

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON HOTEL PATRONAGE IN CAPE COAST: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

ABSTRACT

In Ghana, a huge gap exists in the literature on how social media influences the patronage of hotels especially in Cape Coast. The study sought to determine how social media contributes to the patronage of hotels in the Cape Coast metropolis. The study employed both quantitative and descriptive statistics in the data analysis. The study considered 5 hotels and 65 respondents from the study area. Convenience sampling techniques were used to select 65 respondents from the population. Questionnaires were the key data collection methods used in the study. The results revealed that social media influences hotel patronage. It was evident from the study that social media influences the patronage of hotels in the sense that most people are now very active on social media where they turn to seek information especially when they are away from home and need a place to sleep. Among the media platforms considered, Facebook was found to be the most used social media platform used by guest when searching for hotels. It was concluded that social media has made it easier to access information about products and services and prospective customers get to go through reviews by other customers which helps in decision making. Also, social media helps increase the profit margins of the hotel which is an indication that social media is widely utilised by guests of the hotel. It is recommended that hotels should devote much time and resources to the usage of social media platforms to increase brand awareness of their products and services. Again, further study should be conducted into factors that influence guest choices of a peculiar hotel.

Keywords: social-media, hotel, Cape Coast, patronage

Introduction

There is no doubt that over the years, social media has in many ways changed the way we communicate, interact, share and conduct our relationships with people around our environment especially, with friends, family, colleagues, politicians, news media, celebrities and organization alike (Alperstein, 2019; Maha, 2015; Shukla, Misra, & Gupta, 2023). The days are gone when travelling means first visiting (Altin, Koseoglu, Yu, & Riasi, 2018) a place and then searching for a hotel and tourist destinations. Today's traveller checks the details online first and then makes a decision (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Altin et al., 2018). Holding the pace with the technology, the travel and hospitality industry takes the

social media approach(Pencarelli, 2020). Social media is the most important thing in today's world(Altin et al., 2018; Maha, 2015). Since the entire world has moved to social media, businesses have gained access to a new marketing channel.

Over the last few years, the hospitality industry has welcomed this innovative strategy with open arms. Almost every sector of the hospitality industry today has a social media presence and uses it as an important part of its marketing strategy. Internet technologies have had a significant effect on corporate performance over the previous two decades(Maha, 2015; Stavrakantonakis, Toma, Fensel, & Fensel, 2013). Web 2.0 applications allow for the transfer of internet capacity to a social setting, allowing people to communicate online through social media(Abd-Elaziz, Aziz, Khalifa, & Abdel-Aleem, 2015; Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013)and is a useful medium for getting accurate and up-to-date information. Users can communicate and make reservations through social media without having to be physically present(Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Altin et al., 2018; Pencarelli, 2020; Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013).

Furthermore, social media has been viewed as a powerful billboard for a company's commercial objectives and improved business performance(Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic, 2010; Shukla et al., 2023). The majority of today's word-of-mouth communication takes place online, among strangers. Although the conventional form of Word of mouth (WOM) is considered more trustworthy by the majority of consumers, peer reviews are still thought to be more reliable than information provided by firms(Balaji, Khong, & Chong, 2016; Majeed, Asare, Fatawu, & Abubakari, 2022). Consumers today are more likely to spend time in digital surroundings. They use various forms of social media to evaluate their purchases and share their thoughts with others. Because of the real-time nature of social media, you may post immediate feedback that could reach thousands of other potential consumers(Alperstein, 2019; Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013). As a result, users use social media platforms to search for consumer reviews, which they use to evaluate various items and services. Social media has been garnering more attention from businesses all around the world, thanks to its millions of active users and global reach.

In many situations, social media platforms have already changed the way businesses operate, particularly in the hospitality and tourism industries. Social media is being actively integrated into the marketing toolkits of an increasing number of firms across various industries (Altin et al., 2018; Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013). Consumers in the twenty-first century, on the other hand, have transformed from passive targets of marketing methods to active content creators with a significant ability to influence others' choices (Balaji et al., 2016; Shukla et al., 2023). The hospitality industry is known for being particularly customer-focused and for

reaching out to its customers to provide a personalized experience. Lives are bombarded by print media, radio, and television in traditional marketing.

In recent years, social media has become increasingly important in people's lives and industries around the world. People access the e-world with the help of an internet connection, which has aided in improving their lives. Though traditional marketing strategies play a role in the economic world, and some hotels in Cape Coast still use the old traditional ways of booking guests such as using pen and paper, the question here is, how social media is contributing to the promotion and development of the hospitality industry. Literature is scarce on the subject of social media, particularly in Ghana. Hence, the study aims to investigate the contributions of social media on hotel patronage in Cape Coast.

