

A case study of Accor's digital transformation in the hospitality sector

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Abstract

The digitalisation of the hospitality sector represents a fundamental paradigm shift, pushing the industry into a critical phase of transformation. In an environment of intense global competition, service providers must implement sophisticated technological solutions to meet the growing demands of modern guests. This paper aims to analyse Accor Hotel Group's strategic approaches to digital transformation and examine how these initiatives shape comprehensive customer service. Using a mixed methodology approach, the study evaluates the effectiveness and benefits of specific digital tools with the aim of identifying future industry trends. The results suggest that Accor Group's strategic investments in digitalisation bring measurable economic benefits, increase operational efficiency, and strengthen customer loyalty through personalisation. However, despite these positive outcomes, the paper also highlights the ongoing challenges and technological limitations of implementation, defining the scope for further research in this area.

Keywords: Accor Hotel Group; Sustainability; Digitalization

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1. Introduction

The rapid digital transformation of the hotel industry has placed significant pressure on global hotel groups to adopt modern technologies to enhance service efficiency and customer experience quality. While the integration of digital tools has streamlined many processes, there are still several issues with user interaction with these technologies that directly affect guest satisfaction. Digital solutions are now being implemented in most areas of hotel management. The main motivation of managers is to optimize the workforce and reduce operating time (Buhalis and law 2008). Traditional management models relied primarily on staff experience, often resulting in inefficiency, high costs, and difficulties in standardizing quality.

Digital innovations today allow advanced hotel management systems (PMS) to be used to optimize operations in both the front and back offices. At the same time, supply chain management systems streamline procurement and logistics, significantly reducing operating costs. Beyond the operational level, digitalization plays a key role in meeting guest expectations. Guests form memories and emotions based on the services they receive and are willing to invest more in 'experiences' that exceed their expectations. High-quality service and a positive experience form the basis for building long-term brand loyalty (Cheng et al. 2023). However, despite technological progress, current service processes in hotels are often flawed. Slow room service response times and inefficient feedback processing are critical issues that significantly degrade the guest experience. Today, the entire hotel ecosystem — including investors, management, guests, online travel agencies (OTAs) and suppliers — relies on organic and digital data flows. These flows, provided electronically and manually, form the basis of strategic planning and daily operations. However, the fragmentation of application systems remains problematic, affecting everything from property management and sales to in-room infotainment systems and energy management (Peng et al. 2024).

The differences in management of these isolated processes, along with inconsistent response speeds, lead to decreased standardization and fluctuating service quality. Despite extensive scientific interest, current research on hotel digitalization primarily focuses on management technologies and the economic benefits for operators. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of the user's digital experience itself remains a persistent gap, creating space for further research in this area (Ratna et al. 2023).

1. Literature review

In academic discussions about the hospitality industry, the catalytic role of digital technologies in improving hotel performance is a key area of research. In this context, digital transformation is not only understood as the strategic deployment of technologies to transform business processes, but also to increase the value offered to the end customer (Nikopoulou et al. 2023).

The current trend is dominated by the search for synergy between technology and emotions, although the potential of intelligent services in the hospitality sector remains largely untapped. Despite the widespread adoption of tools such as mobile applications, self-service kiosks and intelligent room systems, they require further optimization to be truly effective. Many applications currently operate merely as supplementary tools, and although self-service systems increase speed, they often require staff assistance. As the primary product offered by hotels is the humanized aspect of services, maintaining an emotional connection with customers amid digitalization is a critical challenge. Therefore, anticipating consumer psychological expectations requires careful planning of the interaction between the digital product and the guest (Anwar et al. 2024). Although the importance of customer experience is growing, existing research suggests that the digital dimension is not yet being addressed adequately (Kozar et al. 2025).

