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The Digital Marketing Approach as a Competitive Advantage in Luxury and 5-Stars Hotels in Marrakech

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The Digital Marketing Approach as a Competitive Advantage in Luxury and 5-Stars Hotels in Marrakech

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Resumo

Numa era marcada por uma rápida transformação digital, o turismo tornou-se uma das indústrias mais profundamente moldadas pelas novas tecnologias e pelas mudanças no comportamento dos consumidores. O marketing digital, em particular, redefiniu as formas como os destinos e as marcas de hospitalidade comunicam com os seus públicos, promovem o envolvimento e constroem relações de lealdade a longo prazo. A relação entre o turismo e o marketing digital tornou-se, assim, inseparável, uma vez que a competitividade do setor depende cada vez mais da capacidade de conceber estratégias digitais inovadoras e centradas no cliente.

Esta dissertação está estruturada em duas partes principais. A primeira apresenta uma revisão da literatura que analisa as perspetivas globais e nacionais do turismo, com especial destaque para as políticas e estratégias de desenvolvimento de Marrocos no âmbito da *Vision 2020* e da *Vision 2030*. São igualmente explorados os principais conceitos, ferramentas e canais de comunicação do marketing digital e a sua aplicação à indústria do turismo, evidenciando a forma como as práticas digitais se articulam com o *branding* de destinos e a gestão da reputação. A segunda parte consiste num estudo de caso centrado em três hotéis de luxo de Marraquexe: La Mamounia, Royal Mansour e Sofitel Marrakech. Através da análise da sua presença digital — particularmente nas redes sociais como o Instagram — esta investigação procura compreender como as estratégias de *branding* online e de envolvimento digital influenciam a perceção dos clientes, reforçam a competitividade e consolidam o posicionamento de Marraquexe como destino de luxo a nível mundial.

Os resultados demonstram que o marketing digital não é apenas uma ferramenta de comunicação, mas também um motor estratégico de diferenciação e crescimento no setor hoteleiro marroquino. Ao articular turismo e inovação digital, o estudo evidencia de que forma os hotéis de luxo utilizam a visibilidade online, o *storytelling* e a e-reputação para garantir vantagem competitiva. De forma mais ampla, reflete sobre as implicações destas práticas para o setor turístico nacional, sugerindo que a integração do marketing digital na gestão de destinos é essencial para que Marrocos mantenha a sua atratividade num mercado global cada vez mais competitivo.

Abstract

In an era marked by rapid digital transformation, tourism has emerged as one of the industries that are most profoundly reshaped by new technologies and evolving consumer behaviors. Digital marketing, in particular, has redefined the ways in which destinations and hospitality brands communicate with audiences, foster engagement, and build long-term loyalty. The relationship between tourism and digital marketing has therefore become inseparable, as competitiveness in the sector increasingly depends on the ability to design innovative, customer-centered digital strategies.

This dissertation is structured in two main parts. The first presents a literature review that explores global and national tourism perspectives, with particular emphasis on Morocco's tourism policies and development strategies under Vision 2020 and Vision 2030. It also examines the main concepts, tools, and communication channels of digital marketing and their application to the tourism industry, highlighting how digital practices intersect with destination branding and reputation management. The second part consists of a case study focusing on three luxury hotels in Marrakech: La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, and Sofitel Marrakech. By analyzing their digital presence—particularly on social media platforms such as Instagram—this research investigates how online branding and digital engagement strategies shape customer perception, strengthen competitiveness, and reinforce Marrakech's positioning as a global luxury destination.

The findings demonstrate that digital marketing is not only a communication tool but also a strategic driver of differentiation and growth in Moroccan hospitality. By bridging tourism and digital innovation. The study emphasizes how luxury hotels leverage online visibility, storytelling, and e-reputation to secure competitive advantage. More broadly, it reflects on the implications of these practices for the national tourism sector, suggesting that the integration of digital marketing into destination management is critical for Morocco to maintain its attractiveness in an increasingly competitive global market.

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INTRODUCTION

Relevance and Objectives of the Research

This dissertation was developed as part of the Master's Degree in Inland Tourism – Education for Sustainability at the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra, School of Education, under the supervision of Professor Dr. João Morais.

The growing digital transformation of the tourism industry has reshaped the ways in which destinations, hotels, and hospitality brands communicate, engage, and deliver value to consumers. Digital marketing has emerged as a central tool for achieving competitiveness, enabling organizations to strengthen brand awareness, build online reputation, and reach global audiences in real time. Within this context, Morocco provides a particularly relevant setting for research. The country's tourism development strategies—Vision 2020 and Vision 2030—have identified innovation, sustainability, and digitalization as key priorities for achieving long-term competitiveness. Marrakech, as Morocco's most iconic and internationally recognized destination, stands out for its luxury tourism supply, cultural identity, and digital modernization. The city's five-star hotels—La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, and Sofitel Marrakech—represent excellence in both traditional hospitality and digital presence. Understanding how these establishments use digital tools to maintain competitiveness and enhance reputation provides valuable insight into the broader evolution of Morocco's tourism industry.

This study therefore seeks to analyze the relationship between digital marketing and tourism, focusing specifically on how digital strategies contribute to branding, reputation management, and customer engagement in the luxury hospitality segment of Marrakech.

General Objective

To analyze the role and effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in strengthening brand identity, managing reputation, and enhancing the competitive positioning of luxury hotels in Marrakech.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify and describe the main digital marketing tools and channels used by selected five-star hotels in Marrakech.
2. To evaluate how digital content and engagement practices contribute to perceived brand identity and guest connection.
3. To assess the influence of online reputation (reviews, ratings, and engagement) on booking intention and customer loyalty.
4. To compare digital marketing practices across the selected hotels and identify common best practices and weaknesses.

5. To formulate recommendations to enhance the digital competitiveness of Moroccan luxury hospitality in alignment with Vision 2030.

Methodology

After defining the research question and objectives, it was essential to establish a structured methodological process. This dissertation adopts a **qualitative case study approach**, considered appropriate for understanding complex phenomena within real-life contexts (Yin, 2018).

The empirical study focuses on three five-star hotels in Marrakech—La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, and Sofitel Marrakech—chosen for their reputation, luxury positioning, and active digital presence. Data collection was based on **digital content analysis**, primarily examining **Instagram accounts** and official hotel websites using tools such as **NinjaLitics** and **Instagram Analytics**.

This method allows for a detailed examination of brand communication, customer interaction, and online reputation management. Secondary data, including literature, reports from the **UNWTO** and **WTTC**, and governmental documents (ONMT and Vision 2030) were also analyzed to support the research context and discussion.

Organization and Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into **two main parts** and **seven chapters**, structured as follows:

- **Part I – Literature Review:**

This section presents the theoretical framework and explores the main themes that support the study. It begins with an overview of global and national tourism, followed by a discussion of Morocco's Vision 2020 and Vision 2030 strategies. It also analyzes the principles, tools, and channels of digital marketing and explores concepts of branding, online reputation, and their application to tourism.

- **Part II – Case Study: Digital Marketing in Luxury Hotels in Marrakech:**

This section applies the theoretical framework to real-world examples, analyzing how digital marketing is used by La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, and Sofitel Marrakech. The methodology, data collection process, results, and comparative analysis are presented and discussed in detail.

The dissertation concludes with a **summary of key findings**, **practical implications**, and **recommendations** for future research and tourism policy development in Morocco.

Part I: LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 1: TOURISM: GLOBAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic and influential industries worldwide, contributing significantly to global economic development, employment generation, and cultural exchange. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2023), international tourist arrivals reached 1.3 billion in 2023, showing a strong recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic and signaling the resilience and adaptability of the industry. The evolution of transportation infrastructure, increased disposable incomes, and digital access to travel information have made tourism more accessible than ever.

Initially seen as a luxury for the elite, modern tourism is now a mass phenomenon facilitated by low-cost airlines, globalized marketing, and growing interest in intercultural experiences. Technological innovation, especially digital platforms, continues to shape how destinations are discovered and experienced.

1.2 INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

➤ 1.2.1 Historical evolution

Tourism, as an organized activity, has evolved significantly over the centuries. In ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome, travel was primarily reserved for military, religious, or political purposes (Towner, 1996). Leisure tourism emerged slowly and was originally accessible only to elite groups. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the European aristocracy developed a tradition known as the “Grand Tour,” which involved educational and cultural travel across Europe, particularly Italy and France (Black, 2003). This practice laid the foundation for modern leisure tourism.

By the mid-20th century, commercial aviation revolutionized long-distance travel, leading to the emergence of mass tourism. Innovations such as charter flights and standardized tour packages made international travel accessible to the middle class (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Organizations such as the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) helped formalize and promote the tourism sector globally (UNWTO, 2023). The widespread use of the internet and mobile technologies in the 21st century has further transformed tourism into a digitally mediated experience, allowing travelers to independently plan and customize their trips (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Tourism is no longer a luxury; it is now deeply embedded in the global economy, influenced by digital innovation, consumer behavior, and environmental concerns. It has become a vector of cultural exchange, economic opportunity, and soft diplomacy between nations (WTTC, 2024).

➤ 1.2.2 Economic Impact and Growth Factors

Tourism is widely recognized as one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2024), the tourism sector contributed approximately USD 9.9 trillion to global GDP in 2023, accounting for over 9% of total global economic output. This growth is supported by several interrelated factors:

- 1) **Technological advancement:** Innovations in transportation and communication have reduced travel time and cost while improving accessibility.
- 2) **Urbanization and middle-class expansion:** The rise of a global middle class, especially in emerging markets, has increased demand for international travel.
- 3) **Visa facilitation and policy reforms:** Many governments have eased visa requirements to encourage tourist inflows.
- 4) **Digital marketing and promotion:** Destination branding through social media, influencers, and content platforms has increased global visibility.
- 5) **Experiential consumption trends:** Tourists are increasingly seeking immersive, authentic, and personalized experiences, which has fueled the growth of niche markets such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and luxury travel.

Additionally, tourism stimulates job creation across a wide range of sectors, including hospitality, transport, retail, and entertainment. It also encourages infrastructure development and investment in cultural heritage conservation. In many developing countries, tourism is a key strategy for economic diversification and rural development.

➤ 1.2.3 World Rankings and Statistics

Global tourism performance is usually measured through indicators such as international tourist arrivals, tourism receipts, and economic contribution to GDP. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2024), international tourist arrivals reached approximately 1.3 billion in 2023, representing a strong rebound following the COVID-19 pandemic. Europe remains the most visited region,

hosting nearly 60% of all international tourists, followed by Asia-Pacific and the Americas. Africa and the Middle East have also experienced significant growth, with Morocco, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia emerging as increasingly competitive destinations (WTTC, 2024).

In terms of **most visited countries**, the top five in 2023 were:

1. **France** – approximately 100 million visitors
2. **Spain** – 84 million
3. **United States** – 72 million
4. **Italy** – 65 million
5. **Turkey** – 60 million

These rankings are influenced by infrastructure, safety, cultural appeal, and national tourism strategies.

As for tourism revenue, the United States consistently leads global rankings due to high expenditure per visitor (UNWTO, 2023). The World Economic Forum's *Travel & Tourism Development Index* evaluates destinations on competitiveness, safety, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability, highlighting how structural factors shape long-term attractiveness (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2021). In recent years, countries such as Japan, the United Arab Emirates, and Singapore have gained prominence due to strategic investments in digital innovation and service quality (WTTC, 2024).

Global forecasts by the UNWTO and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) suggest that by 2030, international arrivals will reach 1.8 billion, driven by technological integration, increased connectivity, and a growing interest in travel among younger generations (UNWTO, 2023; WTTC, 2024). The prevailing trend is toward personalization, sustainability, and digital integration. Travelers are increasingly seeking immersive experiences, eco-conscious options, and seamless digital convenience, ranging from virtual previews to real-time booking, mobile check-ins, and AI-powered travel assistance (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Sigala, 2018).

1.3 TOURISM IN MOROCCO

➤ **1.3.1 Historical Development and Key Figures**

Morocco's tourism development can be traced back to the 1960s, when the newly independent country identified the sector as a key driver for economic diversification and international visibility (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2024). The early years saw the establishment of coastal resorts, the development of national parks, and the promotion of the country's imperial cities through collaboration with European tour operators (Hibou, 2004). This initial phase was also characterized by strong state involvement in infrastructure investment and regulatory frameworks.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Morocco gradually embraced economic liberalization and opened the door to private investment in the hospitality and aviation sectors (Couvreux, 2016). The creation of the Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT) helped shape national branding strategies and attract new source markets. Efforts were made to expand the product portfolio to include beach tourism, desert experiences, eco-tourism, and cultural heritage circuits (ONMT, 2024).

By the early 2000s, international arrivals had grown to 5 million per year. Following the launch of Vision 2010 and subsequently Vision 2020, the country adopted a more structured and strategic approach to tourism development, focusing on quality, sustainability, and market diversification (UNWTO, 2023). Tourist numbers increased to 12.9 million in 2019, just before the global pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis temporarily slowed progress, but recovery efforts were swift and effective, aided by a strong vaccination campaign, health protocols, and digital innovation in service delivery (World Bank, 2022).