Currently, the hype surrounding social media strategies for marketing is on the increase, but the hotel industry in Ghana is still trying to cope and see the advantages of the latest trends on the internet. Therefore, practitioners in the hotel industry must adopt the new trend in promoting their facility through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This study is also significant because it will enable managers to know what attributes and qualities to include in their social media marketing promotions. After all, social media has come to stay and all its benefits must be adopted to increase sales in the industry. The findings of this study would benefit the hotels' ability to assess their current social media utilization and to determine the key drivers of hotels' social media that need more attention and enhancement.

The effective utilization of social media will result in attracting more tourists, especially, international tourists, and increasing hotels' booking rates as well as revenues. The findings of this research will provide marketers with the knowledge on an effective tool to do marketing in reality. Finally, the study will serve as a source of reference for further research.

Review of Related Literature

The use of social media in the hotel industry

The parameters of social networking websites possess several unique implications for the hospitality industry including guests, staff, and management. These sites provide a platform for a rating system that can be used to generate, monitor, and evaluate the reputation and image of the business. Online consumer-generated content is perceived as highly credible and in fact, more so than information attributed to the hospitality entity (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Shukla et al., 2023). Hotel's participation in online social networking is a cost-effective means for interaction and engagement with potential clients. Participation in

these websites provides businesses with direct access to active users without the need to add any additional hardware or software. A social networking site that is easily accessible, straightforward, and appealing enables participants to become engaged in unique ways. It comes as no surprise that many hotels, restaurants and travel businesses have entered the social network space. Hotel businesses are proactively interacting with their customers by coming up with innovative customized solutions and much responsive and prompt customer service(Alperstein, 2019; Altin et al., 2018; Kasavana et al., 2010; Perloff, 2014). Online consumer reviews play a big part in the choice of hotel and travel consumers make today.

With consumers becoming more immune to conventional advertising and communication channels, hotels should turn to social media (such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter) as a means of reaching out to their audience. While social media engagement is essential to a business's branding and communication, it can also work against a business if used inappropriately. However, a social media policy can be developed to educate and provide a better understanding for their employees to keep within certain parameters and implications of their participation.

The adoption of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have opened up a variety of avenues and opportunities to listen to the (hotel) guest. While social media is fairly new to most, the question on every business's mind is as follows: is social media a distraction or a revenue generator?

Social Media as a Tool for Marketing Hotels

To be more specific, social media, also known as consumer-generated media, has brought many changes in customer communication, specifically in the tools and strategies for communicating. Thus, many experts, like(Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Altin et al., 2018; Kasavana et al., 2010; Shukla et al., 2023; Tatar & Eren-Erdoğan, 2016)have suggested that using social media before and during the purchasing process empowers buyers to make informed decisions. Customer engagements exchanged on social media networks give market intelligence to a company(Kasavana et al., 2010; Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013).

Social mediaboosts brand recognition, changes purchasing behaviour, aids in pre- and post-purchase communication and evaluation, and expands the audience. When it comes to acquiring new customers (tourists in the case of tourism) and building strong relationships with them, social media can be regarded as a method to experiment with new options that can help improve and generate new kinds of customer value(Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Sehar, Ashraf, & Azam, 2019). At the same time, the internet has transformed from a world of information to a world of influence, and its components, such as social media, have begun to

revolutionize the state of marketing, advertising, and promotions(Altin et al., 2018; Balaji et al., 2016; Sehar et al., 2019). As a result, businesses are beginning to see social media as a vital part of their marketing strategy. What is it about social media that makes it such an appealing and valuable tool in all aspects of our lives, including tourism?

The Internet has become a mass media vehicle for consumer-sponsored communications and is presently the most popular source of media for consumers at work and the second most popular source of information at home(Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Kasavana et al., 2010).Second, today's customers demand more control over the media material they consume, including instant access to information, and are abandoning traditional forms of advertising such as radio and magazines. Also, a variety of social media platforms offer consumers an almost limitless number of options for doing information searches, which might impact purchasing decisions. Finally, customers regard social media as a more reliable source of product or service information than traditional trade communications based on traditional promotion mix parts(Alperstein, 2019; Shukla et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the advantages and downsides of using social media as a marketing tool, including tourism, are defined/described in the literature. Five major benefits of social media marketing have been summarized in this work:

Cost savings: Because most social networking sites are free, there is no charge for creating a profile or publishing content. The most well-known example is undoubtedly Facebook, which advertises that it is "free and always will be." These sites, on the other hand, provide the option of targeting people based on specific criteria, which is less expensive than traditional advertising choices such as television(Altin et al., 2018; Kasavana et al., 2010).

