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A Study on the Use of Digital Marketing Tools in Accommodation Businesses: The Case of Bolu

Konaklama İşletmelerinde Dijital Pazarlama Araçlarının Kullanımı Üzerine Bir Araştırma: Bolu Örneği

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate how 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star accommodation businesses in Bolu utilise digital marketing tools. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the research examined the websites, social media accounts, and search engine activities of selected businesses. The findings indicate that these businesses effectively use their websites to facilitate customer decision-making and employ various digital marketing tools—particularly social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, as well as email marketing and search engine optimisation—to build sustainable relationships with their target audiences. The results highlight the strategic role of digital marketing in enhancing marketing efficiency and customer engagement within the accommodation sector. The study also offers practical implications for business managers and provides valuable insights for future research on digital transformation in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Digital marketing tools, Accommodation businesses, Social media, Content analysis, Hospitality industry.

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Öz: Bu çalışma, Bolu'daki 3 yıldızlı, 4 yıldızlı ve 5 yıldızlı konaklama işletmelerinin dijital pazarlama araçlarını ne ölçüde kullandığını değerlendirmek amacıyla yapılmıştır. İçerik analizine dayalı nitel bir araştırma tasarımı benimseyen çalışma, seçilen işletmelerin web sitelerini, sosyal medya hesaplarını ve arama motoru reklamlarını incelemiştir. Bulgular, bu işletmelerin müşteri karar verme sürecini kolaylaştırmak için web sitelerini etkili bir şekilde kullandıklarını ve hedef kitleleriyle sürdürülebilir ilişkiler kurmak için çeşitli dijital pazarlama araçlarını, özellikle Instagram ve Facebook gibi sosyal medya platformlarını, e-posta pazarlamasını ve arama motoru optimizasyonunu kullandıklarını göstermektedir. Sonuçlar, dijital pazarlama araçlarının konaklama sektöründe pazarlama verimliliğini artırmada ve müşteri bağlılığını güçlendirmede stratejik bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Çalışma ayrıca işletme yöneticileri için pratik çıkarımlar sunmakta ve konaklama sektöründe dijital dönüşüm üzerine gelecekteki araştırmalar için değerli bilgiler sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital pazarlama araçları, Konaklama işletmeleri, Sosyal medya, İçerik analizi, Konaklama sektörü.

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of information technologies and the widespread use of the Internet have profoundly transformed the marketing activities of accommodation businesses. In today's competitive environment, digital channels—such as websites and social media platforms—play an increasingly influential role in shaping consumer behaviour and redefining how businesses interact with potential customers (Ziakis and Vlachopoulou, 2020). Technological devices, including smartphones, tablets, computers, and Internet infrastructure, have become essential tools that digitalise the relationship between businesses and consumers. As customers now spend a significant portion of their time on digital platforms, the effective use of digital marketing tools has become critical for reaching and engaging potential customers (Gunelius, 2011).

In the accommodation industry, digital marketing encompasses all stages of the marketing process—from the creation of touristic products to post-sale services (Yücel and İnan, 2020). By enabling businesses to reach potential customers regardless of time and space, digital marketing contributes to enhancing brand awareness and customer loyalty. According to Khan et al. (2020), digital marketing primarily focuses on establishing sustainable relationships with customers, while Parker (2012) emphasises its role in gaining a competitive advantage.

Although several studies have examined the websites of accommodation businesses (Ateş and Boz, 2015; Çubukcu, 2010; Kara, 2023; Ünal and Çelen, 2018), there is still a lack of comprehensive research focusing on the evaluation of such websites in Bolu—an important tourism destination in the Western Black Sea region of Türkiye. This study addresses this research gap by analysing the websites and social media accounts of accommodation businesses in Bolu through content analysis. It aims to contribute to the academic literature and provide managerial implications for practitioners in the hospitality sector.

In this context, the study first reviews the relevant literature and then outlines the research purpose, study population, and data collection methods in the methodology section. Subsequently, the findings and conclusions are presented, followed by practical recommendations for accommodation businesses. As it focuses on a current and under-researched topic, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on digital marketing in the hospitality industry.

2. Literature Review

The increasing use of technological tools and the Internet has become an integral part of both individuals' daily lives and business operations. This development has driven tourism enterprises to invest more in technology and digitalisation (Nuskiya, 2018). In the tourism sector, consumers actively utilise online channels throughout the entire travel process—from pre-trip destination research to post-trip experience sharing on social media platforms.

