



AKDENİZ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ



Sergey ZUIKIN

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF A BRAND IN A FIVE-STAR HOTEL
VIA DIGITALIZATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Turizm İşletmeciliği Anabilim Dalı
Yüksek Lisans Tezi

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Danışman

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LIST OF SHORTENINGS

- Acad. Market. Sci.** - Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science
- Adv. Manag.** - Journal of Advances in Management Research
- Ed.** – Editor
- E. J. Sci. Technol.** - European Journal of Information Technologies and Computer Science
- Eur. J. Market** - European Journal of Marketing
- Fig.** – Figure
- Geneva Pap. R. I.** - The Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance
- i.e.** – that is
- Inf. Organ.** - Information and Organization
- Inform. Technol. People** - Information Technology & People
- Int. J. Manag. Rev.** - International Journal of Management Reviews
- Int. J. Retail Distrib. Manag.** - International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management
- Int. J. Wine Bus. Res.** - International Journal of Wine Business Research
- J Bus. Res.** - Journal of Business Research
- J. Commun. Manag.** - Journal of Communication Management
- J. Consumer Res.** - Journal of Consumer Research
- J Mark Manag.** – Journal of Marketing Management
- J. Purch. Supply Manag.** - Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management
- J. Serv. Res.** - Journal of Service Research
- Natl. Lab. Sci. Comput.** – National Laboratory for Sciences and Computing
- Psychol. Market.** - Psychology & Marketing
- Res. Technol. Manag.** - Research Technology Management
- IEEE Trans. Circuits Syst. Video Technol.** - IEEE Transactions on Circuits and Systems for Video Technology
- Transf.: Eur. Rev. Labour Res.** - Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research

ÖZET

Dijitalleşme artık sadece teknik bir terim olmaktan çıkıp sosyal ve kültürel bir fenomen haline gelmekte ve insanların profesyonel ve kişisel yaşamlarının hemen hemen bütün alanlarında bir etkiye sahip olduğu görülmektedir. Dijital kanallar, akıllı markaların günlük uygulamalarında doğrudan müşterilere ulaşmanın bir yolu olarak kabul edilmektedir. Dahası şirketlerin güçlü markalar oluşturmak, sürdürmek ve yönetmek için kullandıkları marka oluşturma süreci dijital araçlardan büyük ölçüde etkilenmektedir.

Konaklama endüstrisi, etkinlikleri, güvenilirliği ve düşük maliyetleri kanıtlanmış olan modern araçları ve kanalları entegre etme fikriyle dijital araçları kullanma konusunda öncü sektörlerden biri olarak görülmektedir. Sosyal medya, küresel ölçekte sınırları aşarak müşterilere doğrudan erişim sağlama konusunda önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Sosyal sayesinde, konaklama işletmeleri yerelden küresele doğru büyümüş ve küresel bir karakter kazanmıştır. En güncel konulardan biri olan konaklama sektöründe dijitalleşme, sadece endüstriden değil akademik dünyadan da ilgi görmektedir.

Bu yüksek lisans tezinin temel amacı, dijital faktörlerin ve araçların konaklama endüstrisi bağlamında marka oluşturma ve marka yönetimi üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmaktır. İlgili literatürü, sosyal medya hesaplarını, dijital kanalları ve konaklama işletmelerinin üst yönetimi ile yapılan birebir görüşmeler kullanılarak marka oluşturma sürecinde dijital araçların kullanımının etkinliğini değerlendirmeyi ve güçlü bir marka farkındalığı ve sadakati oluşturmayı amaçlanmıştır. Konaklama işletmelerinin üst düzey yöneticileriyle yapılan görüşmeler de dahil olmak üzere, dijitalleşmenin güçlü bir marka oluşturma konusunda değerli bir etkisi olup olmadığı keşfedilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Metodolojimiz, literatür taraması ve veri toplama ile şirketin web sitesi, sosyal medya hesapları ve dijital kanallarının analizini içermektedir. Bu araştırmada nitel analiz, betimsel durum çalışması yaklaşımıyla Türkiye'nin Antalya ilindeki otellerden biri üzerinde çalışılmıştır. Çalışmamızın ana değeri, 'dijitalleşme' olgusuna genel bir sistematik yaklaşımda bulunması ve bunun güçlü bir konaklama markası yaratma ve sürdürmede amacıyla uygulamada kullanılabilmesinde yatmaktadır. Araştırma sırasında, "dijitalleşme" olgusunun görece olarak yeni olması nedeniyle, bunun değeri ve etkisinin genellikle hafife alındığı ve dijital teknolojinin genel olarak marka oluşturma faaliyetlerine dahil edilmesine çok az önem verildiğini anlaşılmıştır. Bu araştırma, sektör profesyonellerine yönetsel çıkarımlar ve tavsiyeler içermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Marka, Dijitalleşme, Konaklama, Sosyal medya, Dijital kanallar

SUMMARY

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF A BRAND IN A FIVE-STAR HOTEL VIA DIGITALIZATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Digitalization now becomes more than just a technical term but a social and cultural phenomenon. It has an impact on almost all spheres of human professional and personal life. Digital channels are treated as a direct way to access customers which wise brands employ in their everyday practices. Brand building process is being highly affected by digital instruments which companies are using to establish, maintain and manage strong brands.

Hospitality industry became one of the pioneers of using digital tools with the idea to incorporate modern instruments and channels which proved their effectiveness, reliability and low cost. Social media appeared to be a direct way to access customers across borders on a global scale. With the help of that, hospitality enterprises started to emerge from local to global players establishing global character of their business. Being one of the most contemporary agendas, digitalization in the hospitality attracts attention not only from the industry but also from the academic world.

The major purpose of this master thesis is to investigate the impacts of digital factors and tools on brand building and brand management in the hospitality context. We aimed at evaluating the level of using digital tools in brand construction process and building a strong brand awareness and loyalty using relevant literature, social media accounts and digital channels, interviews with top management of the hospitality brand. We tried to find out whether digitalization makes a valuable impact on building a strong brand.

Our methodology includes literature review, data collection, and analysis of company's website, social media accounts and digital channels. In our research we used qualitative analysis, descriptive case study approach to one of the hotels in Antalya, Türkiye. The major value of our study lies in an overall systematic approach to the phenomenon of 'digitalization' and its implementation toward practical usage in creating and maintaining a strong hospitality brand. During the research we found out that due to the relative novelty of 'digitalization' phenomenon, the value and the impact of it is often underestimated and minor attention is paid to overall incorporation of the digital technology into brand building activities. The research contains managerial implications and recommendations to industry professionals.

Key words: Brand, Digitalization, Hospitality, Social media, Digital channels.

PREFACE

In the following master thesis strategic usage of digitalization and digital tools in a five-star hotel in Antalya, Türkiye, have been examined. There is a variety of researches focusing on advantages of using digital tools and recommendations on how a hospitality enterprise can benefit from those. Conversely, underestimating the usage of digital instruments and social media platforms can lead to losing sustainable competitive advantage for companies which are not employing such instruments or use them in a small proportion. There are a few reasons causing the situation, among them there is a lack of knowledge or ignorance of modern tools in favor of traditional instruments which have been used throughout the years. However, digitalization has become a global economic, social and cultural phenomenon. Hotel guests are becoming ‘digitalized’ and with the help of social media platforms are able to influence hospitality brands and the hospitality industry in a dramatic way.

In this master thesis a qualitative research approach and analysis is used to find out the impacts of digitalization and social media on hospitality brand development based on the example of a 5-star hotel in Antalya.

INTRODUCTION

The rising popularity of digital means of communication where social media plays a significant role stipulates for reconfiguration and redesign of the marketing approaches and models in the hospitality industry. Businesses are affected by a new paradigm of relationship between a brand and customers associated with a trend to provide consumers more power (Pires et al., 2006: 937). Now consumers start contributing to co-creation of the brand by posting, sharing and commenting any information related to a brand. Moreover, businesses have to incorporate social media techniques into their strategies to obtain sustainable competitive advantage (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014: 339). There are different formats that social media exists in such as blogs, virtual communities and online channels, online comments and reviews, and social networks: 'Blogs, product reviews, discussion groups, product ratings, etc. are new important sources of information describing how customers collect information, use that information, and how that information is used in their decision-making, shopping behavior, and post-purchase behavior' (Leeflang et al., 2014: 2).

Nowadays understanding the functioning of brand consumption through a social media channel becomes vital. There is an argument that the intangible ownership of the brand is being transferred to the customer, emphasizing co-creation to brand-building (Ostrom et al., 2010: 21). The practice of brand consumption is now changing its location towards online communities where the process of stakeholder interactions takes place (Vock et al., 2013: 311). Consumption itself evolves into social co-production marking a greater meaning of online communities in the consumption process (Tuominen, 2007: 189). The role of consumers changes dramatically from 'quiet, unnoticed individuals into a loud noisy collective' of people who understand their power and have influence upon brands (Libai et al, 2010: 267). Through active online interactions consumers create and exchange content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 61), which appear to be quite democratic, and where exchange and accessibility become a norm (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010: 312). All these lead to forming a better understanding on how online consumption behavior functions and can be managed.

According to the latest WTTC (2022: 2) report, tourism and traveling provide one out of four of total new workplaces created throughout the globe, which stands for 10.3% of overall jobs (333 million), and 10.3% of global GDP (US\$9.6 trillion) (WTTC, 2022: 2). In many countries, tourism is supposed to be one of the most attractive activities and a lot of people around the planet fulfil regularly their travel experiences. According to UNWTO (2022: 8), international tourism continued its revival in 2022, demonstrating a dramatic

change in comparison to 2020 and 2021 respectively. The industry is experiencing a constant growth and after a dramatic fall-down caused by pandemic situation in the world, it is recovering at a high speed. Global tourist arrivals demonstrated a dramatic increase and reached a peak of 116 million tourists in August 2022. When compared to the same period of 2020 and 2021, the absolute number of tourists has almost doubled (UNWTO, 2022: 8).

In the recent time latest technologies have changed the service industry dramatically (Yaldaie, 2019: 2). The role of digitalization is becoming more important and is spreading wider. Interestingly, advanced information technologies provide assistance for small businesses to represent themselves on the market in an electronic form (Yaldaie, 2019: 2). Using digital tools and channels, both industry and customers benefit from its advantages. Hospitality brands are using more and more diverse digital instruments to support and develop their brand awareness, brand equity and, furthermore, brand loyalty.

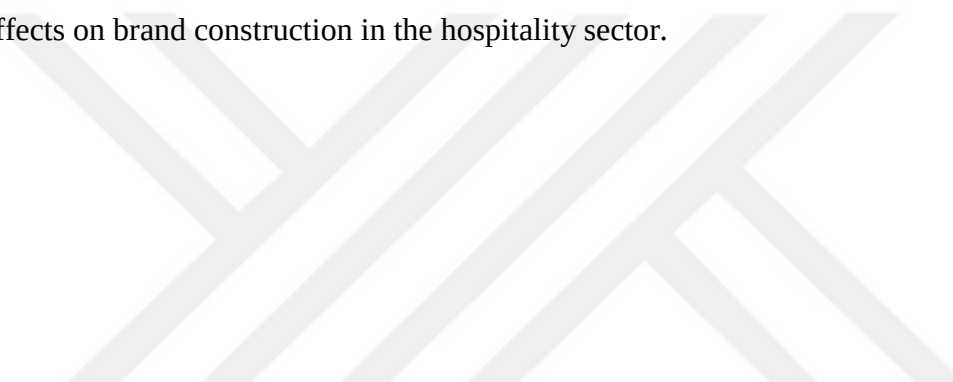
However, challenges caused by using digital means are also there and can be found everywhere throughout the process. Enormously wide spread of information, very high speed of delivering news and comments force brands to take precautions and pay additional attention to the e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth), which becomes one of the most powerful digital armors which customers use to interact with brands in the hospitality industry. The aim of the master thesis is to take a glance at the phenomenon of digitalization and clarify digital means and tools, to consolidate and summarize the effects of digitalization upon brands in the hospitality industry context.

The structure of the text will include introducing the topic and presenting a literature review, focusing on particular areas of digitalization such as its definition, various aspects of using it within branding activity, its implementation within the tourism and hospitality environment. We will use a case-study approach to analyze the current situation and activity in the industry based on the example of one of the brands (Hotel X). We will consolidate and summarize results of our research and will try to come up with the logical and research-based conclusion along with managerial implications and practical recommendations on using digital tools for developing and promoting the brand.

Hotel X is a successful and well-reputed 5-star hotel in the region of Antalya (Türkiye). It combines excellence in traditional services delivery with the most up-to-date technological innovations. Top management is very sympathetic and open to novelty. Hotel X is a popular tourist destination among local and international tourists and is continuing its activity to improve the quality of performance and obtaining an undisputed reputation. It is a

part of a large international consortium and, therefore, major policy is being defined by the headquarters and is associated with the whole business group.

To our mind, the contribution and originality of the present research will lie in the focus on the digitalization phenomenon as a whole, while summarizing its components and elements, wide usage of systematic approach for analyzing digitalization, consolidating the knowledge previously presented in the academia and also applying for practical usage of such information. Keeping in mind business relevance, we will also focus on innovation and intensification of business processes using digital tools having the primary objective of contributing to brand equity and brand development. The contribution of the research will also lie in the attempt to present in one study the diversity and variety of literature written about one of the most widely discussed aspects of modern professional and personal life and its effects on brand construction in the hospitality sector.



CHAPTER ONE

TRENDS AND DEMANDS IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

1.1. Current Trends in Hospitality Industry

The 21st century and the rise of economy 4.0 bring more challenges in developing and creating a relevant and modern customer-service business model and still maintain exclusiveness of their products. Intensive competition in the hospitality industry characterized by raising number of hotel bedrooms and services throughout the world, high level of customer mobility and transformation of traditional marketing into digital now become a reality. Global hotel industry now experiences a dramatic change. Inevitable and incredible technological progress affects the whole humanity, every aspect of our life and business and becomes a driving force for the development of the industry. Naturally, there is a great challenge that affects hotels on how to satisfy needs of their customers in a constantly changing environment (Tutek et al., 2018: 3).

Hoteliers are now facing the necessity to provide an individual personalized experience for each customer which they have to find out. Customers' expectations and preferences have to be collected and analyzed and necessary changes have to be made into principles of segmentation and ways of measuring collected data. Thus, companies have to start treating their customers mainly as individuals with the idea to satisfy their personal demands rather than form a general segment based on a common feature. Higher level of digitalization causes a larger transparency of information and this leads to a special importance of 'knowing your customer' as the main principle. The 'tourist has demanded better experiences, faster service, multiple choice, social responsibility and greater satisfaction' (Yeoman, 2010: 6).

Digitalization is defined as the usage of digital technologies in order to modify a business model and secure new revenue schemes and value-creating opportunities; this is the process of transforming analogue business into digital (<https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/digitalization> Access date: 27.04.2023). A variety of definitions in a multidimensional context will be presented later in chapter two. Segmentation itself has to be modified and new approaches to collecting, evaluating and accessing digital data need to be employed: 'For hotel chains seeking to embrace the future, it is vital that they master: analyzing big data to understand their customers beyond simple segmentation, measuring and monitoring evolving customer expectations, and creating authentic experiences' (Richard, 2017: 60). In the times of 'digital

world' segmentation should focus on activity-based data on the web and particularly in social media platforms and communities. Obviously, segmentation changes its nature from generalized market segmentation into individual and personalized based on digital activity of potential customers. Special attention has to be paid to data collected during the customer monitoring focusing on customer's preferences, selection, purchasing habits, and all relevant information concerning consumption at the time of travel. Such information has to be properly analyzed and customized in order to produce adequate service to satisfy the customer and reflect on redesigned marketing strategy and tailor an individually-oriented supply. In addition to that, a concept of 'total service model' is established to explain and justify individual, customer-tailored attitude. The meaning of the following model circles around customizing of every aspect of customer service. According to Destors and Talwar (2011: 8), a customer is given a possibility to make their choice from a variety of offerings and, therefore, to control and personalize their travel experience from intention and evaluation to decision-making and setting out on a travel. This trend is growing faster than counterparts in a luxury segment where marketers are trying to reach their clientele with the best supply and establish and encourage loyalty within repeat consumers (Richard, 2017: 60).

Digitalization has not just affected hospitality but also other spheres and aspects of peoples' life (Klimova and Glumova, 2020: 14). Global economy becomes digital and digitalization opens up new opportunities and causes innovation and new principles of work. Digital tools change their nature from the auxiliary to the main stipulating for the shift in priority in using industrial instruments. Countries start to invest in developing digital tools for tourism such as Turkey and Kazakhstan, which declared the creation of concept 'Tourism 4.0' (Klimova and Glumova, 2020: 16). The major idea behind the concept is the wide connection between systems within 'Tourism 4.0' and interconnection which ties all stages of a tourist product lifecycle.

Due to the fact that 74% of travelers are making their travel plans online, hospitality and tourism are becoming a 'mainstream digital economy' (Klimova and Glumova, 2020: 14). As far as Google statistics go, there are around 400 search calls during trip planning on average. This insight can be effectively used by businesses who can take advantage and manage the process at all stages from planning till purchasing and traveling (Klimova and Glumova, 2020: 16). Up to 2019, the number of online sales increased up to 1 trillion rubles (Klimova and Glumova, 2020: 14). The diagram below shows the increase in consumption in general and a shift from offline to online purchasing which makes up a global tendency. The

study has analyzed top 50 websites and concluded that from August to November 2019 the growing tendency continued in comparison to the same period of 2018 (Figure 1.1).

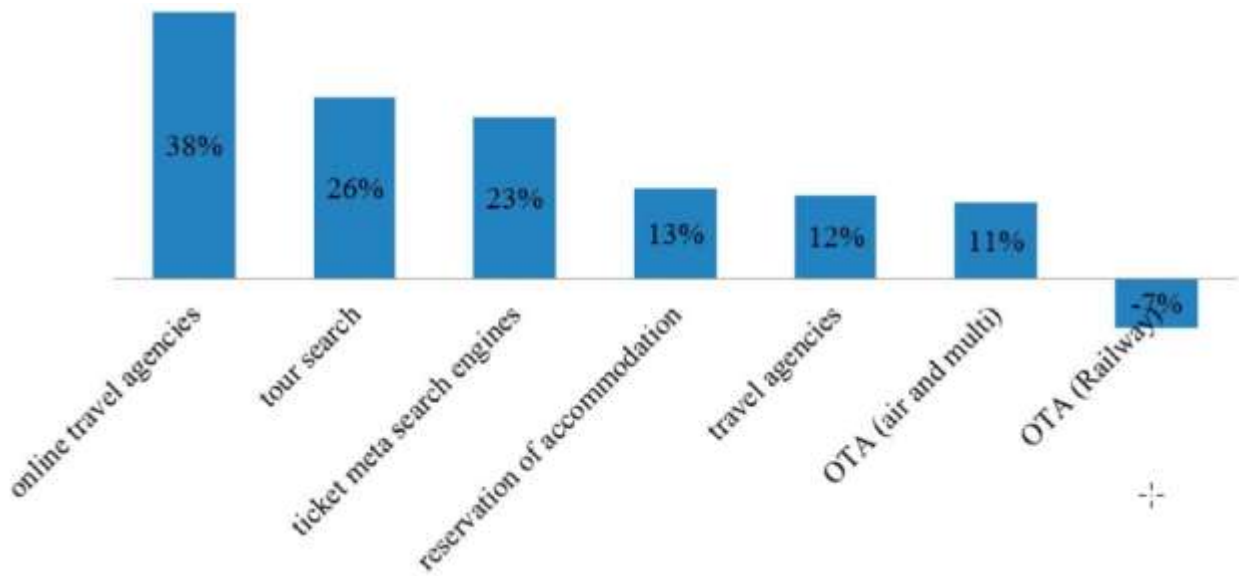


Figure 1.1 The growth in the total number of visitors in August-November 2019 compared to the same period in 2018, % (top 50 sites, excluding carriers). Adapted from Klimova and Glumova (2020:17)

According to the bar chart, it is clear that online travel agencies who sell tours and tourist packages become leaders in visits with 38% of an overall sample. They are followed by individual online travel search and a number of travelers who purchase their tickets through meta search engines, which comprise 26% and 23% respectively. At the end of the preference line is OTA (online travel agencies) which demonstrate 11% of visits for air and other transport and a negative number for railway ticketing with -7% of visits.

1.2. Obstacles and Challenges in Hospitality Industry

As mentioned before there is a global trend to personalization and customization of services in hospitality industry. Businesses are facing high levels of demands and needs from their customers. In luxury segment consumers seek a deeper level of exclusiveness along with highest standards. Rising competition in the hospitality industry becomes another challenge many players in this business have to deal with. Due to its high profitability, tourism attracts attention and interest with investors. Many of them are coming from non-relevant sectors and make the hospitality sector crowded which leads to a number of obstacles. The competition becomes more intensive caused by a larger number of hotels, higher mobility of customers and the development of online technologies. Studying the luxury segment, Mairinger (2018: 5) comes to a conclusion that this segment of hotel industry experiences an evolutionary

transformation. Due to fast technological changes, which impact every aspect of life and business, hotel professionals are at the front of the necessity to continue providing top level services to a constantly changing customer in a rapidly changing environment (Tutek et al., 2018: 3).

In 2020 and later COVID-19 was mentioned as one of the most essential obstacles for the industry. Wide spread of the virus and announced pandemy had an enormous impact on tourism and hospitality and led to catastrophic consequences in several sectors of global economy. Countries started to experience a dramatic loss in revenue for tourism and many businesses in the sector faced bankruptcy. Official ban for traveling, both domestic and international, shelter-in-place instructions, social distance and multiple restrictions, wearing masks, PCR tests, etc. were the responses to the emerging global pandemy. Large numbers of people were affected by travel restrictions around the globe (Singh et al. 2021: 2). It then led to loss of jobs for people who were temporarily employed and whose work has a seasonal character which reflected in overall pessimism about rapid recovery of the whole industry (Forsythe et al., 2020: 13). Finally, the pandemy has ‘wreaked a havoc’ to the tourist and hospitality industry causing millions to lose their jobs, closing hotels and travel businesses, closing borders between countries and restricting tourism (Singh et al. 2021: 2).

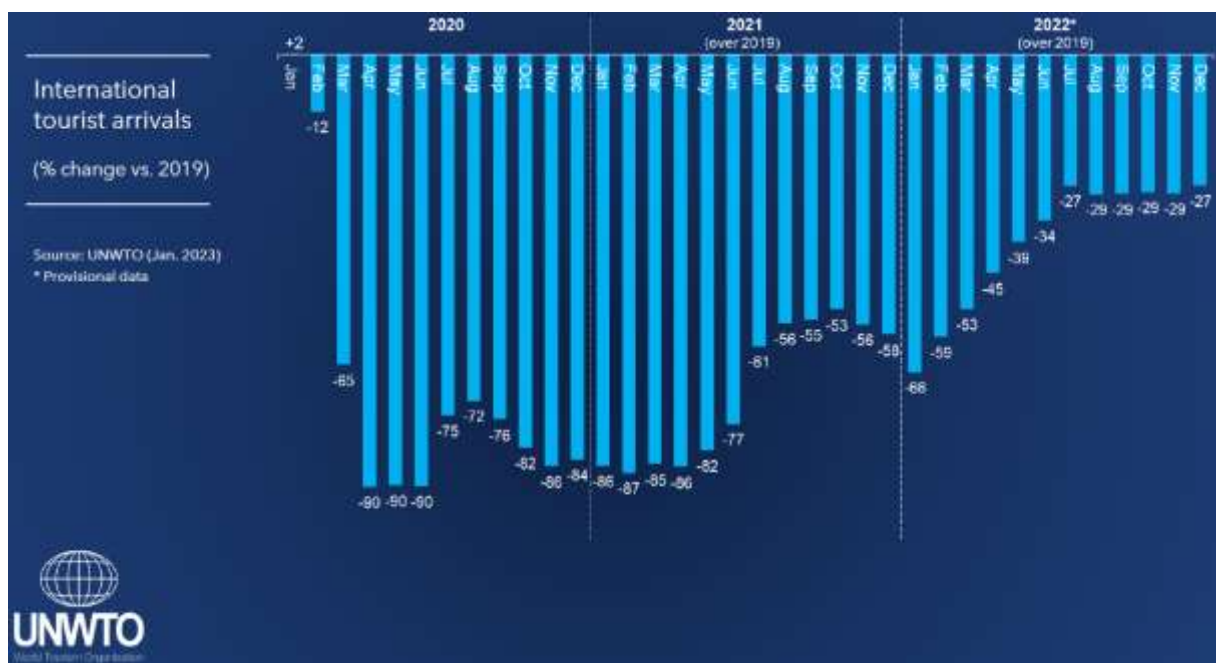


Figure 1.2 International tourist arrivals in 2020-2022. Adapted from UNWTO (2023: 4)

The following diagram demonstrates the increase in numbers of international tourist arrivals in post-pandemic years 2022-2022. Though all regions demonstrate

positive dynamics for recovering, the situation still needs to be improved to achieve pre-pandemic levels of tourist arrivals.