Social interaction:The Internet has become an influential area when considering the number of hours spent online, checking email, social networking sites, blogs, reading newspapers, and watching movies. Consumer behaviour studies suggest that individuals give greater importance to advice and information given online, spending more time with websites that provide third-party assessments(Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Chan & Guillet, 2011).

Targeted market: Online marketing has grown quite popular and widely employed as a result of its capacity to target audiences and different target groups based on their preferences. This means that, based on one's social media preferences (such as a desire to see a certain movie or vacation), one will receive advertisements relevant to his interests. Google has gone even further by utilizing its algorithm to provide advertisements based on your most recent search. Traditional marketing approaches, however, do not appeal to some sectors of clients as some

customers tend to prefer the image of being “in the know,” and hence find satisfaction in promoting new, exciting products”(Kasavana et al., 2010; Sehar et al., 2019).

Customer service: Different types of shortcuts are available on social media platforms to make the shopping process quicker and faster. One of the most well-known Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) includes easy links to various companies as well as explanations of the site’s content. A well-thought-out logistics system that ensures prompt delivery after the checkout process helps to consumer happiness, which leads to loyal behaviour (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Ho, Chen, Wang, Yeh, & Huan, 2022).

Interactivity: Interactivity is the amount to which users participate in modifying the shape and content of a mediated environment in real-time(Altin et al., 2018; Chan & Guillet, 2011) and this normally entails filling out various forms and surveys, which can be important tools for targeting in the later stages of the process. However, one must wonder what is going on the demand side, and why would individuals consider internet content when purchasing a product or service, or in our instance, to change a previously bad perception of a country.

According to Law, Sun, Schuckert, and Buhalis (2018), advances in information technology have altered the profile of consumers (in this case tourists) and placed them in the middle of the purchasing process. Consumers may now access information quickly and in great detail by utilizing various social media platforms such as social networking sites, blogs, and websites. Various forums provide the possibility of initiating a debate about a specific subject that aids in the decision-making process when purchasing a service or product. Finally, the advancement of ICTs, particularly the Internet, has empowered the “new” tourist, who is growing more informed and seeking great value for money and time. They are considerably more interested in pursuing their interests and schedules than in following the throng on packaged trips(Altin et al., 2018; Law et al., 2018; Shukla et al., 2023). The process of altering visitor behaviour, preferences, and demand coincides with the growing relevance of social media as a marketing tool, making it an essential variable in this study.

Challenges of Social Media Marketing

The strengths and prospects of social media platforms have received a lot of attention. Consumers have a more positive brand perception after connecting with a company through social media (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020; Maha, 2015) and companies can use social media to achieve a variety of goals, including increased revenue, improved brand image, and improved customer service, among others. As observed by Appel et al. (2020), social media allows people to freely interact with others and offers multiple ways for marketers to reach and engage with consumers. Apart from that, it could be

used to communicate with employees, communities, and other stakeholders and to establish relationships (Alperstein, 2019; Ho et al., 2022; Law et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the social media landscape is rapidly evolving, necessitating the development of adaptive marketing strategies. As a result, marketing techniques that are effective today may become obsolete tomorrow. Despite the numerous advantages for the hospitality industry, monitoring social media may be a difficult undertaking. As a result, businesses must approach social media marketing with caution and a clear set of marketing goals.

Poor social media management, such as ignoring unfavourable comments or failing to be transparent, is likely to harm the company's reputation as well as its financial performance (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Law et al., 2018). Current research makes instances of frequent mistakes to avoid when it comes to social media marketing. It also includes various suggestions for how to improve social media strategy to meet predetermined goals. One of the prevalent misconceptions among hotel management, according to Chan and Guillet (2011), who researched hotels' social media strategies in Hong Kong, is that social media serves merely as an additional advertising channel. As a result, businesses miss out on an opportunity to interact with their consumers and establish real relationships, which is at the heart of social media marketing. Given the competitive nature of the hospitality industry, hotels must use social media platforms not only for promotional purposes but also to increase consumer involvement. Otherwise, customers may get the impression that hotels are trying too hard to advertise their products, and they will disregard their social media pages (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Maha, 2015). To get the most out of their social media efforts, hotel marketers should start conversations with their followers and seek input from customers. Hotels, on the other hand, may find themselves in a disadvantageous position, wasting both manpower and money. Another issue with managing hotels' social media accounts is the marketing initiatives' long-term viability. Simply put, being fully devoted to social media marketing is the key to maintaining a long-term relationship with a customer.

