



THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AMONG THREE-STAR HOTELS IN THAI NGUYEN: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF CURRENT PRACTICES, BARRIERS, AND SUPPORT NEEDS

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Abstract:

Rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), are expanding the potential applications of these technologies in hotel marketing communications. However, access to and use of AI for individual tasks do not necessarily mean that AI has been integrated into organizational processes. This study aims to clarify the scope of AI use, the degree of AI integration, the barriers encountered, and the support needs associated with AI use among three-star hotels in Thai Nguyen. The study adopts a qualitative multiple-case design involving nine hotels and combines semi-structured interviews, reviews of digital communication channels, and evidence relating to AI-use processes. Data were analyzed within individual cases and comparatively across cases. The findings show that eight of the nine cases had experimented with AI, primarily for idea generation, content creation and editing, translation, and visual-content support, whereas applications involving personalization, data analysis, and system integration remained limited. In many cases, AI use originated from individual initiatives before being formalized at the organizational level. The most salient barriers concerned users' AI capabilities, the quality and accuracy of AI-generated outputs, the absence of formal procedures, authenticity, data-related issues, and copyright. Support needs centered on hands-on training, guidance on prompt development, output verification, and process standardization. The findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between AI use and AI integration in hotel marketing communications.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; generative AI; marketing communications; AI integration; three-star hotels; multiple-case study

1. INTRODUCTION

Rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), are expanding the possibilities for applying technology to business marketing activities. In the tourism and hospitality sector, GenAI can support the creation and adaptation of marketing content, message personalization, customer engagement, and certain decision-making activities (Sigala et al., 2024; Bilgihan et al., 2024; Zhang & Prebensen, 2024). The growing accessibility of GenAI tools has also enabled employees to use them directly in their day-to-day marketing communication tasks (Sigala et al., 2024; Saleh, 2025).

However, access to and use of AI do not necessarily mean that AI has been integrated into organizational activities. An employee's voluntary use of GenAI to support an isolated task should be distinguished from a hotel's incorporation of AI into multiple stages of its communication process, with clearly defined responsibilities, verification criteria, and standardized content-approval procedures. Therefore, the assessment of AI adoption should not be limited to whether an organization "uses AI" or not. It should also consider the tasks for which AI is used, the frequency of use, the

position of AI within the workflow, and the way its use is organizationally controlled. As AI becomes more deeply involved in content creation and processing, issues concerning information accuracy and reliability, authenticity, privacy, intellectual property, and accountability in AI use also become increasingly important (NIST, 2024; Shen et al., 2026).

Recent studies have provided important insights into the potential, applications, and challenges of GenAI in tourism and hospitality. The review by Li et al. (2025) shows that current GenAI research is concentrated in three main areas: antecedents of use, impacts and applications, and technical issues. Saleh (2025) similarly highlights the need for a deeper understanding of practical implementation challenges, prompt-development strategies, and the operational implications of GenAI. At the organizational level, Shin et al. (2025) identify drivers and barriers to AI adoption as well as the workforce skills required during the adoption process. Cozzio et al. (2026) show that perceptions of AI opportunities and barriers may differ across hierarchical levels within hotels, whereas Wang and Zhang (2025) emphasize the roles of technological capability, organizational support, and AI strategy in the use of GenAI in hotel marketing. Taken together, these studies suggest that individual-level access to and use of AI represent only part of the technology-adoption process. More research is needed to clarify how task-level AI use develops into repeated practices that are controlled and integrated into organizational processes. It is also necessary to understand the barriers that arise during this process and the corresponding support needs of hotels.

This study focuses on three-star hotels in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam. In 2025, Thai Nguyen received more than 7.3 million tourist arrivals (Thai Nguyen Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2025). According to the Thai Nguyen Provincial Online Portal (2026), as of early 2026, the province had 787 tourist accommodation establishments, including 10 three-star hotels. Focusing on hotels within the same classification and within a relatively bounded case framework enables an in-depth comparison of how different hotels use and integrate AI into their marketing communication activities.

Against this background, the study aims to clarify how AI is used and integrated into the marketing communication processes of three-star hotels in Thai Nguyen, while identifying the barriers involved in moving from task- or individual-level AI use toward more organized forms of use, together with the corresponding support needs. Specifically, the study examines: (i) the AI-related activities and tools currently being used; (ii) differences in the forms and degree of AI integration across cases; (iii) the main barriers to integration; and (iv) the support needs associated with these barriers. Conceptually, the study approaches AI adoption not simply in terms of whether AI is used, but also in terms of the scope of AI-supported tasks, frequency of use, the position of AI within the workflow, and the extent of organizational formalization and control. From a practical perspective, the study maps identified barriers onto corresponding support needs, thereby providing a basis for developing the capabilities of employees who directly use AI, organizing output-verification activities, and progressively standardizing AI use within hotel marketing communication processes.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. AI and generative AI in hotel marketing communications: concepts and scope

According to the OECD (2024), an artificial intelligence (AI) system is a machine-based system that can infer from the input it receives how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that may influence physical or virtual environments. Within this broader category, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is particularly relevant to marketing communications because of its ability to generate content in multiple formats, including text, images, audio, and video (OECD, 2024).