By 2023, Morocco surpassed its previous records with 14.5 million international visitors, according to the Moroccan Tourism Observatory (2024). The sector now represents over 7% of national GDP, making it one of the country's top sources of foreign exchange. Tourism also employs more than 550,000 people, directly and indirectly, across hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tour guiding, transportation, and handicraft sectors (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2024).

Morocco's attractiveness is built on a unique combination of factors: a mild climate, a rich and diverse cultural identity, nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites, modern infrastructure, and a reputation for safety and hospitality (UNESCO, 2023). The country's efforts to position itself between Europe, the Arab world, and sub-Saharan Africa have also contributed to its distinct touristic brand (ONMT, 2024).

➤ 1.3.2 Vision 2020 and Vision 2030

To remain competitive in the global tourism market, Morocco has pursued long-term strategic frameworks designed to shape the sector's growth and international positioning. The first major initiative, **Vision 2020**, was introduced in 2010 with the ambition of making Morocco one of the twenty most visited destinations worldwide. Its targets included reaching 20 million international arrivals, doubling tourism revenues, and embedding sustainability in development practices (ONMT, 2011; Moroccan Tourism Observatory, 2024). A distinctive feature of Vision 2020 was the creation of six "tourism territories," each structured around a thematic identity such as culture, desert adventure, seaside leisure, or eco-tourism. The plan also emphasized the importance of environmental protection, professional training, and stronger collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Although not all objectives were fully realized, Vision 2020 nevertheless produced important outcomes. It expanded Morocco's tourism infrastructure, diversified regional tourism beyond the traditional hubs of Marrakech

and Agadir, and improved international air connectivity. The growth of low-cost carriers, in particular, increased accessibility from European markets and supported a more balanced distribution of tourist flows. The program also reinforced institutional capacity and professionalized the sector, even if political and global crises limited the overall achievement of its initial goals (UNWTO, 2023).

Launched after the COVID-19 pandemic, **Vision 2030** builds on these foundations while aligning with Morocco's broader *New Development Model* (2021). The strategy is articulated around six pillars: (1) accelerating the digitalization of tourism through online platforms, big data, and improved international visibility; (2) positioning Morocco in high-value niches such as luxury, wellness, and cultural tourism; (3) enhancing governance and coordination among stakeholders; (4) promoting sustainability through eco-certification, energy efficiency, and carbon reduction; (5) strengthening human capital with training in digital skills, languages, and customer service; and (6) reinforcing Morocco's brand image through international partnerships and targeted marketing (ONMT, 2024; WTTC, 2024).

What distinguishes Vision 2030 is its explicit integration of **digital marketing and branding** as key drivers of competitiveness. Moroccan destinations are encouraged to embrace global best practices in social media management, content creation, and reputation building. Smart tourism tools—such as mobile geolocation services, QR-coded cultural trails, and immersive experiences using virtual or augmented reality—are also promoted to enrich visitor experiences and meet the expectations of increasingly connected travelers (UNWTO, 2023).

The implications of this strategic shift are significant. For luxury hospitality, particularly in Marrakech, Vision 2030 provides a framework for embedding digital innovation in service design, customer engagement, and brand differentiation. For Morocco as a whole, the strategy signals a transition from a model centered on infrastructure expansion to one based on **innovation, digital transformation, and sustainability**, which are expected to secure long-term competitiveness in the international tourism landscape.

➤ **1.3.3 Marrakech as a Leading Destination**

In recent decades, Marrakech has positioned itself as a top-tier luxury destination in Africa and the Arab world. The presence of prestigious hotels such as La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, Sofitel Marrakech, and Savoy Le Grand Hotel has elevated the city's international profile (ONMT, 2024). These establishments have also pioneered sophisticated digital marketing strategies, including influencer partnerships, immersive online content, and real-time engagement with global audiences (Sigala, 2018).

Marrakech is also a hub for major cultural and artistic events, such as the Marrakech International Film Festival, the Marrakech Biennale of contemporary art, the Oasis Music Festival, international fashion shows, and high-profile private events, including destination weddings (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2024).

Furthermore, Marrakech has emerged as a pilot city for digital transformation initiatives promoted under Vision 2030. It has been among the first destinations in Morocco to test smart tourism solutions, including geolocation applications, QR-coded heritage signage, and AI-based personalization services in hotels (UNWTO, 2023).

The city's success lies in its ability to offer a multi-dimensional experience that combines heritage, luxury, innovation, and hospitality. Its role as a model destination is not only symbolic but also strategic, as lessons learned from Marrakech's tourism model can be applied to other Moroccan regions seeking to modernize and diversify their tourism offer (WTTC, 2024).

CHAPTER 2: DIGITAL MARKETING IN TOURISM SECTOR

2.1 Digital Marketing: Definitions and Key Concepts

Digital marketing is a multidimensional discipline that involves the use of digital technologies, platforms, and tools to promote products, services, and brands in a measurable and interactive way. It encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or the internet, including content creation, online advertising, mobile applications, data analytics, and search engine optimization (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). In contrast to traditional marketing—which operates through static channels such as print, television, or radio—digital marketing enables two-way communication, real-time feedback, and highly targeted campaigns (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014).

According to Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan (2021), digital marketing is not just a channel of distribution but a system of value creation and customer engagement. It reflects a shift from a “push” approach, where companies broadcast generic messages to mass audiences, to a “pull” approach, in which consumers actively seek relevant, engaging, and tailored content aligned with their preferences. This evolution highlights the centrality of customer experience, personalization, and digital ecosystems in contemporary marketing strategies (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Digital marketing strategies are often structured around several key principles:

1. **Audience segmentation and targeting:** Digital tools allow marketers to identify specific customer profiles based on demographics, psychographics, and behavioral data. This enables precise targeting and personalized offers. (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2021)
2. **Content-driven engagement:** High-quality content—such as blogs, videos, images, and interactive posts—is essential for attracting and retaining audience attention. This is especially relevant in tourism, where visual storytelling plays a major role in destination appeal. (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Mariani, Borghi, & Cappa, 2021)
3. **Analytics and performance tracking:** Metrics such as conversion rates, bounce rates, and customer lifetime value are used to assess the effectiveness of digital campaigns and adjust strategies in real time. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019)
4. **Customer relationship management (CRM):** Through digital tools, companies can maintain continuous interaction with their clients, enhancing loyalty and satisfaction through timely communication, loyalty programs, and feedback loops. (Payne & Frow, 2017).

In the **tourism industry**, digital marketing has emerged as a cornerstone of competitiveness. The traditional travel planning process—once dependent on travel agents, brochures, and guidebooks—has been radically

transformed by digital platforms. Today, potential tourists often begin their journey on **search engines**, gather inspiration on **social media**, book through **online travel agencies (OTAs)**, and evaluate destinations based on **user reviews and ratings**. (UNWTO, 2023).

This process, known as the “**digital customer journey**”, includes the following stages:

1. **Dreaming** – inspired by visual content, influencer experiences, or blog articles.
2. **Planning** – using search engines, maps, and reviews to compare options.
3. **Booking** – through OTAs, hotel websites, or apps.
4. **Experiencing** – sharing experiences in real-time on social media.
5. **Sharing and reviewing** – publishing photos, videos, and ratings that influence others. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

In addition, the rise of mobile technology and AI-based personalization has revolutionized the tourist experience. Travelers now expect seamless, mobile-first services such as digital check-ins, real-time travel updates, geolocation services, and smart assistants (Neuhofer et al., 2015; Xiang et al., 2015). Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are also increasingly used in pre-trip marketing to offer immersive previews of destinations and hotel facilities, enhancing engagement and shaping expectations (Tussyadiah et al., 2018).

For luxury and 5-star hotels—like those featured in this dissertation’s case study—digital branding is no longer optional. These establishments rely on a carefully curated online identity that reflects values of exclusivity, refinement, and excellence (Okumus et al., 2018). Their websites, social media accounts, and digital campaigns serve as extensions of their brand experience, often influencing guest perceptions before arrival. The alignment between offline service quality and online presentation is therefore essential to maintaining brand credibility and competitive differentiation (Sigala, 2018).

Finally, the growing importance of e-reputation—how a brand is perceived online—has elevated the role of review platforms, customer feedback, and social listening tools. Studies show that online reviews are among the most influential factors in travelers’ decision-making, shaping both booking behavior and trust in hospitality brands (Filieri, 2016; Sparks & Browning, 2011). Tourism businesses that neglect their digital presence risk being overshadowed by more agile and digitally competent competitors.

In summary, digital marketing in tourism is not merely a trend but a transformative force that redefines how destinations are discovered, experienced, and remembered. It allows for greater personalization, broader reach, and deeper emotional connection—all of which are vital to remaining competitive in a globalized and experience-driven tourism market.

2.2 Tools and Channels of Digital Marketing

Digital marketing relies on a variety of tools and communication channels that enable organizations to build relationships with customers, enhance visibility, and influence purchasing decisions (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). These tools are not only technical in nature but also strategic, as they must be carefully selected and integrated to align with the brand's goals, target audience, and market positioning.

In the tourism sector, digital marketing tools encompass a wide range of practices, from **owned media** such as official websites, blogs, and mobile applications, to **earned media** such as online reviews, social media shares, and word-of-mouth recommendations, and **paid media** such as search engine advertising and sponsored influencer campaigns (Kotler et al., 2021). Together, these channels create an integrated ecosystem where brands can attract, engage, and retain customers across multiple touchpoints.

The growing use of **social media platforms** like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok has been particularly impactful for tourism, as they allow destinations and hotels to use visual storytelling, influencer partnerships, and user-generated content to enhance authenticity and reach (Sigala, 2018). Likewise, **email marketing, SEO, and search engine marketing (SEM)** remain critical in maintaining direct connections with travelers and ensuring visibility in highly competitive search environments (Xiang et al., 2017).

For destinations, hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators, the careful deployment of these tools allows them to promote their offerings with precision, reach global audiences, and differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive digital space (Buhalis & Law, 2008). More importantly, digital tools enable continuous interaction with travelers before, during, and after the trip, reinforcing customer loyalty and contributing to long-term brand equity in the tourism and hospitality industry (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

➤ **2.2.1 Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a core element of digital marketing, encompassing strategies to improve a website's content, structure, and performance to increase visibility in search engine results for relevant queries (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). In the tourism sector, SEO is particularly important because travelers often begin their planning online, searching for terms such as “best 5-star hotels in Marrakech” or “luxury desert experiences in Morocco.” High search engine rankings enhance consumer trust and brand credibility, which can directly influence booking decisions (Law, Buhalis, & Cobanoglu, 2014).

SEO strategies are commonly divided into on-page and off-page approaches. On-page SEO focuses on optimizing website content, keywords, images, and meta-tags, while off-page SEO involves building backlinks and increasing a website's authority through external references (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). As a long-term investment, SEO contributes to trust, credibility, and visibility, making it especially valuable for hotels, destinations, and tour operators that rely on organic traffic.

➤ **2.2.2 Social Media Marketing**

Social media has transformed tourism marketing by enabling brands to engage directly with users, share real-time updates, and create visually compelling narratives (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Pinterest, and YouTube are particularly influential in tourism, as they allow the dissemination of high-impact visual content that enhances destination and brand appeal (Mariani et al., 2018).

Instagram, in particular, plays a crucial role for luxury hotels. It enables the presentation of aesthetics, ambiance, amenities, and guest experiences through professional photography, user-generated content, stories, and influencer collaborations (Dolnicar et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2013). A strong social media presence contributes to brand perception and emotional engagement with potential customers.

Key strategies include the use of hashtag campaigns to increase content discoverability, partnerships with influencers to reach niche markets, live videos and stories for behind-the-scenes insights, and interactive posts or contests to boost engagement (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Hudson & Thal, 2013). Social media also serves as a customer service channel, allowing hotels to respond promptly to inquiries, feedback, or complaints, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Xi & Gretzel, 2010).

➤ **2.2.3 Content Marketing**

Content marketing involves creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience (Pulizzi, 2012). In the tourism sector, this can include blog articles, destination guides, itineraries, promotional videos, photo galleries, and email newsletters (Buhalis & Law, 2008). High-quality content serves several purposes: it educates and inspires potential travelers, builds trust and authority in the market, enhances SEO performance, and drives conversions by linking content to booking platforms (Kotler et al., 2019).

Luxury hotels frequently employ content marketing to showcase unique guest experiences, highlight local cultural connections, promote sustainability initiatives, and offer curated packages. Examples include dedicated blog sections or digital magazines on hotel websites, which allow hotels to engage audiences, communicate brand values, and encourage direct bookings (Hays et al., 2013).

➤ **2.2.4 Email Marketing and CRM Tools**

Although one of the oldest digital marketing tools, email marketing remains highly effective, particularly when integrated with Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). By leveraging segmentation and personalization, tourism businesses can deliver tailored messages to specific customer groups, including promotional offers, booking reminders, post-stay surveys, or loyalty program invitations (Noone et al., 2011).