Hotels have had difficulty maintaining their efforts over time because they are on so many channels, certain hotels are more likely to have trouble coming up with new material regularly (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Yoong & Lian, 2019). They pay attention to one social media channel but ignore the others in some cases. Nonetheless, the constant flow of information and exchanges among users characterizes social media. As a result, hotels must ensure that the material they produce is both fascinating and current to keep clients coming back to their websites. Dormant and infrequently updated social media

accounts give a negative impression to customers. In this aspect, idle social media accounts assist competitors who actively engage in social media marketing, giving potential customers a positive first impression. Similarly, creating intriguing and engaging material goes hand in hand with this.

Simply said, hotels must prioritize quality over number (Ho et al., 2022; Yoong & Lian, 2019), and listening to what customers want to hear or discuss could be a wonderful place to start learning more about their target market (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Osei, Atakpa, Paintsil, & Spio-Kwofie, 2020). Other challenges, such as when customers openly voice their dissatisfaction with the company's products or services, make maintaining social media difficult. One of the inherent dangers of engaging in social media marketing is being exposed to unfavourable internet reviews. This is due to consumers' freedom to share both positive and negative experiences with other social media users. According to various research, some social media companies either do not respond to unfavourable comments or remove them in the hopes that other followers will not notice (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Ho et al., 2022; Shukla et al., 2023). A corporation loses an opportunity to turn such remarks into meaningful conversations with unsatisfied customers if it does so. These suggestions may eventually assist them in improving their overall performance.

Poor criticism handled ineffectively may propagate negative word-of-mouth, resulting in a decline in hotel bookings. According to the findings, if hotels respond to bad reviews, they may be able to improve their online reputation not just in the eyes of reviewers, but also in the eyes of other readers (Blythe & Coventry, 2018; Law et al., 2018). The staff who is supposed to manage online comments often does not know how to deal with client problems. As a result, hotel management should focus their efforts on developing operational procedures for dealing with consumer criticism. They should also assign employees to respond to consumer feedback and inquiries in a courteous and timely manner. A hotel may be able to recover its brand reputation while also exhibiting its attention to client feedback in this manner. Furthermore, having a prompt answer from a hotel will give guests the sense that they are important to the company and increase customer satisfaction (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Osei et al., 2020; Yoong & Lian, 2019).

Even though hoteliers can meet all of the aforementioned problems, industry experts concur that it is critical to keep an eye on developing trends and predict changes in consumer behaviour. Businesses should take advantage of this trend by becoming more mobile-friendlier. Simultaneously, they will need to build an infrastructure that allows for seamless communication between hotels and their visitors (Blythe & Coventry, 2018; Law et al., 2018).

This is a significant step toward increased customization, which is often associated with higher standards, particularly in the hospitality industry.

Hotel marketers should pay attention to social media trends such as the rise of customer sharing in that, while social media has aided in consumer empowerment, it has also become an essential tool for hotel marketers. Hotels could benefit from increasing consumer sharing in a variety of ways. They can, for example, encourage their customers to use branded or particular hashtags that are relevant to their campaigns and products while uploading photos and videos. This is a simple but successful approach to gaining new consumers by encouraging existing customers to share photographs or videos about a company on social media(Law et al., 2018; Yoong & Lian, 2019).

Customer Patronage

All of the steps a customer takes to select, purchase, use, or dispose of items to meet his or her requirements and desires have been attributed to customer purchasing behaviour. Various definitions emphasize physical, mental, and emotional processes as well as needs and goals, as well as the impact of expected threats(Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Ho et al., 2022; Yoong & Lian, 2019). Because the requirements and desires of customers in a segment are nearly comparable, market segmentation is an important aspect of customer purchasing behaviour. In their daily lives, regular buyers make a variety of decisions and customer communication is not the only thing that defines consumer behaviour; the range of encounters that are associated with purchasing is also a part of purchaser behaviour (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Kim, Kim, & Heo, 2016; Shukla et al., 2023). Taking into consideration Kotler's (2018), five-stage model of the buyer purchasing process (need recognition and awareness, searching for information, evaluation of alternatives, purchasing decision, and post-purchase behaviour)the customer's purchasing activities can be associated with creative business.

The need for recognition and awareness are the major stages where the client perceives and becomes aware of the necessity; for example, when a brand logo or a rebranding of their corporate character is required. The need is triggered by either internal or external events, and the first step in the customer-buying process, problem recognition, may occur because the consumer requires something new(Blythe & Coventry, 2018; Yoong & Lian, 2019).Customers may obtain info through print, visual, online, or word of mouth and finally determine which of the various options can produce the best results. Customers are unquestionably influenced by the reviewers and analysts who publish their assessments (for instance, client audits on Yelp.com, websites, announcement sheets, blogs etc.)(Balaji et al.,

2016; Maha, 2015; Sehar et al., 2019).Buyers start to compare and contrast their expectations with their perceptions of the service and during this phase, the customer assesses the purchase and determines whether or not the service met **their** expectations. This statement is crucial since it is here that the consumer may decide to make another buy. Customers can determine if they are satisfied or unsatisfied by comparing services to previous expectations(Ho et al., 2022; Majeed et al., 2022; Yoong & Lian, 2019).Social media is used by travellers at various stages of the preparation process. They check social media evaluations to gain confidence in their purchasing decisions and to visualize what their trip experience would be like. To compete in a highly competitive world, being current with the newest social media and technical trends is critical.