High level of development of information technologies and wide spread of digitalization lead to numerous problems. Moreover, implementing these technologies and putting them into practical usage are associated with challenges which accompany the process. Voronova et al. (2020: 8) allocate several major problems such as high expenses of technological developments, longer time of personnel preparation to use it and adaptation technologies to current business practice of companies. There is also an argument that in the hospitality industry it is also necessary to deal with management reluctance to put the innovation forward due to higher risks of failure. In addition to that, there is a relative complication of attracting investment into hotel industry. It is mainly connected with large amount of investment and longer period of return amid higher risks and unpredictable situation in global economy and the hospitality industry respectively (Voronova et al., 2020: 8). More examples of obstacles and challenges will be given in chapter 2.

1.3. Rising Competition as an Important Factor in Hospitality Industry

Naturally, hospitality environment is considered to be intensively competitive and the competition is being intensified with the development of technology and alternative solutions due to larger number of hotels as well as improved individual services (Tutek et al., 2018: 2). Such services like Booking.com and Airbnb have dramatically changed the environment. According to Richard (2017: 57), while Airbnb experiences 10% increase in one market, hotels' income goes down to 0.37% and this situation stimulates players in the industry to establish innovative solutions and adapt new forms of cooperation.

In the digital age the majority of business activity is being done online. As a result, this area becomes highly competitive for businesses who want to establish brand new technology. Based on the development of web-based activity online travel agencies become rivals to traditional agencies and their relationship with hotels change dramatically due to the higher significance of their position. According to Langford & Weissenberg (2017: 14), the number of online bookings through online travel agency channels exceeded offline bookings and the tendency to grow continues. Moreover, more and more investment is being attracted into the growing online technology so that online travel agencies find a possibility to offer travel planning options which are not easy to match by competitors (<https://www.phocuswright.com/Travel-Research/Research-Updates/2017/In-the-World-of-Travel-Apps-Suppliers-Are-Nowhere-to-be-Seen> Access date: 27.04.2023). In addition,

online travel agencies add rentals of accommodation, individual tours and leisure options, restaurant bookings, etc. to the list of their services. As Langford & Weissenberg (2017: 14) have stated, online travel agencies do not just invest into new technology but also incorporate a variety of booking and purchasing opportunities which can enlarge their chances to win in the competition by providing an individual customer experience. In order to become more competitive on the market over their counterparts, hotels have to establish their own applications with the idea of providing customized and personally-tailored services to their guests. Bonuses, a point system, campaigns and loyalty programs are the examples of what hotels now include into their list of incentives to stimulate customer loyalty and encourage direct contacts with guests. According to Kansakar et al. (2018: 1), such possibilities can be enabled by a wide employment of technological infrastructure using analytics and advanced communication. In contrast, online agencies with the help of innovative technologically-intensified marketing offer their customers access to hotels services. But here a segmentation comes into play as soon as online travel companies focus mainly on lower-price segment customers while hotels have an opportunity to deal with upper-middle and high payment segment stimulating their loyalty and maintaining a closer relationship with such guests. On the other hand, a case of ‘coopetition’ (a combination of ‘cooperation’ and ‘competition’) might take place between online travel agencies and hospitality enterprises (Langford & Weissenberg, 2017: 14).

1.4. Technologies used in Hospitality Industry

Hospitality industry nowadays faces a bunch of challenges and necessity to provide reliable, decent and attractive services to their customers. With the following purpose the recommendation to invest into technology and start exploiting it appropriately looks logical and modern. However, the main obstacle here is to identify the category and level of technology to use keeping in mind goals and clientele demands (Tutek et al., 2018: 5).

Voronova et al. (2020: 3) come up with the following classification of contemporary digital information technologies used in the hospitality sector in Figure 1.3.

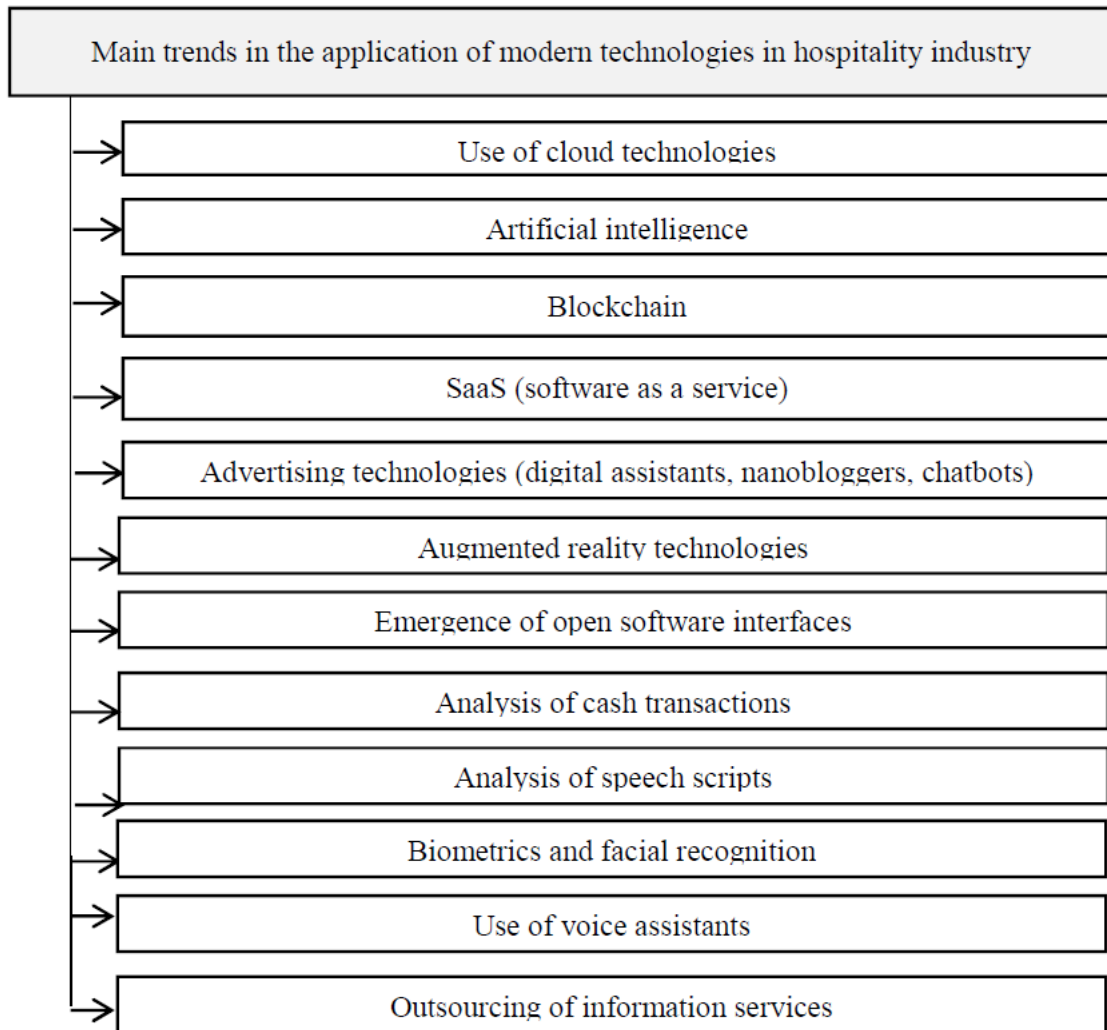


Figure 1.3 Major trends in introduction of modern technologies at the enterprises of hospitality industry.
Adapted from Voronova et al. (2020: 3)

1.4.1. Cloud technologies

Cloud technologies are defined as a special technological solution based on the idea of storing information in a virtual environment - 'cloud' (Gulmez et al., 2014: 98). Buyya et al. (2009: 599) argue that 'cloud computing' is based on 'a model where users access services based on their requirements without regard to where the services are hosted or how they are delivered'. According to Voronova et al. (2020: 3), a significant number of businesses make their choice in favor of cloud technologies instead of exploiting traditional servers. The major reason lies in a level of comfort and usability. Thus, traditional technologies have less powerful characteristics and contain several downsides such as regular maintenance, forming of specially-trained administration staff, poorer access to database because of network facility restrictions, slower speed of internet connection supplied by a local provider, and a high load to a server in case of multiple usage. However, a cloud-based technological solution brings a

lot more positivity in the usage and contains a certain number of benefits such as easier maintenance because of being done by a data center professionals. Another good point is modifying the power of computing which is integrated in the software and does not need a human to be implemented. Access to database can be unlimited in case of proper administration and smooth usage of rights such as login and password. And the final point is the security of access due to a high number of communication channels which enables continuous usage. More and more hospitality enterprises start exploiting cloud technology gaining certain benefits such as respond to all requests, improving operating efficiency, increasing employee productivity along with lowering capital expenditure on software and hardware and reducing IT complexity (Oracle Hospitality, 2022: 2).

1.4.2. Artificial intelligence

‘Artificial intelligence is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. Specific applications of AI include expert systems, natural language processing, and speech recognition and machine vision’ (<https://www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/definition/AI-Artificial-Intelligence> access date: 01.04.2023). The number of cases using this technology is enormous and is growing rapidly. This type of advanced technology allows a great variety of technical possibilities which have not been experienced before. ‘Smart’ homes and ‘smart’ hotel rooms are becoming more popular with the industry worldwide. In a ‘smart’ room artificial intelligence can analyze the demands and necessities of a guest and offer a solution such as adjusting temperature, lights, offering drinks, sightseeing and cultural programs, etc. Artificial intelligence (AI) can work independently without direct guidance and supervision from a human. In a hotel context this technology can analyze guests’ preferences, provide information and guidance using smartphones and delivering information directly to service users, analyzing and providing commands to staff in a hotel. In catering AI helps improve quality of services allowing fast and efficient service provision. AI technology allows kitchen staff prepare dishes before a courier arrives. According to Voronova et al. (2020: 4), artificial intelligence (AI) helps control the staff in a restaurant in terms of financial activity, billing, order cancellation and checking.

Due to advanced character of AI, this technology might collect and exploit customer data in order to design a more precise customer profile. Moreover, collected data is used to predict possible demands rapidly and in a more effective way (<https://hospitalitytech.com/three-ways-technology-will-transform-luxury-concierge->

2018 Access date: 27.04.2023). Interestingly, hotels are currently using ‘smart’ mirrors used as computer monitors and delivering various information concerning hotel stay such as weather forecast, stock market statistics, emails and messages and can effectively integrate guests’ smartphones (<https://www.hotelmanagement.net/tech/how-smart-mirrors-are-changing-way-guests-interact-hotel-rooms> Access date: 28.04.2023). There is also a possibility to use smart home assistant software such as Amazon Alexa or Google Home which enable constant connection and direct the management of chosen objects. So customers can ask for assistance and access services with the help of touchpoints doing that in a more effective way (<https://hospitalitytech.com/three-ways-technology-will-transform-luxury-concierge-2018> Access date: 27.04.2023).

One of the side examples of artificial intelligence is robotic technology. The European Commission comes up with the following definition of robotics as ‘a technology that encompasses the design, building, implementation, and operation of robots. Robotics includes applications designed to conduct a specific task or series of tasks for commercial purposes’ (<https://ati.ec.europa.eu/technologies/robotics> Access date: 02.04.2023). Robots are used more and more in all spheres of industry and service, medicine and even entertainment. Hospitality industry also starts exploiting robots in various ways as bartenders, room service delivery, housekeeping, receptionists, etc. Seitzman et al. (2017: 5) argue that robots now can use elevators with the help of WI-FI sensors. The following solution is based on a technological platform – a combination of various programming interfaces and a travel recommendation tool.

According to Bellini and Convert (2016: 20), the intellectual ability of this aggregator enables serving guests such as providing information, consulting and giving recommendations. Figure 1.4 presents the example of how robots, artificial intelligence (AI) and service automation technologies change guest service and guest expectations.

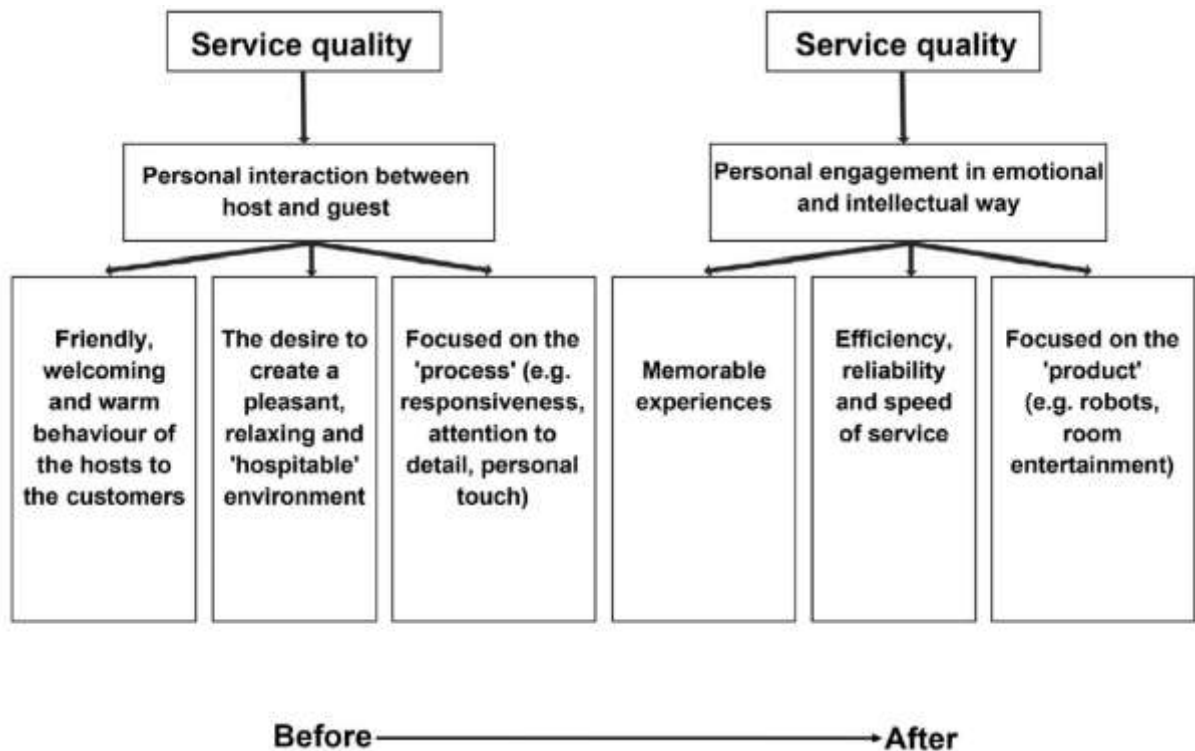


Figure 1.4 Robots and AI technologies change guest service. Adapted from Busulwa et al. (2020: 45)

The following diagram contains comparison before and after using technology in delivering service quality. In the times before broad usage of technology, the main focus was on personal interaction between a guest and a host including friendly and warm behavior toward a guest, creating ‘hospitable’ environment and focusing on the ‘process’. Since the introduction of technology in hospitality, the main focus shifted to crafting memorable experiences, efficiency, reliability and speed of service together with focusing on the ‘product’.

Apart from robots, artificial intelligence is widely used in mobile devices and gadgets. Using such devices enables utilizing self-service technology. Hotels establish kiosk system where guests can do check-in and check-out autonomously. It saves a lot of time so guests only enter their data and immediately afterwards they receive their card that enables them to use hotel services (Wei, Torres and Hua, 2017: 4). Due to constant developing character of this technology, wide usage of it is natural particularly in the hospitality industry. Moreover, mobile gadgets can be used as credit card or room keys with the help of face recording. There is a variety of benefits this technology brings. One of the most important advantages is security that can be reached with the help of individual mobile devices (<https://intevity.com/blog/5-benefits-of-mobile-device-management-for-hotels> Access date: 29.04.2023). Also memory ability of such devices is a useful tool that helps store personal

information and enable personalized services. A great variety of database services such as room facilities requests are also becoming real via wider usage of technology in the industry. In addition to that, smart hotel managers establish personalized hotel-apps.

A hotel application (or app) is defined as ‘a software application, which has been specifically designed to run on a mobile device – most commonly a smartphone or a tablet’. Hotel choose the services to be included into the app, whereas customers use the app and services it contains (<https://www.revfine.com/hotel-app> Access date: 27.04.2023). Mairinger (2018: 10) continues stating that the hotel app contains ‘features such as mobile check-in and check-out, mobile key, ordering room-service, loyalty programs and more can be integrated in the app and vary among the different providers’. It becomes a reality that one of the latest trends in the hospitality is the demand for personal service. Enabling that, hotels need to establish a channel with the help of which they could have a direct access to potential customers. Nowadays, hotels, especially in a luxury segment, are encouraging customer engagement with the help of platforms that enable personal experience via such direct access. Surprisingly or not, hospitality enterprises regard mobile gadgets as ‘more important items than a toothbrush’ (<https://www.egencia.com/en/expediaegencia-study-reveals-the-smartphone-as-the-most-indispensable-travel-companion> Access date: 27.04.2023). Obviously, a mobile gadget becomes one of the most significant tools as a personal channel that businesses use to contact their customers. ‘Many people have an emotional connection with their mobile devices and apps they’ve downloaded. Therefore, it makes sense that we can deepen our relationship with Marriott Rewards members by delivering greater recognition, and easy access to the loyalty programs’ features through our new mobile experience’, said Thom Kozik, vice president of Loyalty, Marriott International (<https://news.marriott.com/news/2017/02/07/marriott-reimagines-its-mobile-app-to-meet-the-needs-of-modern-world-travelers> Access date: 27.04.2023). It becomes a necessity to enable technically a channel of access and hotels are introducing their own mobile apps. Such apps, often called the ‘digital concierge’, enable two-way communication with customers, meet clients’ demands fast and effectively and also enable collecting data regardless of a customer’s location and physical presence. ‘Guests can use the app to chat directly with hotel staff before, during and after their stays for special requests that require personal attention, or choose from a drop-down menu of the most frequently requested services or amenities such as more towels or extra pillows’ (<https://news.marriott.com/news/2017/02/07/marriott-reimagines-its-mobile-app-to-meet-the-needs-of-modern-world-travelers> Access date: 27.04.2023).

Traditionally, the role of concierge is being treated as important whereas ‘digital concierge’ concept allows more possibilities for interaction between customers and hospitality service providers (Bellini and Convert, 2016: 21). Digitalization of concierge services secures a 24/7 access to virtual support enabling using services at the speed of a click via touching a gadget screen. According to Schyma (2017: 3), regular practice stats show that most of the issues are of a general character and can be handled in automatic format while only more complex ones require a personal human concierge attention. In this case, the concierge can focus on delivering a more personalized assistance to a customer, which meets the latest trend of personalization of tourist experience. Closer relationships with guests enable a stronger customer engagement and loyalty to the brand. Moreover, regardless of the phase of the trip the guest is on, the hotel app allows fast and effective online access to assistance enabling personalized service based on a need of a particular service user at the particular moment (<https://news.marriott.com/news/2017/02/07/marriott-reimagines-its-mobile-app-to-meet-the-needs-of-modern-world-travelers> Access date: 27.04.2023). Nowadays, the standard variety of options provided by apps include online check-ins and check-outs, room-service option, room key, customer loyalty programs, etc. Table 1.1 presents an overview of hotel apps and their features.

Table 1.1 Overview of hotel apps and their features. Adapted from Mairinger (2018: 21).

Main Features		Marriott Rewards	Hilton Honors	Conichi	SuitePad	Intellity
	Mobile check-in/check-out	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Mobile key	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *		✓ *
	In-app chat	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Special requests (like pillows, towels, shower gel)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Loyalty program w/ personal account	✓	✓		✓ ****	✓ ****
Special Features						
	Research and book	✓	✓			✓
	Room upgrade	✓	✓			✓
	Room selection from a digital floor plan		✓ *			
	Ordering room-service				✓	✓
	Reservation at the hotel-restaurant				✓	✓
	Booking activities on property (sports, spa-treatments, etc.)				✓	✓
	Integration of 3 rd -party services		✓		✓	✓
	Real-time messaging	✓ ***				✓
	Push-notification	✓ ***	[✓]		✓	✓
	Connected-room		✓ **		✓	✓
	In-app payment			✓		
	Reading/leaving a review/feedback				✓	✓

* Only in a few hotels available

** In testing phase, not available yet

*** Only available in the US and Canada, in Europe in testing phase (pilot program)

**** Does not offer a native loyalty program, only existing ones from hotels can be embedded in the app.

However, the extent at which digitalization is used has to be carefully analyzed because personal human contact plays a highly significant role to support experience with a variety of positive impressions that could hardly be raised through machine type of service delivery. It sounds natural that the biggest issue for hotel professionals is to find a healthy balance between technology and human type of relationship (Amadeus, 2016: 22). Digitalization should aim at providing additional features in a faster and available way enabling a ‘gaming approach’ to the new generation of guests focusing on benefits provided by technology (Bellini and Convert, 2016: 20).

1.4.3. Blockchain

According to the Synopsys Glossary (<https://www.synopsys.com/glossary/what-is-blockchain.htm> Access date: 03.04.2023) a blockchain is ‘a decentralized, distributed and public digital ledger that is used to record transactions across many computers so that the record cannot be altered retroactively without the alteration of all subsequent blocks and the consensus of the network’. Blockchain becomes an innovative technology that is supposed to revolutionize different spheres of human activity. Nowadays the system is widely used in financial sphere taking control over transactions and flow of funds, real-estate, and energy consumption, to name a few. Hospitality, as the industry that integrates a variety of different spheres, is also among the active users of the innovative system. Up to now, blockchain technology brings a bunch of advantages enabling faster processing and security of operations. In hospitality the technology minimizes the leakage of important and private data and, on the other hand, protects businesses from fraud and unsolicited invasion into the database. Based on a decentralized principle of organization, the system now brings certain benefits of integrating big data together with high level of security and wider usage of artificial intelligence within the industry. Voronova et al. (2020: 4) argue that blockchain technology now enables integrating services such as real-estate operations, transport rentals, booking excursions and guiding services into the hospitality industry, assists in selecting attractions, bars, restaurants due to higher level of objectivity and a decentralized principle of organization, instant access to insurance services, and a big database for travellers with necessary and updated information. Technology also enables using ‘digital money’ and provides a precise and accurate identification of hotel guests which plays an important role for hoteliers (Voronova et al., 2020: 4).

1.4.4. SaaS (Software as a service)

According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology to the U.S. Department of Commerce ([https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/software as a service](https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/software%20as%20a%20service) Access date: 03.04.2023), SaaS (Software as a Service) is ‘the capability provided to the consumer to use the provider’s applications running on a cloud infrastructure’. Applications could be accessed with the help of customer interface (web browser) or program interface. The information and necessary data are stored in a cloud over which a customer does not have a managing control except personal settings. Traditional licenses for hospitality enterprises are purchased by a single payment not affecting the validity of the license. Such licenses are non-refundable, cannot be returned or sold to third parties. With SaaS licenses businesses receive a variety of benefits: licenses can be purchased on a monthly basis, which saves enterprises from necessity to invest a large sum at one time. In case of changing profile of the hospitality enterprises, the content of a license can be changed (Voronova et al., 2020: 4).