Email marketing offers several advantages, such as cost-effective communication, personalization based on previous behavior or preferences, and a higher return on investment compared to many other channels (Kotler et al., 2019). In luxury hospitality, this approach is used to promote exclusive packages, private event invitations, or VIP treatment opportunities for repeat guests, reinforcing brand loyalty and enhancing customer engagement (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

➤ **2.2.5 Influencer Marketing**

Influencers play a significant role in shaping travel decisions, particularly among Millennials and Generation Z, by providing authentic and relatable content that often resonates more than traditional advertising (Freberg et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In tourism, influencer marketing commonly involves sponsored trips, brand ambassadorships, or collaborative content creation, all aimed at increasing brand awareness and engagement (Mariani et al., 2021).

Luxury hotels frequently partner with lifestyle influencers, travel bloggers, and celebrities to generate buzz and expand their digital reach. Successful influencer campaigns require selecting individuals who align with the brand image, maintaining transparency and credibility, and measuring return on investment through engagement rates, bookings, or referrals (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencer-generated content enhances Instagram discoverability, boosts brand visibility, and adds emotional appeal to the guest experience, making it a critical component of modern luxury hospitality marketing strategies (Mariani et al., 2021).

➤ **2.2.6 Online Reputation Management (ORM)**

Reputation in the digital space is a critical asset in the tourism industry, as customers increasingly rely on online reviews and ratings when making travel decisions (Xiang et al., 2015; Litvin et al., 2008). Platforms such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Google Reviews, and Yelp significantly influence public perception and booking behavior (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014).

Effective online reputation management involves monitoring review platforms for feedback, responding promptly and professionally to both positive and negative comments, encouraging satisfied guests to leave reviews, and analyzing review trends to identify strengths and areas for improvement (Zhang et al., 2019). For luxury hotels, managing digital reputation is essential to maintain brand prestige, justify premium pricing, and reassure potential clients about service quality and trustworthiness (Law et al., 2014).

➤ **2.2.7 Digital Advertising and Paid Media**

Paid media, including Google Ads, Meta Ads (Facebook/Instagram), display ads, and retargeting campaigns, enables tourism businesses to reach specific audiences based on demographics, interests, location, and online behavior (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Ryan, 2016). Digital advertising offers several advantages, such as rapid visibility, precise audience targeting, and the ability to track performance through analytics (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014).

Luxury hotels often employ retargeting strategies to re-engage users who have visited their websites but did not complete a booking. Targeted ads shown on other websites or social media platforms increase the likelihood of conversion, supporting both revenue generation and brand recall (Leung et al., 2013).

➤ **2.2.8 Mobile Marketing and Apps**

With most travel research and bookings now conducted on smartphones, mobile optimization has become

essential for tourism businesses (Wang et al., 2016; Buhalis & Law, 2008). Investments in mobile-responsive websites, booking apps, and in-app messaging improve user experience and reduce friction during the booking process.

Key mobile features, such as mobile check-in, digital room keys, real-time concierge services, and push notifications for personalized offers, enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly within the luxury hotel sector (Sigala, 2018). Mobile marketing thus serves as a critical tool for engaging guests, streamlining services, and reinforcing brand value.

➤ **2.2.9 Analytics and Performance Tools**

Data is fundamental to any successful digital marketing strategy. Analytics tools, including Google Analytics, Meta Business Suite, NinjaLitics, and HubSpot, enable tourism businesses to monitor user behavior, engagement rates, conversion paths, and return on investment (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Marr, 2016). Such tools support informed decision-making, audience segmentation, campaign optimization, and trend forecasting. Organizations that adopt data-driven strategies operate more efficiently, respond quickly to market changes, and maintain a competitive edge in the tourism sector (Sigala, 2018).

In summary, digital marketing in tourism constitutes a dynamic ecosystem of tools and channels, each offering specific advantages. The most effective strategies are integrated, personalized, and continuously optimized, allowing tourism brands—particularly in the luxury segment—to enhance visibility, foster emotional connections with customers, and drive long-term success. This section provides a theoretical foundation for analyzing how luxury hotels in Marrakech implement and measure these strategies in practice.

2.3 The Role of Digital Marketing in Tourism

Digital marketing plays a fundamental and transformative role in today's tourism industry. It is not merely a communication tool but a strategic engine that shapes how destinations are discovered, evaluated, experienced, and remembered by travelers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Its influence extends across the entire travel journey—from the inspiration stage to planning, booking, experiencing, and post-trip sharing (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In a highly competitive and experience-driven sector, the ability to attract, engage, and retain customers through digital platforms has become a decisive factor of success, particularly for luxury tourism brands (Sigala, 2018; Buhalis, 2020).

➤ 2.3.1 Redefining Customer Behavior in Tourism

Tourism consumption patterns have changed significantly in recent years due to widespread mobile technology adoption, the growth of digital media, and the rise of user-generated content (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Sigala, 2018). Contemporary travelers are more autonomous, well-informed, and highly connected, relying on digital channels for searching, booking, and sharing experiences. Peer reviews, social media influencers, and online communities often carry more weight than traditional advertising (Leung et al., 2013).

Consequently, tourism marketers must adapt by providing personalized, accessible, and engaging digital experiences. Effective digital marketing allows brands to deliver emotionally resonant content, respond to the needs of diverse audience segments, and facilitate real-time communication and support. This interaction fosters trust and loyalty while enabling businesses to better understand and predict customer behavior using data analytics (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

➤ 2.3.2 Enhancing Visibility and Global Reach

Digital marketing enables tourism brands to reach global audiences with relatively low investment, enhancing visibility and market access (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Through search engine optimization (SEO and PPC), targeted advertising, and strategic use of social media, destinations and tourism providers can extend their presence far beyond physical boundaries (Mariani et al., 2018).

This approach is particularly beneficial for emerging destinations and niche providers, who may lack resources for large-scale international promotion but can achieve strong visibility through organic content, partnerships, and well-managed digital campaigns. Luxury hotels leverage these digital platforms not only to attract tourists but also to cultivate aspirational brand identities that appeal to lifestyle-oriented consumers worldwide. Carefully curated visuals, storytelling, and influencer engagement help position these brands in the minds of potential clients even before any formal interaction occurs (Dolnicar et al., 2018; Freberg et al., 2011).

➤ **2.3.3 Building Brand Identity and Emotional Engagement**

Unlike transactional marketing, tourism relies heavily on emotional connection and brand storytelling. Destinations and hotels communicate not only services but also experiences, sensations, and values (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Hudson & Thal, 2013). Digital marketing facilitates this through diverse multimedia formats, including video tours, blog posts, interviews, customer testimonials, and immersive social media stories, allowing potential travelers to experience the destination virtually before visiting (Leung et al., 2013).

Emotional marketing strategies—such as visual content, behind-the-scenes insights, or cause-related campaigns promoting sustainability and local community involvement—foster deeper audience engagement (Kotler et al., 2019). Luxury hospitality brands, in particular, benefit from emotional engagement that reflects exclusivity, refinement, comfort, and trust. In this context, content is not merely a promotional tool but a reflection of the brand's essence, which must remain consistent, curated, and tailored across all digital platforms (Sigala, 2018).

➤ **2.3.4 Optimizing the Customer Journey**

Digital marketing enables optimization at every stage of the tourism customer journey, from initial inspiration to post-trip engagement (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Sigala, 2018). During the inspiration phase, travelers encounter content on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, travel blogs, and influencer posts. The research stage involves consulting TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and official hotel websites to gather information and compare options. Booking occurs via online travel agencies, hotel booking engines, or direct website reservations, while the experience phase is enhanced through mobile apps, personalized services, and real-time digital assistance. Post-trip engagement includes email follow-ups, loyalty programs, and encouragement to leave online reviews.

This full-cycle digital approach allows tourism businesses to remain visible and supportive throughout the traveler's journey. It also fosters repeat bookings and advocacy, as travelers are more likely to return to brands that demonstrate attentiveness and responsiveness before, during, and after their trips (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

➤ **2.3.5 Leveraging Data for Strategic Decision-Making**

Digital marketing provides access to performance metrics and behavioral data, enabling tourism businesses to track customer interactions, measure campaign outcomes, analyze booking patterns, and receive real-time feedback through reviews and surveys (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Marr, 2016). Such data supports market segmentation, service personalization, revenue management, and forecasting of demand and trends.

In luxury hospitality, data-driven insights allow hotels to offer personalized touches, such as welcome gifts based on past preferences, curated itineraries, or tailored email communications for individual guests. This level of

customization enhances guest satisfaction, fosters loyalty, and strengthens the overall brand experience (Sigala, 2018; Buhalis & Law, 2008).

➤ **2.3.6 Supporting Crisis Communication and Reputation Management**

The tourism industry is highly sensitive to global events, including health crises, political instability, and natural disasters. In these situations, digital platforms play a critical role in communication, reassurance, and damage control (Sigala, 2020; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Hotels and tourism authorities can provide updates, manage cancellations, and maintain transparency through email, social media, and official website alerts.

Proactive management of online reputation is equally important. Monitoring reviews, responding promptly, and demonstrating responsibility, empathy, and service resilience help preserve brand trust and credibility (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013). In the luxury sector, where customer expectations are high, effective digital crisis communication and reputation management are essential, as word-of-mouth—both online and offline—significantly shapes brand perception.

➤ **2.3.7 Driving Innovation and Competitiveness**

Digital marketing is constantly evolving, with emerging technologies such as voice search, artificial intelligence (AI), chatbots, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) reshaping the tourism sector (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Mariani et al., 2018). These innovations enable experiences such as virtual hotel tours, AI-driven concierge services, interactive destination previews, and real-time translation or smart travel assistance.

Hotels and destinations that adopt these technologies enhance their competitive positioning and brand differentiation, particularly in the premium market segment, where innovation and forward-thinking strategies are key to attracting and retaining high-end clientele (Sigala, 2018; Leung et al., 2013).

2.4 Branding and Reputation in Tourism Marketing

Branding is the strategic process of creating a distinct identity for a product, service, or organization that differentiates it from competitors and fosters recognition, trust, and loyalty among consumers (Aaker, 1996). It involves both tangible and intangible elements, including visual identity (e.g., logos and design), verbal identity (e.g., slogans and messaging), brand values, storytelling, and the emotional associations that the brand evokes. Through effective branding, organizations can establish credibility, shape consumer perceptions, and cultivate lasting relationships with their target audience (Keller, 2013).

➤ **2.4.1 The Nature of Branding in Tourism**

Branding in tourism extends beyond logos and taglines, encompassing the emotional and cognitive associations travelers form with a destination or service provider (Aaker, 1996). A strong brand provides consistency, authenticity, and a promise of quality. Key brand assets in tourism include visual identity (logos, website design, photography style), tone of voice in communications, storytelling (history, mission, values, personality), and symbolism or lifestyle associations such as luxury, eco-consciousness, or cultural immersion (Keller, 2013).

Effective tourism branding creates narratives that resonate emotionally with travelers. For instance, La Mamounia in Marrakech communicates luxury, heritage, and Moroccan elegance consistently across digital channels, architecture, and service design, reinforcing its brand identity and customer perception (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Pike, 2016).

➤ **2.4.2 Digital Branding Strategies**

Digital platforms have transformed how tourism brands are created, managed, and perceived. Websites, social media profiles, and user-generated content (UGC) are now central to shaping brand identity (Kapferer, 2012; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Effective digital branding strategies include maintaining a consistent visual and verbal identity, curating content that reflects brand values such as sustainability or exclusivity, engaging in storytelling through blogs, videos, testimonials, and behind-the-scenes content, and fostering interactive communication with users across platforms. Emotional branding, emphasizing aspirational lifestyles and unique experiences, further strengthens brand perception (Keller, 2013).

In luxury tourism, digital branding relies heavily on aesthetic excellence and emotional sophistication. High-quality imagery, immersive experiences, and influencer collaborations contribute to a brand identity that feels exclusive and aspirational. Additionally, travelers increasingly co-create brand meaning through reviews, social media posts, and shared content. Managing both corporate and customer-generated content is therefore essential to maintain a coherent, credible, and appealing brand image (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Mariani et al., 2018).

➤ **2.4.3 Online Reputation Management (ORM)**

Online reputation represents the collective perception of a brand formed by what is shared and discussed across social media, review platforms, blogs, and news outlets. In tourism, where services are largely intangible, trust is essential and is heavily influenced by online ratings and peer reviews (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013). According to TripAdvisor's Global Travel Trends Report (2023), over 93% of travelers consult online reviews before booking a hotel or tour, while LYFE Marketing (2022) reports that 92% of consumers trust user-

generated content more than traditional advertising.

Effective online reputation management (ORM) involves monitoring platforms such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Google Reviews, and social media, responding promptly and empathetically to guest feedback, highlighting positive reviews in marketing materials, addressing misinformation transparently, and using insights from reviews to enhance service delivery. In luxury hospitality, managing online reputation is particularly critical: poorly handled complaints can harm perceptions of exclusivity or excellence, whereas well-managed responses strengthen credibility, demonstrating professionalism, care, and attention to detail (Sigala, 2018; Mariani et al., 2018).

➤ **2.4.4 The Link Between Brand, Trust, and Booking Decisions**

Brand and reputation are dynamic assets that significantly influence travelers' decision-making processes (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Sigala, 2018). Research in tourism marketing demonstrates a strong correlation between positive brand perception, online trust, and booking conversion rates.

