

# Experience Economy

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## Experience Economy and Digital Marketing Strategies: Their Impact on Hotel Competitiveness through Customer Engagement

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### Abstract

Consumers are increasingly demanding memorable stays, not just regular hotel rooms, and are actively competing for hospitality in West Java. Although different strategies have been enacted, a gap in the literature exists regarding customer engagement as a mediating variable between strategic endeavors and hotel competitiveness. This paper aims to analyze the impact of experience economy strategies and digital marketing strategies on the competitiveness of hotels directly and indirectly through customer engagement. The population of research includes 320 three- to five-star hotels located in West Java. We estimate a total annual guest population of around 57,600, based on estimates of 15 guests per hotel per month each year. We selected 400 respondents using Slovic's formula with a 5% margin of error and a multistage sampling technique. Data were analyzed through the SEM-PLS method. The results demonstrate that both approaches improve hotel competitiveness (both directly and indirectly via the strong mediating effect of customer engagement, defined as partial mediation). These results corroborate the vital role of experiential and digital strategies in driving a customer-centric mindset that aligns with a hotel's competitive advantage. This study provides theoretical contributions to the hospitality management literature and practical implications for hotel managers in West Java to enhance competitiveness through experience-oriented and digital tactics.

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## 1. Introduction

The sector of tourism is one of the contributors to local and national economic growth; therefore, the hospitality industry in Indonesia, both locally and nationally, should be a large factor of the economy, especially in major tourist destinations like West Java. In the context of the growing dynamism of competitive forces in the hospitality industry, hotels are expected to offer quality service that comes with added value, distinguishing themselves from rivals. In this context, one approach is growing in importance—the application of the experience economy (a marketing strategy that takes the customer experience to another level, creating memories and feelings). Pine & Gilmore (2011) introduced this concept, explaining that consumers no longer buy products or services but experiences instead.

West Java, as one of the provinces with the most tourism contributions and visits in Indonesia, presents various attractive tourism sectors, either in nature, culture, or culinary. Tourists in Bandung, Bogor, Cirebon, and Pangandaran are the most popular tourist targets, whether they are domestic or foreign tourists. The hospitality industry in West Java has grown in response to this unprecedentedly large number of tourist visits. Based on Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data, the number of star-rated hotels has increased dramatically in the province over the past five years, with the most significant increase in 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star hotels. This phenomenon is clearly demonstrated in Table 1, where there is an increase in the number of star-rated hotels from 269 in 2019 to 315 in 2023, with a marked increase from 3-star to 5-star rated hotels. Nevertheless, the average room occupancy rate (OR) is still held below the optimal limit, at the 41–55% range, illustrating that hotel competitiveness in the region awaits improvement, especially from the viewpoint of marketing and customer experience. This concern is similarly apparent in the OR data in Table 1, which demonstrates a dramatic drop in 2020 due to the pandemic and an incomplete rebound by 2023. The scenario further compels the need for innovative marketing approaches focusing on experience creation and the use of digital technology.

**Table 1.** Development of Star-Rated Hotels and Room Occupancy Rates (TPK) in West Java (2019–2023)

Year	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star	Total Hotels	Average Room Occupancy Rate (%)
2019	47	61	110	38	13	269	55.3
2020	48	62	113	41	13	277	30.2
2021	49	64	118	44	14	289	41.7
2022	50	66	125	47	15	303	49.8
2023	52	68	130	49	16	315	53.4

Source: Statistics Indonesia (BPS) West Java Province, West Java Hotel Statistics 2023

Digitalization has emerged as one of the determinant factors transforming the face of hotel marketing with the advent of technology and the development of social media platforms. Digital marketing methods—via social media, online reservation sites, visual content, and digital customer reviews—have already become vital channels to establish communication with prospects and improve hotel brand visibility. Digital marketing has been shown to be an efficient way to build market reach and enhance customers' loyalty (Chaffley & Smith, 2022; Solomon et al., 2020). But when the experience promised by a hotel doesn't match what the guest expected from interacting with digital media, then that gap between promotion and the reality of what a guest actually experiences can turn around and bite hoteliers.

Customer engagement in this context acts as an important mediating variable that links implemented marketing strategies and customers' perceptions of hotel competitiveness. Customer engagement is not just the reflection of customers' interest in hotel services but also

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shows their level of loyalty, advocacy, and active participation in shaping the overall brand image. For example, Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek et al. (2014) highlight the significant impact of customer engagement as a mediator in improving performance for service-oriented firms. However, there are no strong studies that look at the real-world situations in emerging tourist spots with millions of hotel rooms, like those in Indonesia, to connect these ideas in a complete way between the experience economy, digital marketing, customer engagement, and hotel competitiveness.

Most existing research has looked at either how well digital marketing works Leung et al. (2024); Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) or how experiential strategies Neuhofer et al. (2015) work on their own, without exploring how these experiential strategies can work together with digital marketing strategies to enhance customer engagement. For instance, emphasized the role of social media in forming customer perception of hotels, and Pine & Gilmore (2011) and Walls et al. (2011) highlighted the significance of experiences as a value differentiator in hospitality services. Additionally, the literature regarding the combination of strategies for innovation in hotel management remains scant, with few studies identifying hotel competitiveness as the affected variable (Harrington et al., 2012; Sigala, 2019). Consequently, this paper reveals a theoretical and practically relevant niche that must be filled to comprehend the new drivers of modern-day marketing in a fast-changing hospitality industry, especially in tourism markets that are increasingly geomorphic and oriented towards experiences.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effect of the experience economy and digital marketing strategies on hotel competitiveness with customer engagement as a mediating variable. The findings of this study have not only enriched the existing literature of service marketing and tourism but also have practical implications for hospitality industry practitioners in developing more holistic, affective, and digital marketing strategies. This study has scientific merit because (1) it provides a comprehensive conceptual model integrating experiential and digital marketing dimensions and (2) it contributes to the body of knowledge about customer engagement as a mediating role in the effectiveness of marketing strategies for enhancing hotel competitiveness.