1.4.5. Advertising technologies (chatbots and nanobloggs)

Technopedia (<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/31293/ad-tech> Access date: 03.04.2023) states that the term ‘ad tech’ (advertising technology) broadly refers to different types of analytics and digital tools used in the context of advertising’ (<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/31293/ad-tech> Access date: 03.04.2023). There is an obvious trend to establish chatbots in order to start a direct communication with customers and solve various business issues by hospitality enterprises. Generally, the technology is used as a communication mean to answer customers’ questions as well as to provide technical support for product buyers, enable direct consultations via messengers and also conduct surveys and studies. Using blogs and bloggers as advertisers and information providers now become a widely established trend. Interestingly, hospitality companies start to focus on using nannobloggers (blogs with a number of subscribers smaller than 50 thousand). According to Voronova et al. (2020: 5), businesses in hospitality try to select a narrower target audience to achieve a higher and more accurate impact.

1.4.6. Augmented reality

According to Azuma et al. (2001: 35) augmented reality (AR) is ‘a technology that overlays virtual objects (augmented constituents) onto the real world’. Silva et al. (2003: 1) argue that AR ‘is a concept used for computer-generated 3D environments, which allow the user to cross the threshold and interact with synthetic environments’. Hospitality industry

becomes a sector that starts to employ the latest technology in order to maintain sustainable competitive advantage. Nowadays augmented reality becomes one of the promising technologies to be used by hospitality sector in order to attract more customers and enable a direct communication channel. As a part of a brand presentation augmented reality technology can facilitate forming a better and fuller ‘brand impression’ – to form a combination of physical and intangible aspects that a hospitality brand would like to portray.

Voronova et al. (2020: 5) argue that the technology helps a hospitality enterprise interact with guests before, during and after their stay. To use it, customers have to download a hotel app to be used as a direct communication mean for a hotel and potential guests. However, technology can be used in a bigger prospect than a direct channel of communication but also as a collecting tool of information to fulfil guest’s profile.

Technically, augmented reality technology maintains the effect of being present in a hotel facility demonstrating environment, surroundings, and local services. Moreover, the technology can also have a function of virtual concierge and assistant to help imitate real-life situations and facility usage within a hotel.

1.4.7. Emergence of open software interfaces

Application Programming Interface (API) becomes one of the most contemporary technological solutions employed by the hospitality industry. ‘An Application Programming Interface (API) can be defined as a set of rules or protocols for communication between two devices or computer programs’ (Yadav and Pachpore, 2022: 8). A hotel exploits this technology and uses it to facilitate integration between various systems. It allows communication between technological systems of different hotels in an automatic mode. Some of the enterprises adapt API to access deeper functionality enabling clients to use it in a more effective way.

1.4.8. Analysis of cash transactions

According to Investopedia (<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/cashtransaction.asp> Access date: 04.04.2023), ‘cash transaction is the immediate payment of cash for the purchase of an asset’. The following technology has a few goals to achieve among which are accounting system comparison and evaluation, company’s video archive analysis, evaluation of compliance to rules of behavior by company’s personnel and minimizing cases of rule violation. The technology is characterized by a higher level of confidence and automation in transaction operations, serving guests’ accounts, updating financial information, billing, etc.

All operations are indicated in customer's account; transactions are fast and transparent and automatically recorded by the system. All of these help improve accuracy and exclude unnecessary paperwork. The result of using the system is an advanced analysis with higher level of detailing on violations, including categorization of those, possible solutions and redesign of personnel training programs.

1.4.9. Analysis of speech scripts

'Speech analytics, also called interaction analytics, is technology that leverages artificial intelligence to understand, process, and analyze human speech. Contact centers use speech analytics to assess call recordings and transcripts from digital channels such as chat and text messages' (<https://www.nice.com/glossary/speech-analytics> Access date: 08.04.2023). A large group of hospitality enterprises use speech analytics technology to improve their services and maintain high standards to win the competition. The technology may mostly focus on recording voices and conversations and then use audio materials for further analysis on compliance with the rules, standards of behavior, the correct way of using technical equipment, and also identify the best sales practices, saving time for services, etc.

The technology works the following way: audio files are analyzed by a specially-designed program and audio signals are translated into the written text. Using search tools allows specialists to find the most significant information by finding key words (work out hypotheses) on a massive volume of audio material within just a few seconds. Based on such information, new technical frameworks can be designed and effective solutions can be offered. The technology can be an effective method for current procedures and a tool for optimizing self-service systems such as a personal account, cyberspace, etc. Moreover, the technology offers solution for multiple problems appeared in a hospitality environment and use it to reduce costs and increase revenue at the same time, saving time by work efficiency and maintaining customer satisfaction. Finally, all this will turn to achieving a higher level of customer loyalty and satisfaction, improving quality of services while reducing costs (Voronova et al., 2020: 6).

1.4.10. Biometrics and facial recognition

Previous technological solutions such as plastic cards, key rings and passwords appeared to be vulnerable and many cases of crime and privacy invasion were registered. Samatas and Papakostas (2022: 1) define biometrics as 'unique body characteristics used to identify people'. According to Jain et al. (2004: 8), 'the most commonly used biometric

methods are DNA, ear, facial, hand and finger veins, fingerprint, gait, hand geometry, iris, palmprint, retina, signature and voice'. Facial recognition is one of the methods widely used in a broad range of spheres (Jain et al., 2004: 9). Biometrics technology has substituted the previous solutions with a higher level of confidence and protection for users. Nowadays, the technology is also used for identification such as face scanning. For instance, face recognition can be used as a digital signature and face scanners can be installed at the checkout to prove the payment.

According to several forecasts, biometric tech market has a potential of growth in the hospitality sector over the next few years. Employer can use it as a control tool providing real-time information about tasks and usage of working time. According to Voronova et al. (2020: 6), using fingerprint recognition software can save a company up to 2.2 percent of their annual payroll. Some companies are using biometric time recording terminals which identify the usage of working time and then it helps to make necessary correction to the payment. Beside better accuracy, the biometric technology is characterized by a higher operation speed which finally effects the quality and effectiveness of services each hotel provides. Secure payments enabled by the biometric system are also among the most significant advantages the technology brings.

1.4.11. Voice assistants

Oxford dictionary (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/voice-assistant> Access date: 04.04.2023) defines a voice assistant as 'a computer program that can hold a conversation with somebody and complete particular tasks by responding to instructions or to information that it gathers from that person's digital device. This digital voice assistant will learn that you like to work out in the morning and what type of music you listen to'. Alexa for Hospitality, a brand new voice assistant presented by Amazon in 2018 for hospitality industry, is now being tested in Marriott hotels. Technically, special Echo smart speakers are placed in each hotel room. The following configuration allows a direct access to the basic information including services, available facilities and contact with concierge and reception. Moreover, the voice assistant system is used to adjust the room temperature, lights, music in the hotel room, TV and other most popular functions.

However, according to Voronova et al. (2020: 7), the usage of voice assistants raises concern on privacy of voice recordings. Although, Amazon declares that the technology is safe for customers and hotel staff do not have access to voice information as soon as the voice

recordings will be deleted after a guest leaves a hotel. On the contrary, according to Amazon, guests will benefit from their online services such as access to music and films when log in their personal Amazon accounts.

1.4.12. Outsourcing of information services

Technically, outsourcing means inviting and delegating functions to a third-party contractor in a situation when the company itself does not have sufficient resources to implement that. Cambridge Online Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/outsourcing> Access date: 05.04.2023) comes up with the definition of outsourcing as ‘the process of paying to have part of a company's work done by another company’. Acquiring an IT subcontractor nowadays becomes more and more popular and allows businesses to save time and lower expenses. In case of hospitality, companies sign temporary contracts on outsource basis transferring several functions to an outsourcer who specializes in a particular area. It can expand from executing a particular function, establishing a process or a system to regular maintenance or technical support provided on a contract basis.

The main idea of outsourcing is improving quality of services along with reducing costs. According to Voronova et al. (2020: 7), the major criteria for outsourcing is the lack of competitive advantage and a non-strategic position of a particular function for the enterprise. Naturally, the main advantages of this are interchangeable character of employee circulation which means continuity of services, higher qualification of employees over counterparts on the market, relevant expenses customers pay for the service and reduced costs due to reduction of income taxes.

1.5. Consumer Expectations and Demands in Hospitality Industry

Living in the digital era with the high level of development in informational technology and social means of sharing data nowadays customers are well-informed which then leads to a higher level of expectations from service providers (Richard, 2017: 60). Chris Elam, the Vice President of Central Reservations at Hyatt Hotels, argues that customers were given a basic agenda of interaction with personnel of the hotel on regular topics such as bookings, reservations, basic room services. However, the scene has dramatically changed since the rise of technology and information sharing and many hoteliers are now looking at developing touch points founded upon individual treatment (Amadeus, 2016: 22). As soon as the background changes, the major players also experience a dramatic modification such as

appearance of millenials, relatively young generation of customers who are used to meeting the demands immediately at a fair price and in a friendly way. They actively participate in social life, interchange information and opinions and use digital channels on a regular basis. To meet their expectations and current demands, hoteliers have to develop a new combination of services focused on individual approach and customization and being released online (Richard, 2017: 60).



CHAPTER TWO

DIGITALIZATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

2.1. Digitalization as a Social and Technical Phenomenon

Due to the multidimensional character of digitalization researchers come up with a variety of definitions. It mainly depends on the angle they are looking at this phenomenon from and, therefore, various characteristics of it they are identifying. Maxwell & McCain (1997: 147) state that digital technology divides information into small elements. By converting an analogue signal into discrete, digitalization manipulates information, visuals, texts, sounds and videos in a new way, which had never been done before. Hagberg et al. (2016: 2) focus attention on social character of the phenomenon saying that digitalization is one of the most important and valuable transformation of the contemporary society that has been continuing at present and effecting dramatically business and personal life. Researchers also mention conversion from analogue to digital in a broader meaning providing examples from the financial sector (cash payments are being substituted by electronic). They also highlight the 'new forms of value creation' such as transparency, availability, accessibility, to name a few.

In broad meaning, 'digitization essentially refers to the process of converting analog information into its digital form' (Kumar and Shekhar, 2020: 93). Digital means can help use and manage information with higher efficiency and handle better operations (Kumar and Shekhar, 2020: 93). Lenka et al. (2017: 93) refer to the industrial management literature that defines digitalization as a phenomenon of intelligent machines connected to one another, which are using digital technologies and information in a digital format as a source of energy. Machekhina (2017: 2) states that digitalization is defined as a transformation of various types of information (written, audio, video and other types) into the digital format. Similar attitude we can find with some other researchers such as Parviainen et al. (2017: 64) who describe digitalization as a digitizing process – transformation of analogue type of information into the digital. Valenduc and Vendramin (2017: 126) come to a conclusion that digitalization is not 'irruption of a new revolution but the pervasive synergy of digital innovations' used in economy and social life. Table 2.1 presents a variety of 'digitalization' definitions.

Table 2.1 Definitions of ‘digitalization’. Adapted from Reis et al. (2020: 447-448)

Author(s)	Definition(s)
Maxwell and McCain [33]	Digital technology takes information and breaks it down into its smallest components. By transforming an analogue signal into discrete pieces, digitalization makes it possible to manipulate information, text, graphics, software code, audio, and video in ways never before thought of, thus its informing, transforming capabilities
Hagberg et al. [26]	Digitalization is one of the most significant on-going transformation of contemporary society and encompasses many elements of business and everyday life. Digitalization refers both to a transformation from “analogue” to “digital” (e.g. a shift from cash to electronic payments) and to the facilitation of new forms of value creation (e.g. Accessibility, availability, and transparency) (citing Amit and Zott [34])
Clerck [28]	Digitalization is defined as the use of digital technologies and of data in order to create revenue, improve business, replace/transform business processes and create an environment for digital business, whereby digital information is at the core
Lenka et al. [20]	The industrial management literature defines the digitalization as the phenomenon of intelligent connected machines that information and digital technologies power (citing Lerch and Gotsch [35] and Parida et al. [36])
Machekhina [37]	Digitalization means transformation of all information types (text, sound, visuals, video and other data from various sources) into the digital language
Parviainen et al. [2]	The action or process of digitizing; the conversion of analogue data (esp. in later use images, video, and text) into digital form
Thorseng and Griot [38]	The transformation of existing socio-technical structures that were previously mediated by non-digital artefacts or relationships into ones that are mediated by digitized artefacts and relationships with newly embedded digital capabilities (citing Yoo et al. [39])
Valenduc and Vendramin [40]	The term “digitalisation” is not the irruption of a new revolution, but the pervasive synergy of digital innovations in the whole economy and society (citing Perez [41])
Crittenden et al. [23]	Digitalization creates new forms of interaction between companies and customers through channels (citing Hansen et al. [42])
Devereux and Vella [43]	Digitalization is the process of spreading of a general purpose technology. The last similar phenomenon was electrification. Digitalization of products and services shortens distances between people and things. It increases mobility. It makes network effects decisive. It allows the use of specific data to such an extent that it permits the satisfaction of individual customer needs – be it consumers or businesses. It opens up ample opportunities for innovation, investment, and the creation of new businesses and jobs. Going forward it will be one of the main drivers of sustainable growth (citing Gaspar et al. [44])

Author(s)	Definition(s)
Eling and Lehmann [27]	The integration of the analogue and digital worlds with new technologies that enhance customer interactions, data availability and business process
Gobble [22]	Digitalization refers to the use of digital technology, and probably digitized information, to create and harvest value in new ways
Morley et al. [45]	Digitalization is the growing application of ICT across the economy “encompassing a range of digital technologies, concepts and trends such as artificial intelligence, the “Internet of Things” (IoT) and the Fourth Industrial Revolution” (citing IEA [46])
Ringenson et al. [32]	Digitalization is about social life’s restructuring around digital communication and media infrastructures (citing [31])
Gebre-Mariam and Bygstad [47]	Digitalization refers to the development and implementation of ICT systems and concomitant organizational change, it involves the transformation of socio-technical structures formerly mediated by non-digital artefacts into ones mediated by digitized artefacts (citing Yoo et al. [48])
Srai and Lorentz [30]	Digitalization is defined as the way many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures. In simple terms, digitalization may be defined as the use of digital technologies

Overall, almost all researchers admit that digitalization has a global character and its role is gradually emerging due to a broader usage of technology for every aspect of social life, economy, and political activity and interrelations. Scientists agree on its innovative character and recognize its status as a global, multidimensional phenomenon. A larger role of technology is being emphasized as catalyst of the digitalization, also its source and driving force. In addition, we can admit that digitalization became a planet-wide phenomenon due to a higher level of a demand from the society that is seeking for faster, easier and cheaper solution. Digital technology has been able to offer a solution of such kind and, therefore, expanded its influence on each aspect of life.

Since the start of the phenomenon, researchers were trying to evaluate the impact that is made by it upon every sphere of social life. There are certain advantages for the economy that digitalization creates such as innovation opportunities for each industry. In various aspects of our life including academic sphere 'a full reinvention of goods, services and experiences' is offered. A lot of businesses have introduced the process of digital transformation of a company into a 'digital enterprise' using automatization of their business functions and processes (<https://www.idginsiderpro.com/article/3305780/how-digital-transformation-is-shaping-industries.html> Access date: 12.04.2023).

According to Goasduff (2023), the CIO Agenda Industry Insights report says that digitalization in business is listed as one of the top priorities for the industry. The survey has covered 98 countries and 15 major industries and CIO respondents of 11 admitted digitalization as the supreme business target for the year of 2018 (Goasduff, 2023).

Due to technological innovation and higher involvement of information technologies into our life, the impact produced on economy stipulates for introducing the notion 'digital economy'. In the digital economy innovations in technology enable transition to digital ways of organizing processes, managing them, facilitating and working (Ruel and Njoku, 2020: 3). Colbert et al. (2016: 737) broaden the impact of digital technologies upon a variety of spheres of human life, including economy and labor in a global scale. With the vast establishment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) implications have been spread for the 'nature, structure and conditions of work', and as a result, changed Human Resource Management practices in dealing with talents. Following the topic of Artificial Intelligence, Bringsjord and Govindarajulu (2023) attract attention to using intelligent machines with the idea to provide design facilities for work. AI devices are becoming able to 'react, learn and train as humans' in order to use human intelligence and execute tasks only humans could have taken through their ability to analyze a great amount of data in real-time and enable higher performance comparatively to human efforts (Bringsjord and Govindarajulu, 2023).

Digitalization became one of the most influential developments that has invaded each sphere of human life. Businesses and a customer-brand relationship were impacted by a new paradigm of digital solutions to redesign the nature of this relationship. Berthon et al. (2012: 269) describe a 180-degree shift in the manner of how customers use information technologies for the period from 2002 to 2010. O'Reilly (2007: 30) states that the development and wide usage of social networks (Web 2.0) become a driver for such a shift, helping passive users become active, supplying a variety of interactive digital solutions which then lead to customer engagement. As soon as social media networks become a reality, hospitality professionals need to keep up with the latest changes in using technology and adapt it to brand-related practices. Social media channels such as online networks and communities, photo and video sharing platforms, blogs and forums, wikis and online review websites appeared in the recent time. As Hanna et al. (2011: 2) mention, such channels grow in popularity and importance in the large range of platforms covering all social media dimensions and including conventional channels such as mass media.

Kim et al. (2016: 2) examined reviews from TripAdvisor hotel users in New York to find out the level of satisfaction with visitors. Surprisingly, "staff and their attitude" was

proven to be the most influential factor. Furthermore, King and Lee (2016) studied the role of social media as stimulator of internal communication among employees in a hospitality enterprise. Ladkin and Buhalis (2016: 327) examined the role of social media as a source of recruitment for employers and prospective employees in the hospitality industry. Edwards et al. (2017: 1) would evaluate social media as a mediator of travel data sharing and delivering information about the trip with community members and travelers.

In the course of online digitalization special attention is attracted to corporate websites, which still play a significant role in affecting customers, who are seeking interactive relationship, receiving their feedback and stimulating their online activity, and, therefore, getting advantages from IT technologies within the Web 2.0 (Berthon et al., 2012: 261). According to Hoehle et al. (2015: 1), who examined digital channels of interaction within customer-brand relationship paradigm, such tools as smart phones and online apps (applications) are now taking the dominant position in the rankings. Figure 2.1 demonstrates the framework of the main new social media originated from Web 2.0.



Figure 2.1 New social media emerged from Web 2.0. Adapted from Moro and Rita (2018: 348)

According to the framework in Figure 2.1, traditional websites along with online channels evolving with the Web 2.0 are the beneficiaries of the Web 2.0 technology. Websites that contain other types of user-generated content, such as wikis and blogs, evolved afterwards, and appeared to be the most representative. Websites with technical possibility of sharing opinions and contents, such as online reviews and forums and also cyber communities, which develop the function of facilitating social relationships, become more and

more popular. In the recent time researchers mark a transition to social networks, which are becoming probably the most representative types of social media. There are also other types of social media where users can share images (e.g. Instagram) or videos (e.g. YouTube) and which can be described as websites for sharing content. Viral posts and pieces of information in the form of e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) along with E-marketing (electronic marketing) tools delivered via mobile devices and apps (applications) take a medium position between different categories of online channels enabling wide spread of information at the speed of a click.

2.2. Traditional versus Digital Marketing

American Marketing Association (<https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing-what-is-marketing/> Access date: 21.04.2023) gives the following definition of marketing (traditional marketing): ‘Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large’. According to Kotler and Keller (2016: 27), marketing is how to ‘identify and meet human needs and social needs’. One of the simplest definitions of marketing is "meeting needs profitably", mainly focused on how to turn a need into a profitable business opportunity (Kotler & Keller, 2016: 27). With the development of global economy customers came up with the demand to ‘question’ a product before buying it (Durmaz and Efendioglu, 2016: 35). This is how marketing as a business practice appeared. Gradually, with the establishment of ‘brand’ concept and ‘advertising’, marketing became a regular and necessary business activity. Companies came to a conclusion that to gain competitive advantage and profitability they need to put a customer into the central position trying to satisfy their needs and demands. With establishing marketing companies started to focus on customer satisfaction. To set up marketing activity businesses used a variety of channels they had access to: radio, newspapers and magazines, television, billboards, etc. The abovementioned (traditional) channels are still used, however, with the development of digital technology and electronic means of communication, more and more companies started to adopt digitalization and include it into their marketing practices.

At the end of the 20th – start of the 21st century brand new technologies appeared on the market and started dominating in the core spheres of traditional marketing. Companies started to use advanced technologies for interacting with their partners and competitors which was later called ‘business to business’ (B2B). To win the competition, companies began to actively employ technologies in electronic trade and digital marketing. With the help of that,

businesses realized that they have to establish a two-way connection between companies and customers (Durmaz and Efendioglu, 2016: 36). Therefore, both sides tend to understand that digital marketing is very different from traditional. Unlike traditional marketing with its idea to change customers' perception of a product or service, digital marketing aims at meeting customers' demands at the highest speed and being guided by customers at the same time (Durmaz and Efendioglu, 2016: 36). Digital marketing is a 'broad term that refers to various and different promotional techniques deployed to reach customers via digital technologies. Digital marketing is embodied by an extensive selection of service, product and brand marketing tactics, which mainly use the Internet as a core promotional medium, in addition to mobile and traditional TV and radio. Digital marketing is also known as Internet marketing, but their actual processes differ, as digital marketing is considered more targeted, measurable and interactive' (<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/27110/digital-marketing> Access date: 08.04.2023).

With the help of digital technologies customers can easily access products and services, collect information and make a decision, exchange their ideas of a product and spread information of a product widely which positively affects the purchasing process. Traditional shopping is now being substituted by online which speeds up the process and eliminates unnecessary time spending. The main objective of online marketing is ultimately monetizing resources to make profit. Nowadays, all major business activities such as pricing, promotion and distribution are also transferred online. Advantages that are brought by online marketing are multiple.

At the moment there are various ways how digital marketing is being done. The most common ways include using social media, search engines, viral applications to name a few. For most businesses digital marketing becomes a common practice which substitutes traditional marketing activity. In the hospitality context traditional marketing is being rapidly substituted but digital. For hospitality enterprises this opens large opportunities to connect directly to their customers, influence their decisions, inform and increase their brand awareness. Social media platforms are now the places which are broadly used by hotels and travel agents with the idea to attract more potential visitors.

2.3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Digitalization

Global phenomena such as digitalization always contain pros and contras and cannot be measured only in a single paradigm. Obviously, the process of digitalization has an enormous impact on almost all spheres of human life (Hansen and Salskov-Iversen, 2005: 34).

Digitalization becomes the ‘most significant on-going transformation’ of human society and influence almost all spheres of our life, such as social (Ringenson et al., 2018: 5), economic and organizational sphere (Gebre-Mariam and Bygstad, 2019: 1), with the idea to create value (Gobble, 2018: 56).

Hospitality industry was one of the first sectors to establish and actively use the new digital technology innovations such as computer reservation system (CRS) in the 1970s, global distribution system (GDS) in the 1980s and the Internet in the 1990s (Buhalis and Law, 2008: 3). Since the start, the technology has gone a long way to excel enabling faster and more convenient purchase of hospitality services at lower expenses. According to Mihajlovic (2012: 153), a few of the biggest advantages of adopting information computer technology (ICT) is a wide access to reliable information that helps customers find an easier way to a service provider, ability to share data and knowledge with large number of potential customers, increased quality together with reduced costs. For businesses, digitalization becomes a tool to increase revenues along with lowering operational costs, fast and effective marketing research and creating databases, and encouraging customer loyalty (Morrison et al., 1999: 100).

For individuals, the benefits are obvious and digital technology can multiply them. With the development of Hospitality Industry 4.0 mass tourism should be reduced and the trend to individual, personalized approach would continue to dominate putting a customer in the center of value chain (Ben Youssef and Zeqiri, 2020: 14). Moreover, digital platforms enable fast as a click information sharing which would bring benefits to either individuals or shareholders of hospitality enterprises (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2015: 386). Ben Youssef and Zeqiri (2020: 5) argue that consumers would benefit from digital environment as being incorporated into various activities with the idea to satisfy more extended, more sophisticated demands. Table 2.2 demonstrates the overview of technologies and their usage within the industry.

