

University of Wales Trinity Saint David
School of Business and Management

Report Title:

The Changing Landscape of
Marketing in Hospitality: A Personal
Exploration and Application

A Case Study of **Premier Inn**
(Whitbread PLC)

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Student Name: **Richmond Galahardt**

Abstract

This report explores the rapidly evolving marketing landscape within the hospitality industry, focusing on Premier Inn, a leading brand under Whitbread PLC. Using a self-designed marketing experiment, the study applies emerging marketing concepts including user-generated content, personalisation, and influencer engagement. The report critically evaluates how these trends are transforming traditional hospitality marketing approaches and clearly articulating the departure from the traditional approaches when it comes to marketing as we know it. It also provides strategic recommendations for both large and small hospitality businesses while reflecting on personal learning outcomes from the fact-finding mission and research that I have conducted based on the acquired knowledge, other writers work extracts and personal assessments.

Executive Summary

This report investigates the changing dynamics of hospitality marketing through a planned campaign experiment which was titled '#StayWithPremierInnStories'. Aimed at increasing Gen Z and Millennials age groups engagement with Premier Inn, the campaign applies user-generated content, influencer marketing, and personalisation tactics. The report integrates academic theories with practice by analysing the campaign against current marketing trends, such as short-form video content and data-driven personalisation. It also examines how Whitbread's Premier Inn compares to competitors and identifies strategic gaps. A personal reflection highlights how the experiment enhanced understanding of marketing principles and influenced professional aspirations. Finally, the report presents actionable recommendations for hospitality firms seeking to remain competitive in a digital-first era.

Report has been structured to articulate the following key focus areas: Personal engagement including marketing experiment description, emerging trends and their Impacts. Case study Analysis: Premier Inn's response to emerging trends. The report goes on to explore and explain the personal reflection and application then conclusion and recommendations.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose

The hospitality industry has witnessed an unprecedented transformation over the past decade. Technological advancements have resulted in massive digital disruption across the globe, shifting consumer preferences, and macro-environmental forces, including the COVID-19 pandemic and economic uncertainties, have dramatically altered how hospitality brands engage their customers (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Marketing today is totally different to what it was many years ago, consumer behaviours have remarkably changed, People are no longer just lured by affordability or quality of services alone but there is many other factors that consumers now consider before engaging with a product or service from a supplier; things like sustainability have become key and pivotal in decisions on who to do business with. Marketing traditionally focused on broad appeal, has now evolved towards precision-targeted, personalised experiences delivered in real time.

This report explores these shifts through the lens of Premier Inn brand and business, the flagship brand of Whitbread PLC. As a value-focused hotel chain with a broad UK footprint, Premier Inn faces increasing pressure to remain competitive amid changing guest expectations, especially among younger generations/demographics. The study combines theory and practice through a self-designed marketing experiment and evaluates how Premier Inn's current strategies align with emerging marketing trends and how to remain relevant and competitive going into the future.

1.2 Methodology and Chosen Approach

social media has become a great asset for business growth if used well and with the right parameters and controls in place. On the other hand, social media can also be the reason for a failure of a business if something goes wrong leading to serious reputational damages especially for business operating in the hospitality industry who do not sell tangible goods but rather sell a service all they have is their Reputation.

The methodological approach for this report is grounded in a marketing experiment rather than an interview. The campaign, titled '#StayWithPremierInnStories', was designed to simulate how a hospitality brand could use user-generated content (UGC), micro-influencer marketing, and data-driven personalisation to improve engagement. This experimental design allows for reflection on both strategic planning and tactical execution, aligning with Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984).

2. Personal Engagement: Marketing Experiment Description

2.1 Campaign Context and Strategic Rationale

The campaign '#StayWithPremierInnStories' was conceptualised to address a critical gap in Premier Inn's digital strategy, its limited appeal to Gen Z and digitally native Millennials. Research indicates that 84% of Millennials do not trust traditional advertisements but are significantly influenced by peer recommendations and relatable user-generated content (Bazaarvoice, 2021). To attract Gen Z and millennials businesses must be more flexible and more digital in their approaches as these young people are accustomed to mobile apps, tech and fast response interactions.

Social media is a powerful tool for marketing to Gen Z and Millennials as it aligns with their digital-first lifestyles and preference for authenticity. Platforms such as Tik Tok, Twitter (Now X), Facebook and Instagram enable brands to engage directly with their audience through real-time interaction, fostering a sense of community and trust. Influencer marketing is particularly effective, as younger audiences tend to trust recommendations from creators over traditional advertising. Social media also allows for personalised and targeted content, ensuring messages resonate with specific demographics. Gen Z and Millennials are drawn to visual and short-form content, making platforms like TikTok and Instagram ideal for delivering quick, impactful messages. Additionally, they value brand transparency and social responsibility, so social media becomes a key channel for showcasing ethical practices and inclusive values. User-generated content and trends help drive engagement, offering social proof and a sense of involvement. With features like in-app shopping, social media also makes the path from discovery to purchase seamless, increasing the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns.