The hospitality industry has been a pioneer in adopting innovative technologies to enhance customer experience and streamline operational processes (Buhalis and Cheng, 2020). In recent years, AI-enabled tools such as smart room systems, mobile applications, automated payment systems, and voice assistants have increasingly been used to improve service quality, enhance customer satisfaction, and gain a competitive advantage (Icibot, 2023). These innovations make travel experiences more seamless by enabling customers to easily access the services they desire.

Within this context, digital marketing tools have emerged as essential instruments that enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and increase customer satisfaction. They provide accommodation businesses with a variety of applications, ranging from customer service to marketing and sales (Çolak and Karakan, 2021). However, despite these advantages, several challenges are associated with digital marketing. For businesses, issues such as the rapid spread of negative feedback, imitation of campaigns, and rising competitive pressure are considered significant drawbacks. From the consumers' perspective, problems such as fraudulent websites and online payment scams can lead to financial and emotional harm (Yapıcı and Özden, 2021).

Previous studies have shown that when accommodation businesses utilise digital marketing tools effectively, they can achieve improved market visibility and enhanced customer engagement. Commonly used tools include email marketing, social media platforms, websites, and search engine optimisation (Avcı and Bilgili, 2020). Similarly, recent research conducted in Kosovo's tourism industry has demonstrated that digital marketing plays a crucial role not only in promoting destinations and increasing customer interaction but also in supporting the sustainable development of tourism through enhanced digital engagement among businesses, consumers, and industry experts (Veseli et al., 2025). In addition, recent studies emphasise that the broader process of digital transformation in the hospitality sector—through the adoption of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and big data analytics—significantly enhances operational efficiency, service personalisation, and guest satisfaction, further highlighting the strategic importance of digitalisation for competitiveness and long-term sustainability in tourism (Anwar et al., 2024).

Although these studies highlight the growing role of digital marketing in hospitality, there is still a lack of research focusing on regional contexts such as Bolu, a key tourism destination in the Western Black Sea region of Türkiye. Most existing studies (Aksaraylı and Özgen, 2010; Cha, 2009; Magano and Cunha, 2020; Veseli et al., 2025) address global or national trends, leaving a gap regarding how regional accommodation businesses implement digital marketing tools and the resulting impact on customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and sustainable tourism development.

Based on the literature gap and theoretical framework, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do accommodation businesses in Bolu utilise digital marketing tools, including websites, social media, email marketing, and search engine optimisation?
2. Which digital marketing tools are perceived as most effective by these businesses in enhancing customer engagement and operational efficiency?
3. How does the use of digital marketing tools contribute to sustainable tourism development in Bolu?

2.1. Email Marketing

E-mail marketing, an effective digital marketing tool, enables direct communication with existing and potential customers through e-mail to inform them about product details and promotions (Kaya, 2021). As a highly cost-effective marketing tool, e-mail offers businesses the opportunity to deliver brochures, visual materials, and various texts to consumers (Yücel and İnal, 2020). Typically, e-mails feature one or more images and are linked to the business's social media pages, making them one of the most commonly used methods (Lammenett, 2009). (Lammenett, 2009). The growing use of mobile devices has further facilitated businesses in reaching their target audience more easily through e-mail (Bulunmaz, 2016).

Recent advancements in automation and artificial intelligence now enable hyper-personalized e-mail campaigns, which significantly enhance customer engagement and drive higher conversion and retention rates (Muminov, 2024; Patil., 2024). AI-driven systems can tailor content in real time based on consumer behavior, purchase history, and interaction data, improving both marketing efficiency and customer satisfaction

Accommodation businesses widely utilize e-mail marketing because it allows them to quickly announce new services, offer personalized promotions, and maintain low-cost communication with customers (Ersoy and Gülmez, 2013; Wynne and Berthon, 2001). E-mail enables consumers to obtain information about desired services directly and rapidly by engaging with businesses. Studies on e-mail marketing within accommodation enterprises (Murphy et al., 2003) indicate relatively low response rates to customer e-mails, although both large-scale and small-scale hotels tend to perform better in this regard (Matzler et al., 2005). Similarly, Aksaraylı and Özgen (2010) found a low response rate in their study conducted in Turkey. These findings emphasize the importance of developing faster, more efficient, and customer-oriented e-mail response systems to enhance satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality sector.

