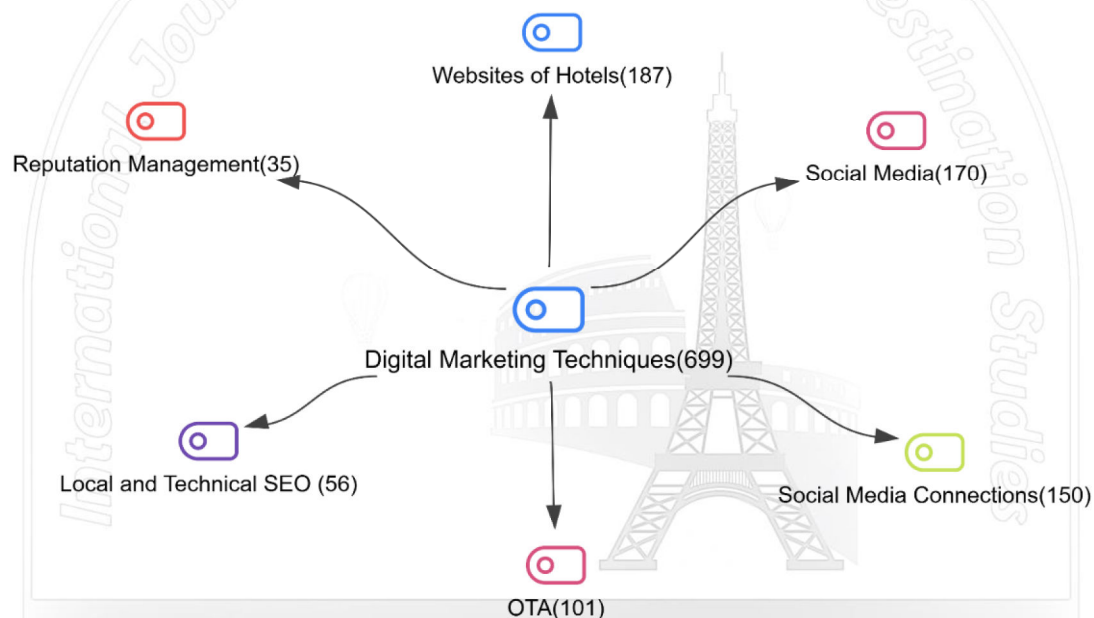


Figure 1. Distribution of Coded Digital-Marketing Channels and Indicators. Parent-Code Values Represent Aggregated Code Occurrences; Percentages in the Text Refer to Hotels

To address RQ2, Figure 2 presents website-related indicators. Direct-sales and conversion tools produced 60 code occurrences, the highest parent-category total. This result indicates that booking and conversion features were visible across the sample, but it does not by itself demonstrate that hotels achieved more direct bookings or reduced OTA dependence.

Multilingual features produced 49 code occurrences, followed by visual-marketing elements (26), personalized communication (20), Google/Yandex map integration (17), and multiple payment options (15). The pattern suggests that visibility and sales-oriented features were more common than some functions that improve navigation, communication, and transaction convenience. Adoption was uneven, however, and parent-category totals should not be read as the number of hotels.