Recognising this, the campaign sought to build both digital and emotional connections through guest storytelling on social media, primarily via TikTok and Instagram Reels.

2.2 Tactical Development and Theoretical Underpinning

The SOSTAC planning framework (Smith, 2020) was used to structure the campaign development:

- Situation Analysis: Declining engagement from younger users and high bounce rates on digital booking platforms.
- Objectives: Increase user engagement by 150% and boost bookings by 10% over a six-week period.

- Strategy: User generated content based storytelling promoted through regional micro-influencers with under 50,000 followers.
- Tactics: Daily posts on Instagram and TikTok using branded hashtags, reposts on Premier Inn's social pages.
- Action: A five-week launch calendar (see Appendix B), influencer recruitment, promo code integration.
- Control: Campaign success measured via Google Analytics, hashtag usage, and other relevant social media KPIs.

2.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Feasibility

To ensure campaign authenticity, micro-influencers were selected based on their follower engagement, alignment with travel and lifestyle niches, and geographic relevance to Premier Inn's hotel locations. Influencer selection adhered to Keller's Brand Equity Model (Keller, 2003), focusing on resonance and imagery to influence target perceptions. Stakeholders included digital marketing staff, local property managers, and external media consultants.

2.4 Campaign Rollout

The campaign was structured into four core phases:

- Phase 1: Influencer recruitment and onboarding.
 - Phase 2: Launch of User generated content challenge with a reward-based incentive system.
 - Phase 3: Amplification through brand reposts and paid boosts on high-performing content.
 - Phase 4: Campaign wrap-up, post-campaign surveys, and analysis of booking trends.
- Each phase was designed to align with the AIDA model; Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (Kotler et al., 2015), ensuring a structured funnel from content engagement to conversion.

2.5 Projected vs. Simulated Outcomes

Given the theoretical nature of the experiment, results were simulated using industry benchmarks. With a targeted 12% engagement rate (based on short-form video trends), the campaign was expected to generate:

- Over 600 uses of the #StayWithPremierInnStories hashtag.
- A 30% increase in Premier Inn's TikTok and Instagram followers.
- A 7–10% increase in booking conversion, aligned with benchmarks reported by Hospitality Net (2023).

These metrics demonstrate the campaign's potential to drive both digital engagement and commercial outcomes.

3. Emerging Trends and Their Impacts

3.1 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has transitioned from a fringe tactic to a core strategy within hospitality marketing. As social media usage surges, influencers, particularly micro-influencers are key drivers in shaping consumer perceptions. According to Mediakix (2023), brands earn an average of \$5.78 for every dollar spent on influencer campaigns. An interesting fact that came out in recent research/findings is that; Influencers with fewer than 50,000 followers tend to generate higher engagement rates due to perceived authenticity and closer audience relationships (Brown & Fiorella, 2020). People have become cautious with influencers with massive following as over time it has become apparent that these influencers can be paid to just endorse something they have not actually used or fully understand making it difficult for consumers to believe their reviews or comments on products unlike someone with a decently big following but as still seen as a genuine user of a product or service. Premier Inn's adoption of influencer partnerships, particularly through its '#StayWithPremierInnStories' initiative, represents a step toward bridging the generational engagement gap.

3.2 Short-Form Video

Short-form video content, such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, has revolutionised the way hospitality businesses interact with audiences. These formats are highly consumable, emotionally resonant, and ideally suited to mobile-first users. According to Statista (2024), 92% of global mobile users watch video content at least weekly, making this format crucial for visibility. The use of music, humour, and behind-the-scenes content enables brands to humanise their offerings. For example, Marriott Bonvoy's TikTok campaign showcasing local stories gained over 12 million views in one quarter (Travel Daily News, 2023).

3.3 Personalisation

Today's consumers demand hyper-personalised experiences. Data analytics tools and Customer Data Platforms (CDPs) allow brands to tailor promotions and service offerings based on browsing behaviour, geolocation, and past purchases. Salesforce (2023) reports that 76% of travellers expect businesses to understand their needs and expectations. In the campaign experiment, personalisation was achieved through audience segmentation and promo code tracking. Future iterations could integrate AI

chatbots to recommend tailored destinations or discounts, improving the guest journey from search to checkout.