Table 2.2 Main pillars of hospitality industry 4.0. Adapted from Zeqiri et al. (2020: 59-60)

Authors	Pillar	Description of the technology	The technology in hospitality industry
(Lee et al., 2015)	CPS	CPS are defined as integrated and interconnected physical and virtual arrangements based on computation, communication, and control systems.	CPS consists of two aspects: first, interconnection of the physical and cyber worlds which enables access to the real-time data; second, smart data management, analytics and computational capability.
(Munir et al., 2017); (Kansakar et al., 2019)	IoT	IoT involves interconnectivity among physical devices and cyber worlds.	IoT enables interactions with tourists and collection of real time tourist data, thus creating personalized and localized services, and accurate evaluation of tourists' behaviors and preferences.
(van Krevelen and Poelman, 2010); (Kounavis et al., 2012)	AR	AR involves the combination of real and virtual objects in a real environment, synchronization of real and virtual objects, and interaction in 3D and real time.	AR provides tourists with more personalized services and several additional benefits. It enables tourists to share and exchange information and opinions with other tourists in large networks.
(Desai et al., 2014); (Wiltshier and Clarke, 2016).	VR	VR simulates reality. VR is "a computer simulated (3D) environment that gives the user the experience of being present in that environment".	VR provides people with opportunities for virtual travel with a low cost and contributes to sustainable tourism.

(Ben Youssef and Zeqiri, 2020); (Buhalis and Leung, 2018)	Big data	Big data analytics are related to recent technological developments, which cope with the data processing and analysis.	In the hospitality sector, big data include internal and external big data. Data can be classified based on their characteristics and type, and hospitality ecosystem actors can access and use these data to prepare strategic business plans and manage their operations in a dynamic way.
(Tung and Law, 2017); (Horváth and Szabó, 2019); (Ben Youssef and Zeqiri, 2020)	AI and robots	AI and robots are used in workplaces to maintain contact with people in a shared non-industrial environment and can replace humans in R&D activities.	AI and robots are used in the hospitality sector to create more personalized and unique experiences, for instance at traveller information centres in the airport.

Together with positive, wide usage of digital technologies could also bring negative results. Table 2.3 summarizes the future trends and challenges for the industry caused by the development of technologies within Industry 4.0. Murniati (2012: 237) argues that the changing business environment demands a rapid response to challenges arising and mainly caused by extended usage of technology. There is a great shortage and, therefore, a great demand for skillful, well-qualified and capable labor force who can deal with the latest technological innovations and can function in constantly changing environment. Because of higher competition and more demanding customers, hospitality professionals now have to demonstrate top level competencies and soft skills with the emphasis on developing human relations.

Personalization, creating an individual experience, becomes probably the most notable change in the industry. Together with value for money, customers put forward higher demands to hospitality enterprises and staff. Obviously, it brings challenges for industry professionals and necessity to differentiate the tourist product and adjust to changing environment. Companies are encouraged to provide individual tourist experience as soon as it is ‘exceptionally vivid and long lasting’ (Kim, 2010: 781). Nowadays the central position in the ‘company-customer relationship’ is occupied by a customer allowing them to have power and control over this relationship. Along with higher level of competition and cost pressures these become a sufficient challenge for industry players to redesign and reconfigure their

proposals. For managers it is also connected with increased level of responsibility and higher time spending.

Table 2.3 Future trends and challenges in hospitality caused by technologies within Industry 4.0.
Adapted from Murniati (2012: 238)

No	Future trends in tourism and hospitality industry
1.	Rapid change of information technology
2.	Increased competition and globalization
3.	More demanding customers
4.	Value for money sensitivity
5.	Increased demands for quality
6.	Lack of professional manpower
7.	Pressure from tour operators
8.	Increased responsibility for managers
9.	Cost pressures in hotel operation
10.	Increased demands for safety and security
11.	Increased sensitivity for environment responsibility

Digital technology allows companies to collect personal information easier and many enterprises now do not delete their customers' data but rather use it for maintaining relationship. It causes additional demands for responsibility in operating and storing personal data and protecting it from invasion or theft.

Sustainable hospitality requires using environmentally-friendly practices to minimize the negative outcome caused by human activity. According to statistics, tourism takes responsibility of 5% of the carbon emissions on the planet where transport, in particular, accounts for 75% of carbon emissions in the industry (Peeters and Dubois, 2010: 447). More than a half of that percentage has been caused by the air travel – 40 percent (Gossling, 2009: 1).

2.4. Digitalization in Hospitality Industry

Tourism and Hospitality also experience influence from digitalization (and Artificial Intelligence as one of its elements) and its effects on the nature of the whole industry. Overall global trend to digitalize each part of our life is being recognized by Team (2023), who focused on an emerging role of the digitalization process in modern life. Moreover, a demand for digital tools and resources becomes higher and the constant growth of the market becomes

a reality (Team, 2023). Yaldaie (2019: 1) admits that humankind now lives in a digital era that changes the nature of business-customer relationship and with the idea to attract more customers hospitality enterprises have to adopt and master new technologies. With the greater possibility to use digital booking platforms visitors receive a powerful tool to supply their own bookings at a less time and more convenience (Yaldaie, 2019: 1)

Team (2023) highlights the possibilities that digitalization can bring in order to provide assistance and a better quality service. Moreover, the chance to reach millions of customers with the help of digital tools becomes a great advantage for the industry today. Team (2023) argues that a well-designed website today becomes an effective platform where larger numbers of potential customers could be reached. Appropriate software such as a digital Content Management system is recommended for adoption and implementation (Team, 2023). A thoroughly-designed online platform brings a variety of benefits such as fast and efficient reservation system and an intensive communication together with a better management and lower expenses. Such tools are a perfect instrument for businesses to maximize their revenues and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (<https://www.onyxcentersource.com/blogs/hotels-online-platforms/> Access date: 28.04.2023).

Due to age and ability to master new technologies, younger generation can be an object of such technological innovation that will enable including this segment into the list of active visitors. According to Yaldaie (2019: 2), such technological improvements will enable reaching the variety of the 'new generation of technophile individuals' who are characterized by a limited budget for traveling. Personalization of the travel experience and digital service tools become the target of such improvements. Kansakar et al. (2018: 1) admit that digitalization can be an efficient solution for the current operational problems for businesses. Designing individual customer offers for every visitor may take efforts from guests and service providers. However, a digital platform that enables effective business-customer communication can potentially eliminate such issues and lead to a higher level of simplicity for the operations (Kansakar et al., 2018: 1).

Moreover, digitalization of services can contribute to fulfilling travelers' experience allowing visitors to personalize their preferences and demands, and, therefore, enable the 'smooth incorporation of technology' into their experience. Online ticketing and service booking through internet aggregators become quite popular along with personalized communication and interaction through social media (Yaldaie, 2019: 2). In addition, Kansakar et al. (2018: 1) recommend hotel brands to create their own applications in order to improve their services and reach visitors directly. Using incentives such as discount prices, points,

bonuses and coupons will encourage customers to broadly use the following applications and maintain a direct contact with service providers (Kansakar et al., 2018: 1).

Lai and Hung (2018: 39) have introduced the notion 'intelligent hotel'. 'IT revolution' has dramatically changed ('reshaped') the hospitality sector where IT became an inevitable trend 'Intelligence of the hotel' – a broader usage of IT solution for each aspect of hotel activity – can be a valuable solution to limitations and challenges arising in the sector. Information technologies can be established in order to enable operational control and general optimization (Lai and Hung, 2018: 39).

Tourist companies and organizations are now taking advantage of adopting the latest information technology solutions such as intranets to modify internal processes and extranets to establish relationship with partners, and the Internet in order to have a direct communication with customers and stakeholders. 'Use of ICTs allows for combining customer-relationship management and supply chain management into a single source that facilitates a variety of operations – product selection, ordering, fulfillment, tracking, payment and reporting, which are all performed with one easy-to-use tool' (Zlatanov and Popescu, 2019: 84). With the development of Web 2.0 a broad introduction of information technologies into tourism and hospitality becomes a global process with the vast 'informatization' of every aspect of the hospitality sector. Web 2.0 applications 'have led to the "informatization" of the entire tourism value chain and the development of the concept of Travel 2.0, that is, internet sites that allow tourists to publicly express their opinion about any travel-related content' (Zlatanov and Popescu, 2019: 85). These technological solutions now dominate and change dramatically the whole hospitality environment to enabling direct contact between guests and the industry. Lai and Hung (2018: 37) also admit that digitalization could make travelling and booking more affordable and convenient, enabling more differentiated pricing models and more universal services at the highest standard, giving businesses a chance for achieving sustainable competitive advantage on the market. They highlight a bigger role of digital platforms and a 'degree of hotel and tourism intelligence' and also information collected with the help of technological platforms (Lai and Hung, 2018: 37).

2.5. Development of Social Media in the World

Nowadays we witness the fact that wide employment of social media by brands enhances marketing capability in tourism and improves performance because a lot of tourists, both real and potential, perceive a strong reliability to social media and its dominance over

conventional for brand marketing, bearing in mind ease of use and higher functionality of social media platforms in contrast with conventional media (Kim et al., 2016: 30).

The number of relevant studies in the social media usage context is emerging to be used in tourist brand-related marketing and scholars suggest a wide usage of social media for tourism marketing activities. Meanwhile, recently published studies refer to a broad perspective, for example, social media as a marketing instrument (Hays et al., 2012) or concentrate on a particular aspect of social media platforms, for example, social media usage for the search of travel information (Kotoua and Ilkan, 2017) or as a tool in tourism marketing, for example, usage for destination marketing (Song and Kim, 2016).

2.6. Importance of Social Media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) suggest the following definition of social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. Social media is defined as ‘forms of electronic communication (such as Web sites) through which people create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, etc.’ (<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/social-media> Access date: 28.04.2023). Cambridge dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social-media> Access date: 28.04.2023) comes up with the definition of social media as ‘websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone’. Technologically, potential consumers receive access to social communication platforms in various ways from blogging to information sharing and networking. ‘User Generated Content’ concept changes dramatically the environment and status of people who are treated not just as consumers of the content, but those who are actively involved in generating, distributing and using the content and, as a result, treated as co-creators of value for brands (Habibi et al., 2014: 124).

According to Habibi et al. (2014: 123) ‘life in the internet’ is going to be a ‘new reality’. Fournier and Avery (2011: 194) name social media a “People’s Web”. The widespread character of it becomes influential so Lang (2010) argues that people spend more than thirty percent of their day time on social media. Unique character and widespread coverage of audience have made a revolutionary change in marketing and marketing activities (Hanna et al., 2011: 1) and consumer behavior starting from sharing information, continuing to purchase intention and finalizing with post-purchase experience (Mangold & Faulds, 2009: 358). Although the new phenomenon of social media has agreed to be influential and

dramatically increasing in popularity, a consensus and overall systematic understanding by practitioners on how to use it effectively is still underestimated (Habibi et al., 2014: 123).

Social media now becomes not only technological but also a social phenomenon with its unique characteristics. According to Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010: 61), the possibility to create and share (i.e. generate) the content is the most important feature of social media as well as building relationships between consumers and brands. In addition, a few other unique characteristics come to mind when describing social media in the context of online communities. One of such is the cost of creating such online communities which is relatively low and the outcome that is much larger than the traditional online activity (LaPointe, 2012: 286). A completely different paradigm of brand treatment was noticed by McAlexander and Schouten (1998: 13), who state that there comes a possibility to not own the brand but contribute to its value creation and social media gives these opportunities in full.

Social media with the help of online platforms establish the dialogue between customers and brands and, which is also important, with other customers (Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 358). Social media stimulates customer engagement and at the same time establish interaction between customers and customers with enterprises (Fortezza and Pencarelli, 2015: 564). Being engaged, customers and brands create a unique type of relationship which makes customers (products and service users) into brand advocates, a significant marketing tool that is used by companies in the promotion and market development (Zivkovic et al., 2014: 758).

Hospitality enterprises demonstrated a high level of incorporation into social media, adopting it to the needs of a brand and demands of customers. Starting with establishing social media accounts players in the tourism market now exploit social media marketing tools, create and maintain online communities, encourage visitors to co-create a strong brand awareness by posting, sharing and spreading information about the brand.

2.7. Social Media Tools

There is a variety of social media tools which have a different function and characterized by a set of features. According to Tatar and Erdogmus (2016: 252), the most significant tasks here are to precisely identify online behavior of a target audience and then to generate the appropriate content that will appeal to their needs and demands. Unlike the idea of using external online tools, the first instrument to be suggested is hotel's own website with a communication space such as blog, forum, FAQ section. Owned and controlled by hotels, these tools will take charge of creating positive online customer experience, contributing to

building a strong and well-reputable brand image and then value for brands. Companies tend to establish a unique online brand experience which is a combination of content, visual presentation, technical support, connection speed and comfort in navigation, distribution and outcome (de Chernatony et al., 2011: 298). Naturally, this experience consists of cognitive and affective aspects (Rose et al., 2011: 28). Functionality and usability form a bunch of cognitive elements (Flavian et al., 2006: 2), whereas satisfaction (enjoyment) and impressions (fun) make up an effective range of aspects (Bridges and Florsheim 2008: 314).

2.7.1. Twitter

Twitter is one of the most popular social media platforms that is preferred by enterprises globally for communication, dealing with customers' issues and generating positive impressions of a brand. Different 'social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are increasingly being used as tools for external stakeholder engagement. The increased outreach and richness offered by these platforms facilitates many-to-many interactions and are a powerful knowledge source' (Mount and Garcia Martinez, 2014: 124). Social networks such as Twitter effect management evaluation in a negative way but have to influence on new product development team collaboration (Marion et al., 2014: 1). However, Twitter is not only a communication and customer care tool but also a mean of broadcasting events and showcasing advertising campaigns.

2.7.2. Facebook

Facebook is another social media platform with enormous exposure which could enable creating online marketing campaigns and accessing the appropriate target audience in case of a proper analysis (Tatar and Erdogan, 2016: 252). According to Sullivan (2023: 13), Facebook is the largest social network with over a billion users. For hotels it gives a great chance to directly connect their potential guests and deliver its information through its virtual network (Sullivan, 2023: 13).

In the hospitality context Facebook hotel started to be 'real' for potential guests (Neti, 2011: 9). First, hotels use Facebook as a showcase platform to demonstrate their visual presentation of hotel facilities and services. Second, they encourage communication with clients and, therefore, maintain their customer loyalty and stimulate customer retention (Neti, 2011: 7). To achieve high level of brand loyalty and increase in sales, hospitality enterprises are recommended to exploit Facebook facilities and post textual, audio and visual information of high quality. Moreover, they have to encourage guests to come up with structured feedback

such as putting grades and writing reviews so that to use those for re-thinking and redesigning their social media practices.

Overall, hotels can reach their marketing strategy goals to attract and retain new customers by utilizing resources of Facebook in a skillful manner (Russell, 2010: 6).

2.7.3. YouTube

YouTube is a video social media platform and a hosting for videos not only for entertaining but also for generating electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and attract new clients by demonstrating videos to the defined target audience (Grieve et al. 2014: 2). YouTube is a global internet-based video channel that provides access to millions of videos and has an enormous number of views daily (Shipley, 2023). Interestingly, videos to be broadcasted on the platform can be produced by the hotel or by its guests (Yu, 2023). Hotels create and demonstrate corporate videos to attract more customers and spread information about their facilities and services out there (Lim, 2010: 16). Obviously, the content created by hotel guests is perceived as more reliable and trustworthy so it can then have a greater effect on potential guests to persuade them using the hotel services and book their reservation with the hotel (Tatar and Erdogmus, 2016: 252-253).

According to Lim (2010: 15-16), hotels can also use YouTube videos for keeping their guests informed and provide necessary instructions on using facilities within the hotel. Hotels also tend to motivate their guests to write reviews and comments for corporate videos to share their impressions and thoughts. Then, this information will be used as an attraction for potential guests to book the hotel. Therefore, the personal impression of the hotel is likely to be impacted more by experience than by its product (Lim, 2010: 29).

2.7.4. Instagram

Instagram is a photo and video sharing platform and a social media which was established in 2010. According to Instagram - Statistics & Facts, as of January 2023 Instagram unites over 2 billion users. India and the United States are the leading countries with most users: almost 330 million in India, and 143 million users located in the United States. Interestingly, Instagram is more popular with men than women, and people aged from 18 to 34 years old, who make up almost 60 percent of users (Dixon, 2023).

Because of its rising popularity, Instagram also becomes a business-related platform where brands can showcase their products and maintain contact with customers both current and potential. Encouraging followers and comments from people, companies rely on

establishing a mutually useful dialogue with users and other brands. This is how brands can occupy a leading position in customer-brand relationship. The major purpose of the social media is to lead generation (Tuten & Solomon, 2018: 45). Data collected while the interaction goes, can be analyzed and used for future strategy development and design of a more appropriate proposal, increasing brand awareness and popularity and development of business.

Picture marketing, demonstrating visual side of their products and services, is especially significant for sectors with a high visual presentation and hospitality is one of such. Beautiful nature and landscapes together with renewed facilities and interior of hotels make a great impact on guests and stipulate for the turn to visual demonstration through pictures and videos. Brands often use influencers and celebrities who help make the desirable impression of a brand. Famous brand ambassadors are used as an instrument for spreading word-of-mouth.

2.7.5. TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Airbnb, etc.

Instead of using social media individually, hotels may want to join the user-generated review portals because of their frequent citation that makes them a powerful tool to influence travelers with their purchase behavior (Patel, 2011: 4). Those websites such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Airbnb publish a user-generated content and enable free flow of information current without restriction to achieve objectivity and present the unfavorable information for hotels (Katsoni, 2014: 111). The following principle of organization makes such web portals another form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which has an influential power over customers and, therefore, it is highly recommended for hotels to carefully design an action plan to achieve favorable publicity (Patel 2011: 5).

TripAdvisor is considered to be the largest web portal of the following category (Miguéns et al., 2008: 2). It allows its users post ‘unfiltered’ comments and ‘honest’ reviews (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Tripadvisor> Access date: 12.02.2023). According to Sim (2023), in 2013 TripAdvisor reached the bar of 150 million reviews and tourism-based comments on a web portal. Every year more than 2 billion people regularly use TripAdvisor for planning their trips, booking their space in more than 3.7 million accommodations, restaurants and places of interest globally (Sim, 2023). With this, TripAdvisor proves to be one of the most convenient web portals for marketing hotel services and facilities and attract potential customers and service users (van Niekerk, 2014: 36).

Due to recent changes and rapid speed of digitalization, new players appear on the market. Damnjanović et al. (2020: 235) call the newcomers ‘new digital attackers’ claiming that they are changing the rules of the game and disrupt the traditional value chain in hospitality and tourism. There is a classification for newly appeared players who are divided into three groups and compared according to the level of change and share in value chain:

- Disruptors (Airbnb, HomeAway). According to the diagram, the following group is described as a high change level and highest value chain share. Airbnb occupies a leading position in providing peer-to-peer accommodation. As concluded by Boswijk (2017: 3), Airbnb’s primary value proposition for users comes from forming a combination of memorable experience and financial benefits.
- Innovators (Booking.com, Expedia) is another group of players on the tourism market that is characterized by a medium position in the change section and also medium share of value chain. They position themselves as online travel agents specializing in providing rental, booking opportunities and tools for hotel stay. According to Damnjanović et al. (2020: 235), brands ‘Booking’ and ‘Expedia’ ‘have almost replaced hotel brands’.
- Aggregators (TripAdvisor, SkyScanner, Kayak) are the websites specializing in metasearch. Their key characteristics are low level of change and low share in the value chain. The primary task for an aggregator is finding a variety of alternatives for accommodations, hotel stay and price offerings and accumulate (aggregate) that information on a single website. It provides a lot of benefits and comfort for travelers to use such web portals and find the most relevant information and offerings. Damnjanović et al. (2020: 235) state that users find lots of benefits in accessing the best option at the lowest price still being assured in the quality level.

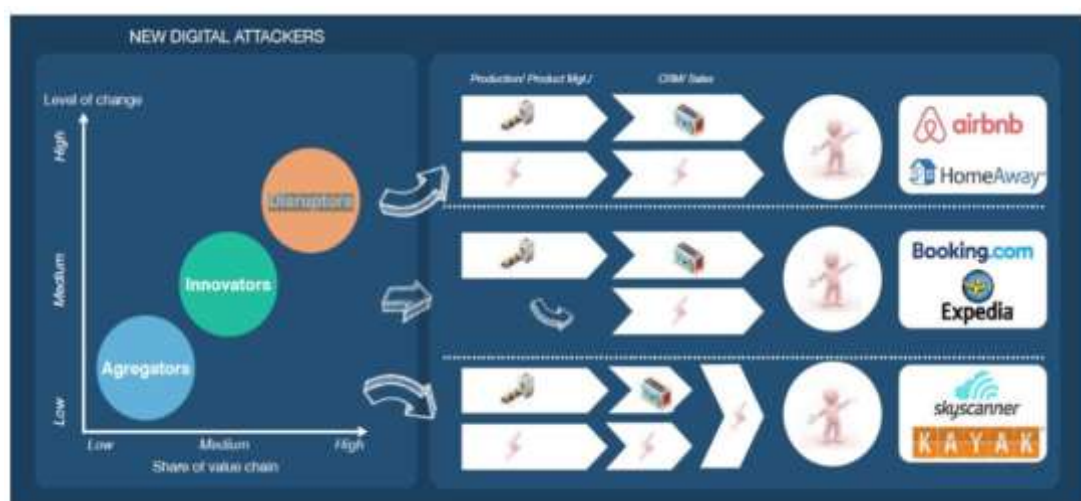


Figure 2.2 New ‘digital attackers’ in hospitality and tourism. Adapted from Damnjanović et al. (2020: 236).

2.7.6 Blogs/Microblogs

A 'blog' is defined as an internet page which contains individual's thoughts, beliefs, and discussions and is a part of a personal online journal with a hyperlink provided by writer (Kichatov & Mihajlovski, 2010: 7). Interestingly, business blog can be an effective tool to spread word-of-mouth with the information from a brand. Therefore, blogs like other social media tools provide opportunities to maintain relationship between enterprises and customers, reach their audience and, as a result, to stimulate customer loyalty (Castronovo & Huang, 2012: 123). Due to their mobility and flexibility, blogs are often updated faster and easier and make a comfortable platform for sharing ideas, comments, discussions, and any type of audio and visual information while reaching the right reader (Weinreich, 2011: 219).

A microblog 'is a type of blog in which users can post small pieces of digital content like pictures, video or audio on the Internet' (<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/4946/microblog> Access date: 29.04.2023). According to Weinreich (2011: 220), microblogging means providing concise updates and pieces of information via services such as Twitter designed to use a limited sized posts. Normally, large marketing campaigns start with short messages on Twitter (twits) and prepare the audience for a large portions of information through other social media portals.

Smart marketers are recommended to use carefully their online resources such as blogs/microblogs on the corporate websites to appropriately market their activity and get feedback from their customers (Colomo-Palacios et al., 2014: 792). Blogging and microblogging are popular with hospitality brands due to the relatively low cost and enormous outcome. A smart blogger with an 'army' of followers can spread positive (or negative) information and/or impression extremely widely at the speed of a click. Now hotels prefer to establish a tight contact with a blogger/microblogger to enable spreading information through the blog channel and maintain relationship with visitors.

2.8. Social Media Marketing

Since the rise of popularity of social media marketing, the phenomenon started to attract researchers' attention (Vinerean, 2017: 28). According to some of them, social media marketing is a foundation element in a search for business objectives because of its close connection with customer loyalty, purchase intention and rights of a client (Felix et al., 2016: 6). Another group of researchers define social media marketing as an instrument that maintains the link and relations with current and prospective customers (Choi et al., 2015: 4). Yadav and Rahman (2017: 3) come up with the definition of social media marketing as the

way how companies create online marketing products and services and maintain relationship between shareholders. Saura (2020: 92) focuses attention on value creation aspect as social media marketing (SMM) does for stakeholders by sharing information, purchase proposals, stimulating word-of-mouth (WOM) regarding products and services. Cormier (2023) defines social media marketing as a way how businesses utilize social media for marketing purposes. Jayasuriya and Azam (2017: 179) establish a similar definition of SMM as an activity that facilitates promotion of products and services via online platforms. Such activities include blogging, sharing text, audio and visual information, posting and commenting. According to Jayasuriya and Azam (2017: 179), such activities enable customer-brand relations, communication and interaction.

