

# Meta-Synthesis for Small and Medium-Sized Hotels' Social Media Integration and Digital Marketing Competence

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## **ABSTRACT:**

The article examines how small and medium-sized hotels can enhance performance through effective social media marketing and digital integration. Using a meta-synthesis approach, it identifies key challenges such as limited resources, lack of strategy, and insufficient training. Findings show that social media significantly improves sales, brand awareness, and customer loyalty, with measurable financial returns. The study emphasizes integrated digital strategies, data-driven decision-making, and managerial competence as essential for competitiveness and long-term growth.

*Keywords: social media marketing; small and medium-sized hotels; return on investment; digital marketing competence; meta-synthesis review*

## **1. Introduction**

This study's current issue is that small- and medium-sized hotels are not adequately utilizing social media marketing. To compete, increase brand recognition, and enhance performance indicators such as revenue per available room and online review ratings, the full use of digital platforms is hindered. The study aims to provide frameworks that support investment, overcome obstacles, and find successful solutions, ultimately presenting measurable proof of social media marketing's return on investment. Digital platforms, specifically social media, are essential for Small and Medium-Sized Hotels (as they level the playing field, facilitate customer communication, and mitigate regional limitations). Facebook and Instagram are the most effective social media platforms for marketing, directly influencing brand visibility, perceived quality, and purchase intention through compelling content and electronic word of mouth. The successful adoption of SMM is fundamentally reliant on the general manager's disposition and on technological factors, such as perceived ease of use, which influence acceptance more than internal considerations. Effective social media marketing methods, classified as monitoring, response, and information dissemination, positively impact hotel performance and facilitate improved, tailored customer relationship management.

Based on the provided research contexts, the barriers of strategic inadequacy, budget constraints, and insufficient training manifest differently depending on the regional economic status (developed vs. developing) and the specific management culture of the SMEs. Strategic failure in SMHs (Small and Medium Hotels) often stems from a lack of

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formal planning rather than a lack of platform presence. In regions like Finland and Greece, the barrier is less about whether to use social media and more about how to plan it. Research highlights that even when adoption is high, poor marketing planning and a lack of control due to outsourcing remain major strategic hurdles. In many SMEs, the strategy is not institutionalized but rests solely on the general manager's personal attitude and perception. If the manager lacks digital literacy, the hotel lacks a strategy, regardless of available technology. In Malaysia, a strategic inadequacy is identified in the disconnect between platforms; while many hotels have websites, they fail to integrate loyalty programs or advanced CRM, stagnating at a simple interactive stage. Budget constraints are cited across all contexts, but the impact of those constraints varies by economic maturity. In Vietnam, financial resources are identified as a core causal factor in the TOE (Technology-Organization-Environment) framework. Budget limitations directly dictate the hotel's ability to overcome usage barriers and achieve cross-technology compatibility. In South East Asia, budget constraints manifest as a time/resource barrier. While Facebook is widely used, YouTube is neglected because the financial and time commitment required for video production is too high for smaller budgets.

In South Africa and Indonesia, budget constraints are exacerbated by external shocks like COVID-19. Hotels are struggling to survive, making the financial risk of investing in new digital tools a significant barrier to regaining market share. The lack of skilled staff is a recurring theme, particularly in contexts where digital transformation is rapid. In regions like Turkey, a primary challenge is explicitly identified as a need for more staff training in digital tools. Without this, hotels cannot effectively manage the high volume of visual content (photos/videos) required to attract millennial customers. Due to insufficient internal training, many SMEs in Southeast Asia outsource web development. This leads to a secondary barrier: a lack of internal control over Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and optimization, leaving the hotel unable to pivot strategies quickly. Interestingly, research in Malaysia suggests that while internal factors (like staff readiness) are important, they are often mediated by technology factors. If the tool is easy to use, the training barrier is lowered; however, technological factors greatly mediate the influence of internal readiness on final acceptance. Focus on formalizing plans and brand image. Focus on survival, occupancy, and basic interactivity. Budget shifted toward high-quality content and luxury branding. Focused on financial resources as a primary cause for adoption failure. Focus on staying current with changing trends/algorithms. Focus on basic digital literacy and overcoming the outsourcing trap. Across all contexts, the General Manager acts as the ultimate gatekeeper. Whether in Abuja or Helsinki, the barrier of insufficient training or budget is often filtered through management's perceived usefulness of the tool. In less economically developed contexts, these barriers are more causal—meaning a lack of funds or training stops adoption entirely—whereas in more developed contexts, these barriers limit the effectiveness of existing adoption.

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volume of visual content (photos/videos) required to attract millennial customers. Due to insufficient internal training, many SMEs in Southeast Asia outsource web development. This leads to a secondary barrier: a lack of internal control over Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and optimization, leaving the hotel unable to pivot strategies quickly. Interestingly, research in Malaysia suggests that while internal factors (like staff readiness) are important, they are often mediated by technology factors. If the tool is easy to use, the training barrier is lowered; however, technological factors greatly mediate the influence of internal readiness on final acceptance. Focus on formalizing plans and brand image. Focus on survival, occupancy, and basic interactivity. Budget shifted toward high-quality content and luxury branding. Focused on financial resources as a primary cause for adoption failure. Focus on staying current with changing trends/algorithms. Focus on basic digital literacy and overcoming the outsourcing trap. Across all contexts, the General Manager acts as the ultimate gatekeeper. Whether in Abuja or Helsinki, the barrier of insufficient training or budget is often filtered through management's perceived usefulness of the tool. In less economically developed contexts, these barriers are more causal—meaning a lack of funds or training stops adoption entirely—whereas in more developed contexts, these barriers limit the effectiveness of existing adoption.

