

## **Promoting tourism through "Digital" : Case of the hotel sector of Agadir city, Morocco**

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### **Abstract :**

The tourism sector is today one of the main pillars of development of several countries, especially with the hotel business offering varied products and services and involving several actors such as travel agencies, tour operators ...However, the achievement of a competitive advantage in hotel services requires the improvement of services and the satisfaction of customers in a fiercely competitive situation characterized by the use of innovations and digital, which is now widely used in the hotel business and is likely to play a catalytic role.

According to the review of the literature that we have carried out, the use of digital allows the hotel industry, through the new modes of communication, organization and marketing that it offers, to diversify the services as part of an integrated general approach, to reach an important audience, to manage the activities in real time and to improve hotel performance.

This article proposes to study the impact of the digitalization of hotel activities on the improvement of the profitability of lodging establishments in the city of Agadir, which is a seaside Moroccan city known for its important tourist activity and in particular by the increased development of the hotel industry within it.

To do this, based on an empirical study conducted with the various hotels in the city of Agadir, we examined the role that digital could play in improving hotel services. The results obtained were analyzed and allowed us to bring out conclusive answers to our problematic and to develop some recommendations for professionals in the sector.

**Keywords:** Marketing, digital, tourism, hotel industry, Agadir

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## **Promoción turística a través del concepto « digital": El caso sectorial hotelero, Agadir ciudad, Marruecos**

El sector turístico es hoy uno de los principales pilares de desarrollo de varios países, especialmente con el negocio hotelero que ofrece productos y servicios variados e involucra a varios actores como agencias de viajes, operadores turísticos. Sin embargo, el logro de una ventaja competitiva en hotelería Los servicios requieren la mejora de los servicios y la satisfacción de los clientes en una situación ferozmente competitiva caracterizada por el uso de innovaciones y digital, que ahora se utiliza ampliamente en el negocio hotelero y es probable que desempeñe un papel catalizador.

Se ha realizado una revisión bibliográfica, dando por conclusión como el uso de lo digital permite a la industria hotelera, a través de los nuevos modos de comunicación, organización y comercialización que ofrece, diversificar los servicios como parte de un enfoque general integrado, para llegar a una audiencia importante, para gestionar las actividades en tiempo real y mejorar el rendimiento del hotel.

Este artículo propone estudiar el impacto de la digitalización de las actividades hoteleras en la mejora de la rentabilidad de los establecimientos de alojamiento en la ciudad de Agadir, que es una ciudad costera marroquí conocida por su importante actividad turística y, en particular, por el mayor desarrollo del sector hotelero.

Para hacer esto, en base a un estudio empírico realizado con los diversos hoteles de la ciudad de Agadir, examinamos el papel que podría desempeñar lo digital en la mejora de los servicios hoteleros.

Los resultados obtenidos fueron analizados y nos permitieron sacar respuestas concluyentes a nuestra problemática y desarrollar algunas recomendaciones para los profesionales del sector.

**Palabras clave:** marketing, digital, turismo, hotelería, Agadir

### **Introduction:**

Achieving a competitive advantage in hotel services requires successful marketing, which today largely depends on the use of digital technology. This article studies the impact of digital solutions on improving tourism marketing. To do this, on the basis of an empirical study conducted on different hotels in the city of Agadir, we will examine this relationship.

Indeed, the Digital constitutes today a vehicle of the change of organizations, because of its coupling with other developed technologies. The use of digital technologies more and more abundantly within companies has a strong impact on all of their structures and functions, while opening up a new economic dimension. Digital is disrupting the information system and the organization of companies, revolutionizing the relationships that the company maintains with its partners and customers. It influences and transforms the strategies and practices applied within organizations, and brings to light new models of internal management.

Tourism marketing is one of the functions of the company which has made great transformations with the Digital. More specifically in the hotel industry, innovation is essential for marketing strategies, to improve the value of the offer, stand out from the competition and adapt to new consumer and travel trends. In particular that this sector of activity brings together an infinity of services which produce an enormous amount of data on a daily basis, and their optimization would only be possible in the context of better storage and processing of information in a timely manner, such actions could not be envisaged only by resorting to the digitalization of work techniques.

It is in this sense that this work falls, our problematic revolves around the following question: To what extent can Digital participate in improving the marketing of hotel establishments?

### **Interest and objectives of the study:**

This study aims to analyze how the use of digital can contribute to the success of the marketing of hotel establishments in the city of Agadir. The problematic of the present work, consists in first of all clarifying, the changes experienced by hotels during the introduction of digital technologies as well as their impacts on marketing efforts. In addition, the analysis of expectations regarding the use of Digital will allow hotel staff to be aware of the problems blocking the process of using these techniques and to those responsible for identifying the causes.

