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Facebook Reviews and Intentions to Purchase Hotel Accommodation in South Africa

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University of the Witwatersrand

Facebook Reviews and Intentions to Purchase Hotel Accommodation in South Africa.

Final Research Report

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management, University of Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (MMSM).

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ABSTRACT

The growth of social media use and internet has resulted to more consumers interacting with each other and the brands on social media platforms. At present, Facebook is the most popular social media platform globally, with many users actively participating and connecting on the site. There is a shortage of studies conducted in the South African hospitality sector regarding the impact of Facebook reviews on hotel booking intentions. This research explored how Facebook reviews and comments, customer trust, and brand awareness impact the likelihood of booking a hotel room.

The research study was conducted through self-administered questionnaire which was distributed to a random sample of university students and the working professionals through social media. Data collected from the survey was analysed using SPSS 28 and Amos 28 software. The findings indicated the strong and positive influence of Facebook reviews and comments on consumer purchase intention for the hotel accommodation in South Africa. This research provides important findings for hotel companies, marketing managers, and practitioners in the accommodation industry who are involved in creating and executing strategic plans for social media platforms. Furthermore, aid them in managing customer reviews and comments on their social media accounts to promptly address unhappy customers that could damage their brand.

Keywords: *Facebook reviews and comments, customer trust, brand awareness, purchase intention, social media*

DECLARATION

I, Mbongeni Nkanyiso Tshuma, I declare and certify that this research comprises of my own work with no any material previously published by any other person except being acknowledged through references. This is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Management (MMSM) in Strategic Marketing at the University of Witwatersrand located in Johannesburg in South Africa.

Signed at Pretoria

…  ……

Mbongeni Nkanyiso Tshuma

23rd April 2024.

DEDICATION

First and foremost this Masters degree is dedicated to my lovely family, my parents Mr B. Tshuma and Mrs Josephine Tshuma, my wife (Sandra Tshuma) and my son (Thando Tshuma) who have always been very supportive and remembered me in their prayers through out this journey.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The following section presents the research topic introduction starting by deliberating the main purpose of the study, which is followed by discussing the scope of the study. After this section the researcher upacks the problem statement of the study and defines the research gap, which will be preceded by stating research objectives, then the research questions of the study.The chapter concludes by concentrating on the delimitation of the study and defining the main terms found in the research.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The study seeks to determine if comments and reviews (both negative and positive) found in social networks mainly on Facebook, have an effect on the purchase decision making of the travellers (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). The previous studies conducted on comments and online reviews by (Ferrer-Rosell, Martin-Fuenter & Marine-Roig, 2020; Zhang, Omran & Cobanoglu,2017) shows a literature gap of not comparing the effects of both reviews and comments on Facebook in relation to the consumer purchase intention in the context of hotel accommodation sector in South Africa .

According to Ladhari and Michaud (2015) more future studies should be done which relate to any variencies in the effects which consumer's negative and positive comments as well as reviews, have on the view point concerning the booking intention of a hotel room for both local and international well known hotel brands. Furthermore these authors, also state that the researchers should deliberate the influence of the previous experience of the travellers regarding the services received within the hotel brand. Therefore, in order to address this gap of knowledge, this research will present and test the model that examine infleunce of social network attributes, particularly Facebook on consumer's intention to purchase a hotel room (Al-Hadban & Almotairi, 2020; Oumayma, 2019).

Social media usage is seen to be more beneficial in the tourism sector, as it aids tourists and travellers in planning their trips which ultimately impacts the tourist

behaviour and their decision making (Javed, Tuckova & Jibril, 2020). The research gap that needs to be identified and addressed is the intervention role played by trust and customer engagement between the social media platforms such as Facebook and its effects towards consumer purchase intention (Sharma, Singh, Kujur & Das 2021; Manzoor, Baig, Hashim & Sami, 2020). Bearing in mind the gaps in the theory that exists, the current study is therefore concentrated on pinpointing the impact of customer reviews in the hotel space more specifically on Facebook platform towards purchase intention of a hotel room (Kamalasena & Sirisena, 2021).

This study is intended to contribute to the hospitality industry businesses to understand more about importance of comments and reviews on Facebook in determining the final destination and the choice of the hotel. Furthermore, the current study will help the hotel marketing managers to focus on social media reviews and customer feedback in terms of experience they have with the brand. It will also help the companies to increase sales, at the same time reducing returns through controlling the way in which the comments and reviews are presented to the consumers (Zinko, de Burgh-Woodman, Furner & Kim, 2021). This will help them to know what to expect from the customers due to changing behaviour as result of what they see online or in social media.

In addition, the business managers within the hospitality and tourism industry will benefit from this literature as it will help them to understand the role of social media and importance of information shared online and through social media. This information will prepare them to come up with profitable marketing strategies and policies which will be used in different social media platforms. Through analysing the comments on online communities such as TripAdvisor and Virtual tourist, hotels and other travel-related companies are able to better understand what their guests like and dislike about them and their competitors (Leung, Law, Van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013).

The knowledge obtained from this research study will have some contribution to the literature review for future research for other scholars and researchers.

1.2 Context of the study

Tourism and hospitality industry has, over the years, become one of the fastest-growing industries on a global scale, owing to its continuous growth and deepening diversification (Hua, Ramayah, Ping & Juan-Hwa, 2017). According to a study by Tajvidi and Karim (2021) reflects that as of the 19th century the tourism and hospitality sector had speedily developed and gradually towards becoming a globally industry (Wood, 2017). This industry is seen as one of the fastest growing sectors not only in South Africa but also globally. This sector contributes to every country's economic growth including South Africa and is perceived as part of the booming sectors in the economy of United Kingdom (Pappas & Apostolakis, 2016).

According to PwC Outlook Report (2016), South Africa's hotel industry was estimated for a stable five years' growth between 2016 and 2021, motivated by the high number of the visitors coming to the African continent. As per the Report the revenue from hotel room accommodation in South Africa went up by 8.1% in 2015 to about R14.2 billion, this showed reflecting an upsurge in stay unit nights and a 6.5% increase in the average room rate (PwC Outlook Report, 2016). The report also reflects that, general the revenue from hotel is estimated to expand at a 7.8% compound annual rate in 2020 to R20.6 billion. PwC's report included hotel accomodation information from countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Mauritius, Kenya, and Tanzania. The relaxation of some visa requirements by the SA government had a positive effect on tourism sector since a lot of tourist are now able to visit the country and this is creating more revenue for the hotel businesses (StatsSa, 2016).

Facebook has essentially reshaped the way information relating to travel is being attained and distributed, and also the way tourist plan their trips (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Hajli, Wang &Tajvidi, 2018). According to the world report released on January 2021, it showed that the world demographics were at an estimation of 7.8 billion by year 2020, whereas the amount of internet users had reached 4,929 billion globally as per quarter 3 estimates (Internetworldstats, 2020). Social media, digital and mobile are interconnected with the lives of most people in the world and have become a mandatory part of most people's lives (Kemp, 2020).

On average about 4 billion people worldwide are very active and engaging on Facebook platform and Instagram platform on a monthly basis (Statista, 2021; & Onofrei, Filieri & Kennedy, 2022). Globally there are more than 4 billion users of social media and this number grew by 320 million people from January 2023 (Sproutsocial, 2024). Research demontsrates that social media platforms such as Facebook stimulate and influence majority of the travelling plans for the age groups of 12 to 27 years and of 28 to 43 years (Statista, 2020). In addition Onofrei et al. (2022) highlights, social media prominently impact the way consumers obtain information and share their opinions and experiences, asses and select the products/services (including destionation locations) [see, Chung & Koo, 2015: Ge & Gretzel, 2018: Huang, 2016: Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014 for more].

Digital marketing has changed the way businesses and other organisations communicate with their customers and also how they do business. Dutrueux (2020) argues that technology is increasingly used in African hotels to improve the guest experience before, during and after a stay. Customers are seeking smart experiences, from automated check-in to enhanced booking experiences, in-room technology and interactive communication. (Tajvidi & Karami, 2021).

Previously, bfeore the social media was more popular consumers used to dpeend on the tradional methods and word of mouth in getting information regarding their destination holiday and hotels to book, however these methods have now been substituted by social medi and internet (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Further, social media is now carrying out the responsibility of providing information to both consumers and businesses in the travel and tourism in order for the consumers to plan their trips and businesses to interact with consumers (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014: Tumer, Aghaei, Öney & Yahya, 2019)). Therefore, it is very imperative for companies to manage their social media and the influence it has on potential consumers and their decision making on purchasing products or services (Marco-Lajara, del Carmen Zaragoza-Saez, Claver-Cortes, Ubeda-Garcia & Garcia-Lillo, 2017). There are some benefits offered by use of social media by a both consumers and the companies and these includes reduction of costs, improved brand image of the company, customers who are highly satisfied and speedy

direct communication (Melian-Gonzalez & Bulchand-Gidumal,2016; Okazaki, Andreu & Campo, 2017).

For the purpose of this research, Facebook will be selected as a social media platform as it is one of the most used social media in South Africa with a coverage of 7.15 million users (Statista, 2023). In a study done by Abuhashesh, Al-Khasawneh, Al-Dmour and Masa'deh (2019), it reflected that Facebook has been considered as the most commonly utilised social media platform by businesses and customers over the world (see Mariani, EkStyven & Ayeh, 2019). Facebook is is currently the most used social media marketing tool globally with over 2.9 billion users in a month (Stelzner, 2012; Datareportal 2023). Facebook users have admitted that they have trust and confidence on the site and are highly eager to share information on this platform compared to the other social media networks (Dwyer, 2007).The communication and experience information posted by friends on Facebook in the form of travel related services is predominantly having a huge influence on travel consumers. (Latif, Malik, Pitafi, Kanwal & Latif, 2020). In addition the infleunce of friends' communication in the form of travel content on Facebook is having an effect on travel-related decision making it very less studied (Hajli, Wang & Tajvidi, 2018; Liu, Wang & Gretzel, 2019; Latif, Malik, Pitafi, Kanwal & Latif,.2020). According Payne (2019) the hotel bookings for the 28 to 43 age group will be hugely affected by the information that customers get exposed to on social media. This means that the social media has a serious effect on the purchasing behaviour decisions for most consumers which in turn has also become a very importatnt communication tool for the hotel businesses (Garg & Kumar, 2021).

1.3 Problem statement

Hotel companies are facing a huge problem in maintaining a good brand image which is caused by the negative comments and reviews shared by other travelers and customers on social media platforms (Hassan, 2022; Karlson & Strom, 2021). Companies overlook the role played by other consumers within the social media landscape (Hogreve, Bilstein & Hoerner, 2019). This results in companies losing potential customers thereby impacting negatively on the number of bookings.

Verma, Stock & McCarthy, (2012) further clarifies that a hotel enticing negative comments and reviews is unlikely to be choosen by potential customers and existing customers when booking a hotel room. On the other hand, Almana and Mirza (2013) authenticate that reviews with higher ratings are likely to play a critical role in the purchase decision making. Thus, checking of online reviews and comments on social media about a hotel establishment has become an essential step to be taken by those who book hotels before making a purchase decision (Chen & Ku, 2021; Pantano, Rese & Baier, 2017). This means that comments and reviews found online and on social media platforms are therefore, seen as a “decisive factor” for travellers to make some final decisions (Wang, Wang, Zhang, Wang, & Li, 2021).

According to a study by Huiyue, Peihan and Haiwen (2022) it states that it is essential for hotel industry to study negative internet and comments on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram especially negative reviews and adoption preference. This is due to the major damage that negative internet comments can have on the brand image and the reputation of a hotel if there are not managed properly (Xia, Chan, Zhong & Xu, 2021). However, some of the hotels can still use information from these negative comments in a way of improving the quality of the customer service they offer and thereby ensuring their customers stay longer with them. Some researchers have suggested that electronic word of mouth (e’WOM) and online reviews have a strong influence on a variety of features for travel services like purchase intention decision, satisfaction with services and brand impressions (Zinko et al.2021; Hogreve, Bilstein & Hoerner, 2019). The other studies have shown that consumers are inclined to pursue negative reviews and comments to alleviate risk and some of the worries associated with the products or services to be purchased (Berger, Sorensen & Rasmussen, 2010). This result to companies or businesses losing potential customers and existing customers because of failing to address online reviews and comments by customers (Lee, Park & Han, 2008). Hence the purpose of this study analyses how Facebook comments and reviews can influence a tourist or traveler in the decision-making process when booking or reserving their future accommodation in South Africa (Pontes & Ramos, 2022).

In addition, several prior researchers acknowledged that the customer online reviews and comments on Facebook pages can lead to purchase intention. According to Yagci and Das (2018), the online reviews have speedily changed into a significant opinion sharing platform between peers and serve as a main factor of success in the online marketplace. Its further state that in the hotel sector, for instance, online reviews have been a cause of major attention and well-informed content (Boo & Busser, 2018). Therefore, it is very vital to have a better understanding of the role played by social media platforms in the consumer's decision-making process in relation to tourism products, specifically the role of customer reviews and comments (Vikes, 2019).

Moreover, many researchers have investigated the purchasing intention for the online consumers with a widespread growth of social media marketing in different parts (Garg & Kumar, 2021). For instance, studies by Ferrer-Rosell, Martin-Fuenter and Marine-Roig (2020); Pontes & Ramos (2022) investigated on the social media influence more specifically consumer purchase intention on hotel accommodation at a broader scale. However, very limited research has been done in examination of Facebook reviews and comments, their role and impact on hotel's consumer's purchase intention in the South African hotel landscape (Garg & Kumar, 2021). This study fills this literature gap by examining how comments and reviews on Facebook influence the consumer purchase decision and leads to a purchase intention of accommodation in the hotel industry. The study is further narrowed down to focus on the role of customer trust on the reviews and comments shared by other customers on Facebook in relation to consumer purchase decision.

1.3.1 Main Problem

Yoo and Lee (2017) express that customers can make use of Facebook as a marketing tool to communicate and share product or services information, experiences and opinions among customers and travelers in relation to their travel experiences. This kind of information or content shared between customers can broadly influence the customer's decision when it comes to booking a hotel or selecting a hotel (Zhang et al. 2017). Wang and Wand (2020) study results

showed that positive online customer, talking about a specific product do often lead to higher purchase intentions than if the same product would have negative or unpleasant comments and reviews. Therefore, the objective or purpose of this research is to empirically investigate an integrated framework for handling comments and reviews on Facebook and their influence in relation to the consumer purchase intention of a hotel accommodation industry in South Africa.

1.3.2 Sub Problem:1

The sub problem number one is to investigate the influence of comments or reviews on customer trust in a hotel brand.

1.3.3 Sub problem: 2

To examine the correlation between Facebook reviews, brand awareness and purchase intention on the hotel accommodation in South Africa.

1.3.4 Research Objectives

The key objective of the study is to investigate the effects of customer comments and reviews on Facebook in relation to purchase intention.

Objective 2: To examine the role and effects of trust in a hotel as a result of the comments on Facebook.

Objective 3: To determine if there is a correlation between customer trust and consumer purchase intention.

Objective 4: To inquire about the relationship between Facebook reviews and brand awareness.

1.3.5 Research Questions

As highlighted in the above problem statement about the lack of literature on the effects of reviews and comments shared or posted on Facebook by customers about a particular brand, product/service on purchase intention and that it has

not been widely researched, this therefore lead to the formulation of the below research questions;

1. Does Facebook reviews and comments on a post about a hotel brand increases the intention to book a hotel?
2. Does customer trust have a positive effect on purchase intentions in relation to the reviews posted/shared on Facebook?
3. Is there any direct relationship between the customer trust and consumer's intention to purchase a hotel room.?
4. What impact does the brand awareness have on the intention to make a purchase ?

1.4 Significance of the study

There seem to be insufficient research done on Facebook reviews in relation to consumer purchase intention within the hotel industry in South Africa, many studies carried out in South Africa in relation to Facebook are to do with the use of Facebook pages for markketing purposes (Barnard, Cuervo-Cazurra & Manning, 2017), while other studies are to do with Facebook advertsing (Brakel, 2020). More research has been done in other countries but limited research has been done in the South African hospitality industry with more focus on the consumer purchase intention during the customer journey for booking a hotel. In addition, many studies have observed that the impact of positive comments and negative comments and reviews posted on different social media platforms during decision making process can have on the bevahiour of travellers in relation to the hotels and the faith on those hotels (Liu & Park, 2015; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013; O'Connor, 2008; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Ye, Law, Gu & Chen, 2011). Nevertheless, out of those studies done, none have investigated the influence of Facebook comments towards an inention to book a hotel room (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015).