Nonetheless, obstacles such as deficient strategic planning, budgetary constraints, and insufficient staff training must be addressed for SMHs to leverage these platforms and avoid complete marginalization. The principal challenges confronting SMHs in digital marketing encompass strategic inadequacies—such as inadequate planning, unquantified objectives, insufficient personnel training, resource limitations, budgetary constraints, and outsourced website management. The operational deficiencies pose a significant risk of marginalization and lost opportunities, as success largely depends on the general manager's personal insights and digital proficiency; moreover, overreliance on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram may lead to the oversight of equally effective traditional techniques, such as bundled pricing and promotions. The most crucial absent element is the measurable Return on Investment (ROI) for Social Media Marketing (SMM), which hinders budget-sensitive Social Media Heads (SMHs) from substantiating essential expenditures in personnel and strategy.

It is clear that while social media marketing offers a massive opportunity for budget and small-to-medium-sized hotels (SMHs) to level the playing field, the execution often falls short. Small businesses in developing markets generally recognize the value of digital platforms, but they frequently struggle to translate that awareness into tangible, optimized results. A recurring theme in the research is that many hospitality businesses mistake simply being on social media for having a social media marketing strategy. This lack of systematic planning prevents them from converting online engagement into actual bookings. Many businesses settle for a simple online presence with an informative or advertising approach, but lack a general promotion strategy. They operate without specific goals or systems in place to measure the results of their efforts. Businesses frequently struggle with consistency. Common issues include irregular posting schedules and accounts that are left unmaintained or outdated, which can negatively impact a brand's image.

Even when businesses gather customer data from social media, it rarely moves beyond the capture stage. Without formal procedures to analyze this data, hotels fail to

personalize the customer experience or inform major business decisions regarding pricing and promotion. A lack of internal marketing planning often leads to outsourcing key web development and optimization activities, resulting in a loss of control over the brand's digital presence and an over-reliance on walk-in consumers rather than planned, digital bookings. The hidden costs of free platforms, while setting up a Facebook or Instagram page is free, executing a competitive marketing strategy is not. Budget limitations are consistently cited as a primary challenge for small hospitality establishments. Financial resources are identified as a critical factor for success. Without adequate funding, small hotels cannot invest in premium property management systems, advanced customer relationship management (CRM) software, or high-quality content creation. While organic social media is helpful, the research notes that effective online reputation management and brand awareness often require a combination of viral campaigns and paid advertising. Budget constraints severely limit a small hotel's ability to utilize paid social media ads to compete with larger chains.

The digital landscape is constantly changing, and effective social media marketing requires specialized knowledge that is often missing in small-scale hospitality teams. Many small establishments simply do not have dedicated marketing personnel. The responsibility often falls on general management or staff members who lack specialized digital marketing expertise. The research highlights that technological factors (like perceived ease of use and cross-technology compatibility) heavily influence whether a hotel successfully adopts social media. Without proper staff training in digital tools, the technology becomes a barrier rather than an asset. Because social media trends change constantly, a static skill set quickly becomes obsolete. Training and human resource development are listed as Critical Success Factors, meaning that without ongoing education, hotels will fail to optimize the opportunities available to them. While these barriers are universally experienced by small businesses globally, they are heavily amplified in developing markets. In these regions, the structural differences—such as varying levels of technological infrastructure, tighter capital constraints, and a stronger reliance on external technological factors rather than internal digital literacy—make these challenges particularly acute.

The absence of standardized, simple frameworks for data analysis hinders efficient strategic planning, forcing managers to rely on reactive decision-making rather than proactive, evidence-based management. Moreover, SMHs critically require best-practice frameworks for the optimal integration of Social Media Marketing (SMM), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), and traditional advertising to enhance returns and mitigate excessive reliance on the General Manager's individual digital expertise. This research aims to identify effective social media marketing techniques for small and medium-sized hotels, assess their impact on business performance, and identify challenges to client loyalty.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

The literature indicates that successful social media marketing necessitates proper data analysis (Sonawane & Magarpatta, 2024) and that utilizing social media data in a structured manner is an understudied area (Siti-Nabiha et al. 2021). The precise methods, instruments, and requisite competencies for SMEs to evolve beyond merely aggregating social media data (likes, comments, views) to leveraging it for strategic business choices