## 2. Literature Review

### Experience Economy Strategy on Hotel Competitiveness

A more relevant strategy in the current era of tourism has been the experience economy strategy. (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) have explained that firms that are able to create memorable experiences along four dimensions—entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism—will have an enduring competitive advantage. Especially in an oversaturated and competitive market, unique, immersive experiences are considerable value-adds for guests within the hospitality space. Customer utilization of experience-based services has been found to build loyalty to a hotel and strengthen its brand image (Oh et al., 2007; Walls et al., 2011).

Previous studies highlight the advantages that hotels that implement aspects of the experience economy into their operation and services experience over those with a more functional focus (Ali et al., 2016; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). In the ever-evolving landscape of the global tourism industry, hotels have shifted their paradigm from accommodation provision to creating lasting experiences that yield emotional capital for customers. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis in this study, which is grounded in this review:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The experience economy strategy has a positive and significant effect on hotel competitiveness.

### Digital Marketing Strategy on Hotel Competitiveness

With the rapid development of information technology and the change in consumer behavior, the digital marketing strategy becomes an essential part of enhancing the hotel's competitiveness. Social media, search engines, websites, and e-mail marketing—part of the sphere of digital marketing—give hotel online consumers direct and measurable access to hotels, enabling stronger brand positioning, direct booking growth, and long-term relationships with guests (Nurtirtaway et al., 2021; Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021; Singh et al., 2024). Optimizing digital platforms, such as responsive websites and online booking systems, increases conversion rates and customer loyalty López-Gamero et al. (2023), and social media offers personal interactions that enrich the customer experience (Arief et al., 2024). Moreover, Sigala (2018) further highlighted how customer data management through digital strategies could not only improve the quality of the decision-making process but also help bolster competitiveness.

Moreover, it has been found in recent studies that digital strategies can be considered as advanced instruments for the production of information within the frame of the company's product life cycle that add a new dimension to the offering of promotion. According to Amilkotta et al. (2024), hotels that actively make efforts to adopt digital channels through these platforms tend to experience a better rate of occupancy as well as long-term repeat business. The hospitality industry finds digital marketing as one of the key elements to create sustainable competitive advantage in the ever-changing world of global rivalry. In this review, the hypothesis is proposed:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Digital marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect on hotel competitiveness.

### Experience Economy Strategy on Customer Engagement

This meant they focused more on retention and offered their users deep and memorable experiences that trained them to retain their emotional engagement and loyalty under the umbrella of the Experience Economy strategy. As Pine & Gilmore (2011) note, consumer experiences can involve things like customized services, a distinct environment, and emotional connections that result in memorable moments. According to Yan et al. (2024), real-world experiences could also be realized to drive customer engagement, in which customers were having closer relationships with brands and being repetitive in their utilization.

This strategy is particularly pertinent in a hospitality context, as hotels that win at creating memorable experiences tend to be more effective at engaging repeat guests and reinforcing long-term ties (Agapito & Sigala, 2024). In addition to providing accommodation facilities, hotels create experiences that add value for customers who view their services: According to research by J. Kumar et al. (2024) the deeper the experience, the greater the impact on customers attitudes (what they will say, feel, or do, which in turn links back to increased satisfaction or engagement—what is perceived or the actual experience). Additionally, instances of positive customer experiences typically result in good recommendations and brand loyalty, both of which influence the hotel's popularity and ultra-competitiveness. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** The Experience Economy strategy has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement.

### Digital Marketing Strategy on Customer Engagement

Digital marketing strategy consists of utilizing technology and digital platforms to foster better relationships with customers, access new markets, and improve customer interaction and engagement. Digital marketing channels, including social media, search engines, and email marketing, enable companies to engage with consumers more directly than ever before and

measure the efficacy of these communications (Fahimah & Ningsih, 2022). Research by Leung et al. (2024) shows that hoteliers who actively employ techniques associated with digital marketing can make proactive use of these touchpoints to establish more personalized and responsive customer relationships, which contributes to increased levels of grassroots engagement. Moreover, according to Felix & Rembulan (2023), digital marketing is characterized by the ability to personalize promotions according to customer preferences, which helps enhance customer engagement and loyalty towards the brand.

Digital marketing strategies can enhance customer relations in the hospitality sector by empowering more intensive two-way communication, assisting in the speed of response to customer needs, and improving brand image. Based on a study by Unami & Darma (2021), hotels using digital platforms, including social media and interactive websites, are able to develop more connected experiences and personalize their services, resulting in greater customer engagement. On this basis, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Digital marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement.

#### **Customer Engagement on Hotel Competitiveness**

Customer engagement is a key contributor to hotel competitiveness; greater customer engagement can lead to greater emotional attachment to the hotel and greater customer loyalty. Khalifa et al. (2022) found that high customer engagement can cause customers to interact more intensely with the brand, leading to perceptions of higher service quality and more satisfying experiences. Iglesias et al. conducted this research. This relationship also suggests that intensive engagement with customers results in stickier customers, hence leading to more loyalty, which in turn can help a hotel bolster its competitive positioning in a market that is increasingly saturated (Almeida & Campos, 2022). Furthermore, Khoi & Le (2022) highlight the significance of constructive consumer interaction as it aids in not only maintaining customer databases but also providing more repeat visits and consumer recommendations to the hotel.

In the context of the hospitality industry, customer engagement can be viewed as enhancing hotel competitiveness through better brand reputation and more memorable customer experiences. According to a study by Hong et al. (2023), hotels that are successfully able to build emotional engagements with customers generally find higher satisfaction levels and are more resistant in a competitive marketplace. Research, such as that from Bouachra et al. (2024), suggests that customer engagement (an interaction modality of the customer-hotel relationship), in the form of direct customer engagement through social media or loyalty programs, strengthens the customer-hotel relationship, which can be leveraged to improve the competitiveness of the hotel. Based on these results, we postulate the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Customer engagement has a positive and significant effect on hotel competitiveness.

