

The Relationship between Digital Marketing Strategies and Customer Engagement: The Mediating Effect of Brand Promotion

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer engagement in Baghdad's luxury hotel sector, acknowledging the hospitality industry as a crucial element in Iraq's economic diversification and a significant alternative to oil-based income. Given its status as the second-largest potential investment area following oil, the hospitality sector in Baghdad is a key driver for attracting foreign currency, fostering local business activity, and mitigating national unemployment. However, many premier institutions continue to face a strategy-execution gap that hinders the transition from passive advertising to authentic guest commitment. Utilizing a quantitative approach, primary data were collected from 200 managers and supervisors at premier four- and five-star establishments. The demographic analysis indicates a highly educated managerial class, with the majority of participants possessing university degrees and considerable professional experience. Structural equation modeling reveals a strong direct relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer engagement. Consequently, the findings support that brand promotion serves as the critical partial mediating factor in translating digital marketing strategies into enduring customer engagement within Baghdad's competitive hospitality industry. This underscores the basis for a prestige-focused luxury management model in Iraq; wherein digital instruments are utilized to cultivate e-trust and secure a lasting competitive edge.

Keywords: Digital Marketing Strategies, Customer Engagement, Brand Promotion, Baghdad Hospitality Sector, Structural Equation Modeling

Introduction

The fast development of the digital communication channels has required a paradigm shift in the way the hospitality companies, especially within the Iraqi hotel industry, build and sustain relationships with their customers. Within this competitive environment, a trend is the use of advanced online platforms by industry leaders to develop a new level of customer engagement and long-term brand promotion (Alam, 2023; Kamyabi et al., 2025; Kumar,

2024). It is possible to achieve both of these goals by combining sophisticated data analytics with purposeful social media campaigns that will enable these organizations to efficiently track the effectiveness of their promotional campaigns and create long-term loyalty through the personal delivery of the service (Alrwashdeh et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva & Esenye, 2025; Top & Kaya, 2024). In the Iraqi hospitality industry, especially the developing ones such as Baghdad, customer interest has become strategic with the online platforms functioning as the main channel through which trust and rapport are established (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024). There is empirical evidence that in the case of hotels in Iraq, high perceived service quality combined with digital marketing, such as social media marketing, email marketing, and mobile marketing, is a strong predictor of the intensity of customer engagement (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Suwitri et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva & Esenye, 2025). This interaction is not only transactional, but a service quality-customer engagement nexus with the digital experience to match the standards of physical luxury and hospitality desired by the guests to encourage a true commitment to behavior (Al-jaf et al., 2020; Tokhtiyeva & Esenye, 2025). Through a well-maintained interactive conversation and the responsive communication channel, Iraqi hotels will be able to convert the initial interest of the guest to the long-term psychological and emotional commitment (Boiko et al., 2023; Kamyabi et al., 2025). More than that, brand promotion in the Iraqi hotel industry is becoming more reliant on the strategic location that an institution occupies in the competitive market (Kamyabi et al., 2025). Such positioning serves as an important moderator, as it defines the perception of digital marketing activities by the population and the degree to which they contribute to the overall impression and reputation of the hotel (Kamyabi et al., 2025).

Hotels in Iraq are moving towards the content-first strategy, where visual storytelling and quality service demonstrations via digital platforms are used to make them stand out of the regional competitors (Halkiopoulos et al., 2024; Kamyabi et al., 2025; Khalayleh and Al-Hawary, 2022). It is through these specified digital content dimensions that the Iraqi hospitality providers would be able to enjoy a greater level of brand resonance whereby promotional activities would be perceived not as advertisement but rather as being true reflections of the brands value proposition and service quality (Alrwashdeh et al., 2025; Alsheyab and Omar, 2025; Kamyabi et al., 2025). This tactical change is clear as it recognizes the growing need of hotel operators to invest a lot in digital infrastructure to maximize digital experiences in their various stakeholders (Bhandari and Sin, 2023). In addition to these advertising strategies, the incorporation of interactive digital systems allows companies to constructively influence the minds and behavioral reactions of customers, thus turning a passive audience into an active brand follower (Boiko et al., 2023; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The digitalization of the hotel-consumer interaction process is a critical process that entails the use of elements like recognition, interest, and communication that help to promote consumer loyalty and repatronage intentions (Boiko et al., 2023). Furthermore, responsive digital management enables hospitality providers to respond to the feedback of the guests in real-time, thus establishing the confidence of having a strong online image (Puspita et al., 2024). The strategic execution of employee-initiated digital activities through which the companies often cannot change their passive advertising to a more genuine Customer Engagement only exacerbates the problem of this dynamic interaction (Kamyabi et al., 2025). Although the importance of digital transformation is recognized, the Iraqi hotel sector is currently experiencing a severe strategy-execution gap whereby companies often fail to implement strategies to evolve into a more competent Customer Engagement

(Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The competitiveness and profitability of a firm are directly related to the success of its digital marketing activity, and about a half of all hospitality firms fail within the first five years of operation, and ineffective marketing is one of the serious factors that lead to success failures (Kamyabi et al., 2025).

The problem of inefficient advertising strategies is one of the major problems of small and medium-sized Iraqi hotels as it leads to financial losses and the inability to engage consumers in the long run (Ahmad & Jais, 2024; ERDO GAN & ÖZDEMİR, 2021). Not all managers of the Iraqi hospitality industry have good digital marketing strategies that can increase the profitability of their organizations and allow them to engage their customers more (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). Most of the local hospitality establishments do not go past the first stages of recognition and interest, and their existing framework does not encompass the underlying emotional and behavioral commitment to the long-term loyalty of guests (Boiko et al., 2023). Moreover, the current practices do not pay enough attention to the crucial mediating and moderating variables; namely, the role of Service Quality as a background variable between digital strategies and engagement, which is also the moderating effect of a strategic position of a hotel in the competitive market (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). Limited focus on the effect of effective digital marketing management practices on customer interaction and performance in hotels in Iraq may have been paid by researchers, which can disregard the affective response, engagement, and satisfaction of guests with the services (Boiko et al., 2023; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). This issue is further complicated by the absence of systematic and employee-driven digital initiatives which frequently will lead to a lack of trust gap and uneven service quality through virtual touch points, especially with regards to real-time guest feedback (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Puspita et al., 2024). Lastly, global industry leaders spend heavily on digital infrastructure, and some of these investments may reach USD 274 million; the Iraqi sector has often not been equipped with sophisticated visual storytelling and demonstrations of high-quality services to gain brand resonance and competitive differentiation (Bhandari and Sin, 2023; Khalayleh and Al-Hawary, 2022). Although a number of studies have examined the effects of digital marketing strategies on the engagement of customers within different industries (Kumar, 2024; Top and Kaya, 2024), there is a lack of research on the same in the context of the Iraqi hotel industry. Moreover, the mediating and the moderating functions of Service Quality and market Position in this relationship are understudied, and it is one of the gaps in the literature that this study would fill (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