2.2. Social Media Marketing

Social media platforms offer accommodation businesses a significant competitive advantage when they closely follow changing consumer trends and adapt their marketing strategies accordingly (Erdoğan, 2020). In these channels, businesses engage in both direct and indirect marketing activities to promote their products to existing and potential customers and to enhance brand awareness, a practice commonly referred to as social media marketing (Gunelius, 2011). Accommodation businesses, particularly chain hotels, utilize these platforms to provide services such as menu suggestions, weather updates, exchange rates, and last-minute offers (Yapıcı and Özden, 2021).

Moreover, social media enables businesses to gather customer feedback rapidly and facilitates effective communication, which helps to manage potential negative situations and enhance customer satisfaction. Research indicates that customers frequently share their positive or negative opinions about accommodation businesses on social media, and these reviews significantly influence decision-making when selecting destinations or services (Eryılmaz and Zengin, 2014; Karaca and Özbakır Umut, 2017; Volo, 2012). Consequently, maintaining an active and strategic presence on social media has become nearly essential for accommodation businesses to influence consumer preferences and strengthen brand loyalty (Arat and Dursun, 2016; Chung and Han, 2017; Kheiri and Nasihatkon, 2015).

Recent advancements in artificial intelligence have further enhanced social media's impact on tourism services by enabling real-time assistance in travel planning, improving service efficiency, personalizing offerings, and strengthening destination competitiveness (Gündüzyeli, 2025; Sharma et al., 2025). For accommodation businesses in regional destinations such as Bolu, leveraging these AI-powered tools can provide a significant competitive advantage by aligning marketing strategies with destination branding and sustainability objectives.

2.3. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Today, potential customers typically begin their accommodation search by visiting websites, prompting businesses to employ search engine optimization (SEO) tools to improve their rankings and better match customer search queries (Dixit and Agarwal, 2015). SEO helps accommodation businesses increase brand visibility and appeal by presenting information clearly and accessibly (Sert and Sağlam, 2023), while also supporting connections with consumers via additional digital marketing channels.

Paraskevas et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of planning, implementing, and analyzing SEO strategies effectively, and Pan (2015) highlighted its critical role in accommodation, transportation, and tourism. Research indicates that businesses leveraging SEO gain a significant competitive advantage in terms of customer preferences (Li-Hsing et al., 2010; Yüksel and Tolon, 2019; Zeren and Kaya, 2020).

Recent studies further emphasize the strategic role of artificial intelligence in SEO, where generative AI tools enhance search precision, automate optimization, and support personalized engagement, thereby increasing visibility and overall performance for accommodation businesses (Ziakakis and Vlachopoulou, 2024).

2.4. Website as a Digital Marketing Tool

In the tourism sector, accommodation businesses increasingly maintain websites to strengthen their digital presence and engage customers effectively. These websites serve as the outward-facing representation of the business and play a significant role in shaping the perceptions of potential customers (Cha, 2009; Kapan and Üncel, 2020). Therefore, websites should be designed to satisfy users conceptually, functionally, and aesthetically, as impressively designed, original, and up-to-date websites leave positive impressions and contribute to enhancing brand image (Yalçın and Bahar, 2019). Websites also function as key digital marketing tools, influencing sales figures and supporting sustainable customer relationships (Top, 2022; Yapıcı and Özden, 2021). Mobile-friendliness and regularly updated key contact information, such as addresses, phone numbers, and email details, further ensure effective communication and accessibility for users (Ercan, 2020).

Studies on hotel websites in Turkey reveal disparities in design and functionality. Yılmaz (2017) found that domestic hotel groups' websites generally include more elements, while foreign groups' sites are more user-friendly. Nevertheless, many accommodation businesses in Turkey still do not fully exploit their websites as effective digital marketing tools (Ateş and Boz, 2015; Karabağ et al., 2010; Özkan and Ulama, 2018), highlighting the need for continuous improvement to maximize engagement, customer satisfaction, and overall marketing effectiveness.

In line with this need, recent studies indicate that integrating artificial intelligence into accommodation websites can further enhance user experience and operational efficiency. AI-powered tools, such as chatbots and personalized recommendation systems, have been shown to improve customer engagement, satisfaction, and the overall quality of service delivery (Sousa et al., 2024; López-Naranjo, 2025).