Methodology

This study adopted the mixed research method which is both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the contribution of social media **to** patronage of hotels. Quantitatively, the research focused on gathering data from the population under study while the qualitative approach made it possible for a vivid description of certain aspects of the data that dominate any form of counting but could only be described based on actual thinking.Primary data were obtained from the respondents; that is guests as well as management of selected hotels within the Cape Coast Metropolis using a questionnaire.

The target population for this study comprised guests and management of the selected hotels. The sample size is the proportion of a group of people selected and studied, which serves as a representative of the whole or entire population (Creswell, 2019). In this study, 5 hotels were selected. Again, because the population is unknown seventy (70) respondents **made up of five (5) managers and sixty-five (65) guests** was considered, and this was based on the researchers' convenience and time.It must be noted that the focus was on the **guests**, hence the **managers'** responses were not analysed. The convenience sampling technique was used in selecting the guest respondents. This technique was used because it allowed the researchers to administer the questionnaires to any guest who was available and willing to respond to questions. On the other hand, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the management respondents, because it is believed that they will provide responses needed to achieve the objective of the research.

Primary data for this study were collected using questionnaires administered personally to guests and management of the various hotels selected.Data collected were processed and analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Solutions (SPSS) version 20.

Presentation of the analysed data was done using relative frequencies and percentages, organised in tables and pictorial presentation using figures such as pie charts and bar graphs.

Results and Discussions

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The first section of the analysis sought to obtain demographic information about the respondents. This was to enable the researcher to make comparisons among the respondents. Information obtained included gender, age range, marital status, employment status, and nationality. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of guests

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	39	60
Female	26	40
Total	65	100
Age		
20-25 years	10	15
26-30 years	15	23
31 and above	40	62
Total	65	100
Marital status		
Married	55	84
Single	10	15
Divorced	0	0
Separated	0	0
Widowed	0	0
Total	65	100
Employment status		
Student	10	15
Employed	40	62
Self Employed	15	23
Unemployed	0	0
Retired	0	0
Total	65	100

Nationality		
Ghanaian	50	77
Non-Ghanaian	15	23
Total	65	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Overall, the ratio of males to females is approximately 1:1 (60%: 40%). The gender distribution of the **guests** involved in the research work is presented in this section and **can** be observed that 60% of the respondents were males while 40% were females. The results show that the likelihood of a **guest** at the hotel being male is higher **than being a** female. From **Table 1**, it can be seen that the largest group was the 31 years and above age year group, which made up 62% of the respondents. **This relatively high score may imply** that this age group had free time and discretionary income available to them to pay for hotel rates. The second largest group was the 26-30 age group, 15 (23%) respondents were included. The remaining of them belong to below 20-25 years age groups, to be specific, these occupied 10(15%).

In terms of respondents' marital status, 55(84.6%) of the respondents were married while the rest 10(15.4%) were single as depicted in Table 1. It showed that many of the respondents encountered during the survey were married. The employment status of individuals has been noted to influence their attitudes and participation in the effect of service within an organisation (Kim et al., 2016; Majeed et al., 2022). From the sample drawn for the study, it was obvious that respondents who were employed were more in the survey. From the table, 10(15%), 40(62%) and 15(23%) were students, employed and self-employed respectively.

Finally, Table 1 depicts that the majority of the respondents 50(77%) were Ghanaians whilst the remaining 15(23%) were non-Ghanaians. This shows that Ghanaians are active in the patronage of hotels.

Social Media **Influence on Hotel Patronage from Guest's Perspective**

The objective of the study was to ascertain how social media influences hotel patronage. The section consists of two (2) items namely smartphone and tablet. The results are depicted in **Figure 1**.

