

The Influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya

Sarah Maina - Njoka

Student Number - 166249

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Business in Hospitality Management at Strathmore University**



School of Tourism and Hospitality

Strathmore University

Nairobi, Kenya

June, 2025

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

Declaration and Approval

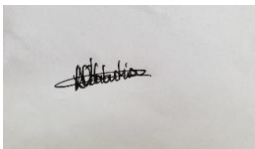
Declaration

I declare that this work has not been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contain no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

© No part of this thesis may be reproduced without the permission of the author and Strathmore University.

Sarah Maina - Njoka

Sign:



Date: 23rd May, 2025

Approval

The thesis of Sarah Maina - Njoka will be reviewed and approved for examination by the following:

Dr. David Chiawo,

Senior Lecturer and Dean, School of Tourism and Hospitality,
Strathmore University

Prof. Bernard Shibwabo,

Director of Graduate Studies,
Strathmore University

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of digital marketing strategies on the brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya. With digital marketing gaining importance in the hospitality sector, there is limited research on its effectiveness in rural and emerging hotel markets such as Murang'a. This study focuses on three key strategies: social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing, using the Resource-Based View and Integrated Marketing Communication theories to guide the analysis of how these strategies impact hotel brand performance. A descriptive research design was employed, and data were collected through structured questionnaires from 137 hotel managers across 18 hotels. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression to determine the relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance indicators such as occupancy rates, sales revenue, and profitability. The findings revealed that digital marketing strategies collectively explained 49% of the variance in brand performance. Of the strategies studied, SEO had the strongest positive influence on brand performance, followed by content marketing and social media marketing. However, challenges to the adoption of digital marketing were identified, including limited financial and human resources, lack of digital marketing expertise, and poor infrastructure, such as unreliable internet connectivity, which affected the engagement and effectiveness of digital marketing initiatives. Despite these challenges, the study demonstrated that the strategic use of digital marketing significantly enhanced brand visibility, customer engagement, and overall hotel performance in the region. Based on these findings, the study recommends that hotel managers integrate social media, SEO, and content marketing into a unified digital marketing strategy. Additionally, policymakers should support the digital transformation of the hospitality sector by improving internet infrastructure, offering incentives for digital training, and creating clear regulations for ethical digital marketing. This research contributes valuable insights into digital marketing's role in enhancing brand performance in rural hotel markets, addressing a gap in the existing literature focused mainly on urban or star-rated hotels. The study suggests directions for future research, such as the impact of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality, and a comparison of digital marketing effectiveness in urban versus rural hospitality markets.

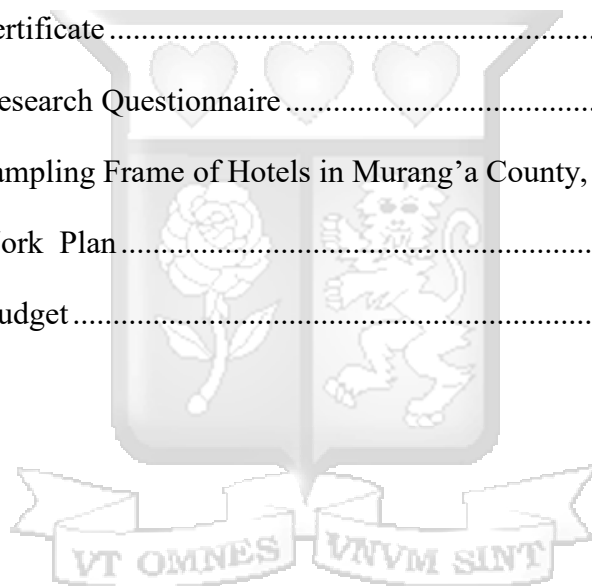
Table of Contents

Declaration and Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Definition of Terms	xi
Acknowledgement	xii
Dedication	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.1.1 Hotel Industry in Kenya.....	3
1.1.2 Digital Marketing Strategies.....	4
1.1.3 Brand Performance.....	6
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	8
1.3 General Objective.....	10
1.3.1 Specific Objectives.....	10
1.4 Research Questions.....	10
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	10
1.5.1 Management of hotels in Murang'a County.....	10
1.5.2 Local Tourism Authorities, Policymakers, and Industry Practitioners.....	11
1.5.3 Academic Researchers and Scholars.....	11
1.6 Scope of the Study.....	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13

2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 Theoretical Framework	13
2.2.1 Resource-based View Theory	13
2.2.2 Integrated Marketing Communication Theory	14
2.3 Empirical Framework	15
2.3.1 Social Media Marketing and Brand Performance	16
2.3.2 Search Engine Optimization Marketing and Brand Performance	18
2.3.3 Content Marketing and Brand Performance	20
2.4 Gaps in Literature	23
2.5 Conceptual Framework	23
2.6 Operationalization of Study Variables	25
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	26
3.1 Introduction	26
3.2 Research Philosophy	26
3.3 Research Design	27
3.4 Target Population	27
3.5 Sampling Design and Sample Size	28
3.6 Data Collection Instruments	30
3.7 Data Collection Procedure	30
3.8 Research Quality	30
3.8.1 Validity of Research Instrument	31
3.8.2 Reliability of Research Instrument	31
3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation	31
3.10 Ethical Considerations	32

Chapter 4: Presentation of Research Findings	33
4.1 Introduction	33
4.2 Response Rate	33
4.3 Demographic Findings	34
4.4 Descriptive Statistics	35
4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Social Media Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County	35
4.4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Search Engine Optimization Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County	37
4.4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Content Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County	39
4.4.4 Descriptive Statistics for Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County	41
4.5 Reliability Analysis	43
4.5.1 Reliability Analysis of Social Media Marketing	43
4.5.2 Reliability Analysis for Search Engine Optimization Marketing	44
4.5.3 Reliability Analysis for Content Marketing	45
4.5.4 Reliability Analysis for Brand Performance	46
4.6 Correlation Analysis	47
4.7 Regression Analysis	48
4.7.4 Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization Marketing and Content Marketing on Brand Performance	48
Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations	50
5.1 Introduction	50
5.2 Discussions	50
5.3 Conclusions and Recommendations	52

5.3.1 Conclusions	52
5.3.2 Recommendations	53
5.4 Suggestions for Further Research	54
References	55
Appendices	64
Appendix A: Similarity Report	64
Appendix B: Strathmore University Institutional Ethics Review Clearance Certificate	66
Appendix C: National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) Certificate	69
Appendix D: Research Questionnaire	70
Appendix E: Sampling Frame of Hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya	73
Appendix F: Work Plan	74
Appendix G: Budget	75



List of Figures

Figure 2.1: A Conceptual Framework	24
--	----



List of Tables

Table 2.1: Operationalization of the Study Variables	25
Table 3.1: Target Population	28
Table 3.2: Distribution of Sample Size of Hotel Managers from 18 Hotels in Murang'a County	29
Table 4.1: Response Rate	33
Table 4.2 Demographic Findings	34
Table 4.3: Social Media Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County	36
Table 4.4: Search Engine Optimization Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County	38
Table 4.5: Content Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County	40
Table 4.6: Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County	42
Table 4.7: Reliability Analysis of Social Media Marketing	43
Table 4.8: Reliability Analysis for Search Engine Optimization Marketing	44
Table 4.9: Reliability Analysis for Content Marketing	45
Table 4.10: Reliability Analysis for Brand Performance	46
Table 4.11: Correlation Analysis	47
Table 4.12: Model Summary of Bivariate Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization Marketing and Content Marketing on Brand Performance	48
Table 4.13: Regression of Coefficients for Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization Marketing and Content Marketing on Brand Performance	49

List of Abbreviations

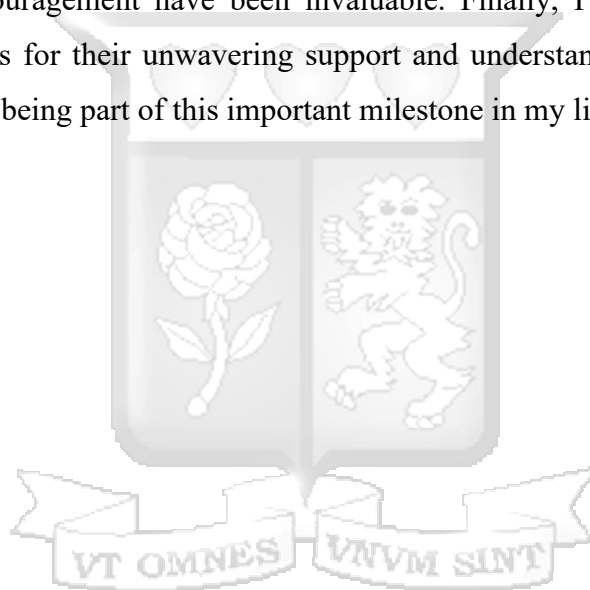
ADR	Average Daily Rate
AI	Artificial Intelligence
GOPPAR	Gross Operating Profit per Available Room
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MSMEs	Micro Small and Medium Enterprises
NACOSTI	National Council for Science and Technology and Innovation
NPS	Net Promoter Score
PEOU	Perceived Ease of Use
PPC	Pay-Per-Click
PU	Perceived Usefulness
RBV	Resource-Based View
RevPAR	Revenue per Available Room
ROI	Return on Investment
SEM	Search Engine Marketing
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SERPs	Search Engine Results Pages
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

Definition of Terms

Brand Performance	Is the measure of a brand's outcome or success against company goals that are initially set (Odawo et al, 2022)
Content marketing	A strategy focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and engage a target audience (Odawo et al, 2022)
Customer Age Profile	Is a demographic analysis that categorizes customers based on their age groups to help understand their preferences, behaviors, and purchasing patterns (Ngatia, 2023).
Digital Marketing	Is the use of online platforms and technologies such as social media, search engines, email, and websites to promote products or services and engage with target audiences (Hanlon, 2021)
Social media marketing	Use of social media platforms to promote a brand, engage with its audience, and drive business objectives through targeted advertising (Wen et al., 2021)

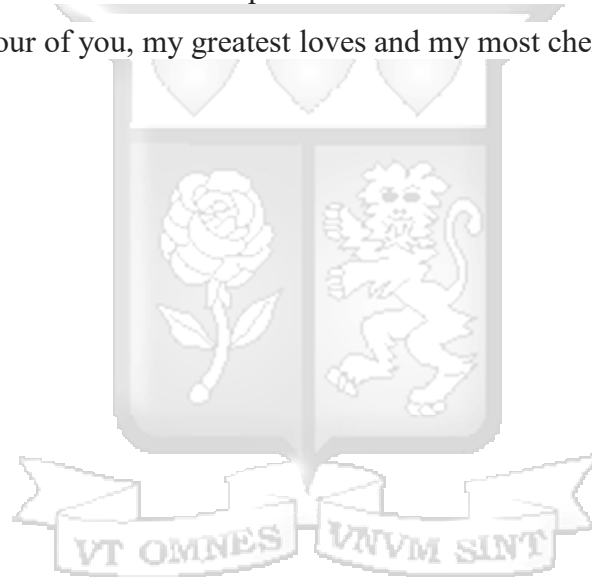
Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who supported me throughout the process of completing this thesis. Firstly, I am profoundly grateful to Strathmore University for providing an enriching environment that has enabled my academic and personal growth. My heartfelt thanks go to my supervisor, Dr. David Chiawo who generously gave his time, expertise, and guidance through out this thesis. His dedication and encouragement were pivotal to my success, and I am forever thankful for your support. I would also like to extend my appreciation to my colleagues, whose camaraderie and collaboration made this journey both enjoyable and fulfilling. Your insights and encouragement have been invaluable. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support and understanding during this journey. Thank you all for being part of this important milestone in my life.



Dedication

To my husband, David Njoka, whose unwavering support, love, and encouragement have been my anchor throughout this journey. Your belief in me, even during the most challenging moments, has been my greatest strength. This work is as much yours as it is mine. To my daughters, Nadia, Skylar and Nami, whose endless curiosity on what my thesis is all about and encouragement have been my inspiration. You remind me every day of the importance of perseverance, curiosity, and the beauty of endless possibilities. As women, know that we can shatter the glass ceiling and achieve our heart's desires, even while wearing many hats. May this achievement serve as a testament to the power of determination and the limitless potential that lies within you girls. This thesis is dedicated to the four of you, my greatest loves and my most cherished blessings.



Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The hospitality industry is a vital component of the global economy, significantly contributing to employment, tourism revenue, and international trade. Within this sector, the hotel industry plays a central role, offering accommodation, food and beverage services, and curated guest experiences that support both domestic and international travel. Over the past few decades, the performance of hotels has been shaped by factors such as economic conditions, technological advancement, evolving guest expectations, and global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic (Busulwa, 2020).

Among these factors, digital marketing has emerged as a key enabler of competitiveness. It empowers hotels to expand their market reach, build brand recognition, improve customer engagement, and streamline operations (Kotler et al., 2021). Digital marketing encompasses the strategic use of social media platforms, search engines, email campaigns, booking platforms, and analytics tools to deliver targeted and personalized communication. It allows hotels to promote offers, manage reviews, showcase property features, and interact with customers in real time (Hanlon, 2021; Wen et al., 2021).

The rise of social media has particularly transformed how hotels manage their brand presence. Through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TripAdvisor, hotels can post updates, collect guest feedback, and share immersive visual content, fostering both brand affinity and trust. Similarly, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and online booking integrations help hotels appear more prominently in search results, increasing their chances of capturing potential bookings directly from digital channels (Zamyatina & Solntseva, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the digital shift in hospitality. Contactless check-ins, mobile apps, virtual concierge services, and digital menus have become standard in many properties, enhancing guest safety and convenience while reducing operational strain (Musoga et al, 2021). Hotels that adopted these digital tools reported increased efficiency, cost savings, and improved guest satisfaction, which in turn strengthened their brand loyalty and market resilience (Ouma & Mutinda, 2022).

Today's travelers increasingly prioritize not just service quality but personalized, sustainable, and technology-enhanced experiences. This has led to the rise of boutique and lifestyle hotels offering tailored services, eco-conscious amenities, and wellness features. Digital marketing is central to communicating these differentiators, targeting niche segments, and converting interest into loyalty through data-driven campaigns and influencer partnerships (Collins, 2023; Dang & Nguyen, 2023).

The importance of effective marketing strategy is further underscored by strategic frameworks such as the Ansoff Matrix, Market Orientation Theory, and the Dynamic Capabilities Framework. These models emphasize innovation, customer alignment, and responsiveness as key drivers of performance (Lukose & Lagat, 2022). International hotel groups like Radisson Blu and Serena Hotels in Kenya have embraced digital-first strategies from real-time social engagement to customized booking platforms allowing them to strengthen brand equity in competitive environments (Musoga et al., 2021).

Online travel platforms like Booking.com, Jumia Travel, and Airbnb have also reshaped the Kenyan hospitality distribution landscape. These platforms provide exposure to a global audience, allowing even small, rural hotels to attract bookings with minimal marketing budgets. However, this has also intensified competition, making digital differentiation a necessity rather than an option (Ouma & Mutinda, 2022).

