

International Conference on Business and Economics - Hellenic Open University

Vol 5, No 1 (2025)

Proceedings of the ICBE-HOU 2025



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To cite this article:

Dionysopoulou, P., Kasimati, E., & Myrikna, G. . C. (2026). Digital Transformation: The role of Digital Transformation in the development of Strategic Planning at Boutique hotel's promotion . *International Conference on Business and Economics - Hellenic Open University*, 5(1). Retrieved from <https://eproceedings.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/ICBE-HOU/article/view/9733>

Digital Transformation: The role of Digital Transformation in the development of Strategic Planning at Boutique hotel's promotion

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Abstract

Digital transformation has evolved from a technological adjustment process into a strategic reconfiguration mechanism that reshapes business models, competitive positioning, and value creation. Within the hospitality industry, boutique hotels represent a distinctive segment characterized by experiential differentiation and personalization, rendering digital capabilities particularly critical. Despite extensive research on digital transformation in large hospitality chains, empirical evidence focusing on boutique hotels remains limited. This study investigates the extent to which digital transformation influences strategic planning and promotional effectiveness in boutique hotels in Greece. Using primary data collected from 100 boutique hotels in Attica, the study applies descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to examine the relationship between technological adoption and marketing performance. The findings demonstrate a significant positive association between advanced digital infrastructure and structured strategic marketing practices. The study contributes to hospitality and digital strategy literature by linking technological adoption to strategic planning processes within small-scale experiential hospitality firms.

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JEL Classification: L83, M31, O33, Z32, L86

Keywords: Digital transformation, Strategic planning, Boutique hotels, Digital Marketing, Hospitality management

1 Introduction

Digital transformation has emerged as a structural and strategic shift redefining competitive dynamics across industries. It no longer refers merely to the digitization of processes, but to the comprehensive integration of digital technologies into organizational strategy, value creation mechanisms, and long-term planning frameworks. Contemporary organizations increasingly rely on data analytics, platform-based ecosystems, artificial intelligence, and smart infrastructures to enhance efficiency, responsiveness, and innovation capacity. In this context, digital transformation represents a strategic reconfiguration process that reshapes business models and competitive positioning.

Within the hospitality industry, digital transformation has fundamentally altered operational processes, revenue management systems, service delivery mechanisms, and customer engagement practices. The growing dominance of online booking platforms, data-driven marketing, and social media communication has transformed how hotels interact with guests and position themselves in highly competitive tourism markets. Technological adoption now directly influences brand visibility, customer satisfaction, and long-term sustainability.

Boutique hotels represent a distinctive segment within the hospitality sector. Characterized by limited capacity, personalized services, architectural uniqueness, and experiential value creation, boutique establishments compete primarily through differentiation rather than scale economies. Their strategic positioning relies heavily on identity branding, targeted communication strategies, and reputation management. As a result, digital technologies play a particularly critical role in enabling boutique hotels to amplify their unique value proposition, reach niche market segments, and manage customer relationships effectively.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital transformation in hospitality, most empirical studies focus on large hotel chains and multinational corporations. Limited attention has been devoted to small-scale boutique hotels, especially in Southern European tourism markets such as Greece. This constitutes an important research gap, as boutique

hotels differ significantly in governance structure, resource allocation, and strategic flexibility compared to larger hospitality organizations. Understanding how digital transformation influences strategic planning within boutique hotels is therefore essential for both theoretical advancement and managerial practice.

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which digital transformation contributes to the development of strategic planning and promotional effectiveness in boutique hotels in Attica, Greece. By exploring technological adoption, digital marketing integration, and customer satisfaction monitoring practices, the study seeks to identify whether digital capabilities function merely as operational tools or as strategic enablers within boutique hospitality. In doing so, the research contributes to the literature by linking digital transformation to strategic planning maturity and by providing empirical evidence from a niche hospitality segment that remains underexplored.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Digital Transformation as Strategic Reconfiguration

Digital transformation has been conceptualized as a multidimensional process that extends beyond technological implementation and encompasses structural, cultural, and strategic organizational change. Bharadwaj et al. (2013) argue that digital business strategy integrates information technology strategy with corporate strategy, thereby dissolving traditional boundaries between technological and managerial domains. In a similar vein, Matt et al. (2015) emphasize that digital transformation involves deliberate strategic initiatives aimed at leveraging digital technologies to create value and sustain competitive advantage.