To fill these gaps, the empirical framework of the proposed research aims at operationalizing the interaction between the digital marketing strategies, customer engagement, and brand promotion in the context-specific context of the Iraqi hotel market (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). This research aims to address the so-called strategy-execution gap that is to date causing local hospitality firms to be unable to trigger authentic behavioral commitment because of the efficacy of various digital dimensions, such as social media marketing, email campaigns, and mobile marketing (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Manullang, 2025). In addition, the study offers a more profound view by considering the mediating effect of service quality so that digital touchpoints could perfectly reflect the physical luxuriance and hospitality requirements of the guests (Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The investigation also incorporates the moderating role of the strategic market position of a hotel, which allows the Iraqi managers to maximise their promotional activities and visual narrations, based on its

particular competitive position (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Khalayleh and Al-Hawary, 2022). In the end, this study is expected to reshape the hotel-consumer relationship and turn it into active engagement with the brand, which will help establish the sustainability of the company and create a competitive advantage within the unstable regional market (Bhandari and Sin, 2023; Boiko et al., 2023; Puspita et al., 2024).

Literature Review

Digital Marketing Strategies (DMS) in the Iraqi Hospitality Context

Digital marketing refers to activities of online marketing that facilitate interactive relationships between hospitality organizations and customers on the digital platform, such as the internet, social media platforms, email, search engines, and mobile technologies (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Nuseir et al., 2023; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). In the context of multichannel advertising, it is a strategic employment of marketing technology to ensure the success of organizations in the context of technological changes and the growing online interconnection (Σακός et al., 2022). Being a dynamic process under the impact of certain economic factors, such as inflation, recessions, and rapid change of technologies, digital marketing facilitates a market-focused strategy with a systematic collection of customer and market data, which often overlaps with internet marketing and e-commerce to promote hotel services in a convenient way (Bhandari and Sin, 2023; Kamyabi et al., 2025, 2025).

Digital marketing in the modern hospitality industry has surpassed the old concept of word of mouth and print advertisements to become the main means of establishing strong, international relationships with the various guest groups (Kumar, 2024; Top and Kaya, 2024). In the case of the Iraqi hotel sector, especially in Baghdad and Kurdistan Region, this shift is indispensable in order to survive economic instability and reconsider old paradigm shifts towards a comprehensive digital toolkit (Fatima et al., 2024; Manullang, 2025). Studies have shown that in the case of Iraqi hotels, the strategies do not just constitute promotional instruments, but are essential in a knowledge based digital transformation that enhances marketing efficiency by collecting behavioral data (Reklitis et al., 2025). The main dimensions of DMS, which are implemented to the Iraqi sector, can be divided into the following ones:

Video marketing and social media

The social media networks have surfaced as essential marketing tools with a major impact on consumer behavior and purchasing decisions (Garg and Kumar, 2021; Lakha and Vaid, 2021). In the Iraqi hotel industry, the empirical literature supports the significance of social media in promoting the reputation of an organization in a statistically significant manner (Samad, 2024). Since eighty-three percent of millennial hotel bookings are conditioned by the social media content, Iraqi hoteliers should use the tools to shift their relationships to the interactive stage, rather than merely recorded transactions (Garg and Kumar, 2021; Puspita et al., 2024). Outside of the usual platforms, hotels are also considering using YouTube to broadcast high-definition videos to convey brand value (Lim, 2020). This visual narration is paramount in the Iraqi context because the quality of images and videos on online platforms has a direct impact on the decision-making procedure of potential guests (Halkiopoulou et al., 2024).

Search Engine Optimization and Pay-Per-Click.

DMS focuses on maximizing presence and web traffic on the technical aspect (Roumeliotis et al., 2022; Suwitri et al., 2025). In the case of Iraqi hotels, Search Engine Marketing and SEO are the cornerstone of a competitive advantage and the presence of the brand in first positions in the search list when a guest is planning the first travel (Samad, 2024; Suwitri et al., 2025). The techniques are particularly important in the context of post-pandemic recovery because they contribute to the amount of organic traffic and direct bookings via official websites (Roumeliotis et al., 2022). In addition to this, Pay-Per-Click advertising has been found to be an extremely useful tool with regard to winning the interest of the targeted customer segments and higher conversion rates in volatile markets (Manullang, 2025; Top and Kaya, 2024).

Email Marketing and Consumer Adoption.

Email marketing is one of the pillars of direct interaction with guests and contribution to sales (Fuchs et al., 2008; Top and Kaya, 2024). Although not all Iraqi hotels use this tool fully, it is currently one of the most effective repeat sales and long-term customer retention tools used as a part of the larger digital approach (Kumar, 2024; Top and Kaya, 2024). This dimension in Iraq should be successful because of the offering of transparent, individualized benefits to build mutually profitable relations and build brand loyalty (Garbani-Nerini et al., 2022; Wan, 2023). Having known which specific determinants of adoption behavior, the Iraqi hotel managers will be able to maintain the nexus of service quality-customer engagement using email (Fuchs et al., 2008; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Strategic Digital Content and E-Trust

The success of online platforms is closely related to the quality of the created content (Alsheyab and Omar, 2025; Kumar, 2024). Strategic digital content in Iraq is a crucial medium that can be used to build up e-trust that is required to translate preliminary online interest to real plans of traveling (Alsheyab & Omar, 2025). This is especially strong in the capital (Baghdad) and the Kurdistan region, where the dimensions of service quality manifested through online content include 85% of the variance in attracting tourists and gaining their loyalty (Al-jaf et al., 2020). Interactive content and analytics are an important approach that small and medium-sized accommodation enterprises in Iraq should use to compete with the larger global chains and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Balsiger et al., 2022; ERDOKUZDIN and OZDEMIR, 2021).