Moreover, digital innovations have enabled hotels to boost operational efficiency. Automated check-ins, AI-driven chat support, and cloud-based property management systems reduce overheads and errors while improving service speed (Arthur et al., 2020). Data analytics tools allow hotels to understand guest behavior, segment audiences, monitor performance indicators, and refine marketing spend thereby enhancing profitability (Lee & Kotler, 2022; Goryushkina et al, 2019).

Equally important, digital branding creates emotional resonance with customers. Through content marketing, storytelling, user-generated content, and loyalty platforms, hotels can shape customer perceptions and influence purchase decisions. Positive guest experiences shared online become powerful endorsements. For instance, hotels in East Africa like Serena and Sarova use digital storytelling to merge local culture with global luxury

expectations, maintaining strong brand performance (Ouma & Mutinda, 2022; Dang & Nguyen, 2023).

In Kenya, particularly in rural counties like Murang'a, the adoption of digital marketing in hospitality remains limited despite its potential. Many hotels struggle with outdated websites, minimal social media presence, and lack of skilled personnel. Understanding the role of digital strategies in enhancing brand performance in such settings is therefore critical not only for individual hotels but for uplifting the competitiveness of the broader regional hospitality sector.

1.1.1 Hotel Industry in Kenya

Kenya's hotel industry is a major pillar of its service economy, supporting employment, domestic and international tourism, and national income generation. With its blend of natural attractions, diverse cultures, and improving infrastructure, Kenya remains a key destination for both leisure and business travelers (Akomo, 2019). The Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA), under the Tourism Act of 2011, is responsible for the licensing and classification of hospitality facilities in Kenya, ensuring compliance with operational standards and star ratings (TRA, 2011).

Hotels in Kenya are typically categorized into star ratings ranging from one to five, based on amenities, service quality, and infrastructure (Akunja, 2020). The market includes a mix of international chains, boutique hotels, eco-lodges, conference hotels, and budget accommodations (Gioko et al., 2021). Prominent brands such as Radisson Blu, Sarova Hotels, and Fairmont operate primarily in Nairobi, Mombasa, and tourism hotspots, targeting international clientele and high-end business travelers (Lukose & Lagat, 2022). Mid-tier hotels like the Boma Hotel and Sarova Panafric, and affordable three-star establishments such as Sentrim Boulevard serve a broader domestic and regional market segment (Lukose, 2023).

Kenya's hospitality sector has benefited from infrastructure development such as the upgrading of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA), Moi International Airport, and improved road connectivity to key tourism circuits. Initiatives like the Magical Kenya campaign have also promoted hotel occupancy by driving destination awareness and encouraging domestic travel (Musoga et al., 2021; Korir & Muchemi, 2020). These

factors have contributed to steady hotel growth in urban and coastal regions, although rural areas remain underserved.

Digital platforms and online marketing have increasingly shaped hotel competitiveness in Kenya, with platforms like Booking.com, TripAdvisor, Jumia Travel, and Airbnb playing an integral role in shaping visibility and guest decision-making. Hotels that maintain active digital profiles attract higher engagement and enjoy improved occupancy, especially in regions with competitive accommodation options (Ouma & Mutinda, 2022). However, many small and medium-sized hotels still rely on walk-ins or traditional marketing, limiting their reach and performance.

In Murang'a County, the hospitality industry is emerging but remains relatively underdeveloped compared to Nairobi or the coastal regions. The county has several small to mid-sized hotels, guesthouses, and lodges catering to domestic travelers, business guests, and cultural tourists. Key attractions include the Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga shrine, scenic tea and coffee plantations, and proximity to the Aberdare ranges. However, challenges persist in infrastructure, digital capacity, and professional staffing.

Lukose and Lagat (2022) observe that while proactive marketing efforts by local authorities and some hotels in Murang'a have increased visibility, many hotels lack the digital infrastructure, marketing expertise, and online booking integration necessary to compete regionally. According to Lukose (2023), gaps in quality service delivery, inadequate online presence, and limited investment in technology have resulted in low occupancy rates and poor brand performance. These challenges emphasize the need for tailored digital strategies to enhance competitiveness in Murang'a's hotel sector.

1.1.2 Digital Marketing Strategies

Digital marketing refers to the strategic use of online platforms and digital technologies to achieve marketing objectives such as attracting, engaging, and converting customers into loyal patrons (Hanlon, 2021). In the hospitality industry, digital marketing encompasses website optimization, search engine marketing (SEM), social media engagement, email marketing, influencer partnerships, online reputation management, and paid advertisements (Kotler et al., 2020; Chaffey & Smith, 2022).

As travelers increasingly rely on digital tools for researching and booking accommodation, hotels must adopt comprehensive digital marketing strategies to remain competitive. These strategies are designed not only to increase visibility but also to enhance customer relationships and drive direct bookings (Kotler et al., 2023). For instance, website optimization using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) ensures that hotels appear prominently in search results, boosting organic traffic and reducing reliance on third-party booking platforms (Lukose, 2023).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X), and LinkedIn provide hotels with interactive spaces to showcase their properties, promote special offers, and engage with guests in real-time. In Kenya, Facebook is the most commonly used platform among hotels, particularly for sharing promotions and responding to customer inquiries (Ngatia, 2023). However, limited uptake of platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn is often due to staffing constraints and low digital literacy levels.

Content marketing plays a complementary role by generating blog posts, promotional videos, and visual narratives that highlight amenities, local attractions, and guest experiences (Marques, 2021). In Murang'a County, where hotels are located near scenic tea plantations and cultural landmarks, content-based storytelling could be a powerful differentiator. However, preliminary audits reveal that many hotels in the region have minimal digital content and rarely update their websites or social media pages (Ngatia, 2023).

Email marketing continues to be a vital channel for direct communication. It enables segmentation by customer preferences and booking history, allowing hotels to send personalized promotions and seasonal offers (Yang et al., 2019). However, adoption remains low in smaller establishments due to a lack of trained personnel and digital tools.

Another increasingly influential area is online reviews and reputation management. Platforms such as TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Booking.com serve as key decision-making tools for travelers. Hotels that actively monitor and respond to guest reviews tend to gain customer trust and encourage repeat bookings (El-Said, 2020). In contrast, hotels that neglect online feedback may suffer from poor digital perception, which directly affects brand credibility and performance.

Loyalty programs, though more common among international chains, are gaining traction even in mid-sized Kenyan hotels. These programs reward repeat visits with discounts, upgrades, or free services, thereby improving customer retention. Locally, customized loyalty programs integrated with mobile platforms can be used to build long-term relationships with guests, especially in regional markets like Murang'a.

The application of data analytics further refines digital strategies by providing insights into website traffic, conversion rates, social media engagement, customer demographics, and return on marketing investment (Arthur et al., 2020; Goryushkina et al., 2019). Tools like Google Analytics, Meta Ads Manager, and property management dashboards enable hotels to assess campaign performance and tailor content to audience behavior (Lee & Kotler, 2022; Collins, 2023).

These digital strategies are directly linked to core brand performance indicators such as occupancy rates, sales revenue, customer retention, and profitability. Hotels with strong digital engagement often report higher booking volumes, stronger brand loyalty, and greater operational efficiency. Personalized messaging and customer profiling also enable hotels to upsell services, increase average revenue per customer, and streamline communication costs (Ouma & Mutinda, 2022).

In Murang'a County, however, most hotels are still in early stages of digital marketing adoption, with basic Facebook pages and limited search engine visibility. Few hotels utilize SEO techniques, email automation, or structured analytics. This study therefore aims to examine how such digital marketing strategies, if effectively deployed, can contribute to measurable improvements in brand performance among hotels in Murang'a.

1.1.3 Brand Performance

Brand performance refers to the extent to which a brand achieves its strategic business objectives, including occupancy rates, sales revenue, customer loyalty, profitability, and market competitiveness (Busulwa, 2020). In the hospitality sector, particularly in the hotel industry, brand performance reflects how well a hotel delivers on its brand promise, differentiates itself in the market, and consistently attracts and retains guests (Odawo et al., 2022). A high-performing brand often commands stronger customer trust, premium pricing, and repeat business, thereby contributing to long-term sustainability.

One of the core indicators of brand performance in hospitality is the occupancy rate, which represents the proportion of available rooms that are booked over a given period (Munyoki et al., 2020). This metric is a direct signal of guest demand, market appeal, and the effectiveness of marketing strategies. High occupancy often reflects strong brand visibility and service satisfaction, while low occupancy may point to service gaps, inadequate digital reach, or poor market positioning (Marques, 2021; Dang & Nguyen, 2023). In rural counties like Murang'a, where many hotels have limited marketing infrastructure and staff capacity, maintaining consistent occupancy remains a challenge.

Sales revenue is another critical metric, representing the total income generated from services such as accommodation, food and beverage, event hosting, and ancillary services (Sharma & Aggarwal, 2021). Steady or rising revenue trends often indicate effective demand generation and successful branding efforts. Revenue can also reveal customer preferences; for instance, if a hotel's food and beverage revenue is growing, it may suggest brand strength in culinary services. In the context of digital marketing, increased revenue is often tied to effective online promotions and targeted campaigns that drive both bookings and upselling (Herath et al., 2023; Wollard, 2022).

Profitability, the ability to generate financial gains after covering operational costs, is a comprehensive indicator of brand performance. Metrics such as net profit margin, gross operating profit, and earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) reflect a hotel's capacity to manage costs efficiently while sustaining strong revenue streams (Santos et al., 2022; Mugambi et al., 2023). Profitability also enables reinvestment into brand-enhancing areas such as service quality, staff training, facility upgrades, and technology adoption. For Murang'a-based hotels with narrow margins, cost efficiency and strategic marketing are essential to achieving and sustaining profitability.

Beyond these core indicators, the hospitality industry relies on additional metrics to assess financial and operational performance. Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR) evaluates both pricing and occupancy efficiency, while Average Daily Rate (ADR) reflects pricing power by measuring income per occupied room. Gross Operating Profit per Available Room (GOPPAR) provides insights into operational performance relative to revenue generation (Ouma & Mutinda, 2022). These financial indicators, while

technical in nature, are critical in guiding managerial decisions and benchmarking brand success.

Digital marketing plays a central role in influencing these aspects of brand performance. Through tools such as search engine optimization (SEO), social media advertising, content marketing, influencer partnerships, email automation, and online reputation management, hotels can significantly increase visibility, drive traffic to booking platforms, and build long-term customer relationships (Dang & Nguyen, 2023; Arthur et al., 2020). Personalized messaging and automated remarketing also help hotels target the right segments with customized offers, enhancing conversion rates and guest satisfaction (Lee & Kotler, 2022).

Furthermore, digital platforms provide real-time performance tracking and analytics, allowing hotel managers to monitor user behavior, evaluate campaign effectiveness, and adjust strategies accordingly. This is particularly important for small and mid-sized hotels in Murang'a County, where financial constraints necessitate efficient marketing and resource allocation. The use of such digital tools can enhance strategic decision-making, identify underperforming channels, and highlight customer engagement opportunities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Effective digital marketing plays a crucial role in brand performance within the hotel industry in Kenya. Previous research has established that branding is a critical determinant of hotel performance, influencing occupancy rates, customer loyalty, market share, and profitability (Busulwa, 2020; Marques, 2021; Odawo et al., 2022). Strong hotel brands are associated with better customer experiences, repeat business, and a competitive edge. However, most of this research has focused on large cities and tourism hubs such as Nairobi and Mombasa, with limited contextual studies on smaller counties like Murang'a.

Despite growing recognition of digital marketing's value, the hospitality industry in Murang'a County continues to experience poor brand performance (Lukose & Lagat, 2022). Evidence of this challenge can be seen in negative customer reviews from hotels such as Norkas Hotel, where guests have complained of delayed food service, poor setup quality, unprofessional staff, and broken infrastructure (Musoga et al., 2021). Other

hotels like Ranges View Lodge and Goshen Farm Hotel struggle to attract guests due to inadequate marketing strategies, substandard service quality, and limited investment in modern amenities. These issues result in an unappealing destination image and low occupancy rates (Ngatia, 2023).

Murang'a (2023) further noted that although many of these hotels are situated in scenic locations near attractions such as the Aberdare Forest and Mt. Kenya, they fail to promote these assets effectively due to lack of targeted digital advertising and underdeveloped content strategies. This results in lost opportunities to improve sales revenue and tourism visibility. Additionally, many hotel employees lack the necessary technological skills and experience to manage digital platforms or create quality content for online marketing campaigns.

The failure to utilize digital tools such as social media, online booking platforms, and search engine optimization has also reduced hotel visibility, customer reach, and online engagement (Stringam, 2020). Robaina et al. (2020) highlighted that poorly optimized websites and low-quality digital content lower search engine rankings, which in turn reduce web traffic and direct bookings. This diminished online presence negatively affects brand performance, especially when competing against better-resourced hotels in counties like Nairobi and Mombasa.

While existing studies have highlighted the relationship between digital marketing and brand performance, there remains a gap in understanding how this relationship plays out in underperforming regions such as Murang'a County. Furthermore, few studies have explored how customer profiling the process of segmenting and targeting customers based on demographics, preferences, and behaviors can enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies and strengthen brand performance outcomes.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the digital marketing strategies employed by hotels in Murang'a County and their influence on brand performance. It also aims to fill the identified knowledge gap by investigating the mediating role of customer profiling in this relationship. The findings are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in hospitality and tourism marketing while offering practical strategies for improving competitiveness and visibility of hotels in Murang'a County as a tourist destination

1.3 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to determine the influence of digital marketing strategies on brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the influence of social media marketing on brand performance among hotels in Murang'a county, Kenya.
- ii. To assess the influence of search engine optimization marketing on brand performance among hotels in Murang'a county, Kenya.
- iii. To determine the influence of content marketing on brand performance among hotels in Murang'a county, Kenya.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the influence of social media marketing on brand performance of hotels in Murang'a county, Kenya?
- ii. How does search engine optimization marketing influence brand performance of hotels in Murang'a county, Kenya?
- iii. What is the influence of content marketing on brand performance of hotels in Murang'a county, Kenya?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The thesis will be significant to various groups as listed below.

1.5.1 Management of hotels in Murang'a County

The research has been highly significant to the tourism and hospitality sector, providing empirical evidence on how digital marketing strategies influence brand performance in a rural setting like Murang'a County. As the hospitality industry becomes increasingly competitive, particularly in regions with limited infrastructure, understanding the strategic application of digital tools has helped hotel managers optimize their marketing efforts, attract more guests, and increase market share.

The study has offered actionable insights into the most effective digital marketing practices, enabling hotel management to allocate resources efficiently, enhance customer

satisfaction, improve booking rates, and achieve better returns on investment. Specifically, it highlighted high-impact areas such as targeted online advertising, social media campaigns, and search engine optimization. These insights are valuable not only for hotels in Murang'a County but also for small and mid-sized hotels in other counties or rural areas facing similar challenges across Kenya and other developing regions..

1.5.2 Local Tourism Authorities, Policymakers, and Industry Practitioners

Local tourism authorities and policymakers have benefited from this research by gaining deeper insights into the digital landscape of the hospitality industry, particularly in underdeveloped regions like Murang'a County. The findings have informed policy formulation and the development of support programs aimed at boosting digital literacy and digital marketing capabilities among hotel operators, especially in rural and peri-urban counties. This has enhanced the visibility and competitiveness of lesser-known destinations, thereby contributing to the diversification and resilience of Kenya's national tourism industry.

