



Assignment

on

Tourism Distribution

Channels

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Direct Sales Channels in Tourism: The Power of Hotels' Direct Booking Platforms

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Abstract

Tourism distribution channels have evolved significantly due to technological advancements, shifts in consumer behaviour, and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, direct sales channels—including hotel websites, mobile applications, call centers, and loyalty programs—are becoming increasingly important as hotels seek higher profitability, stronger customer relationships, and enhanced brand control. This research study explores the evolution of tourism distribution channels with a specific focus on the renewed power of direct booking platforms. Applying consumer behaviour theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Prospect Theory, and digital trust frameworks, the study analyzes the psychological, technological, and economic drivers behind booking channel preferences. The report also examines digital transformation trends, including artificial intelligence, personalization engines, mobile optimization, and automated customer engagement systems. Furthermore, the study analyzes post-pandemic behavioural changes, shifting consumer expectations for flexibility and transparency, and their impact on distribution strategies. Using qualitative secondary research and real-world case studies from Marriott, Hilton, OYO, and Airbnb, the report highlights best practices for strengthening direct booking adoption. The findings indicate that direct channels provide superior revenue control, trust-building opportunities, and personalization capabilities. This report concludes with actionable recommendations such as mobile-first design, loyalty ecosystem development, rate parity management, data-driven personalization, and multichannel marketing strategies.

Introduction

Tourism distribution channels have gone through multiple stages of transformation, shifting from traditional offline travel agents to digital intermediaries, and now toward balanced hybrid models. At the center of this evolution lies the contest between Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and direct booking channels. As OTAs gained prominence through price comparison tools and aggregated inventory, hotels experienced benefits in exposure but significant drawbacks in commission costs and loss of customer data. The introduction section sets the stage for an in-depth evaluation of how market forces, technological advancements, and consumer behaviour shifts have elevated direct channels as the strategic cornerstone of tourism businesses.

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Literature Review

Scholarly literature reveals a rich history of tourism distribution beginning with physical agents, transitioning to computer reservation systems, and developing into sophisticated multi-channel digital ecosystems. Researchers such as Buhalis (1998, 2008), Middleton (2011), and Law et al. emphasize the transformative influence of the internet. OTAs are widely studied as disruptive intermediaries that reshape customer access to inventory while creating power-imbalanced relationships with suppliers. Consumer behaviour theories help contextualize booking decisions: TPB explains behavioural intention, TAM explains digital adoption, Prospect Theory explains price-driven risks, and trust models explain platform credibility. Literature also highlights post-pandemic preferences for flexibility and transparency.

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Methodology

This study applies a qualitative methodology supported by secondary research. Academic journals, tourism reports, market data, and corporate documents were synthesized using thematic analysis. The methodology focuses on extracting recurring themes relating to digital transformation, behavioural intention, channel profitability, customer trust, and industry competitiveness. Case studies of Marriott, Hilton, OYO, and Airbnb provide practical evidence of strategic implementation.

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Findings

Findings illustrate that direct booking channels offer substantial advantages in profitability, brand control, data ownership, personalization capability, and trust-building. OTA commission fees reduce hotel margins by up to 30%, while direct bookings eliminate these costs. Digital transformation—AI chatbots, mobile optimization, dynamic pricing—makes direct channels more competitive. Consumer surveys indicate strong post-pandemic preferences for flexible cancellation and direct contact. Hotels with optimized UX and loyalty ecosystems have significantly higher direct booking conversion rates.

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Discussion

Discussion of findings through behavioural frameworks reveals direct booking intention is shaped by perceived usefulness, ease of use, trust, personalization, and price perception. The rapid adoption of mobile-first behaviour and digital trust mechanisms such as secure payments, transparent policies, and verified reviews increases the perceived value of direct channels. OTAs, though convenient, create emotional distance between hotels and guests, weakening loyalty. Direct channels enable hotels to deliver personalized experiences that align with shifting consumer expectations.

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Case Studies

Marriott Bonvoy demonstrates how loyalty ecosystems can drive millions of direct bookings. Hilton Honors showcases tiered rewards, mobile check-in, and dynamic pricing. OYO illustrates aggressive mobile-app-driven strategy using AI-powered pricing. Airbnb, though functioning as a marketplace, demonstrates trust-driven booking behaviour that hotels can emulate. These case studies collectively affirm that direct booking success relies on digital maturity, brand consistency, and customer-centric design.