More recently some research have been done on the intention to purchase hotel accommodation in regards to the online and or social media reviews but limited resarch has been conducted on the purchase behaviour intention impacted by

Facebook comments and reviews in relation to the hotel industry (Sim, Lee & Sutherland, 2021). The intrigue for this study on Facebook is also driven by the undisputable approval of this platform as it is widely used by many people (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). As per the recent Digital Global report on social media it reflects that Facebook is currently the world's commonly used social media platform with an estimated monthly users of 2.96 billion as of 2023 (Digital -Datareportal, 2023). Therefore, it is valuable to research on the influence of comments and reviews shared and posted on Facebook by other customers in relation to their travel experience with a hotel establishment. This is because of the number of the Facebook users who now share their experiences on the platform by posting their travel photos, videos and also leave comments on the post (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015).

This study will explore this gap especially with the customer reviews and comments information shared on Facebook which may influence the purchase behaviour of the travellers and their decision making process on a hotel choice. This study will help the hotels to see the importance of social media in generating and acquiring information related to travel and how to manage the negative reviews that may tarnish or damage their brand and resulting in low bookings and revenue loss. Furthermore, the study will bridge the gap of the limited literature review in the hotel industry particularly in South African landscape.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

The scope of this study was only focused on the hotel industry in South Africa and not the entire accomomodation sector. This was due to time constraints and the limited resources to sample and collect data on the entire accommodation sector which includes Hotels, Guest Houses, AirBnB and Lodges. Another reason was because these other different accommodation service providers operately differently and offer different services from the hotels.

Targeting the age group of 18 to 45 years residing within Gauteng region which are enrolled students at a public university and also working professionals who have had a hotel stay experience. This age group of 18 to 45 was targeted as it

includes most social media users and also people who are employed and have disposable income to travel and spend on accommodation. According to a Global data 2023 report on Southa African tourism, the age group 35 to 49 is the most active demographic when it comes to travel. The report also showed that the social networks (social media) are the second most visited apps or website (94.6%) in the word by the internet users in the age group 16 to 64 years (GWI, Q3 2022).

1.6 Definition of terms

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing marketing encompasses the promotion of goods or services through digital technologies, primarily on the Internet, such as mobile devices, display ads, and other online platforms (Sudah & Sheena, 2017)

Social Media

Social media refers to online social networking sites and is a broad example of Web 2.0, such as Twitter, Youtube, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, Instagram, Whatsapp, and blogs (Kanchan & Gaidhane, 2022).

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking site designed to help individuals connect with one another (Frein, Jones & Gerow, 2013.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

eWOM refers to any casual online communication aimed at consumers regarding the features or usage of specific products, services, or their providers (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008).

Purchase Intention

Consumer purchase intentions purchase is people's probability of buying a service or product (Tien, Rivas & Liao, 2019). In other words, it is the probability that a customer will purchase a particular product or service (Bai, Law & Wen, 2008; Sparks & Browning, 2011).

Hospitality Industry

Lashley(2000) state that hospitality is essentially a relationship based on hosts and guest and it is the host guest relationship that is key distinguishing characteristic of hospitality from which several other dimensions emerge (Pritchard 1981). This is referring to companies or organisations which provide food and or drink and /or accommodation to people who are away from home. There are two key businesses under hospitality sector that is Accommodation (hotels, guest houses, motels, lodges) and Food and beverages.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to customer's ability to recognise and recall a particular brand regardless of the situation (Bernato, Berlianto & Palupi, 2020).

Brand Equity

Brand equity is defined as a measure of the strength of consumer's attachment to a brand (Wood, 2000). Aaker (1991) explains brand equity as a

multidimensional concept with first four core dimensions which are brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty.

1.7 Report Structure

Chapter: 1 - Introduction: The first chapter presents the research study and outlines the background of the study, the purpose of the study, the problem statement and sub problems, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, delimitations of the study and the defining of the terms found in this study.

Chapter: 2 – Literature Review: The second chapter provides an overview of previous research and a comprehensive literature, theories related to the research problem and the key variables/ constructs of the research. The chapter also discusses the hypothesis development and conceptual framework.

Chapter: 3 – Research Methodology: This chapter outlines and explains the methodology that was adopted for this research study. It contains below sections research design; population and sample including sampling techniques; research instrument; procedure to collect data; research pilot study conducted; analysis of data analysis and interpretation; the research limitations; validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter: 4 – Data Presentation and Analysis: This chapter unpacks the statistical analysis of data collection and present the research findings and results in the form of tables, graphs, charts and so forth. The chapter further discusses study validity and reliability testing methods and assessing the overall model fit for the research . The chapter concludes by presenting the hypotheses testing results.

Chapter: 5 – Discussion of results: The chapter discuss the findings and results of the study comparing it with the study objectives, hypotheses and literature.

Chapter: 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations: This chapter is gives a conclusion remarks of the research paper, the theoretical and practical

implications of the study and suggestions or recommendations for future research. This chapter is followed by the References, Appendices, List of figures and tables.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the study overview and the purspose of the study, then the research gap and research problem of the study was subsequently discussed. The researcher went on to deliberate on research objectives objectives and questions, followed by outlining the significance of the study, delimitations and defining key research terms. Finally the study oultines the structure or framework of the research. The following chapter will discuss the literature review of the study.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Constantinides, Lorenzo-Romero and Alarcón-del-Amo (2013) states that social media has brought about a revolution not only in the way people communicate but also in the way customers make decisions on purchasing or using products and services. This chapter 2 focuses in discussing the literature review from the previous studies done in relation to the research objectives of this study. The chapter begins with explaining the tourism and hospitality industry in South Africa, and further gives a brief overview on digital marketing. It narrows down to discuss the literature of social media in Hospitality and then focus more on the Facebook as a social media platform being investigated in this research. A funnel approach was used in discussing the literature of the study before discussing the writings of the key variables found in the research objectives. The study further discusses the hypotheses development and developing key hypotheses to be tested in the next chapter of data collection.

2.2 Tourism and Hospitality

Tourism is described as a temporary movement of people to places from their own permanent homes to treat themselves in an enjoyable and exciting activities or travelling for business purposes (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2007). Tourism is one of the sectors with a very close relationship with the new information and communication technologies. South Africa has experienced a progressive growth in the hospitality and travel industry over the past years before the industry was hit by the Covid 19 pandemic. Toursim and travel industry has been seen as one of the largest economic industries producing a global GDP of about 10.4% (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). Subsequently, the type of the tourism product that it is intangible and its not just a physical product, and high cost as well as risk assocaited with toursim products, it therefore makes social media and online

networks to be the ideal area for travellers to access any travel and tourism related information (Tan et al. 2018; Lin et al. 2019). Electronic word or mouth (e-WOM) is a most important informational source for customers looking for information to make travel decsisions (Castillo-Manzano et al. 2022; Kim & Hwang, 2022; Gonzalez-Rodriguez at al.,2021; Li et al. 2019). This mean that the consumers are now well informed and up to date with due to the easy accessibility of such information and content about travel and toursim through different social media platforms and they also can go to online rating sites to rate and leave reviews for these toursim products and services (Baker & Kim, 2019; Chang et al. 2019; Lo & Yao, 2019).

Electronic word of mouth is a very powerful tool for commmunication as it permits the potential customers in the tourism sector to share information with one another and increases customer engagement (Saragih, 2021). This inturn helps in reducing the percieved risks and enable more informed choices and decisions regarding puchase intention (Litvin et al. 2018). Furthermore, Ferrer-Rosell et al. (2020) focus on the social media effects in relation to the toursim and travel sector since they are mainly to share information and experience between tourists and customers who trust that the online content and information is more reliable, trustworthy compared to the one found or shared in the company or hotel website, and other third parties. Thus travelling companies, airlines and hotel companies utilizes social media extensively to promote their products and services (Ni et al. 2021). Social media assist to improve the toursim sector, as it allows a great exposure for both domestic and international brands (not only nationally but also for the internationally), by generating value for those brands (Silva et al. 2023) . Although many of those hotel companies are not yet familiar with all the mechanisms offered by social media. Therefore, there is a room for expansion for this sector in relation to the level of impact and usefulness on the social media platforms, due to some of the hotel companies that are not acquainted with social media and its benefits (Malheiro, Sousa & Ferreira, 2019).

2.2.1 Hospitality Industry

As per a study by Law, Leung and Chan (2019) the significance of social media and online reviews in the hospitality industry more sepcifically the hotel accommodation sector have been thoroughly researched and largely demonstrated. The social media influence on the purchase decision making process in relation to toursim sector has been conducted and it presented that there is a huge effect on the consumer and followers, thereby improving the probability to travelling to the destination (Magno & Cassia, 2018). Hospitality is currently one of the fastest-growing sectors globally, as more people are now travel not only for leisure but also for education, business, medical purposes and so forth (Chothawe, 2020). The hospitality sector in South Africa is a combination of international hotel brands such as Marriot, Radisson, Accor Hotels etc and domestically grown hotel brands such as Southern Sun hotels and City Lodge hotels. The country has several different individual hotel properties which are spread across the major cities and towns. Theocharidis, Argyropoulou, Karavasilis, Vrana and Kehris (2020) reveals that hotels account for the utmost important physical elements of the tourism sector, since in most circumstances, the tourists' destination wouldn't have any competitive advantage without including the hotel accommodation (Attila, 2016).

According to the Outlook 2019 – 2023 by PWC, google travel estimates that about 74% of the travellers plan and book their trips through online where it's easy for them to shop around and do price comparisons, to reduce the costs for the trips and save few funds. South Africa is already the leading convention destination in Africa led by Cape Town which is ranked among top 50 convention cities in the world (Pwc Outlook, 2017). The city is attracting lot of tourists both domestic and international from all corners of the world. According to a study by Gfk South Africa in 2018, Cape Town attracted about 1.2 million at V&A front, and 800 000 visitors visited Table Mountain, while 940 000 visitors visited Cape Point. Some of the tourists visited other attraction places in other provinces and towns such as Robert Island, Apartheid museum, the Kruger park, Mandela house etc. South Africa is a becoming very aggressive in bidding for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibition business, supporting growth in the international

tourism and to attract more business tourists. The PWC report expected a projection of an 4.7% increase in the domestic travellers in the period of 5 years from 2019 to 20223, thus a rise of estimated 7.50 million in 2023, from 5.97 million in 2018 (PWC hospitality outlook, 2019 – 2023).

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2019-23 CAGR
Available rooms (thousands)	60.4	60.9	60.8	61.1	61.2	62	63.4	64.5	65.5	66.2	67	67.2	
% change	*-0.2*	*0.8*	*-0.2*	*0.5*	*0.2*	*1.3*	*2.3*	*1.7*	*1.6*	*1.1*	*1.2*	*0.3*	*1.2*
Guest nights (millions)	12.5	13.1	13.1	13.3	13.7	13.8	13.7	13.7	14	14.3	14.6	15	
% change	*6.8*	*4.8*	*0*	*1.5*	*3*	*0.7*	*-0.7*	*0*	*2.2*	*2.1*	*2.1*	*2.7*	*1.8*
Occupancy rates (%)	56.5	58.9	59	59.6	61.2	61	59.2	58.2	58.4	59.2	59.7	61.1	
ADR (R)	855	935	1 000	1 065	1 160	1 205	1 220	1 225	1 235	1 255	1 280	1 310	
% change	*4.3*	*9.4*	*7*	*6.5*	*8.9*	*3.9*	*1.2*	*0.4*	*0.8*	*1.6*	*2*	*2.3*	*1.4*
Total room revenue (R millions)	**10 688**	**12 249**	**13 100**	**14 165**	**15 892**	**16 629**	**16 714**	**16 783**	**17 290**	**17 947**	**18 688**	**19 650**	
% change	*11.4*	*14.6*	*6.9*	*8.1*	*12.2*	*4.6*	*0.5*	*0.4*	*3*	*3.8*	*4.1*	*5.1*	*3.3*

Figure 1: Hotels in South Africa *(Source: Statistics South Africa, PricewaterCoopers LLP, Wilkofsky Gruen Associates)*.

Currently hospitality has also become tailored whereby all the travel and hopsitality products or services are available online and are just one click away (Lakha & Vaid, 2021). The days are gone when travelling meant first visiting a place and then searching for a hotel and tourist place to stay at (Lakha & Vaid, 2021). Nowadays consumers first do their research online and also through social media platforms to get more information about the hotel/place before making a purchase decision (booking). Such information is just a one click away and is available to consumers to have access to it at any time. In addition, the industry offering accommodation is found to be the highly recognized in using social media, with Facebook having been acknowledged as the most popular social media in the accommodation sector and being mostly used by hotels for different reasons (Minazzi & Langrosen, 2014; Moro & Rita, 2018).

Major hotel chains have recognized social media as a significant distribution channel and subsequently launched their own social media pages on Facebook and Twitter to inspire customers to utilize the direct booking function (Revinate, 2012). Hotels and other accommodation businesses are required to have a better knowledge and understanding of how to convey messages and communication through social media platforms in order to be competetive and successful (Lakha

& Vaid, 2021). Customers tend to trust information shared or posted by their friends or families on Facebook page, hence by them liking or commenting positively on the hotel Facebook page it is seen as a personal recommendation for the hotel as they see them as credible (Lakha & Vaid, 2021).

The overall hotel marketing set-up has been reformed by the precence of social media hence nowadays hotels need to be very careful in managing customer complaints and queries as they can tarnish the image and reputation of the hotel (Lakha & Vaid, 2021). This is because customers are now sharing almost everything on social media even if it's a negative experience with a brand, product or service they use the social media to vent out their frustration and ensure that everyone see their bad experience. To add on this logic, Theocharidis et al. (2020) concluded by saying the greater significance of social media in travel and tourism will have a considerable effects on the way customers can communicate and share their experiences and opinion with the hotel leading to developing of new contenet that is how hotel customers can share their experience with the hotel thereby creating new content that is accessible and has an impact on other potential customers (Jung, Dieck & Chung, 2018). As soon as the total statistics of a hotel brand show more negatives, it will lead to customers developing a negative attitude towards the hotel (Theocharidis et al. 2020). This movement makes social media to be very important for the hotel businesses, particularly since majority of current's customers will first view and read reviews about a hotel establishment prior to making a booking intention (Silva, Silva & Rodrigues 2023).

2.3 Digital Marketing

Marketing is described as the foundation of marketing your product or services in return of earning revenue or income (Chothave, 2020). According to Bala and Verma (2018) marketing's role has dramatically changed due to disasters such as energy shortages, inflation, economic recessions, high unemployment, dying industries, dying companies, terrorism and war, and impacts cause by fast changes in technology in some industries.

Changes such as the advancement in technology have enforced current marketing executives to be more market focused when making strategic decisions, needing an official means of obtaining precise and timely information regarding customers, products, market place and the total surroundings (Bala & Verma, 2018). Technology is changing the background and practice of marketing: marketers are increasingly forced to operate in a complex and changing world where they do not have any more the full control of the media and the message (Bala & Verma, 2018). As the growing number of many people now depend on internet and social networks in order to get current or updated valuable information on products or services, social media have a huge role to run in developing the marketing strategy for the hotel businesses. (Chothave, 2020). Furthermore, brands have now combined social media marketing into their marketing strategies to create long lasting dealings and connections with consumers (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012).

2.3.1 *Digital Marketing*

Digital marketing today has changed how businesses operate and it has become an indespensable part of every business regardless of the type of business or the size of the business. It has become one of the critical focus for most businesses across the world as it began as a way of communication but later evolved to not just as another source of revenue for these businesses. It is now used as a way if developing and mantaining long term business relationships within various parties in the sector (Kaur, 2017). According to Chaffey (2012) digital marketing can be defined as “the application of the internet and related digital technologies in conjuction with traditional communications to achieve marketing objectives”.