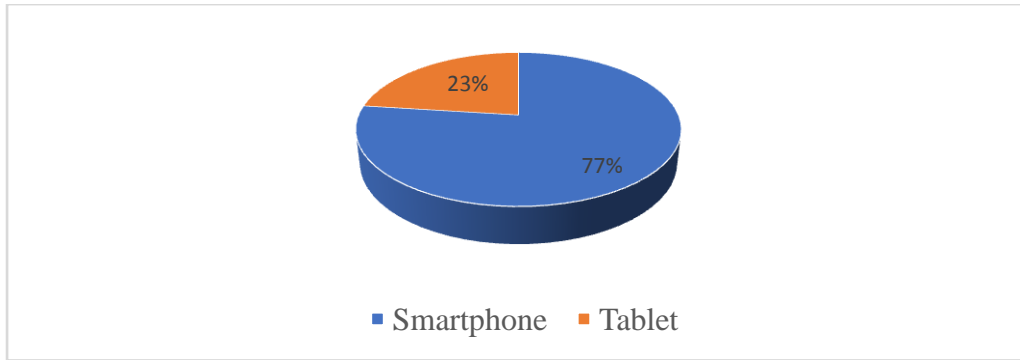


Figure 1: How respondents access social media

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

As depicted in Figure 1, (77%) of the respondents accessed social media through their smartphones, whilst the remaining (23%) accessed social media on their tablets. It can be deduced from the results that the majority of the respondents accessed the services and products of the hotel through their smartphones and this agrees with (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Maha, 2015; Pencarelli, 2020; Shukla et al., 2023) that smartphones have helped the majority to access services and products through the Internet.

How Respondents Got to Know About Hotel

This section seeks to find out how respondents got information about the hotel and the result is shown on Table 2.

Table 2: Source of information on the hotel

Source of Information on the Hotel	Frequency	Percent
Friends and relatives	15	23.0
Social media	45	69.0
Television	5	8.0
Radio	-	-
Newspaper	-	-
Total		100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

As depicted in Table 2, 15 representing 23% of the respondents got to know about the hotel through friends and relatives, 45 representing 69% of the respondents indicated that they got to know about the hotel through social media, whilst the remaining 5(8%) of the respondents indicated that they got to know about the hotel through the television. This is consistent with

the assertion that social media has fundamentally changed how travellers plan for and book trips, access information, and the way of sharing experiences as alluded that using social media to sell tourism items is an excellent way to promote marketing.

Social media platforms

The study considered the various social media platforms on which respondents depend for hotel information and the results are given in Figure 2.