The complexity and low user-friendliness of some systems can negatively impact the overall impression. Hotel companies must therefore prioritize holistic quality management and consider interface factors that are tailored not only to customer segments, but also to the hotel category (Kumar and Sharma 2024). Considering the revival of tourism, having a digital strategy has become essential for development. This involves implementing client devices and using cloud infrastructure and data analytics to improve strategic decision-making. A notable example of substantial investment in addressing these challenges is the Accor Group, which invested \$255 million in launching its 'ALL' (Accor Live Limitless) loyalty program and digital transformation (Wu et al. 2024).

The implementation of standardized digital procedures is now closely linked to the sustainability and greening of operations. Contactless technologies, from check-in to payment systems and digital tipping, are fundamentally changing the way travelers engage. Integrating artificial intelligence and the cloud streamlines the back office and enables the deep personalization of services (Susilo and Santos 2023). However, as digitalization increases, issues of privacy and cybersecurity are coming to the fore. The strategic use of data and mobile-centric services, such as digital keys, is transforming the operational landscape. Application programming interfaces (APIs) play a pivotal role in this, facilitating communication between disparate systems and fostering operational synergies (Wu et al. 2024). The need to protect sensitive guest data is driving the adoption of strict security protocols and compliance with global data protection standards.

In a highly competitive market, hoteliers who do not actively pursue digital innovation risk becoming irrelevant. Embracing digital transformation fully enables hotels to increase customer satisfaction and achieve operational excellence and financial success, thereby securing their market leadership position (Damjanovic et al. 2020).

2. Methodology

This scientific study focuses on the analytical deconstruction of the benefits of digitalization in the hotel sector, assessing its strategic relevance in the context of the current highly competitive market environment. To achieve objective and valid conclusions, the study uses a mixed-methods research design that integrates qualitative and quantitative procedures through methodological triangulation to evaluate the effectiveness of Accor Group's digital activities.

The research process is carried out in the following phases:

1. Secondary data collection and critical analysis. The primary database consists of secondary sources of information that are subject to description and comparison processes. The analytical set includes audited annual reports, official corporate statements, internal strategic documents, and published case studies focusing on technological transformation. This phase enables the identification of key success factors and the determination of structural barriers associated with the implementation of digital innovations.
2. Qualitative inference through SWOT analysis: This tool is used to systematically classify the internal and external factors that influence the Accor Group's digital trajectory. This framework enables the precise categorization of the following: Strengths: Robust technological infrastructure, Innovation potential, Scalability of digital solutions; Weaknesses: Operational complexity in system integration and organizational limits in the adaptation process; Opportunities: Strategic potential in the field of cognitive technologies (AI), cloud computing, and hyper-personalization of services; Threats:

Exogenous risks in the form of cyber threats, market volatility, and the growing influence of online distribution platforms (OTAs).

3. Synthesis and formulation of recommendations: In the final phase, the acquired knowledge is synthesized into a comprehensive theoretical-empirical framework. This framework serves as a basis for predicting future trends and formulating strategic recommendations for accommodation service management.

3. Results and Discussion

Digital Strategies at Accor Group

Accor, a global leader in the hospitality industry, began its comprehensive digital transformation in 2014. A significant milestone was the strategic acquisition of the French start-up Wipolo, whose innovative 'travel companion' app paved the way for modern digital guest interaction (Jelassi and Martínez-López 2020). This acquisition was an integral part of the ambitious 'Leading Digital Hospitality' program, which aimed to digitally connect and transform the entire customer service cycle. The initiative focused on three strategic areas: improving guest services, streamlining employee work and strengthening relationships with partners. This ultimately consolidated the group's position in the distribution market. The successful implementation of this reform was based on two pillars: establishing a robust IT infrastructure and implementing sophisticated systems for data management and analysis.

Investment structure and resource allocation Accor Group has allocated 225 million euros of capital for this five-year (since 2014) transformation program. The investment plan was strictly structured:

- 60% of the funds were directed towards strengthening current performance by modernizing mid-end and back-end solutions.
- 40% of the funds were allocated to expanding market share and optimizing costs for distribution units (Fu 2026; Kozar et al. 2025; Mazur and Glushak 2025).