Social media marketing enables a variety of opportunities for customers and also for businesses (Vinerean, 2017: 30). Focusing on innovative character of the SMM, Nadaraja and Yazdanifard (2023: 3) state that it has already become a new trend and has given businesses a chance to establish a direct contact and communication with customers. In addition to traditional online ways of promotion such as newsletters and online advertising campaigns, SMM completes the variety of methods adding and modifying its methodological structure. Driving traffic to websites and web pages, social media marketing stimulates brand awareness, widespread reach and access to global customers (Flavin, 2023). As an instrument for that social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, etc. are utilized. The connection between a customer and a brand is the most significant advantage businesses could gain from it as it results in customers' perception of a brand. Naturally, marketers concern of the correct interpretation of their brand because the risks of misinterpretation are high and it could end up with "massive success" or a "total disaster" (Flavin, 2023).

Another significant aspect of the SMM is the direction of marketing activity to the target audience that, of course, increases the chances for a more effective and fruitful influence (Ta, 2019: 22). Brand-related information and recommendations come through trusted links and are shared online by reliable contacts within a social network. Due to the huge dimension of online databases, businesses could reach their target audience with more distinction and bigger chance to get the information delivered to the right audience (<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/5396/social-media-marketing-smm> Access date: 08.04.2023). With such wide spread of brand-related information, social media has established new opportunities of 'exponential dissemination' and reliability to mass communication and online marketing. For hospitality companies using social media

marketing becomes one of the primary tools in order to reach the right target audience with relatively low efforts. Promoting their brands on the digital platforms, hotels and tourism-related firms spread widely necessary information and keep control over its delivery. Posts, pictures, discussions in communities and forums became available and effective tools the industry started adopting quite intensively.

2.9. Managing Social Media

Providing unique opportunities social media can also hide potential risks for brands and, therefore, they need to be treated with a high level of accuracy. Momtaz et al. (2011: 4) suggest a three-step structure for companies to utilize effectively their social networks. First, a company is recommended to find an appropriate social media platform for communication and interaction with customers. Second step is to define opinion leaders among customers to use their communication in order to influence other customers. The third step is when opinion leaders spread information about the brand and its products/services as their network is large and various. It sounds logical that involving opinion leaders is beneficial for companies because such eWOM marketing can generate positive impressions of a brand by disseminating information about product/services, giving recommendations and tips, providing comments and support for potential consumers (Momtaz et al., 2011: 4).

Opinion leaders possess higher level of reliability and are able to influence other people's thoughts, preferences and even behavior and they reach a bigger groups of potential customers using blogs and social media platforms (Acar and Polonsky, 2007: 60). Such social communication and interaction platforms enable innovative ways of reaching potential customers and accessing the right target audience with their marketing message (Trusov et al., 2009: 98). Bashar et al. (2012: 98) suggest that brands should include social media into their marketing schemes as one of the most powerful tool. Moreover, it is recommended to reconsider marketing strategies with inclusion of social media activities through social media networks. Analyzing customers online preferences through their communication might help design a picture of a potential audience and receive feedback with opinion about company's products/services. The second element here for brands is to establish a social relationship with potential customers. Naturally, consumers are more responsive to marketing proposals if they are involved into relationship with brands and other customers (Moran and Gossieaux, 2010: 234). Therefore, a wise marketing strategy is supposed to stimulate customers' sharing information and contribution to the content in an interactive format. Encouraging guests to send feedback, post, vote, like and comment becomes now a regular practice for hospitality

brands. A variety of social media platforms enable now a direct contact for companies and customers becoming a place where enterprises can stimulate the desired interaction with a hospitality firm.

There are several ways to measure effectiveness of social media engagement in marketing activity of a brand. Trunfio and Rossi (2021: 267) have reviewed literature to summarize methods on measuring social media engagement. All methods have been divided into 4 macro-categories: quantitative metrics, normalized indexes, set of indexes, qualitative metrics (Trunfio and Rossi, 2021: 267). Quantitative approach was dominating and was used in 66% of studies (Trunfio and Rossi, 2021: 284). However, such metrics cannot be absolutely reliable because of the vulnerable character of human interactions. 'Despite their great diffusion among academics and practitioners, some scholars (7% of the studies) argue that quantitative metrics are not enough to appreciate the real value of customer engagement on social media, and a qualitative approach is more suitable' (Trunfio and Rossi, 2021: 284).

CHAPTER THREE

BRAND AND BRANDING

3.1 Definition of a Brand and Branding

Branding is known over the time as an activity 'to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another' (Keller, 2013: 30). The word brand finds its origin from the Old Norse 'brandr', which means "to burn". It is clear that in ancient times farmers were concerned with the necessity to mark their cattle in order to identify own. As soon as times have changed, the idea to identify own production and differentiate it from competitors is still in the center of branding activity (Keller, 2013: 30). According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) (<https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/> Access date: 21.04.2023), the term 'brand' means a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition".

Therefore, by creating a new product, image, design and name one can create a brand. There are certain elements to a brand, which are sometimes called brand identities, with the primary function in identifying and differentiating a brand. The major elements are brand characters, jingles, names, logos, URLs, symbols, spokespeople, slogans, packages, and signage. It is clear that forming a customer-based brand equity marketers need to select brand elements in order to stimulate brand awareness, encourage building a strong, recognizable and unique brand associations and, therefore, arise positive feelings and associations toward a brand (Keller, 2013: 142).

Ideally, consumers have to express certain feelings to a product with only one brand element in mind. Keller (2013: 142) distinguishes the following six criteria for brand elements. 'A brand has to be:

1. Memorable
2. Meaningful
3. Likable
4. Transferable
5. Adaptable
6. Protectable.'

Konecnik and Gartner (2007: 400) state that a brand can be seen as a 'legal instrument, logo, company, identity system, image, personality, relationship, and/or as adding value'. De Chernatony and McDonald (2011: 19) define a successful brand the following way: 'a

successful brand has a name, symbol or design (or some combination of these) that identifies the ‘product’ of an organisation as having a sustainable, competitive advantage; for example, Coca-Cola, IBM, Tesco. A successful brand invariably results in superior profit and market performance’ (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2011: 19).

One of the major characteristics of a brand (not simply a tangible product) is a relationship with a consumer – ‘a relationship that is personified either by the company’s name or by the brand name on the product itself. IBM, BMW and Shell are excellent examples of company brand names (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2011: 16-17). In the hospitality sector the brand names are Hilton, Marriott, Intercontinental, Accor, to name a few. Obviously, there is an interrelation between two brand concepts in modern science: brand identity and brand equity concept. The word ‘equity’ in the second concept means a combination of factors (or ‘dimensions’) which makes up for a brand’s value with a customer (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007: 403).

Although the literature on brand building is enormous, Back and Parks (2003: 423) define three types of interactions, as Figure 3.1 shows. According to this classification, the first stage is cognitive and includes strategies associated with perception of the brand by its consumers such as brand image, brand reputation, brand awareness and brand influence. In the second (affective) stage there are relationships that the brand is developing with its customers and it includes brand satisfaction, experiences with the brand, brand trust and brand loyalty. Finally, the third stage, named ‘conative’, is translated into sales forming direct business value. The stage is being described through a behavioral context and includes interaction, intention, purchase and commitment. According to Back and Parks (2003: 423), the stages of brand building have direct influence on a relationship with customer in the hospitality context. These three stages define types of brand relationships and affect directly and indirectly on brand strategies.

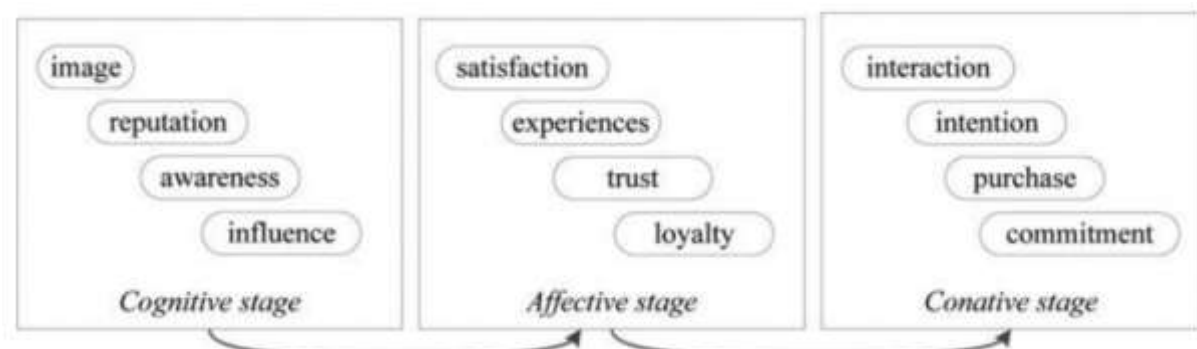


Figure 3.1 Stages of brand building. Adapted from Back and Parks (2003: 423)

3.2. Person Brands and Product Brands

In addition to brand elements mentioned before, brand equity could be achieved through related or secondary brand associations. Brands do not exist isolated – unlike that they are linked to other brands or entities which produce certain associations in consumers' minds. Brands can 'borrow' those associations from other brands and entities.

According to Keller (2013: 260), the variety of secondary brand associations looks as presented in the following diagram. The key element here is the linkage and interrelations between types of brands. As far as it is presented in the picture, various entities can be named and managed as brands such as products, things, places, etc. People can either represent (endorse) brands or become brands themselves.

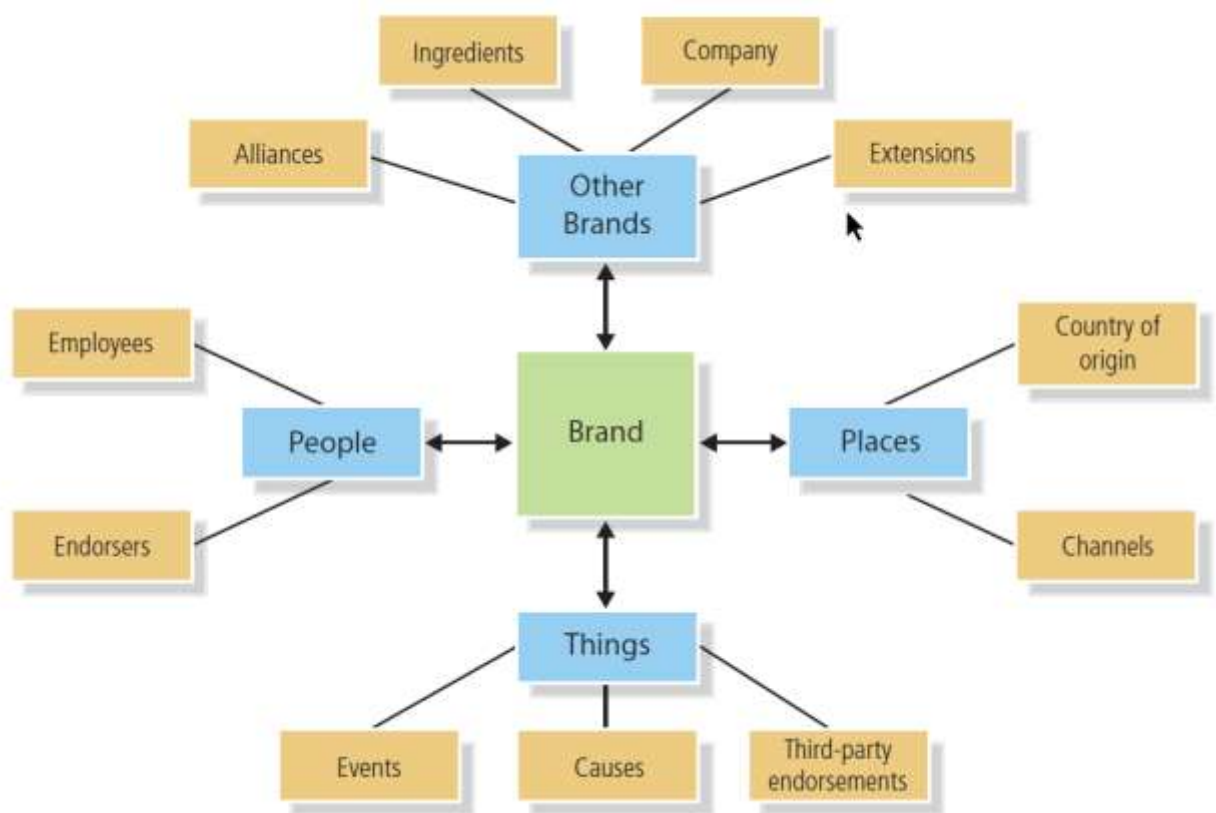


Figure 3.2 Secondary Sources of Brand Knowledge. Adapted from Keller (2013: 260)

The first and the quickest association that comes to consumers' mind while saying 'personal brand' is the celebrity endorsement of a particular product or service. Actors, singers, media stars, politicians, any type of public people represent a product or a brand. According to Keller (2013: 279), the major idea behind this activity is that a famous person can attract attention to the brand and form a particular perception of a product or brand through their image associations. Another aspect is that a celebrity has their own fan base

which could be valued as potential consumers to the product of brand. To sum up, a person brand is the celebrity with ‘high level of visibility and useful associations, judgments and feelings, credible in terms of expertise, trustworthiness, and likability or attractiveness, as well as having specific associations that carry potential product relevance’. Such celebrity can build a strong, ‘highly credible person brand’ (Keller, 2013: 279). With the high level of visibility such celebrity can generate a positive and attractive image which would potentially affect brand equity and form specific associations. Oprah Winfrey, a well-recognized TV host and star, makes one of the most successful and valuable person brands. According to Keller (2013: 279), Forbes magazine set an estimated net worth for this star at \$2.7 billion. Having a regular presence on national TV, Oprah Winfrey welcomes 12 million TV viewers in the US daily. Her shows are being aired in 144 countries so the effect of her endorsements grows dramatically as well as her audience. The list of celebrities is enormous and many famous people appreciate their interactions with brands and aim at setting contacts and deals whereas brands seek these contacts also. Based on such successful partnership, celebrities become brands themselves and be used to promote a certain product or product brands, which Keller defines as ‘an existing brand that is related to a specific product such as Samsung Galaxy S 4G’ or Sennheiser MK4, can be defined as a product brand (Keller, 2013: 263).

Celebrities who have established a person brand tend to promote or endorse not only products but hotels, resorts and countries as tourist destinations. For example, Zooey Deschanel promotes a hotel group in especially-designed marketing campaign (<https://skift.com/2023/04/03/choice-hotels-calls-on-zooey-deschanel-to-promote-direct-bookings-in-new-advertising-campaign/> Access date 09.04.2023).

3.3. Brand identity

Brand identity together with brand image became a critical element for a successful destination brand (Cai, 2002: 270). According to Keller (2013: 167) brand identity is a combination of multiple brand elements to brand image and brand awareness. Aaker (1991:70) states that gaining brand identity together with linking it to the product class are the two necessary tasks while achieving brand awareness. However, brand image is defined as ‘consumer perceptions of and preferences for a brand, measured by the various types of brand associations held in memory’ (Keller, 2013: 549). Two concepts look similar, however, the difference exists. Florek et al. (2006: 276) focus attention on the perspective used to view the notion. They offer two perspectives defining the view angle: sender’s and receiver’s. Thus, brand identity is created by the sender and brand image, naturally, is being maintained by the

receiver. It becomes clear to define marketers and brand specialists as ‘senders’ of the ‘impulse’ whereas consumers become ‘receivers’ of the ‘impulse which creates certain associations in their minds’ (Florek et al., 2006: 279).

It is necessary to mention that there is a two-way relationship between identity and image. Image plays an important role in creating brand image (Cai, 2002: 270), whereas brand image is a reflection of brand identity (Florek et al., 2006: 277). In the case of destination branding a destination image is being created in minds of guests based on brand identity (Qu et al., 2011: 467). Keeping this idea in mind, marketers stimulate and build brand identity based on the information and associations that guests have about a particular destination brand. Therefore, it is clear that this is vital to create a positive image which would be well-reputed and recognized. With this purpose they focus on highlighting strong, unique and valuable brand associations. As Qu et al. (2011: 467) mention for customers (or ‘receivers’) it means forming a specific range of associations based on positive perception of the brand image that suggests benefits of obtaining a product or service from a particular brand. Finally, this becomes a solid foundation for creating a variety of feelings and emotions toward a brand by forming brand unique image that will differentiate it from counterparts (Qu et al., 2011: 467).

3.4. Brand image and associations

Brand image is defined as ‘anything that is linked in memory to a brand’ (Aaker, 1991: 147). It also means customers' impressions of the brand and the reality they perceive (Celikkol, 2020: 2479). A positive image created for the brand enables customers to create awareness about the products and services offered on the market that has reached satisfaction. Brand image forms one of the elements that characterizes a brand focusing on its visual side. According to Aaker (1991: 145), ‘the features and benefits of the product or service, together with its package and distribution channel, are central to a brand image’. Cretu and Brodie (2007: 230) emphasize the influencing character of a brand image on customers’ attitude and its relations and impact with company’s reputation as ‘brand’s image has a more specific influence on the customers’ perceptions of product and service quality while the company’s reputation has a broader influence on perceptions of customer value and customer loyalty’. A unique image helps brands differentiate their product from rivals while maintaining customer satisfaction focusing on the critical role of a proper image (Hung, 2005: 243). Naturally, in hospitality a brand image is being concerned as one of the critical elements. Kandampully and Hu (2007: 436) name image as an ‘important factor’ for the hospitality industry which has a

dramatic effect on the guests' assessment of a destination. Moreover, Shankar et al. (2008: 567) state that nowadays one of the primary concerns for businesses is protecting their brands and invest into forming a strong well-reputable image. Therefore, hotels can benefit by having better chances for a broader market share and sustainable competitive advantage in the business environment which is characterized by a seasonal character of business activity and high competition.

Brand associations affect consumers' vision of the brand, its perception and, therefore, influence on intention to buy a product or service from that brand. Brand associations are the 'other informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers' (Keller, 2013: 72). According to Keller's (2013: 423) classification there are following categories of brand associations: common product attributes, benefits, or attitudes; people and relationships; programs and values; and corporate credibility. Attributes are the features which describe a brand. In other words, this is what a consumer thinks of a brand and what it must be according to their vision of a brand. It also includes the features which might be included in the purchasing package. Benefits are the personal value of the brand consumption that consumers associate with brands in the form of experiential, functional and symbolic attachments. In other words, this is what the brand can do for a customer in terms of usability. Finally, 'brand attitudes are customers' overall evaluations of the brand' and a foundation for customer behavior (purchasing intention) (Qu et al., 2011: 467).

In terms of destination, Gu and Ryan (2008: 642) argue that brand image is a significant resource. An image can be seen as a starting point of customer's (traveler's) expectations which might convert into decisions and determine them. One of the significant change in the recent time caused by technology development is loss of control over brand image. Having a closer look at the changes one can come to a conclusion that 'it seems that the times in which it was possible to pursue control over the brand image are long gone' (Munar, 2015: 26). The impossibility of control from a single hub either by a company or even society becomes a reality. This fact dramatically changes the situation making brand image and associations it causes a result of a 'huge unprecedented platform of communication and interconnection' (Munar, 2015: 26).

In the literature related to tourism branding, it is widely accepted that the image of a destination (brand) is affected by affective and cognitive evaluations (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001: 3). Cognitive evaluations mean information, knowledge and beliefs consumers have about the object. Unlike that, affective evaluations stand for feelings and emotions expressed

toward the object. It is important to mention that the majority of researches focused on cognitive evaluations, although some concentrated on both types trying to form overall and complex picture of a brand image (Qu et al., 2011: 467). Naturally, it is wise considering both aspects of brand image, cognitive and affective, to construct an effective branding model.

It is widely recognized that each aspect could have its own unique influence and contribution on brand image (Qu et al., 2011: 467). According to Keller (2013: 342) each evaluation has its impact on brand image but at a different level due to difference in perception by consumers in terms of performance.

3.5. Brand awareness

Brand awareness is defined as ‘the ability for a buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category’ (Aaker, 1991: 61). It has become a crucial component of the brand equity and plays a significant role in Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model (Saeed and Shafique, 2019: 1493). As a significant element in CBBE, large brand awareness has enormous impact on customer behavior and affects purchasing intention heavily (Sürücü et al., 2019: 115). San Martin et al. (2018: 15) come up with the definition of brand awareness as a “ticket to enter the market”. With this, it occupies a central position in the theory of customer behavior and management (Barreda et al., 2015: 1). Moreover, there is an emphasis on the vitality and importance of brand awareness for the hospitality industry (Martinez and Nishiyama, 2017: 9).

It has been proved by various researches that brand awareness has a lot of similarities with brand reputation. Hur et al. (2014: 1) performed a study of 867 South Korean customers and found correlation between brand reputation and brand equity. Foroudi (2019: 13) conducted a research of 379 hotel guests from the UK which proved positive relationship between brand awareness and brand reputation correspondently. According to Mishra (2019: 5), brand awareness and brand image form core elements of brand equity. Based on these arguments, Qalati et al. (2019: 1) conclude that brand awareness has a significant influence upon brand trust.

Aaker (1991: 61) argues that ‘brand awareness involves a continuum ranging from an uncertain feeling that the brand is recognized, to a belief that it is the only one in the product class’. At this step, a probable consumer has some general information about the existence of a brand but the connection and attitude to brand is at a low level. A customer might refer to the brand creating associations with a product because they begin to see the value when a customer starts to accumulate large amounts of information about the brand. Advertising,

mailing, press releases, WOM and traditional promotion stimulate higher level of awareness in multiple ways (Grover and Srinivasan, 1992: 87). Naturally, the extent of brand awareness reflects in higher possibility of making a purchasing decision. In the hospitality sphere there is a high necessity to make a wide exposure to their products in order to stimulate the formation of a large group of brand-loyal customers with high-level of product consumption possibility (Tepeci, 1999: 225). A great variety of places where products could be bought stimulate a repeat purchasing intention turning a single time consumer into a repeat customer with regular consumption history. The example of Holiday Inn is remarkable and demonstrates a dominating position of the brand in the business-travel market in the US.

3.6. Brand equity

Brand equity can be defined as a value added to a product or service which makes up a brand name (Hsu et al., 2012: 357). Overall, there is an agreement among researchers that brand equity is a valuable and significant resource for businesses. Aaker (1991: 35) has identified the dimensions of brand equity and Keller (2013: 73) found out its sources, created the concepts of brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand associations, perceived quality and brand image which found direct and indirect correlation with brand equity. The relationship between these elements and brand equity was widely evaluated through multiple researches (Boo et al., 2009: 224). According to Vazquez et al. (2002: 12) brand equity has a direct impact to company's continuous profitability and build a solid basis for sustainable competitive advantage. It has been argued that brand equity has an influence on subjective perception and value of a product or service by consumer (Baldauf et al., 2003: 220). Moreover, it increases the value and usability of a brand name (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995: 28). The continuous effect is then being spread into building customers' loyalty, brand choice and influences on decision-making process, i.e. purchasing intention (Jones et al., 2000: 267). Bailey and Ball (2006: 18) proved that careful attention to building strong brand equity enables customers form a variety of benefits, emotional and functional, and, therefore, enables creating a strong and positive perception of the brand which subsequently results in favorable customer behavior.