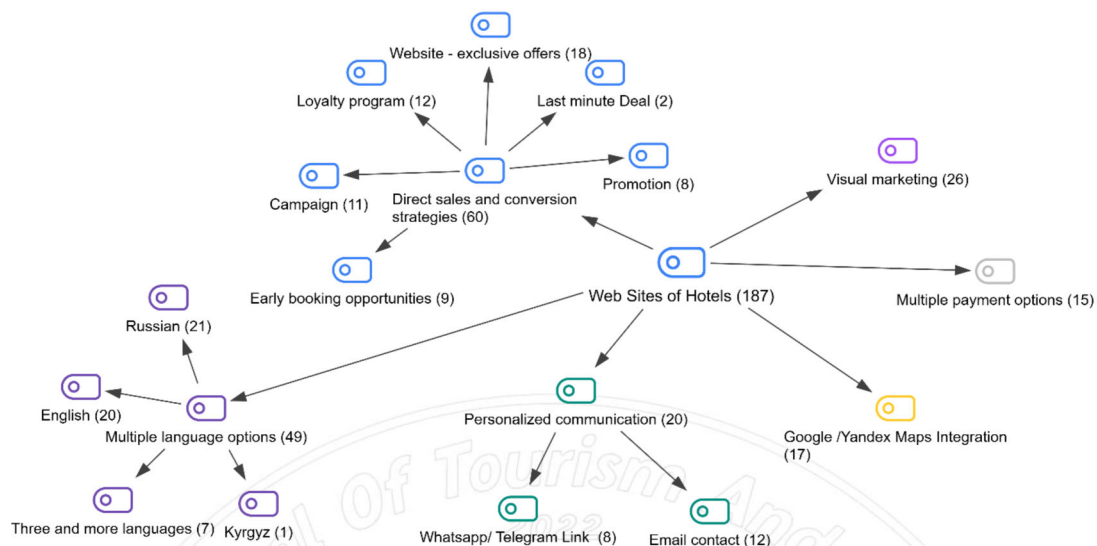


Figure 2. Distribution of Website-Related Digital-Marketing Indicators (Aggregated Code Occurrences)

RQ2 was also examined through the social-media code system shown in Figure 3. The social-media parent category accumulated 170 code occurrences across its sub-indicators. The following subcode values refer to the number of hotels in which each feature was observed.

Visual content appeared in 25 hotels, calls to action in 24, Stories/Reels in 23, and Story Highlights in 21. Campaigns or promotions were observed in 13 hotels, while systematic hashtag/tag use was observed in 11. User-generated content and influencer collaboration were each observed in only two hotels. Thus, basic visual and action-oriented content was common, whereas advanced participatory and partnership practices were rare.

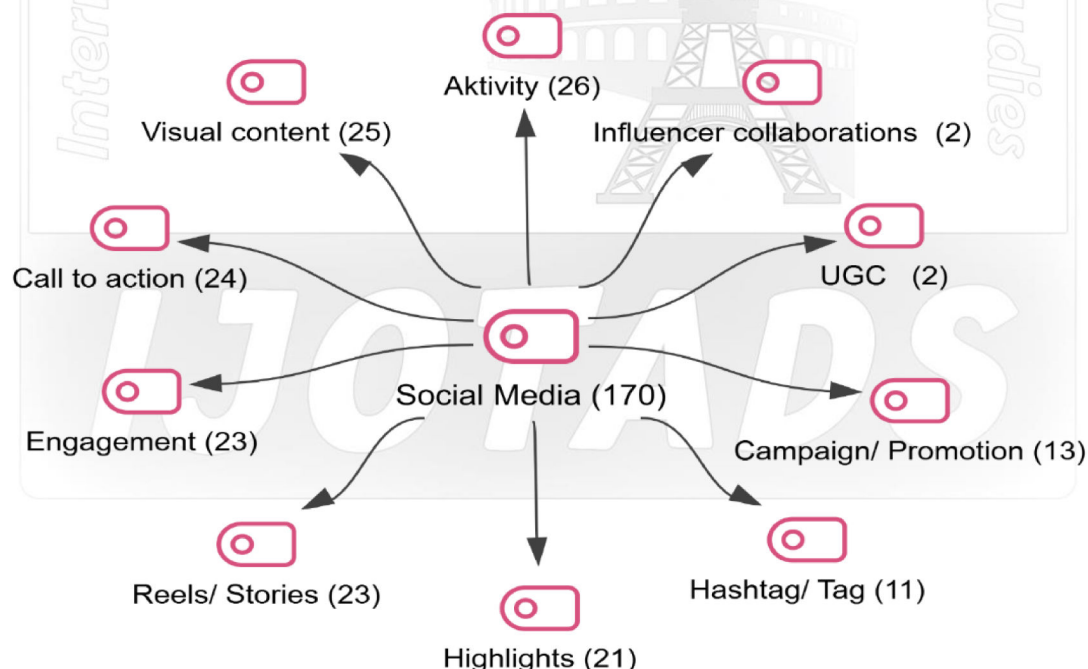


Figure 3. Number of Hotels Displaying Selected Social-Media Marketing Features

Figure 4 details platform presence and activity. Facebook profiles were identified for 24 hotels, while 10 had no Facebook profile. Of the 24 profiles, 8 were coded as active and 16 as inactive or not recently maintained. Instagram was present for 33 hotels; 20 accounts were coded as active and 13 as passive. Instagram was therefore the most widely used social platform, but account presence did not always correspond to sustained content production.