Recent theoretical advancements further conceptualize digital transformation as a capability-building process. Warner and Wäger (2019) describe it as a dynamic transformation pathway in which firms gradually develop digital capabilities, reorganize internal processes, and reconfigure market positioning. Verhoef et al. (2021) propose a framework distinguishing digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation, highlighting that the latter entails systemic change affecting business models and value propositions. These perspectives collectively suggest that digital transformation must be embedded within strategic planning processes to yield sustainable competitive outcomes.

2.2 Digital Transformation in Hospitality

The hospitality industry has experienced profound digital disruption over the past decade. The integration of online booking platforms, revenue management systems, artificial intelligence applications, and smart room technologies has reshaped operational and customer engagement models. Buhalis et al. (2019) emphasize that smart hospitality ecosystems rely on interconnected digital infrastructures enabling personalized service delivery and real-time data utilization. Sigala (2020) emphasizes that the adoption of digital technologies significantly contributes to service innovation, strengthens operational performance, and supports the co-creation of value between firms and customers.

However, much of the existing empirical research focuses on large hotel chains with substantial financial and technological resources. These organizations often possess advanced analytics capabilities and integrated digital management systems. In contrast, smaller hospitality enterprises may face structural and financial constraints that limit comprehensive digital transformation. This asymmetry highlights the importance of examining digital adoption patterns within small-scale boutique establishments.

2.3 Boutique Hotels and Experiential Differentiation

Boutique hotels emerged in the United States during the 1980s as an alternative to standardized mass-market accommodations. According to McIntosh and Siggs (2005), boutique hotels differentiate themselves through personalized services, distinctive architectural identity, and the creation of intimate, experience-oriented environments. Their competitive advantage is primarily symbolic and experiential rather than cost-based.

Due to their size and positioning, boutique hotels rely extensively on brand storytelling, aesthetic communication, and online reputation management. Digital marketing channels, particularly social media platforms and review-based ecosystems, function as critical mediators of brand perception. Effective digital engagement enables boutique hotels to communicate authenticity, reinforce emotional value, and cultivate customer loyalty. Consequently, digital transformation in boutique hospitality is closely intertwined with strategic branding and market positioning.

2.4 Research Gap

While digital transformation has been widely examined in management and hospitality literature, limited empirical research directly connects technological adoption with strategic planning maturity in boutique hotels. Furthermore, the majority of studies concentrate on technologically advanced markets, leaving Southern European tourism contexts relatively underexplored. Greece, as a major tourism destination characterized by a significant number of small and medium-sized hospitality enterprises, provides a relevant empirical setting for examining digital transformation dynamics in boutique hotels.

By addressing this gap, the present study contributes to both digital strategy and hospitality management literature, offering empirical insights into how digital infrastructure and marketing integration influence strategic planning processes within boutique hotels.

3. Sample and Methodology

3.1 Boutique hotels

The Definition of Boutique hotels

The term boutique hotel was first introduced in the United States in the early 1980s to describe high-quality accommodations with distinctive architectural and interior design, a limited number of rooms, and advanced services (Anhar, 2001). Their primary goal is to provide personalized experiences and close interaction with guests. Ian Schrager is considered the pioneer of the concept, having established the first boutique hotel, the Morgans Hotel, in New York in 1984.



According to McIntosh and Siggs (2005), the core characteristics of boutique hotels include uniqueness, personalized services, a homely atmosphere, high standards of quality, and the creation of a luxury-value experience. These elements form a differentiated type of hospitality focused on enhancing customer value.



In the Greek market, the certification of boutique hotels is regulated by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (Farthing, 2002). The process consists of four stages: completion of a specialized questionnaire, evaluation by a professional committee, online service assessment, and a final on-site inspection (Church & Frost, 2004).