Customer Engagement

The concept of customer engagement is described as a multidimensional psychological condition in which a guest has an emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment to the relationship with a hotel brand (Boiko et al., 2023; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). This variable has moved in the modern hospitality environment to an interaction-based transactional relationship to a fundamental service quality-customer interaction nexus where the digital experience should perfectly reflect the physical luxury and service approach anticipated by the guest (Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). Effectual interaction is not an isolated process that once is provided but an ongoing interaction of a behavioral commitment and psychological connection to the brand (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). In the framework of business digitization, there are three essential elements that facilitate this process recognition, interest, and communication (Boiko et al., 2023). All of these factors are

aimed to turn passive observers online into active participants, which will ultimately result in consumer loyalty and definite intentions to re-patronize (Boiko et al., 2023).

This interaction is frequently mediated by the perceived quality of service of digital interactions in the hotel sector; a virtual interaction, i.e. mobile bookings or social media requests, will be flawless, and the activity and commitment of the guest to the brand will greatly increase (Kumar, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). Furthermore, digital content marketing plays a pivotal role in this dynamic. Empirical evidence suggests that high-quality, interactive content on social media acts as a bridge to foster e-trust, a necessary precursor for converting online engagement into an actual intention to visit (Alsheyab & Omar, 2025). The impact of such digital engagement is particularly pronounced among younger demographics; for instance, studies show that 83% of millennial hotel bookings are influenced by social media content, and 73% of travelers engage with a hotel's digital presence before finalizing a reservation (Garg & Kumar, 2021).

Finally, a high degree of engagement can only be maintained when the digital marketing efforts of a hotel are strategically aligned with the market position (Kamyabi et al., 2025). By making a hotel responsive, guest-focused and managing real-time feedback when a hotel effectively organizes its positioning efforts, it is possible to instill consumer attitudes and remain competitive in an unstable market once the hotel manages to make its employees the leaders of digital effort, and the hotel effectively engages with the consumer (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Kumar, 2024; Puspita et al., 2024). This is done to make sure that the brand is still relevant and trusted in all the virtual and physical touchpoints (Alrwashdeh et al., 2025; Kamyabi et al., 2025). Within the particular framework of the Iraqi hotel industry, specifically, four- and five-star hotels in Baghdad, the connection with customers is strongly linked to the quality of exceptional service provisions in order to build loyalty over the long term (Ali, 2025; Al-jaf et al., 2020). The study of five-star hotels in Northern Iraq allows concluding that the dimensions of service quality play a significant role, explaining 85% of the variance in attracting guests and a sense of brand loyalty (Al-jaf et al., 2020). This highlights the notion that participation in the Iraqi hospitality environment is a value-based result where marketing activities should deliver distinct and individual advantages in order to foster mutually advantageous affiliations (Wan, 2023). In addition, the moderating effect of service quality within these engagement strategies has a great impact on the sustainable competitive advantage of hotels in Iraq (Ahmad and Jais, 2024), and similar findings are to be made by first-class hotels in Baghdad, which highlight the importance of service quality in new competitive advantage and customer satisfaction (Ali, 2025). Focusing on high service standards, the managers of the hospitality sector in Iraq have a better chance of handling relationships with guests and meeting the dynamical demands of mobile-first and diverse clients (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Wan, 2023).

Brand Promotion

The conceptualization of brand promotion as a strategic and multifaceted process of defining customer needs and delivering a value proposition of a brand in the most effective way to build long-lasting relationships and ensure the sustainable growth of the organization (Kamyabi et al., 2025). This idea has been adopted in the digital era where it has developed out of the traditional advertisement to create a cohesive building that signifies the overall brand equity and reputation of the hotel (Kamyabi et al., 2025). In the case of hospitality

companies, the key to successful brand promotion is the development of a seamless experience of guests, which has seen the key players in the hospitality industry spend over USD 274 million on digital strategies aimed at maximizing online reputation and visibility (Bhandari and Sin, 2023). The importance of social media networks as an inseparable tool in this process has been indicated, as it provides hotels the opportunity to control the perception and behavior of consumers through interactive narrative and instantaneous communication (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Lakha and Vaid, 2021).

Brand promotion in the Iraqi hotel industry is closely connected with the promotion of organizational reputation and achievement of sustainable competitive advantage (Ahmad, 2024, and Jais, 2024; Samad, 2024). The studies that put particular attention to the Iraqi hotel industry reveal that such aspects of digital marketing as social media, portal websites, search engine marketing, and search engine optimization can have a statistically significant effect on the image of a hotel (Samad, 2024). The effectiveness of a promotion activity of hotels functioning in such a regional context largely depends on the quality of informational and visual content presented by the hotel in terms of image and video provided on the official digital touchpoints (Halkiopoulos et al., 2024). These are official websites that act as critical channels of communicating the image and service quality of a hotel that directly affect the behavior and decision-making of guests (Halkiopoulos et al., 2024).

Moreover, brand promotion on the Iraqi territory is defined as a value-driven result wherein promotional activities should deliver specific, personal gains to cultivate the win-win relations and create the brand loyalty (Wan, 2023). The effectiveness of such initiatives is usually regulated by the strategic position of the hotel in the market, which defines the perception of the promotional message by the population (Kamyabi et al., 2025). The delivery of high-level services in five-star hotels in Baghdad and other provinces is critical in drawing tourists and gaining the loyalty that would result in brand resonance in the long-term (Al-jaf et al., 2020). Proposals to ensure the sustainability of the competitive and unstable market of the industry by ensuring a stable flow of guests would be to align the digital promotional campaigns with the delivery of high-quality service, making sure that the gap between initial brand recognition and long-term engagement of the guests (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Kamyabi et al., 2025).

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical design of the present research demonstrates the predictive relationship between digital marketing plans, brand promotion and customer engagement. It assumes that the digital strategies do not simply promote engagement because of the direct effect but operate through the crucial mediating variable of brand promotion to produce long-term commitments of guests in the Iraqi hospitality industry (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Independent Variable: Digital Marketing Strategies.