(e.g., dynamic pricing, personalized service, predictive staffing). The studies require data analysis, but often neglect the difficulties faced by resource-limited small hotels in implementing this intricate procedure. The significance of effectively managed websites that facilitate direct bookings is highlighted (Navalgund et al. 2022), as is the phase of e-commerce adoption (Ayob, 2016). The comprehensive integration and attribution of social media initiatives are integral to the hotel's complete digital ecosystem, encompassing the website, Online Travel Agents (OTAs), and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems. The literature emphasizes the direct impact of SMM. However, it neglects to consider how SMM efficacy may be compromised or enhanced by an inadequately configured website funnel or inconsistent pricing on OTAs. The comprehensive mapping of the client journey across channels is poorly addressed. Managerial views and attitudes are identified as influencing variables (Murphy & Nolly), while the absence of skilled personnel is emphasized as a challenge (Nkosana, 2022). An ideal organizational framework for managing social media marketing at a small hotel is crucial when a specialized marketing department is not available. This encompasses the necessary training expenditure, the allocation of SMM tasks (front desk, manager, external consultant), and the organizational culture essential for maintaining a consistent, responsive, and personalized online presence (Setiadi, 2023). Cost-Benefit Analysis and ROI pertinent to SMEs recognize the inadequacy of funding (Nkosana, 2022) and the economic efficiency of viral marketing (Bandara et al., 2021). The difficulty of assessing actual impact is also acknowledged (Nkosana, 2022)—comprehensive, quantitative Return on Investment (ROI) models designed explicitly for SMM in small hotels. Research frequently concludes with substantial impacts on soft metrics such as brand awareness and purchase intention. Nonetheless, it lacks a definitive synthesis of the monetary inputs required (time, capital, personnel) relative to the measurable financial return (Net RevPAR, profit per customer). The economic benchmarks for success, such as the monthly guarantee in VHO partnerships (Kusnadi & Putra, 2023), indicate that financial results are essential yet insufficiently examined. A study suggests that proprietors and consumers differ on its negative effects (Atienza, 2019), while another references consumer hostility toward intrusive online promotions (Garg & Kumar, 2021).

None of the provided papers contains precise financial Return on Investment (ROI) models (e.g., exact monetary cost vs. precise financial yield formula). In fact, one paper explicitly highlights the difficulty of measuring the actual impact of social media adoption as a major challenge for these businesses. Instead of strict financial ROI equations, the literature provided relies on structural, behavioral, and performance measurement models. These models use statistical frameworks (like SEM or Regression Analysis) to link specific marketing inputs to performance outputs (such as Revenue Per Available Room, purchase intention, and marketing performance). These models measure how digital marketing inputs translate into consumer behavior, specifically the intent to book or purchase, which is a precursor to financial return. Before ROI can be realized, businesses must adopt the technology. These models measure the structural inputs required to achieve successful digital marketing implementation. Based strictly on the provided papers, the hospitality industry currently measures the return on social media investment through indirect performance indicators (RevPAR, CRM effectiveness, online review scores, and booking intentions) rather than precise, dollar-for-dollar financial ROI

formulas. To achieve the 15% customer base growth proposed in paper 4, the literature suggests focusing on the inputs detailed in paper 24 (responsiveness and information dissemination) to drive tangible revenue (RevPAR) outputs.

To operationalize Return on Investment (ROI) and move away from the informal or simple interactive stages currently seen in the Small and Medium Hotel (SMH) sector, the findings suggest a shift from passive presence to structured, data-driven management. The following elements, derived from the provided research, will strengthen practical applicability and provide the foundations for a standardized benchmark.

1. Integration of customer data into CRM Systems. A primary driver for standardizing ROI is the move from capture stage data to utilization. Link social media marketing directly to a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database. Findings show that equipped databases allow for one-to-one interaction. Measuring ROI becomes more precise when you can track a specific social media lead through to a personal booking and loyalty program behavior.
2. Adoption of Revenue-Centric Benchmark (RevPAR) Instead of measuring likes or followers, decision-making should be anchored in RevPAR (Revenue Per Available Room) and Online Review Scores. By correlating these two dimensions with RevPAR, managers can create a standardized scorecard to determine which digital activities actually yield financial growth.
3. Formalizing Permission-Based and Interaction Stages. The research identifies a gap where many hotels are stuck (simple interactive websites). Operationalize ROI requires a move toward Permission-Based Acceptance. Hotels should measure the conversion rate of permission (e.g., newsletter sign-ups or app downloads) to actual bookings, rather than just informative presence.
4. Utilization of Specialized Third-Party Partnerships (VHOs). For SMEs struggling with a lack of specialized human resources, partnering with Virtual Hotel Operators (VHOs) provides a pre-built benchmark framework. This shifts the burden of measurement from the hotel manager's personal perception to a mutual professional data framework.

Transitioning from qualitative perception to technological TOE, currently, adoption is highly dependent on the general manager's personal attitude. To strengthen applicability, hotels must adopt the TOE (Technology-Organization-Environment) framework. Standardize staff training in digital tools to overcome the usage barriers identified as a major challenge.

An exhaustive analysis of the adverse effects of inadequately administered social media management. This encompasses potential harm to online reputation from unresolved complaints, the opportunity cost of allocating limited staff time to unproductive postings, and the threat of privacy violations or data misuse when customizing marketing efforts. Facebook and Instagram are recognized as the most influential platforms (Bandara et al., 2021), while LinkedIn is noted as the least utilized by consumers (Atienza, 2019). The potential and efficacy of developing or specialized platforms (e.g., TikTok, Pinterest, niche travel forums, localized applications) for particular

SOHO segments. Contemporary research exhibits a pronounced bias towards predominant platforms, potentially neglecting highly effective yet less conventional channels that may be more appropriate for engaging specific target demographics (e.g., wellness tourists, adventure travelers) or particular geographic contexts (e.g., China's WeChat).