In this study, the use of AI in marketing communications refers to a hotel's use of AI-based tools or functions to support one or more stages of customer-oriented communication activities. The analytical scope includes idea

generation and content planning; the creation and adaptation of text, images, or video; translation and message personalization; support for customer interaction and responses; the synthesis of customer feedback; and support for evaluating communication effectiveness. This scope was developed for the present study with reference to the logic of the GAI Marketing Model proposed by Bilgihan et al. (2024), which considers GenAI across multiple stages of marketing activity rather than solely as a content-generation tool.

The study distinguishes between AI use and AI integration. AI use refers to the application of AI to one or more communication tasks, whereas AI integration refers to the extent to which such use becomes a recurring part of the workflow, occupies a relatively defined position within that workflow, and is subject to organizational control. Accordingly, a hotel may use AI frequently while still exhibiting a limited degree of integration if such use depends primarily on individual initiative and has not been formalized within organizational processes.

For cross-case comparison, the study identifies the degree of AI integration through four analytical dimensions: the scope of AI-supported tasks; frequency of use; the position or depth of AI involvement within the workflow; and the degree of organizational formalization and control. These dimensions are considered jointly when analyzing individual cases and comparing cases. They are not aggregated into a composite index or treated as a standardized AI maturity scale.

Although AI is used as the overarching concept in this study, the empirical focus is primarily on GenAI tools and AI functions that support the creation, adaptation, or processing of communication content. Therefore, interpretations concerning tool use in this study largely reflect the GenAI context and should not be generalized to all forms of AI that may be used in hotel operations.

2.2. From task-level AI use to integration into organizational processes

One stream of research focuses on the capabilities of GenAI in creating and adapting marketing content. Zhang and Prebensen (2024) show that ChatGPT can generate tourism marketing materials with high levels of attractiveness and semantic fluency, suggesting the potential for a co-creative relationship between GenAI and marketers. Guttentag et al. (2025) likewise find that tourism product descriptions optimized using ChatGPT are evaluated more favorably on several dimensions, although they do not significantly increase travelers' desire to undertake the trip. These findings indicate that content creation and adaptation represent clear areas of GenAI application in marketing, while also demonstrating that the effectiveness of the technology for a specific task should not be equated with overall marketing effectiveness or with the degree of AI integration at the organizational level.

As attention shifts from technological capability to the organizational use of AI, human and governance conditions become increasingly important. Shin et al. (2025) identify drivers and barriers to AI adoption as well as the skill sets required by frontline employees in the hospitality sector. Cozzio et al. (2026) show that groups at different hierarchical levels within hotels may emphasize different opportunities and barriers in relation to AI adoption. In the context of international hotel marketing, Wang and Zhang (2025) report that technological capability and organizational support are significantly associated with AI-enabled innovative behavior, while AI strategy strengthens the relationship between organizational support and innovative behavior. Taken together, these studies suggest that employees' access to and experimentation with GenAI represent only part of the adoption process. For AI use to become a stable organizational practice, appropriate conditions relating to capabilities, resources, and governance are also required.

When AI contributes to content used in customer-facing communication, the relevant issues extend beyond productivity to include quality and accountability. Bui et al. (2024) show that the perceived authenticity of AI-generated images is positively associated with tourists' trust and choice intentions. This is particularly relevant to hotel communications because much of the content describes attributes that customers may later compare with their actual experiences. NIST (2024) also highlights risks relating to information accuracy and integrity, data privacy, security,

and intellectual property in the use of GenAI. Shen et al. (2026) identify five dimensions of responsible GenAI in tourism: authenticity, security, care, ethics, and fairness. On this basis, human oversight in the present study is understood as the purposeful involvement of human actors in checking, verifying, editing, and approving AI-generated outputs before content is published.

Taken together, the existing literature points to three interrelated layers of concern. First, GenAI's capacity to create and adapt content makes specific marketing tasks a likely initial point of application. Second, the transition from task-level use to recurring and organized practices is associated with workforce capabilities, resources, and organizational support. Third, when AI is incorporated into activities directly related to customer-facing content, requirements concerning quality control, authenticity, data, intellectual property, and accountability become more salient. Accordingly, this study analyzes AI use through a process-oriented logic that moves from access and experimentation toward repeated use, formalization, and controlled integration. This logic does not imply that all hotels necessarily follow the same linear sequence.

2.3. Research gap, analytical framework, and research questions

Recent review studies indicate that research on GenAI in tourism has expanded rapidly but remains concentrated primarily on antecedents of use, impacts and applications, and technical issues (Li et al., 2025). Saleh (2025) also highlights the need for further research on practical implementation challenges, prompt-development strategies, and the operational implications of GenAI. Within the body of literature reviewed above, three issues remain insufficiently understood in the operational context of hotel marketing communications.