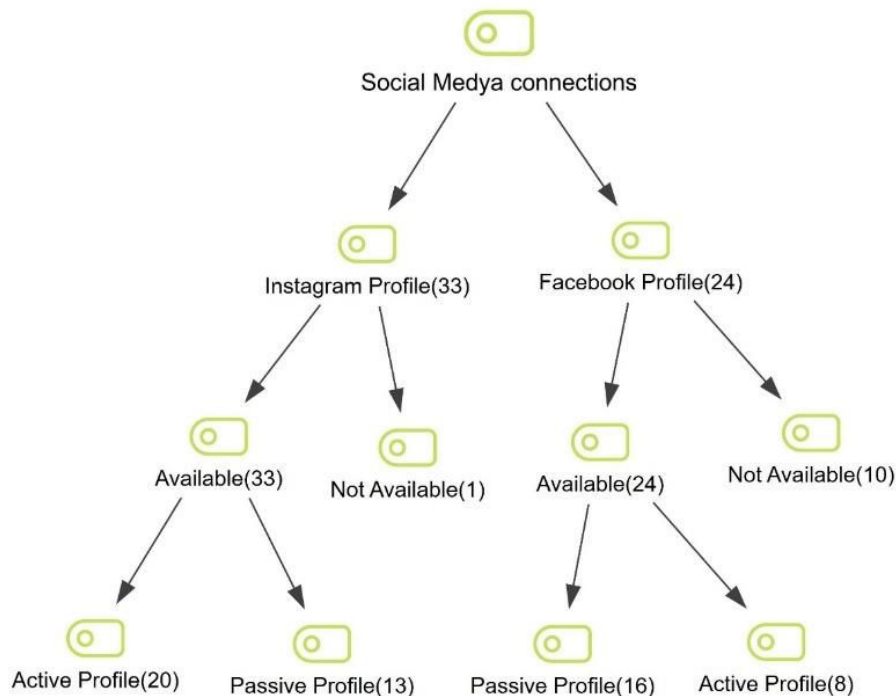


Figure 4. Social-Media Platform Presence and Activity Among the Sampled Hotels

Figure 5 presents direct-sales and conversion sub-indicators. Special offers were the most frequently observed feature, appearing on 18 hotel websites, whereas last-minute deals appeared on only two. Other conversion features were used unevenly, indicating that hotel websites differed substantially in their capacity to move users from information search to a direct transaction.

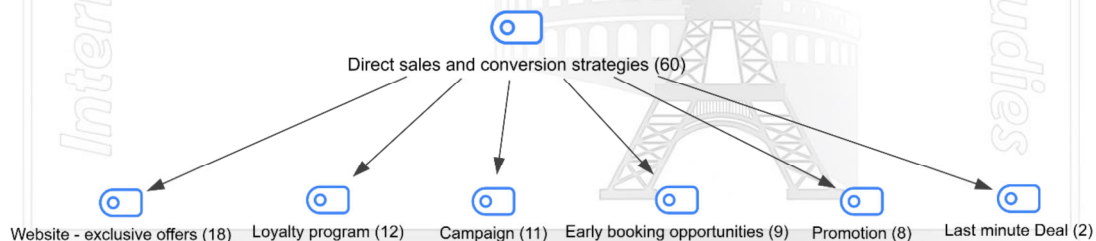


Figure 5. Number of Hotels Displaying Direct-Sales and Conversion Tools on Their Websites

Figure 6 presents website language options. Russian was available on 21 hotel websites and English on 20. Seven websites offered three or more languages. Kyrgyz was available on only one website, belonging to a four-star hotel. The results show that multilingual access was present but concentrated mainly in Russian and English, while the local state language was almost absent from the observed hotel websites.