#### **Mediating Effect of Customer Engagement**

In general, customer engagement is considered a significant mediating variable for marketing strategies and customer experience effects toward brand competitive advantage, especially in the hospitality industry context. Customer engagement, as Manosuthi et al. (2021), forms a critical part of establishing enduring relationships with consumers, facilitated by favorable views of the marketing approach and brand experience. According to Ghonim et al. (2024), an experience economy strategy offers an emotional experience for customers, allowing for an increase in the company's engagement with its consumers, ultimately achieving a greater level of customer loyalty and competitiveness for the company. Haryanto & Alshoushan (2025)

further support this when they state that memorable experiences contribute to emotional engagement, leading to stronger loyalty and repeat purchase decisions.

Conversely, the indirect impact of digital marketing strategies on competitiveness through customer engagement as a mediator has also been explored. Leung et al. (2024) also mention that digital strategies help hotels engage with customers in a more intensive two-way communication way with personalized content, which creates higher engagement. According to a study conducted by Japström et al. (2025), active digital interactions create a meaningful and immersive experience with the brand that enriches the emotional bond. According to Naparin (2025), the key link between digital marketing effectiveness and brand competitive success is customer engagement. Taking these findings into account, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1:** Customer engagement mediates the effect of the experience economy strategy on hotel competitiveness.

**H2:** Customer engagement mediates the effect of digital marketing strategy on hotel competitiveness.

Considering the literature reviewed, the conceptual framework of this research is proposed, organizing the variables being analyzed in a systematic and comprehensive way. This theoretical framework shows how important theories and previous studies connect to explain how experience economy strategy and digital marketing strategy lead to customer engagement, which helps hotels compete better. Moreover, customer engagement mediates the customer-oriented strategies adopted by retail firms to improve their competitiveness, which is also added to the framework. This approach allows the study to both test the direct linkages between variables and to explore the potential mediators that may further strengthen or clarify the pathways of influence. A model is a framework that gives a theory for underlying hypothesis tests as well as guidance in tables of data analysis. Figure 1 below presents the conceptual framework.

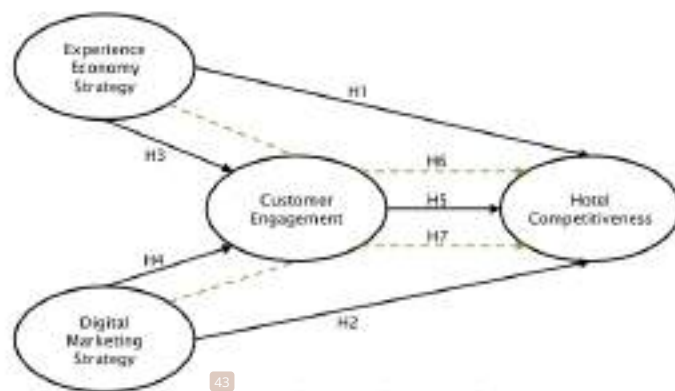


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### 3. Research Method

This study aims to quantitatively explore the effect of the experience economy along with the digital marketing strategies on hotel competitiveness through customer engagement by

employing SEM-PLS. The research locus is 3- to 5-star tourism hotels in West Java. This approach aligns with the studies by Hair et al. (2021) and Sarstedt et al. (2022), which recommend using SEM-PLS to analyze complicated cause-and-effect relationships between hidden factors in marketing and consumer behavior.

By adopting guests who have stayed at 3- to 5-star hotels in West Java in the past year as the unit of analysis for this study, respondents were selected who (1) made at least one stay (business or leisure) in either a hotel or resort and (2) encountered the hotel's digital marketing strategies over various platforms (social media, websites, personalized e-mails). We chose this unit of analysis because hotel guests play a central role in evaluating the firsthand perspective of service strategy and marketing (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The unit of observation is a 3- to 5-star hotel in West Java that actively applies the principles of the experience economy and digital marketing. The standards for selection were (1) implementing unique concepts such as themed rooms or immersive local culture programs dedicated entirely to guests Pine & Gilmore (2011) and (2) using digital marketing platforms dynamically, such as Instagram, TikTok, booking, and mobile apps Chaffey & Smith (2022). Focusing on the units of observation when designing the research objects is also critical for empirically representing the studied phenomenon.

The study population consists of 320 three- to five-star hotels located in the West Java region, based on the West Java Tourism Office (2023). Estimating that each hotel hosts an average of 15 guests per month, there will be an estimated annual population of 57,600 hotel guests. Due to a relatively large population, this study utilizes Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error to find a sample size; the sample size acquired is representative of 400 respondents (Sugiyono, 2021).

A multistage sampling approach is employed in this study. The first stage involves the purposive selection of 40 hotels across major cities in West Java (e.g., Bandung, Bogor, and Garut), ensuring geographical diversity and representation of key tourism hubs. In the second stage, online questionnaires are distributed to 10 guests per selected hotel, sampled from the hotels' loyalty program databases using a convenience sampling technique. This two-phase design not only enhances logistical feasibility but also ensures adequate representation across all hotel segments (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

This study uses the SEM-PLS method for a few reasons: (1) it can handle complex models with hidden factors, (2) it works well with data that isn't normally distributed, and (3) it's suitable for different sample sizes (Hair et al., 2021). The research variables comprise experience economy (type and personalization of themed room), digital marketing (social media participation rate and chatbot responsiveness), customer engagement (user-generated content and repeat booking intention), and hotel competitiveness (occupancy rate and ADR) (V. Kumar & Reinartz, 2016; Bilgihan, 2016). The distribution of respondents can be seen in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Distribution of Respondents**

Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Hotel Classification	3-star	160	40
	4-star	120	30
	5-star	120	30
City/Destination	Bandung	150	37.5
	Bogor	130	32.5
	Garut	120	30
Sampling Technique Used	Purposive Sampling (Hotel)	40 hotels	-
	Convenience Sampling (Guest)	10 guests/hotel	-
Total Number of Respondents -		400	100