Luxury travelers, in particular, value not only high-quality service but also a meaningful relationship with the brand. They expect personalized experiences, discretion, cultural sensitivity, and immersive narratives. Brands that consistently meet these expectations—across both digital and physical touchpoints—benefit from repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth, and loyal brand advocates (Mariani et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2013).

In today's environment of digital transparency, reputation serves as a key differentiator. While many hotels offer similar amenities, those with a trusted brand and robust online reputation are more likely to stand out and achieve sustained competitive advantage.

2.5 The Moroccan Context: Digital Marketing in Local Tourism

While Morocco has established itself as one of Africa's leading tourism destinations, the digital maturity of its tourism sector remains uneven. Over the past decade, both the Moroccan government and private stakeholders have made substantial efforts to enhance the country's digital presence in the global tourism market (ONMT, 2024). Initiatives such as Vision 2020 and Vision 2030 have emphasized digital transformation, smart tourism solutions, and brand reinforcement as critical pillars of national competitiveness (UNWTO, 2023). However, challenges persist—particularly regional disparities in digital adoption, gaps in digital training among tourism professionals, and the underutilization of innovative marketing tools by smaller operators (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2024).

This section explores the current state of digital marketing in Moroccan tourism, highlighting both achievements and areas for improvement. Special attention is given to Marrakech, which has become a benchmark for other destinations in Morocco through its advanced luxury positioning, innovative branding practices, and integration of digital strategy

into the broader tourism ecosystem (WTTC, 2024).

➤ **2.5.1 Government Initiatives and National Strategies**

The Moroccan government has positioned digital transformation as a strategic pillar for enhancing tourism competitiveness. Under initiatives such as Vision 2020 and Vision 2030, digitalization is viewed not merely as a promotional tool, but as a cross-cutting enabler for improving visitor experiences, supporting smarter governance, and strengthening Morocco's international tourism positioning (ONMT, 2023; Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

Key initiatives include the launch of **VisitMorocco.com**, the official tourism portal managed by the Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT), which promotes destinations, events, and cultural experiences; increased investment in digital marketing campaigns targeting Europe, the Gulf, and the Americas; support for e-tourism startups and online booking platforms through public-private partnerships; and the integration of destination management systems (DMS) to monitor tourist flows and inform planning decisions (ONMT, 2023).

Despite these efforts, challenges remain, including limited coordination between local and national tourism authorities, uneven internet access in rural areas, and a digital skills gap among tourism professionals, particularly within family-owned accommodations and local tourism services (Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

➤ **2.5.2 Regional Disparities in Digital Readiness**

Digital adoption in Morocco varies considerably by region. Major cities such as Marrakech, Casablanca, and Agadir—key hubs for international tourism—have benefited from substantial investments in digital branding, social media marketing, and online booking infrastructure (ONMT, 2023; Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

In contrast, smaller cities and rural areas often face limited access to digital tools, training, and structured promotional strategies. Many local businesses continue to rely on informal marketing or word-of-mouth, missing the opportunities for global visibility offered by platforms like Booking.com, Airbnb, and Instagram (Belyazid, 2021).

Bridging this digital divide is crucial for achieving the inclusive growth goals outlined in Vision 2030. Tourism training institutes, such as the **Institut Supérieur International de Tourisme de Tanger (ISITT)**, have begun integrating digital marketing and e-tourism modules into their curricula, though further nationwide efforts are needed to enhance digital readiness across all regions (ISITT, 2022).

➤ 2.5.3 Marrakech as a National Benchmark

Marrakech has emerged as Morocco's leading reference point for digital transformation in tourism, often described as a **benchmark for integrating technology into destination marketing and luxury hospitality** (ONMT, 2023). According to Buhalis (2019), smart tourism ecosystems rely on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance both visitor experience and destination competitiveness. In line with this perspective, Marrakech illustrates how digital branding strategies are embedded within a broader framework of smart tourism development.

Luxury hotels such as La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, and Sofitel Marrakech exemplify this approach by adopting **sophisticated online strategies**, including high-quality visual storytelling, partnerships with international influencers, and campaigns that emphasize exclusivity and prestige. Research highlights that content-driven engagement and influencer marketing are increasingly central to destination promotion, particularly in luxury segments where emotional appeal and authenticity drive consumer decision-making (Mariani, Borghi, & Cappa, 2021; Sigala, 2018). In this sense, Marrakech reflects global trends in e-tourism, where digital platforms serve as key intermediaries between destinations and potential travelers.

At the institutional level, city tourism authorities complement these efforts by supporting digitalization through coordinated campaigns and the hosting of high-profile cultural and artistic events, such as the Marrakech International Film Festival. As noted by Gretzel et al. (2020), destination competitiveness increasingly depends on the alignment between cultural identity, global visibility, and digital innovation. Marrakech's strategy illustrates this alignment, positioning the city not only as a flagship destination in North Africa but also as a **model of smart tourism** in the wider Arab world.

The case of Marrakech demonstrates that the integration of **digital branding practices** with **local heritage and cultural distinctiveness** can create a compelling tourism offer. This aligns with findings in the literature that emphasize the importance of hybrid approaches, where technological adoption strengthens—rather than replaces—the cultural authenticity of destinations (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Marrakech thus provides a practical example of how national tourism visions, such as Vision 2030, translate into localized strategies that combine luxury hospitality, innovation, and tradition.

➤ 2.5.4 Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Despite notable progress, Morocco faces several challenges in developing a cohesive and effective national digital tourism strategy. These include limited content localization, as many tourism platforms and promotional materials are not yet available in emerging markets' languages (e.g., Mandarin, Russian, Hindi), which constrains

appeal beyond European audiences. The Moroccan tourism brand sometimes lacks consistency, with regional entities promoting overlapping or conflicting messages. Additionally, user-generated content, such as guest reviews, photos, and testimonials, remains underutilized, and standardized performance metrics are often absent, making it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of digital initiatives (ONMT, 2023; Belyazid, 2021).

At the same time, Morocco has strong potential for digital innovation. Opportunities exist in smart tourism solutions (e.g., QR-coded city tours, AI-powered travel assistants), virtual and augmented reality to preview experiences, offerings for digital nomads—particularly in cities like Taghazout and Essaouira—and sustainability storytelling aimed at environmentally conscious travelers (Sigala, 2018; Marr, 2016).

While digital marketing in Morocco’s tourism sector has evolved considerably, its full potential remains underexploited outside major urban centers. The success of Marrakech demonstrates the benefits of strategic digital investment aligned with luxury branding and international outreach. To remain competitive globally, Morocco must expand its digital infrastructure, enhance professional training, and ensure that the advantages of digital tourism are more evenly distributed across regions and stakeholders.

2.6 Conceptual Framework of Digital Marketing, Branding, and Reputation in Luxury Tourism

In tourism, and particularly in the luxury hospitality sector, **branding goes beyond logos and visual identity**; it functions as a symbolic representation of cultural heritage, exclusivity, and experiential promise. Destination branding scholars argue that brands in tourism act as “mental shortcuts” that guide traveler decision-making by combining functional attributes with emotional appeal (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Pike, 2016). For luxury hotels in Marrakech, branding communicates not only service excellence but also a connection to Moroccan identity, architecture, and tradition, which reinforces their positioning in global markets. A strong hospitality brand thus signals reliability and uniqueness while fostering emotional engagement with guests (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013).

The role of **digital presence** further amplifies this brand identity. Research shows that tourism brands increasingly depend on digital platforms—particularly social media and online communities—to shape perceptions and deliver storytelling that extends beyond the physical stay (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Mariani & Borghi, 2021). In this sense, luxury hotels in Marrakech, such as La Mamounia and Royal Mansour, strategically employ digital engagement campaigns that emphasize exclusivity, heritage, and immersive experiences to sustain their competitive advantage.

Closely linked to digital presence is **online reputation management**, which has emerged as a decisive factor in consumer trust and booking decisions. Studies highlight that in tourism, user-generated content such as reviews and ratings are perceived as more influential than traditional marketing messages (Filieri, 2016; Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley, 2013). For luxury hotels, managing e-reputation requires active monitoring of digital channels, personalized responses to feedback, and the use of analytics to align brand communication with guest expectations (Sigala, 2018).

Taken together, these insights inform a **conceptual framework for luxury hospitality branding**, where brand identity, digital engagement, and online reputation converge to create competitive positioning. In Marrakech, leading hotels demonstrate how these elements can be integrated: brand identity rooted in Moroccan heritage, digital engagement through curated online content, and reputation management that reinforces trust and loyalty among global travelers.

Proposed Conceptual Framework: Branding, Digital Presence, and Reputation in Luxury Hotels :

Component	Function in Luxury Tourism	Supporting References
Brand Identity	Differentiates hotels; conveys exclusivity and heritage; builds emotional connections with guests	Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2012
Digital Engagement	Extends brand storytelling; drives visibility and emotional connection	Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Mariani & Borghi, 2021
Online Reputation	Builds trust, influences bookings, and strengthens loyalty	Sigala, 2018; Filieri, 2016
Competitive Positioning	Achieved through alignment of brand, digital presence, and guest perception	Eisenhardt, 1989; Buhalis, 2020

This framework reflects my interpretation of how branding, digital marketing, and reputation management work together in luxury hotels. In Marrakech, hotels such as La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, and Sofitel Marrakech strategically integrate these elements to enhance visibility, maintain exclusivity, and strengthen their competitive advantage in the premium market.

Part II - CASE STUDY: THE DIGITAL MARKETING APPROACH AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN 5 STARS HOTELS AND PALACES IN MARRAKECH

Introduction

The hotel digital marketing (also known as hospitality marketing) means building and maintaining a hotel's presence online. This includes social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram in addition to Google and other search engines.

Digital marketing strategies in this context encompass social media engagement, search engine optimization (SEO), paid campaigns, content marketing, and online reputation management. These tools allow luxury hotels to showcase unique experiences, heritage, and service excellence while reaching affluent and globally connected travelers.

In Marrakech, where international tourism is a major economic driver, visibility across multiple digital channels—including Instagram, Google, metasearch platforms, and influencer partnerships—is critical. By strategically integrating these channels, hotels can guide the guest journey from initial discovery to booking, ensuring that their brand stands out in a crowded marketplace.

Thus, this case study examines how selected 5-star hotels and palaces in Marrakech leverage digital marketing not only to maintain visibility but also to achieve differentiation, enhance customer engagement, and secure a sustainable competitive advantage.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This dissertation employs a qualitative case study methodology to explore how digital marketing strategies are implemented in luxury hospitality in Morocco, focusing on three five-star hotels in Marrakech. Case studies are widely recognized as an effective qualitative approach for examining complex phenomena within their real-world settings. According to Yin (2018), case studies allow researchers to investigate situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. Similarly, Stake (1995) highlights that this method is particularly useful for understanding the uniqueness and complexity of individual cases or a small set of cases, while Merriam (1998) notes its ability to generate rich, contextually grounded insights.

This approach is well-suited to the current research for multiple reasons. First, the digital marketing practices of luxury hotels are closely connected to the wider tourism and branding environment of Marrakech; the case study method provides a framework for analyzing both internal strategies and their interaction with the destination's brand image. Second, case studies are particularly appropriate for addressing “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 2018), which aligns with the research aim of understanding the mechanisms and effectiveness of social media and digital branding strategies. Third, focusing on multiple hotels enables both within-case and cross-case analyses, revealing similarities and differences in strategic approaches.

By adopting this methodology, the study moves beyond simply observing patterns to examining the strategic use of digital tools in depth. As Eisenhardt (1989) explains, case study research supports analytic generalization, meaning that findings can contribute to broader theoretical understanding even if they are not statistically generalizable. This allows the research to connect observed practices in Moroccan luxury hotels to wider theories of digital marketing, destination branding, and luxury tourism.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this case study is to examine how digital marketing strategies are applied within selected five-star hotels in Marrakech. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze the various approaches these hotels employ to manage their online presence, focusing on branding, customer engagement, and the strategic use of digital platforms. It also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of social media—particularly Instagram—in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing brand image. In addition, the research intends to identify best practices and potential areas for improvement in digital marketing within the context of Moroccan luxury hospitality. Finally, the study explores how digital marketing contributes to brand differentiation and competitive positioning, providing insights into the ways hotels leverage online strategies to maintain and enhance their

market standing.

3.3 Justification for Case Selection

Marrakech was selected as the focus of this research due to its status as Morocco's most iconic and advanced tourism destination. The three hotels—La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, and Sofitel Marrakech—represent a diverse range of luxury hospitality brands that are active on digital platforms and cater to both international and high-end local clientele.

These establishments were chosen for several reasons. They are recognized leaders in luxury service delivery and brand prestige. They also maintain active and well-structured Instagram accounts, providing rich data for digital content analysis. Furthermore, they reflect different brand identities, with some emphasizing traditional Moroccan heritage and others aligned with modern international chains.

3.4 Case study Design

The case study design allows for an in-depth examination of each hotel's digital marketing strategies while enabling cross-case comparisons to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in branding, customer engagement, and online presence. Data collection draws on multiple sources, including Instagram Analytics, NinjaLitics, official hotel websites, and secondary materials such as literature reviews, industry reports, and expert articles. The analysis focuses on a three-month period (May to July 2025), evaluating posting frequency, content types, engagement metrics, storytelling, brand personality, and integration with booking platforms.