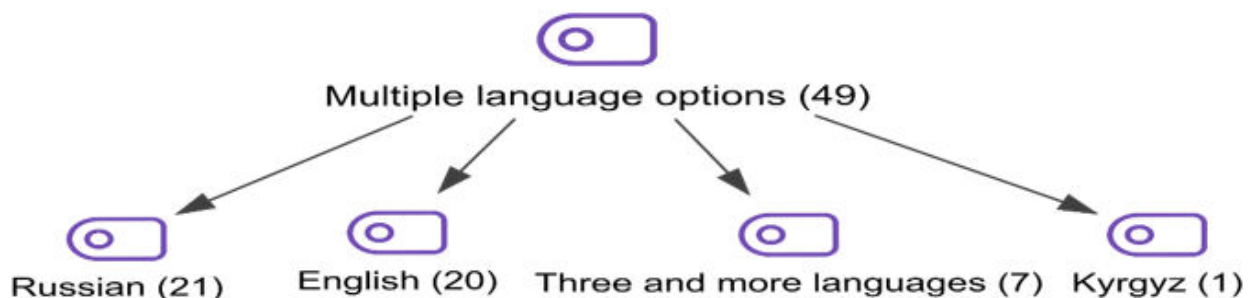


Figure 6. Number of Hotel Websites Offering Each Language Option

To address RQ3, Figures 7 and 8 compare the 28 four-star and 6 five-star hotels. Because the groups were unequal and the five-star group contained only six hotels, raw counts are reported together with percentages. These percentages describe the observed analytic sample and should not be interpreted as inferential evidence or as stable estimates of category-level prevalence.

Among four-star hotels, posting activity was observed in 20 properties (71.4%), visual content in 19 (67.9%), calls to action in 18 (64.3%), engagement features in 17 (60.7%), Stories/Reels in 17 (60.7%), Highlights in 15 (53.6%), campaigns/promotions in 7 (25.0%), and hashtags/tags in 7 (25.0%). Influencer collaboration and user-generated content each appeared in one four-star hotel (3.6%). Among five-star hotels, posting activity, visual content, calls to action, engagement, Stories/Reels, Highlights, and campaigns/promotions appeared in all six hotels (100.0%); hashtags/tags appeared in four (66.7%); and influencer collaboration and user-generated content each appeared in one (16.7%). These corrected values show more consistent adoption among five-star hotels, while advanced participatory practices remained uncommon in both categories.