Furthermore, digital marketing professionals, consultants, and agencies working within the hospitality sector have gained a better understanding of the contextual challenges and strategic needs of hotels operating outside of major urban centers. This knowledge has enabled them to design and deliver more tailored and effective marketing solutions that align with the specific operating environments of such hotels..

1.5.3 Academic Researchers and Scholars

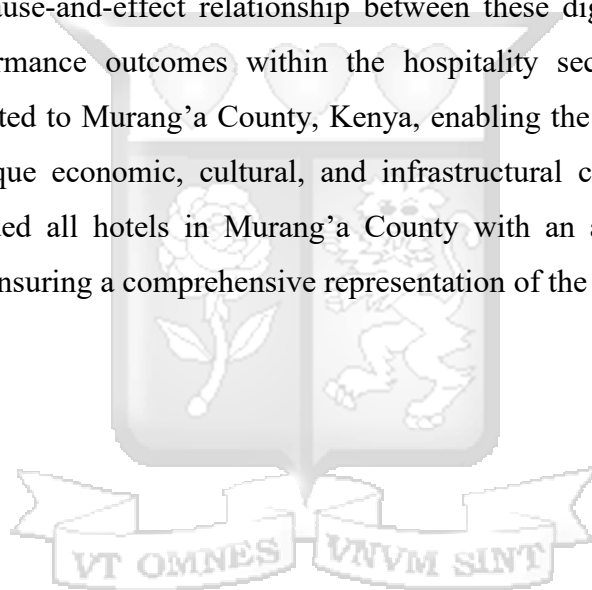
Academic researchers and scholars have found this study useful as it expands the body of knowledge on digital marketing and its effect on brand performance within the hospitality industry. The research has contributed empirical evidence from a rural Kenyan context, where relatively few studies have been conducted. It serves as a reference point for future research and supports the development of more comprehensive theories and models in digital marketing, brand strategy, and hospitality management.

By systematically analyzing the current digital marketing practices and their effectiveness, the study provides a robust basis for further inquiry. It also reveals potential gaps in knowledge and points to emerging themes such as the role of customer profiling, the

impact of local content strategies, and the digital readiness of hotel staff. The study's framework and findings may be adapted to other counties in Kenya or similar tourism economies globally, offering a valuable comparative dimension to future research and curriculum development in tourism and hospitality studies.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study's contextual scope was confined to examining the impact of specific digital marketing strategies namely social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing on the brand performance of hotels. Employing an explanatory research design, the study primarily utilized quantitative data collection methods to investigate the cause-and-effect relationship between these digital marketing strategies and brand performance outcomes within the hospitality sector. Geographically, the research was limited to Murang'a County, Kenya, enabling the findings to be tailored to the county's unique economic, cultural, and infrastructural characteristics. The target population included all hotels in Murang'a County with an annual guest turnover of 10,000 or more, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the region's hotel industry.



Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a thorough review of the literature related to the study. It begins by exploring the theoretical foundation that underpins the research, focusing on the key theories that guide the investigation. A review of relevant studies follows, specifically in the areas of digital marketing strategies, brand performance, and their application in the hospitality industry. The chapter concludes by presenting a conceptual framework that outlines the relationships among the study variables.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the key theories guiding the study, including the Resource-Based View Theory, which highlights the strategic use of resources, and the Integrated Marketing Communications Theory, which focuses on coordinated marketing efforts. These frameworks provide the foundation for understanding digital marketing strategies and brand performance.

2.2.1 Resource-based View Theory

This theory was proposed by Jay Barney in 1991 as a strategic management framework that emphasizes the importance of internal resources as the basis for achieving sustainable competitive advantage and better performance (Barney et al., 2021). It assumes that firms possess unique resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, distinguishing them from their competitors. A valuable resource enables a firm to capitalize on opportunities or neutralize threats, directly contributing to its efficiency and effectiveness (Freeman et al., 2021). A rare resource is one that few, if any, competitors possess, reducing the likelihood of others replicating the firm's success. Resources that are inimitable are difficult to copy due to unique historical development, complex interconnections, or proprietary knowledge (Davis & DeWitt, 2021). Additionally, a non-substitutable resource cannot be replaced by an alternative that delivers the same strategic benefit, providing the basis for competitive advantage. Nayak et al. (2022) indicated that many of these resources are embedded within the firm's

culture, processes, or systems, making them inherently challenging to transfer or replicate across organizations.

This theory was relevant in this research as it highlighted the role of technology as a unique and strategic resource that significantly contributes to competitive advantage and performance (Sukaatmadja et al., 2021). Digital marketing tools such as social media platforms, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing represented valuable resources that facilitated better customer outreach, personalized marketing, and data-driven decision-making. It was also observed that not all hotels in Kenya had fully adopted or optimized digital marketing strategies, making such capabilities a competitive differentiator. In addition, building effective digital marketing systems required investment in expertise, infrastructure, and time, which competitors may struggle to replicate quickly. Thus, hotels with dedicated teams managing digital marketing could fully leverage the benefits of such technology. Furthermore, a hotel brand with a distinct reputation for personalized guest experiences, well-trained staff, and high profits supported by advanced customer data analytics created an inimitable value proposition that competitors struggled to replicate. By focusing on leveraging such unique internal resources, firms could differentiate themselves in the marketplace, achieve superior performance, and establish long-term success. This principle highlighted that the strategic development and protection of internal resources were critical to sustaining a firm's competitive advantage and performance (Lubis, 2022).

2.2.2 Integrated Marketing Communication Theory

This theory was developed by Don Schultz in 1977. Integrated marketing communication is a strategic approach that emphasizes the importance of integrated marketing efforts and ensures consistency and coherence in messaging across various communication channels (Alameda García et al., 2019). The theory assumes that messages across all communication channels, such as advertising, public relations, and direct marketing, should be consistent and aligned with the brand's positioning and values. All marketing communications should also be logically connected and mutually reinforced, creating a unified brand message (Laurie & Mortimer, 2019). It also assumes that different communication channels should complement each other to amplify the overall impact of

marketing efforts. In addition, these marketing efforts should be continuous over time to build brand recognition and maintain customer relationships (Kushwaha et al., 2020).

Despite the popularity of this theory, some scholars, such as Metcalfe (2019), criticized it by highlighting that achieving true integration across all channels can be difficult due to organizational silos and disparate functional responsibilities. Zhao (2020) also argued that measuring the impact of integrated campaigns comprehensively across multiple channels can be complex. Nonetheless, this theory has continued to be used in recent studies that yielded key findings on the importance of using multiple marketing channels for marketing effectiveness and brand recognition. The study by Varadarajan (2020) explored the impact of marketing mix strategies on the performance of developing economies. The research found that firms that effectively managed their marketing mix strategies achieved higher sales growth and profitability. It also highlighted the importance of adapting marketing strategies to local market conditions and consumer preferences.

In addition, the study by Adams et al. (2019) analyzed how strategic marketing management practices influenced firm performance in the IT industry. The study concluded that well-defined marketing strategies achieved superior financial performance and sustainable competitive advantage. Similarly, this theory was applicable in this study as its assumptions and principles supported the use of multiple channels, particularly in assessing different digital marketing strategies, such as social media marketing and content marketing, employed in hotels in Murang'a. This theory also demonstrated that digital marketing efforts have a direct impact on brand visibility and engagement. Furthermore, it emphasized that understanding how different digital marketing strategies complement each other plays a crucial role in creating a cohesive brand image. The theory focused on aligning and harmonizing various promotional tools and channels to create a seamless and unified brand experience for the customer, which was crucial for enhancing brand performance.

2.3 Empirical Framework

This section presented a review of studies related to social media marketing, content marketing, and brand performance in the hospitality industry across different countries. It

examined their research methods, key findings, and the underlying research gaps that were identified. The review provided insights into how these digital marketing strategies had been studied globally and highlighted areas where further research was necessary to enhance understanding, particularly within the context of the hospitality sector in Murang'a County, Kenya.

2.3.1 Social Media Marketing and Brand Performance

Social media marketing involves utilizing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn to promote hotel services, engage customers, and enhance brand awareness. Its influence on brand performance is well documented, with studies showing that effective social media marketing increases brand visibility, fosters customer loyalty, and drives direct engagement with target audiences (Korir & Muchemi, 2020). By enabling real-time communication and feedback, social media helps maintain a positive brand image and builds long-term relationships with customers, critical factors in a competitive hospitality industry (Lukose & Lagat, 2022).

A comprehensive study by Tajvidi and Karami (2021) explored social media use in the UK hotel sector, using the Theory of Planned Behavior, Technology Acceptance Model, and Resource-Based View Theory to understand how hotels' attitudes, perceived ease of use, and resources influence social media adoption and overall performance (Parvez et al., 2022). Their findings revealed a strong positive correlation between social media use and hotel performance, mediated by marketing capabilities and enhanced by branding and innovation capacities. However, these studies largely measured general hotel performance, with limited focus on the direct impact of social media on brand performance a gap this study seeks to address, particularly within the context of independent and mid-tier hotels.

Haudi et al. (2022) examined social media marketing's effect on brand trust, equity, and loyalty among SMEs in Indonesia, finding that consistent and strategic use of social media significantly increased customer engagement and reinforced brand loyalty. Similarly, Ebrahim (2020) identified key social media attributes such as trendiness and customization that positively affect brand loyalty through the mediating role of brand trust. While these insights underscore the power of social media in building strong brands,

their focus on SMEs and telecom companies limits their direct application to the hospitality sector, indicating a clear contextual research gap.

Further, Arasli et al. (2021) investigated social media's role primarily via Facebook in enhancing tourist festival satisfaction and revisiting intentions in Nigeria, emphasizing the mediating role of cultural motivation. Ibrahim (2021) also found that in Northern Cyprus, hotel ratings moderated the effect of Facebook marketing on brand loyalty, with higher-rated hotels experiencing stronger positive relationships between social media marketing and customer loyalty. These studies reinforce the importance of platform-specific strategies and customer perceptions in social media's effectiveness.

In Kenya, Korir and Muchemi (2020) documented widespread adoption of social media marketing among rated hotels in Nakuru County, reporting positive effects on hotel performance through enhanced online visibility and customer engagement. Lukose (2023) corroborated these findings in star-rated Kenyan hotels, highlighting social media's positive influence on customer satisfaction, market share, and profitability. Arusho (2023) stressed the use of diverse platforms like Instagram and YouTube to broaden customer reach and strengthen brand identity, while Morang'a (2023) demonstrated that increasing platform usage and social marketing capacity significantly improved hotel performance in Kenya's Central Region.

However, a critical limitation across these studies is their focus on rated hotels situated in well-established tourist destinations. They largely overlook independent and mid-tier hotels in emerging regions such as Murang'a County. These hotels, typically locally owned and offering moderate amenities to regional and domestic customers, face unique challenges including limited digital marketing expertise, constrained budgets, and lower brand recognition compared to international chains. This creates a pressing need for research tailored to the localized dynamics of Murang'a's hospitality sector. The current study addresses this gap by focusing on these independent and mid-tier hotels, aiming to identify effective social media marketing practices that can enhance their brand performance and competitive positioning within the local market.

2.3.2 Search Engine Optimization Marketing and Brand Performance

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) marketing is a crucial strategy for enhancing the online presence and performance of hospitality businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and travel services. By optimizing websites to rank higher on search engine results pages (SERPs), these businesses attract more organic, targeted traffic. This increased visibility is essential as travelers heavily rely on search engines to find, compare, and book accommodation options (Chaffey & Smith, 2022). Unlike paid advertising, SEO offers a cost-effective solution that generates sustained traffic over time. In the competitive hospitality landscape, a robust SEO strategy enables businesses to differentiate themselves, build credibility, and foster trust among potential customers. Additionally, the results of SEO efforts are measurable, allowing continuous refinement of marketing strategies based on performance metrics (Setiawan et al., 2020).

Angeloni and Rossi (2021) examined the influence of online search engines and online travel agencies on the profitability of tours and travel organizations in Italy. Their findings indicated that the use of these online platforms improved customer acquisition rates by simplifying travel service search and booking processes. Moreover, these platforms reduced marketing and distribution costs compared to traditional channels, leading to greater cost efficiency and higher profit margins. Similarly, Nusairat et al. (2022) identified search engine marketing and privacy as key factors affecting mobile customer relationship management and marketing performance in Jordan's hotel industry. Anguera-Torrell and Langer (2022) further emphasized that a straightforward, functional design of metasearch platforms helps consumers make informed decisions by effectively distinguishing options. They also noted the necessity of continuous employee training to maximize the effective use of online tools, underscoring the importance of investment in digital skills development. While these studies provide a broad understanding of search engine usage in hospitality, tours, and travel organizations, they fall short in addressing how local hotels specifically leverage SEO to enhance brand performance.

Setiawan et al. (2020) conducted a case study on the impact of Google search on website visibility and accessibility at the Palembang Polytechnic of Tourism in Indonesia. Their results showed that effective use of search engines improved website rankings on SERPs,

enhanced usability, and optimized navigation, which collectively improved user experience and reduced bounce rates. Roumeliotis et al. (2022) found that successful SEO practices significantly enhanced online reputation and credibility among Greek hotels. By achieving high search rankings, these hotels increased visibility to potential guests, which bolstered their perceived trustworthiness and appeal, leading to more positive reviews and higher booking rates. Dimitrios et al. (2023) also revealed that strong SEO rankings were particularly advantageous for luxury hotels by attracting affluent travelers seeking premium accommodations. This elevated online presence not only increased brand prestige but also drove targeted traffic, resulting in higher booking rates and revenue. Despite these insights, these studies mainly focus on the digital and educational aspects of tourism rather than on the operational or branding dynamics specific to hotels.

In South Africa, Estialbo (2021) examined digital marketing and branding among micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), utilizing the Technology Acceptance Model and Dynamic Capabilities Theory to explain how firms adapt and optimize strategies to enhance brand performance in competitive markets. The study showed that digital marketing strategies substantially increased brand awareness and market recognition. Manishimwe et al. (2022) found that hotels leveraging digital platforms like social media and search engines gained competitive advantages, attracting more customers and achieving higher occupancy rates. However, resource limitations and lack of digital skills among staff hindered many hotels' ability to optimize these efforts. These findings were gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may affect their applicability post-pandemic.

Siaw et al. (2023) reported that inadequate knowledge and expertise in SEO among hotel staff in Ghana negatively impacted their online visibility and brand performance. Additionally, intense competition for popular search terms made it challenging for individual hotels to attain high search rankings. In Kenya, Macharia and Khamah (2022) investigated e-marketing tools' influence on sales performance of beach hotels in Mombasa County. Their research demonstrated that SEO had the strongest positive and significant effect on sales performance, surpassing social media marketing, internet advertising, and email marketing. However, these studies tend to treat e-marketing tools

as a broad category, whereas SEO specifically focuses on website optimization for search engines.

Ndung'u (2022) highlighted that search engine marketing targets audiences at the optimal time, ensuring that content and advertisements reach highly engaged users actively seeking related offers. This targeting occurs at minimal cost and without being intrusive. Furthermore, viral marketing facilitates rapid message dissemination from person to person, amplifying brand or product interest and ultimately increasing sales. Despite these promising findings, many studies do not center on the hospitality sector or address the specific needs and challenges faced by local hotel brands, especially in emerging markets like Murang'a County. This gap underscores the necessity for targeted research examining how SEO strategies influence brand performance among Murang'a's independent and mid-tier hotels.