Digital marketing is the utilization of electronic media by the marketers to promote the products or services into the market (Yasmin, Tasneem & Fatema, 2015). Digital marketing is one form of marketing being widely used to promote products or services and to reach consumers using digital channels. Digital markting plays a vital role in the whole tourism consumer buying process (Stojanovic & Kostic, 2018). The online communities have brought people across the world together

due to the migrating of the real-world relationhsips into virtual world, as result this change into digital dimension permits customers to share their experiences, knowledge, and endorse discussions in between various cultures (Budden Anthony, Budden, & Jones, 2011; Kumar, Novak & Tomkins, 2010).

Digital marketing is a sub branch of traditional marketing and uses modern digital channels for the placement of products e.g. downloadable music, primarily for communicating with stakeholders e.g. customers and investors about brand, products and business progress. There are various elements of which the digital marketing is formed, and the most important ones include; (a) Social media, (b) Online advertising, (c) Email marketing, (d)Affiliate marketing and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). This study will be more aligned on the social media aspect of the digital marketing.

In order to achieve success through digital marketing, businesses should make use of word of mouth communication on social medai as it is being viewed as verified time tested instrument (Trusov, 2009). Social neworking platforms like Facebook has opened up opportunities for the businesses to communicate and engage with lots of poeople across the globe regarding the products or services, and more new marketing opportunities have been created (Bela and Verma, 2018).

2.3.2 Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality

According to a study by Alhabash & Ma (2017) Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X) (social media platforms) and other online sites which over the real life of societies and social relationship networks to the digital era and originates new bond between individuals and communities (social cohesion). Social media is deliberated as one of the mainly current and significant E-marketing isntruments in the present moment (Anyebe, 2018). It delivers accessibility to customers with the aim of knowing their benefits and needs as well as impacting their purchasing intentions (Anyebe, 2018: Iblasi, Bader & Al-Qreini, 2016). Kohli, Suri and Kapoor (2014) described social media as media created by consumers to share information online on various topics of interest.. It is therefore become a more popular platform used in the travel and tourism sector.

According to Kemp (2019) digital report analysis there were 3.48 billion social media users' in 2019 and 3.26 billion people use social media on mobile devices. Social media is being used by consumers to get in contact with other travellers online, get information regarding a product they intend to purcahse online and also to read and view other customers reviews or comments regarding their experience with a product or service (Dedeoglu, Taheri, Okumus & Gannon, 2020). Further, the way how consumers access and obtain this information regarding products or services, destination information and their experience with the product is subsequently influenced by social media (Onofrei, Filieri & Kennedy, 2022).

Berthon, Pitt, Plangger and Shapiro (2012) testify that social media has a direct influence on consumer perceptions towards businesses and organisations communicating over these platforms. Consumers can form certain opinions based on what is being said about a company over social media networks, this can inturn have a huge influence on a company brand image and reputation (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger& Shapiro,2012).

Appel, Grewal, Hadi and Stephen (2020) emphasises the importance of social media in different fields which include marketing field, advertising, and communication which is contributed by the yearly increase in the number of social media users (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2020). Therefore, customers with a strong correlation with a company share their experinece with one another on social media and recommend the offerings of the company to their friends and colleagues through positive word of mouth (Manzoor, Baig, Hashim & Sami, 2020).

Hotel industry benefits a lot by incorporating social media in their marketing strategy and this is through increase in sales, improved direct contact with the customers, good distribution and procurement, reduction of costs, increase in customer satsfaction which result to customer loyalty (Melian-Gonzalez & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016; Okazaki, Andreu & Campo, 2017). By having a big solid precense in social media also benefits the hotel companies as they tend to reach a wider range of customers when sending a message or communication directly to them with less money and time spent. (Su, Swanson & Chen, 2016).

According to a study by Bilal, Ahmed and Shehzad (2014) social media allow users not only to form, join, and communicate with groups as well as individuals online, but also to create and distribute original content in ways not possible in the past. On the contrary when hotel guest or customers share their travel experience and travel documentaries on social media with other customers, that content or information assist businesses to understand their customer needs and expectations, which helps them to improve their offerings in order to attract more customers and retain them (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Furthermore, social media gives an opportunity to the customers to collaborate and share content that can improve the brand image of the company and awareness to customers who intend to purchase similar products in future (Sashi, 2012). Such partnerships and interactions between customers and companies may yield good result such as customers understanding better the company and its offerings This result in high customer satisfaction and creation of solid long-term relationhsip between the customer and the business (Sashi, 2012). Social media in hospitality sector provides several benefits to hotels such as ease of information spread, promotion of the hotel, engagement with customers,easy access of information anywhere at any given point and internationalisation of the brand (tom Dieck, Jung, Kim & Moon, 2017). Hence, social media helps to expand the tourism industry by allowing a high publicity both at national and internationally level thereby creating value for brands (Silva, Silva & Rodrigues, 2023).

Aydin (2019) suggests that by using social media, users can easily add to the information, content or message created by other users and brands alternatively they can also begin their own communication themselves. Along these lines of interconnecting with brands, contributing to regular communication with different brands and other users is possible (Aydin, 2019). Though numerous scholars agree that travellers use different social media platforms to get information online during each travel stage of the decision making (Verma, Stock & McCarthy, 2012). It has been debated that social media disclose their main important function in the pre-travel stage, this whereby tourists/travellers refer to social media for planning their travel and searching for information, and decision making

process, (Cox, Burgess & Sellitto, 2009; Zeng 2013). A study by Kim, Lim and Brymer (2015, pp 136) states that, “companies should make serious efforts to understand the impact of online reviews and prepare better marketing strategies to address social media”. Social media meaningfully influence the way consumers acquire information from other customers and share their experiences (through photos, reviews, comments etc), opinions and as well as choosing of products and services (purchase intention), (Cheung & Koo, 2015; Ge & Gretzel, 2018; Huang, 2016; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

As reported by Putra, Waruwu, Asbari, Novitasari, and Purwanto (2021); Praditya (2020) the social media is broken down into three ways specifically; online communities, bloggers and social networks. The online communities and forums are descibed as a group of community memmbers created by the customers with the same interests and without being persuaded or impacted by the company advertising contente (Putra et al. 2021, & Praditya, 2020). Through this forum created the online communites can easily communicate or engage directly with the company and share their opinions and posts with other customers and the company. Furthermore, blogging is viewed as one of the most popular social media tool used in the travel and tourism sector which allows customers to be engaged by being part of the discussion (Thevenot, 2007). Erlangga (2021) describe bloggers as the online journal showing short notes which are looked by the online users and these are countinously updated and most considerable means of word of mouth communication. Thirdly the social networks are a important force in marketing for both , both business to customer and business to business. Such networks include social medi site such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn (Putra, Asbari, Purwanto, Novitasari, & Santoso 2021; & Praditya, 2020).

2.3.3 Facebook in Hospitality

Facebook is a social networking site designed to help individuals connect with one another. Facebook is widely used by the hotels to both communicate and to create relationships with both existing and potential customers, as well as permitting the delivery or sharing of appropriate information and content which

contributes to a positive travel experience and complete customer satisfaction (Ferrer-Rosell, Martin-Fuentes, & Marine-Roig, 2020). According to a study by Ferrer-Rossell et al.(2020) hotel companies share the brief information of the hotel's services or any aspects related to hotel's location on Fcaebook in order to stimulate the interests of customers and Facebook users. Facebook has become the most popular social media network worldwide with 2.38 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2019; Ferrer-Rosell et al. 2020), and this number has increased in the latest reports for 2021 which showed the monthly active users of about 2.80 billion (Facebook, 2021). In addition Facebook users have a wider variaety of age users than those of other social media platforms such as Twitter (X) (Kim & Hastak, 2018). More marketers and businesses have guaranteed to have a Facebook existence so as to intearct with their customers and be directly influential on their purchase intention decision making (Tien, Rivas & Liao, 2019).

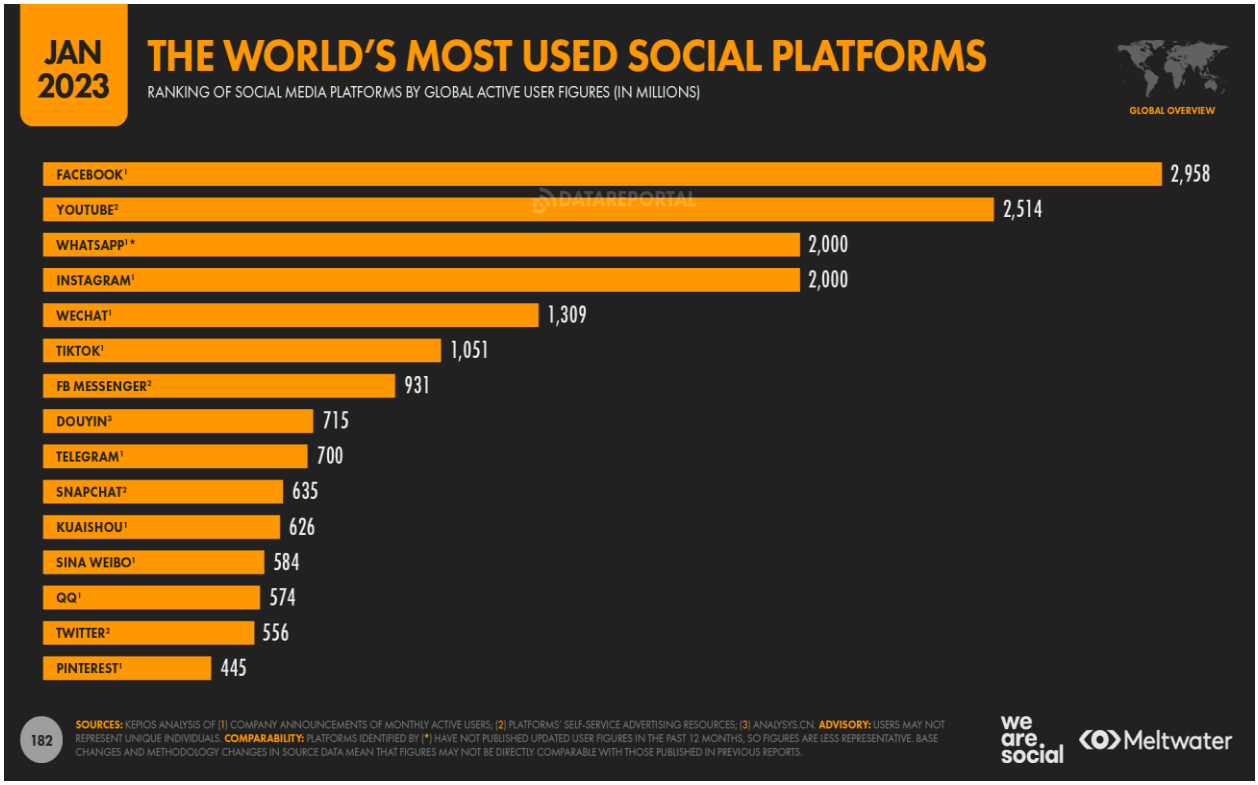


Figure2 : World's most used Social media platforms January 2023 *(Source: DataReportal, 2023)*

The above figure shows the global statistics of the most used social media platform based on the 2023 report. Facebook has become the mostly widely used social media platform with 2.9 billion active users in 2023. In addition, Meta's 3rd quarter of 2022 investor earnings reports shows that the 2.9 billion monthly active users it equates to almost 37% of the world's total population. According to Qwerty (2017) digital statistics report in South Africa, Facebook was the mostly used social media in 2017 with 49% of the population being Facebook users.

TravelClick poll report reveals that, about three quarters of respondent hotels have used social media as marketing or promotion tools. Out of that total figure only 65% was showing the hotel companies that used Facebook, making it the most favoured social media channel, followed by Twitter which contributed to 20% (hotelmarketing.com, 2011). The total number of the Facebook users which surpasses the number of customers who visits or view the company websites to get product and promotional information is as a result of the wider web esistence of Facebook when compared to the company webisites (Jung & Kim, 2015). Research study by Haigh, Brubaker & Whiteside, (2013) proves that communication on a Facebook page lead to positive perceptions about a hotel brand or brand to its customers and, the attitudes in relation to a hotel's Facebook page are perceived as elements boosting the booking intentions of customers (Leung & Baloglu, 2015).

Earlier research proves that experience of customers with a hotel Facebook page can affects the behaviour and attitude of the customers due to the the content and information they access in the page, this can inturn be influential to consumer's purchase intention towards a hotel brand (Leung & Tanford, 2015). This means that the customer's breaviour and attitude in relation to the hotel brand will affect hotel booking intentions. Nevertheless, the research did not examine the impact of the customer reviews and comments that they share on a hotel Facebook page regarding their experience with the hotel brand (Leung Tanford, 2015).

Facebook has changed to a platform whereby consumers can present their own opinions about products or services, and share what is on their minds in relation to a product or service (Richard & Guppy, 2014). Facebook users can now share

their experience and opinions through posting pictures and videos of their travel experince regarding the product or service they consumed and also give recommendation to their friend who will be looking for some information in order to make a purchase decision (Richard & Guppy, 2014). This feedback or reviews that other customers come across on Facebook consequently influnces them in their purchasing decision.

It is very important for guests to share their honest feedback and experience about a hotel brand on social media platforms. Some customers will post a picture or a video for their experience with the hotel and the other customers or friends that are connected to the customer will comment and also share their feedback either negative or positive review. While most consumers find out about a hotel brand ot a product from the information they information they have access to on social media from their peers and friends, they tend to have a lot of confidence about this information rather than the information received by other consumers through brand generated content only (Herbst, Finkel, Allan & Fitzsimons, 2012).

2.4 Consumer Behaviour

Furthermore, Solomon (2018) describe consumer behavior as the steps taken by individuals or groups to choose, buy, use, or get rid of products or services, ideas or experiences to meet their needs and desires. In terms of purchasing online travel products, Beldona, Morrison & O'Leary (2005) argued that a consumer's motivation to book online travel products depends upon the consumer's past experience and the heterogeneity of travel products. Sharma and Rehman (2012) present the information existing on social media platforms regarding a brand or product which is either negative or positive has a considerable overall effect on the purchasing behaviour of the consumers. Understanding consumers' decision-making behaviours for travel products has become a critical issue for not only academics but also for practitioners (Yavas & Babakus, 2003). The constant development of information technology, in particular, has evolved the way travel services are purchased (Llach, Perramon, Alonso-Almeida & Bagur-Femenías, 2013).

All customers go through a various stages during the buying process of hospitality or travel service, thus, businesses should understand customer's behaviour and the decision process that customers adopt (Oktadiana & Kurnia, 2011). Tourists and travellers are being influenced by the social media and the information they see and read on social media when planning their trips (Tham, Mair & Croy, 2020). Throughout the travel, the customers are actively using social media by sharing stories, pictures, and videos, also impacts other potential tourists for travelling toward unusual places (Javed, Tuckova & Jibril, 2020). For instance currently we see celebrities and influencers posting their holiday pictures and destination pictures on Facebook and Instagram (Javed, Tuˇcková & Jibril, 2020). Such information influences other potential travellers to also try to visit that same establishment or holiday destination due to the positive information and content shared by the people they trust. Consumers' attitudes toward brand preferences can be an important determinant of their purchase decisions (Ajzen, 1991). In the field of consumer behaviour, the construct of attitude plays a central role in explaining consumers' buying motivations, particularly in the area of product evaluation, changing attitudes and determinants of brand opinion (Ajzen, 2008). An understanding of consumer behaviour (behaviours patterns and how they make purchase decisions) is more important in order to make marketing activities and strategies successful.

Morrison (1996) asserted that customer behaviour is the way in which customers select, use and behave after they have purchased hospitality and travel services. Personal and interpersonal are the two key factors that impact the behaviour of a customer (Oktadiana & Kurnia, 2011). Personal factors includes the psychological characteristics of the individual, while the external influences of people are referred to interpersonal factors(Oktadiana & Kurnia, 2011). Buying behaviour occurs when consumers feel the urge to buy something at the same time without further evaluation (Thamizhvanan & Xavier, 2013). So, it can be concluded that the orientation of purchase intention is the impetus to make a higher purchase will result in higher online purchase intentions towards a product.