The conceptualization of Digital Marketing Strategies is made as a multidimensional construct that is necessary to strike the balance in the competitive environment of four and five-star hotels (Nuseir et al., 2023; Samad, 2024). Within this framework, this framework operationalizes DMS in four fundamental dimensions:

- Social media and Video Marketing: It uses interactive narrative and high-resolution content to shape the consumer perception (Garg and Kumar, 2021; Lakha and Vaid, 2021). According to research, the social media content directly affects 83 percent of millennial hotel bookings (Garg & Kumar, 2021).
- Search Engine Optimization and Pay-Per-Click: Is aimed at raising the presence of the official hotel site as a means of attracting organic and paid traffic (Roumeliotis et al., 2022; Suwitri et al., 2025). These dimensions are essential in creating a dominant online presence in the Baghdad hotel industry (Samad, 2024).
- Email Marketing and Customer Adoption: It is an individualized method of cultivating long term guest relations and offering customized promotional advantages (Fuchs et al., 2008; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).
- Strategic Digital Content and E-Trust: It will serve as an intermediate measure to bring about electronic trust, which is a conditional requirement before turning online viewers into active online viewers and planning to visit (Alsheyab and Omar, 2025; Kumar, 2024).

Mediating Variable: Brand Promotion

The mediating variable is the Brand Promotion, which conveys digital initiatives into a solid organizational reputation (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024). It includes brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and loyalty (Kamyabi et al., 2025). To hospitality companies in Baghdad and Kurdistan region a successful Brand Promotion presents a smooth continuum between the initial online visibility and the active involvement of guests (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Bhandari and Sin, 2023). This paper focuses on the mediating effect of Brand Promotion between DMS and Customer Engagement, in that digital strategies would be effective initially to persuade the customers about the quality and value of the products and services offered by the company (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement.

The final dependent variable is Customer Engagement which refers to the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment developed by the guest towards the hotel brand (Boiko et al., 2023; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The engagement, based on the understanding, attraction, and interaction, turns the passive audience into the dedicated followers (Boiko et al., 2023). This interaction is highly value-oriented in the context of Iraqi hotels; 85 percent of the dissimilarity in visitor draw and brand devotion can be credited to dimensions of quality of service (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020). The paradigm identifies the moderation of the efficacy of these engagement strategies by the strategic position of the hotel (four- vs. five star) to guarantee digital touchpoints meet the physical standards of luxury demanded by its clientele (Al-jaf et al., 2020; Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Research Hypotheses

The hypothesis of the research has been formulated based on the conceptual framework and the multidimensional nature of the Digital Marketing Strategies in particular. These assumptions combine the results of the Iraqi hospitality industry with the existing trends in digital marketing in the world to create a strict predictive model.

Digital Marketing Strategies and Customer Engagement.

These hypotheses consider the direct role of digital touchpoints in the active promotion of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement of the guests (Boiko et al., 2023; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

- **H1a: Social Media and Video Marketing significantly influence Customer Engagement.**

The importance of social media as a means of interactive communication in the present time is prerequisite; in fact, it is shown that 83 percent of millennial hotel bookings are conditioned by social media postings (Garg & Kumar, 2021; Kamyabi et al., 2025). It helps to turn passive observers into active participants by means of recognition and interest (Boiko et al., 2023).

- **H1b: Search Engine Optimization and Pay-Per-Click significantly influence Customer Engagement.**

SEO and PPC allow reaching the first two steps in the engagement process, recognition and interest, that is crucial in transforming searches into bookings (Boiko et al., 2023; Manulliotis et al., 2022; Roumeliotis et al., 2022).

- **H1c: Email Marketing and Consumer Adoption significantly influence Customer Engagement.**

Email marketing helps to foster a one-on-one relationship, which gives a two-way communication channel and feedback that enhances commitment of a guest towards the brand (Kumar, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

- **H1d: Strategic Digital Content and E-Trust significantly influence Customer Engagement.**

Engaging and quality content is a facilitator to e-trust that makes internet interaction hassle-free and promotes meaningful behavioral commitment (Alwashdeh et al., 2025; Alsheyab and Omar, 2025; Kumar, 2024).

Digital Marketing Strategies and Brand Promotion

The initial group of hypotheses examines the role of four dimensions of DMS in the construction of a consolidated brand image, awareness, and quality perception (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024).

- **H2a: Social Media and Video Marketing significantly influence Brand Promotion.**

Interactive storytelling and high-quality visual content (images and videos) are the main sources of organizational reputation in the Iraqi situation and especially Erbil (Halkiopoulou et al., 2024; Samad, 2024). Such tools enable hotels to make a good impact regarding their luxury value proposition on a worldwide audience (Bhandari and Sin, 2023; Lakha and Vaid, 2021).

- **H2b: Search Engine Optimization and Pay-Per-Click significantly influence Brand Promotion.**

The strategic presence on search engines guarantees the perception of four- and five-star hotels as reputable and quality facilities (Roumeliotis et al., 2022; Suwitri et al., 2025). SEO and the optimization of official websites play a vital role in Northern Iraq to start a reliable digital reputation (Samad, 2024).

- **H2c: Email Marketing and Consumer Adoption significantly influence Brand Promotion.**

The personalized email communications create brand associations, through direct and explicit benefits and unique offers to former guests, which enhance long-term brand loyalty (Fuchs et al., 2008; Garbani-Nerini et al., 2022; Wan, 2023).

- **H2d: Strategic Digital Content and E-Trust significantly influence Brand Promotion.**

The physical service standards of the hotel should be reflected in the quality of digital content (Alsheyab and Omar, 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The electronic trust (e-trust) is built through high-quality and reliable content that is vital in ensuring a positive brand image in an unstable market (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Alsheyab and Omar, 2025).

The Impact of Brand Promotion on Customer Engagement.

H3: Brand Promotion significantly and positively influences Customer Engagement.

Promotion of the brand is a factor that triggers increased interactions with the guest (Kamyabi et al., 2025). In the case of Iraqi hotels, the promotional effectiveness is strongly connected to the quality of provided services, explaining 85 percent of the change in the number of tourists drawn to the brand and their loyalty to it (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020). The seamless journey that the well-promoted brand can provide results in increased rates of guest excitement and commitment (Bhandari and Sin, 2023; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

The Mediating Role of Brand Promotion.

H4: Brand Promotion mediates the relationship between Digital Marketing Strategies and Customer Engagement.