2.3.3 Content Marketing and Brand Performance

Content marketing refers to the strategic creation and distribution of valuable, relevant, and consistent digital content aimed at attracting and engaging a defined audience with the goal of driving profitable customer actions. In the hospitality sector, content marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing brand performance by showcasing unique experiences, destinations, and hotel services (Wen et al., 2021). Well-crafted content such as blog posts, videos, social media stories, and newsletters allows hospitality brands to narrate their stories, demonstrate their unique value propositions, and build emotional connections with potential guests. This engagement fosters brand loyalty, trust, and preference as modern travelers increasingly rely on authentic and informative content when making travel decisions (Marques, 2021). Additionally, high-quality digital content can be distributed across multiple platforms, expanding reach, amplifying brand visibility, and improving search engine rankings, which are essential for attracting a wider audience and generating more direct bookings.

Research by Khalayleh and Al-Hawary (2022) examined the impact of digital content marketing within the marketing mix on the performance of five-star hotels in Jordan. Their study found that digital advertisements containing images and videos related to service quality significantly influenced customer awareness and booking decisions.

Similarly, Siripipatthanakul et al. (2022) investigated the effect of content marketing on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and booking intentions among hotel consumers in Thailand. Their findings emphasized that hotels that actively engage in content marketing, e-promotion, and managing eWOM achieve higher customer intention to book rooms, reinforcing the role of well-curated content in driving brand preference.

Further insights come from Bu et al. (2021), who studied content marketing's role in food tourism in China and found that content entertainment had a positive effect on informational social impact, while self-expression was linked to normative social impact. Both types of social influence were found to enhance eWOM, demonstrating how content marketing encourages customer interaction and trust, which in turn contributes to brand reputation. Mathew and Soliman (2021) compared digital content marketing's influence on consumer behavior in Egypt and Oman, concluding that perceived enjoyment and convenience were critical precursors shaping customer attitudes and purchase intentions related to tourism products. Makanyeza et al. (2021) expanded on these findings by showing that motivations for consuming digital content strongly affect both relational (customer engagement) and monetary outcomes, as well as driving active social media engagement.

In Nigeria, Alamai et al. (2020) investigated content marketing's effect on service delivery in the hospitality and tourism sector. Their study revealed that well-designed online content not only educated customers about services and local attractions but also enhanced satisfaction by setting accurate expectations and improving the overall customer experience. These findings underscore the pivotal role content marketing plays in building a brand's service promise and meeting guest expectations, which are critical for fostering repeat business and positive brand equity.

Despite these contributions, many of these studies primarily focus on how digital content influences consumer behavior and social engagement but do not directly assess the impact of content marketing on brand performance metrics such as occupancy rates, sales revenue, profitability, and brand loyalty. This reveals a conceptual gap that the present study aims to address by linking content marketing efforts to measurable brand performance outcomes within the hospitality industry.

In the Kenyan context, Gakii et al. (2022) explored online video marketing's influence on market performance among registered tour and travel agencies in Nairobi County. They found a strong positive correlation, demonstrating the power of visual content in attracting customers and enhancing market reach. Similarly, Macharia and Khamah (2022) examined e-marketing tools in beach hotels in Mombasa County and found that content marketing significantly contributed to sales performance by engaging potential guests with compelling and informative narratives about unique hotel experiences and attractions. These strategies helped hotels build stronger brand loyalty, increase online visibility, and drive more bookings and revenue.

However, both studies predominantly focus on well-established tourist destinations with relatively mature hospitality sectors and significant marketing resources. In contrast, Murang'a County's hospitality sector is characterized by smaller, often independently owned hotels and lodges, many of which operate without star ratings and primarily serve local and regional markets. This sector faces challenges such as limited marketing budgets, lower digital literacy, and fewer branding resources, highlighting the importance of localized research to understand how content marketing can be effectively deployed to improve brand performance in such settings.

Additionally, Kitetu (2022) found that digital marketing tools positively influenced student enrollment in hospitality colleges in Nairobi County, with 37.7% of students reporting the use of college content marketing pages to inform their application choices. While this metric does not measure brand performance directly, it indicates growing digital engagement in hospitality-related sectors and highlights the broader potential of content marketing in influencing decision-making.

By examining content marketing's role specifically within Murang'a County hotels, this study aims to fill the gap in localized evidence, offering insights into how smaller and emerging hotels can leverage digital content to build brand identity, increase customer engagement, and ultimately enhance key brand performance indicators. This localized focus is essential given the unique socio-economic, infrastructural, and cultural factors influencing hospitality marketing in the region.

2.4 Gaps in Literature

The reviewed studies clearly demonstrated that digital marketing strategies were among the most highly considered company strategies in the hospitality and tourism industry over the past years, primarily due to rapid technological advancements and evolving consumer needs. These studies, which were mainly conducted in the hospitality, tourism, and SME business sectors, were quite diverse in terms of digital marketing tools and performance measures, thus presenting contextual and conceptual gaps.

Additionally, some studies, including those by Korir and Muchemi (2020), Tajvidi and Karami (2021), Lukose (2023), and Angeloni & Rossi (2021), failed to clearly establish the relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance. This implies that research assessing brand performance as a key performance indicator in the hotel industry remains inadequate. Furthermore, Haudi et al. (2022) and Estialbo (2021) generalized their findings to SMEs, without focusing on a specific sector such as the hospitality industry, which was the primary area of focus in the present study.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework articulates the scope and direction of the study by illustrating the relationships between the key independent variables social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) marketing, and content marketing and the dependent variable, which is the brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya. Each independent variable is operationalized through measurable components such as budget allocation, marketing activities, and monitoring practices.

Social media marketing is measured by the budget allocated for social media campaigns, the frequency and nature of social media activities undertaken by the hotel, and the extent of monitoring and engagement analytics applied. Search engine optimization marketing includes the budget dedicated to SEO efforts, the execution of SEO-specific activities such as keyword optimization and website updates, and the monitoring of SEO performance metrics. Content marketing covers the budget allocated to content creation and dissemination, the actual content marketing activities carried out including blogs, videos, and newsletters, as well as the monitoring of content reach and engagement.

The dependent variable, brand performance, is evaluated through key business outcomes including occupancy rates, sales revenue, and profitability. These indicators provide quantitative measures of the effectiveness of the digital marketing strategies in enhancing the competitive position and financial success of the hotels.

By establishing this framework, the study aims to systematically assess how investments and activities in distinct digital marketing areas translate into measurable improvements in brand performance, thereby providing actionable insights for hotel management and stakeholders within Murang'a County.

Independent Variables

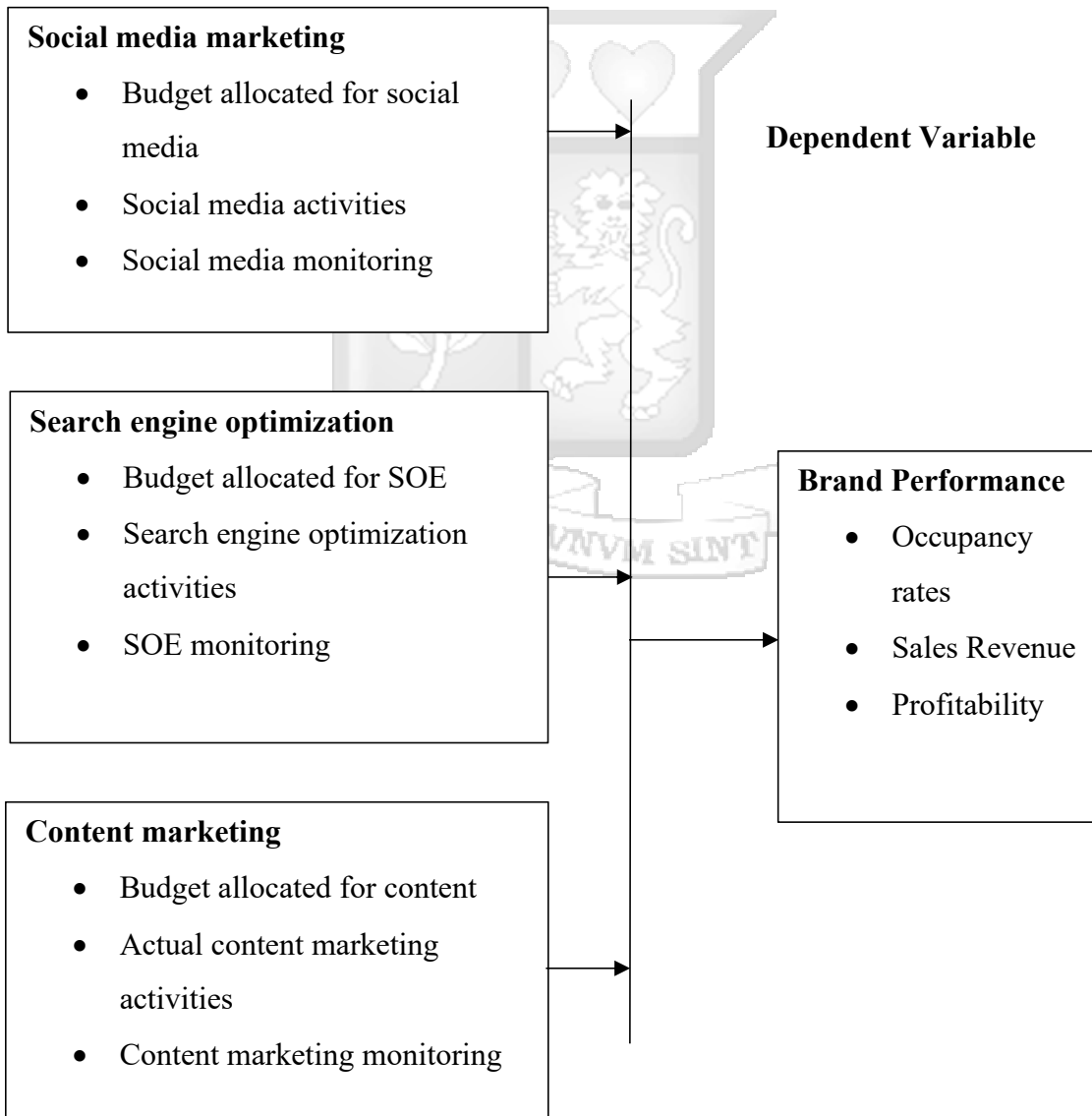


Figure 2.1: A Conceptual Framework

2.6 Operationalization of Study Variables

Table 2.1 below provides a detailed breakdown of the study variables, their indicators and the measurement for each study variable, where a 5-point Likert scale will be in this research.

Table 2.1: Operationalization of the Study Variables

Variable Name	Variable Indicators	Measure	Source
Social media marketing	i. Budget allocated for social media	5 point- Likert Scale	Korir & Muchemi (2020); Lukose & Lagat (2022)
	ii. Social media activities		
	iii. Social media monitoring		
Search engine optimization marketing	i. Budget allocated for SOE	5 point- Likert Scale	Chaffey & Smith (2022); Angeloni & Rossi (2021)
	ii. Search engine optimization activities		
	iii. SOE monitoring		
Content marketing	i. Budget allocated for content	5 point- Likert Scale	Khalayleh & Al-Hawary (2022); Gakii et al. (2022)
	ii. Actual content marketing activities		
	iii. Content marketing monitoring		

Brand performance	i.	Occupancy rates	5 point- Likert Scale	Korir & Muchemi (2020); Macharia & Khamah (2022)
	ii.	Sales Revenue		
	iii.	Profitability		

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the methodology used in the study to achieve its research objectives. This includes the research philosophy, research design, target population, sampling design and sample size, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, research quality, data analysis and presentation and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This study adopted the positivism research philosophy, which is rooted in the belief that the social world can be studied with the same scientific rigor as the natural sciences. It asserts that objective reality exists independently of human perception and that knowledge can be derived from observable and measurable phenomena. Positivists emphasize the use of structured methodologies and quantitative data to test hypotheses and develop laws or theories that explain social phenomena. This philosophy underscores the importance of replicability, reliability, and generalizability in research findings (Kirongo & Odoyo, 2020). Thus, by adhering to the principles of this philosophy, this study employed quantitative data collection methods and statistical analysis to determine the relationship between digital marketing strategies, customer profiling, and brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya. These structured methodologies ensured that the research produced objective and value-free knowledge, leading to relevant conclusions and recommendations for the hospitality industry.

3.3 Research Design

This research utilized a descriptive design, a method employed to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon under study. It focused on answering the “what” question, providing a detailed account of the subject without delving into the “why” or “how” aspects (Odawo et al., 2022). This design enabled the study to describe the demographic information of participants, the digital marketing strategies employed, customers’ age profiles, and the brand performance of hotels in Murang’a County. Additionally, it facilitated the identification of patterns and relationships between the variables, offering valuable insights into how digital marketing strategies influence brand performance in the hospitality industry.

3.4 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised all managers from the 18 hotels operating in Murang’a County, Kenya, as listed in the Murang’a County Integrated Development Plan (2018-2022). The unit of observation was the 18 hotels themselves, while the unit of analysis was the hotel managers selected from each establishment. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the digital marketing strategies employed and their impact on brand performance across the local hospitality sector.

Given the relatively small number of hotels and their managerial staff, the study adopted a census approach, targeting all relevant managers involved in marketing, operations, IT, finance, and customer engagement functions. This ensured broad coverage and enriched data quality by capturing diverse managerial perspectives on digital marketing practices and brand outcomes. The detailed breakdown of the target population by managerial role is presented in Table 3.1.

Data collected from these managers provided valuable insights into budget allocations for digital marketing activities, monitoring efforts, and key brand performance indicators such as occupancy rates, sales revenue, and profitability. Focusing on this population allowed the study to assess the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies within the unique economic, cultural, and infrastructural context of Murang’a County hotels.

Table 3.1: Target Population

Type of Hotel Manager	Target Population
General Managers	18
Operations Managers	18
Finance Managers	18
Human Resource Managers	18
IT/System Managers	18
Front office Managers	18
Food and beverage Managers	18
Credit Managers	18
Sales and Marketing Managers	18
Banquet Managers	18
Facilities and maintenance Managers	18
Spa and wellness Managers	18
Reservations Managers	18
Room Division Managers	18
Security Managers	18
Executive Housekeepers	18
Total	288

3.5 Sampling Design and Sample Size

The target population for hotel managers was 288 (Ngatia, 2023). To determine the appropriate sample size, this study employed Yamane’s (1967) formula which states that;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n= Sample size

N= Population size

e= Margin of error

Therefore, the sample size for the respondents was:

$$n = \frac{288}{1 + 288(0.05)^2}$$

n= 167 hotel managers

Applying this formula, the calculated sample size was 167 hotel managers.

Given the heterogeneity of managerial roles, a stratified random sampling technique was used. The population was divided into strata based on managerial categories such as General Managers, Operations Managers, Finance Managers, and others, ensuring each subgroup was adequately represented. The proportionate sample size for each stratum was then calculated, as shown in Table 3.2.