2.4.1 Theoretical Framework

A theory of planned behaviour will be used to discuss the relationship between consumer behaviour, attitudes and their intention to purchase. The theory of planned behaviour is used to predict leisure intentions and consumer behaviour (Ajzen, 1985). The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) will be a very appropriate framework for this current study. This is because the model has been positively tested in an extensive range of backgrounds, disciplines and countries, including in the hopsitality and tourism (Sparks & Pan, 2009). A

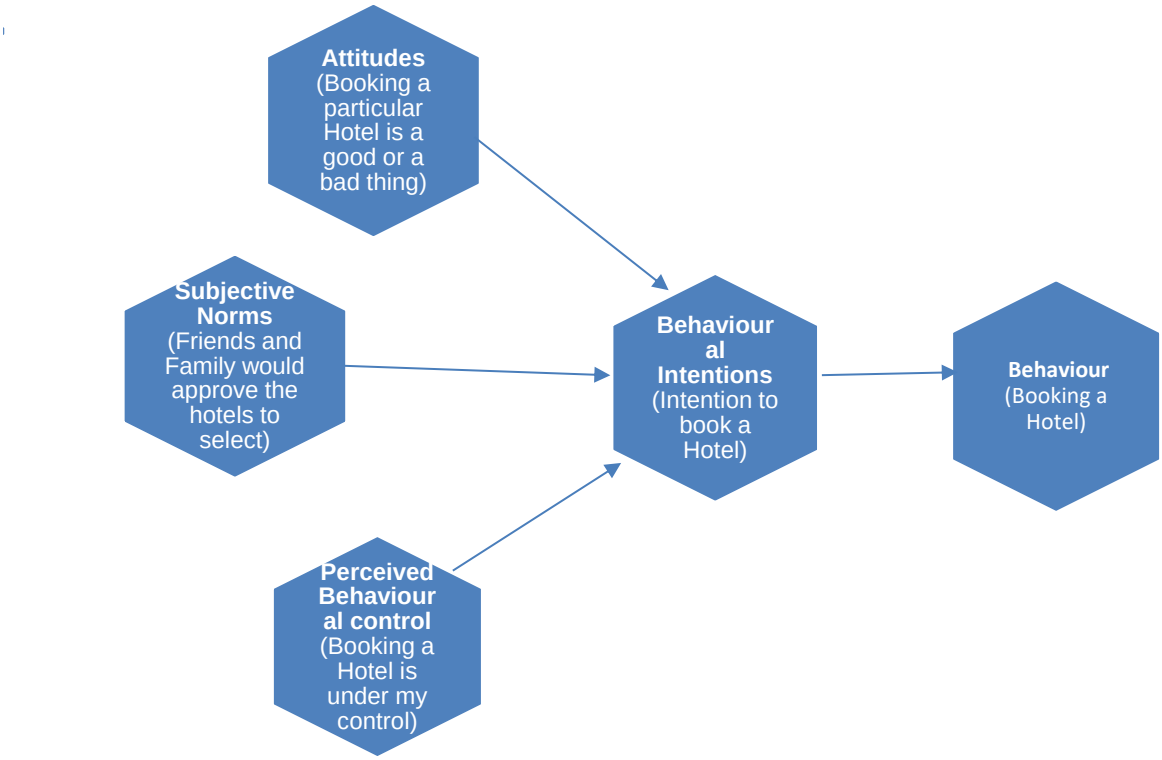


Figure 3: Theory of Planned Behaviour Framework

As stated by Quintal, Lee and Soutar (2010) limited studies have examined “the possible relationships between these variables; attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, even though relationships among these variables are frequently high, particularly for attitudes and subjective norms”. In addition the struggle that the power of association among these variables suggests that subjective norms may influence attitudes (Oliver & Bearden,1985). The stronger the willingness (strong intention) to carry out the behaviour, can result to a greater likelihood of behavioural success (Dung, 2020). Bojei and Abu (2016) identified

TPB as the extent to which an individual has either favourable or unfavourable valuation of a precise behaviour. King (2019) also argue that with TPB, numerous human conduct can be projected from behaviour intention and that consumers tend to conduct themselves in a planned and purposely manner.

This model is explaining the importance of attitudes on Facebook reviews and information shared, how they influence the behaviour of customers when deciding to purchase or select a hotel. Furthermore, this theory proposes that behaviour is influenced by intention, and that intention is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control. Generally speaking, individuals will intend to perform a behaviour when they evaluate it positively and/or when they are influenced by social pressure. In this present study, the purchase intention which is referred as the ouput variable is attached on the framework of theory of planned behaviour (TPB), due to purchase intention being combined under the theory of behavioural intention (Ahmed, 2014).

2.4.2 Hotel Decision Making Process

It is very critical to comprehend the function played by social media platforms in the decision making process of the consumers in relation to the products or servicesin the tourism sector (Gupta, 2019). Consumers nowadays are actively seraching for information on social media and online during their decision making process, such information is accessed in sites such as company websites, blogs and online reviews to comprehend their options (Court, Elzinga, Mulder & Vetvik, 2009). Furthermore, in current consumer decision making process, the consumers aggressively search and draw up some product related information from different sources online and on social media platforms (Somohardjo, 2017). The consumer decision making process includes different stages that a customer go through before they making a purchase intention. This process encompasses all the stages from a need recognition through the pre-purchase stage, searching for information on possible ways to satisfy the customer need, followed by the evaluation of alternative options stage, then to the actual purchase and the post purchase process including experience and evaluation of the product (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt & Füller, 2013).

Social media represents a point of online interaction between customers and businesses during consumer journey, and this can influence the process of consumer decision making during cutomer journey (Hu & Olivieri, 2020). Pop, Saplacan, Dabija and Al (2021) found that the complete experience of a customer, known as the customer journey, includes various interactions like pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase behavior (see, Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, for more). They further reflects that this customer journey signifies all online interaction points between the customer and brand, as well as all the experiences customers encounter during their decision making journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Chen, Nguyen, Klaus & Wu, (2015) established that the decision making process of consumer's online holiday which involves includes 3 stages discussed below; information serach, evaluation and purchase stages.

The customer participates in different beahviour types during each of these 3 customer journey stages (pre-purchase, purchase and post purchase). First of all there is a need recognition that customer will go through and then followed by the searching for information from different sources. The customer then makes a decision on the choice based on the information they found about a product, which leads to making a purchase (transaction stage), then lastly the customer consume the prodcust or service (usage of the product) and after sales service (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). These stages are interlinked and cannot be considered in separation since the customer uses previous experience stage before they move to another stage and this has an influence on the upcoming experiences of the customer.

Pre-Purchase Stage (Pre Travel stage)

The pre-purchase phase involves the stage which a customer experience prior to making a purchas intention (transaction phase), (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the hotel decision making process this can be referred as a pre-travel stage, meaning the period in which a customer go through before they book a hotel. Marketers can successfully modify their marketing content to customers by understanding how consumers use the external information sources and significance they ascribe to each information source (Gursoy, 2018). Selecting a hotel occasionally is complicated for travellers because they have to consider many aspects in their

mind and it can cause problem for them to decide and select hotel to stay at (Chen, Chen & Haung, 2012).

Gursoy (2019) assert that the pre-purchase stage is the stage of searching for information regarding the product or service to be purchased. This information serch process is a very vital and difficult instrument of consumer decision making process. The afforementioned is correct for the sectors as aggressive as the hospitality industry where significant risks are associated with the products due to their experiential and intangible nature (Xiang, Magnini & Fesenmaier, 2015). Pre-purchase information search is a functional method that is used by consumers to collect information for a familiar and instant purchase decision (Lu, Gursoy & Lu, 2016).

At the nformation search and evaluation stage, most consumer grow an anticipation about their journey end point, that is further boosted by the trust from the information they find on social media relating to their destination (Pop, Saplacan, Dabija & Ali 2021; Hudson & Thal, 2013). Due to the social media precence and access of information online, consumers are now anticipate to have instant access to the updated information relating to the product or service as well as the reviews and comments recently shared by other customers (Gursoy, 2019). While there are several sources of external information available online, it is tremendously large for consumers to consume all of it, hence travellers will not likely to make use of all those sources (Lu & Gursoy, 2015). The consumers will select a small number of those outside sources that will produce the most usefulness information in their pre-purchase information search process (Gursoy, 2019). Sources such as Facebook and other company websites are some of the main sources that the customers rely on for the pre-purchase information.

According to Smith, Anderson and Moore (2012) social media provided online customers the authority to read and assess comments and notes shared by other customers on Facebook which are associated to products or services they are concerned with. The online reviews and comments regarding the hotels play an important role in assisting the current consumers at the evalution stage by offering them with negative and positive reviews and comments and communication between customers (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

In addition when consumers are evaluating substitute sources or substitute products they consult social media links and platforms in order get the opinion and experiences shared by other tourists, (Chen et al. 2015 & Pop et al, 2021). In addition, Gursoy, Yolal, Ribeiro and Panosso Netto (2017) argues that during the information search process, consumers are not likely to utilize every available source because of the time, effort and processing capacity required. As a result, consumers are likely to evaluate the importance, quality and reliability of information provided by each information source in order identify the sources that can generate the most useful and trustworthy information (Gursoy, 2019). The concept of Fcaebook posted reviews and comments has advanced significantly to reveal people's need to connect to specific brands (Abuhashesh, Al-Khasawneh, Al-Dmour & Masa'Deh, 2019). This is predominantly vital for the Facebook platform due to their prominance and greater visibility as well as attraction of numerous photos and review videos (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

During the evalution stage the decisions to book a hotel are regularly influenced by customer reviews and comments (negative and positive) found online and in social media, as they increase the customer awareness and may have imapct on their behaviour torwards a hotel (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Verma, Stock, and McCarthy (2012) display an example in their study as they discovered that the negative comments found on social media regarding a hotel negatively impact the hotel as it is less likely to be booked by potential travellers who come across such information.

Purchase Stage

After deciding which alternative best meets their needs the consumer, then make a purchase intention of the product or service. Perhaps the most salient numbers encountered at this stage are price and price promotions (Santana, Shelle, Steven, Dallas & Vicki Morwitz , 2020). This includes a complete engagement with the brand by the consumer as they choose the product or preferred torurist package they intend to purcahse (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Across all other online networking sites, those platforms such as Facebook which allow customers to share and post their comments and reviews regarding their experiences are now the most trusted and important source of information of

experiential products like the hotel products. Such information is trusted at the purchase stage as it is recommended by friend or relatives (Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu & Okumus, 2016; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Ye, Law & Gu, 2009)

An important aspect witnessed in this setting is that the consumer decisions of others to purchase a product are affected by individuals or customers who are influenced by social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter e.t.c (Cox & Park, 2014).

Post-Purchase Stage

After consumers have made the purchase they enter a post-purchase evaluation stage. In this stage the consumers make a comparison of their product experience with the prior expectations which eventually lead to customer satsfaction or disatisfaction (Dunne, Flanagan & Buckley, 2011). Post purchase touch point is the most important stage of the consumer decision journey as it deal with the after sales service, whereby consumers raise their complaints or satisfcation levels of the product they purchased through online community group or word of mouth communication (Gogua & Smirnova, 2020). The attitude or beahviour of customers at this stage is revealed by consumption, usage of the product and engagement as well as service needs. Further the authors express that by completing the purchase the customer is offered a more personalized customer service approach of the brand (Gogua & Smirnova, 2020).

It is therefore very important for the hotel managers to meet the expectations of the customers and satisfy them. In otherwords if customers are not content with the service they received or not satisfied with the product performance they can share and spread negative information through various social media platforms. (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009).

2.4.1 Sub Problem 1: Influence of Comments and Review on Purchase Intention

2.4.1.1 Consumer Purchase Intention on Hotels

Kamalasena & Sirisena (2021) define puchasing intention as a mixture of consumer's readness and appeal to buy a product or service. Purchase intention is a kind of decision-making that studies the reason to buy a particular brand by consumer (Shah, Aziz, Jaffari, Waris, Ejaz, Fatima & Sherazi, 2012). Since the forecasting of future consumer behaviour is a vital problem for businesses, it should be projected more precisely (Baabdullah, Alalwan, Rana, Kizgin & Patil, 2019).

Purchase intention is typically associated to the behaviour, perceptions and consumer attitudes (Mirabi, Akbariyeh & Tahmasebifard, 2015). Cheruiyot & Maru (2013) express that formation of a consumer's purchase intentions is affected by the consumer's overall viewpoint towards a product or service. This means that, the higher the customer expectations, the higher the number of people who are likely to buy the product (Manzoor, Baig, Hashim & Sami, 2020). Purchase intention is also indicated as to how far consumers want to approach behaviour and how much effort is generated to carry out certain behaviours in purchasing, because of that purchase intention also needs to be explored further regarding its role as a more prominent predictor (Phua & Kim, 2018).

Gogoi (2013) reflects that the purchase intention may be transformed due to the imapct of price , known quality and value. Furthermore, consumers are impacted by these internal or external drives throughout the buying process. Purchase behaviour is a key point for consumers to access and evaluate the specific product. In addition, being familiar with the purchase intention for a brand is very important to consumers and businesses as it potrays the customer retention impression. Further, there are some of the measurements of the brand upon which purchase intention is inclined to and these include; brand image, brand attitude, quality, brand kowledge, brand loyalty and attributes (Tariq, Nawaz, Nawaz & Butt, 2013). Personal behaviour, attitudes, and random circumstances have an influence on the purchase intentions (Kotler, 2003).

2.4.1.2 Facebook influence on purchase decision

Customers are making use of social media platforms like Facebook for engaging and communicating with other customers through sharing their experiences and opinion in relation to the product or service they purchased (Abuhashesh et al. 2019). This information that customer share among themselves can have influence on consumer's purchase decision of accommodation(Clarke, Murphy & Adler, 2016; Roque & Raposo, 2016; Zhang, Omran & Cobanoglu, 2017). Insufficient information with images, photos, videos etc on a hotel Facebook pages is deliberated to be the key reason for the hotel guests for not returning to the hotel's Facebook and this may lead to low purchase intention of the said hotel brand (Hue et al. 2022). Furthermore, marketers have made sure that they have a presence on Facebook platform so as to communicate with their consumers and directly influence their purchase decission (Tien et al. 2019).

Montero & Fernandez-Aviles (2010) argue that consumers prior to making a purchase decision of a product or service they already increased their expectations torwards the product, while in the tourism industry, tourists will express anticipations regarding the service they provide (Pop et al. 2021). In addition this information about a product that is accessible in different social media platforms and other consumers opinions and recommendation is seen as very crucial for the prospects in the travel and tourism sector (Pop, Saplacan, Dabija & Alt, 2021). Online communication with other consumers or travellers that include the use of videos and photos is the key impact of consumer's interest to travel to a certain detsination and this is found in the first phase of the process (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Hence it is important for hotels to share videos and pictures on their Facebook pages for customers to see the type of products/services they offer.

A study by Wen & Aun (2020) found that facebook is a considerable channel of e-WOM whereby the users have the power as buyesr to engage with hotel and can express their opinions openly towards products or services and their intention of buying them. Facebook gives users an opportunity to write short comments or message regarding their experience with the product or service, such information

is displayed to the Facebook user's connection of friends in the real time using the news feed or on their profile feed (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes, 2009).

Yoong & Lien (2019) express that different social media sites expedite sharing of travel information among the customer and also among the consumers and companies. This role of information sharing in social media platforms like Facebook has increased customer engagement and leading to high purchase inetention (Osatuyi, 2013). For example, most hotels have Facebook pages that is connected to their website which they use to engage with customers and receive ratings and feedback from customers on their experience with the brand. Richard and Guppy (2015) state that as soon as the consumers or Facebook user log into their Facebook page or profile and see such information shared or posted about a product or service, that comment feature may influence their purchase intention. When Facebook fan page followers share their previous experience information, comments and reviews on Facebook can assist other customers to make well informed decisions before purchasing a product or service (Shi & Chow, 2015).These findings have resulted to the below proposed hypothesis;

H1. *The comments and reviews found on Facebook influences hotel purchase intentions.*

Phillips, Barnes, Zigan & Schegg (2017) explains that the way customers positively and negatively recognize a hotel brand and its services has a strong influence on the customer's decision making process. This means that any positive comments and reviews regarding the hotel and its services may have more impact on the consumer's behaviour rather than the negative comments shared by other customers. (Phillips, Barnes, Zigan & Schegg, 2017; Hilbrink, 2017). It is therefore, shown or proven that an increase in hotel booking intentions is connected with the positive comments and reviews found on social media regarding the hotel brand(Chan, Lam, Chow, Fong & Law, 2017; Hilbrink, 2017).