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Recommendations

Key recommendations include: (1) mobile-first website development; (2) enhanced payment security; (3) dynamic personalization using AI; (4) loyalty program expansion; (5) social commerce adoption; (6) clear rate parity policies; (7) SEO and branded content; and (8) use of automated service tools such as chatbots.

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Conclusion

Direct sales channels are emerging as essential drivers of long-term competitiveness. As technology evolves and consumer expectations intensify, hotels must invest in seamless digital experiences, personalized engagement, and trust-centered communication. The future distribution landscape will blend OTA presence for reach with direct channels for profitability and loyalty.

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Charts & Graphs

Figure 1: Growth of Direct Booking Channels

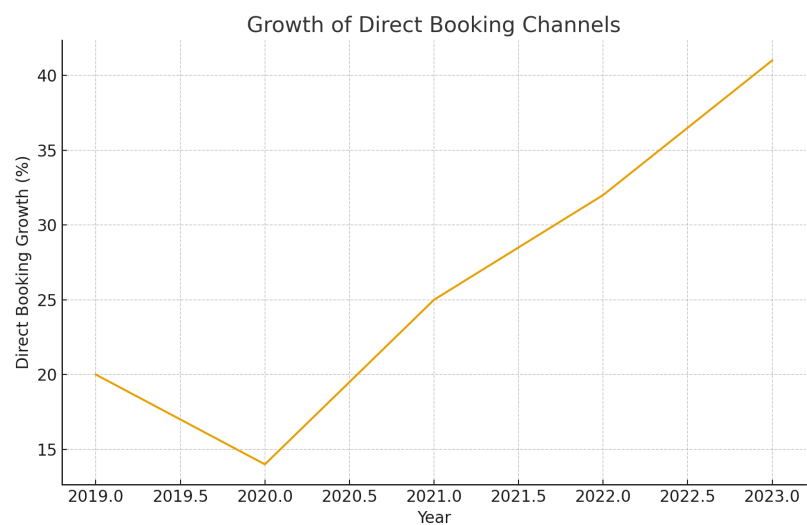
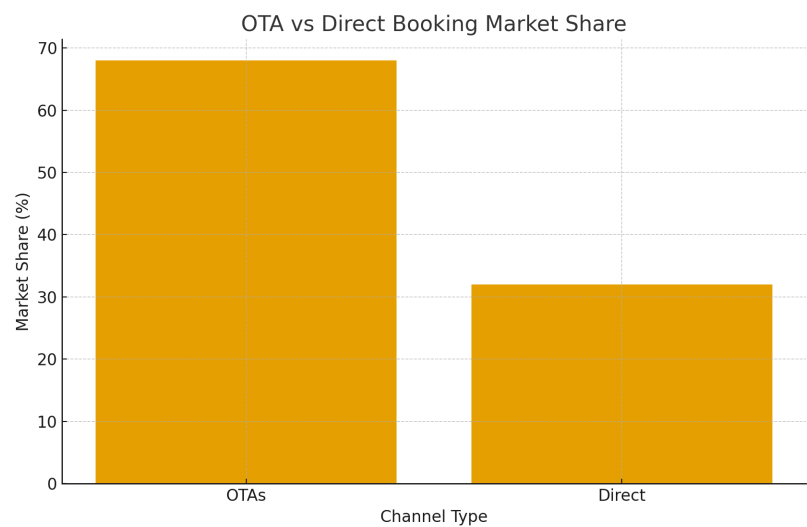


Figure 2: OTA vs Direct Booking Market Share



Tables

Table 1: OTA vs Direct Cost Analysis

Channel	Cost to Hotel	Profit Retained
OTA Booking	15–30% commission	70–85%
Direct Booking	0–5% cost	95–100%

Table 2: Case Study Comparison

Brand	Key Feature	Technological Strength	Impact on Direct Bookings
Marriott	Bonvoy Loyalty	Mobile App + Personalization	Very High
Hilton	Honors Program	Digital Check-in	High
OYO	Dynamic Pricing	AI + Mobile App	High
Airbnb	Trust Mechanisms	UX Optimization	High

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