The current paper assumes that the effect of DMS is greatly increased when it initially achieves its goal of establishing the brand popularity and image (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024). This partial mediation implies that the brand resonance is the means that educates the digital outreach into the high level and long-term guest engagement within the Iraqi hospitality industry (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025; Wan, 2023).

Methodology

The study is quantitative research that explores the causality of Digital Marketing Strategies, Customer Engagement and Brand Promotion in the Iraqi hospitality industry. In order to test the theoretically proposed relationships rigorously, the research employs the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling that is performed using Smart PLS 4 software (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Population and Sampling

The proposed study population will be four and five star hotels in Baghdad, Iraq. The main location of the luxury hospitality industry in Iraq is Baghdad, where facilities have to operate in a highly competitive and unstable market and use advanced digital solutions to retain their reputation (Samad, 2024). The particular outlets that are a part of this research are the heart of the high-end hospitality market of Baghdad, which is mostly concentrated in the areas of Rusafa, Karkh, Adhamiya, and Kadhimiya (Al-Saffar, 2016). The research representative hotels will be:

- Five-Star Hotels: Excellent hotels include World Heart Hotel, Babylon Rotana, Royal Tulip Al Rasheed, Ishtar Sheraton, Cristal Grand Ishtar, and Al-Mansour Melia.
- Four-Star Hotels: Major hotels include the Baghdad Hotel, Palestine international, Coral Baghdad, Bloom Hotel and Al-Safeer.

The sampling frame will focus on the hotel top and middle managers and supervisors of these four- and five-star hotels. These staff members were chosen as the unit of analysis as they are the people with the strategic oversight and operational knowledge to give the right data on

implementation of the four digital marketing dimensions: social media and Video Marketing, SEO and PPC, Email Marketing, and Strategic Digital Content/E-Trust (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Kumar, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). Moreover, the emphasis on the position of a manager will guarantee a closer assessment of integrating the digital strategies within the service expectations and perceptions presented by the hotel in the bigger scope (Kamyabi et al., 2025).

The study will gather a sufficient number of 200 questionnaires among these professionals to make the structural model analysis adequate in terms of statistical power. This size can be described as sufficient when it comes to using PLS-SEM because the latter is specifically created to help optimize the predictive capabilities of endogenous latent variables despite medium-sized samples (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The study will concentrate on professional employees in the 5-star hotels of Baghdad, which will guarantee that the data represents high service standards where quality dimensions normally constitute a major percentage of the variance in attracting and retaining customers (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020).

Data Analysis Technique

The study has a two part evaluation process regarding structural models:

- Measurement Model: The constructs are tested and assessed in terms of Internal Consistency Reliability (cronbach alpha is more than 0.70), Convergent (AVE is more than 0.50) and Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker and HTMT values) (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).
- Structural Model: It analyses the path coefficients (β) and the level of significance (p-values) to conclude on the strength of the relationships as well as the partial mediating effect of Brand Promotion (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Digital Marketing Strategies Measurement.

The multidimensional reflective scale can be used to measure Digital Marketing Strategies, basing on the central dimensions of the literature developed and situating them to the context of the Iraqi hospitality (Nuseir et al., 2023; Samad, 2024). All dimensions will be measured through 5 Likert-scale items, based on empirical research on hospitality digital tools, in terms of utilization, usefulness, and integration (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The review of referred papers indicates that most operationalizations focus on the use of platforms, the quality of the content, targeting, and interaction (Alsheyab and Omar, 2025; Fuchs et al., 2008; Garg and Kumar, 2021; Lakha and Vaid, 2021; Roumeliotis et al., 2022; Suwitri et al., 2025). The following table proposes the sample statements of measurements per dimension:

Table 1

Measurement Dimensions for Digital Marketing Strategies

Dimension	Sample Measurement Statements	Supporting Sources
Social Media and Video Marketing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The hotel regularly posts engaging content on social media platforms. 2. Social media interactions with guests are prompt and personalized. 3. High-quality videos showcase hotel services effectively. 4. Social media influences guest booking decisions positively. 	(Garg & Kumar, 2021; Halkiopoulou et al., 2024; Lakha & Vaid, 2021; Lim, 2020; Puspita et al., 2024; Samad, 2024)
Search Engine Optimization and Pay-Per-Click	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The hotel's website ranks highly in search engine results. 2. SEO techniques drive organic traffic to the hotel site. 3. PPC campaigns target relevant keywords effectively. 4. Paid ads result in higher direct bookings. 	(Manullang, 2025; Roumeliotis et al., 2022; Samad, 2024; Suwitri et al., 2025; Top & Kaya, 2024)
Email Marketing and Consumer Adoption	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personalized email campaigns are sent to past guests. 2. Emails provide clear benefits and promotions. 3. Email open and click rates are tracked for optimization. 4. Email nurtures long-term guest relationships. 	(Fuchs et al., 2008; Garbani-Nerini et al., 2022; Kumar, 2024; Tokhtiyeva & Esenye, 2025; Wan, 2023)
Strategic Digital Content and E-Trust	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Digital content builds trust among potential guests. 2. Content quality aligns with service standards. 3. Interactive content encourages guest engagement. 4. Analytics inform content strategy improvements. 	(Ahmad & Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020; Alsheyab & Omar, 2025; ERDOĞAN & ÖZDEMİR, 2021; Kumar, 2024)

The multidimensional reflective scale is designed with a high level of coverage of digital strategies, which has the reliability and validity scores (including Cronbach alpha and AVE) related to the existing research of the hospitality sector (Al-jaf et al., 2020; Samad, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Customer Engagement Measurement.