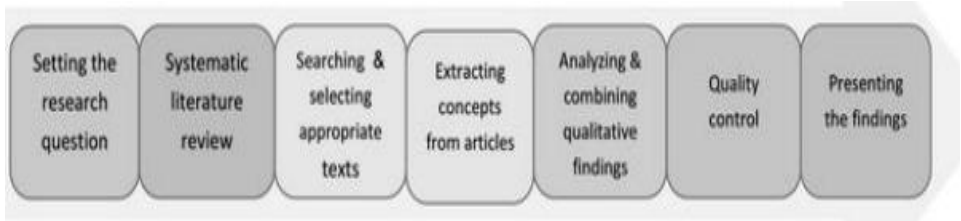
### 3. Research Methodology

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject, this study utilizes a seven-step meta-synthesis within a mixed-method systematic review to integrate qualitative findings and identify intricate thematic relationships. By synthesizing data from multiple prior investigations, the research evaluates the business impact of social media marketing, positioning it as a critical competitive equalizer that drives brand awareness, customer loyalty, and sales. Ultimately, the analysis reveals that social media marketing serves as a core determinant of performance for small and medium-sized hotels, yielding significant returns on investment and contextualizing the qualitative experiences essential to business success.

#### Step 1

To initiate the meta-synthesis, this study established a focused research question exploring how small and medium-sized hotels can leverage the metaverse to enhance digital marketing and social media integration. Utilizing a study population of relevant literature published between 2015 and 2025, the researcher employed a targeted collection method to select high-impact articles that address this novel field's specific parameters.

**Figure 1**



#### Step 2

This study explored international databases like Publish and Perish, Google Scholar, LitMap, Connected Papers, dissertations, and theses to find and gather pertinent studies.

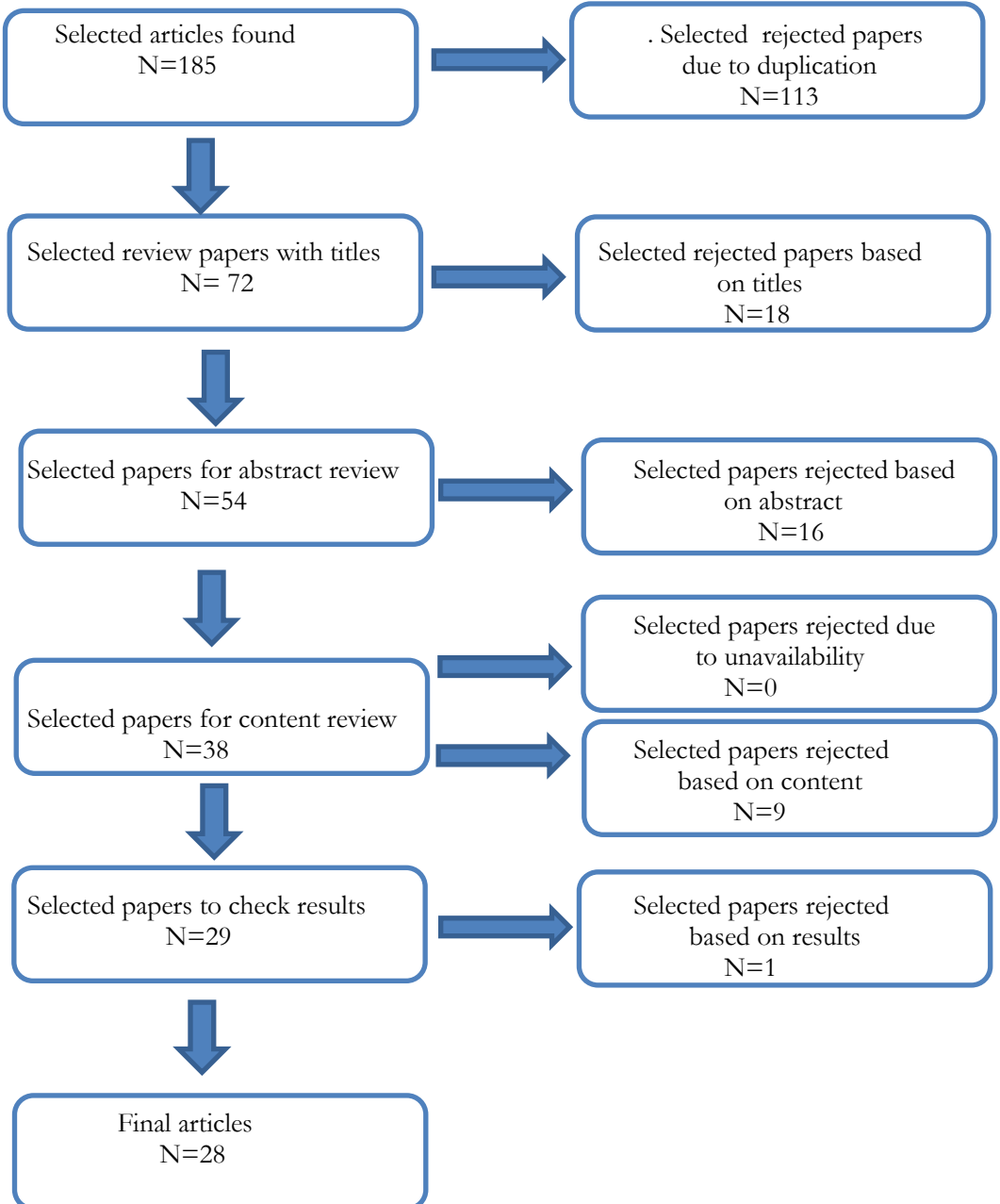
#### Step 3

To refine the data collection process, researchers conducted a strategic search across multiple databases for literature published between 2015 and 2025. By evolving from broad keywords to specific combinations—such as social media marketing, ROI, and performance indicators—and applying database filters, the search targeted high-quality,

relevant papers. While 185 studies were initially identified based on title and abstract inclusion, a rigorous assessment of accessibility and content relevance narrowed the final selection to 28 key articles for synthesis.