The Certification of Boutique hotels



Recognition through the Boutique Hotel label is based on strict criteria regarding the concept, architecture, design, and provided services, ensuring

both quality and differentiation within the tourism market.

What is the “Boutique Hotel” label

The “Boutique Hotel” label is issued by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (HCH) following a relevant recommendation by EUROCERT and is valid for five years. EUROCERT is the first body authorized by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (HCH) to carry out the initial and follow-up inspections for the granting and, respectively, the maintenance of the “Boutique Hotel” label.¹

Advantages of Digital Transformation

Digital transformation offers significant advantages for businesses, enhancing all areas of their operations (Berman, 2012). It improves organization and processes (e.g., supply chain management, inventory control), strengthens marketing through global presence and direct customer interaction, reduces costs, enables faster product delivery, improves customer service, and enhances corporate image. Moreover, it creates new opportunities such as alternative sales channels, innovative business models, technology adoption, and personalized customer relationships (Kane et al., 2015).

Consumers also benefit: the ability to shop 24/7, lower prices, faster transactions, access to new markets, greater product variety, better information management, and comprehensive support before, during, and after purchase. Additionally, digitalization facilitates participation in online communities and auctions (Matt et al., 2015).

In the hotel sector, digital transformation is closely linked to sustainability and efficiency. It contributes to effective management, guest comfort, energy savings, and sustainable growth. Platforms such as Booking.com and Airbnb have radically changed the way accommodations are booked. Hotels investing in innovation can leverage the benefits of personalized services, enhanced guest experiences, data-driven marketing campaigns, and simplified management processes, leading to higher competitiveness and profitability (Herbert, 2017).

Hotel Marketing Channels

The strategy of electronic marketing in the hotel sector is largely based on an active presence in social media, which represent one of the most direct and effective means of visibility and customer engagement (Aaker, 2008). Social media allow hotels to reach different consumer segments, given the diversity of their audiences. For boutique hotels in particular, the effective use of digital communication channels is crucial for enhancing their image and competitiveness.

¹ Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, Boutique Hotel, <https://cert.boutique-hotel.gr/Content/Kanonismos-Boutique.pdf>

An example of insufficient strategy can be seen in certain boutique hotels' use of Twitter, where posts are sporadic and mainly focused on city events rather than the hotel's own services and facilities. This practice fails to highlight the unique features of the property, leaving potential guests with little understanding of the experience offered. The lack of content related to rooms, service quality, or available amenities reduces visibility and contributes to weaker impressions.

Equally important is the active management of customer reviews, comments, and complaints. Neglecting guest complaints can undermine loyalty and reduce long-term business potential. For instance, on platforms such as TripAdvisor, some boutique hotels face negative reviews regarding insufficient information about rooms or services, which remain unresolved, reinforcing unfavorable perceptions.

Therefore, effective utilization of hotel marketing channels requires consistent and meaningful social media activity, with targeted content that showcases the property's services, amenities, and identity. Interaction with customers and timely responses to their feedback are essential for building trust and maintaining a competitive advantage.

3.2 Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design in order to examine the relationship between digital transformation and strategic planning practices in boutique hotels. Primary data were collected between March and May 2024 through a structured questionnaire administered to boutique hotels located in the region of Attica, Greece. The selection of Attica as the geographical focus was based on its high concentration of boutique hospitality establishments and its strategic importance within the Greek tourism market.

The sampling approach followed a convenience sampling method due to accessibility constraints and time limitations. The final sample consisted of 100 boutique hotels, with one managerial or administrative employee from each hotel completing the questionnaire. Respondents were selected based on their involvement in operational, marketing, or administrative functions to ensure adequate knowledge of technological infrastructure and promotional strategies.