To answer this problematic, we will first try to identify the specificities of services in the hotel industry. We will then try to briefly recall a few definitions and concepts related to Digital and tourism and hotel marketing in order to highlight their importance. Finally, we will check our comments on a practical case in this area, taking as a field of application: hotels in the city of Agadir.

### **Hotel service characteristics:**

Over the years, the hotel industry has become a strong and major link in the tourist chain, and is one of the economic industries that have a structure that is both complex and heterogeneous.

Generally, a hotel is defined as an establishment offering a paid accommodation service, for a fixed period. In addition to reception and accommodation, the hotel offers its clients several services at the same time, such as restoration

, conference and meeting rooms, swimming pool. Like any tertiary enterprise, a hotel offers services in order to meet a need, expectations and requirements. This concept of service is essential in the hotel sector, it includes the use of material goods but also service in the abstract sense of the term, that is to say all that involves the relationships between customer and staff in contact, in particular that the latter often plays a key role in the hotel offer because it communicates the image of the establishment. However, these products and services may only be used in a desired period by the consumer, they will never really belong to him. Although intangible, services necessarily involve some variable tangibles. This is important because more the service has a strong tangible component, the easier it is to standardize and ensure the quality of the final service. However some hotels will be consumed for their more intangible characteristics (scenery, quality of service, atmosphere, view, etc.) that are at least as important as the tangible aspects (FROCHOT, LEGOHÉREL, 2007). However, the product, as a material good, can be standardized and its quality easily verified through professional benchmarks or standards. We understand as well as the concept of "hotel product" is complex since it includes the use of tangible goods by the customer, and a set of services, too tangible and intangible services, which has implications for the different functions of hotel establishments.

#### **Tourism and hotel marketing:**

Tourism marketing is part of service marketing. It can be defined as all of the marketing techniques devoted to the design, promotion and marketing of tourist products, services and destinations. Whose main purpose is to attract visitors (DECHAVANNE, 2018).

The hotel industry is one of the pillars of tourism, and promoting it can go, among other things, by promoting the activities of hotel establishments. Indeed, the hotel sector is part of a culture and personalized know-how, where managers and staff listen, analyze all the motivations of their customers to meet their expectations through their satisfaction. In addition, faced with the abundant offers of competitors, and so that the marketing of hotel establishments can create performance for them, it is important to prioritize the requirements in any action attributed to customers, by providing them with the best products or services. In the hotel industry, several entities have noted that it is much less expensive to keep customers than it is to try to create new ones. Customer retention and loyalty have become priority objectives. If winning new customers is very expensive, retaining existing customers is very profitable (BOUCHIBA, 2011). These actions will only be carried out with an incomparable quality hotel service offer that meets customer expectations, gives them satisfaction and generates loyalty to the hotel establishment. It is no longer enough to be competent to stand out from the competition, you have to be excellent for better competitiveness and profitability.

#### **The use of digital in hotels:**

The definition proposed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1993, considers electronic administration as "the use of information and communication technologies and in particular the Internet as a tool aimed at setting up a better quality administration towards the citizens" (BOUCHIBA, 2011). We end up with the following proposition: the electronic business would be a tool aiming to set up an organization satisfying the explicit, implicit or latent needs (in other words the expectations) of the users.

It also constitutes a guarantee of quality because it improves the internal organization of services and offers great efficiency by automating monotonous and repeated tasks, better monitoring and control of internal management processes; a reduction in costs, deadlines and geographic constraints which posed the problem of information transfer between departments and organizations. Companies, by networking, by putting useful information for customers online, will be able to simplify work procedures. Thus, the integration of digital into can contribute to making its organizations more efficient, by presenting the client with a better service, listening to them and responding to their needs.

The increasingly abundant use of Digital has had a strong impact on the structures and functions of the various business sectors. The hotel industry is also confronting developments common to the entire information society. Indeed, hotels bring together different services in which the use of digital seems essential for a better offer to customers, especially with the large volumes of data and information that each service produces in its daily operation. In this sense, digital offers them new modes of organization, and allows real-time activity management and increased flexibility.

Laëtitia Roux-Morin (ROUX-MORIN, 2006), concluded in her article Electronic administration and quality of public service that in sum, digital technologies allow "to provide better services adapted to needs at a lower cost by putting interoperable systems accessible to all".

However, Dorsaf Omrane and Jean-Luc Bouillon have developed, in an article entitled "Information and Communication Technologies and service relationships in a globalized economy", on some disadvantages relating to the appropriation of digital technologies in services and how they can be perceived by customers, "On the one hand, technologies are modifying the service's manufacturing processes and will necessarily influence the role, place, expertise and confidence that the personnel in contact have with the organization. on the other hand, digital can be assimilated by certain customers as a deliberate will on the part of the service provider to "get rid" of them. In addition, the performance of the process and the quality of the service will increasingly depend on the skills of the client and his use of the solutions offered by digital. This use will depend not only on the advantages it derives from it (detemporalization, offshoring, saving time, facilitating the process of accessing services, etc.), but also on its willingness to accept and appropriate new forms of servuction without interpersonal contact " (DORSAF Omrane, BOUILLON Jean-Luc, 2006).