By isolating the case study in this section, the methodology clearly distinguishes between the general research approach and the specific application to the chosen hotels, ensuring transparency and rigor in the research design.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

As with all qualitative research, this case study has certain limitations. The focus on Instagram may not fully represent the hotels' broader digital marketing strategies, which could include platforms such as Google, email,

YouTube, or TikTok. Only three hotels are analyzed, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the wider luxury hotel market in Morocco. The study relies exclusively on publicly available data, excluding private marketing insights, budgets, and customer analytics. Additionally, the three-month analysis period provides a snapshot rather than capturing long-term patterns.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into current digital marketing practices in Moroccan luxury hospitality and provides a foundation for future research and strategic development.

3.6 Analysis of the Methodology in depth

The case study approach is widely recognized as a robust qualitative method for examining complex phenomena in real-life contexts. Yin (2018) defines it as an empirical inquiry suitable when the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are unclear. Stake (1995) emphasizes its value for understanding the uniqueness and complexity of individual cases, while Merriam (1998) highlights its ability to produce rich, detailed, and contextually grounded insights. Following these perspectives, the case study methodology was chosen for this dissertation as it enables a comprehensive investigation of digital marketing strategies in luxury hotels.

This approach is particularly appropriate for several reasons. First, it ensures relevance to context: luxury hotels' digital marketing practices cannot be separated from the broader tourism and branding environment of Marrakech, and the case study method allows examination of both internal practices and their interaction with the destination brand. Second, it provides exploratory depth, enabling an in-depth understanding of how and why strategies are implemented, including aspects such as visual storytelling, cultural integration, and brand differentiation. Third, focusing on three hotels (La Mamounia, Royal Mansour, and Sofitel Marrakech) allows for both within-case and cross-case comparisons, revealing patterns of similarity and divergence. Fourth, the method aligns with the research objectives, addressing "how" and "why" questions regarding brand image development and the effectiveness of digital strategies. Finally, while the findings are not statistically generalizable to all Moroccan hotels, they allow for analytic generalization to broader theories of digital marketing, destination branding, and luxury tourism (Eisenhardt, 1989).

In summary, the case study methodology provides the depth, flexibility, and contextual sensitivity required to investigate digital marketing strategies as embedded practices within Marrakech's cultural, economic, and brand environment.

Presentation of the analysis tool used in the case studies



NinjaLitics

NinjaLitics is an online analytics platform designed to monitor and evaluate public Instagram accounts. It provides insight into various performance metrics such as follower growth, engagement rate, posting frequency, hashtag usage, and interaction levels. Unlike internal Instagram tools (such as Meta Business Suite), NinjaLitics can be used to assess accounts that are not directly managed by the user, making it a valuable research tool for external benchmarking and comparative studies.

In this dissertation, NinjaLitics was used to analyze the Instagram profiles of four luxury hotels in Marrakech: **La Mamounia**, **Royal Mansour**, **Sofitel Marrakech**, and **Savoy Le Grand Hotel**. This tool enabled the researcher to collect publicly available data for each hotel's account during a defined three-month period (April–June 2025), focusing on engagement rates, content types, growth patterns, and digital branding strategies.

NinjaLitics offers a user-friendly dashboard and exports performance metrics in real time. It is particularly useful in tourism and hospitality research because it allows scholars to observe how brands interact with audiences visually and emotionally, without needing access to private business analytics. In this study, it helped quantify the online activity of each hotel and provided a reliable basis for evaluating their **social media positioning**, **content strategies**, and **digital competitiveness**.

4. CASE STUDIES

1- PRESENTATION OF THE PALACE MAMOUNIA



La Mamounia is one of Morocco's most iconic and internationally renowned luxury hotels. Located in the heart of Marrakech near the medina and Koutoubia Mosque, it has been a symbol of Moroccan hospitality and elegance since its opening in 1923. Known for its blend of traditional Moroccan architecture and Art Deco influence, La Mamounia consistently ranks among the world's top luxury hotels.

Located near the Bab Jdid fountain, the hotel has an ideal location, near the ramparts of the Marrakech Medina, 2 minutes from the new city.

Calm and big, Mamounia deploys its splendors with discretion and elegance. An art of living that is both warm and refined: the power of architecture, the richness of materials, the flavor of the kitchen, the calm of the gardens and the enchantment of nebnw sounds.

By placing sensory discovery at the heart of its values, La Mamounia promises unique and unusual experiences: experiences made of inspiration, emotion, glamor and elegance Magic, dream, enchantment but also excellent service and perfect detail are the promises of Mamounia.

Digital Marketing Strategy on Instagram

To assess La Mamounia's Instagram presence, the tool **NinjaLitics** was used to extract performance metrics from the hotel's official account during the period **Mai–July 2025**. The analysis focused on content type, frequency, engagement levels, and branding consistency

Profile Growth

Figure 1: Evolution of Instagram Followers of La Mamounia (@lamamouniamarrakech), June–July 2025
Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June 16–July 14, 2025).

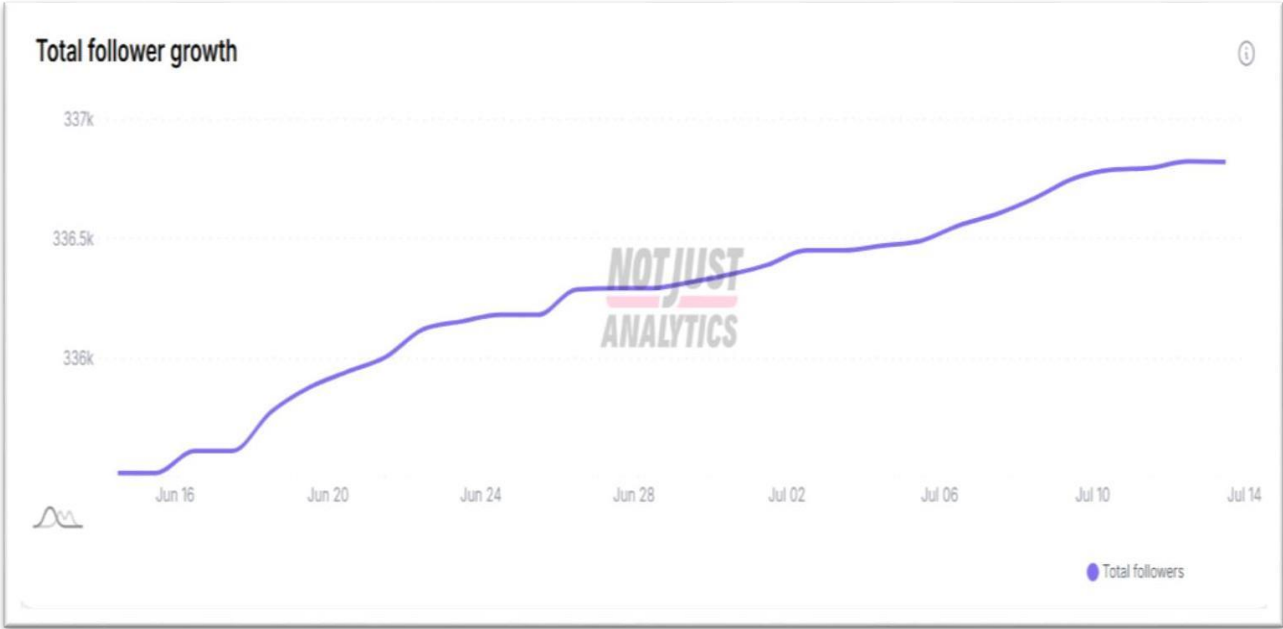


Figure 2 : Variation in Instagram Followers of La Mamounia (@lamamouniamarrakech), June–July 2025
Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June 16–July 11, 2025)

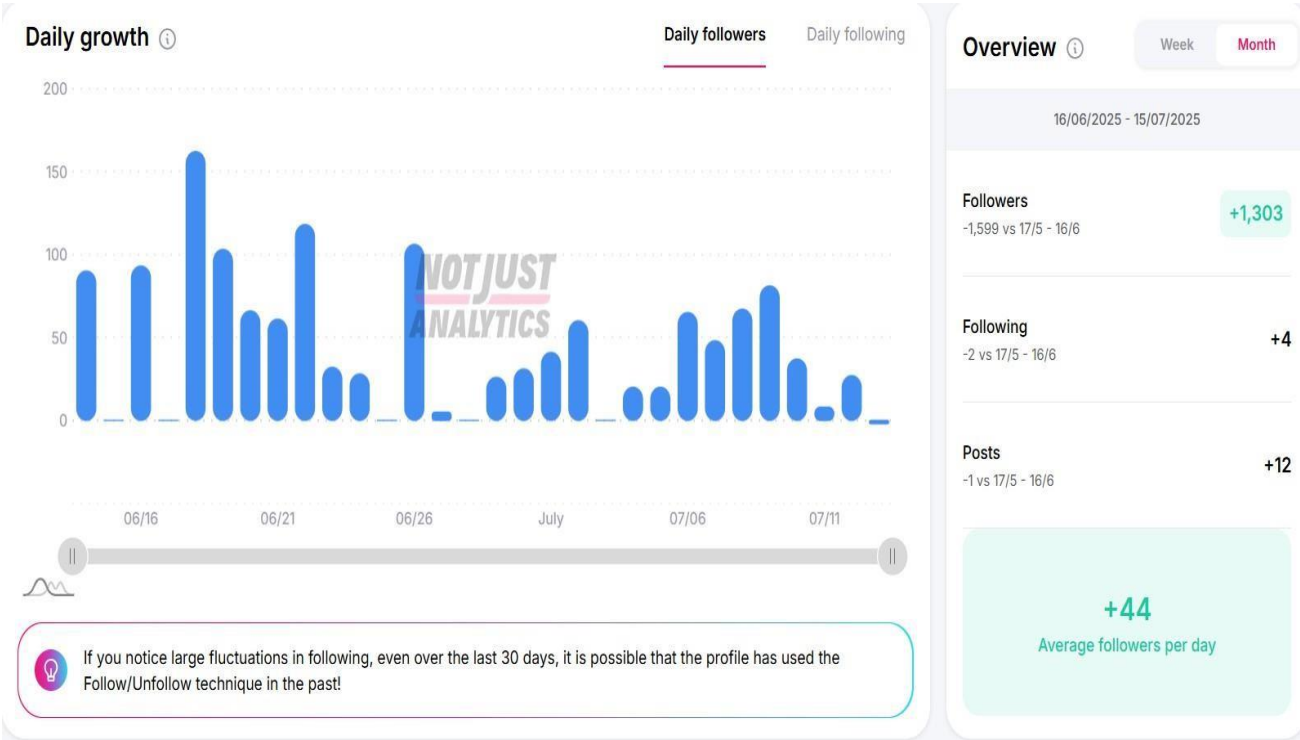


Figure 3 : Hashtag Usage Analysis of La Mamounia’s Instagram Posts, June–July 2025

Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June–July 2025).

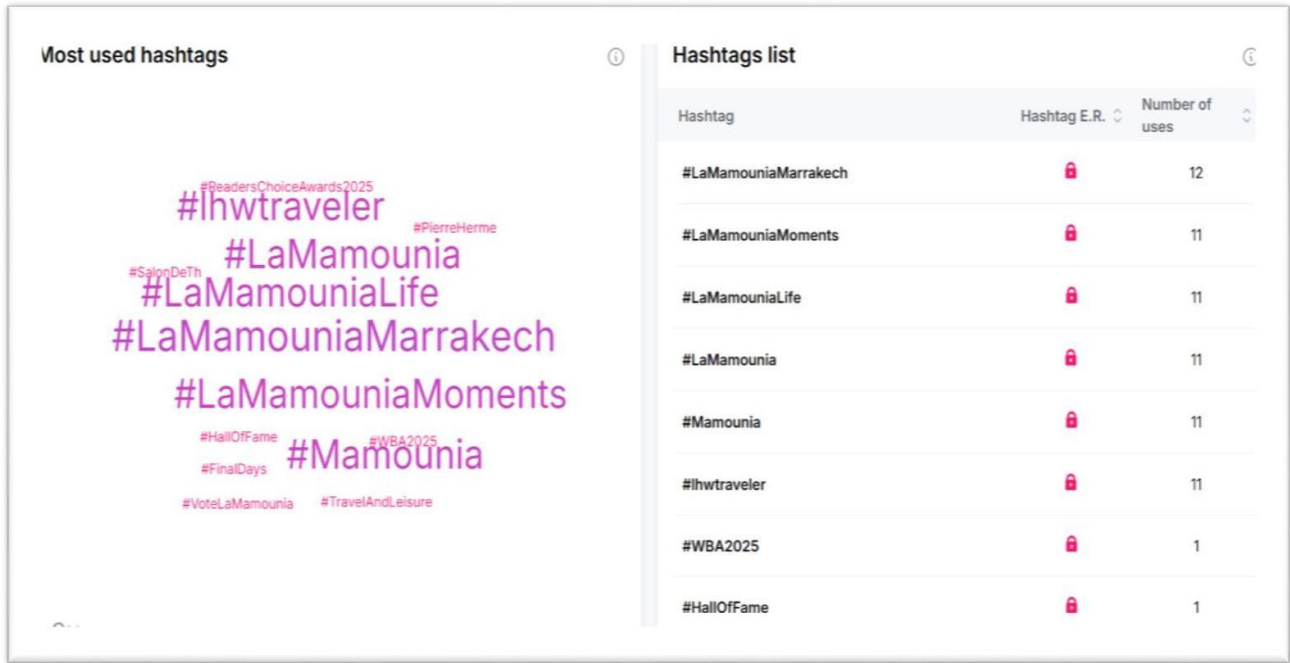


Table 1 : Summary of Instagram Analytics for La Mamounia (@lamamouniamarrakech), Mai–July 2025

Source: Author’s elaboration based on Instagram Analytics data (Mai–July 2025).