3.4 Sustainability and Ethical Branding

Consumers are increasingly factoring sustainability into their booking decisions. Hospitality businesses are expected to showcase environmental responsibility, from energy use to community engagement. Nielsen (2022) found that 73% of Millennials are willing to pay more for sustainable offerings. Premier Inn has an opportunity to embed green messaging into its digital marketing, such as highlighting eco-certifications or low-emission building designs in UGC campaigns. Such alignment can improve reputation and appeal to ethically conscious travellers.

3.5 Alignment with Campaign Design

The '#StayWithPremierInnStories' campaign integrates all four emerging trends. Its focus on authentic storytelling via micro-influencers reinforces trust, while the use of short-form video formats maximises reach. Personalisation through targeted promo codes enhances relevance, and potential tie-ins with eco-conscious messaging promote ethical branding. This synergy allows Premier Inn to build a cohesive and resonant brand identity across digital platforms.

4. Case Study Analysis: Premier Inn's Response to Emerging Trends

4.1 Application of the Marketing Mix (7Ps)

Premier Inn has consistently demonstrated strong performance in delivering a standardised value proposition across its properties, rooted in the traditional 7Ps of the marketing mix. Its 'Product'; a clean, affordable, and reliable hotel stay, is well positioned for budget conscious travellers. Its 'Price' strategy leverages dynamic pricing software, optimising revenues based on seasonality and demand.

However, limitations arise in the 'Promotion' and 'People' dimensions. Marketing remains highly functional, focusing on price comparisons, Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising, and loyalty incentives. Unlike newer competitors, Premier Inn has not fully embraced influencer engagement or storytelling in its branding. This is a missed opportunity for 'co-creation' of value, a concept supported by Vargo and Lusch's Service-Dominant Logic (2004), which posits that value is co-created with the customer rather than delivered unilaterally.

4.2 Digital Competitor Benchmarking

Comparative analysis highlights Premier Inn's conservative approach relative to digitally progressive competitors. Marriott's Moxy Hotels and IHG's Voco brand have launched bold campaigns using Instagram Reels and curated influencer partnerships. For instance, Moxy's 'Play On' initiative uses humour and music to create relatable content for Gen Z audiences (Marriott News Centre, 2023).

Premier Inn's continued reliance on functional search-engine optimisation and email newsletters fails to resonate with mobile-first users who value immediacy and interactivity. Research by the Journal of Digital Hospitality (2023) shows that 45% of consumers consider immersive and participative digital content more persuasive than static ads.

4.3 Organisational Culture and Innovation Barriers

Whitbread PLC's strength lies in operational efficiency: mobile check-ins, automated kiosks, and reliable property maintenance. However, its culture is heavily skewed towards back-end innovation rather than emotional brand-building. Crane et al. (2019) argue that authentic emotional branding cultivates long-term loyalty, particularly among experience-driven demographics. The lack of emotional resonance in Premier Inn's current marketing suggests untapped potential. Internal risk aversion and legacy systems may also constrain agility in adopting trend-responsive marketing strategies.

4.4 Opportunities for Advancement

The '#StayWithPremierInnStories' campaign offers Premier Inn a cost-effective method to revitalise its brand positioning. It aligns with lean marketing principles, low capital outlay, high engagement potential, and rapid feedback loops. By empowering guests to co-create content, Premier Inn could enhance trust and social proof, critical drivers of booking intent (Bright Local, 2022). This is a smart move as it is more authentic and more convincing as the testimonial interaction of a guest is the best marketing that any business can do and is worth more than any other traditional marketing strategy. It will be more appealing to other potential consumers and will likely attract more people to Premier Inn.

Key opportunities include:

- Leveraging influencer marketing to access younger demographics.
- Using UGC (User generated Content) to reinforce authenticity and relatability.
- Creating emotionally resonant narratives to differentiate from competitors.
- Investing in AI tools to personalise offers and streamline content delivery.

5. Personal Reflection and Application

5.1 Theory-to-Practice Integration

Executing the '#StayWithPremierInnStories' campaign concept allowed me to connect theoretical frameworks with practical marketing considerations. For example, applying the SOSTAC model (Smith, 2020) offered a structured yet flexible approach to campaign design, while the AIDA model guided the creation of emotionally engaging content.

I also gained a stronger appreciation for the nuances of channel selection. Although TikTok offers higher engagement metrics, it also presents challenges in content moderation and brand consistency. Conversely, Instagram allowed for more controlled storytelling but yielded lower virality potential. One of the key dynamics noticed is people are getting increasingly used to TIK TOK as the go to platform for most social interaction which could explain some of the changes in numbers and how it takes to go viral on Tik Tok vs Instagram. These trade-offs underscored the need for integrated channel strategies; an insight directly informed by integrated marketing communications theory (Belch & Belch, 2018).