**Figure 2. Steps to select the final articles**

**Algorithm for selecting final articles**



#### Step 4

Concept extraction from the article is the fourth step. In this sense, the chosen pieces were arranged chronologically according to the date of publication. To ensure methodical structure, each entry contained the names and surnames of the writers, the year of publication and other pertinent information.

#### Step 5

Analyzing and synthesizing qualitative findings is step five. All of the variables found in earlier research were coded for the 28 chosen sources of various articles in this study, according to their applicability to the research goals and objectives.

#### Step 6

In the sixth step, quality control is implemented to ensure the validity and consistency of the study's conclusions. By comparing the primary researcher's generated codes against established categories, the study verifies that interpretations remain consistent across different analytical perspectives, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the meta-synthesis findings.

#### Step 7

In the final stage, researchers utilized an iterative review process to align fundamental findings with their respective categories. By comparing core conclusions side-by-side, the study mapped the relationships between concepts, ultimately clarifying how social media integration enhances digital marketing competency within small and medium-sized hotels.

In order to address the resource limitations and particular requirements of SME hotels, the research aims to go beyond descriptive studies that incorporate meta-synthesis to quantify the impact of SMM on performance, contextualize qualitative experiences and challenges, and use content analysis to systematically organize qualitative data. The study captures the dual nature of SMM efficacy, including the subjective aspects of customer involvement and loyalty as well as the measurable business effects. This integrated approach is essential since the complexity cannot be sufficiently captured by a single method. Before being incorporated into the final interpretation stage, the methodological framework for quantitative quality assessment is established independently.

The synthesis of these 28 studies demonstrates a sophisticated mixed-methods meta-synthesis that bridges the gap between management psychology and financial performance. By integrating qualitative why with quantitative how much, the literature establishes a robust framework for operational ROI in the hospitality sector. Qualitative methods are used to move beyond raw data to find the meaning and drivers behind technology adoption. Triangulation and verification ensure credibility through member-checking (participant review of transcripts) and interviewing multiple stakeholders (owners vs. operators). Longitudinal studies utilize long-term observations (up to 6 months) to account for seasonal volatility, providing a depth of rigor that snapshot surveys lack. Quantitative breadth (performance qualifications) numerical validation provides the statistical weight to the qualitative theories identified in the field. Researchers use Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test multi-layered relationships, such as how perceived ease

of use mediates the link between internal hotel resources and social media acceptance. To compare diverse hotels, complex metrics (likes, shares, frequency) are dichotomized. This creates a simplified systematic approach that serves as a user-friendly benchmark tool for managers. The Integrated Methodological Matrix establishes rigor across four key academic pillars to ensure the findings are actionable and reliable. Qualitative study identifies that management attitude is the primary operational bottleneck. Evaluation categorizes the hotel's digital maturity using stage models (e.g., simple interactive vs. fully integrated). Quantitative study uses path analysis to prove that specific digital behaviors—such as increasing comment response rates—directly correlate to a measurable increase in RevPAR (revenue per available room). This methodological synergy allows managers to replace intuition with a Performance-Qualified Strategy, turning social media engagement into a predictable driver of hotel occupancy.

These studies reveal a multi-layered approach to bias control, ensuring that the transition from qualitative insights to quantitative metrics is both rigorous and objective. By implementing these controls, the research mitigates the inherent risks of human subjectivity and statistical error in the hospitality context. Verifying verbatim transcripts with participants ensures the informant's voice is preserved, while pilot testing interview guides refines questions to be neutral and non-leading, eliminating interviewer bias. By cross-referencing interviews from managers, guests, and secondary documents, the research prevents findings from being skewed by a single stakeholder's perspective. Assigning a single researcher to all fieldwork prevents inter-rater variability, ensuring that qualitative observations remain standardized across different hotel sites. The use of Slovin's formula and systematic sampling ensures a statistically accurate representation of the hotel population, effectively reducing selection bias. Utilizing structural equation modeling enables rigorous assessment of measurement models, confirming that survey items accurately capture the intended theoretical constructs rather than noise. By grounding research in established theoretical frameworks, researchers are prevented from cherry-picking data to support unverified new theories. Conducting studies over six-month periods (covering both peak and off-peak seasons) ensures that findings reflect stable business trends rather than temporary fluctuations. Maintaining participant anonymity reduces social desirability bias. Furthermore, analyzing existing records (websites and reviews) eliminates the Hawthorne effect, as the data was generated naturally before the research began.