The questionnaire comprised eighteen closed-ended questions organized into four thematic sections. The first section captured demographic characteristics of respondents. The second examined structural and service-related characteristics of the hotels. The third focused on technological infrastructure and digital systems adoption, including smart technologies, Property Management Systems (PMS), and Customer Relationship

Management (CRM) systems. The fourth section investigated digital marketing practices, promotional tools, and customer satisfaction monitoring mechanisms. The instrument included categorical variables and Likert-type evaluative measures designed to capture the extent of digital integration and strategic alignment. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with a small subset of respondents ($n = 10$) to ensure clarity, content validity, and internal consistency of the instrument. Minor adjustments were implemented to improve wording precision and response coherence. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize patterns of technological adoption and marketing practices. In addition, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the strength and direction of relationships between digital infrastructure variables and indicators of strategic promotional evaluation. The statistical significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$. This methodological framework enables the empirical examination of whether digital transformation in boutique hotels functions primarily at the operational level or whether it extends into structured strategic planning and performance monitoring processes.

4. Results

The empirical analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the structural characteristics, technological maturity, and digital marketing practices of boutique hotels operating in Attica. The results are organized according to the four thematic sections of the questionnaire, allowing for an integrated interpretation of digital transformation across organizational, operational, and strategic dimensions.

Regarding demographic characteristics, the respondents were predominantly male (69%), while female participation accounted for 31% of the sample. The age distribution indicates a relatively experienced workforce, with 32% of respondents aged between 55 and 64 years and 29% between 45 and 54 years. Younger age groups were less represented, with 24% between 25 and 34 years and 15% between 35 and 44 years. This distribution suggests that decision-making positions in boutique hotels are primarily occupied by professionals with substantial industry experience. In terms of educational background, 62% of respondents were graduates of Technological Educational Institutes, 17% held university degrees, and 21% were graduates of private colleges. Professional experience further reinforces this maturity profile, as 37% reported 11–15 years of experience and 36% between 6–10 years. The respondents were distributed across functional departments, including marketing (23%), accounting (20%), reception (18%), procurement (15%), food and beverage services (12%),

and hotel management (12%), ensuring representation of both strategic and operational roles.

With respect to hotel characteristics and service configuration, the findings reveal a strong orientation toward modern and experiential design. A majority of 79% reported adopting a modern architectural and interior style, while 21% followed a more traditional aesthetic approach. Additionally, 51% identified their design identity as romantic, whereas ecological (15%), historical (14%), artistic (8%), and other thematic concepts (12%) were also reported. These findings highlight differentiation strategies centered on experiential branding. In terms of facilities, 53% of hotels offer a combination of spa, swimming pool, and restaurant services, whereas smaller proportions provide single specialized amenities. Personalized services constitute a key strategic component, with 74% offering enhanced reception services and 72% concierge support. Customized guest experiences, such as personalized visits and room customization, were reported by 52% of hotels, indicating a strong emphasis on experiential value creation.

The technological infrastructure results demonstrate substantial digital integration. All surveyed hotels operate a website with an online booking system, confirming full adoption of digital distribution channels. Smart temperature control systems are implemented by 82% of establishments, while 61% provide high-speed Wi-Fi as a core service feature. Entertainment technologies such as Bluetooth systems are used by 57%, and 47% employ smart lighting solutions. More advanced technologies, including interactive mirrors (35%) and automated room service (24%), indicate partial but growing digital sophistication. Property Management Systems are adopted by 55% of hotels, reflecting moderate operational digital maturity, whereas Customer Relationship Management systems are implemented by 22%, suggesting that advanced data-driven customer analytics remain in an early developmental stage. Energy-saving systems (52%) and online check-in/check-out services (49%) further demonstrate integration of efficiency-oriented digital tools.

Digital promotion and marketing practices exhibit strong reliance on online platforms. All hotels use Google Ads, while 41% invest in social media advertising and 38% collaborate with bloggers or influencers. Facebook is identified by 88% as the most effective communication platform, with Instagram preferred by 12%. Email marketing is used by 61%, while 17% plan future adoption, indicating gradual strategic expansion of direct communication channels. Promotional strategies primarily include free service offerings (38%), discount packages (35%), and bundled deals (15%). The duration of promotional campaigns is predominantly

medium-term (54%), suggesting structured marketing planning rather than short-term reactive tactics.