Within each stratum, simple random sampling was conducted to select respondents, ensuring that each manager had an equal chance of being chosen. This approach improved the representativeness of the sample and minimized selection bias, enabling the collection of diverse perspectives on digital marketing strategies and brand performance from different managerial functions.

Table 3.2: Distribution of Sample Size of Hotel Managers from 18 Hotels in Murang'a County

Type of Hotel Manager	Target Population	Sample Size
General Managers	18	13
Operations Managers	18	10
Finance Managers	18	10
Human Resource Managers	18	10
IT/System Managers	18	10
Front office Managers	18	10
Food and beverage Managers	18	10
Credit Managers	18	10
Sales and Marketing Managers	18	14
Banquet Managers	18	10
Facilities and maintenance Managers	18	10
Spa and wellness Managers	18	10
Reservations Managers	18	10
Room Division Managers	18	10
Security Managers	18	10
Executive Housekeepers	18	10
Total	288	167

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

This study utilized structured questionnaires to gather primary data from 167 hotel managers. The structured questionnaires consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions, allowing the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. To ensure consistency and comparability of responses, the structured questionnaire employed a Likert interval scale for the closed-ended questions. This approach enabled the study to systematically capture the perspectives of hotel managers regarding digital marketing strategies and their influence on brand performance while ensuring data reliability and ease of analysis.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

The study commenced by obtaining an introduction letter from Strathmore University and a research permit from the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). These documents were presented to the management of the 18 hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya, accompanied by a clear explanation of the study's purpose. Upon securing permission, the researcher approached the selected managers, securing voluntary informed consent and ensuring participation was free of coercion.

A trained research assistant was engaged to assist with questionnaire distribution and provided respondents with guidance on how to complete the instrument. Questionnaires completed on the same day were collected immediately, while follow-up visits were made within a week to retrieve the remaining responses. The researcher monitored the process through periodic follow-ups to maximize the response rate and ensure data completeness. Data collection took place April, 2025.

3.8 Research Quality

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted to enhance the overall research quality by identifying potential errors, constraints, or deficiencies within the questionnaire. This preliminary testing facilitated the refinement and streamlining of the data collection process, thereby ensuring smooth and efficient execution during the main study.

The pilot test involved evaluating both the validity and reliability of the research instrument. A small representative sample of five hotel managers was randomly selected from a four-star hotel within Murang'a County, Kenya. The insights gained from this pilot phase improved the clarity, structure, and relevance of the questionnaire, ensuring that the final instrument was effectively designed to capture the necessary data.

3.8.1 Validity of Research Instrument

To guarantee that the research instrument accurately measured the intended theoretical constructs, the study assessed both construct and content validity. Construct validity refers to the degree to which the instrument truly measures the theoretical concept it purports to assess. This was evaluated using statistical methods such as factor analysis, which analyzed the relationships between observed variables and their underlying constructs (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). Content validity, meanwhile, ensured that the questionnaire comprehensively covered all relevant aspects of the study variables. Experts in the field, including research supervisors, reviewed the instrument to confirm its thoroughness and appropriateness (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). Feedback from these experts was incorporated to enhance the clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of the final questionnaire.

3.8.2 Reliability of Research Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through the Cronbach's Alpha method, which measures internal consistency. Data collected during the pilot test from the five hotel managers was used to calculate this metric. The instrument was deemed reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha value set at a minimum threshold of 0.7, which is widely accepted as an indicator of adequate internal consistency for research instruments.

3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation

This study employed both descriptive and inferential analysis to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on brand performance in hotels. Descriptive analysis included the use of frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, and graphical representations such as histograms. Frequency distribution was used to determine how often each digital marketing strategy was implemented by the hotels and to analyze the

demographic characteristics of hotel managers. Histograms provided a visual representation of the data, making it easier to identify patterns and trends in digital marketing adoption.

To assess relationships between variables, correlation analysis was conducted to examine the association between social media marketing and brand performance, search engine optimization (SEO) marketing and brand performance, as well as content marketing and brand performance. Linear regression analysis was used to evaluate the individual influence of each digital marketing strategy on brand performance. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was performed to analyze the combined effect of digital marketing strategies on brand performance while controlling for other factors such as hotel size and star rating (Rodriguez et al., 2023). The multiple linear regression model was structured as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \epsilon$$

Where;

Y= brand performance

β_0 = Y-intercept

β_1 - β_3 = Beta coefficients of the independent variables (X_1 , X_2 , X_3)

X_1 = social media marketing

X_2 = search engine optimization marketing

X_3 = content marketing

ϵ = Error term

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to the ethical standards established for the data collection process. Ethical clearance was obtained from Strathmore University Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee (SUISERC) under clearance number SU-ISERC2600/25. Additionally, a research permit was granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), with permit number NACOSTI/P/25/417566. These measures ensured that the data gathered was used solely for academic purposes.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research, and the identities of the respondents were not disclosed at any point. Furthermore, the study observed principles of voluntary participation. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the influence of digital marketing strategies on the brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya. The findings are based on the data collected from hotel managers and analyzed to determine the impact of social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) marketing, and content marketing on brand performance. The chapter is structured into key sections, including response rate, descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis, providing insights into how digital marketing strategies influence hotel brand performance.

4.2 Response Rate

The response rate analysis shows that 137 out of 167 targeted respondents successfully participated in the study, yielding an 82% response rate, while 30 respondents (18%) did not complete the survey as evidenced in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Type of Hotel Manager	Planned Sample Size	Actual Respondents	% Planned Sample	% Actual Respondents
General Managers	13	9	7.78%	6.57%
Operations Managers	10	8	5.99%	5.84%

Finance Managers	10	9	5.99%	6.57%
Human Resource Managers	10	8	5.99%	5.84%
IT/System Managers	10	9	5.99%	6.57%
Front Office Managers	10	7	5.99%	5.11%
Food and Beverage Managers	10	7	5.99%	5.11%
Credit Managers	10	8	5.99%	5.84%
Sales and Marketing Managers	14	13	8.38%	9.49%
Banquet Managers	10	8	5.99%	5.84%
Facilities & Maintenance Managers	10	8	5.99%	5.84%
Spa and Wellness Managers	10	9	5.99%	6.57%
Reservations Managers	10	8	5.99%	5.84%
Room Division Managers	10	8	5.99%	5.84%
Security Managers	10	10	5.99%	7.30%
Executive Housekeepers	10	8	5.99%	5.84%
Total	167	137	100%	100%

4.3 Demographic Findings

The study recorded responses from various hotel manager categories in Murang'a County, totaling 137 respondents out of a sample size of 167. Sales and Marketing Managers had the highest response rate at 9.49%, followed by Security Managers at 7.30%. General Managers, Finance Managers, and IT/System Managers each accounted for 6.57% of the responses. Operations Managers, Human Resource Managers, Credit Managers, Banquet Managers, Facilities and Maintenance Managers, Spa and Wellness Managers, Reservations Managers, Room Division Managers, and Executive Housekeepers reported response rates ranging between 5.84% and 6.57%. The lowest participation was from Front Office Managers and Food and Beverage Managers, each at 5.11%, as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.2 Demographic Findings

Type of Hotel Manager	Sample Size	Response rate	Percentage
General Managers	13	9	6.57
Operations Managers	10	8	5.84
Finance Managers	10	9	6.57
Human Resource Managers	10	8	5.84
IT/System Managers	10	9	6.57
Front office Managers	10	7	5.11
Food and beverage Managers	10	7	5.11
Credit Managers	10	8	5.84

Sales and Marketing Managers	14	13	9.49
Banquet Managers	10	8	5.84
Facilities and maintenance Managers	10	8	5.84
Spa and wellness Managers	10	9	6.57
Reservations Managers	10	8	5.84
Room Division Managers	10	8	5.84
Security Managers	10	10	7.30
Executive Housekeepers	10	8	5.84
Total	167	137	100.00

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

The section below present descriptive statistics on social media marketing statistics.

4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Social Media Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County

The study examined the extent of social media marketing practices among hotels. The allocation of an adequate financial budget for social media marketing recorded a mean score of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 1.232, with nearly 44% of respondents indicating agreement or strong agreement, showing a fair level of financial commitment. In terms of human resource allocation, the mean stood at 3.04 with a standard deviation of 1.395, reflecting a more divided opinion; approximately 41% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while close to 37% expressed disagreement. Regarding the creation and sharing of engaging content, the hotels demonstrated moderate activity, with a mean of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 1.342. Almost 47% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their hotels actively create engaging posts on social media platforms.

The adoption of paid advertisements to enhance visibility showed a mean score of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 1.218, with about 46% of respondents acknowledging their use of this strategy. In monitoring customer feedback and reviews, the results indicated a mean of 3.23 and a standard deviation of 1.352, with close to 48% of respondents

agreeing or strongly agreeing that their hotels consistently track customer feedback to improve services.

The application of social media analytics tools to measure campaign performance produced a mean score of 3.23 and a standard deviation of 1.328, with approximately 46% of respondents reporting the use of these tools for tracking audience engagement and effectiveness. These key highlights correspond to the data presented in Table 4.3.

It is notable that many of these mean scores hover near the neutral midpoint, indicating a moderate or tentative engagement with social media marketing strategies across the sampled hotels. This neutrality suggests variability in practices and possibly reflects differing levels of resource allocation, digital marketing expertise, or organizational priorities, which will be explored further in the discussion section.

Table 4.3: Social Media Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std Dev
The hotel has allocated adequate financial budget for social media marketing	7.3	19	29.9	20.4	23.4	3.34	1.232
The hotel has allocated adequate human resource budget for social media marketing	19.7	16.8	22.6	21.9	19	3.04	1.395
The hotel regularly creates and shares engaging content on social media platforms to attract potential customers	16.1	11.7	24.8	27	20.4	3.24	1.342
The hotel utilizes paid advertisements on social media to increase visibility and attract a broader audience	10.9	13.1	29.9	28.5	17.5	3.28	1.218
The hotel consistently	17.5	9.5	24.8	28.5	19.7	3.23	1.352

monitor customer feedback and reviews on social media to improve its services								
The hotel uses social media analytics tools to track the performance of campaigns and audience engagement.	13.9	16.1	24.8	24.1	21.2	3.23	1.328	

4.4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Search Engine Optimization Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County

The study assessed the use of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategies among hotels in Murang’a County. Allocation of an adequate financial budget for SEO marketing recorded a mean score of 3.44 with a standard deviation of 1.322. Approximately 55% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their hotels had dedicated sufficient funds towards SEO initiatives. For human resource allocation in SEO efforts, the mean stood at 3.47, with a standard deviation of 1.356. Around 55% of the respondents indicated agreement, suggesting reasonable dedication of personnel to SEO activities.

On the aspect of content optimization, the hotels reported a mean score of 3.44 and a standard deviation of 1.271. Nearly 53% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their hotels regularly updated website content with relevant keywords to improve search engine rankings. Investment in backlink strategies recorded a mean of 3.42 and a standard deviation of 1.407, with about 53% of respondents affirming that their hotels engaged in link-building practices to enhance online visibility. The use of SEO tools to monitor keyword rankings and identify areas for improvement yielded a mean score of 3.32 with a standard deviation of 1.317. Approximately 49% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their hotels utilized such tools.

Finally, tracking of website performance metrics, such as organic traffic and click-through rates, reported a mean of 3.27 with a standard deviation of 1.331. Close to 44% of the respondents confirmed that their hotels tracked these performance indicators to evaluate SEO effectiveness. These key highlights correspond to the data presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Search Engine Optimization Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
The hotel has set aside adequate financial budget for search engine optimization marketing	12.4	11.7	21.2	29.2	25.5	3.44	1.322
The hotel has assigned a sufficient human resource budget for search engine optimization marketing	11.7	13.9	19.7	24.8	29.9	3.47	1.356
The hotel regularly updates its website content with relevant keywords to improve search engine rankings	11.7	9.5	25.5	29.9	23.4	3.44	1.271
The hotel invests in backlink strategies to enhance its website's visibility on search engines	13.9	13.9	19.7	21.9	30.7	3.42	1.407
The hotel uses SEO tools to monitor keyword rankings and identify areas for improvement	13.1	13.1	24.8	26.3	22.6	3.32	1.317
The hotel tracks	14.6	10.9	30.7	20.4	23.4	3.27	1.331

website performance metrics, such as organic traffic and click-through rates, to evaluate SEO effectiveness

4.4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Content Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County

The study explored the application of content marketing strategies by hotels in Murang'a County. The allocation of an adequate financial budget for content marketing recorded a mean score of 3.50 with a standard deviation of 1.231. Approximately 49% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that sufficient funds had been dedicated to content marketing initiatives. For human resource allocation, the mean score stood at 3.61, accompanied by a standard deviation of 1.341. About 60% of respondents affirmed that their hotels had assigned sufficient personnel for content marketing efforts, indicating strong staffing support.

Regarding the publication of high-quality and engaging content, such as blog posts, articles, or videos, the hotels recorded a mean of 3.55 with a standard deviation of 1.266. Close to 57% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their hotels actively produced engaging content to attract and retain customers. The use of storytelling techniques to promote brand and services yielded a mean score of 3.55 and a standard deviation of 1.188, with roughly 56% of respondents indicating their hotels effectively leveraged storytelling in their content strategies.

Evaluation of customer engagement metrics, including likes, shares, and comments, reflected a mean of 3.41 and a standard deviation of 1.263, with around 49% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that such metrics were regularly assessed to gauge content performance. Finally, the use of analytics tools to monitor the reach and effectiveness of content recorded a mean score of 3.52 and a standard deviation of 1.176, with approximately 49% of respondents confirming the use of these tools to track content outcomes across various digital platforms. These key highlights correspond to the data presented in Table 4.5.

These findings, summarized in Table 4.5, suggest that while Murang’a hotels are making moderate to strong efforts in content marketing, there remains room to enhance budget allocation and the systematic use of performance metrics to maximize brand performance.

Table 4.5: Content Marketing on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
The hotel has allocated adequate financial budget for content marketing.	8.8	8.8	33.6	21.2	27.7	3.50	1.231
The hotel has assigned a sufficient human resource budget for content marketing	10.9	10.9	18.2	26.3	33.6	3.61	1.341
The hotel regularly publishes high-quality and engaging blog posts, articles, or videos to attract and retain customers	10.9	7.3	24.8	29.9	27	3.55	1.266
The hotel leverages storytelling in its content to promote its brand and services effectively	8	9.5	26.3	32.1	24.1	3.55	1.188
The hotel evaluates customer engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments, to assess the performance of its content marketing	12.4	6.6	32.1	25.5	23.4	3.41	1.263

efforts							
The hotel uses analytics tools to track the reach and effectiveness of its content across different digital platforms.	8	6.6	36.5	23.4	25.5	3.52	1.176

4.4.4 Descriptive Statistics for Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County

The study evaluated key indicators of brand performance among hotels in Murang’a County over the past five years. Attainment of high occupancy rates was the most prominent result, with a mean score of 4.11 and a standard deviation of 0.968. A significant 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their hotels consistently experienced high occupancy during this period.

Regarding the influence of digital marketing strategies on occupancy, the mean score was 3.93 with a standard deviation of 1.026, supported by approximately 72% of respondents who acknowledged that digital marketing efforts had positively impacted occupancy rates.