3. Method

This study aims to evaluate the use of digital marketing tools (e-mail, social media, search engine optimization, and websites) by 3, 4, and 5-star accommodation businesses operating in Bolu province. In this study, a qualitative research method was employed. Qualitative research was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of phenomena within their natural contexts and provides rich, meaningful data that help elucidate the situational framework of the phenomenon (Merriam and Grenier, 2019). The data were collected through document analysis, which is an effective data collection technique that allows for the systematic examination of printed and electronic materials relevant to the research topic (Bowen, 2009).

The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis, which involves categorizing and interpreting data to identify key themes and patterns. Content analysis is a method that enables the systematic examination of texts and visual materials according to predetermined themes (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis process in this method consists of coding the data, determining the themes, organizing the codes and themes, and defining and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım, 1999). The data for the research were obtained by accessing the websites of the businesses through a scanning method between August and September 2024. This technique allowed the digital assets of accommodation businesses to be analyzed in their natural conditions, yielding meaningful findings.

The population of the study consists of 39 accommodation businesses with Tourism Business Certificates on the website of the Bolu Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism. From this universe, 19 businesses with 3, 4 and 5-star status were included in the sample. The sample selection was made because businesses in the high star category tend to invest more in digital marketing practices. These businesses stand out in terms of the intensity of their use of digital marketing tools. Indeed, Avcı and Bilgili (2020) state that the most frequently used digital marketing tools in accommodation businesses are email, social media, websites, and search engines.

During the data collection process, the websites of the businesses were accessed by a scanning method, and the data obtained were analysed directly within the framework of these four criteria. The survey model allows the researcher to analyse the object of study in its natural conditions without any intervention (Karasar, 2017: 109). The collected data includes elements such as address, telephone number, e-mail information, online reservation details, visual elements and social media links of the businesses. These data were systematically classified and tabulated, and converted into quantitative findings to contribute to the analysis process. To make the analysis process more understandable, each business in the sample was coded as BOTL1, BOTL2, BOTL3...BOTL19. To ensure reliability, coding consistency was checked with a second researcher.

4. Findings

One of the primary conditions for obtaining robust findings in scientific studies is the creation of a reliable and inclusive universe and sample. In this context, Table 1 provides descriptive information about the 19

businesses that constitute the study's sample. In this part of the study, the relevant accommodation businesses were named using the coding method explained in the method section.

Table 1: Descriptive Data on Accommodation Businesses

ROW	Business Code	Star Status of the Business	Location of the Business
1	BOTL1	5 stars	Mudurnu/ Bolu
2	BOTL2	5 stars	Karacasu/Bolu
3	BOTL3	5 stars	Mudurnu/ Bolu
4	BOTL4	5 stars	Bolu Mountain
5	BOTL5	4 stars	Center/ Bolu
6	BOTL6	4 stars	Karacasu / Bolu
7	BOTL7	4 stars	Kartalkaya / Bolu
8	BOTL8	4 stars	Center/ Bolu
9	BOTL9	4 stars	Center/ Bolu
10	BOTL10	4 stars	Gerede/Bolu
11	BOTL11	4 stars	Center/ Bolu
12	BOTL12	3 stars	Gerede/Bolu
13	BOTL13	3 stars	Center/ Bolu
14	BOTL14	3 stars	Kartalkaya / Bolu
15	BOTL15	3 stars	Abant Road/Bolu
16	BOTL16	3 stars	Gerede/Bolu
17	BOTL17	3 stars	Gerede/Bolu
18	BOTL18	3 stars	Center/Bolu
19	BOTL19	3 stars	Abant Road/Bolu

Based on the data in Table 1, it has been determined that four of the businesses that comprise the research sample carry out their activities in 5, seven in 4 and eight in 3-star status. The distribution of these businesses according to their location in Bolu is as follows: There are two businesses in Mudurnu, two in Karacasu, one in Bolu Mountain, six in Bolu City Center, two in Kartalkaya, four in Gerede, and two in Abant Road. It has been observed that these businesses' fields of activity and service standards are shaped according to their locations.