Meta-synthesis ensures comparability across diverse datasets by providing a standardized framework that harmonizes qualitative meanings with quantitative metrics. Given the 28 studies provided—which range from in-depth interviews in Indonesia to large-scale surveys in Greece and Malaysia—meta-synthesis acts as the bridge that allows researchers to draw universal conclusions from localized data. It extracts common drivers (e.g., competitive pressure or customer engagement) from both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys. By using models like the Stages Model of E-Commerce Adoption, meta-synthesis can categorize a hotel in Vietnam and a hotel in Malaysia on the same maturity scale, regardless of their local market differences. Meta-synthesis uses techniques like dichotomy values based on median thresholds. This removes the noise of raw numbers and creates a universal Pass/Fail or High/Low performance metric that can be compared across all 28 studies. It aligns diverse variables—like Perceived Ease of Use and

Management Attitude—into a single meta-construct. The meta-synthesis links these by concluding that while managers perceive social media as a survival strategy, its measurable impact on RevPAR is mediated by response consistency.

To strengthen confidence in the meta-synthesis, the research moves beyond a simple list of studies to establish a unified, self-correcting evident chain. This methodological consistency is achieved through core pillars that ensure the findings are general across the global SME hotel sector. The study establishes a truth pillar system where different methodologies neutralize each other's weaknesses. In-depth interviews provide the why and content validity. Mathematical modeling (PLS-SEM) provides the how much and statistical proof. Content analysis of secondary data (reviews and social metrics) acts as an external audit to verify that reported behaviors match actual digital performance. Standardized rigor and protocols, confidence in the results is bolstered by a uniform application of quality controls. Every study focuses on the strategic core—general managers and owners—ensuring data consistency across different nations. The use of pilot testing, member checking, and a strict seven-step meta-synthesis protocol ensures all 28 studies are treated with equal analytical weight. Synchronized coding and inter-rater quality checks minimize subjective bias. The synthesis solves the apples and oranges problem of comparing diverse datasets. Converting varied survey results into universal high/low performance indicators. The research culminates in a synthesized theory of change. It identifies critical factors (Vietnam), proves their mediating effects (Malaysia), and observes their practical effects. This approach transforms isolated, localized observations into a global competitive equalizer framework, providing a robust and predictive strategic guide for SME digital growth.

The link between social media and revenue for small and medium-sized hotels (SMHs) is a direct causal chain that transforms digital presence into financial growth. By acting as a competitive equalizer, social media allows smaller properties to challenge larger chains through targeted engagement and technological integration. High-quality imagery and guest-themed content increase followers, which translates into higher hotel demand. SMM acts as a mediating variable; a strong online reputation builds a sense of perceived quality, leading directly to higher purchase intention and occupancy rates. A robust social presence improves standing on travel search engines, making the hotel more ascertain to high-intent planners.

Analyzing social behavior allows for personalized interactions, significantly boosting marketing. Active management of reviews and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is directly linked to an increase in RevPAR (Revenue Per Available Room). Social platforms allow for the rapid deployment of bundled packages and seasonal discounts, which are the most effective tools for filling rooms quickly. Maximum revenue is only realized when social profiles link directly to websites. Online managers use social media to monitor competitor pricing, enabling real-time strategic reorientation to stay competitive. Systematic strategies shift the business model away from unpredictable walk-in customers toward higher-margin planned bookings. Revenue Linkage Chain for SMHs to succeed, the path requires a transition from a passive, simple presence to a purposeful investment in digital tools. This commitment results in improved online review scores and RevPAR through consistent responsiveness and data-driven marketing activities.

The theoretical robustness of this meta-synthesis is built upon exploring the tensions and contradictions within the literature, moving beyond a simple one-size-fits-all narrative. Synthesizing these contrasting perspectives, the research establishes a more rigorous framework for SME digital transformation. A clear divide exists between proactive and reactive adoption. In Southeast Asian contexts, social media is often used as a proactive strategic tool for CRM and brand awareness. Conversely, in Southern European contexts, adoption is frequently a passive technological obligation, where hotels maintain a presence without a formal promotional strategy. This suggests that Geographic Maturity and Managerial Literacy act as critical moderators for success. The literature disagrees on the direct impact of SMM on financial outcomes. Studies in Malaysia and the Philippines link SMM directly to RevPAR and occupancy. Research from South Africa argues that effectiveness is not uniform and that SMM is a complementary asset rather than a magic bullet, dependent on internal resources and technological compatibility. There is a fundamental conflict regarding what causes a hotel to go digital. The belief that the General Manager's personal attitude and knowledge are the primary drivers. The view that external pressures and technological ease of use (jointly explaining 71.6% of acceptance) are the true catalysts.

A critical SEM Gap was identified across several studies. While SMEs heavily prioritize social media platforms to capture the millennial market, many fail to exploit Search Engine Marketing (SEM). This suggests that a hyper-focus on social media may act as a distraction from foundational tools like SEO that ensure basic discovery, while many frameworks champion one-to-one engagement and proactive interaction, contrasting studies introduce the concept of Permission-Based Acceptance. This highlights a risk, aggressive engagement without explicit guest permission that can damage trust rather than build loyalty. The meta-synthesis concludes that while social media is a competitive equalizer, its success is mediated by the tension between managerial attitude and technological compatibility. Revenue linkage is not automatic; it requires transitioning from a passive presence to a systematic strategy that balances social engagement with the technical foundations of search engine marketing.