First, there is a need to better understand how actual AI applications are distributed across different stages of the marketing communication process. Second, it is necessary to distinguish employees' use of AI for isolated tasks from the organizational incorporation of AI into recurring, controlled, and formalized practices. Third, further clarification is needed regarding the barriers that affect the transition from task- or individual-level use to organized forms of use, together with the corresponding support needs.

Accordingly, Thai Nguyen is used as the empirical context in which the phenomenon is examined rather than being treated as the research gap itself. The research gap addressed in this study lies in the distinction between task- or individual-level AI use and process- or organizational-level AI integration, together with the barriers and support needs associated with movement between these two levels.

The study therefore addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. In which marketing communication activities are three-star hotels in Thai Nguyen currently applying AI, and which tools are being used?

RQ2. How does AI use differ across cases in terms of task scope, frequency, the position or depth of AI involvement within the workflow, and the degree of organizational formalization and control?

RQ3. What barriers constrain the transition from task- or individual-level AI use to recurring, formalized, and controlled AI use within marketing communication processes?

RQ4. What forms of support do hotels require to address the identified barriers and enhance their capacity to use AI effectively and responsibly?

The study's guiding framework comprises four analytical domains: AI applications, degree of integration, barriers, and support needs. These domains are positioned within an analytical logic that moves from task- or individual-level tool use toward organized AI use within marketing communication processes. Drawing on the literature reviewed above, the capabilities of employees who directly use AI, human oversight, and the organizational structuring of AI

use are treated as issues that cut across the transition from task- or individual-level tool use to organized use within marketing communication processes (Shin et al., 2025; Wang & Zhang, 2025; NIST, 2024; Shen et al., 2026).

More specifically, user capability concerns the ability to provide relevant context, formulate requests, evaluate outputs, and revise them appropriately; human oversight concerns checking, verification, and approval; and the organizational dimension concerns the allocation of responsibilities and the formalization of repeatedly used AI practices. These elements are treated as conditions associated with the process of AI integration rather than as independent components of human resource management. The framework is used to guide data collection, coding, and cross-case comparison; it is neither a causal model nor an AI maturity scale intended for empirical testing.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design and case selection

This study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design, which is appropriate for examining how a phenomenon unfolds within an organizational context and for comparing patterns across multiple cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Each hotel is treated as a case and as the primary unit of analysis, while interview participants serve as informants about the case rather than as independent units of observation.

The case frame consisted of 10 three-star hotels in Thai Nguyen identified in official provincial records at the time the sample was finalized. Given the relatively limited number of eligible cases, all 10 hotels were invited to participate. Nine hotels agreed to take part and were coded from KS01 to KS09. A total of 15 key informants participated in the interviews. Six hotels were represented by two participants, including one person in a managerial role and one person directly involved in marketing, sales, or communication activities, whereas the remaining three hotels were represented by one participant who met the study criteria. Where possible, obtaining information from individuals in different roles within the same hotel enabled comparison between managerial and operational perspectives.

3.2. Data collection

The study drew on three sources of evidence: semi-structured interviews, reviews of publicly available digital communication channels, and evidence relating to AI-use processes. Interviews were the primary source of data and focused on four areas corresponding to the research questions: the scope of AI use and the tools employed, the form and degree of integration, barriers, and support needs.

Rather than asking participants to confirm their use of a predetermined list of tools, the interviews began with a recent communication activity and the participant's most recent use of AI. The discussion then traced the sequence of work objective – input – tool – AI output – editing – checking – approval – publication. This approach helped identify the actual position of AI within the workflow.

Two pilot interviews were conducted before the main data-collection phase to assess the wording and structure of the interview questions. The main interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, lasted approximately 35–60 minutes, were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and were transcribed for analysis.

To supplement and cross-check the interview data, each hotel's publicly available digital communication channels were reviewed over a 90-day observation window. These channels included websites and the social media, search, or booking platforms used by the hotels. The review focused on content type, communication format, frequency of updates, and features relevant to the communication process. Content was not classified as AI-generated solely on the basis of style. AI involvement was recorded only when supported by confirmation from an informant or by appropriate process-related evidence.

With participants' consent, the study also documented evidence such as prompts, AI-generated outputs, content before and after human editing, or descriptions of the workflow. Such evidence was used to identify the stage at which AI was involved, the extent of human editing, and the way AI outputs were checked or approved.

3.3. Data analysis

The data were analyzed at two levels: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. First, data from interviews, reviews of digital channels, and process-related evidence were consolidated into a case profile for each hotel. Each profile captured the organization of communication activities, AI tools and tasks, the position of AI within the workflow, oversight mechanisms, barriers, and support needs. This approach helped preserve the specific context of each hotel before cross-case comparison was undertaken.

The coding process combined deductive and inductive approaches. Initial codes were developed from the research questions and analytical framework, while additional codes were introduced when the data revealed issues not captured by the initial framework. To compare the degree of AI integration, each case was examined along four dimensions: task scope, frequency of use, the position or depth of AI involvement within the workflow, and the degree of organizational formalization and control. These dimensions were interpreted jointly rather than aggregated into a composite index or AI maturity score.