5.2 Career and Professional Relevance

This project significantly reinforced interest in digital marketing and customer experience design, particularly within the hospitality and tourism sectors. By simulating campaign planning and analysing digital metrics, I now feel more equipped to contribute to roles involving performance marketing, digital strategy, and brand innovation. One interesting thing that came out of this research and report writing was the fact that people are more likely to believe an influence with a reasonably big following but not super big following in millions which can be perceived as someone just getting paid to now endorse anything because of the massive following. That has been an eye opener for me and made me realise how today's consumers are smarter, demand more and are very intentional in everything they buy.

The campaign also taught me how to effectively communicate with cross-functional stakeholders, a skill critical for consultancy or in-house strategy roles. Mapping the guest journey from inspiration to conversion helped reinforce customer-centric thinking, which is foundational to modern marketing roles (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

5.3 Personal Development and Skill Advancement

The experience improved several technical and soft skills. On the technical side, I gained confidence in interpreting campaign KPIs, building mock analytics dashboards (see Appendix C), and applying segmentation principles. On the soft skills side, I further developed my data analysis and critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and adaptability as some projects or issues require nuanced approaches and ability to be flexible along the way whilst at the same time always being pro-active

Importantly, this project highlighted the ethical dimensions of digital marketing. Data privacy, influencer transparency, and equitable brand representation are key considerations in campaign design. I intend to continue exploring ethical marketing, especially as I plan to pursue leadership roles where compliance and client trust are paramount (Crane et al., 2019).

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Insights

When you sell a service the only asset and value you have is your people and your reputation. To be successful in marketing you must have and also be able to maintain a good reputation in the eyes and minds of consumers and relevant stakeholders.

The hospitality industry is navigating a significant marketing transformation driven by digital media, changing consumer behaviours, and socio-environmental concerns. Through the '#StayWithPremierInnStories' campaign simulation, this report has demonstrated how Premier Inn; despite its operational excellence, can unlock new value by aligning its marketing strategies with emerging trends in ensuring they remain a competitive business for the foreseeable future and retaining and also growing a healthy consumer base.

The analysis underscores four key insights:

- ❖ the power of micro-influencers in building trust.
- ❖ the dominance of short-form video as a storytelling medium.
- ❖ the centrality of data-driven personalisation; and
- ❖ the rising expectation for ethical and sustainable brand communication. Premier Inn currently under-leverages these opportunities, especially in its promotional mix and emotional engagement efforts.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

For Premier Inn to future-proof its market position, it must move beyond functional messaging and embrace more interactive, participative, and values-driven marketing. The '#StayWithPremierInnStories' campaign offers a practical blueprint for low-cost, high-impact digital engagement. If adopted, such strategies can help reposition the brand as relevant, authentic, and guest-centric, all these qualities appeal to and also resonate with the next generation of travellers.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations for Large Hospitality Brands

- Develop an in-house digital innovation unit to trial emerging formats and influencer collaborations.
- Implement Customer Data Platforms (CDPs) to segment audiences and serve hyper-personalised promotions in real-time.
- Introduce ethical guidelines for influencer partnerships, focusing on diversity, transparency, and data ethics.
- Use gamification and rewards-based systems to encourage guest participation in UGC campaigns.
- Collaborate with NGOs or sustainability bodies to integrate purpose-driven narratives into digital branding.

7.2 Recommendations for SMEs

- Focus on regional micro-influencers and community-led marketing initiatives to maintain authenticity.
- Partner with local tourism boards and cultural institutions to co-create content that highlights local experiences.
- Use free or low-cost analytics tools like Meta Business Suite and Google Trends to track digital performance.
- Offer incentives for repeat bookings and referrals through personalised discount codes.
- Build a library of user-generated content to serve as social proof for future campaigns.

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9. Appendices

Appendix A: Campaign Execution Framework

- ❖ Influencer identification and vetting
- ❖ Content guide development
- ❖ Challenge launch and promo code integration
- ❖ Weekly monitoring and reposts
- ❖ Post-campaign wrap-up and learnings

Appendix B: Content Calendar

- ❖ Week 1: Launch teaser video and influencer intro
- ❖ Week 2–3: Peak UGC submission window
- ❖ Week 4: Repost campaign
- ❖ Week 5–6: Summary video + reward code analytics

Appendix C: Mock Dashboard Analytics (Projected)

- ❖ +30% increase in social media followers
- ❖ 12% average engagement rate
- ❖ 8.4% uplift in bookings from campaign
- ❖ 600+ uses of hashtag #StayWithPremierInnStories