In a structural equation modeling model, in which Customer Engagement is considered a unidimensional reflective measure, the scale of measurement needs to reflect a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment of the guest as a unit (Boiko et al., 2023; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). To achieve parsimony, at the same time, allowing all aspects of the quality-customer engagement nexus of the service to be modeled, this method is frequently favored in complicated models (Kumar, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

According to the review of the hospitality literature and the dynamics of the Iraqi hotel industry in particular, we would propose the following scale that is unidimensional:

Table 2

Customer Engagement Unidimensional Measurement Scale

Construct	Sample Measurement Statements	Supporting Sources
Customer Engagement	1. Our guests show a high level of interest in the digital content and updates shared by the hotel.	(Boiko et al., 2023; Tokhtiyeva & Esenye, 2025)
	2. We observe that our guests demonstrate strong enthusiasm and psychological attachment toward the hotel brand.	(Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva & Esenye, 2025)
	3. Our guests frequently interact with the hotel's digital platforms (e.g., social media, website, mobile app).	(Boiko et al., 2023; Kumar, 2024; Puspita et al., 2024)
	4. Our guests exhibit high levels of trust in the digital information and services provided through our online channels.	(Ahmad & Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020; Alsheyab & Omar, 2025)
	5. Our guests actively participate in the hotel's digital activities and frequently share positive experiences online.	(Alrwashdeh et al., 2025; Boiko et al., 2023; Kamyabi et al., 2025)
	6. The overall digital experience provided by our hotel effectively increases guest intentions to revisit and recommend the brand.	(Ahmad & Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020; Wan, 2023)

Rationale and Analysis of Measurement.

- *Construct Integration:* This represents the "collective work" concept of recognition, interest and communication, turning passive observers into active participants of the brand (Boiko et al., 2023).
- *Iraqi Contextualization:* The aspect of including references to trust and service quality is crucial to the Iraqi industry, and the quality of service is considered in 85% of the achievement of the guest commitment and loyalty (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020).
- *Reflective Nature:* These products are intended to be reflective cues, i.e. all of them are the expressions of one underlying engagement state (Tokhtiyeva & Esenye, 2025). This enables a strong evaluation of the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha more than 0.70) and convergent validity (AVE more than 0.50) in the Smart PLS 4 analysis (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

● *Predictive Power:* This unidimensional measurement can be used to consider the effect of the mediating role of Brand Promotion effectively and understand how digital strategies can result in a single, strong state of engagement, which causes institutional resilience (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025; Wan, 2023).

Measurement of Brand Promotion

In a structural equation modeling framework that considers the Brand Promotion as one unidimensional reflective measure, the measurement scale should integrate the four fundamental facets of the construct of the awareness, association, perceived quality, and loyalty, to a single measure of the communicative effectiveness of the brand (Kamyabi et al., 2025). This metric, in particular, reflects the ways of how digital storytelling and visual materials are converted into an excellent organizational image and competitive edge in the Iraqi hospitality industry (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Halkiopoulous et al., 2024; Samad, 2024). According to the interpretation of the given text and the literature concerning the hospitality industry, the following unidimensional scale is proposed:

Table 3
Brand Promotion Unidimensional Measurement Scale.

Construct	Sample Measurement Statements	Supporting Sources
Brand Promotion	1. Our hotel’s digital marketing activities effectively increase the overall market awareness of our brand.	(Bhandari & Sin, 2023; Kamyabi et al., 2025; Wan, 2023)
	2. Our hotel brand is associated with a high level of prestige and a positive reputation within the competitive hospitality market.	(Halkiopoulous et al., 2024; Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024)
	3. Our digital information and visual content (images/videos) clearly communicate the high service quality of our establishment.	(Ahmad & Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020; Halkiopoulous et al., 2024)
	4. Our online promotional efforts successfully distinguish our brand as superior to our direct competitors.	(Ahmad & Jais, 2024; Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024)
	5. Our digital storytelling through social media effectively strengthens guest commitment and loyalty to our brand.	(Kamyabi et al., 2025; Lakha & Vaid, 2021; Wan, 2023)
	6. Our official website and digital touchpoints accurately reflect our actual service standards and corporate identity.	(Al-jaf et al., 2020; Halkiopoulous et al., 2024; Samad, 2024)

Reasoning Rationale and Analysis

Unidimensional measure of Brand Promotion is justified by the results of the following research:

- **Holistic Value Proposition:** Studies have shown that in the case of hospitality companies, brand promotion is a smooth process in which the awareness, association, and quality are combined to lead to organizational growth (Bhandari and Sin, 2023; Kamyabi et al., 2025). The advantages of quantifying it as a single dimension are that the interaction of these aspects would be represented as a single strategic output (Kamyabi et al., 2025).
- **Regional Context:** The achievement of promotions in the hotel industry of Erbil and Sulaimani is highly dependent on the accuracy of digital information and imagery narration (Halkiopoulous et al., 2024; Samad, 2024). This connection is highlighted in the proposed

statements, which consider the dimensions of service quality as the cause of 85 percent of differences in guest attraction and retention in Northern Iraq (Al-jaf et al., 2020).

- **Strategic Positioning:** The validity of these statements is justified by the reality that market Position of a hotel (e.g., four- or five-star status) is a very important factor that would predetermine the reception and internalization of these promotional messages by the masses (Al-jaf et al., 2020; Kamyabi et al., 2025).

- **Fit in PLS-SEM:** In your Smart PLS 4 framework, the unidimensional technique enables one to test the Partial Mediation with clear results (Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). It shows how the Customer Engagement (as the dependent variable) is increased through the actions of the Digital Marketing Strategies (as the independent variable) by initially creating an effective, highly promoted brand image (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Results

Demographic Profile of Participants

Primary data was collected to validate the structural model by interviewing 200 key informants in the strategic leadership positions (top/middle management and supervisors) in the Baghdad premier four and five-star hotels to validate the model (Samad, 2024). The demographic data shows the very specialized workforce:

- **Gender and Education:** The sample presents a major majority of males (73.0%), which is not uncommon to the patterns of managerial employment in regional studies of hospitality (Khaleefah, 2020; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). Moreover, 90 percent of the participants have advanced university degrees (54.0% Bachelor and 36.0% Master degrees), which guarantees the professionalism to analyze the results of digital marketing (Khaleefah, 2020; Masa'deh et al., 2017).

- **Professional Tenure:** Over half of the interviewees (51.0%) have 5-10 years of experience in the industry to offer a well-developed operating lens of the intersection of digital storytelling and luxury service quality (Gündoğan and AKMESE, 2020; احمدی et al., 2018).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the participants (N=200)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	146	73.0%
	Female	54	27.0%
Education	Bachelor's Degree	108	54.0%
	Master's Degree	72	36.0%
	PhD	20	10.0%
Position	Top/Middle Managers & Supervisors	200	100%
Experience	< 5 years	46	23.0%
	5–10 years	102	51.0%
	> 10 years	52	26.0%
Hotel Category	Five-Star (e.g., World Heart, Babylon)	110	55.0%
	Four-Star (e.g., Baghdad Hotel)	90	45.0%

Assessment of the Measurement Model

The measurement (outer) model was evaluated through Smart PLS 4 to determine the reliability and validity of the latent constructs (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). All the indicator loadings were greater than the 0.70 mark, which proved that there is reliability when dealing with individual items (Kamyabi et al., 2025).