Following the within-case analysis, a cross-case matrix was used to identify recurring patterns, differences, and exceptional cases. Barriers were examined in relation to the contexts in which they arose, while support needs were compared with the corresponding categories of barriers. Cases that did not fit the initial interpretation were retained and used to examine and refine the analysis. Values expressed in the form of $x/9$ were used solely to describe the number of cases sharing a particular characteristic and were not intended for statistical generalization. Similarly, the frequency with which a code appeared was not treated as a direct measure of the importance of a theme.

3.4. Research trustworthiness and ethics

Research trustworthiness was strengthened through the use of a consistent research procedure across cases, triangulation across multiple data sources, maintenance of case records and an analytical audit trail, active consideration of disconfirming evidence, and peer review of the codebook and cross-case interpretations. Interview reporting was also checked against relevant elements of the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) (Tong et al., 2007).

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to decline to answer particular questions, and their right to terminate the interview. Audio recording and the use of process-related evidence were undertaken only with participants' consent. The identities of both hotels and individuals were anonymized through coding. The study did not collect passwords, customers' personal data, or confidential documents.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Case characteristics and current AI use

Analysis of the nine cases shows that AI was relatively widely known and had been experimented with among the hotels studied, although the extent of use varied considerably. All nine cases were aware of or had heard about AI tools that could support communication activities, and eight of the nine cases reported that employees had experimented with at least one AI tool in their work. Four cases were identified as using AI relatively frequently. For KS03, the available data were insufficient to classify frequency separately, while the remaining cases were characterized by occasional, experimental, or very limited use. In six cases, initial AI use was reported to have

originated primarily from the personal initiatives of marketing, sales, or content-related staff before formal hotel-level guidance had been established.

The review of communication channels over the 90-day observation window also revealed differences in the extent of digital presence and activity across cases. These data were used to describe the context and cross-check interview information, rather than to infer whether content had been AI-generated based solely on stylistic characteristics. The AI-use profile of each case is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Case characteristics and current AI use

Case	Marketing organization	AI tools	Main applications	Frequency of use	Evidence of formalization/control
KS01	Dedicated staff	ChatGPT, Canva AI	Idea generation, posts, images, translation	Frequent	Insufficient evidence for full classification
KS02	Sales staff also responsible for marketing	ChatGPT	Posts, promotional content, translation	Frequent	Not formalized; primarily driven by individual initiative
KS03	Small marketing team	ChatGPT, Gemini, Canva AI	Content, images, video, planning, review analysis	Not clearly determined	Clearer pre-publication review steps; AI involved in multiple stages
KS04	Staff with multiple responsibilities	ChatGPT	Idea generation, posts	Occasional	Insufficient evidence for full classification
KS05	Dedicated communication staff	ChatGPT, Canva AI	Content, images, planning, review responses	Frequent	Insufficient evidence for full classification
KS06	Sales staff also responsible for communications	ChatGPT	Idea generation, content, translation	Occasional	Insufficient evidence for full classification
KS07	No dedicated marketing department	ChatGPT	Idea generation, posts	Experimental	Not embedded in organizational processes; largely dependent on individual initiative
KS08	Staff with multiple responsibilities	No stable AI use	No stable AI application established	Very limited	No stable or formalized pattern of AI use established

Case	Marketing organization	AI tools	Main applications	Frequency of use	Evidence of formalization/control
KS09	Dedicated content staff	ChatGPT, Gemini	Content, planning, translation, customer responses, analysis	Frequent	Insufficient evidence for full classification

(Source: Synthesized from interview data, reviews of digital communication channels, and process-related evidence collected in the study)

Note: The “Main applications” column summarizes representative uses in each case and does not constitute a complete list of all coded tasks. The number of cases associated with each activity in Table 2 is based on the full coding matrix. Frequency categories are descriptive classifications based on interview information regarding how repeatedly AI was used in work rather than on a standardized frequency scale. “Insufficient evidence for full classification” indicates that the available data did not allow the overall degree of formalization and control to be fully determined; this does not exclude the possibility that some specific elements, such as the presence or absence of formal procedures, were identified from interviews. Frequency of use and degree of formalization/control are separate analytical dimensions. The degree of AI integration is identified through joint consideration of task scope, frequency, the position of AI within the workflow, and the degree of formalization/control.

Table 1 shows that differences across cases were not limited to whether AI was used, but also concerned frequency of use and the degree of formalization and control. Task scope, the position of AI within the workflow, and patterns of integration are examined in greater depth in Section 4.2.

4.2. Scope of application and degree of AI integration in marketing communications

A clear pattern across the nine cases was that AI use was concentrated primarily in activities at the early stages of the communication process. Seven cases used AI for idea or topic generation, and seven used it to write or edit posts. Six cases used AI for promotional content, while five used it for translation. Image/video-related applications and content planning were less common. At later stages of the communication process, AI use declined noticeably: two cases used AI to support customer responses, two used it to assist with responses to online reviews, and two used it to summarize or analyze reviews. Content personalization and the analysis of communication effectiveness were each observed in only one case. None of the nine cases reported direct integration between AI and CRM or other management systems.