On the other hand, negative reviews and comments have been reported as not having any effect or influence on the consumer purchase intentions (Floh, Koller & Zauner, 2013). Nonetheless, some of the researchers revealed that negative reviews and comments found on Facebook about a hotel brand or establishment

have more impact than the positive reviews due to the wide coverage of Facebook and more users (Mauri, Minazzi & Vannacci, 2017). Jamil and Mat (2011) recommended a further investigation to be carried out among the purchase intention and facebook reviews in future studies as the purchase intention may positively influence genuine online purchasing.

2.4.1.3 Customer online reviews and Facebook comments

Several prior studies regarding the consumer reviews (online) have been more concentrated on the influence these reviews have on the purchase decision making (Gavilan et al. 2018; Liu & Park, 2015; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Ye et al. 2009). Online consumer reviews help customers to make informed decisions and select a right product wth good reviews based on the other consumer's first hand information and experience especially on the high involvement products (Guo et al. 2017).

Some of the benefits of online reviews is that it influences the consumer's rational decision making process throughout purchasing online (Wang & Yang, 2012). Consumers can now rely on the online reviews and comments created and shared by other customers on social media platforms regarding the hotel, this due to the easy access of such information on internet by consumers (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Ye, Law & Gu, 2011; Xie et al. 2011).

Wang, Chow and Yang (2012) express that onlnie reviews which express positive information about a product or service influence the consumer's the positivity of online reviews impacts the consumer's reasoning during the online shopping decision-making process. The increasing easy access to intenert and that consumer can create and share their content at any given time with other customers and potential customers,this result to consumers depending more on these online generated reviews and opinions regarding the hotel destination (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Ye, Law & Gu, 2011; Xie, Fung So & Wang, 2011).

Online reviews are a popular form of eWOM (electronic word of mouth), so customers use them to share information about products and services, and the information from online reviews has a critical effect on customer purchase

decisions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). A customer's exposure to online reviews increases his/her awareness of a hotel and amplifies his/her consideration of it (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Earlier research has offered extensive proof on the importance of word of mouth in purchase intention and behaviour choice, therefore consumers regularly search for word of mouth informstion so as to minimise the anticipated risk when making a purchase decision online (Xie et al. 2014).

Furthermore, Sparks and Browning (2011) argues that eWOM are created by numerous consumers who deliberate and share information the range of product qualities so as to equip other customers with more knowledge and information. Thus, as part of product decision-making or choice, potential buyers can enter a community of past-purchasers to obtain information prior to making a purchase (Sparks & Browning, 2011). These eWOM seems to be predominantly important especially for the products that need one to experience them first prior to consumption, for example hotel services or travel products (Casalo, Flavian, Guinaliu & Ekinci, 2015). With these products one cannot make a purchase decision without getting product information in the form of photos and videos, hence with these products, the views of other consumers who share and publish their experiences through online reviews is seen as truworthy information than the hotel company information (Zhao, Lynch & Chen, 2015; Ye, Law, Gu & Chen, 2011).

As stated by Goncalves, Silva and Martins (2018) in their study, the online reviews gain particular prominence in the hotel industry since consumers are frequently confronted with situations such as having to book a hotel that they don't have any information about and the hotel which is not well known by the public. In such instances consumers rely on the information shared by other travellers or friends online about their experience with the hotel and the brand as it is difficulty to make a choice on the hotel to book. Hence, consumers are inclined to trust in the reviews and comments written and shared by the other consumers who had consumed the same hotel services or had an experience with that particular hotel. (Liu & Park, 2015). A study by Sparks and Browning (2011) found that online reviews are an important source of information for

prospective hotel consumers, and they have an influence on trust and enjoyment (Sparks & Browning, 2011; hotel awareness (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), booking intentions (Casalo, Flavian, Guinaliu & Ekinci, 2015); hotel choice (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), and willingness to pay (Nieto- García, Resce & Ishizak, 2017).

Most studies are displaying some evidence that consumers make use of the online reviews and comments and that these negative and positive reviews have a solid impact on the purchase intention of a product or service (Lempert, 2006; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Such online reviews assist consumers to have an impartial knowledge of the product to be purchased and thereby creating sequence of measurement standards (Liu, Karahanna & Watson, 2011). By doing so, this can also assist consumers to make informed purchase decisions at the same time reducing the amount of information required prior to making purchase decision connected (Liu et. al., 2011; Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979).

2.4.2 Customer Trust

Wang, Yeh, Yen and Sandoya (2014) define consumer trust as “the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” (see Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman, 1993 pp.135). Trust is defined as the perception of reliability from the consumer’s point of view based on experience or more on a series of transactions or interactions characterised by the fulfillment of how the product performed in relation to customer expectation and satisfaction (El Naggar et al. 2017 & Han et al. 2015 & Khadim et al. 2018). Further, they express that customer trust in a brand can be refered to the customer’s wish to rely on a brand with the threats faced because anticipations of the brand will result to optimistic outcomes (El Naggar et al. 2017; Han et al. 2015 & Khadim et al. 2018).

Agag and El-Masry (2017) highlighted that consumers’ faith in the online platforms such as travel websites, hotel websites are depended on how easy is to access such information, and how easy is to navigate the website, the quality of the website, the reputation of the website and professed usefulness. Furthermore, widespread literature proposes that trust is a critical factor that

pushes the connection between brand and customers in the online market, this is because it brand-customer relationship in the online market, because it helps decreases the anticipated risk by customers when they shop online (Han, Nguyen & Lee, 2015). As stated by Naradin et al. (2020) online shopping is perceived as increasingly dangerous yet, a sense of trust might mitigate the anciety of uncertainity in online purchases, so alleviating customers' psychological concerns over e-retailers behaviour (see Mohseni & Sreenivasana, 2014 for more).

Trust in social media represents a readiness to rely on someone else with great hope of satisfying results, and it inspires dependable behaviour and avoids untruthful participants behaviour (Theocharidis, Argyropoulou, Karavasilis, Vrana & Kehris, 2020). Further, Wang et al. (2014) suggests that the main measurements of the hotel trust idea was highlighted by the literature as competence, integrity and reliability. The current study express that trust in online hotel companies signifies customers' readiness to rely on hotels, this is due to the trust on the information shared on Facebook pages and other social media platforms (Theocharidis et al. 2020). Trust is seen as a major important factor for a business or organisational sustainability because it is essential for overcoming uncertainity and alleviating risk and it also plays plays vital role in maintaining long lasting relationships among customers and businesses (Wang et al ., 2014).

Trust in relation to a hotel is more impacted by different factors such as customer satisfaction and the hotel's perceived brand image and inturn trust affects loyalty since satisfied customers are likley to return for another purchase (Loureiro & González, 2008). Jung and Kim (2015) state that trust factor is formed amongst consumers when consumers form an attachment with other consumers and brands through interaction and communication. While most consumers are incline to resemble their own consumers as a most credible source of information, the trust amongst consumers and brands will be strenghthened by positive reviews or posts found on socila media (Jung & Kim, 2015). Trust assist consumers in reducing the nervousness, insecurity and susceptibility associated to the agreement, that end up leading to high customer satisfaction and sequential influence the electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in the matter of

difficult and experiential services (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004).

In addition, consumers are inclined to put more trust and faith in the information sharedonline by the famous or influential people such as the opinion leaders (Metzger, Flanagin & Medders, 2010). People will trust more information shared by the people around them or the people that they know, for instance friends and family. Customers are trusting the recommendations by the friends they follow on Facebook and they will even trust the product information shared by them or the reviews they write about a particular brand or product. Mahat et al. (2020) suggest that the main challenge or hindrance towards booking a hotel room is because of the lack of customer trust on the hotel. Therefore, the more positive comment and posts by Facebook friends and users this will result to an increase on consumer's dependability and faith on the hotel brand (Mahat et al. (2020).

Cheng and Yee (2014) reflects that trust was reported as having an important connection purchase intention online, this means that trust plays a big contributing factor towards online purchase. Researchers have explored the linkage between customer trust and brand loyalty. Veloutsou (2015) revealed that customer trust positively increases brand loyalty. Furthermore, Huang (2017) also stated that customers who trust the brand tend to develop higher brand loyalty. Consequently, it seems that trust in a hotel by the consumers plays a big role on consumer's readiness to book a hotel room and it is considerably impacted by the feedback received from the other consumers and friends (Ladhari & Michaudi, 2015). This is leading to the proposition of the following hypothesis;

H2. *The comments and reviews found on Facebook pages influence the customer trust in a hotel.*

2.4.3 Customer trust and Purchase intention

Comprehensive literature recommends that trust is a critical factor that motivates the relationhsip between brand and customer in the online market this is as result of the perceived customer risk that it helps to minimise. (Han et al. 2015). Trust

has been a subject of plentiful research in the current years as more authors are having more interestst on the online surroundings and situation (Corritore et al. 2003; Jeon and Jeong, 2017), besides it has been emphasized that trust is the most important factor that result to a fruitful online travel shopping within the travel sector (Lu et al. 2016). Futhermore, hotel users frequently view online reviews and comments on Facebook and other social media platforms, which gives them more confidence and trust on a hotel and what it can offer (Akhatar et al. 2019).

In that manner, online reviews play a very significant role in broadening consumer's trust on a hotel and also authenticating consumers' primary expectations, thereby increasing the customer's intention to book a hotel room (Trong & Tran, 2020). Some recent studies have revealed that customers frequently depend on other customer reviews and comments and experiences shared on facebook with regard to their tarvel experience to support them in their purchasing decision and engage with other customers online to reduce the unceratinity and risk (Filieri, 2016; Xiang, Du, Ma & Fan, 2017).

Moreover, Kim, Kim and Park (2017) found that trust in online booking provider sites and trust in hotels increases consumer booking intention. Xiao, Wang, and Chan-Olmsted (2018) suggested that trust has a positive influence on the credibility of information found online and on social media and this could result to an optimistic brand on information credibility and could lead to a positive brand attitude by the customers. Trust has an important effect on consumer behaviour and decision-making when it comes to making a purchase intention (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000). Customer trust and brand awareness are used as one of the constructs in this research as they are linked and connected to the customer engagement and sharing of information on Facebook pages. Customers who shop online need to develop trust in the information that is shared on Facebook and as they engage with the brand and other customers some form of trust is developed which, in turn this result to purchase intention. Jung & Kim (2015) suggests that when consumers engage with brands, there is an increase in customer loyalty and creation of positive influence on brand relationship (Anderson, 2005). This will have an impact on the purchase intention and brand trust by the consumers (Jung & Kim, 2015).

The more positive feedback and reviews found on Facebook pages shared by friends and other customers will likely increase the consumer's trustworthiness in a hotel as there is low uncertainty if the comments or reviews are shared by close friends or family (Wang et al. 2014). Thus, the consumers who do online bookings or shopping rely more on the online reviews and Facebook comments to reduce the uncertainty and risk when it comes to purchase intention. The willingness of booking a hotel room is determined by the reviews or information the consumers find available on Facebook and their trust in the hotel is influenced by the feedback from friends and family (Sparks & Browning, 2011). More people make their bookings or cancel their hotel bookings based on the reviews they have seen on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and so forth (Chothave, 2020). This is due to the big influence the social media has and the trust they have on the opinions or reviews shared by friends and family. Hence the following hypothesis was suggested;

H3*: There is a positive relationship between the customer trust and consumer purchase intention.*.

2.5 Branding

A brand is the product or service of a particular supplier, which is differentiated by its name and presentation, such as Marriott or Hilton for a hotel company, (Tepeci, 1999). Brands present steadiness into businesses and companies which help protect them against any imitations by the competitors hence permit the consumers to have more confidence on the when shopping in a very difficult sphere (Aaker, 1991). Prasad and Dev (2000) have demonstrated that brands would be a quick way for hotels and hotel chains to identify and differentiate themselves in the minds of the customer. As soon as the customers have made a purchase decision on a brand and they are satisfied with the brand, they are likley to recommend friends and families to purchase the same brand they will continue purchasing the same brand creting what is referred as brand loyalty (Assael, 1991). These costumers become loyal to the brand because of the value

they get from the brand, and this result to brand loyalty. Brand knowledge, brand trust and brand equity will be discussed as the constructs to measure branding.

Jung and Kim (2015) findings suggest that if a brand and consumers maintain a deeper interaction on the brand Facebook page, the brand is likely to be favoured by consumers, because of the brand-customer relationship formed. As a result , when consumers are overlooked by the brand, it has a serious influence not only on consumer's purchase intention but also on the consumers' attitudes, negative emotions, behaviours and satisfaction (Mattila et al. 2013). Furthermore, a study by Jung and Kim (2015) reflects on the findings of the research done by Anderson (2005) which suggest that there is an increase in the customer loyalty , when consumers and brands engage and interact with one another, hence positive influence on brand relationship is created.

2.5.1 Sub Problem 2: Relationship between brand awareness and pucharse intention

2.5.1.1 Kelly's Brand Equity Model

This model proposed by Kelly describes brand awareness as a pyramid, commencing with brand identity (answering the question "Who are you?") and culminating in "resonance", the phase at which customers have a positive brand experience and strong emotional connections, leading them to advocate for it (Keller, 1997) . The model's main focus is on the emotional response created by customers. In other words the brand value cannot exist without the perception of customers. Keller (2001) presents the model of customer-based brand equity, which guides customers from brand identity to brand relationship.

Creating brand saliency in the consumer's mind is the initial step in developing brand equity. Brand salience, or brand awareness, pertains to recognizing a brand, including being top-of-mind aware of brand, how easily a brand can be recalled, and the general level of awareness of a brand (Keller, 2001). Furthermore, Keller(2001) explains that brand awarenes serves as the initial step in developing cognitive connections and significance of brand to the consumers.

The next stage in developing brand value involves creating a product that satisfies or exceeds customer expectations goes beyond the consumer's functional, psychological, or social requirements (Keller et al.2011). The next phase of establishing brand equity involves evoking consumer reactions to a brand through brand assessments and brand emotions. Brand judgments are the cognitive assessment of a brand's superiority, quality, credibility, and consideration (Keller, 2001). The last stage in the consumer-centric brand equity model pertains to the attributes of the bond between the customer and the band (Keller, 2001).

Brand Equity has been defined by Aaker(1996), as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand – its name and symbol – that adds to or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm or to the firm's customers. Kelly (1993) further state that when consumer respond more or less favourably towards the marketing mix (product, price, promotion and distribution) of the brand than they do to the similar marketing mix when it is ascribed to a unidentified version of the product or service, that brand is referred to have a positive or negative customer based brand equity. Thus, products that are associated with a famous or common brand name will have impact of consumers viewing the brand as a high quality brand thereby connecting value which could influnece the purchase intentions (Chi, Ye & Tsai, 2009).