The integration of the Accor Live Limitless (ALL) loyalty ecosystem has transformed Accor into a digital leader and set a new industry standard. A key element of this transformation is the ALL-loyalty program, which seamlessly integrates digital technologies into customer service. Through mobile applications, guests can book accommodation, manage itineraries, and access personalized benefits in real time. This comprehensive approach simplifies customer interaction with the brand and allows for the individual management of guest needs, directly correlating with increased satisfaction and long-term loyalty (Augustin and Suyuthie 2025).

As part of process optimization, the group decided to delegate the maintenance and development of its key reservation system, TARS, to an external strategic partner. This step demonstrates the company's commitment to combining external expertise with internal innovation. The group's progressive mindset is also evident in its approach to property management systems (PMS) and its venture capital investments in promising hospitality technology companies [13, 16]. By certifying multiple PMS systems and building open partnerships, Accor has ensured that its technology ecosystem remains flexible and adaptable (Demirciftci and Kizikirmak 2016; Augustin and Suvuthie 2025).

This model increases efficiency by streamlining management operations and enables individual hotels to deliver consistent, personalized customer experiences. Security and forward-thinking — the group's current focus on cybersecurity, contactless solutions, and data harmonization highlights its commitment to its clients and its dedication to data protection. By implementing advanced security protocols and introducing

contactless technologies, Accor is well positioned to meet the ever-changing needs and expectations of the modern global traveler (Liu and Jo 2020).

SWOT analysis of Accor's digital transformation

Table 1 presents the SWOT analysis, which aims to identify and evaluate the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats that determine Accor's digital transformation process.

Implementing this analysis enables Accor's management to accurately define its current position in the digital marketplace. The results provide a solid foundation for formulating strategic measures aimed at:

- maximizing strengths (e.g. global infrastructure and loyalty programs);
- eliminating internal weaknesses (e.g. the technological fragmentation of legacy systems);
- proactively exploiting market opportunities (e.g. artificial intelligence and personalization);
- mitigating external threats effectively (e.g. the growing power of OTAs and cyber risks).

Table 1. SWOT analysis of Accor Group's digital transformation

| Internal factors | |
|--|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| - <i>Innovative digital strategy</i> : The Accor Group has demonstrated innovation and foresight in its digital transformation by acquiring companies such as Wipolo and implementing the "Leading Digital Hotels" initiative. | - <i>Financing and technological constraints</i> : Despite progress in digitalization, the Accor Group may still be at a disadvantage compared to industry leaders in terms of financing and technology. |
| - <i>Technology integration</i> : Accor has successfully incorporated digital technologies into its customer service offering through the Accor Live Limitless (ALL) loyalty program. | - <i>Challenges related to organizational structure</i> : digital transformation requires the support of organizational structures and cultures, and Accor may continue to face challenges in this area. |
| - <i>Agile project evaluation cycle</i> : Accor Group has demonstrated its ability to evaluate technology investments quickly, reflecting its capacity for rapid technical response. | |
| External factors | |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| - <i>Growth in market demand</i> : With the growing demand for digital services, the Accor Group can seize market opportunities by investing more in technology. | - <i>Competitive pressure</i> : The Accor group may be threatened by other hotel groups and emerging digital platforms, particularly regarding customer acquisition and retention. |
| - <i>Increased technology investment</i> : the expected increase in investment in technology should boost online bookings and improve the digital experience for guests, as well as increasing membership and providing further development opportunities for the Accor Group. | - <i>Economic uncertainty</i> : the return on investment and the strategic implementation of Accor's digital transformation may be affected by economic uncertainty. |

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Source: own processing from Accor.com

The analysis confirms that Accor's comprehensive approach to digital transformation, which integrates IT infrastructure modernization, advanced data management and active customer engagement, establishes the brand as a technological pioneer in the hospitality industry. The company's strategic direction sets a new industry standard that reflects the necessity of digital adaptation on a global scale.