Metric	Value (Mai–July 2025)
Followers	336,000
Following	24
Total Posts	2,135
Average Likes per Post	6,800
Average Comments per Post	210
Engagement Rate	2.5%
Posting Frequency	3–4 posts/week
Top Hashtags Used	#LaMamounia #LuxuryHotel #Marrakech #MoroccoLuxury
Content Type	Visual storytelling, architecture, luxury lifestyle, celebrity stays
Bio Link	Direct booking website

Content Style and Branding Identity

La Mamounia's Instagram feed is highly curated, offering a luxurious and immersive visual experience. Its strategy focuses heavily on:

1. **Architectural beauty:** Courtyards, fountains, tiles, arches
2. **Atmosphere:** Lighting, textures, gardens, ambiance
3. **Lifestyle scenes:** Guests enjoying the pool, gourmet meals, spa rituals
4. **Cultural integration:** Moroccan aesthetics, art, and local craftsmanship
5. **Celebrity moments:** Discreetly showcasing high-profile guests, awards, or press mentions

The hotel avoids excessive promotions or discounts. Instead, it positions itself as a **timeless icon**, appealing to travelers seeking exclusivity, authenticity, and aesthetic harmony. Posts often include elegant captions, poetic language, and multilingual options (French, English, occasionally Arabic).

Engagement and Audience Interaction

The account maintains a healthy **engagement rate (2.5%)**, especially considering the size of its follower base. Comments tend to include expressions of admiration, aspirational travel goals, or feedback from past guests. Interaction strategy includes:

1. Prompt responses to comments (usually within 24h)
2. Reposts of user-generated content in stories or highlights
3. High reliance on **organic engagement**, without visible sponsored posts or influencer takeovers

The bio includes a direct booking link, showing integration between brand storytelling and commercial conversion tools.

Strategic Positioning

La Mamounia's Instagram strategy aligns closely with its **luxury positioning and brand heritage**. Rather than aggressive marketing, it relies on aesthetic leadership, emotional appeal, and cultural symbolism. This positions the hotel not just as a place to stay, but as a **status symbol and lifestyle experience**.

Its digital marketing approach is subtle, artistic, and consistent—qualities that distinguish it from more commercial competitors.

2- PRESENTATION OF PALACE ROYAL MANSOUR MARRAKECH



Like every year, Condé Nast Traveler magazine published the results of its Reader's Choice ranking and it was the Royal Mansour that won the title of the best hotel in Africa. Royal Mansour wins the prize for the best palace hotel in Africa last year.

Commissioned by **King Mohammed VI** and opened in 2010, **Royal Mansour Marrakech** is widely regarded as the **pinnacle of Moroccan luxury hospitality**. Unlike conventional hotels, Royal Mansour offers guests private riads instead of rooms or suites, each with its own rooftop terrace, plunge pool, and personalized service via underground tunnels that allow staff to operate discreetly.

The property is not just a hotel; it is a showcase of Moroccan craftsmanship and royal-level service, with every tile, wood carving, and textile handcrafted by local artisans. It hosts three Michelin-starred restaurants, a grand spa, art galleries, and intimate lounges, making it one of the world's most exclusive destinations.

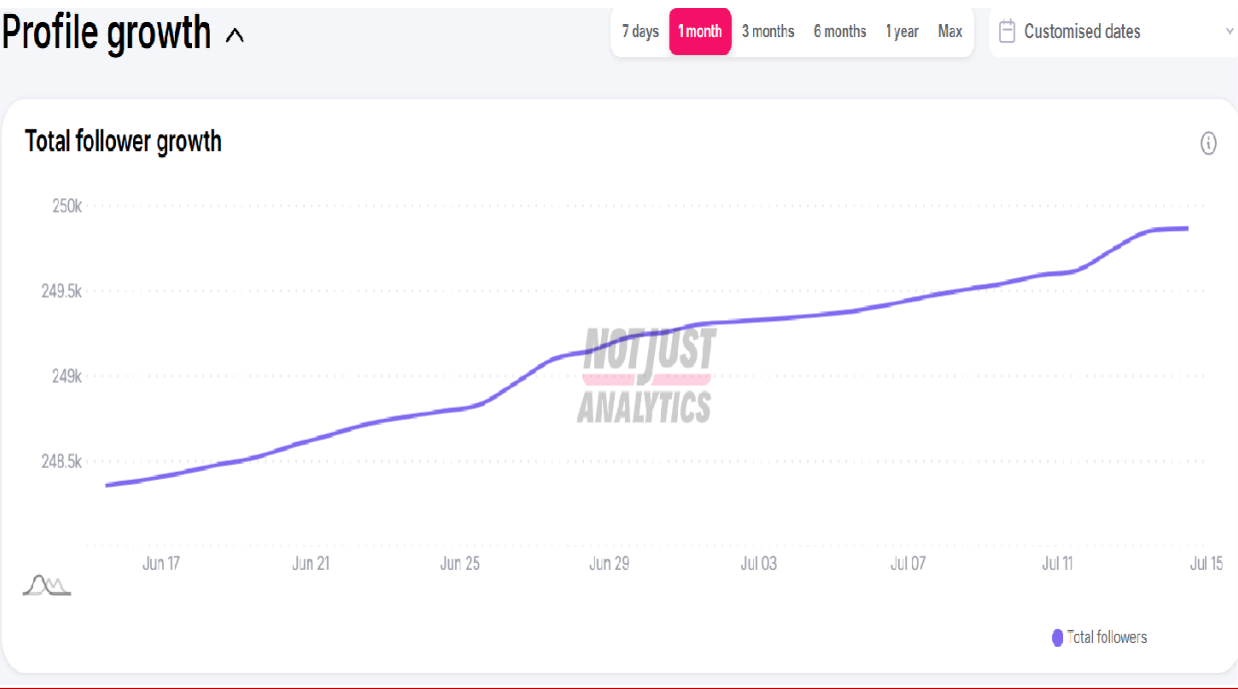
Royal Mansour is not only a product of design and service excellence, but also a **symbol of Moroccan identity, refinement, and modern monarchy**. Its digital marketing strategy reflects this positioning with precision and elegance.

Digital Marketing Strategy on Instagram

Royal Mansour Marrakech maintains a curated and prestigious Instagram presence through its official account **@royalmansour**. The NinjaLitics analysis for the period **Mai–July 2025** provides insight into their performance and content choices.

Profile Growth

Figure 4 : Evolution of Instagram Followers of Royal Mansour Marrakech (June–July 2025)
Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June 17–July 15, 2025).



Daily Growth

Figure 5 : Variation in Instagram Followers of Royal Mansour Marrakech, June–July 2025
Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June 17–July 12, 2025).



Figure 6 : Hashtag Usage Analysis of Royal Mansour Marrakech’s Instagram Posts, June–July 2025
Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June–July 2025).

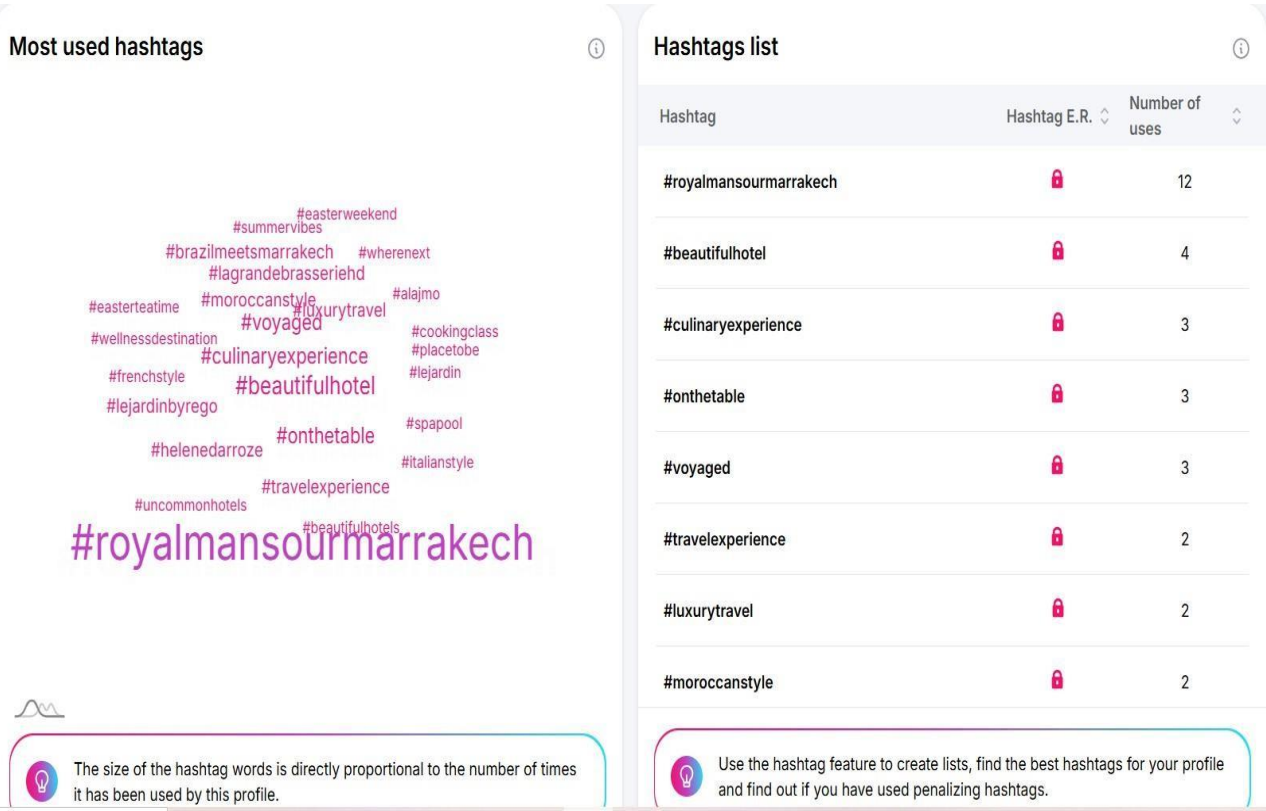


Table 2 : Summary of Instagram Analytics for Royal Mansour Marrakech , Mai–July 2025
Source: Author’s elaboration based on Instagram Analytics data (Mai–July 2025).

Metric	Value (Mai–July 2025)
Followers	249,000
Following	143
Total Posts	2750
Average Likes per Post	6,200
Average Comments per Post	145
Engagement Rate	4.8%
Posting Frequency	5–4 posts/week
Top Hashtags Used	#RoyalMansour #MarrakechLuxury #MoroccanCraft #HauteHospitality
Content Type	Artisan details, private spaces, gastronomy, quiet elegance
Bio Link	Booking + official website

Content Style and Branding Identity

The Royal Mansour's visual identity is defined by **understated elegance**, intricate detail, and intimacy. Unlike more commercial brands, it emphasizes **discretion and serenity** through:

1. **Close-ups of architectural and artisan elements** (mosaic floors, hand-carved doors, lanterns)
2. **Mood photography** with warm lighting and soft tones
3. **Gastronomic moments** presented with artistic composition
4. **Cultural scenes** (Moroccan tea ceremonies, flower arrangements, zellige motifs)
5. Occasional behind-the-scenes glimpses into service rituals, creating exclusivity

The captions are poetic, minimalist, and trilingual (French–English–Arabic). Rather than “selling,” the tone is **inviting and emotionally rich**, appealing to a high-net-worth, culturally aware audience.

Engagement and Audience Interaction

Despite having a smaller following than La Mamounia, Royal Mansour shows a **slightly higher engagement rate (4.8%)**, reflecting the loyalty and exclusivity of its audience. Users frequently leave comments related to admiration, dreams of visiting, and cultural appreciation.

Key interaction features:

1. Highlights categorized by “Suites,” “Spa,” “Gastronomy,” and “Moments”
2. Frequent reposts of guest content in Stories
3. Occasional collaboration with luxury travel influencers and magazines (e.g., *Condé Nast Traveller*)

However, Royal Mansour does not aggressively respond to comments—choosing instead to **maintain mystique and brand distance**, which is typical of ultra-luxury positioning.

Strategic Positioning

The Royal Mansour's Instagram presence is a direct extension of its **luxury-as-art** philosophy. It avoids promotional language and instead creates a **visual and emotional narrative** that speaks to heritage, privacy, and artistic excellence.