Two cases reported the use of AI across five or more groups of communication tasks. However, only one case showed relatively clear evidence that AI had been incorporated into multiple stages of the communication process at the organizational level together with a more explicit review mechanism. This suggests that a broad scope of use does not automatically indicate a high degree of integration.

Table 2. Distribution of AI application activities across cases

AI application activity	Number of cases identified (n=9)	Position/function in the communication process
Idea/topic generation	7	Content ideation
Writing/editing posts	7	Content production and adaptation

AI application activity	Number of cases identified (n=9)	Position/function in the communication process
Writing promotional content	6	Content production
Translation	5	Content adaptation/distribution
Image creation/editing	4	Multimedia content production
Video/script/subtitles	3	Multimedia content production
Content planning	3	Communication planning
Supporting customer responses	2	Customer interaction
Supporting review responses	2	Customer interaction and feedback management
Summarizing/analyzing reviews	2	Feedback analysis
Content personalization	1	Message adaptation
Analyzing communication effectiveness	1	Performance evaluation
CRM/management-system integration	0	System integration

(Source: Synthesized from the study data and the cross-case comparison matrix)

Note: The number of cases is used only to summarize cross-case patterns and should not be interpreted as a proportion intended for statistical generalization. The “Position/function” column indicates where the AI application is located within the communication process rather than assigning non-standardized “high/low” labels.

Across the cases studied, AI was used primarily as a tool for supporting content ideation, production, and adaptation rather than as a component integrated throughout the entire communication-management process. Another notable pattern was that, in many cases, AI use emerged before organizational formalization. At KS02, one participant described AI use as being driven primarily by personal initiative:

“The hotel does not require us to use AI, but I often use ChatGPT on my own to generate ideas and then revise the content before posting it” (KS02-B).

Human review continued to play an important role. Seven of the nine cases reported at least one form of human review, such as rereading, editing, or checking AI-assisted content before publication. However, the consistency and degree of formalization of these review activities varied across hotels. In cases with clearer review mechanisms, AI did not replace human checking but instead operated within a pre-publication review sequence. At KS03, one participant explained:

“Content generated by AI is not published immediately. We have to check prices and service information and revise the wording to match the hotel’s style” (KS03-B).

Differences in integration become particularly apparent when KS03, KS07, and KS08 are compared. KS03 had a broader application scope, with AI involved in multiple stages and with a pre-publication review step. KS07 mainly used AI for idea generation and posts, relied heavily on individual initiative, and had not embedded AI into organizational processes. KS08 had barely established any stable pattern of AI use. These three cases demonstrate that, despite belonging to the same three-star hotel category, the way AI was incorporated into marketing communications differed substantially in terms of application scope, the position of AI within the workflow, and the degree of formalization and control.

Considering the four dimensions of integration simultaneously - task scope, frequency, the position/depth of AI involvement within the workflow, and degree of formalization/control - revealed three descriptive patterns. The first is ad hoc use, in which AI appears only to a limited extent and is primarily dependent on individual initiative. The second is operational AI support, in which AI tools are used repeatedly for several tasks but have not yet been fully formalized within organizational processes. The third is relative workflow integration, in which AI is involved in more stages of the communication process and is accompanied by clearer review or approval steps.

These three patterns were developed as descriptive types to summarize the configurations of use observed across cases. They do not constitute a standardized AI maturity scale, do not imply three mandatory stages, and should not be interpreted as a linear development pathway.

4.3. Barriers to AI integration

The barriers identified across cases clustered into three main groups: AI-use capability; output quality and accountability; and organizational and resource conditions.

The most prominent group concerned users’ AI capabilities. Seven cases indicated that users were able to operate AI tools at a basic level but had limited ability to construct effective prompts, provide sufficient context, and evaluate outputs. Six cases reported that AI-generated content was sometimes generic or insufficiently reflective of the hotel’s distinctive characteristics. One participant at KS06 explained:

“If you ask a very general question, AI produces text very quickly, but the wording ends up sounding similar to that of many other hotels. The hardest part is still providing the right information and bringing the hotel’s own character into the content” (KS06-A).

The second group of barriers concerned output quality and accountability. Six cases reported difficulties in checking the accuracy of content involving prices, services, promotions, or destination information. Five cases expressed concerns that AI-generated content could reduce authenticity or weaken brand identity, while four raised issues concerning copyright, privacy, or data. These concerns were closely associated with the need for output verification and continued human involvement before publication.

The third group of barriers arose at the organizational and resource levels. Six cases reported that no formal procedures for AI use had been established, while five reported constraints relating to staffing or the time available to learn new tools. Tool costs were mentioned in three cases, and difficulties in system integration were reported in two.