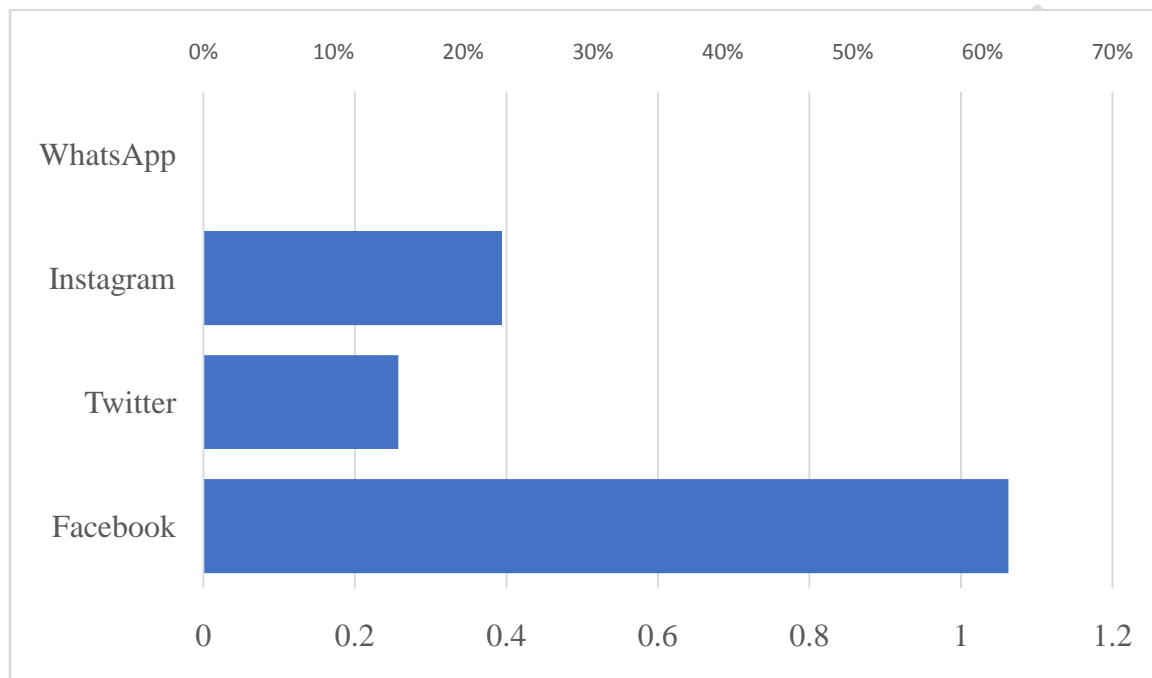


Figure 2: Social media platform respondents use often

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

As shown in Figure 2, 40 respondents representing 62% indicated that they often use Facebook in searching for hotels, 10(15%) indicated that they use Twitter in searching for hotels when the need arises whilst the remaining 15(23%) of the respondents indicated that they use Instagram whenever they are searching for information about a hotel. As depicted in the results, it can be deduced that Facebook is the most often used social media platform used by the respondents when searching for hotels. This outcome resonates with the assertion that social media is more pervasive and compelling than conventional mass media because of its ability to influence a larger number of people, the ability to deliver rich information, and the minimal effort required from individuals to make influence attempts (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Majeed et al., 2022; Perloff, 2014; Sehar et al., 2019).

Online Marketing and Consumer Behaviour towards Hotels

Figure 3 shows results on whether respondents were influenced to patronise hotels as a result of their activeness on social media or otherwise. Respondents were asked to select a yes/no response.

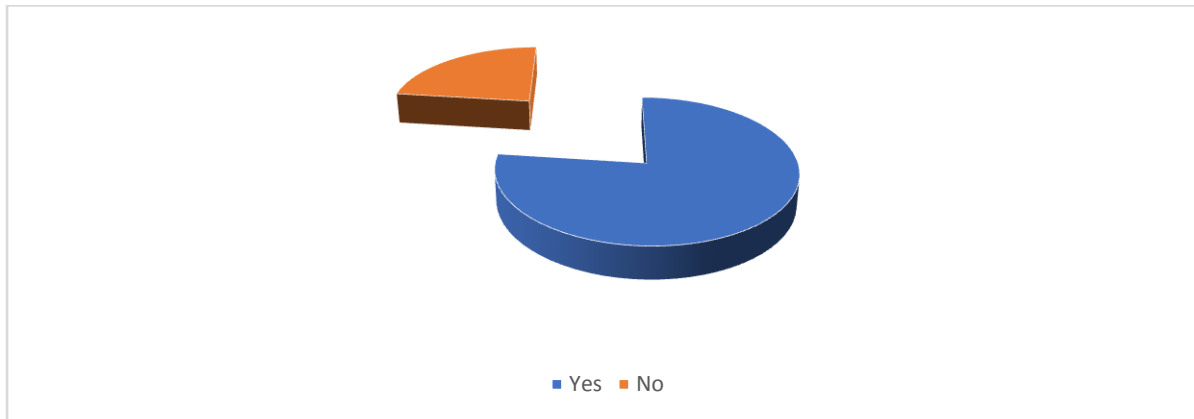


Figure 3: Activeness on social media

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

As depicted in Figure3, 75% were influenced to patronise the hotel as a result of their activeness on social media whilst the remaining 25% of the respondents were not influenced to patronise the hotel because they are not active on social media. From the results, it can be deduced that the majority of the respondents used in the survey were influenced to patronise the hotel due to their presence and activeness on social media which was solely dependent on the reviews on the hotel’s social media handles. The study revealed that social media plays a major role in disrupting traditional business models and is allowing creators of content to connect directly with their audience as alluded to by (Appel et al., 2020; Balaji et al., 2016; Shukla et al., 2023; Tatar & Eren-Erdogmus, 2016) who warns that service businesses that do not use or fail to use social features to increase efficiency and lower communication barriers will not survive long.

Selection of a particular hotel

The study sought to ascertain whether respondents chose the hotel because they saw more reliable information on social media. The outcome is presented in Figure 4.