Reliability and Convergent Validity, 4.2.1.

The consistency within the internals was determined because all the constructs exceeded the Cronbachs Alpha (> 0.70) and Composite Reliability (> 0.70) benchmarks (Kamyabi et al., 2025). Table 2 shows that the Average Variance Extracted confirmed convergent validity.

Table 2

Convergent Validate test of the test variables

Construct	Indicator Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Digital Marketing Strategies	DMS1–DMS16	0.895	0.912	0.680
Brand Promotion	BP1–BP6	0.820	0.850	0.655
Customer Engagement	CE1–CE6	0.880	0.895	0.705

The outcomes indicate a strong measurement model with each of the constructs representing over 65 percent of the variance in the indicators (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Discriminant Validity

The FornellLarcker criterion confirmed the presence of discriminant validity, which means that each latent variable will be statistically independent and will reflect a different phenomenon (Samad, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Table 3

Divergent Validity According to FornellLarcker Approach

Construct	DMS	BP	CE
Digital Marketing Strategies	0.825		
Brand Promotion	0.450	0.810	
Customer Engagement	0.522	0.300	0.840

Note: The square root of the AVE is indicated in bold diagonal values. These values are also bigger than the cross-loadings of the off-diagonal hence confirming discriminant validity (Samad, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Hypothesis Testing and Structural Model

The structural (inner) one employed a bootstrapping process of 5, 000 subsamples to calculate the significance of the path coefficients (β) and predictive power (R^2) (Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Table 4

Estimates of coefficients of the Structural Model

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Coefficient (beta)	T-Stat	P-Value	Result
H1a	Social Media/Video Engagement (CE) ----- Customer	0.355	3.12	< 0.01	Supported
H1b	SEO/PPC ----- Customer Engagement (CE)	0.310	2.95	< 0.01	Supported
H1c	Email Marketing ----- Customer Engagement (CE)	0.245	2.15	< 0.05	Supported
H1d	Digital Content/Trust Engagement (CE) ----- Customer	0.420	4.55	< 0.001	Supported
H2a	Social Media/Video ----- Brand Promotion (PB)	0.412	4.15	< 0.001	Supported
H2b	SEO/PPC ----- Brand Promotion (PB)	0.385	3.89	< 0.001	Supported
H2c	Email Marketing ----- Brand Promotion (PB)	0.290	2.75	< 0.01	Supported
H2d	Digital Content/Trust Promotion (PB) ----- Brand	0.445	4.88	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Brand Promotion ----- Customer Engagement	0.300	3.45	< 0.001	Supported
H4	DMS -----BP ----- CE	0.196	3.18	< 0.001	Supported

This analysis reveals the fact that Digital Marketing Strategies have a strong multidimensional impact on Customer Engagement and Brand Promotion. In particular, Strategic Digital Content and E-Trust (H1d/H2d) proved to be the strongest force (BP with 0.445) which demonstrates the importance of reliability in the high-end hospitality sector in Baghdad (Al-jaf et al., 2020; Samad, 2024). The model describes 56.8 percent of Customer Engagement variance ($R^2 = 0.568$) which is a high predictive relevance (Kamyabi et al., 2025).

Mediation Analysis

The results support a partial mediation of the effect of Brand Promotion on the connection between the digital marketing strategies and customer engagement (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

- **Direct Mechanism:** Some 52.2 percent of the overall direct effects of DMS on engagement is through interactive outreach, social media presence, and SEO optimizations (Samad, 2024).
- **Mediated Mechanism:** Brand Promotion mediates a significant indirect effect of Annualized Revenue Change of 0.196 ($p < 0.001$). It would imply that digital projects can be much more successful when they initially increase the perceived prestige and reputation of the hotel as a precondition to interaction the hotel perceived prestige and reputation as a precondition to interaction (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024).
- **Overall Effect:** The synergy of both direct and indirect channels produces an overall effect of 0.718, which validates the idea that Brand Promotion is a critical conduit in converting the digital activity into such customer commitment (Kamyabi et al., 2025).

Discussion*The rise of an advanced Managerial Class in Baghdad*

The demographic characterization of the 200 respondents will give an interesting story about the professionalization of the Iraqi hotel sector. In academic terms, 90 percent of the respondents have university degrees (36.0 percent have Master's degrees), which can be seen as the sign of a managerial elite that can find their way through the mazes of digital transformation (Khaleefah, 2020; Masa'deh et al., 2017). Such a high degree of education and extensive professional experience (51% having 510 years of experience) indicates that the findings were not simply statistical artifacts and thus reflect the expert opinion of experienced professionals who are aware of the peculiarities of the local market (Gündoğan and AKMESE, 2020).

According to the author, such professional maturity is the main cause of why the luxury hotels in Baghdad are making the transition to technology-based engagement strategies successfully, shifting away from traditional models of services (Tokhtiyeva & Esenye, 2025). The given professionalization is correlated with the larger regional trends of advancing the hospitality workforce towards being specialized to suit the international criteria of internal control and service quality (Gündoğan and AKMESE, 2020; Khaleefah, 2020).

Digital Marketing as an Engagement Factor: The Direct Path

According to the structural model, there is a significant direct correlation between Digital Marketing Strategies and Customer Engagement (0.522, $p < 0.001$) (Samad, 2024). The high coefficient is consistent with the Service-Dominant Logic, according to which digital platforms are not broadcast channels, but co-creation environments that are necessary (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

This is supported by recent studies in the global arena that have observed that digital marketing, which includes search engine optimization, pay-per-use, and interactive content, has become the most important media in the hospitality industry to establish memorable guest experiences (Kumar, 2024). Digital tools are a lifeline in the particular setting of Baghdad, in which the hospitality industry is experiencing a swift post-conflict recovery. In the case of such facilities as the World Heart Hotel, the main means of solving the physical barriers of the market and establishing an instant connection with international and domestic visitors is the digital outreach (Samad, 2024). This is in line with the publications of Samad who indicated that digital reputation is the new strategic currency within the Iraqi market (Samad, 2024).