Overall, the findings suggest that access to AI tools alone is insufficient to indicate that AI has become a stable component of communication activities. The barriers lie not only in the tools themselves, but also in the ability to move AI use from individual practice into organized forms of activity. At the individual level, major bottlenecks concerned the ability to formulate requests, provide appropriate context, and evaluate outputs. As AI use became more

frequent, issues involving verification, accountability, procedures, staffing, and organizational resources became more visible.

Therefore, the transition from individual experimentation to stable and controlled AI use depends not only on access to technology, but also on users' capabilities and on how the organization manages AI use in day-to-day work. These findings provide the basis for comparing the identified barriers with corresponding support needs in the next section.

4.4. Support needs and their correspondence with identified barriers

The support needs identified by participants closely reflected the bottlenecks reported in the preceding section. Seven cases expressed a need for hands-on AI training linked to specific marketing tasks. Six cases sought guidance on prompt development or task-specific prompt templates, and six indicated a need for procedures to verify AI-generated content before publication. A need for guidance on selecting tools appropriate to operational requirements and budget was identified in five cases. Four cases sought guidance on copyright, security, and data-related issues, while four expressed a need for sample procedures. Three cases indicated a desire to strengthen capabilities in data analysis and the evaluation of communication effectiveness.

The practical orientation of these support needs was illustrated by a participant at KS07:

"We do not need AI training that is too theoretical. What we need most is guidance on specific tasks and templates that we can actually practice with" (KS07-A).

Table 3. Barriers, stated support needs, and corresponding support implications

Barrier	Number of cases	Support need stated by participants	Support implication inferred from the findings
Limited capability to use AI effectively	7	Hands-on, task-based training	Practical AI workshops for hotel marketing
Simple prompts with insufficient context	7	Guidance on formulating requests/prompts	Prompt templates and techniques for providing contextual information
Generic content requiring substantial editing	6	Guidance on maintaining brand distinctiveness/voice	Context templates and brand-review guidelines
Difficulty verifying accuracy	6	Guidance on output verification	Verification checklists and human review
Lack of formal AI-use procedures	6	Guidance/procedures for AI use	Concise internal AI procedures with clearly assigned responsibilities
Limited staffing/time	5	Ways to use AI more efficiently	Prioritize high-value tasks and standardize repetitive steps

Barrier	Number of cases	Support need stated by participants	Support implication inferred from the findings
Concerns about authenticity/brand identity	5	Guidance on maintaining authenticity	Content/image rules and brand review
Copyright, privacy, and data concerns	4	Legal/security guidance	Guidance for responsible AI use
Tool costs	3	Selection of tools appropriate to budget	Tool lists aligned with needs and costs
Limited analytical capability	3	Improved analytical skills	Training in digital analytics and communication-performance evaluation
Difficulty with system integration	2	Integration support/consulting	Integration roadmaps aligned with needs and available resources

(Source: Synthesized from interview data and cross-case analysis conducted in the study)

Note: The final two columns are separated to distinguish evidence directly stated by participants from the researchers' interpretations and recommendations. The number in the second column represents the number of cases in which the corresponding barrier was identified, not the number of cases expressing the support need shown in the third column. Frequencies for support needs are reported in the narrative above. The figures are intended only for descriptive cross-case interpretation. "Limited analytical capability" and "difficulty with system integration" are treated as separate phenomena rather than combined into a single category.

Overall, the support needs identified did not primarily concern gaining access to additional tools. Instead, they centered on the ability to use AI appropriately for specific tasks, provide suitable context, evaluate outputs, and organize AI use into practices that can be controlled. This suggests that support for employees using AI should extend beyond introducing new tools and should instead focus on developing practical capabilities, providing appropriate guidance and work templates, and clarifying procedures for verification and accountability. As a particular form of AI use becomes repeated in day-to-day work, support needs may gradually shift from individual skill development toward the standardization of work processes at the organizational level. The correspondence between barriers and support needs therefore suggests that interventions should be designed around employees' actual patterns of AI use rather than around organization-wide AI deployment or the simple provision of additional tools.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings first show that, across the cases examined, access to and experimentation with AI in marketing communications had become relatively common, but the widespread availability of AI tools did not necessarily correspond to a high degree of organizational integration. AI was used most frequently in early-stage communication activities such as idea generation, content writing and editing, translation, and visual-content support, whereas applications at later stages, including personalization, feedback analysis, performance evaluation, and integration with management systems, remained limited. This pattern is consistent with the content-generation and adaptation capabilities of the GenAI tools used in the study. Zhang and Prebensen (2024) show that ChatGPT can generate

tourism marketing materials with high levels of attractiveness and fluency, suggesting the potential for co-creation between GenAI and marketers. Guttentag et al. (2025) similarly report that tourism product descriptions optimized using ChatGPT are evaluated more favorably on several dimensions, although they do not significantly increase travelers' desire to undertake the trip. The present study extends this argument at the organizational level: the ability of AI to support a specific task does not necessarily mean that AI has become a stable and integrated component of the broader marketing communication process.