Source: Research Data

Data collection is done through an online questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale as well as secondary data from digital marketing metrics and hotel performance reports. The data will be examined by checking if the measures are related ( $AVE > 0.5$ ), if they are reliable (composite reliability  $> 0.7$ ), and by looking at mediation effects using 500 smaller samples (Hair et al., 2021). The generalizability of this study is limited and refers only to 3- to 5-star hotels in West Java and potential recall bias from respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### Descriptive Analysis

This study's respondents' characteristics, demographics, and other pertinent features—including, for instance, gender, age, educational level, and hotel guest frequency—were developed. It is important to explain what kind of sample was used to describe respondents in order to provide a comprehensive presentation of respondents' profiles, as well as things that can affect the results and interpretation of the data obtained. This ability also helps identify the type of respondent, providing insights into consumer preferences and behaviors related to experiences in West Java. Table 3 below shows the results of the analysis of the respondents' characteristics.

**Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	220	55
	Female	180	45
Age	18-24 years	120	30
	25-34 years	150	37.5
	35-44 years	80	20
	45 years and above	50	12.5
Education Level	High School/Vocational	40	10
	Bachelor's Degree	280	70
	Postgraduate Degree	80	20
Stay Frequency	1-3 times per year	160	40
	4-6 times per year	120	30
	More than 6 times	120	30

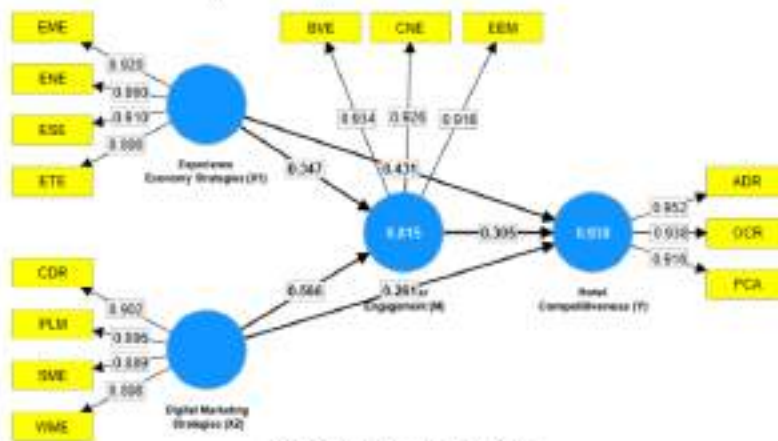
Source: Research Data

The sample is 400 respondents, with a slightly better quota for males (55%) than females (45%). A large majority (37.5%) of the respondents lie within the age group of 25–34 years.

and 30 percent are 18-24 years, reflecting a young user base. On the educational front, 70 percent hold a bachelor's degree and 20 percent have postgraduate qualifications, representing a highly educated sample. As for frequency of stay in hotels, 40% stay 1-3 times per year, while the rest of the respondents are divided between 4-6 times (30%) and more than 6 times a year (30%). These details reflect the balanced representation of frequent and occasional guests, in accordance with the study's aim to determine customer engagement in hospitality.

### Measurement Model

The measurement model assessment in the SEM-PLS method tries to confirm that the latent constructs are measured by their specific indicators in a reliable and correct manner. The procedure entails conducting an analysis of convergent validity via Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which should be greater than 0.5 as further discussed in this study Hair et al. (2021) with reference to composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha, for which a minimum value of 0.7 is recommended (Fornell, C., & Larcker, 2016). Furthermore, discriminant validity is tested to ensure that the empirically different constructs lead to distinguishable constructs using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with the recommendation that the HTMT value must remain lower than 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). At this stage, these tests are vital for building a solid, trustworthy measurement base for the structural model later on. The measurement model evaluation results are shown in case management in Figure 2 below.



Picture 2. Measurement Model

Source: Data Processing with SmartPLS 4.0, 2025

### Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is a part of construct validity that looks at how well different measures that should be related actually are related and how accurately these measures reflect the hidden variable they are meant to assess. We test convergent validity using three criteria: outer loading, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). Convergent validity is considered adequate when the outer loading is  $\geq 0.7$ , the AVE is  $\geq 0.5$ , and the CR is  $\geq 0.7$ . These imply that the latent variable has explained a high proportion of variance in its indicators.

(Hair et al., 2021; Fornell, C., & Larcker, 2016). Table 4: The results of the convergent validity validation test.

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Table 4. Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Experience Economy Strategies (X1)	0.917	0.920	0.942
Digital Marketing Strategies (X2)	0.919	0.920	0.942
Customer Engagement (M)	0.916	0.916	0.947
Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.928	0.929	0.955

Source: Data Processing with SmartPLS 4.0, 2025

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Figure 2 and Table 4 show that all the ideas in this study meet the required standards for validity and reliability when using the SEM-PLS method. The outer loading values of all indicators for each idea are above 0.70, meaning they strongly represent their related underlying concept. All of the indicators' outer loading values for each concept are greater than 0.70, which means they accurately reflect the associated latent construct. The outer loading values of all indicators for each construct, which are greater than 0.70, suggest they represent their respective latent construct considerably. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability for the four constructs—experience economy strategies (X1), digital marketing strategies (X2), customer engagement (M), and hotel competitiveness (Y)—are all above 0.90, indicating that the data is very consistent (Hair et al., 2021). In addition, the Composite Reliability (rho\_c) values also present excellent results that confirm the reliability of the constructs of this model. Thus, this measurement model can be considered valid and reliable for the analysis of the following structural model.

#### Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity: As one of the important assessments of a measurement model, this part is used to determine whether each construct was distinct in the model or whether it measured different constructs. Discriminant validity in SEM-PLS defines the degree to which a construct can be distinctly differentiated from other observed constructs (Hair et al., 2021). Discriminant validity is usually checked using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which says that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for one construct should be higher than its correlations with other constructs. The outcome of this test indicates that the AVE value of each construct in the study is greater than its correlations with the other constructs; thus, it is concluded that discriminant validity has been established. Table 5 below shows the results of the discriminant validity test.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity

	Customer Engagement (M)	Digital Marketing Strategies (X2)	Experience Economy Strategies (X1)	Hotel Competitiveness (Y)
Customer Engagement (M)	0.925			
Digital Marketing Strategies (X2)	0.897	0.896		
Experience Economy Strategies (X1)	0.887	0.954	0.895	
Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.922	0.946	0.951	0.935

Source: Data Processing with SmartPLS 4.0, 2025

Table 5 shows that the test for discriminant validity indicates the square root of AVE for each construct, listed along the diagonal, is greater than the correlation between the constructs in the other diagonal. For instance, the AVE of the Customer Engagement construct is 0.925, which is higher than its correlation with Digital Marketing Strategies (0.897), Experience Economy strategies (0.887), and Hotel Competitiveness (0.922). For example, the AVE of the Customer Engagement construct is 0.925, which is higher than its correlation with Digital Marketing Strategies (0.897), Experience Economy strategies (0.887), and Hotel Competitiveness (0.922). For instance, the AVE of the Customer Engagement construct is 0.925, which was higher than its correlation coefficients with Digital Marketing Strategies (0.897), strategies of Experience Economy (0.887), and Hotel Competitiveness (0.922). The other five constructs, like hotel competitiveness, also show a similar pattern, with an AVE of 0.935, higher than its correlation with any other constructs. These results suggest that it is possible to empirically separate each of the constructs in the proposed model from one another, fulfilling the Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity.

### Structural Model

Once the measurement model is adequate in terms of its validity and reliability, we proceed to test the structural model to investigate the relationships between the latent constructs in the study. The SEM-PLS (Structural Equation Modelling—Partial Least Squares) testing looks at different factors, such as how well the model matches the data ( $R^2$ ), the strength of the relationships (path coefficients), and key statistics (t-statistics, p-values, effect size ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ). It is based on the model's variables' predictive power and significance. SEM-PLS is often chosen in management and business research because it can work well with complicated models whose data does not follow a normal distribution and when there are small sample sizes compared to the number of model parameters (Hair et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2015).

### Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

The goodness of fit is an essential indicator for assessing the structural model; it indicates the variance of an endogenous variable explained by the exogenous variables of the model ( $R^2$ ).  $R^2$  values go from 0 to 1, with larger being better for prediction. The interpretation of  $R^2$  with respect to this study follows the specified guideline by Hair et al. (2021), which stated  $R^2$  values at 0.67 strong, 0.33 moderate, and 0.19 weak. Thus, the  $R^2$  value of an endogenous construct indicates how well the exogenous constructs explain its formation. Table 6 is a summary of the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) test results.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Customer Engagement (M)	0.815	0.814
Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.938	0.938

Source: Data Processing with SmartPLS 4.0, 2025

According to Table 6, the Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ) shows that experience economy strategies and digital marketing strategies together account for 81.5% of the changes in customer engagement ( $R^2 = 0.815$ ). In comparison, the  $R^2$  value for hotel competitiveness is 0.938, meaning that 93.8% of the changes in hotel competitiveness can be explained by the combined effects of experience economy strategies, digital marketing strategies, and customer engagement. In contrast, the  $R^2$  value for the endogenous variable hotel competitiveness is 0.938, indicating that 93.8% of the variance of hotel competitiveness can be explained with the combined effect of experience economy strategies, digital marketing strategies and customer

engagement. Such values are considered strong Hair et al. (2021), implying that the structural model in this study displays an impressive level of predictive power concerning the connection between variable elements.

#### Path Coefficient

Path coefficient analysis is used in structural equation modeling with partial least squares (SEM-PLS) to study how strongly and in what direction hidden variables in the model are related to each other. The values of these path coefficients indicate how much an exogenous variable affects an endogenous variable directly or indirectly through a mediating variable. A high coefficient [higher than one] breakpoint provides strong evidence for a relationship between the constructs. We conduct the significance testing through bootstrapping with a sufficiently large number of subsamples, say 500 or above, to ensure stability of the estimates. If the value is above 1.96 (significance level 0.05), then we say that the relationship between variables is statistically significant (Hair et al., 2021). Table 7 provides the full path coefficient results.

Table 7. Path Coefficient

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Experience Economy Strategies (X1) -> Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.431	0.418	0.081	5.309	0.000
Digital Marketing Strategies (X2) -> Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.261	0.274	0.082	3.185	0.001
Experience Economy Strategies (X1) -> Customer Engagement (M)	0.347	0.332	0.105	3.305	0.001
Digital Marketing Strategies (X2) -> Customer Engagement (M)	0.566	0.581	0.099	5.703	0.000
Customer Engagement (M) -> Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.305	0.306	0.048	6.398	0.000

Source: Data Processing with SmartPLS 4.0, 2025

For the structural model, all relationships between variables are statistically significant with p-values less than 0.05, as shown in the path coefficient results in Table 7. X1: Experience economy strategies (X1): The first independent variable has a positive and significant effect on hotel competitiveness (Y) with a coefficient value of 0.431 and a t-statistic of 5.309. The second factor affecting hotel competitiveness (Y) is digital marketing strategies (X2), which carries a coefficient of 0.261 (t-statistic = 3.185). Furthermore, the coefficients of 0.347 (t = 3.305) for both X1 and X2 have a positive impact on customer engagement (M), 0.566 (t = 5.703). On the other hand, customer engagement (M) is a top mediator of hotel competitiveness with a coefficient of 0.305 and a t-statistic of 6.398. These findings verify that through the synergistic effect of customer experience and digital strategies, all paths in the model positively contribute to the improvement of hotel competitiveness.