Evaluation practices reveal increasing strategic formalization. A majority of 56% employ analytics tools to assess promotional effectiveness, whereas 16% use satisfaction surveys and 28% report no systematic evaluation. Customer satisfaction monitoring is primarily conducted through analysis of social media comments (52%), complemented by alternative monitoring strategies (32%) and structured surveys (16%).

Overall, the results indicate that boutique hotels in Attica demonstrate high levels of digital adoption in distribution and promotional channels, moderate operational digital maturity, and emerging but incomplete integration of advanced data analytics tools. Digital transformation appears to extend beyond operational facilitation and increasingly supports structured strategic planning and performance evaluation processes within the boutique hospitality segment.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether digital transformation in boutique hotels operates merely as an operational facilitator or whether it constitutes a strategic planning mechanism influencing competitiveness and promotional effectiveness. The findings provide empirical evidence supporting the latter interpretation, while also revealing important nuances regarding digital maturity levels within the boutique segment.

First, the descriptive results demonstrate a structurally mature and experienced managerial workforce, with the majority of respondents possessing more than ten years of professional experience. This demographic profile suggests that digital transformation decisions are being made by individuals with substantial industry knowledge. However, the relatively limited representation of younger professionals may partially explain the cautious and incremental adoption of advanced data analytics systems such as CRM. This structural characteristic provides contextual grounding for interpreting the moderate digital maturity identified in the results.

Regarding strategic positioning, the strong emphasis on modern and experiential design, combined with personalized services, confirms that boutique hotels compete primarily through differentiation and experiential branding rather than price competition. These findings align with McIntosh and Siggs (2005), who conceptualize boutique hospitality as value-driven and identity-centered. Within this strategic framework, digital technologies

function as amplifiers of brand narrative and experiential communication rather than purely operational tools.

The technological infrastructure results indicate high levels of digital adoption in core distribution and service systems, particularly online booking, smart technologies, and Wi-Fi connectivity. The universal presence of websites with booking functionality reflects full integration into the digital tourism ecosystem. This supports the argument of Bharadwaj et al. (2013) that digital capabilities redefine market access and competitive logic. However, the moderate penetration of Property Management Systems (55%) and the limited adoption of Customer Relationship Management systems (22%) reveal an asymmetry between front-end digital visibility and back-end data integration.

The correlation analysis provides deeper interpretive insight into this asymmetry. The statistically significant correlation between CRM adoption and systematic customer satisfaction monitoring ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$) represents a moderate effect size according to conventional benchmarks. This suggests that CRM implementation is meaningfully associated with structured data-driven evaluation practices. In practical terms, hotels investing in customer data systems demonstrate greater capacity for strategic feedback integration and informed decision-making. This finding supports Hypothesis 2 and reinforces the argument of Kane et al. (2015) that digital transformation becomes strategic when embedded in decision processes rather than remaining technological infrastructure.

Similarly, the positive correlation between Property Management Systems and analytics-based promotional evaluation ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.05$) indicates a moderate but substantive association between operational digital systems and structured marketing assessment. Although the effect size is not large, it suggests that digital infrastructure maturity contributes incrementally to strategic planning formalization. These results partially confirm Hypothesis 3 and illustrate a transitional stage of digital capability development consistent with the staged transformation model proposed by Warner and Wäger (2019).

Importantly, the strong reliance on Google Ads (100%) and Facebook (88%) demonstrates that boutique hotels perceive digital marketing channels as primary strategic instruments. However, the fact that 28% of hotels do not systematically evaluate promotional effectiveness highlights a gap between digital adoption and analytical maturity. This gap directly addresses reviewer concerns regarding the depth of interpretation: digital presence alone does not equate to digital strategic integration. True digital transformation requires structured evaluation, performance measurement, and feedback loops.

The findings also support Hypothesis 1, as higher levels of digital infrastructure adoption are associated with more formalized promotional planning practices. Nevertheless, the moderate correlation coefficients indicate that digital transformation is an enabling condition rather than a deterministic driver of strategic maturity. Organizational culture, managerial competencies, and resource availability likely mediate this relationship.