This finding suggests that caution is needed when assessing AI adoption solely on the basis of whether an organization uses AI tools. Across the cases studied, the same status of "using AI" encompassed very different practices, ranging from an employee occasionally using ChatGPT to generate ideas to repeated AI use across multiple tasks within a workflow that included pre-publication review. Examining task scope, frequency of use, the position of AI within the workflow, and the degree of formalization and control simultaneously therefore provides a clearer distinction between AI use and AI integration. This approach is compatible with the GAI Marketing Model proposed by Bilgihan et al. (2024), in which GenAI is considered across multiple stages of marketing activity rather than solely as a content-generation function. At the same time, the present findings indicate that the potential applicability of GenAI across multiple stages does not imply that hotels have actually integrated the technology across all of those stages.

A notable pattern concerns the way AI use moves from individual practice into organizational activity. In many cases, AI use began through employees' own initiatives before the hotel had established formal guidelines or procedures. This suggests a form of bottom-up adoption in which employees first experiment with AI tools in specific tasks and continue using them when they perceive them as useful for their work. However, frequent AI use by an individual employee does not mean that the practice has become an organizational capability or organizational process. Moving from individual practice to organized use also requires mechanisms for sharing practices, developing user capabilities, assigning responsibility for output verification, and progressively formalizing repeatedly used AI-enabled tasks.

This finding further clarifies the role of human factors in the AI integration process. The governance issue is not limited to whether employees have access to ChatGPT, Gemini, or similar tools. It also concerns whether users are able to provide sufficient context, assess the reliability of outputs, adapt content to the distinctive characteristics of the hotel, and recognize when additional human checking or approval is required. In this sense, employee capability and human oversight may be viewed as conditions that connect task-level AI use with the possibility of formalizing AI use at the organizational level. This interpretation is consistent with Shin et al. (2025), who emphasize the workforce skills required during AI adoption, and with Wang and Zhang (2025), who report associations between technological capability, organizational support, and AI-enabled innovative behavior among hotel marketing employees. Cozzio et al. (2026) likewise show that AI adoption in hotels is shaped by organizational context and users' hierarchical positions. However, the present study does not measure employee performance or other HRM outcomes. Its contribution is therefore limited to clarifying the roles of capability, oversight, and formalization in the movement of AI from individual practice into organizational processes.

Cross-case comparison also shows that frequency of use cannot be treated as the sole indicator of integration. An AI tool may be used frequently while remaining largely dependent on individual practice, without common guidelines or clear control mechanisms. Conversely, in cases showing clearer signs of integration, AI was involved in multiple stages and its outputs were incorporated into a pre-publication review sequence. This helps explain why the three patterns identified in the study, namely ad hoc use, operational AI support, and relative workflow integration, should not be interpreted simply as three levels of usage frequency. The distinction lies in the configuration of multiple attributes, including task scope, recurrence of use, the position of AI within the workflow, and the degree of formalization and control. These patterns therefore represent descriptive cross-case types rather than mandatory stages of an AI maturity scale.

The role of human oversight becomes particularly important when AI contributes to the creation of customer-facing content. The findings indicate that review activities may involve not only editing wording, but also checking prices, service information, promotional offers, physical-facility attributes, and consistency with the hotel's brand voice. This is particularly relevant to hotel communications because much of the content describes attributes that customers can later compare with their actual experience. Bui et al. (2024) show that the perceived authenticity of AI-generated destination images positively affects tourists' trust and choice intentions. Shen et al. (2026) identify authenticity, security, care, ethics, and fairness as five dimensions of responsible GenAI in tourism. NIST (2024) likewise highlights risks relating to information accuracy and integrity, data privacy, security, and intellectual property in GenAI use. Within this logic, the present findings suggest that human oversight should be viewed as a mechanism linking AI's capacity for rapid content generation with contextual knowledge, information verification, and user accountability, rather than merely as an additional step performed after an AI output has been produced.

The barriers identified across cases further indicate that the main bottlenecks do not lie solely in access to AI tools. Producing an initial AI-generated output may be relatively straightforward, but creating content that is appropriate for a specific hotel requires the ability to provide context, formulate effective requests, evaluate outputs, and adapt them to the hotel's brand characteristics. In the study data, limitations in user skills, generic content, and difficulties in verifying accuracy were identified in more cases than tool costs. At the organizational level, the absence of formal procedures, together with constraints in time and staffing, was also associated with difficulties in moving from individual-level use toward more stable practices. The findings therefore suggest a gap between access to AI technologies and the capability to embed them into organizational activities in a stable and controlled manner. This gap may be obscured if AI adoption is assessed solely in terms of whether an organization uses AI tools.