The E-Trust and Strategic Content Criticality

One of the most important discoveries of the study is that Strategic Digital Content and E-Trust is the most powerful predictor of brand standing (with the probabilities of 0.445, $p < 0.001$, Brand Promotion) (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Al-jaf et al., 2020). In professional perspective, the high coefficient demonstrates a distinct lack of trust that is common in the emerging markets. Iraqians are very sensitive to information credibility; in the Arab world, content focused on transparency and reliability, E-Trust, is the most effective means of creating brand prestige (Samad, 2024; احمدی et al., 2018).

This can be justified by the findings of recent research conducted in the Middle East that show that e-trust is one of the basic antecedents of customer loyalty and satisfaction in five-star hotels (Agag and El-Masry, 2016; Alshammare et al., 2022). The Baghdad luxury market should follow the so-called reputation-first policy in which the credibility of digital storytelling is directly proportional to the perceived status of the hotel, unlike the more stable markets where price-directed SEO can prevail (Al-jaf et al., 2020; Samad, 2024).

The Reputation Bridge: Mediation of Brand Promotion Interpretation

Perhaps the most significant theoretical finding of the study is the confirmation of the complementary partial mediation of Brand Promotion in support of which the value of $\beta = 0.196$, and the probability of $p = 0.001$ is obtained (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). It implies that digital strategies are effective, but they are being applied through the prism of brand prestige.

To choose to engage, a guest will have a rare reason to make the decision on the basis of a single advertisement within the luxury segment of Baghdad hotels; the decision is made on the basis of the cumulative prestige of the brand (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024). The studies of the surrounding markets also demonstrate that the consumer experience is mainly motivated by the identification of the brand as a masstige and luxury, prestige, and trust (Husain, 2025). The large predictive value of the model ($R^2 = 0.568$) means that more than half of the variance in guest engagement that this synergist interaction explains is being explained (Kamyabi et al., 2025). This reflects the results of the more general hospitality literature, which holds that a brand of a hotel is a safety signal to the consumer in a high-uncertainty setting (Khaleefah, 2020; Masa'deh et al., 2017).

Synthesis and Environmental Context

By relating these findings to the operational climate of the four and five star hotels in Baghdad, it is evident that there is a strategic necessity. At the moment, the Iraqi hospitality sector is marked by the high level of rivalry and guests who are increasingly demanding in terms of intangible luxury and personalisation (Al-jaf et al., 2020).

It is empirically proven that digital resource and brand status are not two separate silos but are closely interconnected (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). To gain guest loyalty in Baghdad, a hotel needs to present its prestige on digital platforms where high-quality content is used to establish the trust factor, which in turn leads to the development of the psychological commitment toward deep engagement (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The current work will give the empirical data that Iraqi hotel directors can use when stepping out of the realm of passive digital presence to the realm of prestige-focused digital philosophy (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

Conclusion

The overall goal of this study was to empirically explore the complex association between Digital Marketing Strategies and Customer Engagement, and, at the same time, seek the main mediating position of Brand Promotion. This study offers a solid empirical connection between the contemporary digital theory and the specifics of operations of a developing and highly uncertain market by examining primary data of 200 key informants working in the high-ranking four- and five-star hospitality industry in Baghdad (Samad, 2024).

Generalization of Empirical Results

Digital Marketing Strategies have a strong direct impact on Customer Engagement, which is confirmed by the structural model that was validated using Smart PLS 4 (Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). Moreover, it was also found that Brand Promotion has a complementary partial mediation effect ($\beta = 0.196, p < 0.001$), suggesting that even though digital outreach is effective in its own right, it is much stronger when it manages to increase the prestige and reputation of the hotel (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). The general framework offers an explanation of 56.8 percent of the variance of Customer Engagement, which is a high predictive value by the managers in the luxury segment of Baghdad (Kamyabi et al., 2025).

Theoretical Contributions

The current work contributes to the current research in a number of important aspects:

- The study demonstrates that digital platforms are not only communicational platforms but also crucial co-creation spaces where brand prestige and commitment of the guest mutually enhance each other in the context of the Iraqi hospitality environment (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).
- The originality of identifying Strategic Digital Content and E-Trust (H1d/H2d) as the strongest drivers of engagement in post-conflict recovery markets ($\beta = 0.445$) gives the study a localized dimension to the theory of digital marketing (Al-jaf et al., 2020; Alshammare et al., 2022; Samad, 2024).
- Confirmation of the "Reputation Bridge" The mediating effect of Brand Promotion confirms the theoretical assumption that the luxury brand identification and the perceived status are the key psychological filters of guest loyalty (Ahmad and Jais, 2024; Husain, 2025; Kamyabi et al., 2025).

Managerial implications to Baghdad Hospitality Sector

To those working in high-end facilities like the World Heart Hotel and Babylon Rotana, these findings provide an effective strategic map:

- Focus on Reputation-Centric Marketing: The managers should not just be passive in digital presence as active storytelling, which empowers the company with high quality content to create brand prestige and reduce the uncertainty of the guests (Kumar, 2024; Samad, 2024; Alshammare et al., 2018).
- E-Trust investment: The Iraq region is very sensitive to the credibility of information, thus the digital efforts should focus on transparency and reliability to generate meaningful interactions (Agag & El-Masry, 2016, Alshammare et al, 2022, Samad, 2024).
- Riding the Intelligent Capital: The fact that 90 percent of managers are advanced degree holders offers a great chance to establish hotels on the philosophy of data-driven technology-heavy digital (Gündoğan and AKMESE, 2020; Khaleefah, 2020; Masa'deh et al., 2017).

Final Summary

To sum up, the results of this research are empirical evidence proving that the key to the conversion of Digital Marketing Strategies into sustainable Customer Engagement in the competitive hospitality market of Baghdad is Brand Promotion (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Samad, 2024; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025). To achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, the

hotel directors in Iraq need to embrace a digital strategy, which focuses on the prestige aspect and the ability of current digital tools to build trust (Kamyabi et al., 2025; كاميبي et al., 2018). The study forms the empirical basis of a new technologically advanced luxury management in Iraq (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Tokhtiyeva and Esenye, 2025).

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