Aaker (1991: 27) comes up with the following definition of the brand equity as 'a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers'. Here he identifies five types of brand equity: brand associations, brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and other assets. Thus, brand associations are a variety of

impressions and details a consumer remembers about the brand while brand awareness makes up an ability of a potential customer to recognize a brand as a certain product category. Brand loyalty stands for the extent at which consumer is 'attached' to a brand and perceived quality is a subjective vision of a brand quality in terms of its functionality and in comparison with counterparts. Finally, other brand assets, also called proprietary due to their business character, include channel relationship, patents and trademarks. Brand loyalty was one of the central elements of the multi-item brand measurement system ('brand performance measure') created by de Chernatony et al. (2004: 18) to evaluate consumer-based brand equity. Oh (2000: 61) states that brand awareness is a 'core dimension' of brand equity. Brand awareness is consumers' ability to recognize and portray a clear image of a brand over time and in continuously changing situations (van Riel et al., 2005: 5). Konecnik and Gartner (2007: 403) suggest to use cognitive images to assess brand awareness of service-oriented products in hospitality context. Perceived quality, naturally, stands for opinions and judgments made by customer and evaluating the product in comparison with its counterparts (Netemeyer et al., 2004: 210). Another significant element to evaluate brand equity is brand associations. Aaker (1991: 233) defines brand associations as 'anything mentally linked to the brand'. Aaker (1991: 233) argues then that 'an association can affect the processing and recall of information, provide a point of differentiation, provide a reason to buy, create positive attitudes and feelings, and serve as the basis of extensions'. Keller (2013: 72) sees brand associations as 'the other informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers'.

There is an agreement in academia that brand equity is an essential notion in branding and highly interrelated with customer value (Lawer and Knox, 2006: 122). The role it plays in contemporary brand theory is enormous (Kay 2006: 757). It is clearly understandable because of the 'customer value-oriented' character of activity of modern brands (Zhou et al., 2009: 1064). Although, there is a limited number of studies investigating the connection and influence that brand equity has upon branding strategies of organizations (Vargo and Lusch, 2004: 14).

3.7. Brand strategies

According to American Marketing Association (<https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/> Access date: 21.04.2023) 'a brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers'. Branding includes analysis on how a brand is presented on the market, although branding strategy in the

hospitality context helps to find out which elements of the brand a business needs to use for its products. Whereas brand management involves the analysis and planning on how a brand is perceived on the market, a branding strategy is defined as identification of ‘which brand elements a company chooses to apply across its various products’ (Moro and Rita, 2018: 345). In this particular context digitalization affects dramatically brand elements. With the vast development of internet and new means of communication branding faces dramatic changes with customers who become empowered over managers (Christodoulides, 2009: 141).

In changing circumstances branding starts to change its role and gain more significance for the global hospitality industry (Forgacs, 2003: 2). Social media (Web 2.0) provides an instrument for customers to participate actively in branding activity and stimulating purchasing behavior. Though there is a variety of brand strategies, literature does not specify particular strategies which could be distinct (Moro and Rita, 2018: 345). Kam Fung So and King (2010: 605) examined the influence of branding strategies on brand equity and discovered that service experience, that customers have had, was the most affecting factor as a primary element that contributes to brand equity. Below the definitions of several brand strategies from the managerial point are presented.

With the idea to find agreement on interpretation of functions and impact among branding strategies, the explicit attention is given to definitions which circle particular characteristics in their notions. Thus, advertising is described as ‘a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action now or in the future’ (Richards and Curran, 2002: 74). Co-branding is defined as pairing two or more branded products of constituent brands to form a separate and unique product composite brand (Park et al., 1996: 453). Equity is often seen as “the marketing effects that accrue to a product with its brand name compared with those that would accrue if the same product did not have the brand name” (Ailawadi et al., 2003: 1). Innovation is defined as the “aims to convey either direct or indirect experiences to consumers through every interaction of innovative concepts” (Chien, 2013: 54).

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001: 84) describe performance as “evaluated through outcomes such as market share and relative price”. Positioning finds its notion as “occupying a distinct position, relative to competing brands, in the mind of the customer” and brand promotion is being characterized as “creating differences ... helping consumers organize their knowledge about products and services in a way that clarifies their decision making and, in the process, provides value to the firm” (Singh, 2013: 31). Finally, Merrilees and Miller (2008: 538) provide the following definition to rebranding as “the disjunction or change

between an initially formulated corporate brand and a new formulation”. Understanding definitions helps us identify the commonalities among strategies to treat them from the similar angles.

Obviously, the major focus of the branding strategy is building a successful brand, the process that has been extensively studied, with the emphasis on social media and its influence on the brand construction (Moro et al., 2016: 1). Therefore, there is a necessity to identify relevant drivers and channels (social media is one of those) in brand strategies.

3.8. Effects of Digitalization in Branding

Digitalization in branding started to play a much more significant role with the development and exposure of Web 2.0 – the social web – that benefits from widespread acceptance from visitors. The social web has dramatically changed the nature of the relationship between brands and tourists (Huerta-Alvarez et al., 2020: 7). Customers prefer easy access, low-cost and comfortability of communication platforms. The changes are so dramatic that cannot be ignored or disagreed. Nowadays traditional communication media stops dominating in the information sphere (Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 359). On the contrary, social media empowers consumers with the ability to create, post and deliver information, and, therefore, control it. In a business context, social web allows brands to obtain a quicker access to a larger number of potential consumers, and enabling a more active interaction with clientele through social media channels. As a result, there is a great importance of careful and efficient usage of tourist-generated and customer generated communication through the social media channels (Huerta-Alvarez et al., 2020: 1).

3.9. Effects of Social Media in Branding

Digitalization has invaded different spheres of life reconfiguring the basics and giving rise to a new paradigm of relationship between brands and their customers. The emerging significance of social media solutions have formed an instrument for mutual interaction (O'Reilly, 2007: 30). On the other hand, the spread of digital means of communication exceeded expectations and nowadays prevail over traditional forms. With the idea to accelerate customer engagement, brands keep up with the latest trends in adopting digital IT technologies in their strategic plans (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014: 337). Surprisingly, with the development of digital online communication solutions, brands are losing and somehow delegating some marketing functions to online communities. Losing control over the reachability of marketing initiatives, brands are being put at the mercy of online user

engagement and viral reach (Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 365). Loss of control creates then a marketers' fear toward information spread by users and exchanging through e-word-of-mouth (Kietzmann and Canhoto, 2013: 12).

Due to the nature of online activity, researchers focus attention on the shift from individual user to user communities. Davis et al. (2014: 477) evaluated the idea of social media communities for managing brands. They have identified five drivers that brand consumption demonstrates in social media: emotional, functional, self-oriented, relational and social. The study proposes that with demand of experiencing less problems, finding a better solution and services, customers contact brands via social media channels where they can find relevant information, assess the quality of the service before buying it and also access brand's promotional initiatives such as bonuses, giveaways, etc. Having a direct influence on a product design, quality and perception by other potential customers, online community members co-create brand equity and participate in the branding activity. Social interaction and building connections become drivers for a more expanded social brand consumption. According to Moro and Rita (2018: 348), consumption relations between brands and consumers are described as a co-creation to services and personalization of a customer-brand interaction.

Usage of social media in the branding context rises certain aspects such as specific motivation that customers have toward consumption activity. For branding professionals it becomes mandatory to have a presence and managing activity for the brand in social media. These days' strategies for a brand management need to be aligned with the social media activity (Fournier and Avery, 2011: 195). Adapting a brand strategy with the social media reality and identifying the latest trends in Web 2.0 development become vital for branding professionals and understanding of it should be widespread and clear. Laroché et al. (2013: 81) argue that 'social media could be a platform for brands to achieve the same desired outcome from their brand community activities; that is having more loyal customers'.

Social media usage and management become now a reality in the business sphere. Consumer-brand relationships are in the focus of attention and brands need to find an effective formula to facilitate this relationship. Social media plays here a dynamic role enabling large marketing potential that brands can exploit as an asset for managing their brands. Naylor et al. (2012: 105) mark that all brands in the Fortune 500 list already found it wise to start using social media in some form to enable connection and interaction with their clientele, and this becomes a reliable source of information about their brands. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 59) define certain categories of social media such as virtual social worlds,

collaborative projects, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, blogs and content communities.

Kietzmann et al. (2011: 243) have introduced building blocks of social media in the number of seven as follows: conversations, groups, identity, presence, relationships, reputation and sharing. Users are characterized depending on the extent to which they communicate to each other, which is 'conversations', participate in a community which is 'groups', and reveal themselves which is 'identity'. Furthermore, relating to each other makes up the relationships block and knowing their availability forms the presence whereas awareness of other users' social media position and content form the reputation block and receiving, distributing and exchanging content leads to sharing.

The notion 'community' has been researched for a long time in social sciences. Generally, the term is referred to any group of people without identification of the online or offline status. 'A brand community from a customer-experiential perspective is a fabric of relationships in which the customer is situated. Crucial relationships have typically included those between the customer and the brand, between the customer and the firm, between the customer and the product in use, and among fellow customers' (McAlexander et al., 2002: 38). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001: 412) provide a definition for a brand community as a 'specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand'. Brand communities play a significant role in forming a tight connection between brands and customers as 'in order to facilitate the creation of social and emotional ties, brand managers seek to create "brand communities" by proactively involving the targeted consumer' (Daldanise, 2020: 2). In this sense, virtual communities play a significant role as they form connection through common interests and behavior patterns (Bekin et al., 2007: 2).

Furthermore, McAlexander and Schouten (1998: 5) state that these relationships assist to create 'consumption subcultures' where members can have similar and authentic needs. Consumption is naturally associated with a brand and the core element here is human affiliation where shared feelings or preferences play a uniting role for its members. For such consumers a brand becomes a common point for their specific interrelationships (Davis et al., 2014: 478). Therefore, several researchers would focus on a 'psychical' connection between consumers in brand communities, which become a union helping its members meet their emotional and non-emotional demands (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002: 17). Such principle is used in forming brand-related communities where brand becomes a central point and also an object of interaction. Famous hotel chains and resorts maintain a brand-oriented interaction promoting belongingness to a brand and forming emotional feedback with followers. Malta,

Caribbean, Marriott and Hilton hotel chains have a wide representation over social media platforms encouraging emotional connection to their brands and therefore, having influence on community members.

3.10. Development of a Brand

Brand development is strongly connected with the process of building a brand logically continuing what is being established. Keller (2013: 107) offers four stages of brand development:

1. identity;
2. meaning;
3. response;
4. relationships.

According to Keller (2013: 107) the stages of brand development start with the ‘identity’ of a brand (Who are we?), which is located at the bottom of the chart presenting the initial stage of the process. Afterwards, the diagram goes vertically to the next stage called ‘meaning’ (What are we?). The following stage is called ‘response’ (What about you?) and, finally, the diagram finishes with ‘relationships’ (What about you and me?) on top.



Figure 3.3 Brand Resonance Pyramid. Adapted from Keller (2013: 108)

1. The first stage includes identification of a brand with customers and reflections it produces in customers' minds and associations with its product, advantages it brings or fulfilling customers' needs and demands.
2. The second stage is focused around the concept of a brand (brand meaning) it reflects in customers' minds by linking tangible and non-tangible associations with a brand.
3. Appropriate response to a brand makes the third stage of the diagram.
4. Finally, the fourth stage is made of the conversion of responses into resonance, close relationship a brand has with its customers.

The diagram was named 'a branding ladder' because of its upward direction from the 'meaning' to building relationship. Each stage should occupy its own space in the logical order of levels they are presented on. In addition, Keller (2013: 108) proposes the pyramid consisting of 'building blocks' stating that a brand can achieve success only if it reached the top of the pyramid. Figure 3.3 presents and Figure 3.4 describes in a more detailed way the meaning of each building block and demonstrate the brand-building process. It is necessary to mention that each stage in the process corresponds to a matching building block and its subdimensions. Building blocks on the left side of the pyramid make a more 'rational way' to the brand construction process while right-sided building blocks represent a 'more emotional route'. Obviously, both ways are of the same significance and a lot of successful brands include both sides of the brand building process.

Each stage in the pyramid is characterized by its objective. Thus, at the initial 'identity' stage the major goal is creating a vast awareness of the brand on the market while at the second stage ('meaning') the main focus shifts to differentiation and parity. The third ('response') stage aims at achieving 'positive and accessible reactions to fulfil judgements and feelings'. At the final stage, the major focus will be achieving 'intense and active loyalty' by maintaining closer relationships with brand customers (Keller, 2013: 108).

Christodoulides (2009: 141) emphasizes a broad participation of a customer in each stage and their contributing role, especially for internet brands. This allows brands to handle the brand management process in an easier way by involving customers through creating and generating content that helps companies build a more solid brand (Christodoulides, 2009: 141).

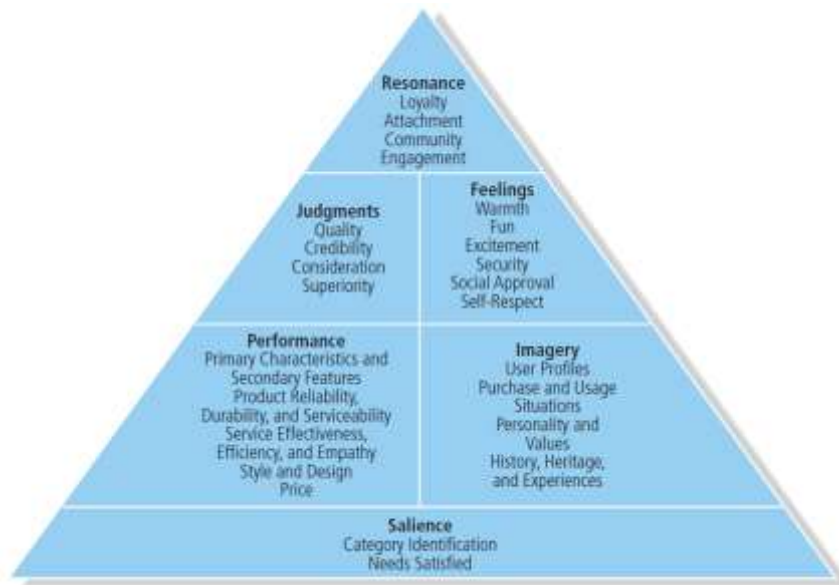


Figure 3.4 Subdimensions of Brand Building Blocks. Adapted from Keller (2013: 108)

Tewary and Mehta (2020: 167) propose an alternative model of brand development adapted for MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) in Figure 3.5. They put additional emphasis on the role of the owner emphasizing that in SMEs the owner might have various roles (Tewary and Mehta, 2020: 167). In such companies owners influence each stage of the brand development and their role is crucial. However, as the business grows, a team of professionals are to be included into brand development process as it lowers the chances for mistakes because of lack of competence and other factors.

With the help of creative marketing and influence from the market, companies are supposed to get involved into brand creation being careful with its name and attributes. Using financial assets through forming appropriate budget and creativity, brands have to invest into sound marketing activities and promotion. This will then reflect in market response, whether a brand can become successful on the market or not, and naturally, the profitability of a brand expressed by volume of sales. Such indicators might then reflect in exiting the policy for weaker brands which then leads to rethinking and redesigning of the whole structure of the company and analyzing the necessity of changes in the organization (Tewary and Mehta, 2020: 168).

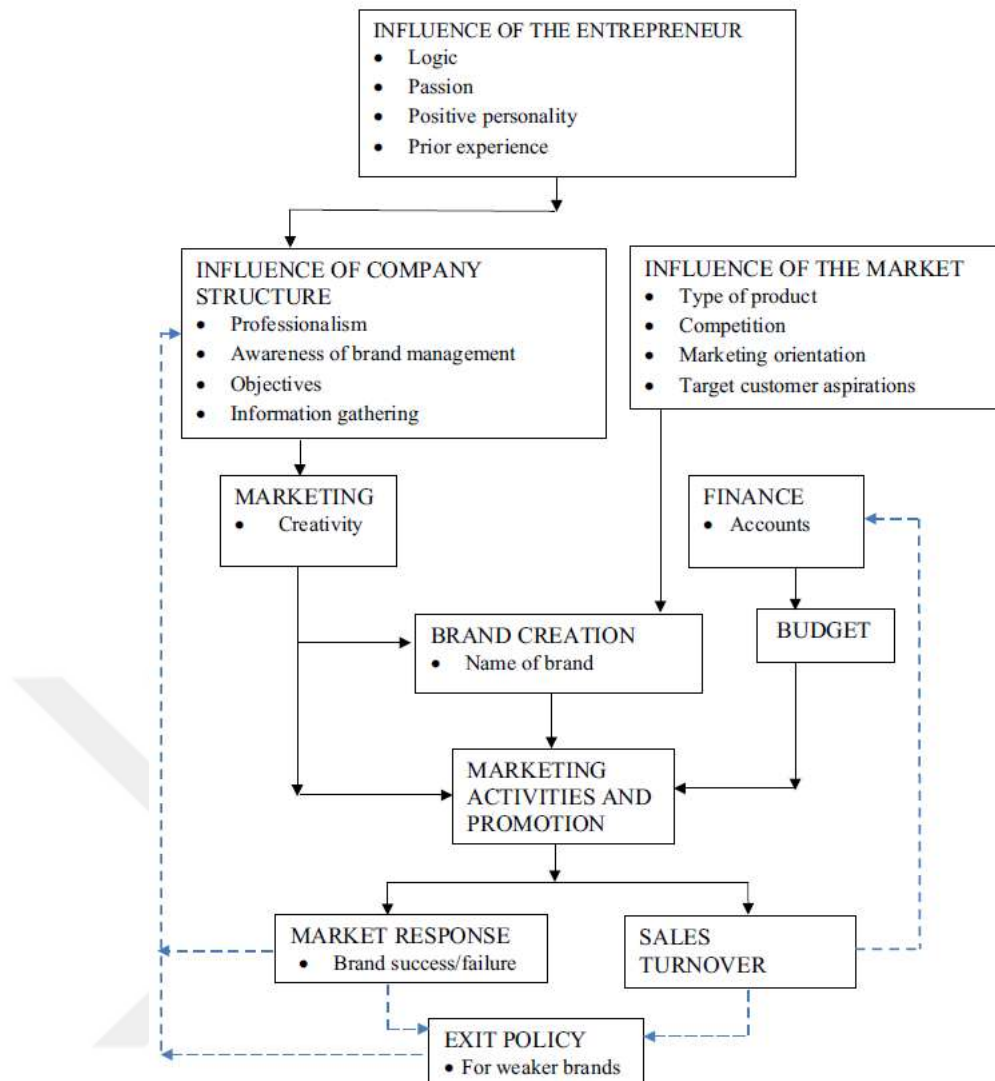


Figure 3.5 Brand development model for MSMEs. Adapted from Tewary and Mehta (2020: 168)

3.11. Academic Studies on Brand Development via Digitalization and Social Media Usage

In the following subchapter we summarize a number of academic studies which enlightened branding and digitalization in conjunction with use of social media in the hospitality industry. Although, these studies refer to the following main topic, they also portray a diverse point of view and focus on various aspects and dimensions of the topic. Due to the specific character of the topic, the major criteria we used here is the relevance to the subject regardless of the publication source, popularity and number of citations of the author(s).

Table 3.1 List of academic studies on brand development via digitalization and social media usage

Title	Focus on	Results	Source
‘The role of digital marketing in consumer behaviour: A survey’.	‘...the role of digital marketing plays on consumer behaviour ... in the tourism sector through three dimensions: (1) mobile apps, (2) social media platforms, and (3) electronic word-of-mouth.’; ‘guiding future developments of digital marketing in tourism’.	‘The reviewed literature thoroughly showed the importance of digital communication for tourism competitiveness, eWOM, tourists’ behavior, and their use of social media and mobile applications.’	Alghizzawi (2019)
‘Traditional Marketing Versus Digital Marketing’.	‘...main ways in which users can be gained and retained through the use of digital marketing’; ‘...role of technologies in monitoring behaviours, analysis of requests, problems, assessment, on the company platforms and social networks.’	‘Digital technologies can monitor behaviours, can analyse the content of requests, problems, assessments, both on the platforms of organizations and on social networks.’	Pascalau and Urziceanu (2020)
‘The influence of social media on the	‘...how social media influence consumer behaviour during hotel decision-making’;	‘The findings reveal refined dimensions of social media and their	Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017)

consumers’ hotel decision journey’.	‘dimensions of social media and their influence on the ‘Evaluation stage’ of the hotel decision journey’	influence on the ‘Evaluation stage’ of the hotel decision journey. The findings revealed that the way consumers search hotel information have changes, as social media play an important role influencing their decision-making process.’	
‘5-star hotel Instagram performance as a Digital Marketing Strategy during the Travelling Restriction’.	‘enhance knowledge and improvement in online digital marketing, especially to increase domestic customers at 5-star luxury hotels in Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia’	‘Instagram has significant role in selling and promoting every brand of 5-star luxury hotels in Nusa Dua and its significant improvement following the updated technology progress and customer demand.’	Andriany et al. (2022)
‘Brand	‘the social and networked	‘The article articulates	Habibi et al. (2014)

communities based in social media: How unique are they? Evidence from two exemplary brand communities’.	nature of social media it is an ideal environment for brand communities’; ‘...the existence of brand communities on social media’; ‘five unique and relevant dimensions of brand communities’.	the existence of brand communities on social media.’ ‘...it delineates five unique and relevant dimensions of brand communities based in social media.’	
‘Customer-based brand equity and destination visit behaviour in the tourism industry: the contingent role of social media’.	‘the role of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) in relation to the intention to select a destination as a tourist destination with the moderating role of social media among international tourists’	‘The findings revealed that social media moderates the relationship between CBBE and the intention to select a destination.’	Saeed and Shafique (2019)
‘The effect of social media marketing on brand trust and brand loyalty for hotels’.	‘...the effect of social media marketing efforts on brand loyalty and brand trust for hotels, especially on hotels’ own websites’.	‘The results show the positive effects of a clear website, website security, online interactivity and collaboration with other useful websites on brand trust and the effect of brand trust	Tatar and Erdogmus (2016)

		on brand loyalty.’	
‘The Effects of Social Media Marketing In the Hotel Industry: Conceptual Model for Development of an Effective Online Community’.	‘...benefit factors of member participation and the relationships between community participation and brand commitment in hotel online communities.’	‘...the results indicated that four benefit factors (functional, hedonic, social and psychological benefits) positively influenced member's community participation.’	Al-Msallam and Alhaddad (2016)
‘Strategic Brand Management’.	Brand building and management theory	Overall analysis and structuring of each aspect of brand building and management in a strategic mode.	Keller (2013)
‘The interplay between social media communication, brand equity and brand engagement in tourist	‘...analysis of how – and to what extent – social media communication, both controlled and uncontrolled by the destination organization, has an impact on destination brand equity and destination brand engagement.’	‘... social media communication, both controlled and uncontrolled by the destination organization, has an impact on destination brand equity and	Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020)

destinations: An analysis in an emerging economy’.		destination brand engagement.’	
‘Social media marketing influence on Boutique Hotel customers’ purchase intention in Malaysia’.	‘...relationship between different social media marketing practices and customers’ purchase intention in Malaysia’s boutique hotels.’	‘...factors including marketing activities and eWOM significantly impact customer purchase intention of the boutique hotels in Malaysia through the mediating variable perceived usefulness and the mediating variable perceived trust.’	Garg and Kumar (2021)
‘The Impact of Social Media Marketing Medium Toward Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty Among	‘study the impact of social media marketing medium toward brand loyalty and purchase intention in Generation Y.’	‘...online marketing communications, specifically, EWOM, online communities and online advertisement are effective in promoting brand loyalty and	Balakrishnan et al. (2014)

Generation Y’.		product purchase intention through company website and social media platforms.’	
‘Inside your social media ring: How to optimize online corporate reputation’.	‘...studying the impact of social media communication strategies on firms’ reputations ...in the hotel industry.’ ‘...insights regarding the challenges of developing online communication strategies that affect corporate reputation.’	‘The results offer insights regarding the challenges of developing online communication strategies that affect corporate reputation.’	Floreddu et al. (2014)
‘The potential of social media for luxury brand management’.	‘...the marketing potential of social media for luxury brand management.’	‘...understanding of the dynamic roles user-generated content and social media play in the formation and maintenance of the emerging consumer-brand-consumer triad culture.’	Jin (2012)
‘Content, context and	‘...content analysis to identify and understand the	‘The findings highlight the	Oliveira and Panyik (2015)

co-creation: Digital challenges in destination branding with references to Portugal as a tourist destination’.	way tourists and travellers perceive the country as a tourist destination’.	tourist/traveller as an opinion maker with access to a plethora of information communication technologies to act as co-creators of brands.’	
‘Digitalization: A Strategic Approach for Development of Tourism Industry in India’.	‘factors that propel tourism industry to opt for digitalization and establish a hierarchical relationship among them’; ‘how digitalization impacts various stakeholders in tourism industry’	‘...customer demand for digitalization, growing essence of sharing economy and presence of social media are important contributors to the enhancement of digitalization in tourism industry.	Kumar and Shekhar (2020)

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.1. Purpose and Importance of the Research

Forming appropriate positive image has always been a concern for the brand specialists. Employing unstructured tools with a wide usage of content analysis and coding becomes more appropriate. Using specific research methods covered by a term 'content analysis' is now becoming a trend in the academia. More and more researchers are including it in their portfolio to study online destination image (Govers and Go, 2005: 75), hospitality and tourism (Hannam and Knox, 2015: 1).