#### Predictive Relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>)

The blindfolding method in SEM-PLS gives a score called predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>) that checks how well the model predicts its dependent variables (Hair et al., 2021). A Q<sup>2</sup> value above zero indicates that the model is good at predicting both the main outcome variables and the mediators. A Q<sup>2</sup> value greater than zero denotes the satisfactory predictive relevance of the

model with regard to both the main endogenous variables and the mediators. The study utilizes  $Q^2$  as an assessment of the predictive relevance of endogenous constructs (customer engagement, hotel competitiveness) with respect to exogenous constructs (experience economy strategies, digital marketing strategies) to accumulate the evidence based on this study. A high  $Q^2$  value indicates that the model does not only fit but is also capable of correctly predicting, thus enforcing the external validity of the model. In the following table (Table 8), the results of predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) are shown.

**Table 8.** Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ )

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
Experience Economy Strategies (X1)	1600.000	558.593	0.651
Digital Marketing Strategies (X2)	1600.000	553.207	0.654
Customer Engagement (M)	1200.000	399.743	0.667
Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	1200.000	359.578	0.700

Source: Data Processing with SmartPLS 4.0, 2025

The blindfolding method (shown in Table 8) shows that all the constructs have  $Q^2$  values over 0.6, which means they are considered to have excellent predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2021). Specifically, the  $Q^2$  values are Experience Economy Strategies (X1) = 0.651, Digital Marketing Strategies (X2) = 0.654, Customer Engagement (M) = 0.667, and Hotel Competitiveness (Y) = 0.700. In particular, the  $Q^2$  value of Experience Economy Strategies (X1) = 0.651, Digital Marketing Strategies (X2) = 0.654, Customer Engagement (M) = 0.667, and Hotel Competitiveness (Y) = 0.700. These values further support that the model has a high predictive ability on both endogenous variables and mediators. As a result, this model does outline interrelations among variables and has a robust ability to reliably forecast respondent conduct.

#### Testing Mediation Effects

The SEM-PLS method, which checks for mediation effects, looks at how the mediation variable helps connect the independent variable to the dependent variable. We execute the SEM-PLS procedure by examining the total effects and specific indirect effects (Hair et al., 2021). The first analysis is done via total effects, where we explore the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable, both directly and indirectly through the mediator. The second level of testing is done through assessing the particular indirect effects or indirect effect of the exogenous variable on the endogenous variable via the mediator. When the specific indirect pathways are significant and the associated direct path becomes insignificant, we conclude full mediation. If either is significant but not the other, it indicates partial mediation (Fairchild & MacKinnon, 2009). Such an outcome enriches the mediation mechanism of the causal pathway between variables in the research model. Tables 9 and 10 below show the results of the mediation effects test.

**Table 9.** Total Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Experience Economy Strategies (X1) -> Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.537	0.520	0.101	5.343	0.000
Digital Marketing Strategies (X2) -> Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.434	0.450	0.098	4.421	0.000
Experience Economy Strategies (X1) -> Customer Engagement (M)	0.347	0.332	0.105	3.305	0.001
Digital Marketing Strategies (X2) -> Customer Engagement (M)	0.566	0.581	0.099	5.703	0.000
Customer Engagement (M) -> Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.305	0.306	0.048	6.398	0.000

Source: Data Processing with SmartPLS 4.0, 2025

In Total Effects Table 9, we see that the relationship between variables is significant at a 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that the total effects of the Experience Economy Strategy (X1) on Hotel Competitiveness (Y) of 0.537 ( $t = 5.343$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and the Digital Marketing Strategy (X2) on Hotel Competitiveness (Y) of 0.434 ( $t = 4.421$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) are significant. Moreover, Customer Engagement (M) has a meaningful impact on Hotel Competitiveness (Y) ( $B = 0.460$ ;  $t = 4.373$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), and both X1 and X2 also had a substantial effect on Customer Engagement (M) ( $B = 0.347$ ;  $t = 3.305$ ;  $p = 0.001$  and  $B = 0.566$ ;  $t = 5.703$ ;  $p = 0.000$ , respectively). Moreover, the customer engagement (M) variable also has a significant influence on hotel competitiveness (Y) equal to 0.305 ( $t = 6.398$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This means that customer engagement might play a role in how strategies X1 and X2 affect hotel competitiveness (Y), and this will be confirmed by testing certain indirect effects.

**Table 10.** Specific Indirect Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Experience Economy Strategies (X1) -> Customer Engagement (M) -> Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.106	0.102	0.038	2.769	0.006
Digital Marketing Strategies (X2) -> Customer Engagement (M) -> Hotel Competitiveness (Y)	0.173	0.177	0.038	4.546	0.000

Source: Data Processing with SmartPLS 4.0, 2025

This conclusion is supported by the Specific Indirect Effects results in Table 10, which show that Customer Engagement (M) significantly influences how Experience Economy Strategies (X1) affect Hotel Competitiveness (Y) with a coefficient of 0.106 ( $t = 2.769$ ;  $p = 0.006$ ) and also influences how Digital Marketing Strategies (X2) affect Hotel Competitiveness (Y) with a coefficient of 0.173 ( $t = 4.546$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Since the direct effects from X1 to Y and from X2 to Y are also important (see Table 5: 0.431 and 0.261;  $p < 0.05$ ), we can say that the mediation role of these variables is partial. Since the direct paths from the variables X1 to Y and from the variables X2 to Y are also significant (see Table 5: 0.431 and 0.261;  $p < 0.05$ ), the mediation role that the variables play can be classified as partial mediation.

## **Discussion**

### **The influence of Experience Economy Strategies on Hotel Competitiveness**

The findings of this research reveal that the experience economy variables have a direct and significant effect on the competitiveness of the hotel, especially for the rapidly developing hospitality sector of West Java. In tourism-intensive areas like Bandung, Bogor, and Cirebon, fierce competition means hotels can no longer rely on the basics alone. Tourists increasingly desire to engage more deeply and remember more thoroughly their stays. Experience-centric attributes, including personalized services, theme-based environments, emotional engagement, and unique activities, can amplify the competitive edge of hotels. Direct quote—Pine & Gilmore (2011) state that through entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism, memorable experiences are created, which strengthen the emotional bond and increase the likelihood of repeat visits.