The correspondence between barriers and support needs suggests that efforts to strengthen AI use can be considered across three interrelated layers. The first concerns users' task-related capabilities, including prompt formulation, provision of context, content generation and adaptation, information verification, and the use of AI in specific communication tasks. The second concerns work organization, whereby recurring AI practices are translated into relatively clear steps involving request formulation, output generation, verification, brand review, approval, and publication, with responsibility assigned at each stage. The third concerns responsible AI governance, including data, intellectual property, authenticity, privacy, security, and accountability for published content. These three layers are not mandatory developmental stages. Rather, they provide a way of organizing the governance needs that emerge as AI use moves from individual tasks toward organized activities.

Overall, the cross-case patterns suggest a process-oriented logic extending from individual-level access to and experimentation with AI toward repeated use and the possibility of formalization within organizational processes. This logic does not imply that all hotels must follow the same linear sequence, nor does it indicate that the study has established causal relationships between these states. More importantly, the transition appears to depend not only on technological capabilities, but also on users' capabilities, the ability to verify outputs, the allocation of responsibility, and the degree of organizational support and formalization. The study's contribution therefore lies not only in identifying AI applications, barriers, and support needs, but also in clarifying how individual-level AI practices may differ from situations in which AI becomes an organized and controlled component of hotel marketing communication processes.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study shows that AI had been relatively widely accessed and used in the marketing communications of the three-star hotels examined, with eight of the nine cases reporting that employees had experimented with at least one AI tool. AI use was concentrated primarily in early-stage tasks such as idea generation, content writing and editing, translation, and visual-content support, whereas applications involving personalization, feedback analysis, performance

evaluation, and integration with management systems remained limited. More importantly, the findings demonstrate that AI use should not be equated with AI integration. The cases differed substantially in task scope, frequency of use, the position of AI within the workflow, and the degree of organizational formalization and control.

In many cases, AI use originated from individual initiatives before hotels had established formal guidelines or procedures. The difficulties associated with moving from individual- or task-level AI use toward more stable and organized forms of use clustered around three main areas: users' AI capabilities; the quality, accuracy, and accountability of AI-generated outputs; and organizational conditions relating to procedures, staffing, and resources. Correspondingly, support needs centered on hands-on training, prompt-development techniques, output verification, process standardization, and guidance on data, copyright, security, and authenticity.

Based on the cross-case patterns, the study suggests a process-oriented logic that extends from individual-level access to and experimentation with AI tools, through task-level and repeated use, toward the possibility of formalization and controlled integration within organizational processes. This logic helps distinguish the state of simply "using AI" from the organizational capability to make AI a stable component of marketing communication activities. However, it represents an interpretation of the states and patterns observed across cases rather than an inevitable developmental sequence or an empirically tested causal relationship.

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that the management of AI use in marketing communications should simultaneously address the technology, the users, and the way work is organized. Because AI use in many cases emerged from employees' specific work tasks, an immediate priority is not necessarily to introduce additional tools or pursue large-scale system integration, but rather to help employees use AI more effectively in the tasks that these tools are already supporting. This includes the ability to provide appropriate context and formulate prompts, verify the accuracy of information, adapt outputs to the hotel's brand characteristics, and recognize issues relating to data, copyright, security, and authenticity.

For employee management, the findings suggest that AI capability development should be closely linked to actual work practices rather than being limited to training on how to operate particular tools. When a particular use of AI proves useful and becomes recurring, hotels may gradually convert individual experience into shareable practices through concise guidelines, prompt templates, checklists, or workflow procedures. Such an approach can preserve employees' ability to experiment proactively while reducing dependence on the experience of particular individuals.

In addition to capability development, responsibility for AI-assisted outputs needs to be clarified. Hotels may specify which types of content employees can verify independently, which cases require approval by managers or other responsible personnel, and what types of information should not be entered into AI tools. For customer-facing content, final accountability should remain with human actors rather than being transferred to the technology. From this perspective, employee management becomes part of the AI integration process: the objective is not to control how much or how little employees use AI, but to create conditions that enable them to use AI appropriately for the task, evaluate its outputs, and remain accountable for AI-assisted work outcomes.

At the organizational level, hotels should prioritize the standardization of AI-supported tasks that are already being used repeatedly and have demonstrated clear practical value, rather than attempting broad-based integration across all activities. Deeper integration with CRM or other management systems should be considered only when practical needs, workforce capabilities, control mechanisms, and organizational resources are sufficiently aligned. The objective, therefore, is not to maximize the extent of AI use, but to improve the quality of use, the ability to control AI-supported activities, and the alignment of AI with hotel marketing communication processes.

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it focuses on nine three-star hotels in Thai Nguyen and adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design. The findings are therefore intended to provide context-

specific understanding and should not be statistically generalized to the hotel industry as a whole. Second, the study examines how AI is used and integrated within communication processes and does not directly measure the effects of AI on marketing performance, customer behavior, or business outcomes. Third, the research design does not follow the cases longitudinally and therefore does not allow a developmental sequence from experimentation to integration to be established.

Future research may extend the investigation to hotels of different classifications and to other geographical settings, adopt longitudinal designs to examine changes in AI use over time, or combine qualitative evidence with indicators of customer engagement, content quality, communication effectiveness, and marketing outcomes.

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