Brand awareness is a crucial element in consumer recognition, and it can be influenced by different communication strategies employed by companies. The more exposure consumers have to specific brands, the more likely they are to form associations in their memory, ultimately enhancing the brand image (Villarejo-Ramos et al. 2000). Therefore, it can be inferred that brand awareness has an impact on brand image. Based on the theoretical foundation of brand awareness, brand image, and brand trust, we can construct the conceptual framework as outlined below;

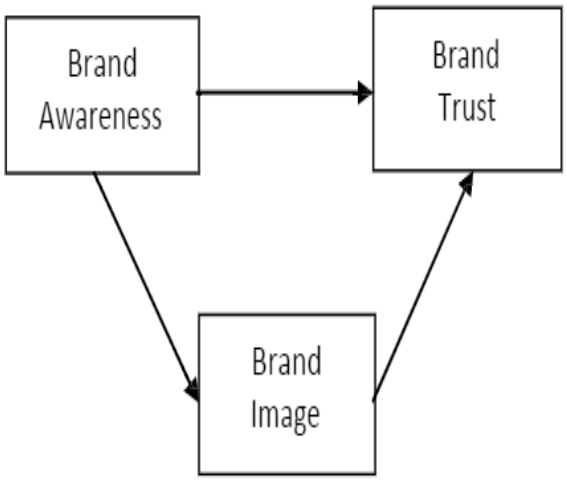


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework (Source: Nurdiana & Nurfarida, 2014)

2.5.1.2 Brand Knowledge

Brand knowledge can be interpreted in two components namely brand awareness and brand image (Keller,1993). Firstly, the brand awareness can be described as the ability of a brand to appear in the minds of consumers when they need a particular product that echoes consumer preferences , making it easier for consumers to remember or recall the product when they need to make a purchase decision (Shimp & Andrews, 2013; Kotler & Keller, 2008). It is very important to understand the content and structure of the brand knowledge as they influence what comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a brand for example in response to marketing activity for that brand (Keller, 1993).

2.5.1.3 Brand image

Brand image is defined as a perception about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory (Keller, 1993). Brand image is a guarantee of a brand, and is also the impression that consumers have on certain products (Kottler & Armstrong, 2014). Brand personality attributes may also reflect emotions or feelings evoked by the brand. According to a study by Sharifi (2004) brand image plays an intermediary role in the relationship between brand awareness and the customer's purchase intention. In a research by Chiang and

Jang (2007) it was found that brand image has a strong impact on consumer purchase intention through brand awareness and therefore it positively affects the perceived quality considerably affecting the purchase intention.

A recent report from TripAdvisor (2008) indicates that approximately 40% of travellers make use of the information fopund on the official hotel website and their rating scores as the only key source of informtaion regarding brand when looking for an accomodation to book, and similar percentage of travellers will book and stay in a hotle with a brand that is familiar to them, trusted and well known (Boonsiritomachai & Sud-On, 2020).

In social media, consumers have the flexibility to create their own brand stories and post them in various formats which can be either positive or negative, leads to favouring or damaging a brand's image (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013). According to a research study by Hutter et al. (2013) on social media, the engagement with branded Facebook fan pages has a positive effect on the consumer's brand awareness, and it could result to WOM activities and purchase decisions of a product or service.

2.5.1.4 Brand Awareness

Hutter and Hautz et al. (2013) state that brand awareness encompasses every factor that enables an individual to perceivea brand. The first dimension that is used to distinguish brand knowledge is brand awareness, this associates to the probability that a brand name will be remembered by a consumer will come to mind and the simplicity with which it ensures this (Keller, 1993). The brand awareness involves two concepts namely brand recall performance and brand recognition. Keller (1993) also found that brand recognition relates to consumer's ability to confirm earlier exposure to the brand when given the brand as a sign. Nonetheless, the brand recall is associated to consumers' capability to regain the brand when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category or some other type of probe as cue (Keller, 1993).

Brand awareness plays an important role in the consumer decision making by (i) increasing the likelihood that the brand will be a member of the consideration set

(Baker, William, Hutchinson, Moore & Nedungadi, 1986; Nedungadi 1990), the handful of brands that receive serious consideration for purchase. (ii) Brand awareness can also influence choices about brands in deliberation set though there are no any other brand associations. Thirdly, the brand awareness influence consumer decision making throug affecting the creation and the power of brand association in the brand image (Keller, 1993). Brand awareness could be seen as way to as a way to permit potential customers to be well informed and familiar with a brand name so as to easily recognise and remember the brand in future (Gursoy, Chen & Chi, 2014).

In addition brand awareness is developed by whatsoever that leads the consumer to have knowledge and cpability of the brand, for example advertising, promotion, publicity, public relations and so forth (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt & Fuller, 2013). In addition, Hutter and Hautz et al. (2013) state that brand awareness is anything that can bring a person to grow a sense of a brand. Social media is one source that is used by companies to expose their brands to consumers, and they can engage or interact online among each other. It follows that the more actively consumers engage with the social media activities of a brand, i.e. the higher the brand page commitment is, the higher the awareness of the brand is the higher the awareness of the brand is (Hutter et al. 2013). If the hotel gains solid brand awareness, it can improve the market share of the brand hence improve the brand features of other brands like brand image, brand equity and brand loyalty (Bilgihan, Peng & Kandampully, 2014). Through using Facebook as a social media site to project, increase post and running different social network sites to engage customers thereby resulting to high awareness , product attention and possibly purchase intention influence (Batra & Keller, 2016).

Furthermore, brand awareness and consumer familiarity with the brand will also directly affect consumer's purchase intention (Tariq, Abbas, Abrar & Iqbal, 2017). It also helps to create brand's cognitive thinking and indirectly affects the customer purchase's purchase intention in front of the brand image. Thus strong brand awareness will form good brand image so that it will foster the need to buy (Brabo et al. 2021). The following hypothesis is then formed based on the above;

H4*. Brand awareness will positively influence purchase intention .*

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is a road map for this study and outlines the key study variables and illustrates potential relationships among them. It consists of both independent variables which is Facebook reviews, customer engagement, customer trust and how they influence the dependant variables such as brand loyalty and purchase intention. This framework will provide the visual presentation of these theoretical constructs and their relationship between different constructs as described in the hypotheses.

Independent Variables (IV)

Independent variables are the variable manipulated by the researcher, thereby causing an influence or change on the dependent variable (Cooper & Schindler, 2017). In this research study the independent variables to be measured are are Facebook customer reviews, customer trust and brand awareness. Both these variables are causing an effect or change on the below dependant variable (purchase intention).

Dependant Variables (DV)

A dependent variable refers to a variable that is impacted or influenced by another variable. Gravetter and Wallnau (2013) argues that some researchers detect dependent variables to decide the impact of their involvement. This is a variable that is expected to be manipulated by the independent variables. For example, consumer purchase intention is a dependant variable that is being manipulated by Facebook reviews, brand awareness and customer trust variables mentioned above.

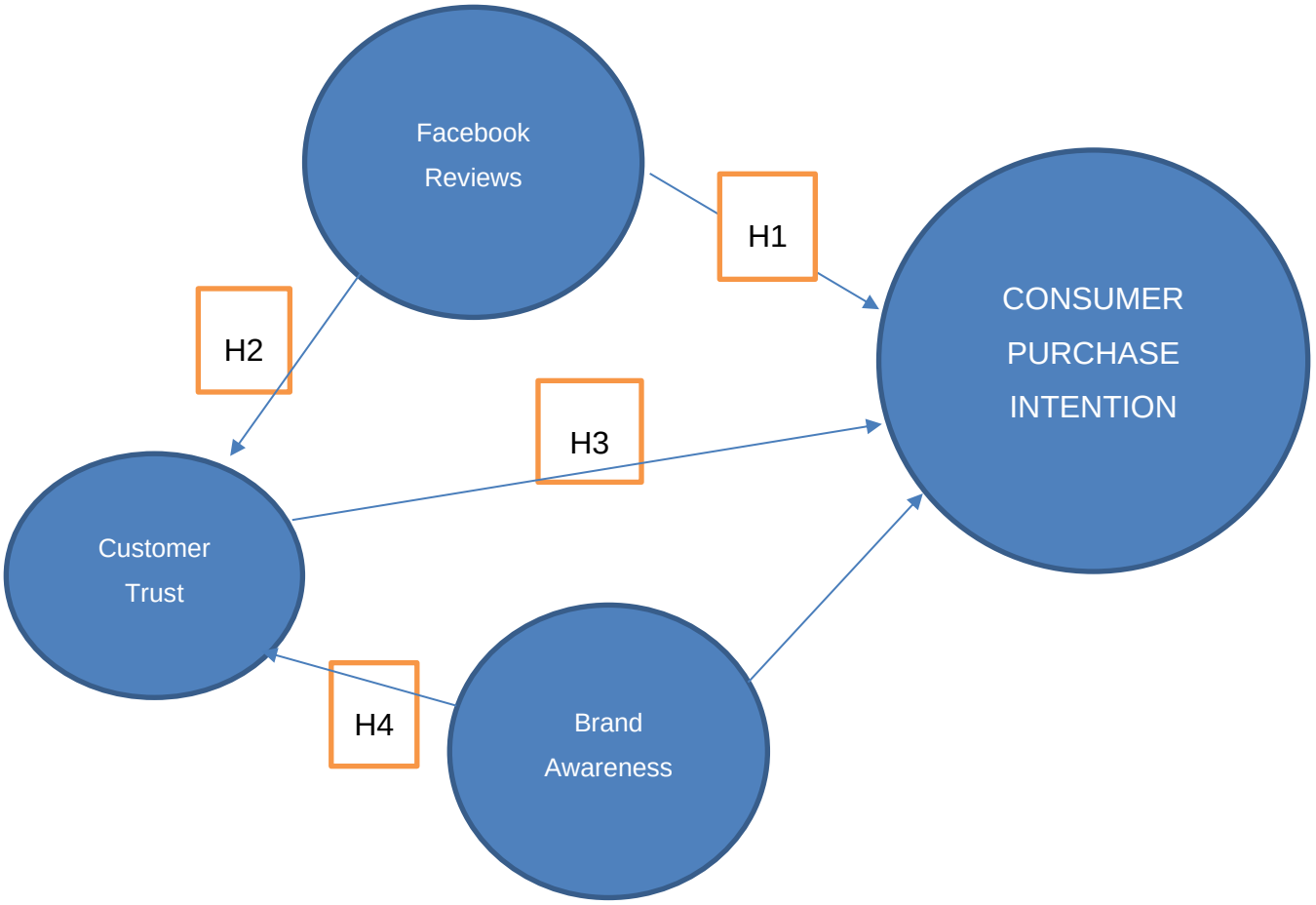


Figure 5: Conceptual Model

Research Hypotheses Development;

Based on the above literature, the below hypotheses are posed to test the model;

H₀: There is no relationship between the Facebook reviews, and consumer purchase intention.

H₁: The comments and reviews found on Facebook influences hotel purchase intentions.

H_0: There is no relationship between customer trust and the hotel in relation to the reviews and comments posted on Facebook by other customers.

H_2: The comments and reviews found on Facebook pages influence the customer trust in a hotel.

H_0: There is no correlation between customer trust and intention to purchase a hotel room.

H_3: There is a positive relationship between the customer trust and consumer purchase intention.

H_0: There is no relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention.

***H_4*:** Brand awareness will positively influence purchase intention

Table1*: Hypotheses Table Summary*

Research Question	**Hypotheses**	**Main Source**
RQ1. Does Facebook reviews and comments on a post about a hotel brand increases the intention to book a hotel?	**H1**.The comments and reviews found on Facebook influences hotel purchase intentions.	Hue et al. (2022) Richard & Guppy (2014). Alnsour (2018)
RQ2. Does customer trust have a positive effect on purchase intentions in relation to the reviews posted/shared on Facebook?	**H2.** The comments and reviews found on Facebook pages influence the customer trust in a hotel.	Kunja, Kumar & Rao (2022) Ladhari & Michaudi (2015).
RQ3. Is there any direct relationship between the customer trust and	**H3**.There is positive relationship between customer trust and	Nikbin et al. (2018)

consumer's intention to purchase a hotel room.?	consumer purchase intention.	Pop, Saplacan, Dabija, & Al, (2021). Loureiro & Gonzalez (2008); Lien et al. (2015); Matzler et al. (2006).
RQ4. What impact does the brand awareness have on the intention to make a purchase ?	**H4**.Brand awareness will positively influence purchase intention.	Duffett (2020) and Hutter and Hautz et al. (2013); Aberdeen et. al. (2016)

2.6 Conclusion of Literature Review

The above literature offers several insights on the customer reviews and comments online and on social media platforms such as Facebook and how influential there are on the customer journey and purchase decision in the toursim and hosptitality. The literature highlighted the importance of Facebook reviews and the role they play in the hotel industry, leading to a purchase intention decision. The study also explained the views of the previous studies and research on the trust factor, its importance and how it infleunce customers to book a hotel room. The study further discusses the effects of brand awarenes and its relationship with purchase intention of a hotel room. The chapter ended with hypothesis development linking it to the literature talking about the objectives of the study.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.5 Introduction

This chapter discussed the resarch methodology in detail, highilghting the research design adopted in the study and discuss the population of the study and the sampling methods adopted by the resecaher. The chapter further discusses the research instrument that was used to collect data and procedure followed for data collection as well as the interpretation and anaylsis methods. It ends the section with deliberating on the research validity and reliability tests.

3.6 Research methodology /paradigm

The research was conducted using the quantitative research methodology. Quantitative research is defined by deductive methodologies that seek to refute or support established theories (Leavy, 2017). Hence, a “quantitative research method deals with quantifying as well as analysis variables in order to get results” (Apuke, 2017). Leavy (2017) confirms that this type of research involves calculating variables and testing the correlation between some variables so as to expose patterns, correlations, or any causal relationships found. On the other hand, Fraser Health Authority (2011) p 6, see this type of research as “research based on traditional scientific research which generates numerical data and usually seeks to establish causal relationships (or association) between two or more variables, using statistical methods to test the strength and significance of the relationships” (Zulu, 2020) .

The method of quantitative approach that was used in this study was correlational research type. This approach uses a structured data collection and analysis process of numerical or and categorical data (Gall et al. 2016). Researchers use this study so as to investigate the correlation among the constructs without manipulating them (Limberg, Gnilka & Broda, 2020). In this study the researcher intended to find out the relationship between Facebook reviews, customer trust on a brand, brand awareness with consumer purchase intention.

3.7 Research Design

The research design is a blueprint of the activities to be taken by the researcher in order to answer the research questions identified in the study. Kumar (2011) defined resarch design as the way the researcher convey their judgements in relation to research design, identified respondents, gathering information, understanding and conveying the research results. The type of research design adopted in this study was a cross -sectional exploratory study which allowed the researcher to analyze variables in their sample of subjects. This type of survey contained self administered survey questionnaire. This type of study also allowed the researcher to investigate the research questions that have not been previously been studied in detailed (George, 2021). The research design is the greatest popular research design, which includes learning a particular occurrence at an exact time and giving the researcher opportunity to make recommendations about the population of interest (Creswell, 2014).

In addition Leavy (2017) explains that surveys are typically used for ascertaining individuals' attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or their reporting of their experiences and/or behaviours. This showed that this survey type was appropriate for this study as the researcher was trying to explain the relationship among different variables, such as Facebook, customer reviews, customer trust, brand awareness, purchase intention and so forth.

The study aimed on getting the opinions and experience of the hotel users through the customer journey and access to the information shared in Facebook about a hotel.

Advantages of Survey Research design

- One of the benefits of this study was that it provided access to more people from different areas and locations through social media.
- The resarcher also benefited from this method as the distribution of the survey was very easy.
- Another advantage for adopting this research method is that it offerred an instrument through which the researcher managed to have access to

people from different background and who had more common interests in relation to the problem statemnet (Wright, 2015).

- The method also offered the convenience of having automated data collection, this lessened the time and effort spent by the researcher in the data collection (Wright, 2015). The researcher managed to reach wider population in collecting data for the study.

Disadvantages of the Surveys

The online surveys offered many benefits to the researcher over other research design methods but it also had its disadvantages that the researchers took into consideration.

- While there was some ambiguity over the validity of the data and sampling errors (Wright, 2016), the study, however, reduced this challenge by using verified email addresses especially for the students who were completing surveys. The survey was sent through University processes that they use to communicate with all their students.
- Another challenge was for the email list problems, for example individuals who could use more than one email address and make more than one response which makes the random sampling online a challenge method in many circumstances (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003; Couper, 2000). This challenge was reduced by getting using verified email addresses for only the registered students at the University. Another solution which the researcher used was to keep track of the response rate and also created a link that doesn't allow the participants to use the same link again to complete the survey to avoid multi responses.

3.8 Population and Sample

3.8.1 Population

Population is the total collection of elements about which we wish to make some inferences (Cooper & Schindler, 2017). According to Burns and Groove (1997), the target population comprisesof all respondents who fulfill the specified criteria.