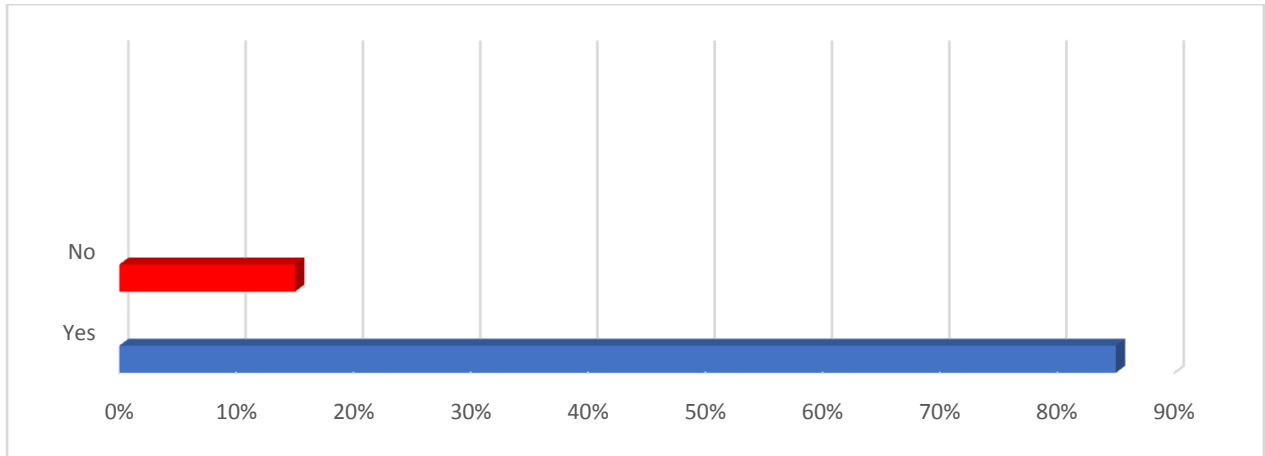


Figure 4: Reliability of information about the hotel

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

As shown in Figure 4, 10(15%) of the respondents indicated that they did not choose the hotel because they found more reliable information about them on social media, whilst the remaining 55(85%) of the respondents affirmed the choice of hotel was because reliable information about them was on social media. Similarly, the works of (Appel et al., 2020; Majeed et al., 2022; Sehar et al., 2019) affirms that social media can influence an individual from the need recognition stage to the actual purchase of tourism products or embark on a trip based on the information received. Accordingly, social media has caused a fundamental change to the consumer decision-making process and this resulted in the emergence of a more sophisticated view of the engagement of consumers with various hotels.

Contributions of social media in promoting hotels

Even though the hospitality industry has not gone full trotter on social media adoption, some international hotel chains already understand the effects and are taking advantage of the benefits. The organization's requirements and direction of the business have to be considered when considering the implementation of social media. In brand communication, for the organization's strategies to be effective, social media needs to be integrated into the strategies before the execution takes place. The objective of the research was to identify the contributions of social media in promoting hotels. The outcome is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Contributions of social media in promoting hotels

Contribution of social media	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Helps in making the hotel known	100	0	0	0	0
Influence consumers' hotel decision making	80	0	0	0	20
Helps to cultivate long-term relationships with guests and the hotel	75	0	0	25	0
Boosts the output of the hotel	75	0	0	25	0
Creates more jobs in the hotel	15	45	0	20	20

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

As shown in Table 3, a greater proportion of the respondents 100% indicated that social media contributes to making the hotels known to its potential customers, 80% of the respondents affirmed that social media influences consumer's hotel decision making whilst 20% indicated that social media does not influence customers' hotel decision making.

This revelation affirms that social media contributes to boosting brand awareness and brand recognition, changes purchasing behaviour, aids in pre- and post-purchase communication and evaluation and expands audience (Appel et al., 2020; Majeed et al., 2022; Sehar et al., 2019).

Table 3 further depicts that 75% of the respondents indicated that social media helps cultivate long-term relationships with guests and the hotel whilst the remaining 25% of the respondents disagreed that social media helps in cultivating long-term relationships with guests and the hotel. On whether or not social media boosts the output of the hotel, 75% of the respondents strongly agreed whilst the remaining 25% disagreed that social media boosts the output of the hotel. Finally, Table 3 shows that 15% of the respondents strongly agreed that social media creates more jobs in the hotel, 45% constituting the majority of the respondents agreed, 20% each of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that social media creates more jobs in the hotel. The findings support the assertion that alluded that social media platform can lead to customer satisfaction and loyalty where customers always fall on a hotel for repeat business while in the long run helping to boost the business performance.

Conclusion

It was evident from the study that social media influences the patronage of hotels in the sense that most people are now very active on social media where they turn to seek information

especially when they are away from home and need a place to sleep. It can be concluded that social media has made it easier to access information about products and services and prospective customers get to go through reviews by other customers which helps in decision making.

Similarly, it is concluded that social media helps increase the sales margins of the hotel which is an indication that social media is widely utilised by guests of the hotel. Finally, based on the findings it can be concluded that social media helps cultivate long-term relationships which helps in the patronage of promotion of the hotels as well as possible retention of a customer.

Recommendations

It is recommended that hotels devote much time and resources to the usage of social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter among others to increase brand awareness of its products and services. Therefore, there is a need to invest in IT infrastructure within the hotel industry to boost social media utilization. This will educate and inform its potential customers and increase the performance of the hotel and its sales margins. Again, there should be a social media utilization policy formulation that will get all stakeholders involved in promoting social media awareness in the hotel industry.

Finally, management of hotels should facilitate and support social media usage among internal and external customers to reduce cost of operation.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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