### **Digital to improve hotel marketing:**

Nowadays, digital is important in the management and marketing of large hotel establishments. Consumers are becoming more experienced, more demanding, and expect from the hotel a better quality offer that is both individual and more modern, which means that the various services and functions of hotel establishments must adapt and integrate these technologies, especially because it is a profession that calls for a mixture of interpersonal and technological know-how. In addition to transactions and reservations, the Internet is becoming the most used means, allowing establishments and customers to access the information they want in real time. Digital" allows hotels to remain autonomous and competitive, and facilitate their daily operations. The innovation carried by technology and contributing to the improvement of the client's functional experience is illustrated by the MURANO hotel in Paris. This hotel replaced the room key with a client fingerprint recognition system. This innovation contributed to the improvement of the client's functional experience since the client no longer had to worry about losing his key" (PHAN, 2007). In addition, the reservation which represents a primordial task in the servuction process of the various hotels, is based today on technology on the one hand and on the means of communication on the other hand (telephone, fax, postal mail... ), with the

appearance of reservation software such as "PMS<sup>2</sup>" which is a reservation, management and billing software.

Digital has also improved services related to reception, customer arrivals and departures, billing and room management. As a result, the increasingly modern reservation systems and the central reservation systems common to hotels of the same brand allow efficient and rapid reservation. The automation of these tasks also makes it possible to mobilize staff on the personalization of the service.

Hotel distribution, as part of hotel marketing, has also undergone a real digital transformation with the increase in online sales. It is marked by the growing influence of more and more numerous and diverse intermediaries on this market: regional and international online agencies, search sites, comparators, social networks...

This digital revolution, which is taking place, is metamorphosing the relationships between the players in the profession and consumer habits, because it allows us to establish a privileged link, more direct and permanent, with each client. This is why the Accor group invests heavily in its information systems and new technologies to be one of the major players in the digital hotel industry and to establish regular and stronger interaction with its customers through its websites and its platform for mobile phones<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, digital solutions have changed the hotel industry, in particular with the emergence of the Internet and the internationalization of the market, whether it's supply or demand. The Internet is a great showcase for communicating about the product, business offer and services. Good referencing and the multiplication of links offer hotels unprecedented visibility. Hotel groups have followed the emergence of Web 2.0 and are increasingly present on blogs, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

According to the results of the 33rd edition of the magazine "French Hotel Industry", digital constitutes an important lever of innovation for the hotel industry which, through this, will be able to surprise customers, through ergonomics and better quality services, they allow the automation of some processes. Access terminals that allow customers to book, pay, obtain their key (or even choose their room and pay for options) are developing enormously in budget hotels as in more upscale hotels.

The introduction of digital in hotels is such that certain hotel groups have created new specific job profiles. The Hyatt International group perfectly illustrates this phenomenon with the creation of "technical concierges" positions. Trained agents help customers install their mobile communication equipment, connect their laptops, and explain how the room facilities work... Swisshotel has created an independent entity of around ten people, responsible for information and communications technology.

The hotel industry is a sector rich in possibilities, since it is possible to apply both the technologies used in points of sale (iBeacons, applications on tablets or smart phones, Google Glass ...) but also all the innovations connected housing (intelligent objects allowing the adjustment of temperature, lighting and other comfort parameters, contextual information...). This investment will particularly benefit the luxury hotel sector, for which connected development will bring significant added value in terms of experience, which will make it possible to renew offers (CLANET Blandine, 2015).

Digital is still considered essential for better management of customer relations, because it provides organizations, through the various techniques, all the information concerning the customers updated, and helps to have a long-term personalized relationship with them. With

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<sup>2</sup> Property Management System.

<sup>3</sup> Accor's annual report, "ACCOR, the new frontiers of the hotel industry 2011", p.20.

digital, the company has been able to develop its studies of consumer behavior, the analysis of these to be on a parallel track with consumer trends, in particular "that with the appearance of recommendation sites, customers have become more sensitive to the advice of their peers in whom they trust more than in any marketing campaign" (BERNARDI, 2019). Indeed, Social Networking allows organizations today to test new ideas with customers and get their reactions; the most used social networks today are Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, but Web 2.0 has made most websites interactive, allowing customers to post their comments and their assessments, to review and exchange their views (JELONEK, Dorota, 2015).

Investing in digital therefore appears necessary to obtain a return on the efforts made in the development of hotel marketing and essential to support the IT industry in a constantly changing technology market.

### **Research methodology:**

In this part, we present the results of a qualitative study conducted during the month of September 2019 with a sample of 12 hotels of different classes in the city of Agadir, of which we chose to interview the sales and marketing managers. or the Information Systems managers according to their availability.