Targeted investments in technological innovation, the establishment of strategic partnerships, and the implementation of customer-oriented strategies have initiated an internal operational revolution within Accor and defined new qualitative criteria for the entire tourism industry (Hossain et al. 2026). The success of this model demonstrates that, in today's highly competitive environment, digital transformation is essential for long-term sustainability and market dominance.

Case study: Accor's "Take Off!" Program

Accor is a leading global player in the hospitality industry, and its approach to digital transformation encompasses more than just technological innovation. Developing human capital and identifying new talent capable of responding to the challenges of the digital era are key pillars of its strategy. In this context, the Take Off! program is a valuable tool that links innovation, education, and the practical needs of the business sector (Accor 2025).

Program characteristics and objectives

Take Off! is an international student competition focused on hospitality innovation that Accor has organized for over a decade. Unlike traditional recruitment or marketing activities, this program has broader strategic significance: it serves as a platform for crowdsourcing ideas and, at the same time, as a tool for identifying talent (Escalera 2025).

The primary objective is to connect young people with real challenges in the hospitality industry and create space for innovative solutions in the areas of digitalization and customer experience.

The main objectives of the program include:

- *Identifying future leaders:* The program involves students from over 100 universities in around 40 countries each year. Participants have digital skills, are creative thinkers, and can work in a multicultural environment.
- *Supporting innovation in the customer experience:* Each year focuses on a different topic, such as the use of artificial intelligence in the hospitality industry, sustainability, or the transformation of hotel spaces into multifunctional community centers.
- *Connecting theory with practice:* Students solve specific tasks based on Accor's requirements, facilitating a knowledge exchange between academia and business.

In this way, the program establishes the foundation for subsequent phases of the innovation process, naturally leading to the practical implementation of solutions.

Innovation Process Methodology

To achieve the above objectives, the Take Off! program uses a multi-stage selection process to simulate a real innovation cycle in a corporate environment. This process ensures the selection of the highest quality ideas and their gradual improvement and verification in practice.

The individual phases of the process logically follow each other:

- *Ideation (concept creation):* In this initial stage, teams present innovative solutions in the form of digital presentations or videos. This phase showcases the participants' creativity and their ability to identify problems in the customer journey.

- *Mentoring and validation:* The best projects proceed to the mentoring phase, in which students collaborate with Accor managers. Here, theoretical proposals are linked to the practical requirements of hotel operations, increasing the feasibility of the solutions proposed.
- *Grand Finale:* Final projects are presented to a panel of industry and technology experts. This phase marks the culmination of the innovation process and the selection of the most implementable solutions (Accor 2014; Accor 2019).

This ensures that the program's outcomes are not merely theoretical proposals, but have real application value, creating a natural bridge to the digital transformation of society.

The importance of the program for Accor's digital transformation

The Take Off! program forms an integral part of Accor's digital strategy and is not an isolated initiative. In fact, it is an integral part of the wider digital services ecosystem, including the Accor Live Limitless (ALL) platform (Accor 2024).

The program's outcomes have a tangible impact on various areas of the company's operations:

- *Improving the customer experience (UX):* Innovative proposals from students are used to optimize mobile applications, reservation systems, and digital services.
- *Strategic understanding of the customer:* The program provides valuable insights into the behaviour of Generation Z, who prefer personalized, authentic, technology-driven services.
- *Testing new technologies:* Accor experiments with modern solutions such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and the gamification of loyalty programs through the programs, while minimizing the associated risks (Denisova et al. 2025; Augustin and Suyuthie 2025; Accor 2025).

This makes the program an important tool for innovation management, supporting the company's continuous adaptation to the digital environment.

Strategic impact on competitiveness

By linking talent management and innovation, Take Off! plays a key role in strengthening Accor's competitiveness. One of the main benefits is the ability to attract and retain young talent, which is crucial for the future development of digital services. In an environment where technology platforms and OTAs dominate distribution, human capital is a decisive factor that sets companies apart.