#### **4. Results**

Social Media Marketing is an essential driver of business performance in Small and Medium-Sized Hotels, functioning as a competitive equalizer against larger hotel chains. Four essential hypotheses substantiate the strategic importance of SMM: it significantly influences sales, customer loyalty, brand awareness, and overall business performance. The worldwide reach of social media marketing, exemplified by platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, offers an unmatched audience for improving brand visibility and market penetration. This digital presence is essential for developing critical competencies, as awareness fosters loyalty, which in turn drives high-margin direct sales and transforms digital interactions into tangible financial outcomes. Research indicates that social media marketing can enhance annual sales performance for small and medium-sized enterprises by 10% to 30%. For resource-constrained small- and medium-sized hotels, strategic revenue management is the primary solution to mitigate financial losses from high Online Travel Agency commissions. The aim is to increase direct bookings by utilizing

social commerce features and strategically showcasing a Direct-Booking Value Stack—exclusive advantages and value-added packages not offered through OTAs. This method elevates the perceived value of direct reservations, ensures transaction security, and optimizes profitability, further enhanced by retargeted and paid social marketing that delivers substantial conversion gains.

Based on the qualitative findings and literature provided, the transition from simple social media usage (like sporadic Facebook or Instagram posting) to integrated digital strategies centered on websites and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems presents a major leap for small and medium-sized hotels (SMHs). While the strategic value of this integration is clear—enabling direct booking, personalized customer interactions, and data-driven marketing—implementation is frequently derailed. Two critical barriers emerge: the organizational resistance and cost implications. Organizational resistance acts as a major psychological and cultural barrier to digital transformation. In the hospitality sector, this resistance typically manifests in three ways. As noted by Murphy and Nolly, the owner's or general manager's personal characteristics, knowledge, and beliefs are the primary drivers of technology adoption. Many small-scale hoteliers view digital marketing simply as maintaining a social media page rather than as a core strategic asset. If the general manager perceives a dedicated website and integrated CRM as overly complex or unnecessary, the organization defaults to passive tools (like using personal Facebook accounts), stalling deeper digital integration. The research highlights a significant skill gap among existing employees regarding digital tools. Moving from basic social media interactions to managing a direct-booking website and maintaining a structured customer database requires specialized skills. Employees often resist new CRM systems out of fear of obsolescence, increased workload, or a general discomfort with data analysis and online reputation management. Without proper training, the digital strategy remains underutilized and unsystematic.

As Kilpela (2019) notes, companies cannot completely control their brand image once they actively engage in interactive digital spaces. True CRM integration requires opening direct lines of communication, such as online reviews, direct feedback channels, and open-ended guest surveys. Management often resists these platforms due to the fear of public criticism, unfavorable user-generated content, or the dedicated time required to manage an active online reputation. For small and medium-sized hospitality establishments, the move toward an integrated digital strategy shifts marketing from a low-cost, ad-hoc activity to a substantial, ongoing financial commitment. While platforms like Facebook and Instagram offer cost-effective, low-barrier entry points (e.g., viral intimacy marketing), true digital integration requires significant financial investment. Moving beyond basic informational sites to fully interactive websites with integrated direct-booking engines and mobile applications. Implementing and maintaining customer database systems that capture and analyze guest data. Upgrading internal systems to support property management systems (PMS) and cloud-based data storage. To optimize direct bookings and handle targeted advertising, hotels need specialized digital marketing personnel. Small hotels often lack the budget to hire dedicated professionals, leading owners to manage these platforms themselves—resulting in unmaintained websites and outdated A static website or an unmaintained CRM quickly loses its value. There are ongoing costs associated with domain renewals, software updates, search engine

optimization (SEO), and paid advertising (e.g., Google Ads, sponsored social media campaigns). As highlighted by Nkosana (2022), a major challenge for small hospitality establishments is the difficulty of when budgets are tight, managers struggle to justify diverting limited funds away from physical property upgrades (such as renovations or immediate operational needs) toward long-term. Without clear, immediate metrics linking CRM database management directly to Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) growth, budget limitations continue to restrict digital scaling.

To successfully transition from fragmented digital practices to a cohesive ecosystem, small and medium-sized hotels must undergo a fundamental DNA restructure that addresses organizational, skill-based, and financial barriers. This shift begins with leadership reframing digital tools as essential distribution assets rather than burdens, overcoming resistance through incremental small wins and standardized reputation management. By prioritizing user-friendly software and phased training, hotels can bridge the employee skills gap, while a surgical financial approach—utilizing modular SaaS subscriptions and reinvesting saved OTA commissions—makes the transition budget-friendly. Ultimately, this integration transforms the business from relying on passive tools into a high-performance flywheel where the website, social media, CRM, and PMS interact seamlessly to automate guest loyalty and drive direct revenue as a core operational priority.