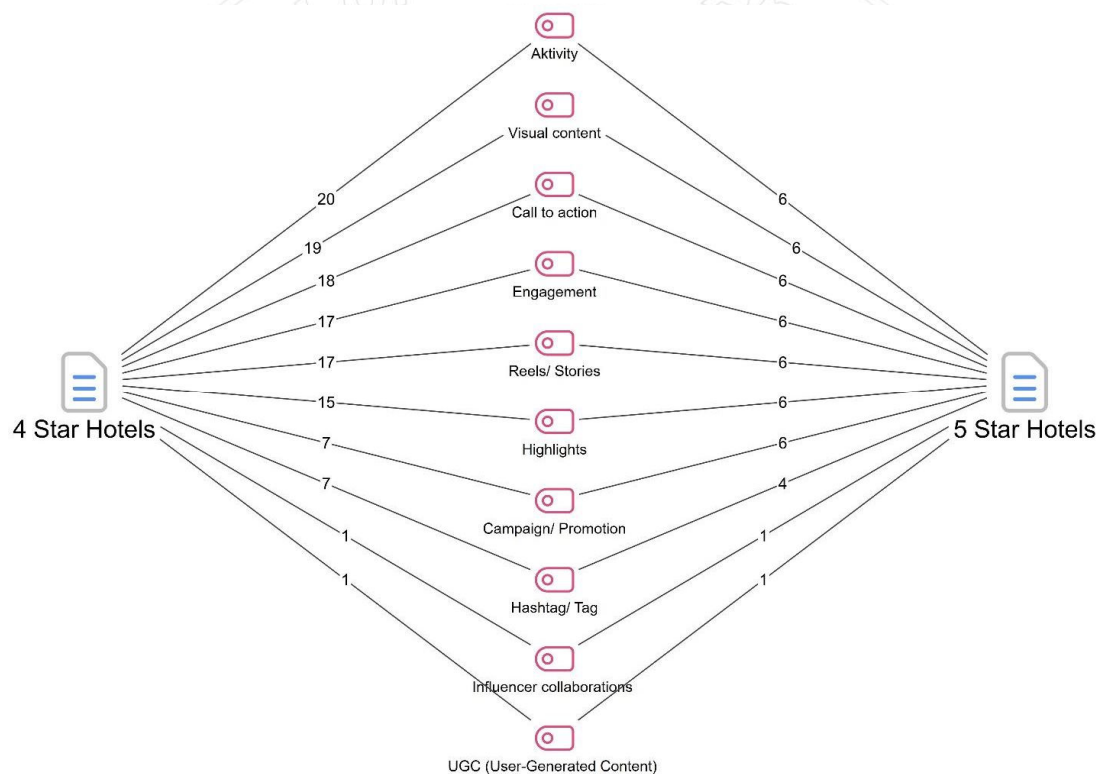


Figure 7. Number and Within-Category Percentage of Four and Five-Star Hotels Using Selected Social-Media Tools

Figure 8 compares a broader set of digital-marketing indicators. TripAdvisor and Booking.com were present for all hotels. Among four-star hotels, Ostrovok, social-media presence, mobile compatibility, and local SEO-related indicators were each observed in 96.4%, while visual marketing was observed in 78.6%. All six five-star hotels displayed TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Ostrovok, social-media presence, mobile compatibility, local SEO-related indicators, and visual marketing. Customer-review features (83.3%), special offers (83.3%), multiple payment options (66.7%), and loyalty programs (83.3%) were also more prevalent among five-star hotels than among four-star hotels.

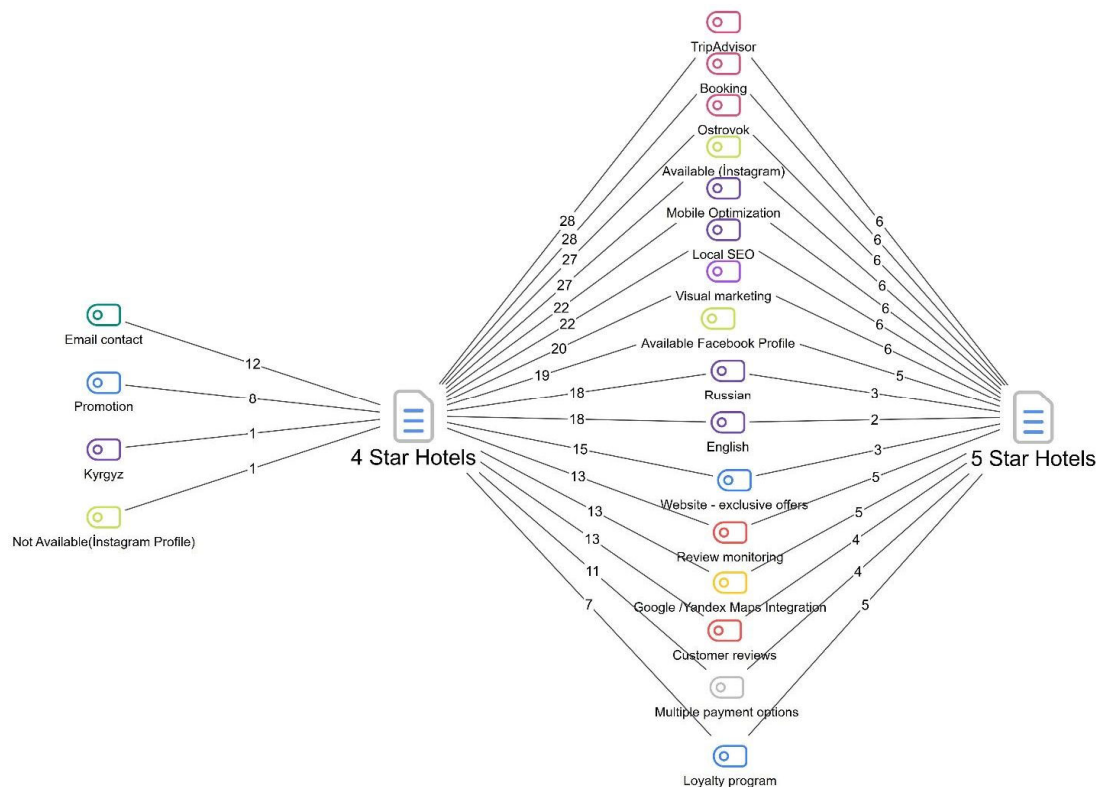


Figure 8. Within-Category Adoption of Digital-Marketing Indicators By Four and Five-Star Hotels

A small number of indicators appeared only among four-star hotels, including a Kyrgyz-language website option (3.6%) and email communication (42.9%); one four-star hotel also lacked an Instagram page. These isolated observations do not indicate greater overall maturity. Within the source-defined analytic sample, the six five-star hotels adopted the observed core tools more consistently, whereas the 28 four-star hotels displayed greater variation across channels and functions. This is a descriptive sample pattern rather than evidence that star category produces the difference.

4. CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study documented the publicly visible digital-marketing practices of a source-defined analytic sample comprising 28 four-star and 6 five-star hotels in Bishkek. The results answer the three research questions by describing channel presence, measuring the adoption of predefined indicators, and identifying within-sample differences between hotel categories. Digital presence was widespread, but the depth and consistency of use varied by channel and among the included hotels.

For RQ1, social media was the most widely available hotel-controlled channel: 33 of 34 hotels had an Instagram account and 24 had a Facebook profile, while 28 had a corporate website. All five-star hotels had both a website and social media presence, compared with 78.5% and 96.4% of four-star hotels. This pattern supports earlier research that identifies websites and social media as complementary communication and distribution channels (Leung et al., 2015; Aluri et al., 2016), but presence alone should not be equated with strategic effectiveness.

The multi-channel pattern also shows why hotel digital marketing should not be assessed through a single platform. Websites, OTAs, social media, reviews, and search-related features perform different functions and can create value when they are coordinated (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018). In Bishkek, broad OTA coverage coexisted with uneven website functionality and social-media activity, indicating that visibility through intermediaries does not necessarily correspond to strong hotel-controlled conversion channels.

For RQ2, direct-sales and conversion features formed the largest website-related category, but

specific functions such as multiple payment options, map integration, and personalized communication were less common. The result is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of website quality, trust, user experience, and booking functionality (Sambhanthan & Good, 2013; Amer, 2021; Salameh et al., 2022; De Vries & Klein Poelhuis, 2024). It also reflects the strategic tension between direct booking and OTA distribution (Lee et al., 2022; Yang & Kim, 2022). Because the study did not observe booking outcomes, the presence of conversion tools cannot be interpreted as evidence of actual channel migration or financial performance.

Social-media practice was dominated by visual content, calls to action, Stories/Reels, and Highlights. This is consistent with the visual and experiential character of hotel marketing and with studies linking hotel-generated imagery to attention, engagement, and booking-related responses (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Pérez-Vega et al., 2018; Çelik & Bora, 2021; Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024; Dragin-Jensen et al., 2024; Gomez-Suarez & Veloso, 2024). However, systematic hashtag use, user-generated content, and influencer collaboration were limited. The findings therefore distinguish routine content production from more participatory or networked forms of social-media marketing.

Instagram was both more widespread and more active than Facebook, yet 13 Instagram accounts and 16 Facebook accounts were coded as passive or inactive. This gap between account ownership and continued use is important because current, interactive content is central to social customer-relationship capabilities and effective hotel Facebook marketing (Trainor et al., 2014; Leung & Baloglu, 2015; Agnihotri et al., 2016; Diffley et al., 2018). Studies associate social-media use with engagement and hotel performance (Kim & Chae, 2018; Minor et al., 2025; Khaki & Khan, 2026), but the present design cannot test those outcomes and therefore limits its conclusion to observable activity.

Language accessibility was a particularly clear weakness. Russian and English were common, whereas Kyrgyz appeared on only one hotel website. This finding extends the earlier observation that Russian dominated Bishkek hotel Instagram content (Asanbekova & Maksudunov, 2018). It also supports treating language strategy as a matter of market orientation, cultural adaptation, and local representation rather than a minor technical feature (Čermák, 2020; Qian & Law, 2021).

For RQ3, five-star hotels showed more uniform adoption of the core digital indicators, while four-star hotels displayed greater variation. Similar category differences have been reported in research on website information quality and luxury-hotel digital strategy (Cheng et al., 2023; Dimitrios et al., 2023). From a TOE and digital-maturity perspective, the pattern may be associated with differences in resources, managerial capacity, or strategic alignment (Wynn & Jones, 2022; Nikopoulou et al., 2023). These explanations remain interpretive, however, because no internal organizational data were collected.