Table 2: Data on Websites of Accommodation Businesses

Qualities of Websites	Yes	No
Current and Sufficient Visual Elements	16	3
Location Information	11	8
Foreign Language Option	13	6
Address, Phone Number and Email	19	0
Social Media Links	13	6
Price and Online Reservation Information	19	0
Information on the timeliness of posts	9	10

The findings reveal notable associations between specific website features and potential outcomes in marketing effectiveness and customer satisfaction. Websites of 16 accommodation businesses that incorporated updated and visually rich content were more likely to generate a professional and credible first impression, thereby enhancing their appeal to prospective customers. In contrast, the absence of such visual elements in three businesses may hinder online visibility and reduce their competitiveness in the digital marketplace. Additionally, the presence of map-integrated location information in 11 businesses facilitates easier access for tourists, contributing to a more seamless user experience and potentially increasing booking intentions. Conversely, the lack of this feature in eight businesses may lead to navigational difficulties and diminished customer trust.

Since the target audience consists of local and international tourists, websites with multiple language options (13 businesses) are better positioned to communicate effectively with global audiences, thereby

enhancing market accessibility. On the other hand, because six businesses did not offer multilingual support, they may lose potential foreign customers due to communication barriers.

Given that all businesses provided contact details and online booking opportunities, this positively affects customer convenience and booking decisions, strengthening digital interaction. However, since six businesses lacked social media links on their websites, they fail to integrate web and social media marketing effectively, which may reduce audience engagement and brand visibility.

Because only nine businesses maintained up-to-date content, these businesses are more likely to gain trust and ensure customer satisfaction, whereas outdated content in ten businesses can mislead tourists or create negative perceptions, potentially resulting in loss of reputation and reduced customer loyalty.

Table 3: Data on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Usage

ROW	Business Code	Is Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Used?	
		Yes	No
1	BOTL1	✓	
2	BOTL2	✓	
3	BOTL3	✓	
4	BOTL4	✓	
5	BOTL5	✓	
6	BOTL6	✓	
7	BOTL7	✓	
8	BOTL8	✓	
9	BOTL9	✓	
10	BOTL10	✓	
11	BOTL11	✓	
12	BOTL12	✓	
13	BOTL13		✓
14	BOTL14	✓	
15	BOTL15	✓	
16	BOTL16		✓
17	BOTL17	✓	
18	BOTL18	✓	
19	BOTL19	✓	
Total		17	2

The data on the use of search engine optimization (SEO) by the businesses that make up the study sample are summarized in Table 3. SEO, one of the basic building blocks of digital marketing, supports businesses' efforts to rank high in search engine results. During the data collection process, search were conducted using keywords such as "Bolu hotels, Bolu Province Accommodation, Bolu Winter Tourism, Bolu Plateau Tourism" on Google and Yandex. The results revealed that 17 of the accommodation businesses appeared on the first page and at the top of search results, while two were listed on later pages.

It was observed that all hotels appearing on the first page were 4- or 5-star businesses, whereas the two hotels ranked on later pages were 3-star. This disparity can be explained by the fact that higher-rated hotels generally possess stronger technical infrastructure and greater financial capacity, allowing them to invest more effectively in professional SEO services and digital marketing strategies. As a result, these hotels achieve higher rankings, attract more website traffic, and enhance their brand recognition among both domestic and international tourists.

However, ranking high in Google search results may not fully reflect SEO success. Factors such as content quality, technical performance, mobile compatibility, user experience, and link authority should also be considered when evaluating SEO effectiveness (Sali, 2025: <https://www.ideasoft.com.tr/kullanici->

deneyimi-ve-seo/). Although appearing on the first page may indicate general visibility, a more comprehensive evaluation is necessary for an accurate assessment of SEO performance.

Table 4: Data on Social Media Presence

ROW	Business Code	Instagram	Facebook	X (twitter)
1	BOTL1	✓	✓	
2	BOTL2	✓	✓	
3	BOTL3	✓	✓	
4	BOTL4	✓	✓	
5	BOTL5	✓	✓	✓
6	BOTL6	✓	✓	
7	BOTL7	✓	✓	✓
8	BOTL8	✓	✓	✓
9	BOTL9		✓	
10	BOTL10	✓	✓	
11	BOTL11	✓	✓	✓
12	BOTL12			
13	BOTL13	✓	✓	
14	BOTL14	✓	✓	✓
15	BOTL15	✓	✓	
16	BOTL16	✓	✓	
17	BOTL17	✓	✓	
18	BOTL18	✓	✓	
19	BOTL19	✓		
Total		17	17	5

The data on the use of social media channels by the 19 enterprises that constitute the study's sample are given in Table 4. Three popular social media channels in Türkiye and the world were analyzed during the data collection. The analysis of social media usage among the 19 accommodation businesses reveals that Instagram and Facebook are the most actively used platforms, while X (Twitter) remains significantly less preferred. This pattern can be attributed to the visual and interactive nature of Instagram and Facebook, which are more suitable for promoting tourism experiences through photos, videos, and customer engagement.