Therefore, the targeted population for the study comprised of registered students drawn from a public univeristy in Gauteng province.. The sample of the respondents was drawn from the target population of around 2500 - 3000 students at the University and the working professionals across different industries through social media platforms.

3.8.2 Sample and Sampling methods

The research sample for the study was a large sample which consisted of all students between the age of 18 and 50 years who had stayed in a hotel or booked a hotel in the last 2 years period of (2021 to 2023). The sample size of the respondents was aimed at between 200 - 300 responses from the entire target population. Collectively with statistical probability sampling for choosing participants, the findings of the survey and conclusions are survey findings and conclusions are projected to big and different populations (Cooper & Schindler, 2017).This sampling method was adopted so that it helps in reducing the sampling bias, as it leads to high quality of findings. The sampling method is also simple and straight forward as it does not involve complicated process compared to the other sampling methods which helps the researcher in creating accurate samples of their population.

The basic idea of sampling is that by choosing some of the elements in a population, we may draw assumptions about the entire population (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). The researcher used the non - probability sampling method for this study. Non-probability sampling consists of various sampling methods that assist researchers in choosing units from a population they wish to study. This type of sampling is frequently utilized by researchers due to the simpler, faster, and more cost-effective procedures for selecting units to be included in a sample, in contrast to probability sampling. This type of sampling is useful in a study where the goal is to determine the existence of a problem or issue quickly and affordably (Cooper & Schindler, 2017), thus the main aim of this current study.

This sampling method was suitable for this study as it offered the opportunity of generalising the findings to the population of interest and it was necessary for the explanatory and casual studies.. The researcher adopted the snowballing

sampling method as it seemed to be appropriate for this study due the target population that was not easily reachable/hidden (Delice, 2010). With this sampling method the researcher had to contact those individuals identified as the target population and ask them if they know anyone within their circles who meet the criteria of the target population and asked them to also complete the survey. By so doing the sample grew like a snowball rolling down a hill.

The survey was conducted through online and was circulated to the currently enrolled students at a public university in Gauteng province and also distributed to working professionals, co-workers,and family members.. The survey was shared through emails and also on social media platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, LinkedIn and Twitter.

3.9 The research instrument

The data collection method adopted in this current study was a questionnaire. Questionnaires are also referred as survey instrument. Abawi (2017) describe a questionnaire as a research instrument involving a sequence of questions and other prompts for the purpose of collecting information from respondents. These questionnaires were completed by the participants online, through Qualitrics. These were self-administered questionnaires and gave the participant enough time to complete them at their own suitable time. The survey took an average of between 10 to 15 minutes to be completed and it was distributed over a period of 3 months.

The questionnaires were designed to pre-test the research hypothesis addressed earlier in the proposal and there were based on those hypothesis and variables being tested. The questions were designed using previous similar studies and linking them with the current variables being tested. The questions in a questionnaire were addressing the hypothesis dealing with hotel customers or travellers and their purchase intention. The constructs that were measured include the brand recall and brand recognition, credibility of the reviews, quality and quantity of the Facebook reviews. In addition, customers also base their brand trust on company reputation, the value the product or service brings and the repeat purchase (customer loyalty).

The nature of the questions that were used are the closed ended questions or forced choice questions. The rating sclae used to measure the constructs was the Likert scale designed by Rensis Likert . This scale contains Likert statements that are straightforward and allow respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement on a scale of five or seven points, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (Sullivan & Anthony, 2013). The questions were provided to the participants with options of answers to choose from and there were on a 5 point Likert scale and rating scale. This type of questionnaire design permits the researcher to gather a span of data, offer data that are easy to count, and has high general applicability when huge samples are utilised (Vogt et al. 2014). According to Kaliannan and Adjovu (2015) expressed that the Likert scale question is the mostly used scale in the quantitative research type and the complete weighted average for each variable offer the views of the respondents in relation to that particular variable. According to Leavy (2017) rating scale provides a statement or question with response options on a continuity and inform the respondents to choose a single response. On the other hand, the Likert scale questions provide a statement with answers that specify the level of agreement and request respondents to select a single response or option (Leavy, 2017).

Section A was for the general questions about respondent demographics and also finding out if the respondents had stayed or booked a hotel and what type of star was the hotel.

Section B was for the questions related to the constructs of the study and focused on the Facebook reviews, customer trust, brand awareness and purchase intention. These questions were in a form of a 5 point Likert scale measurement ranging from “Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree”.

Advantages of Questionnaire

- The researcher can collect a extensive range of data from a bigger number of people (Leavy, 2019).
- The self-administered questionnaire gives respondents some privacy and they are likely to be honest with their answers as they feel comfortable due to the guarantee of anonymity.

3.10 Research Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study on the research instrument 2 months prior to the main study data collection. was done. A pilot study is the first step of the entire research protocol and is often a smaller-sized study assisting in planning and modification of the main study (Arnold, Burns et al. 2009). Pilot studies are important as they help in uncovering research design errors and also offer an early signal about the results quality which are most likely to be acquired (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The pilot study was conducted also to ensure the validity of all the variables (Hu & Zhu, 2022). Furthermore, the researcher conducted pre-testing of the instrument of the study through a pilot study in order to sort out any ongoing matters in the survey and also to test for validity and reliability of the scale (Karanges et al. 2014).

A pilot study was carried out on 25 University students who were sampled and completed the survey online. The feedback that was received from the pilot survey was that the survey was easy to complete and very short. There are some few questions which were confusing and needed to be changed slightly, which allowed some few scales to be changed or taken out from the questionnaire becacuse of very low factor loading value which were presented by the results. All the questiones that had a Cronbach's Alpha value below the minimum acceptable value of 0.7 were changed and altered in order to have a good reliability scale. Afterwards the edited questionnaire was distributed to the largest survey platform through Qualitrics. Hence the data that was collected from the pilot study was utilised to test for the validity and reliability of the scales and make any changes that were necessary.

3.11 Procedure for data collection

The primary data was collected from the population sample through using self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaires were completed as an internet or online based survey. These questionnaires were emailed as a survey link to the population sample in this case which were the University students and also the other survey link was sent through social media platforms such as Facebook

and LinkedIn to the working individuals and professionals. The participants were given a specific deadline to complete this survey and to avoid double or multiple responses the participants were only given one access to complete the survey using the same email address and the link did not allow same participant to double complete it.

The questions were structured based on different research hypothesis being tested. The self-administered survey questionnaires allowed the researcher to include respondents coming from different locations that were currently enrolled at Wits University and the other ones were shared to other professionals through LinkedIn and Facebook. This assisted the researcher with broad information as it covered experience from a variety of hotels from different provinces. The questionnaire was emailed to the population sample (student) from the University and the other questionnaire were shared through social media. A respondent audit was created by the researcher in order to keep track of respondents and minimise a risk of many responses (more than one) from one individual respondent (Ruel, Wagner & Gillespie, 2016). The reminder emails were sent to the participants on a weekly basis to remind them to still complete the survey.

3.12 Data analysis and interpretation

In quantitative research, the analysis process result to a statistical supplying of the data normally illustrated in a set of tables or charts along with a discussion (Leavy, 2017). The quantitative data collected from the survey was analysed, edited and interpreted to determine the findings of the study. The descriptive statistics were reported by the researcher after preparing the data, this was to determine the research hypothesis (Wiese, 2013). Creswell (2014) stresses that in survey research, it is vital for the researcher to report and account on those who did not complete and also members who completed the survey, prior to moving into analysing the statitical data. The researcher did go through this process before analysing the data from the participants.

Different sets of analytical software can be used to assist in analysing the quantitative data collected. The software that was utilised by the researcher in this study is SPSS statistics software. Quantitative data analysis with the

application of statistical software consists of different stages, that include preparing and checking of data; selecting most appropriate tables and diagrams; selecting the most appropriate statistics to describe the data; and selecting the most appropriate statistics to examine relationships and trend in the data collected (Robson, 2011).

Descriptive analysis was used to describe what the data looks like, and this could be in the form descriptive statistics such as range, minimum and maximum and frequency. The type of the test method used was guided by the distribution of the data, then the researcher decided if the data falls under normal distribution or non-normal distribution. The results of the data collected and analysed was presented in the form of graphs, tables, charts and other non –textual elements. According to Cooper and Schindler (2017), the content analysis is described as a research method for the objective, methodical, and quantitative characterization of the evident content of communication.

3.13 Limitations of the study

The limitations for the study in relation to the sampling analysis methods and methodology was time and financial resources;

- Time for completing the study and collecting the data was limited due to the deadline for the submission.
- The findings of the study did not represent all respondents from other geographical areas as the data was collected from majority Wits University students which has campus in Johannesburg.
- Another limitation of the study was that though the population of the study included the working class professionals, some data was also collected from group of students that don’t make use of hotel services more often. Future research should be done on specific hotels and also targeting the tourists.

3.14 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the level to which a measure precisely signifies what it is supposed to. It begins with understanding of what is to be measured and ensuring that the measurement is correct and accurate (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). In order to test the validity and reliability of the survey, a pilot study was conducted whereby a questionnaire survey was sent to a small scale population sample of between 20 – 30 people. According to Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) the aim of a pilot study is for pretesting the research instrument to be used in collecting data, this is in order to get respected isnights prior to conducting full study. Validity in quantitative study is used to express the variety to which a concept is exactly measured or (Heale & Twycross, 2015). In quantitative research validity is the extent to which any measuring instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Thatcher, 2010). This validity was divided into 2 essential parts which is internal and external validity.

3.14.1 Internal Validity

Internal validity indicates if the results of the study are genuine because of the way the reseracher choose the groups, and how the data were recorded or analysed (Willis, 2007). Leavy (2017) state that internal validity focuses on issues that infleunce the internal relations among independent and dependent variables that support different explanations for variations in predicted variable (Adler & Clark, 2011). In overcoming these threats on internal validity the researcher had to pre-tests and post-tests the variables so that it does not influence the results. Factor analysis was adopted in this current study as a way of assessing the validity of the study. This method was used in order to identify the hidden variables. This type of validity was assessed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and factor loadings which helps in determining the importance and contribution of each variable to a factor.

3.14.2 External validity

External validity shows whether the results given by the study are transferable to other groups of interest (Last, 2011). External validity refers to the degree to which the analysis results can be generalised to other contexts such as population and situations (Hair et al. 2019). For instance if the research subjects have extremely unique features, you can't generalize to other settings or groups (Leavy, 2017).

The two different types of validity that were adopted in this study as a validity test are namely convergent validity and discriminant validity, which are the most commonly recognised form of validity.

3.14.3 Reliability

Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson (2010) described reliability as an assessment of the extent of consistency between multiple measurements of a variable. Reliability is associated with measure of consistency (Heale & Twycross, 2015) and it differs from validity as it focuses on "how it is measured". In quantitative research, reliability refers to consistency, stability and repeatability of results, that is, the result of a researcher is considered reliable if consistent results have been obtained in identical situations but different circumstances (Twycross & Shield, 2004). The data is reflected to be reliableif it can be utilised by diverse researchers unders steady conditions with constant and non-fluctuating outcomes (Heale & Twycross, 2015). For example, by using the questionnaire as an instrument, in this scenario the instrument don't hold any measurement faults , and hence the outcomes or findings are trusted and dependable. (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The current study measured and tested the reliability using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), for the consistency of scales and results stability over time.

3.10.3.1.Cronbach's alpha

According to Hair et al.(2019) Cronbach's alpha is the measure of reliability with a scores that ranges from 0 to 1, through the values at 0.6 to 0.70 which are

considered as the lower limit of acceptability. The score of 0.70 indicates a benchmark score and the scale will be deemed unreliable (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). For this study the Cronbach's alpha value showed an average score of 0.8 which indicates that the reliability score was very good since all the values were greater than 0.7 benchmark.

3.10.3.2.Composite Reliability (CR)

Composite reliability (CR) is s a measure of internal consistency in scale items, much like Cronbach's alpha (Netemeyer et al. 2003). The composite reliability does not assume equally weighted indicator loadings (Hair et al. 2019). A composite reliability index value should be above 0.60 for an exploratory research and a score of 0.7 but not more than 0.95 is considered as good reliability of the construct (Hair et al. 2019). This measure is discussed in detailed in chapter 4 of the data analysis.

3.15 Respondents Demographic profile

The demographics of the population that the data will be collected from, include all students currently enrolled at a public university in Gauteng province and working professionals who are above 18 years old. These respondents should be social media users, with an active Facebook account and must have booked a hotel or stayed in hotel in the last 2 years.

3.16 Conclusion

In summary this chapter described the research methodology adopted for the study. The research design was discussed and explained in detail, followed by the researcher explaining the data collection procedures and the techniques adopted for analysing the gathered data.

4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.5 Introduction

This chapter display the findings from the procedure and processes of the previous chapter about data collection of the study. The survey questionnaire was dispersed through different social media platforms and through University email address database to all the participants. The results of the survey were collected from Qualitrics, which is the tool that was used to conduct and distribute survey. The data was collected, cleaned and analysed through the 3 statistical tools namely; SSPS 28 software, AMOS 28 and Excel.

Several statistical validity tests and analysis are then conducted such as reliability test and validity tests using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for construct validity and discriminant validity for multi collinearity treatment, composite reliability, and average variance extracted, testing the fit for the hypothesized CFA model and the revised model (Mustafa, Idris, Abdullah, & Suradi, 2011). This chapter dealt with presenting the analysis of data that was collected in the previous chapter, that is the presentation of the demographic profiles of respondent, and then presentation of the results of the social media users who had purchased hotel accommodation services. After this section the researcher goes on to present the analysis of the reliability and validity measurement of the instrument used in the study and concluded with the summary of the chapter.

4.6 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are the easiest to undertake and interpret and they are a useful way to summarise data and provide a description of the sample.

Argyrous (2011) explain descriptive statistics as study that make use of graphs, tables, and numbers to categorize, analyse and presenting of data. Displaying data is useful for uncovering patterns within the data and for effectively presenting the results of a project (Nick, 2007). This study adopted the descriptive statistics to define some characteristics and make use of them as a supporting instrument

for the analysis (Pallant, 2013). Descriptive statistics are utilised in a research to reflect the to show a recap regarding a sample and measures that have been accomplished (Bryman & Bell, 2011). For this current study the researcher made use of this type of statistics to explain about the features of the population and the respondents demographic profile. This is discussed below;

4.7 Demographic profile of respondents

This section about demographic profile discusses the gender, age, occupation status, and the province in which the respondent stayed at or booked the hotel accommodation. Collecting and understanding the demographics of the respondents was very important as this information will show who pay travel a lot and pay more attention in purchase decision making process when booking accommodation. The dataset had a total of 200 respondents of which some, of these respondents did not complete the survey but for the demographic questions (age, gender, occupation status and provinces) there were no drop offs, the respondent completed the questions. The next question that was asked the respondent was a qualifying question if there have recently stayed in a hotel or booked a hotel. Out of 200 respondents 87% said Yes while the remaining 9.5% said they have not recently stayed or booked a hotel. Another general questions that were asked with the demographic questions were about the star type of hotels and the hotel brands that the 87% who said “Yes” booked or stayed in.

4.7.1 Age profile

The below figure represents the age profile of the total respondents and is followed by a discussion.