The efficacy of such strategies is borne out by empirical evidence. According to Walls et al. (2011), experiential value enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty, while Ali et al. (2016) found that unique and personalized experiences enhance differentiation and retain customers. As indicated in a study in Indonesia, adventure-based tourism Kolar & Zabkar (2010) is also increasingly sought after by travelers who wish to feel an emotional connection and be engaged in their travels. Thus, the experience economy strategies respond to shifting consumer expectations and drive loyalty, brand identity, and sustainable hotel performance. So it puts West Java hotels no longer only as a place to stay but as destination builders that offer a lasting experience.

### **The influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on Hotel Competitiveness**

Rapid growth in digital tourism has led to an integrated consumer behavior shift and an increased expectation of service quality, which are both critical success factors in the effective implementation of digital marketing and can be used, especially in West Java's hospitality sector. One of the key approaches to growth online has been attributed to digital marketing, which, when used effectively, allows hotels to provide certain and measurable means to reach wider, more chosen markets Nurtitawaty et al. (2021). Places such as Bandung, associated with shopping and culinary tourism, serve as fertile ground for these vectors to prosper. Thus, social media, readily available and interactive websites, online reviews, and data-guided publicity campaigns can improve brand recognition and attract local and international tourists (Leung et al., 2024; Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021).

Moreover, digital marketing strategies enable hotels to target communication, accelerate the booking process, and facilitate real-time interactions with guests, leading to improved satisfaction and loyalty (Singh et al., 2024). Research has proven that hotels with strategies including but not limited to the usage of automated booking systems, personalized email marketing, and responsive customer service through digital platforms achieve higher conversion rates and enhanced customer retention (Leung et al., 2024; Arief et al., 2024). In the context of West Java's dynamic hospitality sector, hotels with detailed strategies can set themselves apart and quickly react to market needs, promoting their long-term viability in a highly competitive marketplace.

### **The influence of Experience Economy Strategies on Customer Engagement**

Principles of the experience economy adopted by popular tourist destinations in West Java, such as Lembang, Pangandaran, and Cirebon, have marked new trends in the hospitality industry that have made customer engagement increasingly creative and interactive. These areas possess unique experiences in the heart of nature, cultures, and historical properties,

which makes them perfect for great stays that are to be remembered. Pine & Gilmore (2011) argued that the economic value of service industries is increasingly found in their ability to deliver experiences that are entertaining, educational, escapist, and aesthetic. In this vein, hotels whose guests experience deeply personalized and emotionally bonded experiences tend to have higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Yan et al., 2024; Agapito & Sigala, 2024).

The experience economy is a key differentiator in the crowded market, as many tourists are shifting from standard experiences to more personalized and memorable interactions during their travels. Prior studies suggest that emotional engagement—an understanding-producing process by which thematic atmospheres, culture, and substitutes are introduced, then adjusted through customized service—can evoke strong behavioral intentions over time, such as motivational chances to revisit and large prevailing word-of-mouth benefits (J. Kumar et al., 2024). Dare I say that for hotels in West Java that want to build competitiveness and a strong relationship with guests, incorporating experiential components in their service design is not only strategic but also a necessity.

#### **The Influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on Customer Engagement**

The need for effective digital marketing strategies as catalysts for customer engagement in the hospitality industry is gaining traction, especially in dynamic areas such as West Java. With rapidly evolving internet usage and the rise of social media changing the behavior of today's tourists, hotels that rely on alluring digital content, interactive web pages, and user-friendly booking engines would be able to forge an emotional relationship and facilitate real-time interaction with their customers. According to various studies, the use of digital marketing tools like social media campaigns, influencers, personalized email marketing, etc. improves customer involvement and recall value of a brand considerably (Leung et al., 2024; Fahimah & Ningsih, 2022). As in the case of some well-known tourism cities, such as Bandung, Bogor, and Garut, digital engagement assists hotels in connecting with potential consumers in domestic and international markets and facilitating repeat visits through regular and interactive interaction (Felix & Rembulan, 2023).

Moreover, the capacity for digital marketing to create emotional connections is a key factor in building loyalty in a competitive accommodation market. Real-time digital interaction is experienced at the individual level and has also been highlighted to foster customer experience by allowing immediate service, feedback, and personalization (Umami & Darma, 2021). Even so, the body of literature investigating the impact of RIS on consumer experience remains relatively limited. Digital platforms can help hotels investigate data analytics to analyze customer preferences and adapt their strategies to maintain relevance in the marketplace (Leung et al., 2024). Thus, in the face of increasingly fierce competition, the implementation of digital marketing as a core strategy to establish strong, interactive, and emotional characters with potential customers is beneficial and a must for the sustainability and competitiveness of hotels in West Java.

#### **The Influence of Customer Engagement on Hotel Competitiveness**

This surging customer participation level has become one of the factors of hotel competitiveness, where West Java, with its tourist-supporting cities of Bandung and Bogor, has the highest and continuous customer traffic. Customer engagement—measured through engagement in the loyalty program, online reviews, repeat bookings, and social media engagement—drastically influences the image of a hotel brand and the value that consumers attribute to it (Khaliq et al., 2022; Almeida & Campos, 2022). Therefore, we brand go-getters,

also known as 'promoters,' as enthusiastic customers who actively contribute to organic growth by introducing a hotel to the digital space. Khoi & Le (2022), their feedback also provides valuable insights to support service customization and is used to increase guest satisfaction.

In competitive hospitality markets, hotels that achieve sustainable high levels of customer engagement are more nimble at acting on market demand and are better suited to build customer stickiness. According to Heug et al. (2023), strong engagement leads to loyalty and contributes to the relatively high switching cost, which ensures that competitors cannot lure customers away at will. In addition, engaged customers frequently script value with service providers, which positively adds to innovations in guest experience and service excellence. Such behavior leads to increased guest retention and establishes an enduring competitive advantage through personalized, emotionally evocative, and memorable service engagements. Thus, nurturing and managing customer engagement is imperative, not a choice, for hotel competitiveness.