Data show that 17 of the 19 businesses have active Instagram and Facebook accounts, indicating that these channels are prioritized to enhance visibility and interaction with potential guests. In contrast, only five businesses maintain an X (Twitter) presence, suggesting that this platform's text-oriented structure and relatively lower engagement potential in the tourism sector make it less appealing.

The differences in platform preference reflect the marketing strategies and target audiences of the enterprises; accommodation businesses tend to focus on channels that allow stronger visual storytelling and emotional connection, which are essential for attracting tourists. Accordingly, Instagram and Facebook serve as primary platforms for digital engagement due to their capacity for visual storytelling and emotional resonance, whereas the restricted utilization of X (formerly Twitter) may limit real-time interaction and the potential to reach wider audiences.

Table 5: Data on Social Media Accounts

ROW	Business Code	Instagram			Facebook	
		Follow	Follower	Post	Follower	Post (Abum)
1	BOTL1	3.205	17.700	1.319	4.000	1.450
2	BOTL2	618	36.300	2.785	9.300	1.635
3	BOTL3	4	15.100	1.273	6.200	1.419
4	BOTL4	96	38.900	1.243	1.600	115
5	BOTL5	3.085	2.113	135	1.100	2
6	BOTL6	481	3.820	524	1.300	306
7	BOTL7	7	14.9000	259	11.000	389
8	BOTL8	106	1.983	106	2.600	591
9	BOTL9	Unreachable	Unreachable	Unreachable	8	3
10	BOTL10	156	1.290	156	1.200	14
11	BOTL11	848	31.800	104	2.100	53
12	BOTL12	Unreachable	Unreachable	Unreachable	Unreachable	Unreachable
13	BOTL13	13	185	65	2.000	23
14	BOTL14	612	12.000	36	20.000	2.094
15	BOTL15	556	1.123	15	2.000	8
16	BOTL16	712	470	26	63	36
17	BOTL17	211	5.685	303	680	12
18	BOTL18	46	61	50	193	10
19	BOTL19	1	29.100	51	Unreachable	Unreachable
Total		10.757	346.630	8.450	65.344	8.160

The analysis of Table 5 indicates that Instagram is the dominant social media platform among accommodation businesses in Bolu, with a total of 346,630 followers across 19 businesses, demonstrating its effectiveness in reaching and engaging audiences. BOTL7, with 149,000 followers, stands out likely because it is part of a large hotel group, which enhances visibility through stronger brand recognition. In contrast, BOTL9 and BOTL12, which lack Instagram data, may have limited digital activity, potentially restricting their customer engagement.

High posting frequency and active content management also contribute to visibility, as seen in BOTL2, which combines frequent posts (2,785) with a strong follower base (36,300)—suggesting that consistent interaction drives engagement. On Facebook, BOTL14's high activity (20,000 followers, 2,094 posts) indicates effective utilization of the platform, while BOTL9's minimal presence (eight followers, three posts) reflects weak digital marketing performance.

The findings indicate that 5-star and 4-star accommodation businesses have more followers and posts on Instagram and Facebook compared to 3-star hotels. This disparity is likely explained by the fact that higher-rated hotels generally possess stronger technical infrastructure and greater financial capacity, allowing them to invest more effectively in digital marketing.

Overall, these findings suggest that accommodation businesses with strong technical infrastructure, strategic content planning, and consistent posting schedules achieve higher levels of digital engagement. On the other hand, enterprises lacking systematic social media management fail to fully exploit the marketing potential of these channels. Therefore, maintaining active, up-to-date, and visually appealing social media accounts emerges as a critical factor in enhancing the digital competitiveness and brand recognition of accommodation businesses.