At the same time, the program fosters an internal culture of innovation, enabling the company to respond flexibly to new trends. In the context of the Marketing 5.0 concept, which emphasizes the connection between technology and the human factor, Take Off! plays a pivotal role. It ensures that technological solutions are designed and implemented with a focus on customer needs and the human element of services (Chafizah et al. 2024).

This approach enables Accor to distinguish itself from purely digital platforms and to create an authentic, personalized customer experience.

Case study summary

The Take Off! program exemplifies an effective connection between theory and practice in the field of digital transformation. It demonstrates that innovation in the hospitality industry encompasses more than just technological implementation; it also involves nurturing talent and understanding customer needs.

The case study also confirms that a comprehensive approach integrating technological, organizational, and human factors is required for successful digital transformation.

Digital transformation is a key factor in the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of the hotel industry. Analysis shows that Accor is a leader in implementing digital strategies, with systematic investment in technology and data analytics, as well as the development of the Accor Live Limitless ecosystem, resulting in higher operational efficiency and personalized services.

However, it is also clear that technology alone is not enough. A key role is played by connecting digital solutions with human capital, particularly the ability to identify and develop talent. Digital transformation also presents new challenges, particularly regarding cybersecurity, change management, and overcoming system fragmentation.

The importance of the Marketing 5.0 approach is also confirmed from a theoretical point of view, where success depends on sensitively integrating technology with the human factor. Practical findings also highlight the need for greater consideration of the emotional and psychological aspects of the customer experience, which are often overlooked in existing research.

Overall, it can be concluded that digital transformation is a long-term adaptation, not a one-time process. The future of the hotel sector depends on combining technological innovation with empathy and a deeper understanding of customer needs. Further research should focus on comprehensively grasping the digital customer experience and comparing strategies between competing hotel groups.

4. Conclusion

The results of the Accor Group's digital transformation analysis confirm that success in the "Hospitality 4.0" era hinges not only on the implementation of technologies, but also on their strategic integration into the overall business model. The 'Leading Digital Hospitality' program, initiated in 2014, transformed Accor from a traditional hotel operator into a digitally oriented ecosystem.

A key finding of the discussion is the investment ratio (60% in mid-end and back-end versus 40% in expansion), which indicates that Accor has correctly identified robust IT infrastructure as a prerequisite for client innovation. Without efficient reservation systems (TARS) and flexible property management systems (PMS), personalization in the Accor Live Limitless (ALL) program would not be technically feasible. This approach addresses one of the main weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis: the technological fragmentation of legacy systems.

Synergy of technology and human capital

While many hotel groups focus exclusively on automation to reduce costs, the Take Off! case study reveals Accor's distinctive competitive advantage. Here, the discussion follows the concept of Marketing 5.0, where technology (AI, VR and big data) serves as an accelerator, but human creativity and empathy remain at the core of the service.

Crowdsourcing ideas from Generation Z through this program enables the company to:

- Mitigate threats associated with rapidly changing consumer preferences.
- identify digital talents who understand the logic of algorithms but also the emotional value of hospitality.

Market position and challenges

Despite its position as a technological pioneer, the SWOT analysis highlights ongoing risks. Economic uncertainty and intense competition from online travel agencies (OTAs) are compelling Accor to continually innovate its ALL-loyalty program in order to minimize its reliance on external distributors. Data harmonization and cybersecurity are now fundamental pillars of brand credibility, not just technical requirements (Bravo et al. 2023).

Digital transformation at Accor is not a destination, but a continuous process of adaptation. The success of the ALL model and innovative platforms such as Take Off! demonstrate that entities that can create a seamless transition between the digital world (reservations, check-in, data) and the physical experience (personalized stays, human contact) will be the winners in the market (Casais and Ferreira 2023).

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