To do this, an interview guide was developed and administered directly to the interviewees, in a "semi-directive" manner.

We present, in the following axis, the main results of our empirical study: they particularly concern the responses relating to the opinions of the respondents concerning the digitalization of the relationship of hotels with their customers, the appropriation and training for the use of digital solutions, the disadvantages that can result from the digitalization of hotel services and its influence on hotel marketing. Given the number of respondents, the results were analyzed by content.

### **Results analysis:**

- **To what extent do you consider your relationship with your customers to be digitized?**

The respondents all consider that their relationships with their customers have become more or less digitized, the reasons they cite are:

- The fact that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) today largely depends on digital;
- The fact that with digital, the hotel has easy access to customer data ;
- The fact that with digital, customers quickly find all the information concerning the hotel but also its offers and news.
- The fact that digital facilitates communication with customers.
- The use of E-mailing for customer relationship (birthdays, national days, etc.).
- Development of relationships with existing and potential customers via the Internet (E-CRM).

- **What digital-related techniques do you use to succeed in your hotel marketing?**

The main techniques cited by our respondents in this sense are:

- Digital check-in for better satisfaction and time saving.
- E-commerce to sell hotel services online (reservations, activity offers, etc.).
- Virtual visits of the hotel even before booking clients to stimulate their motivation.
- Hotel software (like PMS hotel Misterbooking) which offers multiple business features and allows quick access to data, and automates the daily operations of the hotel.
- The hotel's loyalty programs are digitized.
- The use by the hotel of commercial e-mailing.
- The smart phone applications (Mobile Marketing) of the hotel.
- SMS sending by the hotel to customers (Mobile Marketing).
- The publication of the hotel newsletter.

- **Were you trained in the use of digital solutions in your hotel?**

With the exception of their initial training and diplomas obtained, the majority of interviewees have never benefited from digital training and only 4 of them confirmed having benefited from training during their professional career from basic training focused on management software: FIDELIO, GALILIO, AMADIOS, and NET PRO. Furthermore, the results show that the frequency of this training remains very low when compared with the number of years of work. However, a respondent working in a hotel that belongs to an international chain said that he periodically receives training related to his position in the marketing department, including one last training concerning the improvement of digital marketing techniques.

- **Do you think that hotel marketing can today achieve the objectives set without digital? How?**

The majority of interviewees replied that without digital, achieving the objectives of hotel marketing would be a difficult task. They want the integration of more digital solutions to support changes and innovations in the hotel sector. For them, digital facilitates access to data, reduces workload, allows good inter-service communication and better time management. Therefore, it improves the quality of service offered while making work more efficient.

Among the main reasons cited by interviewees:

- Without digital, it would be difficult to improve customer service and reduce costs.
- Without digital, it would be difficult for us to know the behavior of our customers and therefore we will be unable to plan marketing actions towards it.
- It is with the use of digital that we manage to increase the effectiveness of our marketing programs, which would be difficult to achieve without digital solutions.
- Digital allows us to achieve what is now called social CRM, or CRM 2.0, which integrates social media in customer relationship management and which greatly helps us in achieving our marketing objectives. So we can't do without it.

- **What do you think are the disadvantages that can result from the digitization of hotel services and negatively influence the marketing of your establishments?**

The responses of our respondents to this question are based on the following points, which have been repeated by more than one respondent:

- Poor exploitation of digital technologies due to the repetition of breakdowns, the lack of technical assistance, maintenance as well as the resistance to changes that some officials prove.
- In the event of any possible breakdown, digital would become a source of slow work.
- The reliability of digital is not 100% guaranteed.
- A danger will arise for hotels that will not follow the perpetual evolution of digital.

### **Conclusion:**

Today digital marketing has become an obligation for hotel establishments in order to confront fierce competition, or even to benefit from a competitive advantage. In the coming years, digital will be even more at the heart of the hotel industry, especially with growing digital needs and innovative options that appear so quickly that they often become obsolete before even being fully implemented.

Visitor expectations are becoming higher and higher, hoteliers will face new challenges, and must continually question themselves about the investment possibilities in order to renew digital equipment. Technological innovations, whether related to the product, service or management process, must be at the heart of hoteliers' strategic thinking.

However, and taking into account the results identified in the context of our survey, it appears that digital constitutes a strategic component in the development of hotel services but under the conditions of accompanying them with appropriate support measures. Among these measures, we could note:

- The importance of the staff awareness of the important role of digital in the improvement and success of hotel marketing;
- Adoption of adequate and periodic digital training plans for the benefit of hotel staff;
- Control of maintenance operations of the digital component of the communication, information and marketing system put in place.
- Motivate customers for a better engagement in a digital relationship offering a better bipartite "Hotel-customer" relationship.

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