This method often includes content analysis and text mining when it comes to qualitative or textual data, for example, 'written documents (e.g. strategic plans) or visual materials (e.g. photographs, videos)' (Hannam and Knox, 2015: 1).

As a reference to exploitation of qualitative methods (Tasci and Kozak, 2006: 307) and content analysis in tourism researches (Govers and Go, 2005: 75) and keeping in mind the idea of complex character of the digitalization, the novelty of our research is in using qualitative method of discourse analysis such as content analysis of online posts through digital online channels. With the idea that brand-related online posts are the factors that influence dramatically brand management, relevant tourist experiences described there, are increasingly becoming a significant factor of co-creation of the brand.

The research question of our master thesis is aimed at identifying the contemporary ways of managing a brand in the hospitality industry via help of digital technologies, investigating the understanding of effectiveness of using digital tools, recognizing strong impact on a brand and wide usage of digital instruments and social media channels for brand building and brand management.

4.2. The Scope and Methodology of the Research

In our master thesis, we employ qualitative method to analyze the data. The "qualitative method" is being defined as interpreting a text or other information without numerical measurement whereas "quantitative" method is defined as a method of performing empirical analysis based on numerical data' (Olanrewaju et al., 2020: 91). Qualitative research can be also defined as 'an investigation that takes place in the settings where subjects of interest exist, in an effort to bring meaning and understanding to different phenomena, as seen by the people who experience them' (Riley, 1996: 38)

According to Decrop (1999: 157) qualitative methods are used broadly for market research and are becoming more and more accepted in the social sciences.

Qualitative research as an alternative methodological approach which is widely used across disciplines, for example, in anthropology, marketing and education (Riley, 1996: 37). As a contrast to quantitative, qualitative research is often perceived as a form of art (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015: 63).

A strong evidence for this method could be found in several researches mentioning that 'science is not a question of numbers but of reasoning', and, therefore, a relevant qualitative study could take place as well as a quantitative one in tourism context (Riley, 1996: 37). Moreover, researchers who are using qualitative methods in tourism and evaluating destination branding, form a limited number (Govers et al., 2007: 8).

4.3. Methodology and Data Collection Tool

4.3.1. Descriptive analysis

For our study, we performed the analysis based on the framework offered by Rahman et al. (2020: 311). There are following elements in the framework to be listed such as social media, web page, brandings like franchising, online booking, mobile apps, establishing forward business relation (linkage with target customers) and backward business relation (linkage with suppliers & personnel), promoting Bangladesh, Facebook page, search engine marketing (SEM), celebrity endorsement and evaluation site.

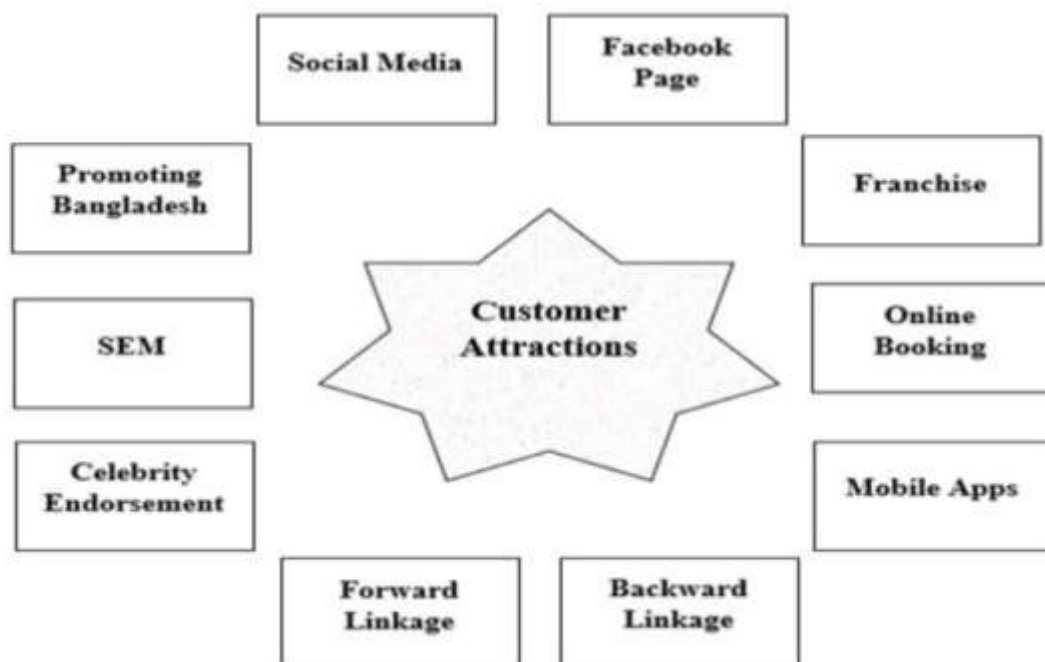


Figure 4.1 Conceptual framework of customer attraction by creative marketing and innovative branding.
Adapted from Rahman et al. (2020: 311)

After careful critical analysis, we have decided to exclude a few components which have less relevance for our study and keep the others. The remaining elements are social media accounts, website, mobile apps, and Facebook page and search engine marketing (SEM). To the list we have added interviews with top and marketing managers. The main purpose is to identify the presence of these elements and describe and check their usage in regular marketing activity. There was also made an investigation on how the full functionality of the elements such as comments, likes, questions-answers and subscriptions are used.

The priority in this study was given to qualitative analysis over quantitative as soon as quality is inevitable component of each process and cannot be underestimated. Moreover, the number of studies with a wider usage of qualitative analysis is still relatively small. The following study does not establish the objective of evaluating effectiveness of digital tools – this is to be done by a separate research. The main objective of the present research is to define which tools are employed and used in brand management activity. We would also like to investigate the most used tools and the dominance of a particular channel/tool in the list.

Another aspect we are focusing on is the presence of social media specialist or a department within the structure of hotel X. To our mind, this demonstrates the status of social media channel in the communication with visitors and brand building. Strong brand construction strategy is supposed to be connected with a wide employment of digital tools and channels of interacting with clientele.

4.3.2. Data collection

To collect data we performed a series of interviews with top managers of the Hotel X. Prior to interviews we have tested the questionnaire with the help of a pilot test. For this purpose, we asked three different managers from Hotel X to answer these questions. The questionnaire consists of twelve relevant questions with the idea to identify the level of digitalization and social media presence for the abovementioned hotel. The major area of our interviews were the extent and the meaning that is devoted to social media presence, the role of social media channel in interacting with customers both real and potential, managing feedback and, especially negative attitude through the social media channel, the status of social media as a major or supporting channel of interacting with customers.

4.4. Methods of Analysis

4.4.1. Content analysis

To analyze social media posts we performed content analysis, which is relevant in many aspect of digital brand construction. According to Hannam and Knox (2015: 3), 'content analysis is an empirical technique', that includes counting, issue identification and textual content interpretation to be qualified as essential. Moreover, content analysis 'is potentially one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences' (Krippendorff, 2003: xiii).

One of the latest trends among researchers becomes a content analysis of travel blogs and tourism-related online publications. Obviously, a wide spread of positive brand-oriented content is a helpful tool in building a strong tourist brand with the real and potential visitors. Carefully curated e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) is an effective instrument in a competition for tourists' trust and loyalty. Naturally, a strong brand is based upon its attractive image and positive publicity available within the tourist society.

A certain number of academicians published their research with the content analysis of traveler bloggers (Pan et al., 2007; Pudliner, 2007; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009; Volo, 2010; Wenger, 2008). Benefits of this analysis are the insights on tourist-generated content and potential power in the brand co-creation (Volo, 2010: 300). The analysis was performed on the basis of 40 travel blogs in South Carolina (USA) for which a combination of semantic network analysis and content analysis was used (Volo, 2010: 300). Oliveira and Panyik (2015: 56) investigated online channels' usage and social media involvement to investigate the level of promoting Portugal as a tourist destination with the help of content analysis of online newspapers.

Following previous researches, in this article we emphasize the importance of tourist-generated content as a significant factor and tool that is seen as driver for strong brand building and a co-creating instrument. Widely spread positive information helps brands obtain a solid position and compete for a larger market share winning the competition game over rivals.

4.4.2. Content analysis of online channels of the Hotel X in Antalya

Hotel X started in the early 2000s and was the first hotel of the chain which was built around it later. Since the very start the main priority was customer satisfaction at the ultimate level. After years of intensive work and sufficient investment, the Hotel obtained the status

‘Premium’ and became one of the top hotels in the chain in terms of its high standards of quality and exceptional attention to a visitor.

Top management of the Hotel recognized the value and impact of digitalization and extensive usage of digital channels. Along with adopting hotel management systems like Fidelio, the Hotel started to cooperate with hotel booking portals such as TripAdvisor and Booking. Nowadays, the information about the hotel is presented on most of the hotel booking resources.

Together with developing digital technologies Hotel X obtained social media accounts. For example, Facebook page was created in 2010, later there came Instagram page, Twitter and the corporate website. Social media accounts are now the platforms for interaction the Hotel is supposed to use. Hotel X maintains relationship with visitors by attracting and inviting them to follow their accounts. Facebook page receives 54 thousand likes and is followed by 56 thousand people and Instagram pages indicates 108 thousand followers.

As a part of our case study research, we have performed a content analysis of the online digital channels of the Hotel X in Antalya. We analyzed textual information on Hotel X's webpage, social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram, and VK). We have also read comments on YouTube in the comment line and analyzed Google search results. All texts were checked on a presence of Hotel X-related information regardless of its positive or negative status. The analysis was performed between 1 January, 2022 and 10 May 2022. The number of posts constitutes the sample for analysis.

4.5. Findings of the Research

The main idea of our master thesis is to perform a qualitative analysis of the social media instruments with the idea to identify how the brand (Hotel X) utilizes the most contemporary digital tools in brand management process. For our analysis we have defined the following social media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram, and VK.

Facebook. On the front page there is a rating (4.6 out of 5) given by Facebook authorities. The number of visitors who like the page and the brand respectively is 52 thousand, which is quite high. Down the page there is a variety of posts. The last posting made by a hotel visitor with the status: Visitor's Name 'is feeling grateful' dates back to 16 April, 2022. Keeping in mind that the date of check is 9 May 2022, we come to a conclusion that visitors of the Hotel X have not made any posts or shared information about the hotel for 22 days. We have also made a brief analysis of posts on the front page and found out that the

total number of posts is 28 with only 7 belonging to visitors. The rest of them are advertisements made by tour operators and travel agencies. Some visitors' posts contain only visual information with the view of the Hotel X. No comment or cross links are being found underneath. There is also a link to Hotel's YouTube channel, a message slot to send messages and 'like' button on the right side. There is also a physical address of the Hotel written on the front page. Below there is a photo gallery and visitors' posts where photos and short comments can be found.

The front page on the Hotel X's Facebook account contains cross links to the four Hotel X-related Facebook pages. They are ***Hotel X musterî fan club***, ***Hotel X Ailesi***, ***Hotel X Local Business page***, ***Hotel X magazine***. We have performed analysis to each page and with the idea of identifying the level of active usage, we calculated the findings. ***Hotel X musterî fan club*** has 55 likes and last post in the line was made on 19 July 2014 (date of check is 9 May 2022). ***Hotel X Ailesi*** received 939 likes and the last post was made on 28 September 2016 (date of check – 9 May 2022). ***Hotel X Local Business page*** contain 15 likes and the date of the last post was 12 July 2019 (date of check – 9 May 2022). And, finally, ***Hotel X magazine*** received 882 likes with 900 followers and the date of the last post was 3 October 2020 (date of check – 9 May 2022).

Summarizing the information presented above, we come to a conclusion that Hotel X's Facebook main account and supporting ones are not used actively as a channel of interaction with customers, updating information and promoting the brand. Most of the posts are out-of-date and regularity in postings has not been determined.

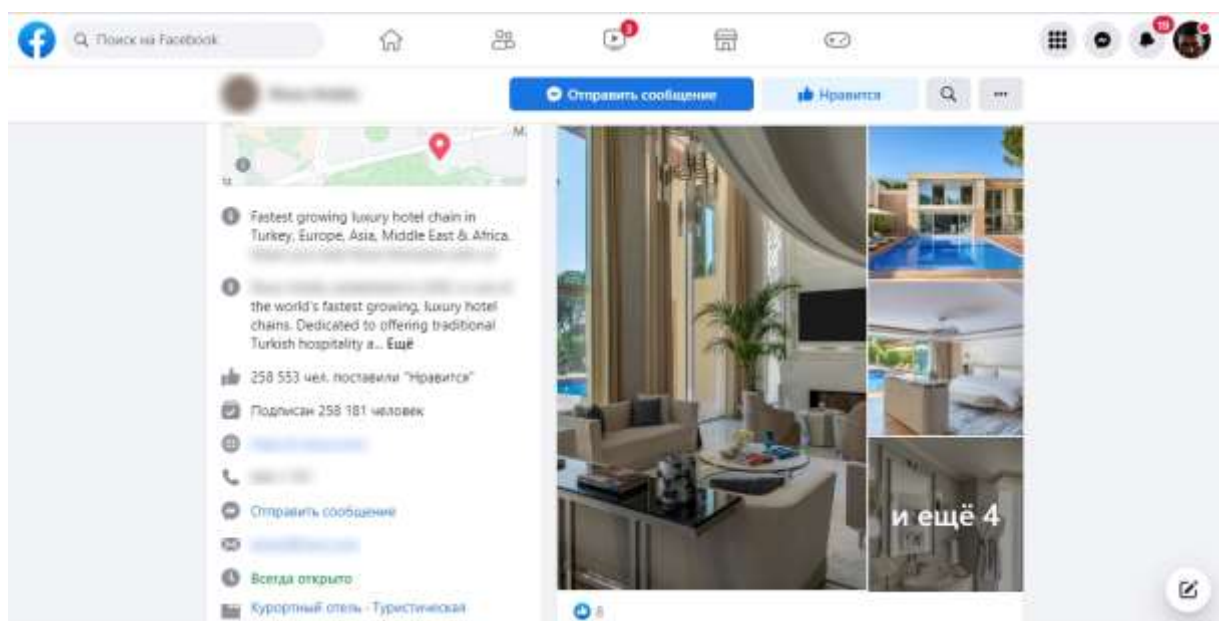


Figure 4.2 Hotel X's Facebook page

Instagram. Hotel X Instagram account has 1565 posts with 92.1 thousand followers. There is a 'message' button on the top of the page so the interaction between the hotel and its customers is possible via Instagram. There is also a hashtag #hotelxmoments and the link to the corporate website. There are ten links to hotel X-related services and facilities. The top post is made by the Hotel X and received 158 likes. The date of the post is 7 May 2022 (date of check is 9 May 2022). However, no comments from outside users were received. Another post is a family picture with the hotel view at the background. The Hotel's moderator is thanking visitors for sharing the photo. 5 comments are received and the majority of them are the heart signs. The date of the post is 5 May 2022. Another post was done by the Hotel X promoting new events. The posts received 201 likes and one comment expressing positive experience in the hotel. The date of the post is 1 May 2022 (date of check is 9 May 2022).

Performing analysis of online posts we came to a conclusion that the hotel is using the following posting strategy: corporate photos and videos are presented in a combination with personal photos and videos from visitors. The number of each type is relatively similar. Based on this analysis we come to a conclusion that Instagram account is used more actively with more updates and interaction with customers.

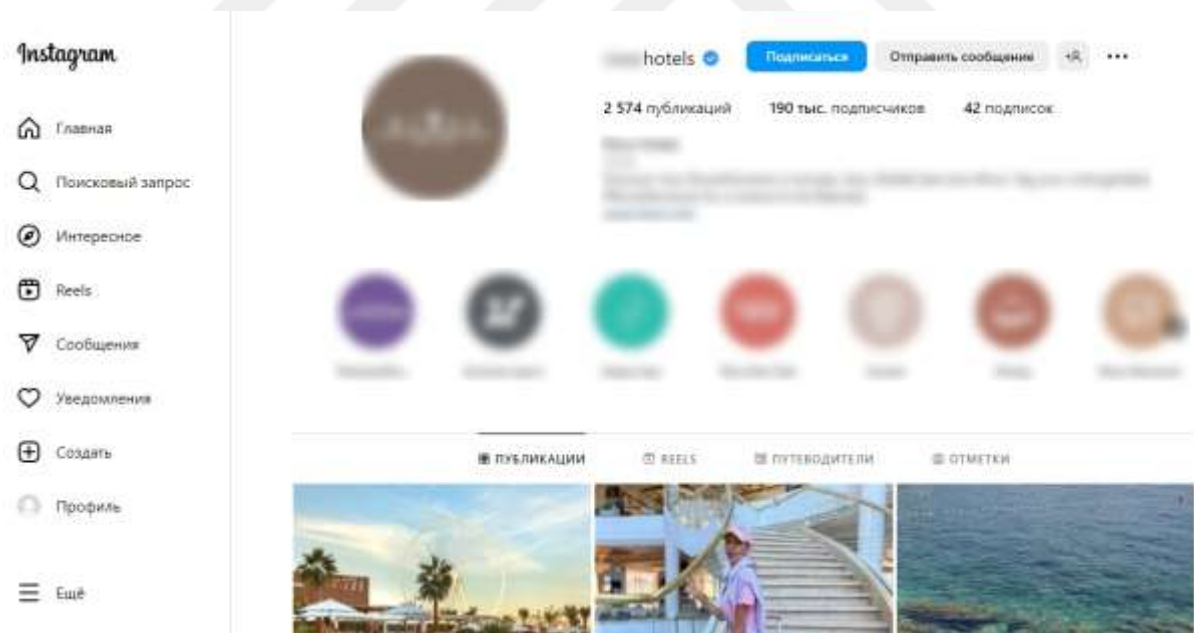


Figure 4.3 Hotel X's Instagram page

Twitter. Hotel X's corporate account contains company's logo and picture on the front page. There is also the link to the corporate website and date of start of the account which is April 2011. The account says that Hotel X is following 138 accounts and is being followed by 2,156 twitter users. The top posting is a corporate video promoting the event. The date of

posting is December 7, 2018 (date of check is 9 May 2022). The information received 2 likes, 0 retweets and 1 comment. The second top post is also a corporate video about the event. The date of posting is also December 7, 2018 (date of check is 9 May 2022). Here the information received 1 like, 1 retweet and 1 comment. The third top post is also a general picture about sea holidays not associated with the Hotel X. The date of posting is December 6, 2018 (date of check is 9 May 2022). Here the information received 2 likes with no retweets and comments.

After the brief analysis we come to a conclusion that Twitter account is not actively used as a platform for interaction with customers, the information there is out-of-date and received limited attention from Twitter users.



Figure 4.4 Hotel X's Twitter page

Telegram. This account contains 28 subscribers and only two posts. The first is a number of photos and another is advertisement offering transportation service. Both posts are semantically united. The first post was viewed 438 times and the second was viewed 439 times. Both posts date back to 15 June 2021. Summing up the information, we draw a conclusion that Telegram channel is not actively used by the Hotel X and needs more attention as a possible platform to reach potential customers.

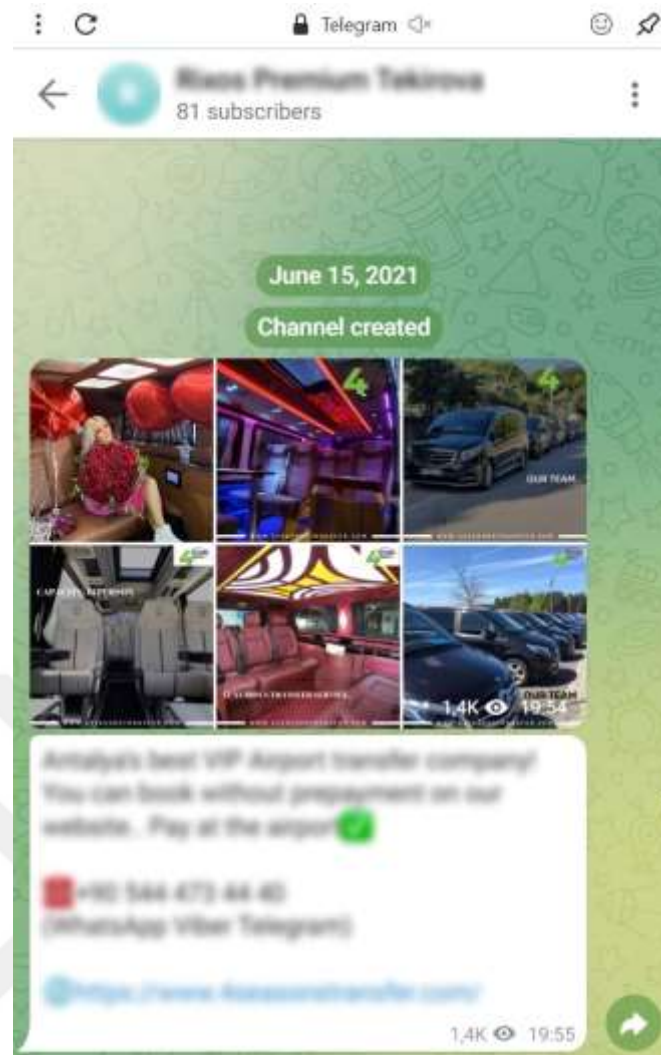


Figure 4.5 Hotel X's Telegram page

VK. This account positions itself as a non-official group to the Hotel X. There are 350 members in this group. The front page does not contain any opinions, comments or posts from visitors, both real and potential. The only information presented is hotel views and advertisements from hotel-related services.

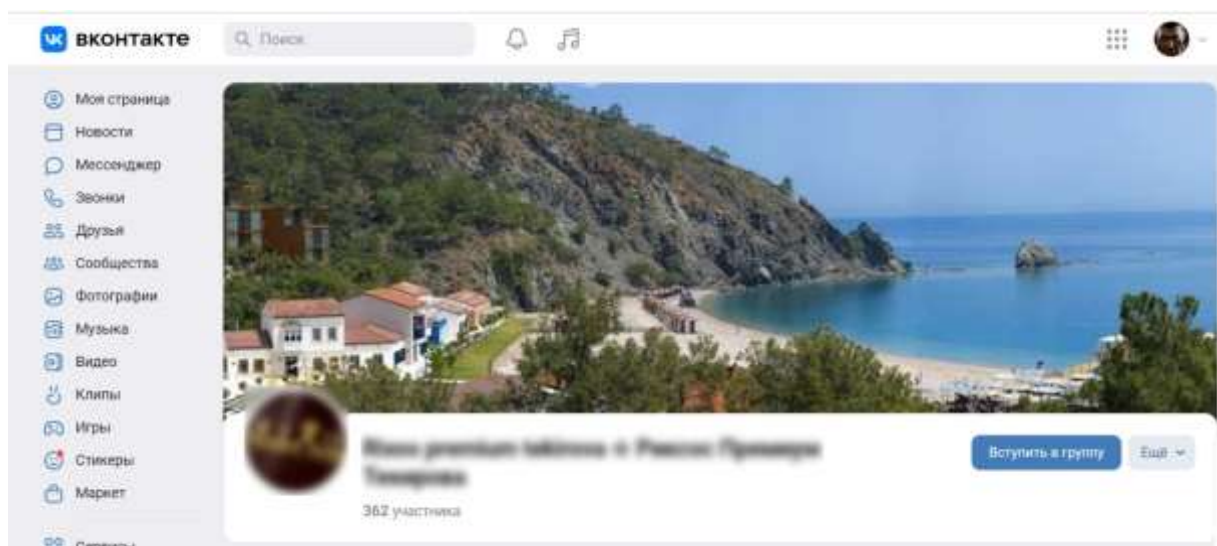


Figure 4.6 Hotel X's VK page

Hotel X's website. Hotel X's website looks colorful and stylish. The information is spread is evenly and easy to read. The gallery contains beautiful views of the hotel territory from the inside and outside its buildings. There are a few language options enabling tourists choose the language upon their preference. The information in each language is correct and perfectly correspond to the main language. It is an actively used platform for customer-brand interaction.