Achievement of sales revenue targets was also assessed, yielding a mean of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 1.208. About 62% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their hotels met or exceeded sales targets over the last five years. In terms of revenue generated specifically from digital marketing, the mean score stood at 3.69 with a standard deviation of 1.223, with nearly 63% of respondents affirming that income from digital marketing contributed significantly to overall sales performance.

Perceptions of profitability were positive, with respondents reporting a mean score of 3.61 and a standard deviation of 1.291 for achieving higher profit margins compared to competitors in the same market segment. Approximately 63% of respondents concurred with this assessment.

Finally, the role of customer retention and repeat business in profitability was examined, producing a mean score of 3.58 and a higher standard deviation of 1.370. About 60% of respondents confirmed that attracting and retaining repeat customers had substantially supported improved profitability.

These results, detailed in Table 4.6, highlight the critical role of occupancy, sales, profitability, and customer loyalty as core indicators of brand performance in Murang'a County hotels, with digital marketing recognized as a key contributing factor.

Table 4.6: Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
The hotel has attained high occupancy rates in the last five years	2.9	3.6	13.1	40.1	40.1	4.11	0.968
Digital marketing strategies have contributed to the highest percentage occupancy rates recorded by the hotel	2.2	8.8	16.8	38.7	33.6	3.93	1.026
The hotel's sales revenue has met and exceeded the set targets in the last five years	5.8	8.0	24.1	22.6	39.4	3.82	1.208
Revenue generated from digital marketing strategies has contributed to the hotel's overall sales performance	5.1	16.1	16.1	30.7	32.1	3.69	1.223
The hotel achieves higher profit margins compared to competitors in the same market segment	10.9	8.8	17.5	33.6	29.2	3.61	1.291
The hotel's ability to attract and retain repeat customers has contributed to increased profitability	12.4	10.2	17.5	26.3	33.6	3.58	1.37

4.5 Reliability Analysis

A reliability test was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement items used to assess the constructs related to digital marketing strategies and brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya. The test aimed to determine the reliability of the scales used to measure key variables, including social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) marketing, content marketing, and overall brand performance. The reliability analysis results, as presented in Tables 4.7, 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10, provide insights into the consistency of the constructs used in the study, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

4.5.1 Reliability Analysis of Social Media Marketing

Reliability analysis was conducted on the social media marketing scale using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the measurement items. The overall Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.707, indicating that the scale met the minimum acceptable threshold for reliability. Each item was analyzed using the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" metric to assess its individual contribution to the scale. The results showed that none of the items, if removed, would have substantially improved the overall reliability of the scale. The Cronbach's Alpha values if deleted ranged from 0.636 to 0.696, suggesting that all items contributed adequately to the construct. The item "The hotel consistently monitored customer feedback and reviews on social media" had the lowest value at 0.636, while "The hotel utilized paid advertisements on social media" had the highest value at 0.696. The item "The hotel regularly created and shared engaging content on social media platforms" aligned with the final Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.707. These results showed that the items used to measure social media marketing formed a reliable and internally consistent scale, as presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Reliability Analysis of Social Media Marketing

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Overall Cronbach's Alpha	Conclusion
The hotel has allocated adequate financial budget for social media marketing	.668		
The hotel has allocated adequate human resource budget for social media marketing	.679		

The hotel regularly creates and shares engaging content on social media platforms to attract potential customers	.660	0.707	Reliable
The hotel utilizes paid advertisements on social media to increase visibility and attract a broader audience	.696		
The hotel consistently monitor customer feedback and reviews on social media to improve its services	.636		
The hotel uses social media analytics tools to track the performance of campaigns and audience engagement.	.661		

4.5.2 Reliability Analysis for Search Engine Optimization Marketing

Reliability analysis was carried out to assess the internal consistency of the items measuring Search Engine Optimization (SEO) marketing. The overall Cronbach’s Alpha value was 0.841, indicating a high level of reliability across the items included in the scale. Individual item reliability was evaluated using the “Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted” metric, with values ranging from 0.80756 to 0.82231.

The item “The hotel uses SEO tools to monitor keyword rankings and identify areas for improvement” recorded the lowest alpha value if deleted, at 0.80756, while “The hotel has set aside adequate financial budget for search engine optimization marketing” showed the highest value at 0.82231. The item “The hotel regularly updates its website content with relevant keywords” yielded an alpha of 0.81054 if deleted, aligning closely with the overall reliability coefficient. Other items such as backlink investment (0.81853), tracking website performance metrics (0.81649), and human resource allocation for SEO (0.81594) also demonstrated consistent reliability scores. These results were presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Reliability Analysis for Search Engine Optimization Marketing

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Overall Cronbach's Alpha	Conclusion
The hotel has set aside adequate financial budget for search engine optimization marketing	0.82231		
The hotel has assigned a sufficient human resource budget for search engine optimization marketing	0.81594		

The hotel regularly updates its website content with relevant keywords to improve search engine rankings	0.81054	0.841	Reliable
The hotel invests in backlink strategies to enhance its website's visibility on search engines	0.81853		
The hotel uses SEO tools to monitor keyword rankings and identify areas for improvement	0.80756		
The hotel tracks website performance metrics, such as organic traffic and click-through rates, to evaluate SEO effectiveness	0.81649		

4.5.3 Reliability Analysis for Content Marketing

Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of items related to content marketing. The overall Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.795, indicating a good level of reliability for the scale. Each item's contribution to the scale was further evaluated using the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" metric, which ranged from 0.746 to 0.772.

The item "The hotel has assigned a sufficient human resource budget for content marketing" recorded the lowest alpha if deleted, at 0.746, while "The hotel uses analytics tools to track the reach and effectiveness of its content" showed the highest value at 0.772. The item "The hotel regularly publishes high-quality and engaging content" aligned closely with the overall alpha score and yielded an alpha of 0.764 if deleted. Other items, including storytelling (0.762), financial budget allocation (0.767), and evaluation of customer engagement metrics (0.771), also demonstrated consistent reliability contributions. The results indicated that all six items contributed positively to the internal consistency of the content marketing construct, as shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Reliability Analysis for Content Marketing

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Overall Cronbach's Alpha	Conclusion
The hotel has allocated adequate financial budget for content marketing.	.767		
The hotel has assigned a sufficient human resource budget for content marketing	.746		
The hotel regularly publishes high-quality and engaging blog posts, articles, or videos	.764	0.795	Reliable

to attract and retain customers	
The hotel leverages storytelling in its content to promote its brand and services effectively	.762
The hotel evaluates customer engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments, to assess the performance of its content marketing efforts	.771
The hotel uses analytics tools to track the reach and effectiveness of its content across different digital platforms.	.772

4.5.4 Reliability Analysis for Brand Performance

A reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the items used to measure brand performance among hotels in Murang’a County. The overall Cronbach’s Alpha value was 0.933, indicating an excellent level of reliability. The “Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted” values were reviewed to evaluate each item's contribution to the overall reliability of the construct, with results ranging from 0.91209 to 0.9349.

The item “The hotel’s sales revenue has met and exceeded the set targets in the last five years” recorded the lowest alpha if deleted, at 0.91209, followed closely by “Revenue generated from digital marketing strategies has contributed to the hotel's overall sales performance” at 0.9124. Other items, including the achievement of higher profit margins compared to competitors (0.91507), attracting and retaining repeat customers (0.92176), and the impact of digital marketing on occupancy rates (0.92318) also showed strong internal consistency. The item “The hotel has attained high occupancy rates in the last five years” had the highest alpha if deleted value at 0.9349. These findings indicated that all six items contributed effectively to the internal consistency of the brand performance scale, as shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Reliability Analysis for Brand Performance

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Overall Cronbach's Alpha	Conclusion
The hotel has attained high occupancy rates in the last five years	.9349		
Digital marketing strategies have contributed to the highest percentage occupancy rates recorded	.92318		

by the hotel			
The hotel's sales revenue has met and exceeded the set targets in the last five years	.91209	.933	Reliable
Revenue generated from digital marketing strategies has contributed to the hotel's overall sales performance	.9124		
The hotel achieves higher profit margins compared to competitors in the same market segment	.91507		
The hotel's ability to attract and retain repeat customers has contributed to increased profitability	.92176		

4.6 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between digital marketing strategies and hotel brand performance. The results indicated that social media marketing was positively correlated with brand performance, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.356 and a significance level of $p = 0.000$, showing a statistically significant relationship at the 0.01 level. SEO marketing had the strongest correlation with brand performance at 0.389 ($p = 0.000$), while content marketing also showed a positive and significant correlation of 0.286 ($p = 0.001$).

The correlation between social media marketing and SEO marketing was weak and negative ($r = -0.109$, $p = 0.206$), and not statistically significant. A very weak positive correlation was found between social media marketing and content marketing ($r = 0.022$, $p = 0.794$), also not significant. In contrast, SEO marketing and content marketing were significantly and negatively correlated ($r = -0.292$, $p = 0.001$). All statistically significant results were observed at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This is summarized in Table 4.11

Table 4.11: Correlation Analysis

		MeanSocialMediaMarketing	MeanSEOMarketing	MeanContentMarketing	MeanBrandPerformance
MeanSocialMediaMarketing	Pearson Correlation	1	-.109	.022	.356**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.206	.794	.000
	N	137	137	137	137
MeanSEOMarketing	Pearson Correlation	-.109	1	-.292**	.389**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.206		.001	.000

	N	137	137	137	137
MeanContentMarketing	Pearson Correlation	.022	-.292**	1	.286**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.794	.001		.001
	N	137	137	137	137
MeanBrandPerformance	Pearson Correlation	.356**	.389**	.286**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	
	N	137	137	137	137

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.7 Regression Analysis

The regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive relationship between digital marketing strategies (social media marketing, SEO marketing, and content marketing) and brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County. The analysis involved generating and interpreting two key statistical outputs: the Model Summary and Regression Coefficients tables.

4.7.4 Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization Marketing and Content Marketing on Brand Performance

The multiple regression analysis revealed that social media marketing, SEO marketing, and content marketing collectively had a strong positive relationship with brand performance. The R value was 0.700, indicating a strong correlation between the combined predictors and brand performance. The R Square value was 0.490, showing that the three digital marketing strategies together explained 49.0% of the variance in brand performance. The Adjusted R Square was 0.478, indicating minimal reduction in explanatory power when accounting for the number of predictors in the model. The Standard Error of the Estimate was 0.74330, reflecting a reasonable level of accuracy in predicting brand performance from the three variables as shown in Table 4.21.

Table 4.12: Model Summary of Bivariate Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization Marketing and Content Marketing on Brand Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
-------	---	----------	-------------------	----------------------------

1 .700^a .490 .478 .74330

a. Predictors: (Constant), MeanContentMarketing, MeanSocialMediaMarketing, MeanSEOMarketing

The regression analysis revealed that all three predictors; social media marketing, SEO marketing, and content marketing had statistically significant effects on brand performance. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for social media marketing was 0.502 (SE = 0.077), with a standardized Beta of 0.408, a t-value of 6.540, and a p-value of 0.000. For SEO marketing, the B value was 0.580 (SE = 0.067), with a Beta of 0.562, a t-value of 8.624, and a p-value of 0.000. Content marketing had a B value of 0.517 (SE = 0.076), with a Beta of 0.440, a t-value of 6.797, and a p-value of 0.000. The constant for the model was -1.619, with a standard error of 0.488, and a t-value of -3.317 (p = 0.001). These results, as shown in Table 4.23, indicate that each of the three digital marketing strategies made a significant contribution to predicting brand performance. Its model is as shown below

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon \dots \dots \dots \text{(Equation iv)}$$

Where;

Y = brand performance

β_0 = Y-intercept (-1.619)

$\beta_1 - \beta_3$ = Beta coefficients of the independent variables (X_1, X_2, X_3)

X_1 = social media marketing (0.502)

X_2 = search engine optimization marketing (0.580)

X_3 = content marketing (0.517)

ε = Error term

$$Y = -1.619 + 0.502 \text{ (social media marketing)} + 0.580 \text{ (search engine optimization marketing)} + 0.517 \text{ (content marketing)} + \varepsilon$$

Table 4.13: Regression of Coefficients for Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization Marketing and Content Marketing on Brand Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
-------	-----------------------------	---------------------------	---	------

		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.619	.488		-	.001
	MeanSocialMediaMarketing	.502	.077	.408	3.317	.000
	MeanSEOMarketing	.580	.067	.562	8.624	.000
	MeanContentMarketing	.517	.076	.440	6.797	.000

a. Dependent Variable: MeanBrandPerformance



Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion, conclusion and recommendations of the key findings from Chapter four in relation to the study objectives and existing literature on the influence of digital marketing strategies on brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County.

5.2 Discussions

The study's results demonstrate that digital marketing strategies significantly influence the brand performance of hotels in Murang'a County. The integrated effect of social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing accounted for nearly half of the variance in brand performance, underscoring the critical role of a coordinated digital marketing approach within this regional hospitality sector.

SEO emerged as the most influential digital marketing strategy. This aligns with global and regional research emphasizing SEO's power to increase online visibility and organic traffic (Macharia & Khamah, 2022; Nusairat et al., 2022). For Murang'a hotels, which largely operate as mid-tier or emerging brands rather than luxury or star-rated establishments, SEO provides a cost-effective way to compete by ensuring their offerings appear prominently in relevant online searches. This visibility is especially important given the competitive pressure from hotels in Nairobi and Mombasa with greater marketing budgets.

Content marketing, ranking second in influence, was found to enhance emotional engagement and foster trust with potential guests, resonating with findings by Wen et al. (2021) and Marques (2021). Murang'a hotels' storytelling around cultural heritage, scenic landscapes, and authentic experiences can differentiate them in the digital space, but this requires deliberate investment in high-quality, relevant content to engage both domestic and international travelers.

Social media marketing, while significant, showed a more modest effect. This may reflect the observed variations in human resource allocation and expertise among hotel managers in Murang'a, as well as potentially limited financial budgets dedicated to paid promotions. This insight corresponds with Lukose & Lagat's (2022) observation that effective social media marketing demands not just presence but sustained, strategic content creation and audience interaction, which may be challenging for smaller or less resourced hotels.

Furthermore, the research revealed information asymmetry among managerial staff regarding digital marketing knowledge and its strategic importance, consistent with findings by Siaw et al. (2023) in similar contexts. This suggests that to maximize the impact of digital marketing on brand performance, hotels in Murang'a must foster cross-departmental collaboration and invest in capacity building and training initiatives to bridge knowledge gaps.

Contextually, the unique economic and infrastructural environment of Murang'a with many hotels serving regional and local clientele shapes digital marketing priorities and outcomes. The limited star-rated hotels and the predominance of mid-tier establishments

require tailored digital marketing strategies that leverage the county's cultural assets and address infrastructural challenges such as internet connectivity and digital literacy.