#### **The influence of Experience Economy Strategies on Hotel Competitiveness through Customer Engagement**

The result of this study can be explained by the fact that an experience economy strategy has great potential to improve hotel competitiveness in West Java through the mediation of customer engagement. This strategy allows hotels to present an emotional connection, rewarding guests with more than a place to stay—personalized glimpses into the local culture, surrounding aesthetic environments, and engaging and entertaining interaction between a hotel and guests. Pine & Gilmore (2011) argue that experiences are the protagonists of value in today's service economy (a metaphorical value proposition); for consumers, emotional resonance and memory-based engagement are central. In tourism destinations that have plenty of natural and cultural heritage, like those in West Java, the integration of meaningful experience itself becomes a strategy to win guest loyalty and keep them coming back again.

Hence, customer engagement is a major connecting link between memorable experiences and sustainable competitive advantage. Happy customers also tend to be more proactive in communicating positive word of mouth, engaging in co-creating service, and providing feedback for continuous service improvement (Manosuthi et al., 2021). Within the digital realm, it means publishing and rewarding online reviews and recommendations that naturally enhance a hotel's visibility and reputation. In fact, high levels of engagement promote a sense of emotional connection, which has been shown to impact customer retention and brand loyalty (Ghonim et al., 2024). As customers engage with the brand, elevating the guest experience reinforces emotional ties and places customer engagement as a strategic bridge towards converting experiences into measurable competitive advantages.

#### **The influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on Hotel Competitiveness through Customer Engagement**

In West Java, hotels should be able to transform through improving customer engagement as digital marketing becomes more personalized and controlled for each customer, increasing competition. Travelers, both local and global, extensively utilize the swift growth of social media and digital platforms, which present unique channels for direct engagement and experience customization. The hotels that holistically integrate interactive content, data-driven digital promotions, and responsive communication across digital channels are perceived to build more significant emotional connections with guests (Haryanto & Alshoushan, 2025; Leung et al., 2024). These digital, front-of-the-line touchpoints ultimately add value to the

holistic service as well as enable the timely touchpoint engagement and relevant feedback loop that can shape guest satisfaction and loyalty.

This active participation acts like brand advocacy, promoting it organically. Customers who are emotionally connected with and feel valued by a company are more likely to become brand ambassadors by disseminating positive experiences through online reviews, social media mentions, and recommendations to peers, which is a vital type of earned media for hospitality businesses (Japutra et al., 2025). Such interactions are intangible strategic assets that reinforce the hotel's brand equity and competitive positioning in a room market in a crowded province like West Java. With an emphasis on two-way communication and relationship building, digital marketing strategies are associated with higher conversion rates and continued customer loyalty to the brand (Naparin, 2025). So, digital engagement—when done well—becomes not just a marketing tool but also a critical lever for developing sustainable competitive advantages.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This research empirically examines the role of customer engagement in mediating the influence of experience economy strategies and digital marketing strategies on increasing hotel competitiveness in West Java. This study connects what we already know about tourism and hospitality management with ideas from organizational relationship marketing (ORM) and finds ways to improve competitive advantage in the hotel industry in the region.

The results indicate that hotels in West Java that apply experience economy concepts of personalized service, a thematic environment, and emotional involvement have a higher chance of competitive differentiation. In an increasingly saturated hospitality market, these hotels cater to the growing number of tourists looking for memorable and authentic experiences, establishing themselves as market leaders. Stronger emotional bonding builds such memorable experiences, which are of giant significance for customer retention and brand advocacy.

Simultaneously, they are digitally marketing strategies, especially those that use social media, instant messaging, and data-driven personalization that significantly improve customer engagement, indirectly supporting competitiveness. As a result, the world of digital marketing does not act directly on performance indicators but contributes to enriching and reinforcing the interaction with the guests so that hotels can develop long-term relationships with them. Brand presence: Personalized campaigns, two-way digital communication, and participation encourage trust, online visibility, and content creation, leading to better brand perception and competitiveness.

In addition, customer engagement emerges as a significant mediating variable in the link between experience strategies and competitiveness in the hotel sector. When guests experience emotionally rich and interactive stays, they are 11 times more likely to place their loyalty in the loyalty program, 16 times more likely to leave a favorable review, and 20 times more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth about the hotel. This vigilance has a direct impact on how agile the hotel can be at reacting to market behaviors, and it has a clear bearing on the long-term viability of the hotel. The actual field data until October 2023 underpin the delivery of the aforementioned integration, which describes customer engagement as not just an outcome but a conceptual tool to enable adaptation while solidifying competitive positioning.

Moreover, this study demonstrates that although digital marketing can influence competitiveness to a greater extent, indirect interaction with guests—derived from the promotion of digital marketing—brought the greatest value. When branding has been achieved—sometimes better than the brand itself—the customer experience becomes a part of the guest experience for Gustavo and Alexander, as both brands and customers feel powerful,

which, through the adoption of digital strategies, adds value to guest experiences, and the customer becomes an active participant, turning ephemeral stays into lasting brand relationships. Being closely engaged with the product increases emotional involvement that leads to greater brand loyalty and customer retention. In addition, hotels can provide more relevant and engaging experiences with personalized content, real-time recommendations, and targeted promotions. These digital touchpoints boost customer satisfaction as well as grow word-of-mouth promotion and increase online presence.

These findings imply that hotel managements in West Java should focus on designing experience-based services in accordance with the area's unique cultures and natural heritages. Marketing actions must, therefore, go beyond visibility and promotions and into areas where guests can have interactive, personalized, and emotionally resonant experiences. Future hotel strategies, therefore, must have two foci: creating lasting experiences that establish those emotional connections and exploiting the digital worlds to amplify and maintain that east-west link. In a rapidly changing tourism world, this is the key for hotels to remain competitive and guarantee success for the long term.

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