5. Conclusion

Digital marketing has emerged as an effective strategy for all stakeholders in today's tourism sector. Accommodation businesses can utilize digital marketing tools to promote their products (Buhalis and Main, 1998), offer personalized services (Ersoy and Gülmez, 2013), and achieve key advantages such as operational efficiency, cost savings, and customer satisfaction (Çolak and Karakan, 2021). In this context,

the main objective of the present study is to evaluate the extent to which 3-, 4-, and 5-star hotel businesses operating in Bolu utilize digital marketing tools. A total of 19 accommodation businesses were included in the sample, and their practices were examined based on four main criteria adapted from the study by Avcı and Bilgili (2020): e-mail marketing, social media activity, search engine optimization (SEO), and the quality of their websites.

According to the findings, all businesses included essential contact elements on their websites, such as address, telephone number, e-mail, pricing information, and online reservation options. This result is consistent with the findings of studies by Çavuş and Kadirhan (2022) and Yapıcı and Özden (2021), which examined the digital marketing practices of accommodation businesses in various regions, including Mersin, Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, and Mardin. However, compared to the aforementioned studies, the lower prevalence of map-supported location information and multilingual website options among hotels in Bolu indicates a situation related to their customer profile—specifically, the predominance of domestic visitors. This finding supports Buhalis's (2000) eTourism framework, which emphasizes that levels of digital adaptation are largely shaped by market structure and visitor origin.

An analysis of search engine results revealed that the websites of 17 businesses ranked highly for specific keywords. This indicates that the businesses place importance on SEO practices and have developed successful strategies in this regard. This finding aligns with Pan's (2015) views on the impact of SEO on online visibility and click-through rates, and it is also consistent with Cha's (2009) observations that effective online visibility is directly associated with customers' booking intentions.

Another significant finding from the research relates to the use of social media by accommodation businesses. It was found that the vast majority of businesses actively use Instagram and Facebook platforms, with Instagram being the dominant one. In contrast, the usage rate of X (formerly known as Twitter) was found to be quite low. This can be explained by the fact that X is primarily used for discussions on serious topics, and hotel businesses' target audience tends to use this platform less frequently. This pattern shows clear consistency with the social media engagement model proposed by Yapıcı and Özden (2021), which emphasizes the role of visually oriented platforms in tourism marketing.

Overall, the study reveals that the accommodation businesses included in the research are aware of the importance of digital marketing tools, provide necessary information on their websites, implement successful SEO strategies, and use social media platforms, particularly Instagram and Facebook, effectively. These findings largely align with the results of similar studies in the literature (Cha, 2009; Çolak and Karakan, 2021; Kapan and Üncel, 2020; Pan, 2015; Sert and Sağlam, 2023; Yapıcı and Özden, 2021). Furthermore, the study offers a meaningful perspective on the digital marketing performance of accommodation businesses in Bolu, an important tourism destination in the Western Black Sea region.

The main limitation of this study is that it was conducted within a limited population in Bolu province, and the sample only included 3, 4, and 5-star businesses. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Additionally, the fact that the digital marketing criteria used were restricted to specific parameters highlights the need for more comprehensive analyses.

Future research could specifically examine the relationships between digital tool diversity and customer engagement levels using quantitative or mixed-method approaches. Additionally, research should aim to enhance the theoretical understanding of digital tourism marketing by investigating the effects of digital marketing strategies on customer behavior, perceived service quality, and destination loyalty in regional tourism contexts. Exploring the interplay between digital engagement and strategic performance is expected to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive framework for effective digital tourism marketing.

Future research should consider working with larger samples that cover different regions, compare businesses across different star categories, and evaluate various aspects of digital marketing (such as digital advertising, content marketing, and customer review management). Furthermore, incorporating primary data (such as interviews with business managers) alongside secondary data could contribute to obtaining more in-depth findings.

It is recommended that accommodation businesses include map-supported location information, foreign language options, and social media links on their websites; create user-friendly designs; and regularly update their website content. Additionally, expanding their social media presence beyond Instagram and Facebook to include platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, or LinkedIn would be beneficial for reaching a broader potential customer base.

In conclusion, it is crucial for accommodation businesses to use digital marketing tools effectively and holistically in order to gain a competitive advantage, increase brand awareness, and enhance customer satisfaction. This study provides valuable theoretical and practical contributions to the sector by revealing the current digital marketing status of accommodation businesses in Bolu.

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