This study thus enriches the literature by providing localized insights into the digital marketing dynamics of a rural Kenyan hospitality sector, highlighting the necessity of integrated digital strategies grounded in local realities. These findings support and extend earlier work focusing on urban and star-rated hotels by emphasizing that digital marketing effectiveness depends heavily on context-specific factors including managerial expertise, resource availability, and local market characteristics

5.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.3.1 Conclusions

Digital marketing has become an indispensable component in the strategic growth of hotels, particularly within emerging markets such as Murang'a County. The evidence from this study underscores that the effective integration of digital marketing strategies encompassing social media engagement, search engine optimization, and content creation plays a pivotal role in enhancing brand performance. However, success in this domain requires more than just isolated efforts; it demands a cohesive and data-driven approach that aligns digital initiatives with customer expectations and evolving market dynamics.

Hotels in Murang'a face distinct challenges, including limited resource allocation and uneven expertise in digital marketing, which can hinder the full realization of potential benefits. This highlights the importance of targeted capacity building and investment in technology to foster more sophisticated digital marketing practices. Moreover, understanding the nuanced preferences of the local and regional clientele is crucial for tailoring content and engagement strategies that resonate authentically with the audience.

While this study contributes significantly to understanding the digital marketing–brand performance relationship in a localized context, it also opens avenues for further exploration. Future research might investigate the long-term impact of emerging digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, chatbots, and virtual reality on customer engagement and brand loyalty in the hospitality sector. Additionally, exploring the role of

digital marketing within sustainability and ethical tourism initiatives could provide valuable insights for hotels seeking to differentiate themselves in a competitive landscape. Ultimately, this study affirms that digital marketing is not a one-size-fits-all solution but a dynamic set of tools that, when strategically harnessed, can drive brand strength, operational efficiency, and profitability. For hotels in Murang'a County, embracing a comprehensive and adaptive digital marketing strategy is essential to sustain growth and competitive advantage in an increasingly digital global marketplace.

5.3.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are proposed to assist hotel managers, digital marketing practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in enhancing the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies to improve brand performance among hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya.

Hotel managers and owners are encouraged to integrate social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing into a cohesive digital marketing strategy. This unified approach will maximize customer engagement, increase online visibility, and strengthen brand loyalty. Given that SEO marketing demonstrated the strongest influence on brand performance, it is essential for hotel owners to allocate sufficient financial and human resources to activities such as website optimization, keyword targeting, backlinking strategies, and the use of analytics tools to track and improve performance. Investing in AI-driven and automated marketing technologies can further enhance decision-making by enabling hotels to analyze customer behavior, optimize campaigns, and improve conversion rates. Additionally, hotels should prioritize the production of engaging, high-quality content including blogs, videos, and customer testimonials that resonate with target audiences while ensuring content is optimized for search engines to expand reach and interaction. Improving social media engagement through real-time customer interaction, addressing inquiries and complaints promptly, and leveraging user-generated content will help build trust and reinforce online presence.

Digital marketing practitioners should focus on developing customized marketing solutions tailored to the unique needs of local hotels in Murang'a County, especially smaller and mid-tier establishments that often lack digital marketing expertise.

Organizing workshops and training sessions in SEO, content creation, social media management, and data analytics will empower hotel staff and build digital marketing capacity. Moreover, practitioners should encourage the strategic use of influencer marketing by collaborating with travel bloggers and social media influencers to amplify brand exposure and attract authentic customer engagement. Guiding hotels on the effective use of paid advertisements across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Google Ads will help optimize visibility and target the right customer segments more efficiently.

Policymakers and industry regulators have a vital role in facilitating the digital transformation of the hospitality sector. Collaboration between government bodies such as the Kenya Tourism Board and Murang'a County authorities is crucial to promote digital adoption through grants, subsidies, or other incentives that support investment in digital marketing tools. It is also important to invest in training programs aimed at improving digital marketing skills within the hospitality workforce, with emphasis on SEO, social media engagement, and content marketing. Since digital marketing effectiveness is partly dependent on reliable internet access, efforts to expand and improve connectivity, particularly in rural areas of Murang'a County, are essential. Furthermore, clear regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines should be established to govern online advertising practices, data privacy, and social media marketing to protect consumer rights and maintain industry standards.

These recommendations collectively emphasize the need for a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach that combines managerial commitment, expert guidance, and supportive policy interventions to unlock the full potential of digital marketing in enhancing brand performance within Murang'a County's hotel industry.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should examine the role of emerging technologies in digital marketing for hotels by exploring how AI-driven chatbots, virtual reality (VR) tours, and blockchain-based loyalty programs impact hotel brand performance. Additionally, since influencer marketing is gaining popularity, a study should investigate how influencer partnerships

affect customer perceptions and bookings in hotels. A comparative study on digital marketing strategies in urban versus rural hotels would provide insights into how hotels in rural areas like Murang'a County differ from those in urban areas like Nairobi in their adoption and effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. Further research could also focus on understanding customer perspectives on digital marketing in the hospitality sector to help hotels tailor their campaigns more effectively. Finally, an exploration of the challenges and barriers to digital marketing adoption among small and medium-sized hotels would be valuable in identifying the financial, technological, and skill-related challenges that prevent full implementation of digital marketing strategies.



References

- Adams, P. , Freitas, I. M. B. , & Fontana, R. (2019). Strategic orientation, innovation performance and the moderating influence of marketing management. *Journal of Business Research*, 97, 129–140.
- Aithal, A., & Aithal, P. S. (2020). Development and validation of survey questionnaire & experimental data—a systematical review-based statistical approach. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMTS)*, 5(2), 233–251.

- Akomo, E. (2019). Influence of customer relationship management dimensions on performance of five-star hotels in Nairobi County [Doctoral dissertation]. Maseno University.
- Akunja, L. A. (2020). Brand Image as a Determinant of Customer Loyalty in Selected Nairobi Hotels. *East African Journal of Business and Economics*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajbe.2.1.168>
- Alamai, M. M., Sule, G. M., & Aliyu, A. A. (2020). Social Media Content and Service Delivery Empowerment in Hospitality business in Nigeria. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 5(1), 65–85.
- Alameda García, D. , Carcelén García, S. , Pintado Blanco, T. , & Sánchez, J. (2019). Integrated marketing communication in the digital environment. Advertiser attitudes towards online communication techniques. *Estudos Em Comunicação*, 29.
- Angeloni, S., & Rossi, C. (2021). Online search engines and online travel agencies: A Comparative Approach. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 45(4), 720–749.
- Anguera-Torrell, O., & Langer, C. (2022). The impact of positioning on click-through-rates in hotel metasearch engines. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 28(2), 228–243.
- Arasli, H., Abdullahi, M., & Gunay, T. (2021). Social media as a destination marketing tool for a sustainable heritage festival in Nigeria: A moderated mediation study. *Sustainability*, 13(11), 61–91.
- Arthur, I. K., Nikoi, E. G. A., & Benagr, S. (2020). Advancing the services sector's potential in Africa through customer experience: A conceptual perspective. In *Customer Service Management in Africa: A Strategic and Operational Perspective*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429031342-30>
- Arusho, L. R. (2023). Effect of Social Media Platforms' use on Hotel Performance in Star Rated Hotels within Uasin Gishu County, Kenya [Doctoral dissertation,]. University of Eldoret.

- Barney, J. B., Ketchen Jr, D. J., & Wright, M. (2021). Bold voices and new opportunities: an expanded research agenda for the resource-based view. *Journal of Management*, 47(7), 1677–1683.
- Bu, Y., Parkinson, J., & Thaichon, P. (2021). Digital content marketing as a catalyst for e-WOM in food tourism. . . *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 29(2), 142–154.
- Busulwa, R. (2020). *Hospitality management and digital transformation: balancing efficiency, agility and guest experience in the era of disruption*. Routledge.
- Chaffey, D., & Smith, P. R. (2022). Digital marketing excellence: Planning, optimizing and integrating online marketing. In *Digital Marketing Excellence: Planning, Optimizing and Integrating Online Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003009498>
- Collins, G. (2023). Impact of Digitalization on Customer Experience Management in the Hospitality Industry. *Hospitality and Tourism Journal*, 1(1), 12–23.
- Dang, T. D., & Nguyen, M. T. (2023). Systematic review and research agenda for the tourism and hospitality sector: co-creation of customer value in the digital age. *Future Business Journal*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-023-00274-5>
- Davis, G. F., & DeWitt, T. (2021). Organization theory and the resource-based view of the firm: The great divide. *Journal of Management*, 47(7), 1684–1697.
- Dimitrios, B., Ioannis, R., Angelos, N., & Nikolaos, T. (2023). Digital marketing: The case of digital marketing strategies on luxurious hotels. *Procedia Computer Science*, 219, 688–696.
- Ebrahim, R. S. (2020). The role of trust in understanding the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and brand loyalty. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 19(4), 287–308.
- El-Said, O. A. (2020). Impact of online reviews on hotel booking intention: The moderating role of brand image, star category, and price. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 33.

- Estialbo, H. A. (2021). A study of the importance of branding and digital marketing to South African MSMEs.
- Freeman, R. E., Dmytriyev, S. D., & Phillips, R. A. (2021). Stakeholder theory and the resource-based view of the firm. *Journal of Management*, 47(7), 1757–1770.
- Gakii, A., Maina, S., & Murigi, E. (2022). Moderating Effect of Firm Characteristics on the Relationship Between Video Online Marketing and Market Performance of Registered Tours and Travel Agencies in Nairobi City County, Kenya. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 14(24), 28–34.
- Gioko, S. M., Mukulu, E., & Oloko, M. (2021). The Influence of Electronic Personalization on Performance of Three to Five-Star Hotels in Kenya. *European Scientific Journal*, 17(23), 367–378.
- Goryushkina, N. E., Gaifutdinova, T. V., Logvina, E. V., Redkin, A. G., Kudryavtsev, V. V., & Shol, Y. N. (2019). Basic principles of tourist services market segmentation. *Eleftherios Thalassinos*.
- Hanlon, A. (2021). *Digital Marketing: Strategic Planning & Integration*. Digital Marketing.
- Haudi, H., Handayani, W., Musnaini, M., Suyoto, Y., Prasetyo, T., Pitaloka, E., & Cahyon, Y. (2022). The effect of social media marketing on brand trust, brand equity and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, 6(3), 961–972.
- Herath, R. B., Tham, J., Khatibi, A., & Azam, S. F. A. (2023). An investigation into the Relationship between Revenue Management Practices and Financial Performance in Star-Rated Hotels in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 11(1), 1–38.
- Ibrahim, B. (2021). The nexus between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty in hotel Facebook pages: A multi-group analysis of hotel ratings. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 69(2), 228–245.

- Khalayleh, M., & Al-Hawary, S. (2022). The impact of digital content of marketing mix on marketing performance: An experimental study at five-star hotels in Jordan. *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, 6(4), 1023–1032.
- Kirongo, A., & Odoyo, C. (2020). Research philosophy design and methodologies: A systematic review of research paradigms in information technology.
- Kitetu, E. M. (2022). Effect of digital marketing communication tools on student enrolment in private hospitality colleges in Kenya [Doctoral dissertation]. Strathmore University.
- Korir, E. J. , & M. A. (2020). Social Media Marketing And Performance Of Registered Rated Hotels In Nakuru County, Kenya. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies*, 7(10), 7(10), 62–70.
- Kotler, M., Cao, T., Wang, S., & Qiao, C. (2020). Marketing strategy in the digital age: applying Kotler's strategies to digital marketing. World Scientific.
- Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H., & Setiawan, I. (2023). Marketing 6.0: the future is immersive. John Wiley & Sons.
- Kotler, P., Pfoertsch, W., & Sponholz, U. (2021). The current state of marketing. In *H2H Marketing: The Genesis of Human-to-Human Marketing* (pp. 1–28). Springer, Cham.
- Kushwaha, B. P. , Singh, R. K. , Varghese, N. , & Singh, V. N. (2020). Integrating social media and digital media as new elements of integrated marketing communication for creating brand equity. *Journal of Content, Community & Communication*, 11(6), 52–64.
- Laurie, S. , & Mortimer, K. (2019). How to achieve true integration: the impact of integrated marketing communication on the client/agency relationship. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 35(3–4), 231–252.
- Lee, N. R., & Kotler, P. (2022). *Success in social marketing: 100 case studies from around the Globe (First Edition)*. Routledge.

- Lubis, N. W. (2022). Resource based view (RBV) in improving company strategic capacity. *Research Horizon*, 2(6), 587–596.
- Lukose, T. (2023). How social media marketing impacts the performance of star rated hotels. *Journal of Business, Economics and Management Research Studies*, 1(1), 20–26.
- Lukose, T., & Lagat, C. (2022). Moderating Effect of Competitive Dynamics on Social Media Marketing and the Performance of Star Rate Hotels in Kenya. *African Journal of Education, Science and Technology*.
- Macharia, A. M., & Khamah, A. H. (2022a). Influence of E-Marketing Tools on Sales Performance of Beach Hotels in Mombasa County. *International Journal in Management and Social Science*, 10(6), 17–39.
- Macharia, A. M., & Khamah, A. H. (2022b). Influence of E-Marketing Tools on Sales Performance of Beach Hotels in Mombasa County. *International Journal in Management and Social Science*, 10(6), 17–39.
- Makanyeza, C., Sivotwa, T. D., & Jaiyeoba, O. (2021). The effect of consumer rights awareness on attitude and purchase intention in the hotel industry: Moderating role of demographic characteristics. *Cogent Business & Management*, 8(1), 189–197.
- Manishimwe, T., Raimi, L., & Azubuike, C. J. (2022). Customer-centric influence of entrepreneurial marketing on business performance of hotels in Nigeria during the COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management*, 21(6), 668–683.
- Marques, C. A. D. J. (2021). Examining good practices in Digital Content Marketing: A study on Portuguese hotel blogs [Doctoral dissertation].
- Mathew, V., & Soliman, M. (2021). Does digital content marketing affect tourism consumer behavior? An extension of technology acceptance model. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 20(1), 61–75.
- Metcalf, J. (2019). Comparing science communication theory with practice: An assessment and critique using Australian data. *Public Understanding of Science*, 28(4), 382–400.

- Morang'a, P. M. (2023). Influence of Social Media Marketing Tools on Performance among Hotels Registered by Tourism Regulatory Authority In Central Region, Kenya [Doctoral dissertation]. KCA University.
- Mugambi, P. M., Muturi, W., & Njeru, A. (2023). Effect of liquidity on financial performance of star rated hotels in Nairobi County, Kenya. *International Academic Journal of Economics and Finance*, 3(8), 305–322.
- Munyoki, J. M. , K. F. , & P. G. P. (2020). The Moderating Effect of Customer Expectations on the Relationship between Service Encounter Quality and Satisfaction of Hotel Guests in Kenya. *DBA Africa Management Review*, 10(2), 87–101.
- Musoga, B., Ngugi, L., & Wanjau, K. L. (2021). Moderating role of service innovation on the relationship between corporate reputation and performance of hotels in Kenya. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147-4478), 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v10i1.1016>
- Nayak, B., Bhattacharyya, S. S., & Krishnamoorthy, B. (2022). Integrating the dialectic perspectives of resource-based view and industrial organization theory for competitive advantage—a review and research agenda. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 38(3), 656–679.
- Ndung'u, J. M. (2022a). Digital Marketing Strategies and Performance of Top 100 Medium Sized Companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Kenyatta University.
- Ndung'u, J. M. (2022b). Digital Marketing Strategies and Performance of Top 100 Medium Sized Companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya [Masters thesis]. Kenyatta University.
- Ngatia, J. M. (2023). Influence of Service Convenience on Guest Loyalty among Hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya [Doctoral dissertation]. Kenyatta University.
- Nusairat, N. M., Al-Gasawnehb, J., Al-Quranc, A. Z., Al-dweerid, R. M., Joudehe, J. M., Anuarf, M. M., & Al-Hammourig, Q. (2022). Implications of search engine marketing and privacy between mobile-CRM and marketing performance. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University*, 57(1).