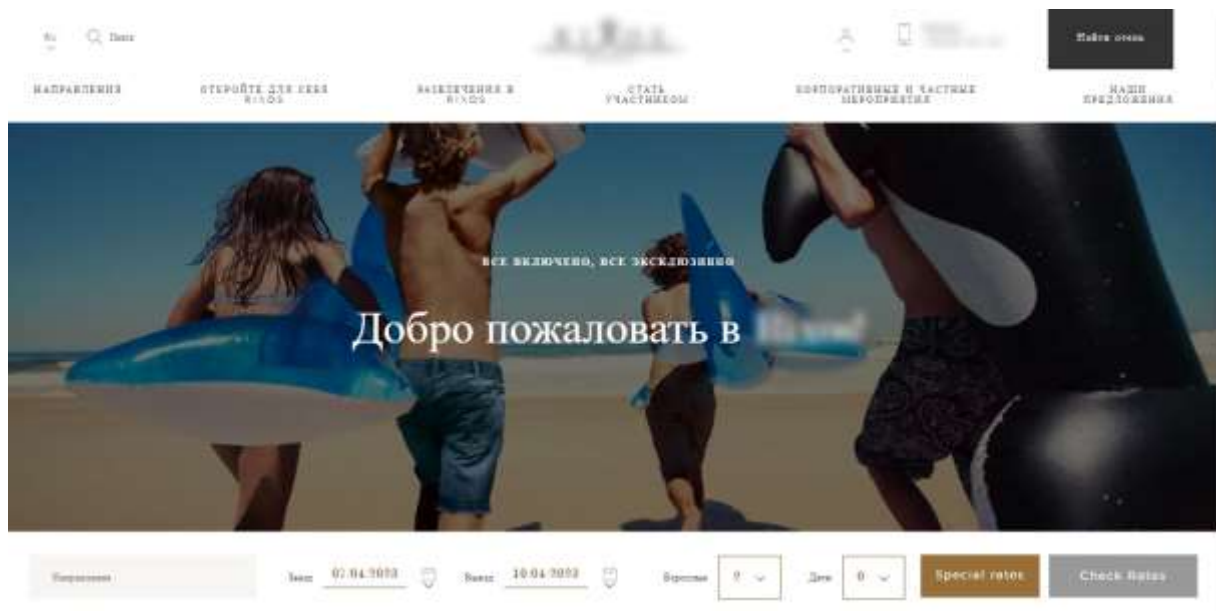


Figure 4.7 Hotel X's web page

Mobile Apps. Hotel X does not use mobile applications (apps) regarding promotion of its activity and reaching possible customers. However, Hotel X is included into hotel accommodation platforms such as booking.com, tripadvisor.com and others, which are actively offering their apps through Google Playmarket and, therefore, have a possibility to be reached through these platforms.

Search engine marketing (SEM). It is widely believed among marketing professionals that obtaining a position on the first page of Google search can differentiate a brand from its competitors and increase its chances for a successful contact with potential customers. Higher Google ratings help a brand to obtain a more reliable image with tourists and multiply chances for successful booking. To check the presence of the Hotel X in the first page Google ratings we have used a few key word combinations. They are: '5-star hotel in Antalya', 'hotel Antalya', 'Antalya hotel booking'. The following results were demonstrated:

'5-star hotel in Antalya' – the Hotel X's link was not shown on the first page; 'hotel Antalya' - the Hotel X's link was not shown on the first page; 'Antalya hotel booking' - the Hotel X's link was not shown on the first page.

Therefore, we are coming to a conclusion that Hotel X's credentials are not recognized by Google search algorithms due to insufficient online activity.

Interview. To identify Hotel X's digital policy and top management's understanding of importance of digitalization, we have performed a series of interviews with the General Manager, Assistant General Manager and the Marketing Manager. With this purpose we used the questionnaire offered by Ta (2019: 83-84). The original list consists of 14 questions, which can be found in the Appendix 2. Due to time limitations and the scope of our master thesis, we have made a decision to use 8 of these 14 questions for our interview. We have adapted questions to the context of our study having kept the original meaning. We also added 4 more questions which seemed relevant and necessary for our interviews and which we could not find in the original questionnaire.

The list of questions and answers based on Ta's questionnaire (Ta, 2019: 83-84) is presented in the table below.

Table 4.1 Interview form with questions and answers

	QUESTION	General Manager	Assistant General Manager	Marketing Manager
1.	How do you see the importance of establishing credibility for your brand (Hotel X) on social media (digital channels of communication)?	Important	Important	Important
2.	What are the social media channels used for marketing activities (and branding)?	Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, hotel's website	Facebook, Instagram and Twitter	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google (SEO)
3.	How important is the role of social media (digital channels) for the Hotel X in raising brand awareness?	Quite important	Rather important	Quite important
4.	Do you often create content on social	No	No	partially

	media that has potential of being shared by many people (encourage guests to post, share and exchange information about the Hotel?)			
5.	How important for the Hotel X is the interaction between the brand and customers (visitors) on social media to maintain relationship?	Important	Fairly important	Important
6.	How does the social media increase accessibility for customers to Hotel X?	Post pictures, information	Posting photos, hot deals	updates
7.	What are the opportunities and challenges of using these kinds of social media on raising brand awareness for the Hotel?	Great exposure. Bad comments	Good reputation. False information	Wide exposure. Time consuming
8.	What is the most active and effective platform?	Instagram	none	none

The list of questions and answers we have added to the list.

	QUESTION	General Manager	Assistant General Manager	Marketing Manager
9.	Does the Hotel perform analysis of digital channels?	No	No	occasionally
10.	Is there a social media manager or a social media department at the Hotel?	No	No	No
11.	How regularly does the Hotel post information about its services, provide updates and share information?	Quite regularly	Quite regularly	Quite regularly
12.	How often does the Hotel analyze and use visitors' suggestions received via social media?	Not regularly	Not regularly	Not regularly

After completing interviews, we have summarized the answers and made a relevant conclusion.

General Manager's answer to Question 1 was: 'We understand that it is quite important for us, for sure'. Assistant General Manager has also expressed agreement saying: 'Social media is important for us. We use it often'. Marketing Manager repeated the same idea saying that: 'We understand how important it is nowadays, for us, for the brand, for the hotel'. Question 1 demonstrated agreement between all respondents. Each interviewee emphasized the importance of establishing credibility for Hotel X by using social media.

Answering Question 2 General Manager said: 'Well, we use Facebook, Instagram and Twitter but we mainly use our own website'. Assistant General Manager admitted: 'I guess we use Instagram, for pictures, Facebook for posts and Twitter a bit'. Marketing Manager answered Question 2 saying: 'We use all of them: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and we also focus on SEO, Google search, you know'. Answering question 2, all respondents mentioned social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The General Manager admitted using corporate website. Marketing Manager has mentioned company's activity in search engine optimization (SEO) with Google search engine tools.

General Manager answered question 3 saying: 'Social media is quite important for our brand. This is how we become more popular'. Assistant General Manager's answer was: 'Rather important. Social media communication is one of the must-haves for a tourism company nowadays. Marketing Manager said: 'We see its role as quite important. It helps us communicate with our guests elsewhere'. Question 3 again found similarity of answers among all respondents, each of the participants emphasized the significance in adopting social media (digital channels of communication) for raising brand awareness.

Answering question 4, General Manager said as follows: 'No, not often'. Similar answer was received from Assistant General Manager who said: 'We don't do it often'. Marketing Manager expressed the same by saying: 'Unfortunately, not often, partially I'd say'. Answering question 4, all respondents admitted that there is no regular practice in creating the content to be shared by potential customers and encouraging guests to post, like and comment.

Positive answer was received from General Manager to question 5: 'Important. Definitely!' Assistant General Manager expressed some hesitation by saying: 'Well, we read comments and answer them sometimes. So, it's fairly important for us, as a hotel'. Marketing Manager said: 'Of course, this is important. We appreciate when our guests write something to us and we try to react fast'. In question 5 interaction between the brand and customers

(visitors) on social media was marked as important, although the Assistant General Manager would rate it as fairly important.

Question 6 received diverse answers. General Manager said: 'We put pictures out there, provide some information on our services, etc.' Assistant General Manager said: 'First, pictures, and then hot deals, how to save money'. Marketing Manager answered the question as follows: 'We put updated information on latest changes. It's important for us'. Answering question 6, General Manager of the Hotels X mentioned regular posting pictures and information while Assistant General Manager would agree on posting photos and mentioned hot deals the Hotel offers to its visitors. Marketing Manager marked regular updates as a tool to increase customers' accessibility to the Hotel X's web portal.

In the case of opportunities and challenges General Manager said: 'Our brand has a great exposure online. This is good. But some people leave their negative comments and we don't like this'. Assistant General Manager said: 'We get a good reputation. We are working on that. But some people would spread false information, especially about our prices and conditions'. Marketing Manager said: 'We can reach millions of people at the speed of a click. But it takes time, a lot of time'. Talking about opportunities and challenges of using social media in question 7, respondents mentioned wide exposure of information together with possibility to maintain good reputation. On the other hand, the list of challenges consists of bad comments and false information along with a time-consuming character of using social media.

Answering question 8 General Manager said: 'I think, it's Instagram. Many people get our info from there'. Assistant General Manager answered the question as follows: 'I guess they are all the same, I don't know which one is more effective'. And Marketing Manager said: 'I cannot define the leader'. Surprisingly, answering question 8 only General Manager could rate a leading platform (Instagram), while other respondents found it difficult to define a dominating one.

In terms of performing analysis of digital channels General Manager admitted: 'We should but we don't. Unfortunately'. Assistant General Manager said: 'We don't'. Marketing Manager answered it as follows: 'We occasionally do that, not regularly'. Question 9 revealed that Hotel X does not perform a regular analysis or create statistic reports, although the Marketing Manager admitted that occasional checks via Google Analytics are conducted.

Answering question 10 General Manager said: 'We don't have such person, we just don't need'. Assistant General Manager mentioned that: 'No, no SM manager in hotel'. Marketing Manager also answered negatively by saying: 'No, no such a person'. Question 10

was answered negatively by all participants of the interview. Managers pointed out the emerging character of social media which has not demonstrated its full potential yet. Therefore, a specialist to curate this direction was not assigned.

To question 11 General Manager answered: 'Yes, quite regularly'. Similar answer came from Assistant General Manager who said: 'Regularly, quite regularly, I guess'. And Marketing Manager also expressed the same idea saying: 'We do it quite regularly because it's important to spread a word out there'. For question 11 participants revealed that the Hotel X regularly posts, updates and presents relevant information about its services and activities.

The final question was answered by General Manager in a negative sense: 'I'm afraid we do not analyze what our guests write, at least, not often'. Assistant General Manager said: 'We sometimes do analysis but not much'. Marketing Manager admitted: 'We read comments, we discuss them but, you know, from time to time'. The final question demonstrated similarity of opinions but raised doubt among respondents. Each of them admitted the importance of visitors' feedback but systematic review and analysis are not performed on a regular basis, although, suggestions and improvements are welcomed and taken into consideration. All interviewees admitted a supporting character of social media channel in a variety of digital instruments employed by Hotel X. Data received at the interviews was checked for qualitative validity and reliability. Transcript was carefully examined for mistakes and biases and irrelevant information was excluded. The data was validated and its reliability was confirmed.

Social Media Manager/Department. The headquarters of the group, where Hotel X is a part, has a special professional focusing on establishing and utilizing digital online tools. The functions for online delivery of information and social media interaction with customers are being also spread between executives in the marketing department and external marketing companies, which perform these functions on an outsource basis. As known from the interview with top managers, Hotel X understands the importance of social media presence and active involvement of this activity into Hotel's regular activity. However, a stronger online presence is the matter of future and there are still necessary actions to be done.

To sum up, it can be admitted that although respondents declared utilization and understanding of significance to widely use digital channels, the extent of practical usage is not high. Interviewees revealed that the Hotel X exploits the most popular social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. However, the analysis of results is not performed or being done occasionally. Respondents also admitted that the full functional capacity of digital channels was either partially used or not used at all. In terms of

communication tools, managers mentioned that relationship with customers is being maintained through social media, however, none of them admitted the dominating role of social media tools over other means. Underestimating the role of social media for the hospitality industry, respondents admitted that there is no specially-appointed person or people to deal with social media – social media manager or social media department - at the Hotel X.

Two out of three interviewees revealed the fact that Hotel X does not encourage visitors to share hotel's information, put 'likes', write comments to posts, to use the interactive function of social media in favor of Hotel X. This fact demonstrates that management of the Hotel X does not put enough attention to promotional and brand management potential of social media and active SM (social media) users. Although the information related to the Hotel X is being put out regularly, the analysis of the results and using feedback demonstrate non-regular character. Finally, all respondents admitted that social media plays a supporting role in attracting potential visitors and, therefore, spreading the information about the brand among potential customers. All of that leads to a conclusion that potential and functionality of digital tools such as social media is being underestimated and its role needs to be changed to more active.

In addition, we would like to express our gratefulness for our respondents who agreed to participate in the interview and shared information with us. We respect their privacy and agree to keep their names confidentially. Based on their requirements, no audio or video recording was performed in order to keep their answers private. We would like to thank our respondents for their cooperation!

4.6. Theoretical Implications of the Thesis

This master thesis gives an insight on digitalization as a global phenomenon, both technological and social, that has an inevitable and unstoppable character. To our mind, modern science can benefit from studying the phenomenon of digitalization as a separate direction on the edge of disciplines within social sciences.

Within brand studies, we tried to demonstrate the impact of digitalization and social media on a brand, brand development and brand management. Theorists and academicians may find it useful to concentrate on exploring different ways and relationship between using digital channels and building brand equity and brand loyalty. In terms of marketing, we investigated the difference between digital and traditional marketing establishing current trend in the academia to study digital marketing and its effects on a brand.

We have also found and demonstrated current trends in the relationship between digitalization in the social media context and businesses. Co-creation of a brand becomes a phenomenon that deserves researchers' attention as it is stated that 'co-created destination brands are the future successful stories' (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015: 71). We have demonstrated that nowadays destinations and hospitality brands are enormously effected by co-creation which turns a brand building process into another level.

We have tried to provide brief classification of updated digital channels and social media instruments which are to be used in the hospitality and other industries. Our classification includes characteristics and examples of using such tools in modern business. We have also demonstrated that the level of success for businesses depends on the speed of adopting digital tools in the business operations. We assume that researchers may want to continue studying the topic as it appears to be one of the most promising trends in the academia in the upcoming decades.

4.7. Practical Implications of the Thesis

For marketers it has to be clear that instead of simply obtaining presence in virtual space, brands have to learn how to exploit the full functionality of digital tools and build strong tourist-oriented branding strategies digitally on the Internet. Visitors need to be stimulated and motivated to co-create the brand consistency and support the branding process. Branding professionals have to be aware that since now the brand is being co-created by both marketers and audiences. To control and manage this process is an incredibly important objective for brands who carefully nurture their reputation on the market.

On the other hand, latest virtual technologies give a fantastic chance for tourists and visitors to influence and impact the creation of the tourist product. Posting opinions and information, sharing content and engaging other travelers are the tools that are used by the audience. Digitalization in general and social media communication have dramatically changed the interrelations between brands and customers and have given a chance to tourists to come up with their valuable contribution. Hotel professionals are recommended to include these insights into their branding strategies.

Positive and negative effects of digitalization also make an influence on brand development and marketers have to consider such facts. With the help of co-creation of a brand, businesses are characterized with high level of adoption of new digital technologies which improve the quality and increase expansion. However, with a broad online presence companies and organizations experience lack of control over a brand. This interesting

phenomenon deserves attention from practitioners and its careful exploration may lead to valuable benefits for those brands, which take it into serious consideration.

Continuous adoption of digital technologies together with careful usage can also be recommended as a practical solution to various issues. Especially hospitality companies may want to focus on broader usage of digital solutions in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

4.8. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Researches

The following study has several limitations to be mentioned. The first limitation is connected with the methodology used in this article. We have decided to focus on qualitative method of analysis due to its non-numerical character. To our mind, there are certain factors related to perception, emotional state and feelings in the brand concept which could not be measured in numbers. We mainly used a descriptive analysis without measuring the value of impact of digital factors and tools on a brand equity.

Our case study concentrated on a particular brand (Hotel X) and all information, description and conclusion is mainly devoted to it. We would argue that the summary and implications are relevant to other hospitality brands in the same sphere of activity, although, it is highly recommended to generalize, analyze and take them into serious consideration with the branding professionals.

During the research we have conducted three interviews with the General Manager, Assistant General Manager and the Marketing Manager to the Hotel X. For further researches, we recommend to increase the number of respondents among managers. We would also suggest to contact brand managing professionals who are actively involved into design of brand strategies on the outsource basis.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the master thesis was to investigate the impact and evaluate the level of using digital tools in brand building and brand management together with recognition of the impact to hospitality industry enterprises.

We have made a description of the current trends and demands in the hospitality sector and also listed challenges and obstacles that affect the industry. Faster service and a personalized tourist experience are now major demands which guests expects from hotels. Rising competition in the hospitality becomes a factor that requires a faster transition to digital forms of working activity. Nowadays high levels of competition correlate with a high level of adoption of digital tools and online instruments such as social media platforms.

A concise classification of digital technologies used in various spheres including hospitality and tourism help understand a variety of tools, which can be used by hotel professionals nowadays. Artificial intelligence, cloud technologies, biometrics and augmented reality now find more and more supporters and active users within the sector.

'Digitalization' and 'social media' now become more than just technological innovations but significant factors which have a value creation function, play important role in brand construction in business and in the hospitality sector particularly, and have an impact on brand building and brand management. Digital tools are used more actively in brand construction process and building a strong brand awareness and loyalty. With the help of relevant literature, analysis of social media accounts, digital channels and interviews with managers who were involved in the process of brand construction, we tried to demonstrate this fact. We found out that digitalization makes a valuable impact on building a strong brand among visitors. To achieve our objective we have used methods of literature review, data collection, analysis of brand's website, social media accounts and digital channels. We have also evaluated the level of using digital tools by the brand (Hotel X) and the influence on the Hotel X's brand equity. Our case study of the Hotel X showed a close connection between digitalization and branding.

Having analyzed several aspects and factors of digitalization for the Hotel X, we came to a conclusion that the management of Hotel X underestimates the power of digital tools for a successful brand-building which can be explained by a fairly modest level of usage of online digital instruments such as social media accounts, virtual communication and online marketing. Modern times, latest technological inventions, global spread of Internet and virtual

reality give an incredible chance for brands to reach their clientele, dominate the market and build a strong brand image and loyalty with their audience.

Posting and sharing demonstrate that visitors, who are encouraged to interact, are actively involved into co-creation of value for a particular brand. Logically the benefit is that tourism organizations can establish their online presence on social media platforms and interact with their audience at a very little cost. The final goal for any tourist company is to meet their visitors' expectations before, during and after a visit, to fulfil their experiences, and encourage them to share those with potential visitors (e.g. by supporting travel bloggers and travel journalists) and therefore, to enable a more efficient destination brand management with a higher level of visitor involvement (co-creation of value). To our mind, a successful tourist brand nowadays is being characterized by a broad customer involvement into value creation and exposing their influence upon customers globally. In other words tourists' virtual experience, supported by online facilities, enhances the strength of a brand through solid online presence and stimulates formation of their loyalty to the brand.

The following master thesis also tried to summarize literature about branding in social media context. The majority of researches marked the shift that was caused by digitalization and social media as one of its dimensions from 'abstract forms of brand communication to close and personal interaction' (Davis et al., 2014: 477). On the other hand, consumers received a tool that identifies a 'person behind the brand', enabling to personalize tangibility of a brand and create a feeling of participation. Moreover, social media revolutionized the business context enabling brands connecting to customers directly.

Brands received a platform via which their contact to customers becomes easy and cheap. With the vast development and wide spread of social media consumers become co-creators of brand equity and play a significant role in brand building. In the hospitality context, tourists and travelers can use their ideas, feelings and preferences and influence the brand and its elements. Not only tourism industry has dramatically changed its nature of the relationship between brands and customers.

We have also summarized knowledge on the phenomenon 'social media' and studied its implementation in the brand-building context. We are convinced that online communities as a central element in the framework of relationships between brands and consumers play a crucial role in attracting customers and enabling communication between customers and brands. The idea of common character of branding in social media was shared throughout the text.

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AP.1 - List of Questions by Ta, T.

1. How important is raising brand awareness for Hanoi Daewoo Hotel?
2. How important is the role of social media in raising brand awareness for Hanoi Daewoo Hotel?
3. What is the target customer group of Hanoi Daewoo Hotel?
4. What are the social media channels used for marketing activities?
5. What methods, tactics are used for different platforms?
6. What is the most active and effective platform?
7. What are the effects of different marketing activities on brand awareness?
8. Can you share more about the types of content on social media of the hotel?
9. How do you think online communities contribute to building brand image and raising brand awareness? What kind of online communities do you want to create for Hanoi Daewoo Hotel?
10. How important is (regular) interaction between brands and customers on social media and customers with each other in building brand awareness?
11. Do you often create content on social media that has the potential of being shared by many people? Are there only brand-generated content or also user-generated content as well on social media? What is the importance of making and sharing quality content and its impact on brand image and brand awareness?
12. How does social media increase accessibility for customers to Hanoi Daewoo Hotel?
13. The importance of establishing credibility for your brand on social media? What does credibility mean to Hanoi Daewoo Hotel? How doing that has helped build your brand and raise brand awareness?
14. What are the opportunities and challenges of using these kinds of social media on raising brand awareness for Hanoi Daewoo Hotel?

AP.2 - INTERVIEW FORM

	QUESTION	General Manager	Assistant General Manager	Marketing Manager
1.	How do you see the importance of establishing credibility for your brand (Hotel X) on social media (digital channels of communication)?			
2.	What are the social media channels used for marketing activities (and branding)?			
3.	How important is the role of social media (digital channels) for the Hotel X in raising brand awareness?			
4.	Do you often create content on social media that has potential of being shared by many people (encourage guests to post, share and exchange information about the Hotel?)			
5.	How important for the Hotel X is the interaction between the brand and customers (visitors) on social media to maintain relationship?			
6.	How does the social media increase accessibility for customers to Hotel X?			
7.	What are the opportunities and challenges of using these kinds of social media on raising brand awareness for the Hotel?			

8.	What is the most active and effective platform?			
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9.	Does the Hotel perform analysis of digital channels?			
10.	Is there a social media manager or a social media department at the Hotel?			
11.	How regularly does the Hotel post information about its services, provide updates and share information?			
12.	How often does the Hotel analyze and use visitors' suggestions received via social media?			

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High School	Lyceum 1, Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan
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Non-Thesis Master's Degree	-
Semester Project	-
Master's Degree	International Tourism Management
Title of the Master's Thesis	Strategic development of a brand in a five-star hotel via digitalization and social media usage
Doctorate Degree	-
Title of the Doctor's Dissertation	-
Languages	English, Russian, German
SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY	
-	
WORK EXPERIENCE	
Internships	-
Projects	1. Strategic Development of Hospitality Brand (2022); 2. Digitalization for Branding in Hospitality Industry (2022); 3. Destination Analysis (2021); 4. Talent Management (2021); 5. Tourist Motivation (2021); 6. Innovation in Tourism Industry (2021); 7. Intellectual System (2021); 8. Energy Security for Germany (2020); 9. ICCT (2019).
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