The study's main theoretical implication is that digital maturity should be separated from basic digital presence. A hotel may appear on several platforms yet lack current content, cross-channel consistency, direct-conversion functionality, review management, or multilingual access. The integrated coding framework makes these distinctions visible and is consistent with calls to examine tourism technologies across disciplinary and organizational boundaries (Sigala, 2018). It should nevertheless be understood as a structured assessment of public digital traces rather than a validated latent measure of organizational digital maturity.

Three evidence-based priorities emerge. First, advanced social-media engagement remains weak, especially user-generated content and influencer collaboration. Second, website functions that support direct conversion and transaction convenience are uneven. Third, Kyrgyz-language representation is almost absent. These gaps provide the basis for the practical recommendations below.

4.1. Practical Implications

The findings offer several practical implications for hotel managers and destination stakeholders in

Bishkek:

- Hotels should manage social-media accounts through a documented content calendar, platform-specific posting schedule, and clear response responsibilities rather than maintaining dormant profiles.
- Hotels should encourage and ethically reuse user-generated content through consent-based reposting, branded hashtags, review prompts, and guest-photo campaigns.
- Influencer collaboration should be selective and measurable. Hotels should define the target market, disclosure requirements, expected content, and trackable outcomes before commissioning travel creators.
- Interactive formats such as polls, question-and-answer sessions, live streams, and location-based Stories should be used to create two-way communication rather than one-directional promotion.
- Hashtag use should combine hotel-specific, Bishkek-specific, and Kyrgyzstan destination terms, with periodic review of reach and engagement rather than indiscriminate tag accumulation.
- Hotel content should connect rooms and services with Bishkek's attractions, events, gastronomy, culture, and transport information so that property marketing also contributes to destination visibility.
- Managers should prioritize practical training in content planning, review response, web analytics, OTA management, direct-booking design, and conversion measurement.
- Hotels should monitor channel-specific indicators such as account activity, response time, booking-engine completion, referral traffic, review-response rate, and direct-booking conversion, using web and business-intelligence data where available (Mariani et al., 2018).
- Kyrgyz-language access should be added to hotel websites and key booking information. At minimum, hotels should provide accurate Kyrgyz versions of contact details, location, room and service descriptions, booking instructions, policies, and emergency information, with professional language review rather than automatic translation alone.
- Hotels, tourism associations, and destination-management stakeholders should coordinate destination content, multilingual standards, and shared digital campaigns while preserving each hotel's independent brand and direct-booking links.

4.2. Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to hotel digital-marketing research by assessing websites, social media, OTA visibility, SEO-related indicators, reputation management, direct-sales tools, communication functions, and multilingual content within one coding framework. This multi-channel approach separates mere platform presence from the breadth and consistency of observable digital practice.

Within the source-defined analytic sample, the six five-star hotels displayed greater consistency across many indicators. The study does not establish that star rating causes digital maturity, nor does it estimate category-level prevalence beyond the included cases. The observed pattern is a descriptive association that can guide future research using an official sampling frame, larger and more balanced groups, organizational data, manager interviews, and performance measures.

4.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to a source-defined analytic sample of four- and five-star hotels in Bishkek and to public digital data collected between 1 January and 31 March 2026. Because a complete current official registry combining operating status and star classification could not be verified, the accessible sampling frame was constructed by cross-checking hotel-controlled and public platform sources. The 34 hotels therefore do not constitute an official census or probability sample, and the findings should not be generalized to all accommodation establishments in Bishkek. The analysis captures visible practices rather than internal strategy, budgets, platform analytics, booking conversion, or customer perceptions. Coding was conducted by one researcher, without independent coding or a separate-time

recoding exercise; accordingly, neither inter-coder nor intra-coder reliability was empirically tested. The unequal group sizes, particularly the six-hotel five-star group, further restrict category comparisons to a descriptive within-sample level. Future research should use an official registry if available, employ independent or repeated coding with a reported reliability statistic, include larger and more balanced category groups, combine digital-trace analysis with manager interviews, and test relationships between digital practices and engagement or performance outcomes.

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Author Contribution Rate: The first author contributed 40%, the second author 30%, and the third author 30%.