- Odawo, L. , M. V. , & K. B. (2022). Utilization of Integrated Marketing Communication to Create Brand Recognition in Three to Five Star Hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya. *Journal of Economics, Management Sciences & Procurement*, 2(1), 85–97.
- Ouma, B. R., & Mutinda, J. (2022). Competitive Strategies and Performance of Star-Rated Hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya. *International Journal of Science and Business*, 15(1).
- Parvez, M. O., Arasli, H., Ozturen, A., Lodhi, R. N., & Ongsakul, V. (2022). Antecedents of human-robot collaboration: theoretical extension of the technology acceptance model. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 13(2), 240–263.
- Robaina, M., Madaleno, M., Silva, S., Eusébio, C., Carneiro, M. J., Gama, C., & Monteiro, A. (2020). The relationship between tourism and air quality in five European countries. *Economic Analysis and Policy*, 67, 261–272.
- Rodriguez, P. L., Spirling, A., & Stewart, B. M. (2023). Embedding regression: Models for context-specific description and inference. *American Political Science Review*, 117(4), 1255–1274.
- Roumeliotis, K. I., Tselikas, N. D., & Tryfonopoulos, C. (2022). Greek hotels' web traffic: A comparative study based on search engine optimization techniques and technologies. *Digital*, 2(3), 379–400.
- Santos, L. L., Gomes, C., Malheiros, C., & Campos, F. (2022). Measuring the hotels' performance using profitability ratios. *Academy of Accounting and Financial Studies Journal*, 26(S6), 1–12.
- Setiawan, A., Harahap, Z., Syamsuar, D., & Kunang, Y. N. (2020). The optimization of website visibility and traffic by implementing search engine optimization (SEO) in Palembang Polytechnic of tourism. *CommIT (Communication and Information Technology) Journal*, 14(1), 31–44.
- Sharma, H. , & Aggarwal, A. G. (2021). The influence of user generated content on hotel sales: An Indian perspective. *Journal of Modelling in Management*, 16(4), 1358–1375.

- Siaw, G. A., Martey, E. M., & Danquah, B. (2023). Effect of e-marketing on the brand image of hotels in Cape Coast, Ghana. *Revista Turismo & Desenvolvimento*, 42, 67–80.
- Siripipatthanakul, S., Limna, P., Siripipattanakul, S., & Auttawechasakoon, P. (2022). The relationship between content marketing, e-promotion, e-WOM and intentions to book hotel rooms in Thailand. *Asia Pacific Journal of Academic Research in Business Administration*, 8(2), 35–42.
- Sukaatmadja, I., Yasa, N., Rahyuda, H., Setini, M., & Dharmanegara, I. (2021). Competitive advantage to enhance internationalization and marketing performance woodcraft industry: A perspective of resource-based view theory. *Journal of Project Management*, 6(1), 45–56.
- Sürücü, L., & Maslakci, A. (2020). Validity and reliability in quantitative research. *Business & Management Studies: An International Journal*, 8(3), 2694–2726.
- Tajvidi, R., & Karami, A. (2021). The effect of social media on firm performance. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 115, 105–174.
- Varadarajan, R. (2020). Customer information resources advantage, marketing strategy and business performance: A market resources based view. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 89, 89–97.
- Wen, J., Lin, Z., Liu, X., Xiao, S. H., & Li, Y. (2021). The Interaction Effects of Online Reviews, Brand, and Price on Consumer Hotel Booking Decision Making. *Journal of Travel Research*, 60(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287520912330>
- Wollard, K. (2022). The state of hotel sales, marketing, and revenue optimization talent 2020–2021.
- Yang, K., Min, J. H., & Garza-Baker, K. (2019). Post-stay email marketing implications for the hotel industry: Role of email features, attitude, revisit intention and leisure involvement level. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 25(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766718814081>

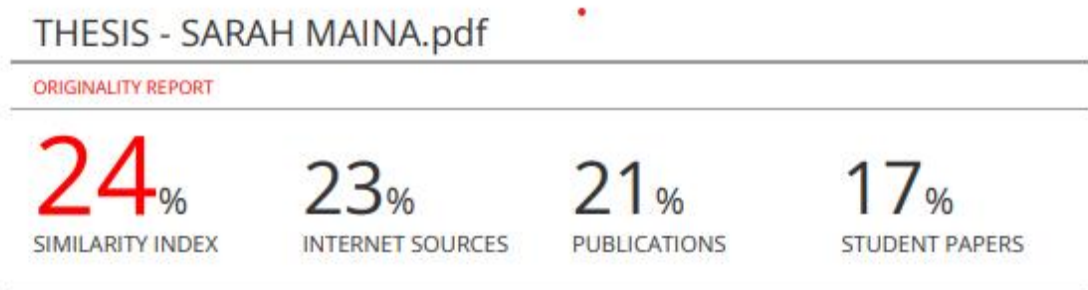
Zamyatina, N. A., & Solntseva, O. G. (2020). Hotel Tech Ecosystem: Adaptations to Online Distribution. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems, 129 LNNS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47945-9_21

Zhao, H. (2020). Explicating the social constructionist perspective on crisis communication and crisis management research: a review of communication and business journals. . Journal of Public Relations Research, 32(3–4), 98–119.



Appendices

Appendix A: Similarity Report





Appendix B: Strathmore University Institutional Ethics Review Clearance Certificate



25th February 2025

Mrs Maina Sarah,
sarah.maina-njoka@strathmore.edu

Dear Mrs Maina,

RE: The Influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya

This is to inform you that SU-ISERC has reviewed and **approved** your above **SU-masters** proposal. Your application reference number is **SU-ISERC2600/25**. The approval period is from **25th February 2025 to 24th February 2026**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used.
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SU-ISERC.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours of notification.
- iv. Any changes anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours.
- v. Clearance for the export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to the expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days of completion of the study to SU-ISERC.

Before commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke/> and obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Ambrose Rachier,
Chairperson; SU-ISERC



THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION ACT, 2013 (Rev. 2014)
Legal Notice No. 108: The Science, Technology and Innovation (Research Licensing) Regulations, 2014

The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, hereafter referred to as the Commission, was established under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act 2013 (Revised 2014) herein after referred to as the Act. The objective of the Commission shall be to regulate and assure quality in the science, technology and innovation sector and advise the Government in matters related thereto.

CONDITIONS OF THE RESEARCH LICENSE

1. The License is granted subject to provisions of the Constitution of Kenya, the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, and other relevant laws, policies and regulations. Accordingly, the licensee shall adhere to such procedures, standards, code of ethics and guidelines as may be prescribed by regulations made under the Act, or prescribed by provisions of International treaties of which Kenya is a signatory to.
2. The research and its related activities as well as outcomes shall be beneficial to the country and shall not in any way;
 - i. Endanger national security
 - ii. Adversely affect the lives of Kenyans
 - iii. Be in contravention of Kenya's international obligations including Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN).
 - iv. Result in exploitation of intellectual property rights of communities in Kenya
 - v. Adversely affect the environment
 - vi. Adversely affect the rights of communities
 - vii. Endanger public safety and national cohesion
 - viii. Plagiarize someone else's work
3. The License is valid for the proposed research, location and specified period.
4. Neither the license nor any rights thereunder are transferable.
5. The Commission reserves the right to cancel the research at any time during the research period if in the opinion of the Commission the research is not implemented in conformity with the provisions of the Act or any other written law.
6. The Licensee shall inform the relevant County Director of Education, County Commissioner and County Governor before commencement of the research.
7. Excavation, filming, movement, and collection of specimens are subject to further necessary clearance from relevant Government Agencies.
8. The License does not give authority to transfer research materials.
9. The Commission may monitor and evaluate the licensed research project for the purpose of assessing and evaluating compliance with the conditions of the License.
10. The Licensee shall submit one hard copy, and upload a soft copy of their final report (thesis) onto a platform designated by the Commission within one year of completion of the research.
11. The Commission reserves the right to modify the conditions of the License including cancellation without prior notice.
12. Research, findings and information regarding research systems shall be stored or disseminated, utilized or applied in such a manner as may be prescribed by the Commission from time to time.
13. The Licensee shall disclose to the Commission, the relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee, and the relevant national agencies any inventions and discoveries that are of National strategic importance.
14. The Commission shall have powers to acquire from any person the right in, or to, any scientific innovation, invention or patent of strategic importance to the country.
15. Relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee shall monitor and evaluate the research periodically, and make a report of its findings to the Commission for necessary action.


National Commission for Science, Technology and
Innovation(NACOSTI),
Off Waiyaki Way, Upper Kabete,
P. O. Box 30623 - 00100 Nairobi, KENYA
Telephone: 020 4007000, 0713788787, 0735404245
E-mail: dg@nacosti.go.ke
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke

Appendix C: National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) Certificate

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

RefNo: 865214

RESEARCH LICENSE




This is to Certify that Ms. SARAH WAIRURI MAINA of Strathmore University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Muranga on the topic: **THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ON BRAND PERFORMANCE OF HOTELS IN MURANG'A COUNTY, KENYA** for the period ending : 01/April/2026.

License No: NACOSTI/P/25/417566

Applicant Identification Number: 865214

Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Verification QR Code



NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.

See overleaf for conditions

Appendix D: Research Questionnaire

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research and for taking the time to complete the questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on brand performance of hotels in Murang’a county, Kenya. Please respond truthfully and accurately to all the items listed and kindly mark the item that matches your opinion with a tick (✓).

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Kindly indicate your job title.....

Section B: Social Media Marketing

This section consists of statements examining the influence of social media marketing on brand performance of hotels in Murang’a county, Kenya. Use the scale of 1-5. Where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Moderately agree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree.

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
2	The hotel has allocated adequate financial budget for social media marketing.					
3	The hotel has allocated adequate human resource budget for social media marketing.					
4	The hotel regularly creates and shares engaging content on social media platforms to attract potential customers					
5	The hotel utilizes paid advertisements on social media to increase visibility and attract a broader audience.					
6	The hotel consistently monitor customer feedback and reviews on social media to improve its services					
7	The hotel uses social media analytics tools to track the performance of campaigns and audience engagement.					

8. Are there other social media marketing strategies employed by your hotel that contribute to its brand performance? Explain

.....

Section C: Search Engine Optimization Marketing

This section consists of statements regarding influence of search engine optimization marketing on brand performance of hotels in Murang’a county, Kenya. Use the scale of 1-5. Where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Moderately agree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree.

	Statements					
9	The hotel has set aside adequate financial budget for search engine optimization marketing.					
10	The hotel has assigned a sufficient human resource budget for search engine optimization marketing.					
11	The hotel regularly updates its website content with relevant keywords to improve search engine rankings.					
12	The hotel invests in backlink strategies to enhance its website's visibility on search engines.					
13	The hotel uses SEO tools to monitor keyword rankings and identify areas for improvement.					
14	The hotel tracks website performance metrics, such as organic traffic and click-through rates, to evaluate SEO effectiveness.					

15. Are there other SEO marketing strategies utilized by your hotel that contribute to its brand performance? Explain

.....

Section D: Content Marketing

This section consists of statements assessing the relationship between content marketing and brand performance of hotels in Murang’a county, Kenya. Use the scale of 1-5. Where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Moderately agree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree.

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
16	The hotel has allocated adequate financial budget for content marketing.					

17	The hotel has assigned a sufficient human resource budget for content marketing.					
18	The hotel regularly publishes high-quality and engaging blog posts, articles, or videos to attract and retain customers.					
19	The hotel leverages storytelling in its content to promote its brand and services effectively.					
20	The hotel evaluates customer engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments, to assess the performance of its content marketing efforts.					
21	The hotel uses analytics tools to track the reach and effectiveness of its content across different digital platforms.					

22. Are there other content marketing strategies used by your hotel that contribute to its brand performance? Explain

.....

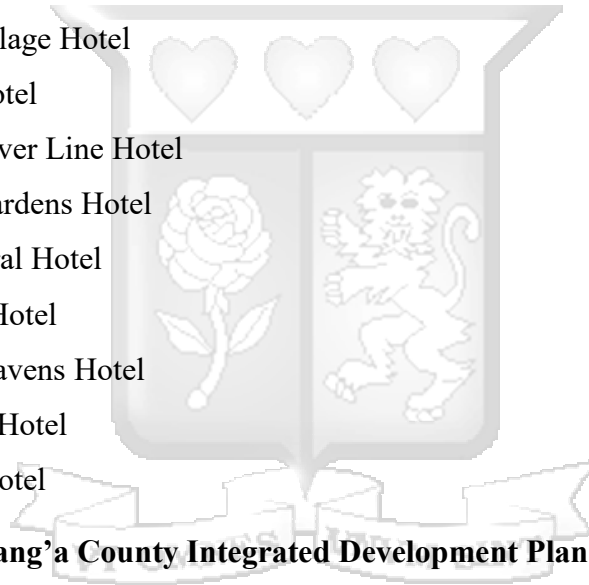
Section E: Brand Performance of Hotels in Murang’a County

This section consists of statements regarding brand performance of hotels in Murang’a county, Kenya. Use the scale of 1-5. Where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Moderately agree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree.

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
23	The hotel has attained high occupancy rates in the last five years.					
24	Digital marketing strategies have contributed to the highest percentage occupancy rates recorded by the hotel.					
25	The hotel’s sales revenue has met and exceeded the set targets in the last five years.					
26	Revenue generated from digital marketing strategies has contributed to the hotel's overall sales performance.					
27	The hotel achieves higher profit margins compared to competitors in the same market segment.					
28	The hotel's ability to attract and retain repeat customers has contributed to increased profitability.					

Appendix E: Sampling Frame of Hotels in Murang'a County, Kenya

1. Aberdare Cottage Hotel
2. Bekam Hotel
3. County Inn Hotel
4. Edge Wood Hotel
5. Fortune Green Hotel
6. Golden Palm Breeze Hotel
7. Goshen Farm Hotel
8. Great North Hotel
9. Ideal Hotel
10. Jambo Village Hotel
11. Nokras Hotel
12. Nokras River Line Hotel
13. Omega Gardens Hotel
14. Green Coral Hotel
15. Roswam Hotel
16. Stanley Havens Hotel
17. Starwood Hotel
18. Trotters Hotel



Source: Murang'a County Integrated Development Plan (2018-2022)

Appendix F: Work Plan

Month/Activity	December	January	February	March	April	May	June-September
Proposal Writing							
Data Collection							
Analysis and Project Writing							
Publication							
Defence							



Appendix G: Budget

Item	Cost (Kshs)
Travelling costs including for research assistants	15,000
Printing and photocopying of proposal	15,000
Binding of proposal	10,000
Data collection analysis	100,000
Printing and photocopying of project	10,000
Publication	50,000
SPSS software	30,000
Contingencies	10,000
Total	240,000