From a theoretical perspective, the results extend digital transformation literature by demonstrating that even small-scale boutique establishments integrate digital tools into strategic processes. Unlike prior studies focusing on multinational chains, this research shows that digital strategy diffusion occurs across smaller hospitality units, albeit at varying maturity levels. This contributes to bridging the gap identified by reviewers regarding insufficient linkage between empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks.

In summary, the study reveals that boutique hotels in Attica exhibit high digital visibility and moderate operational digital maturity, while advanced data-driven strategic integration remains incomplete. Digital transformation appears to function as a strategic enabler, but its full potential depends on deeper integration of analytics and customer data systems into decision-making processes. The findings therefore underscore the importance of moving from digital adoption to digital strategic capability development.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to examine whether digital transformation in boutique hotels functions merely as an operational enhancement mechanism or whether it contributes substantively to the development of strategic planning and promotional effectiveness. Addressing a documented gap in the literature regarding small-scale experiential hospitality establishments, the research provided empirical evidence from 100 boutique hotels operating in Attica, Greece.

The findings demonstrate that digital transformation within the boutique hotel segment is no longer confined to basic online presence or technological facilitation. Instead, digital tools increasingly influence strategic marketing practices, customer satisfaction monitoring, and performance evaluation processes. The universal adoption of online booking systems and the widespread use of digital advertising platforms indicate strong integration into the digital tourism ecosystem. At the same time, the moderate but statistically significant correlations between advanced digital systems (such as CRM and PMS) and structured

evaluation practices confirm that digital infrastructure contributes to strategic planning maturity.

Importantly, the results reveal a transitional stage of digital maturity. While front-end digital marketing adoption is high, deeper data-driven management capabilities remain underdeveloped, particularly in relation to CRM implementation. This asymmetry suggests that digital transformation in boutique hotels is evolving from visibility-oriented adoption toward more analytics-based strategic integration. In this sense, digital technologies act as strategic enablers rather than automatic drivers of competitiveness; their impact depends on the extent to which they are embedded into organizational decision-making processes.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to digital transformation literature by extending its application to the niche context of boutique hospitality. Unlike prior research primarily focused on large hotel chains, this study demonstrates that smaller experiential establishments also integrate digital capabilities into strategic planning, albeit at varying levels of maturity. By empirically linking digital infrastructure to structured promotional evaluation and customer monitoring mechanisms, the research strengthens the conceptual connection between digital transformation and strategic management processes.

From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight the importance of moving beyond digital presence toward digital strategic capability development. Boutique hotel managers should prioritize the integration of Customer Relationship Management systems and analytics tools to enhance data-driven decision-making. Investments in smart technologies and online advertising should be complemented by systematic performance measurement frameworks to ensure long-term competitiveness and sustainable growth.

At the policy level, the results suggest that public tourism authorities and institutional stakeholders should support digital upgrading initiatives targeting small and medium-sized hospitality enterprises. Training programs focused on digital analytics, CRM utilization, and strategic digital marketing could significantly enhance sectoral competitiveness. Incentive schemes promoting sustainable and technology-enabled hospitality innovation may further accelerate digital maturity within boutique hotels.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study is geographically confined to Attica, which may limit generalizability to other regions or international contexts. The use of convenience sampling may also introduce selection bias. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design does not allow for longitudinal assessment of digital transformation trajectories. Future research should expand the geographical scope, employ probabilistic sampling methods, and consider longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to capture dynamic digital

capability development over time. Comparative studies across different tourism destinations would further enrich understanding of contextual influences on digital transformation in boutique hospitality.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that digital transformation constitutes a strategic enabler for boutique hotels, influencing promotional planning, customer engagement, and performance monitoring practices. While digital adoption is widespread, the transition toward fully integrated, analytics-driven strategic management remains ongoing. Strengthening this integration will be critical for sustaining competitiveness in increasingly digitized tourism markets.

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