This strategy effectively distinguishes it from competitors by offering not just experiences, but a **sensory and spiritual escape**, rooted in Moroccan tradition and delivered with royal refinement.

3- PRESENTATION OF HOTEL SOFITEL MARRAKECH



Sofitel Marrakech Lounge & Spa is part of the **Sofitel Hotels & Resorts** brand, operated by the French hospitality giant **Accor Group**. Located in the upscale Hivernage district, the hotel blends modern French elegance with Moroccan hospitality, attracting both international leisure travelers and business guests.

Unlike La Mamounia and Royal Mansour, which focus on heritage and exclusivity, Sofitel Marrakech combines luxury with a **cosmopolitan, vibrant, and contemporary feel**. Its brand appeal lies in its balance between relaxation, nightlife, wellness, and event hosting. It also benefits from strong **brand consistency and visibility** as part of a global hotel chain.

The ideal place for a relaxing break where you can recharge your batteries after a day spent strolling through the alleys of Marrakech.

The hotel is made up of 157 Rooms and Suites:

- **Superior Room, Kingsize bed**
- **Luxury Room, Kingsize bed**
- **Junior Suite, Kingsize bed**
- **Junior Suite, Kingsize bed, Atlas Mountains View**
- **Junior Suite, Kingsize bed, Pool and Atlas Mountains view**

The Sofitel Marrakech Lounge & Spa is a true haven of peace, conducive to well-being. Its contemporary Moroccan design with restful lines and colors reminiscent of the tranquility of the desert, makes it a chic and artistic setting. An ideal space to regenerate away from the stress of everyday life.

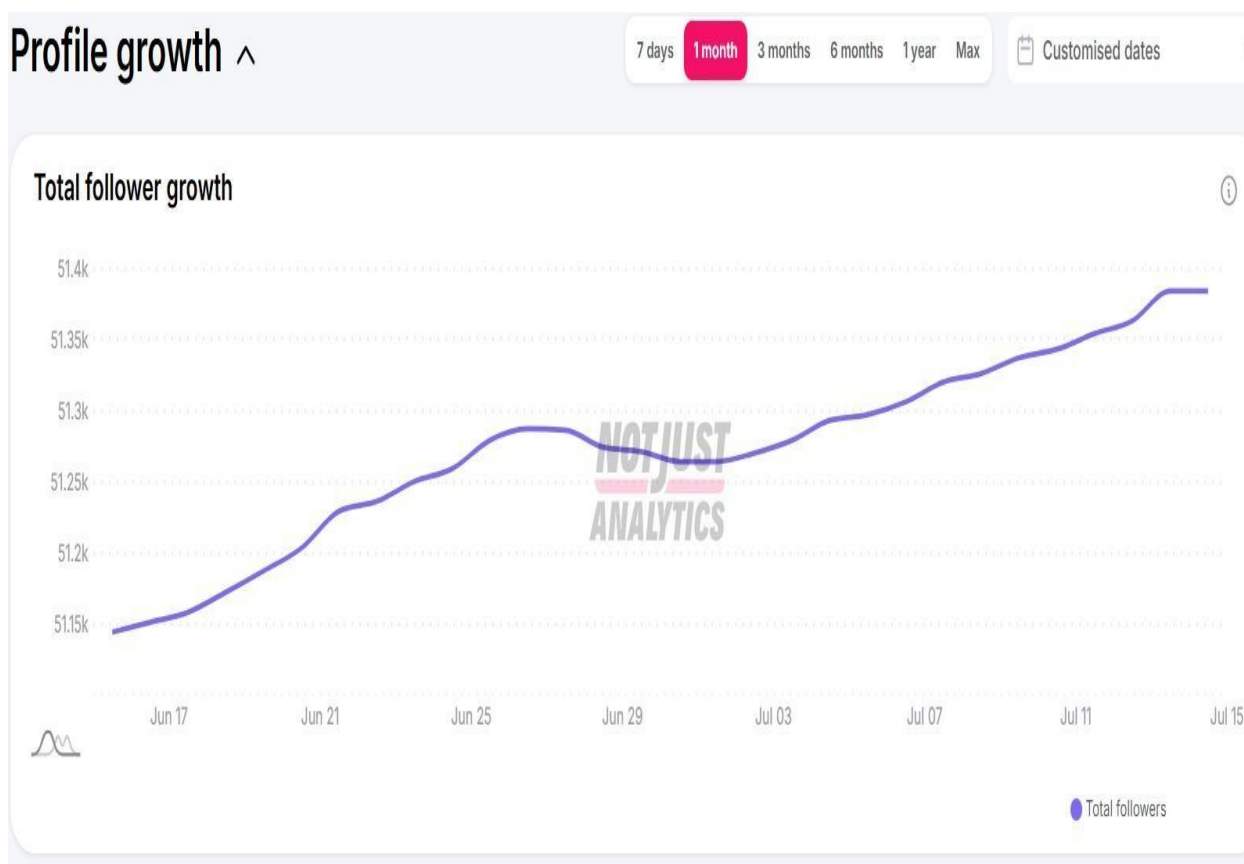
Digital Marketing Strategy on Instagram

Sofitel Marrakech uses its official Instagram account **@sofitelmarrakech** to promote both the Lounge & Spa hotel and its broader experience offerings. Its approach is **more dynamic and lifestyle-oriented** compared to the previous case studies.

Profile Growth

Figure 7 : Evolution of Instagram Followers of Sofitel Marrakech , June–July 2025

Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June 17–July 15, 2025).



Daily Growth

Figure 8 : Variation in Instagram Followers of Sofitel Marrakech (@sofitelmarrakech), June–July 2025

Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June 17–July 12, 2025)

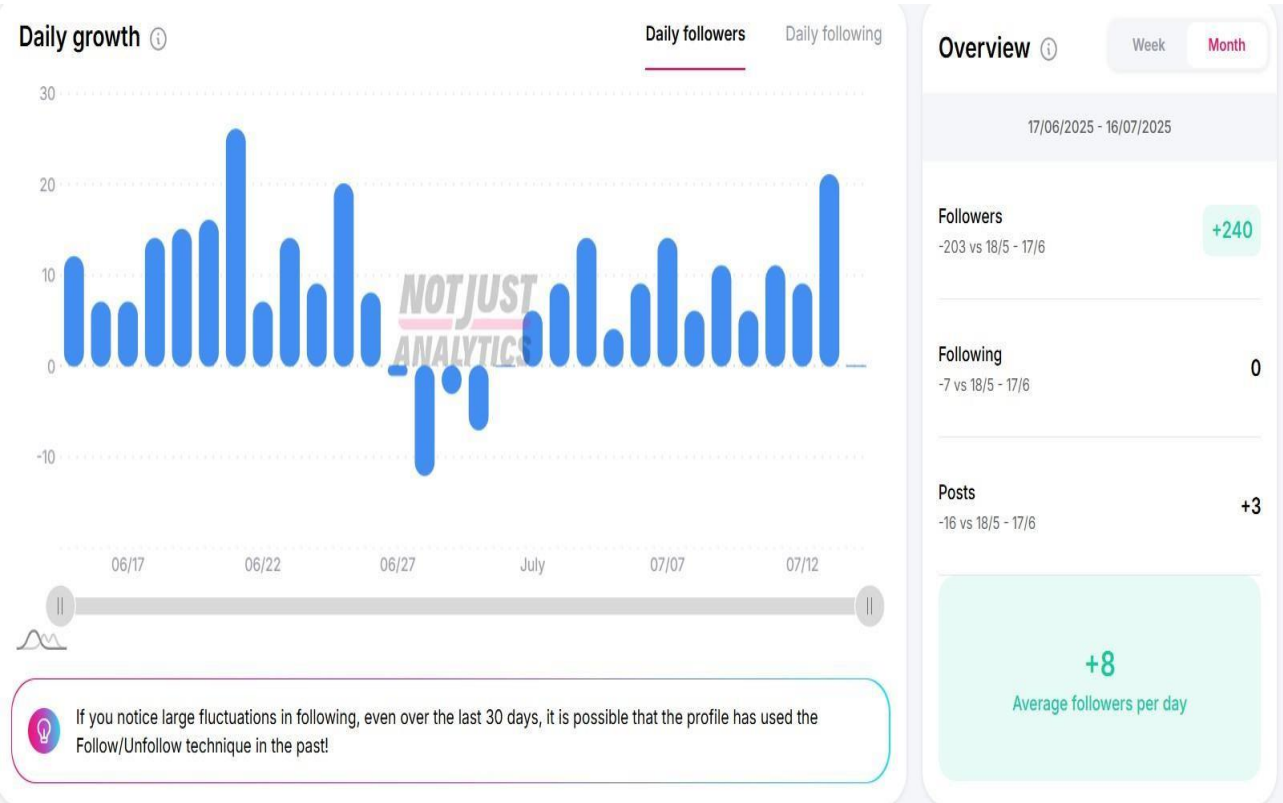


Figure 9 : Hashtag Usage Analysis of Sofitel Marrakech’s Instagram Posts, June–July 2025
Source: Screenshot extracted from NinjaLitics analytics platform (June–July 2025).

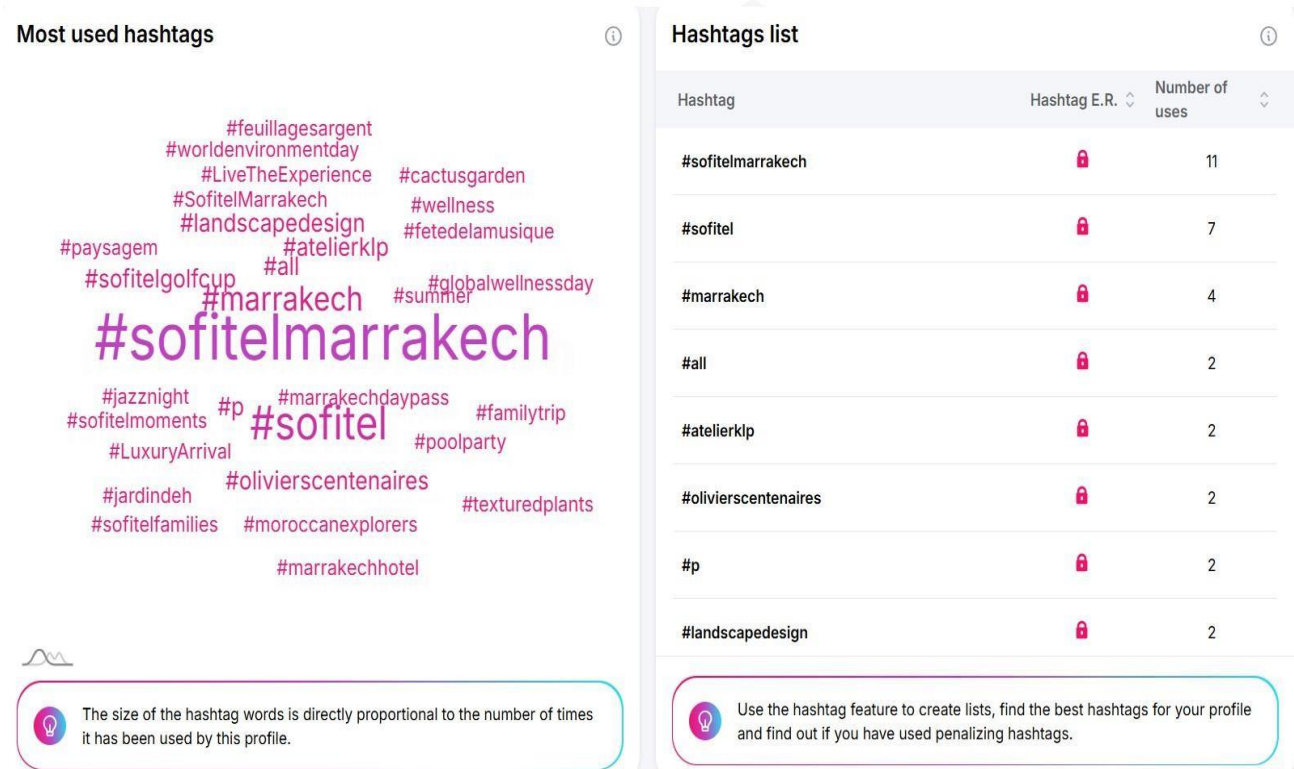


Table 3 : Summary of Instagram Analytics for Sofitel Marrakech , April–June 2025
Source: Author’s elaboration based on Instagram Analytics data (April–June 2025).

Metric	Value (April–June 2025)
Followers	51,300
Following	265
Total Posts	978
Average Likes per Post	2,300
Average Comments per Post	80
Engagement Rate	2.3%
Posting Frequency	3–5 posts/week
Top Hashtags Used	#SofitelMarrakech #LiveTheFrenchWay #LuxuryStay #Hivernage
Content Type	Wellness, events, nightlife, spa, pool, modern rooms
Bio Link	Linktree (website, booking, menu, events)

Content Style and Branding Identity

Sofitel Marrakech’s Instagram feed is **vibrant, youthful, and interactive**. Its content focuses on:

- 1. **Spa and wellness photography**, with relaxing tones and calming captions
- 2. **Event promotion**, such as DJ nights, pool parties, or brunch events
- 3. **Seasonal campaigns** (e.g., Ramadan specials, summer offers)
- 4. **User-generated content** and influencer collaborations
- 5. **French-Moroccan fusion in design and gastronomy**

Captions often use the brand slogan **“Live the French Way”** and blend English and French. The content tone is lifestyle-driven and accessible, aiming to attract both locals and international visitors looking for a modern luxury escape.