Ethical Approval: The authors declare that the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed throughout the preparation of this study.

Ethics Committee Approval: The study is based solely on publicly available corporate data from hotel websites, social media accounts, and online travel agency profiles. No data was collected from human participants, no personal data was used, and no intervention or observation process was conducted. Therefore, the study does not require ethics committee approval. Research data was collected between January 1, 2026, and March 31, 2026.

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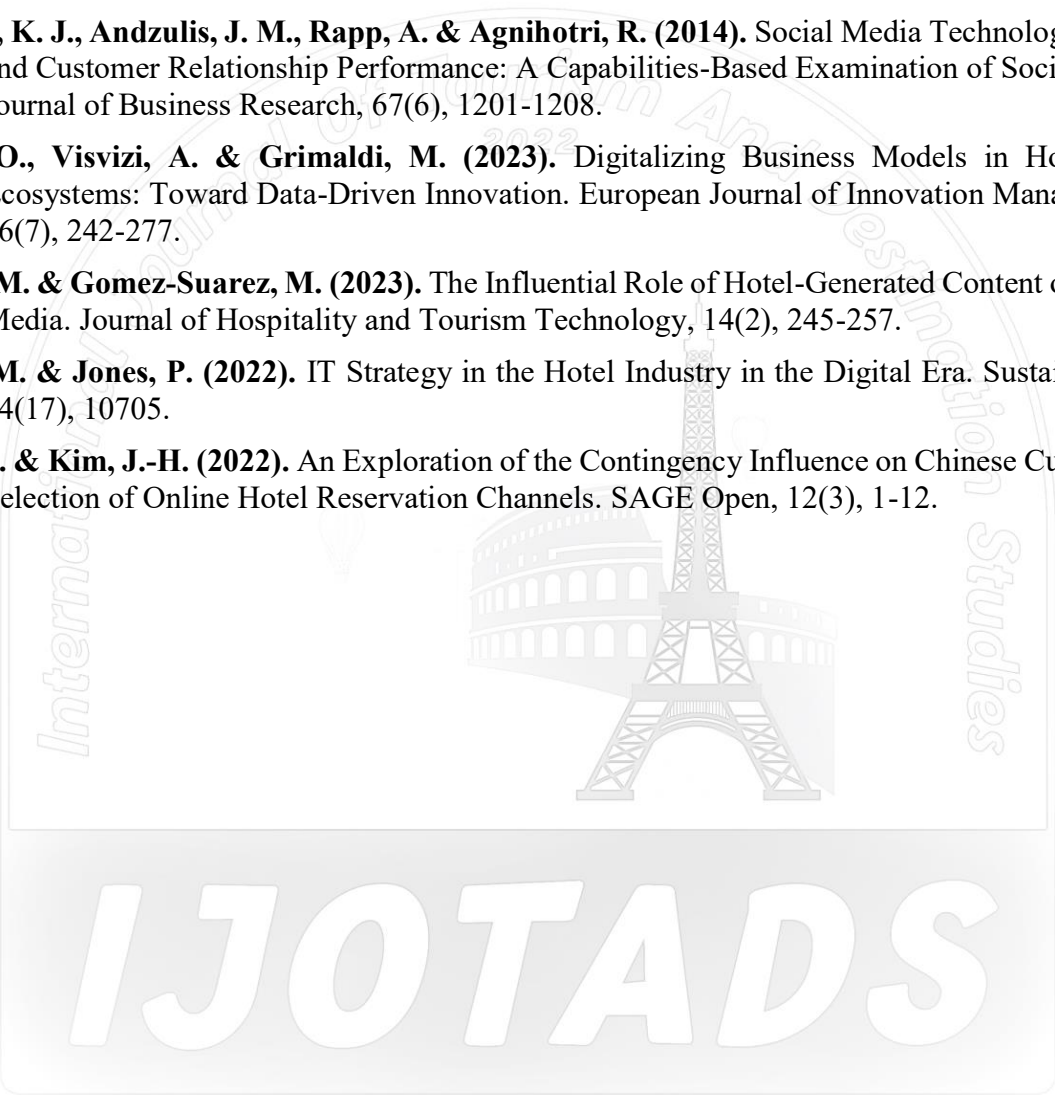
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