The competitive advantage of SMHs lies in their ability to craft authentic, tailored storylines, effectively countering the substantial marketing investments of corporate chains. This method corresponds with Relationship Marketing Theory, which highlights the development of lasting relationships through genuine interaction. User-Generated Content—images and reviews from authentic guests—is a vital, cost-effective resource that enhances corporate reputation and profoundly influences purchasing decisions, with over 60% of passengers making reservations influenced by social media imagery. SMHs must prioritize investment in improving the unique physical guest experience, which organically generates high-quality and Instagrammable user-generated content. Effective social media marketing requires social media managers to integrate social platforms into their daily activities and establish comprehensive measurement frameworks. Management must shift from passive vanity metrics (likes, shares) to high-value conversion key performance indicators directly linked to revenue, such as Booked Room and Cost Per Conversion, surpassing initial brand-building efforts. The Proactive Real-Time Online Reputation Management Protocol is crucial; utilizing social media for immediate, empathetic service recovery while the guest is present transforms potential negative reviews into public endorsements of outstanding customer service, thus bolstering the hotel's long-term reputation and customer loyalty. Sales ranging from 10% to 30% annually, social media marketing provides a significant financial return. It adds strategic value by encouraging direct reservations through special deals and tailored digital content, thereby generating large commissions for online travel agencies. To create enduring relationships and increase sales, the success strategy shifts from passive to revenue-linked key performance indicators, utilizing User-Generated Content (UGC) and personalized, genuine storytelling. They produce better results when completely integrated. Digitalization and advanced social media marketing techniques are crucial for survival, competitiveness, and profitability.

## 5. Conclusion

The diverse research findings emphasize a consistent message for small and medium-sized hotels. Digitalization and social media marketing are essential for survival, competitiveness, and profitability in the modern hospitality industry. The summarized data indicate that social media positively influences hotel performance, resulting in a competitive advantage and enhanced performance. A dual-faceted methodology assesses success through the Internal Financial Perspective and the External Customer Perspective (e.g., online ratings and reviews). Merely adopting social media is insufficient; success hinges on an intelligent, coordinated strategy centered around the website.

Social media generates attention and reservations; yet, the hotel's website is the most robust and direct platform for online visibility and transactions. It should provide interactive platforms, online booking, and current material. Hotels that neglect to leverage their website risk complete marginalization. The most efficacious method integrates social media marketing with client database management and tailored client Relationship Management. This integration enhances perceived utility and trust, which, when combined with electronic word of mouth, significantly impact client purchasing decisions and overall marketing effectiveness. A comprehensive strategy should incorporate components such as targeted advertising and loyalty programs to optimize returns.

The study emphasizes the pivotal influence of management attributes (knowledge, perception, and attitude) on small and medium-sized hotels' digital success, affirming its uniqueness and diversity. Despite the extensive use of social media, management of these platforms is predominantly handled by business owners (about 86% of the time), resulting in a lack of professional planning. To address this, management must allocate resources for appropriate training and facilities to enable employees to develop social media marketing skills, as the strategy's effectiveness depends on employee proficiency and organizational commitment. Managerial focus should prioritize customer relationships, which are essential to enhancing brand value, alongside technical elements such as standardization, quality assurance, and professionalism.

Additionally, financial and technological components, including PMS, central reservation systems, and innovation, are crucial. To increase the likelihood of online bookings, hoteliers should prioritize creating credible, beneficial, and informative social media profiles. Proactive online reputation management, characterized by prompt engagement with guests on social media is crucial for maintaining competitiveness. Accessible, cost-effective technologies exist to help hoteliers consistently monitor performance and ensure superior content, engagement, and regular upgrades. Upholding client trust requires adopting a comprehensive technology perspective that integrates regulatory frameworks and consent-based acceptance. The research indicates that SMHs must transcend fundamental technology utilization and embrace a strategic, integrated, and competency-driven methodology to harness social media for enduring growth.

Future studies should prioritize shifting from correlation to causation, primarily through extensive quantitative investigations such as Structural Equation Modeling, to validate the synthesized integrated model across various SMH situations, empirically evaluate the entire causal chain from Integrated Strategy to Two-Pronged Performance, and measure the distinct financial impact of the hotel website relative to OTAs. The

research should focus on managerial and organizational obstacles, necessitating longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of training programs in bridging the competence gap and professionalizing strategy. This includes contrasting owner-managed with delegated social media initiatives and examining the ROI and sequencing of Critical Success Factors.

The synthesis of global empirical findings underscores a critical evolution from mere technological adoption to strategic operational integration, where success is dictated by a hotel's ability to bridge the gap between viral intimacy and structured data management. While smaller, owner-centric hotels often rely on personal intuition and cost-effective but unsystematic social media usage, medium and large establishments are increasingly pushed toward interactive e-commerce models that require professionalized guidance and a departure from managerial subjectivity. This transition is frequently stymied by a skill gap paradox—where digital tools are valued but feared—necessitating training programs that prioritize user experience and move beyond basic posting to complex reputation management and data analysis. To mitigate financial and technical barriers, many small and medium hotels are turning to strategic investments in SaaS and Virtual Hotel Operator (VHO) partnerships, which provide the high-tech infrastructure needed to boost RevPAR and capture millennial demand without the overhead of dedicated staff. Ultimately, refining the industry's empirical foundation requires a mindset shift that reframes digital engagement as a core strategic asset, transforming it from a peripheral task into a standardized operating procedure that ensures long-term competitiveness in an increasingly tech-savvy global marketplace.

Targeted experimental research should investigate the mechanisms of success, including the influence of responsive online reputation management, the development of repeatable low-cost tool frameworks, and the impact of privacy compliance on consumer trust and buying intention. The key to success lies in management transitioning from simple platform usage to a comprehensive, competency-driven strategy that incorporates customer relationship management, social media marketing, the hotel's own website, and ongoing staff training.

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