Engagement and Audience Interaction

With over 51,3k followers and regular posting, Sofitel Marrakech maintains a **strong online rhythm**. Its engagement rate (2.3%) is slightly below Royal Mansour’s but consistent with its broader target audience.

Interaction strategies include:

1. Frequent use of **Instagram Stories** for real-time engagement
2. Interactive features like polls, countdowns, and live event announcements
3. Highlight reels for **Spa, Dining, Rooms, Events, and Influencers**

Compared to more exclusive properties, Sofitel appears more **accessible and participatory** in its digital tone—more likely to tag users, reshare posts, and promote social interaction.

Strategic Positioning

Sofitel Marrakech positions itself as a **cosmopolitan luxury lifestyle hotel**, emphasizing modernity, well-being, and community. Its digital marketing approach reflects a brand that is:

1. **Energetic**: Frequent posts and active stories
2. **Inclusive**: Engagement with younger travelers, couples, and urban tourists
3. **Globally branded**: Strong integration with Accor's international style and standards

Rather than exclusivity, the focus is on **curated experiences**, connection, and luxury that feels alive and contemporary. Its strategy complements Marrakech's urban appeal and attracts a younger, experience-oriented segment.

5. Discussion and Results

This chapter presents a comparative discussion of the three case studies analyzed: **La Mamounia**, **Royal Mansour**, and **Sofitel Marrakech**. It explores how each luxury hotel in Marrakech leverages digital marketing—particularly through Instagram—to shape its competitive identity. The chapter also identifies strategic strengths, common challenges, and possible areas for improvement, based on the literature reviewed and the Instagram data collected through NinjaLitics.

5.1 Comparative Insights

The digital strategies of the three hotels clearly reflect their **brand positioning** and **target audiences** within the luxury tourism sector.

La Mamounia emphasizes heritage, timelessness, and international prestige. Its visual communication style is elegant and poetic, reflecting the hotel's century-old history and status as a cultural institution. Its Instagram content focuses on **aesthetic storytelling**—including architecture, lighting, and ambiance. This strategy creates a **dreamlike digital environment** that mirrors the hotel's offline

experience, targeting affluent travelers who value sophistication and tradition.

Royal Mansour, on the other hand, projects a tone of **discretion, intimacy, and refinement**. Its content focuses on artistic details, fine craftsmanship, and serene moments. Rather than high-volume engagement, Royal Mansour cultivates exclusivity and mystique. It avoids mainstream marketing practices, reinforcing its identity as a property created by royal commission for the most demanding clients. The hotel’s posts are emotionally rich but strategically minimalist, inviting only those who "recognize" its subtle codes.

Sofitel Marrakech offers a contrasting strategy, focusing on **vitality, wellness, and experiential luxury**. As part of a global brand (Accor), it maintains a vibrant and engaging online presence that appeals to younger, urban travelers. Its Instagram feed integrates events, influencer collaborations, spa promotions, and curated moments of joy and relaxation. The content is visually modern, diverse, and often interactive, reflecting a desire to be both aspirational and accessible.

These three approaches demonstrate that **Instagram is not used uniformly across the luxury sector**, but rather tailored to the core values and market positioning of each brand.

5.2 Competitive Digital Positioning

Table 4: A comparative framework highlights the strategic differences between the hotels:

Source: Author’s elaboration based on Instagram Analytics data

Strategic Element	La Mamounia	Royal Mansour	Sofitel Marrakech
Target Audience	Elite cultural travelers	Ultra-high-net-worth individuals	Modern luxury seekers (young adults, couples)
Digital Tone	Timeless, poetic, elegant	Subtle, intimate, minimalist	Energetic, vibrant, lifestyle- driven
Content Strategy	Architecture, ambiance, prestige	Artisanal detail, serenity, gastronomy	Wellness, nightlife, events, UGC
Engagement Style	Refined responses, warm tone	Low public interaction	Active interaction, promotions
Booking Integration	Direct links on profile	Website only, minimalist CTAs	Linktree: multiple conversion paths
Use of Influencers	Occasional collaborations	Rare/very selective	Frequent partnerships

This comparison shows that **digital positioning is not just about visibility**, but about how a hotel **curates its digital identity to match its offline experience**. While all three use Instagram as a key tool, they pursue different forms of value: **cultural capital** (La Mamounia), **exclusivity and privacy** (Royal Mansour), and **social lifestyle engagement** (Sofitel).

Such distinctions highlight the **maturity of digital marketing in Moroccan luxury hospitality**, where strategies are increasingly sophisticated and aligned with international branding standards.

5.3 Observed Best Practices and Weaknesses

1. Best Practices Identified

Across the three hotels, several effective practices in digital marketing can be highlighted:

1. **Consistent Visual Language:** Each hotel maintains a coherent visual identity. La Mamounia favors deep tones and architectural grandeur; Royal Mansour uses close-ups and soft palettes; Sofitel adopts bright, dynamic imagery. This reinforces brand recognition and emotional appeal.
2. **Storytelling and Cultural Anchoring:** All three brands embed elements of Moroccan heritage—zellige tiles, traditional rituals, riad architecture—into their content, enhancing **authenticity and destination branding**.
3. **High Production Quality:** The photography, editing, and design are all top-tier, reinforcing the sense of luxury and refinement.
4. **Strategic Hashtag Use:** All hotels utilize hashtags effectively for discoverability, often combining global luxury tags with local identifiers (e.g., #Marrakech, #LuxuryHotel, #MoroccoTravel).
5. **Booking Funnel Integration:** While varied in execution, each hotel makes use of Instagram bio links or CTAs to direct traffic toward reservations, pricing pages, or service menus.

• Common Weaknesses and Missed Opportunities

Despite the high quality of their digital marketing, certain gaps were identified:

1. **Limited Use of Video and Reels:** None of the hotels fully exploit Instagram’s evolving formats (e.g., Reels, live videos, 360° tours), which are favored by younger audiences and rewarded by the algorithm.
2. **Underrepresentation of Local Language:** Arabic and Darija are rarely used in captions or stories, which may reduce inclusivity and limit domestic audience engagement especially among Moroccan millennials and Gen Z.

3. **Sustainability Silence:** There is little to no communication around environmental initiatives, social responsibility, or green certifications topics that are increasingly relevant to luxury travelers globally.
4. **Minimal Behind-the-Scenes Content:** The human side of the hotel (staff stories, training, community involvement) is largely absent. Sharing this type of content can **humanize the brand** and build emotional loyalty.
5. **Lack of Crisis Communication:** None of the accounts show clear strategies for communicating during social or global disruptions. This is a vulnerability in an era where digital transparency is key to resilience.

These weaknesses suggest that, while Moroccan luxury hotels are visually strong and brand-driven, there is still **room for improvement in strategic depth, localization, and innovation**.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This dissertation has examined the strategic role of digital marketing—specifically through Instagram—in shaping the competitive positioning and brand perception of luxury hospitality establishments in Marrakech, Morocco. Through a literature review and a comparative case study involving **La Mamounia**, **Royal Mansour**, and **Sofitel Marrakech**, the research has demonstrated that digital marketing is no longer a supplementary tool but a **core mechanism for visibility, identity, and differentiation** in the global tourism sector.

The literature review provided a comprehensive foundation by first exploring the historical and economic significance of global tourism, then zooming in on Morocco's development path under Vision 2020 and Vision 2030. It showed that tourism today is increasingly shaped by **digital platforms**, consumer-generated content, and a demand for authenticity, personalization, and experiential value. Morocco's digital transformation in the tourism sector remains uneven, but major players—especially in Marrakech—are advancing rapidly.

The empirical analysis of the three selected hotels revealed that each uses Instagram in a way that **mirrors its brand DNA**:

1. **La Mamounia** reinforces its position as a world-renowned historical institution, relying on poetic, artistic storytelling and aesthetic grandeur.
2. **Royal Mansour** projects exclusivity and refined intimacy, favoring a minimalist, detail-oriented approach that aligns with its royal heritage.

3. **Sofitel Marrakech** embraces a vibrant, cosmopolitan tone that focuses on lifestyle, wellness, and social engagement.

The research also identified a **common commitment to visual excellence and brand coherence**, although with significant differences in content strategy, audience interaction, and use of platform features.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study confirms that **digital branding in tourism functions as an emotional and symbolic interface**, shaping how potential guests imagine and evaluate destinations before even making a booking. It also affirms the importance of Instagram not just for exposure, but for building **long-term relationships**, cultural narratives, and differentiated experiences.

6.2 Practical Implications for Moroccan Hospitality

This research has practical relevance for Moroccan tourism stakeholders, especially in the luxury hospitality segment. Several implications arise from the findings:

1. Digital Identity Must Reflect Core Brand Values

Luxury hotels cannot afford to approach digital marketing as merely a promotional activity. Instead, every post, visual, caption, or hashtag must reinforce a coherent and emotionally resonant brand story. The success of the three hotels studied lies in their ability to use Instagram as a **mirror of their real-life experience**, maintaining visual consistency and symbolic depth.

2. Digital Maturity Is a Competitive Advantage

Hotels that invest in high-quality content production, audience engagement, and platform-specific strategies gain clear advantages in brand visibility and trust. In a highly saturated market like Marrakech, digital differentiation is essential. Hotels that fail to engage effectively risk **falling behind**, especially with younger, digitally native travelers.

3. Platform Diversity Should Be Embraced

While Instagram is powerful, over-reliance on a single platform may limit reach. Future strategies should include integrated campaigns across **YouTube, TikTok, Google Travel**, and **email marketing**, especially for retargeting and personalized offers. Moreover, **website optimization** and **SEO** remain underused opportunities in the Moroccan context.

4. Local Cultural and Linguistic Integration Is Key

Surprisingly, despite being in Morocco, few of the studied hotels make meaningful use of **Arabic or Darija** in their content. This excludes domestic audiences and contributes to a perceived “foreignness” of luxury

hospitality. Incorporating local languages, music, rituals, and staff stories would enhance **inclusivity and local market engagement**.

5. Sustainability and CSR Communication Is Lacking

Modern travelers—especially from Europe and North America—are increasingly eco-conscious and socially aware. Hotels that showcase **green initiatives, community support, or cultural preservation efforts** can significantly enhance their digital reputation and emotional appeal. None of the studied hotels currently leverage this potential fully.

6. Alignment with Vision 2030 Is Essential

As Morocco advances its national Vision 2030 agenda centered on innovation, inclusion, and sustainability, luxury hotels must align their digital communication with these national objectives. This includes investing in **digital upskilling**, using data analytics for smarter marketing, and adopting **smart tourism technologies** (e.g., virtual tours, AI-based concierge, AR experiences).

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

While this dissertation contributes to academic and professional discussions on digital marketing in luxury tourism, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations:

1. Scope of Platforms

The research focused solely on Instagram, which—though central to visual branding—is only one part of a larger digital ecosystem. Including other platforms like TikTok, YouTube, TripAdvisor, or Google Travel could provide a more holistic picture of a hotel’s digital presence and performance.

2. Data Constraints

The study used **publicly available data** from NinjaLitics and did not have access to private performance indicators (e.g., advertising spend, conversion rates, customer segmentation). A more complete analysis would benefit from internal metrics provided by hotel marketing departments.

3. Sample Size

The study analyzed three hotels in a single city. While they offer meaningful diversity (local icon, royal commission, international brand), broader comparative studies—across regions, star ratings, or chains—would increase generalizability.

4. Customer Perspective Not Included

This research focused on brand-side content and strategy. Future studies could complement this approach with guest interviews, surveys, or sentiment analysis, providing insight into how customers perceive and respond to digital marketing efforts.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the above limitations and observations, future research can explore:

- a) Comparative digital strategies between Moroccan hotels and counterparts in **Dubai, Egypt, or South Africa**
- b) The role of **artificial intelligence and personalization** in luxury tourism marketing
- c) The impact of **influencer credibility and nationality** on hotel brand perception
- d) Studies on how Moroccan consumers engage with digital content, including preferences by age, region, and travel purpose
- e) Investigating how **augmented reality** or **virtual tourism tools** affect destination interest and emotional connection

Final Reflection

This study demonstrates that Instagram has evolved into more than a marketing channel—it is a strategic stage where luxury hotels perform their identity. In Marrakech, where the competition is intense and the expectations are high, what differentiates a five-star hotel is not just the softness of its linens or the opulence of its chandeliers, but how convincingly it tells its story online.

For Moroccan tourism to thrive in the digital era, stakeholders must embrace not just technology, but also storytelling, empathy, and innovation. By merging visual excellence with local authenticity, Morocco can position itself not only as a beautiful destination, but as a digitally intelligent and emotionally compelling brand on the global tourism map.

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