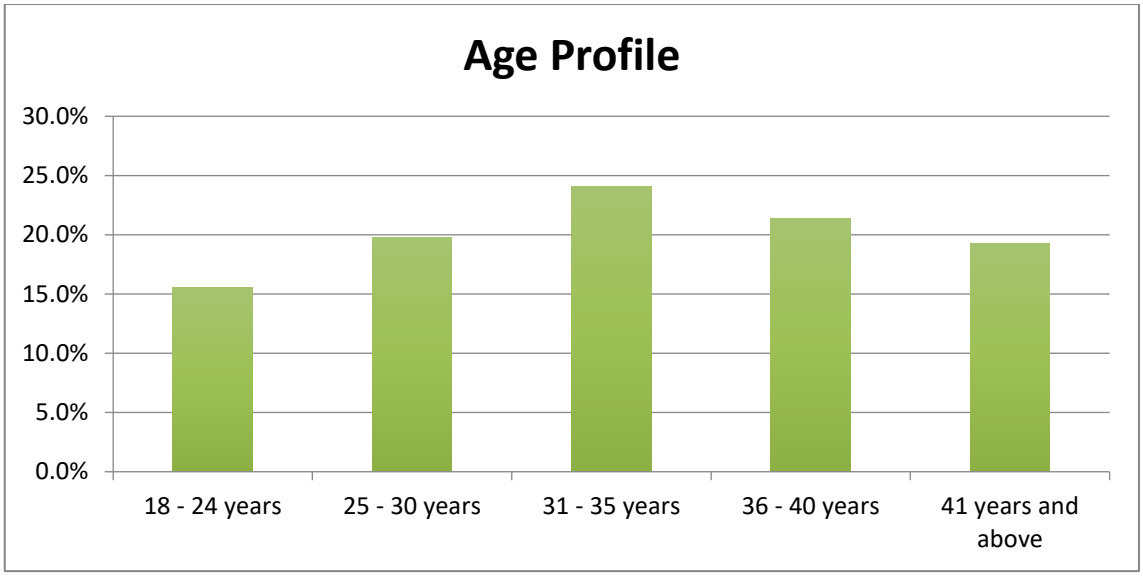


Figure 6 : Age Distribution

From the above age distribution profile the results indicate that 15.5% of the participants that completed the survey, were between the age range of 18 and 24 years. 19.8% of the respondents were in the category of 25 to 30 years age group, followed by 24.1% participants which were between the age of 31 to 35 years and were the majority of the respondents. The results also indicate that in the age group 36 to 40 years we had about 21.4% of the total respondents, lastly only 40 participants which contributed to 21.4% were in the age group of 41 and above.

4.7.2 Respondent's occupation profile

In this question the respondents were to indicate their employment status from the options provided in the answers if they are working or studying e.t.c. The results are shown in the below graph and the discussion follows after the figure.

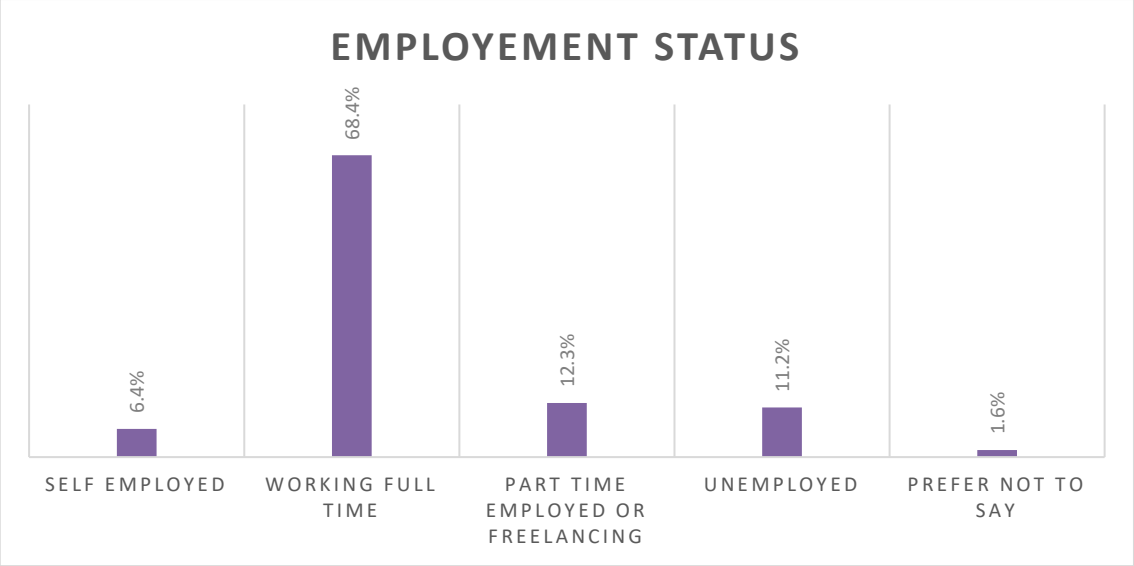


Figure 7 : Employment status

The results of the study revealed that 6.4% of the respondents are self-employed, while most of the respondents with 68.4% are currently full time employed. 12.3% of the respondents are currently part time employed or free lancing, while the 11.2% is unemployed and 1.6% preferred not to disclose their employment status. This question was important as the researcher wanted to find out where the respondents get their income and if they can afford to book a hotel or stay in a hotel. Below graph shows the cross tabulation of employment status and the age profile of the respondents.

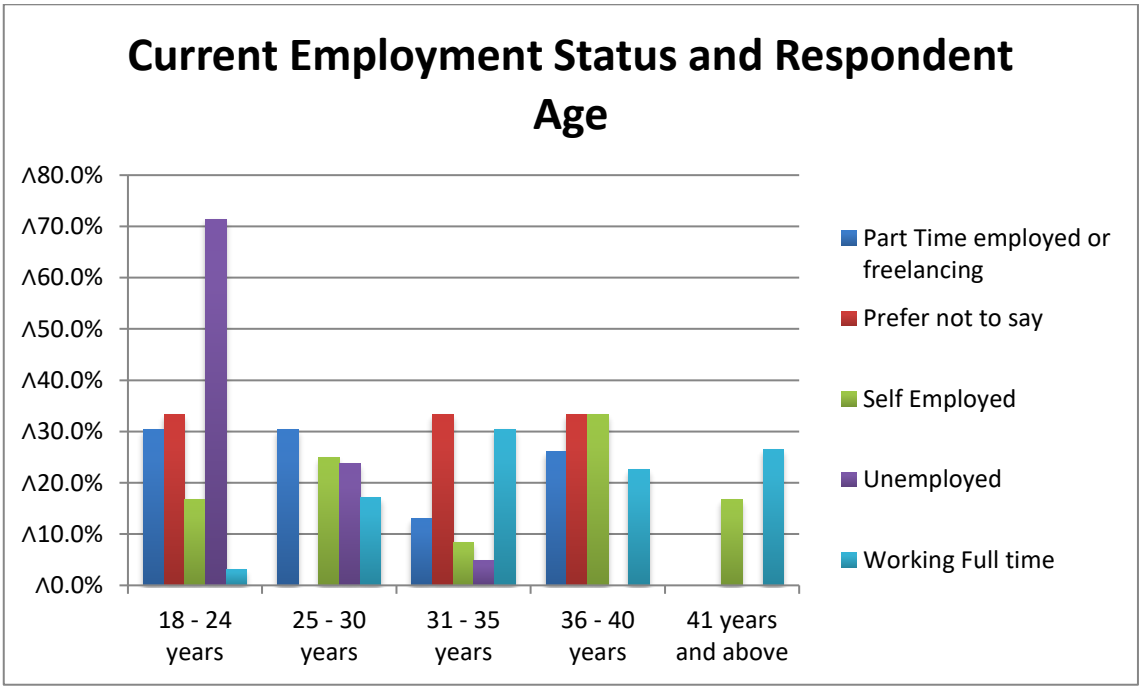


Figure 8 : Employment status and age profile

4.7.3 Social media usage and hotel purchase intention

In this section the researcher presents the findings from the descriptive statistics of the social media usage and booking of the hotel including the type of hotel star, brand and the location of the hotel that was booked. The respondents were asked these questions to find out if they have stayed in a hotel or booked a hotel and in which province was this hotel.

4.3.4.1 Hotel star level booked

The respondents were asked if they have recently booked a hotel and stayed in a hotel and the majority that respondent saying “YES” were then qualified to be the target market for the study. Further, the researcher asked the respondents indicate the level of the hotel star they stayed in. The below figure show the results and findings of the study.



Figure 9 : Hotel star level

The above figure shows that 52.6% which is the majority of the respondents that recently stayed in a hotel had booked a 4-star hotel, followed by 27.4% of the respondents that booked a 3-star hotel. 17.1% respondents stated that they had booked and stayed in a 5-star hotel and 2.3% had stayed in a 1-star hotel, while the remaining 0.6% had stayed in a 2 start hotel level.

4.3.4.2 Hotel brand selected

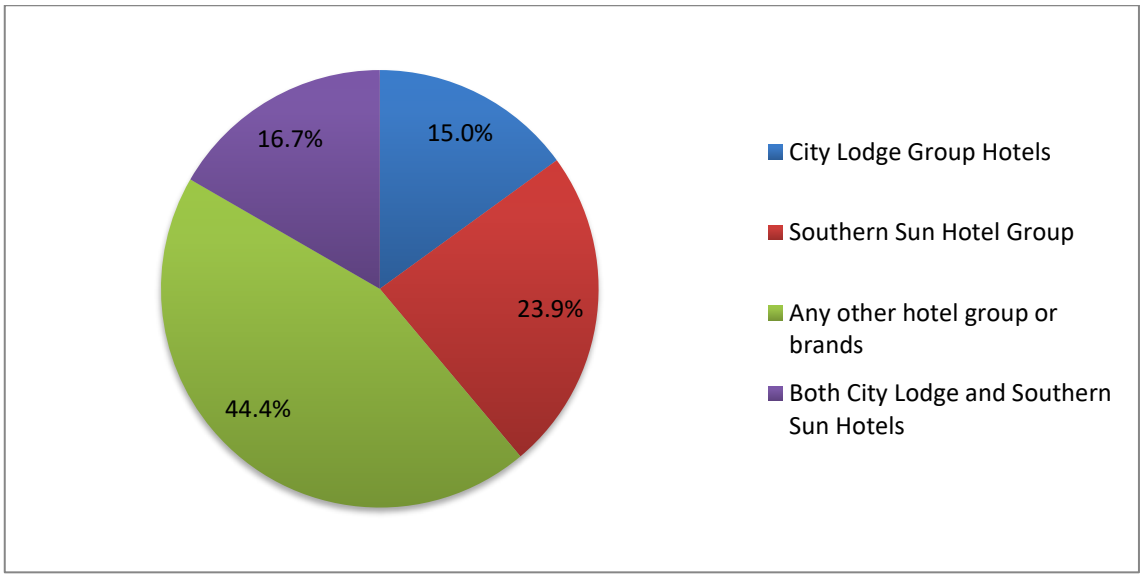


Figure 10 : Hotel brand selected

The above figure shows the results of the hotel brands that were booked by the respondents who had responded to the previous questions regarding the hotel star they booked. The respondents were given 2 hotel brands to select from which is City lodge hotels and Southern Sun hotels. The results indicate that 15% of the respondents stayed at City lodge hotels, while the 23% of the respondents stayed at Southern Sun hotels in different provinces. The majority of respondents indicated that they had stayed in other hotel brands besides City lodge and Southern Sun hotels, while the 16.7% had stayed in both City lodge and Southern Sun hotels.

4.3.4.3 Respondent's hotel preference

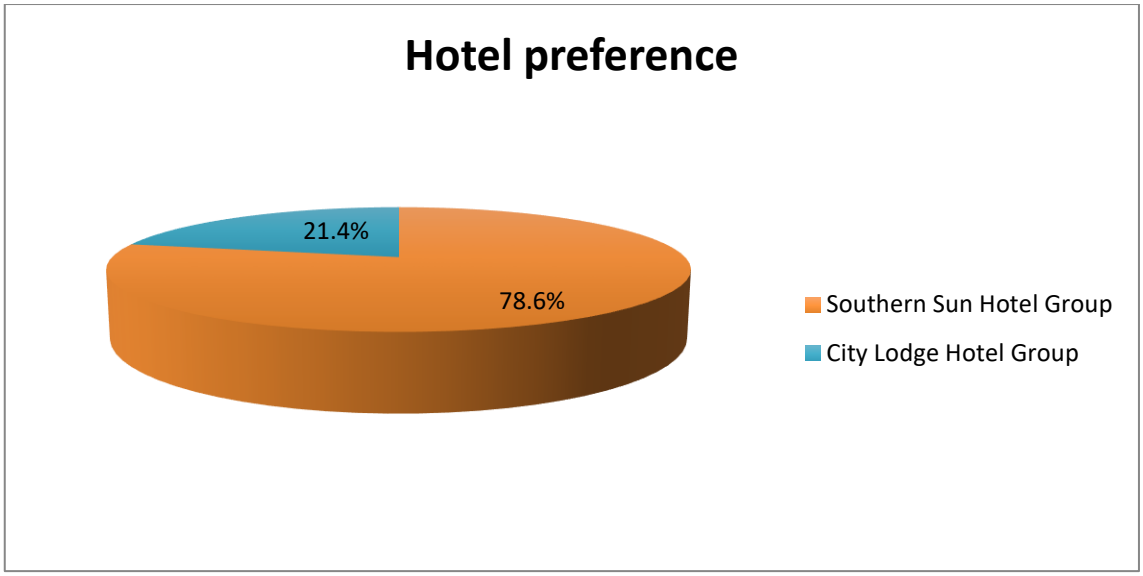


Figure 11: Respondent hotel preference

Figure 11 shows the percentage results of the respondents' hotel preference between the two provided brands, City Lodge and Southern Sun hotel group, which were the two main selected hotel brands to focus on instead of having general hotels as the main focus. 78.6% of the respondents indicated that they prefer to stay in or book Southern Sun hotels and the remaining 21.4% preferred to stay in City Lodge hotels.

4.3.4.4 Social media usage frequency

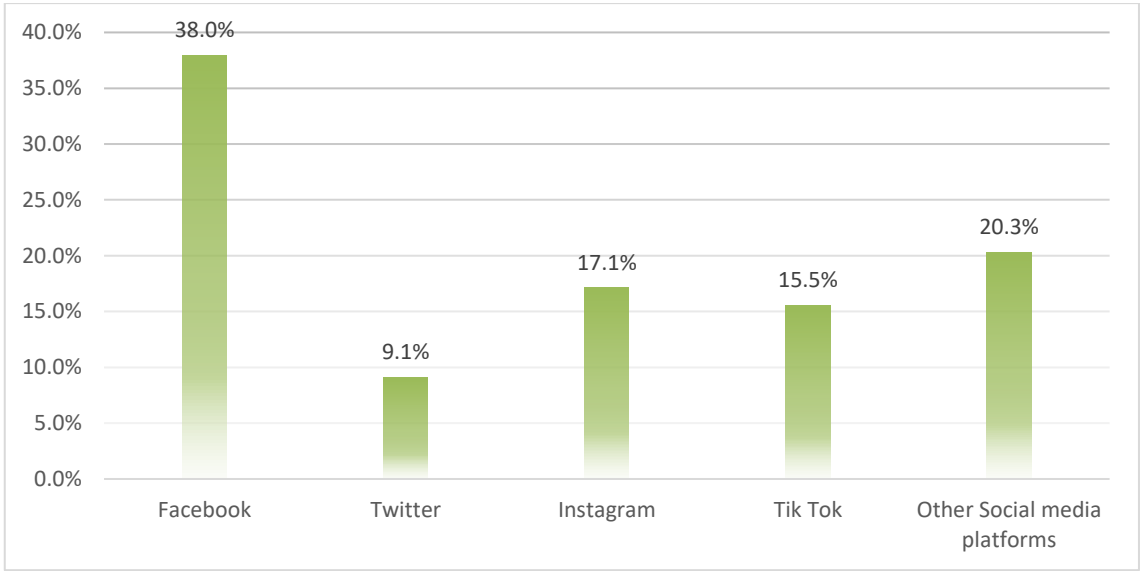


Figure 12: Social media choice

The above figure shows the findings of the most frequently used social media platforms by the respondents and also the social media apps they use to check product reviews when making a purchase decision. From the results 38% of the respondents are using Facebook more than any other social media platforms for checking product reviews. About 9.1% of the respondents indicated that they use Twitter for product reviews during purchase decision, and 17.1% respondents are using Instagram a lot to check product reviews. 15.5% respondents are using Tik Tok and the 20.3% of the respondents are using other social media platforms for product reviews besides the 4 apps mentioned here. According to Digital Datareportal (2023) on the world most used social platforms in the world, Facebook was the leading social platform with 2.9 58 billion users. In addition these results are consistent with the Meta's advertising resource data report for January 2024, which showed that Facebook had 26 million users in South Africa (DataReportal, 2024).

4.3.4.5 Respondents time spent on social media

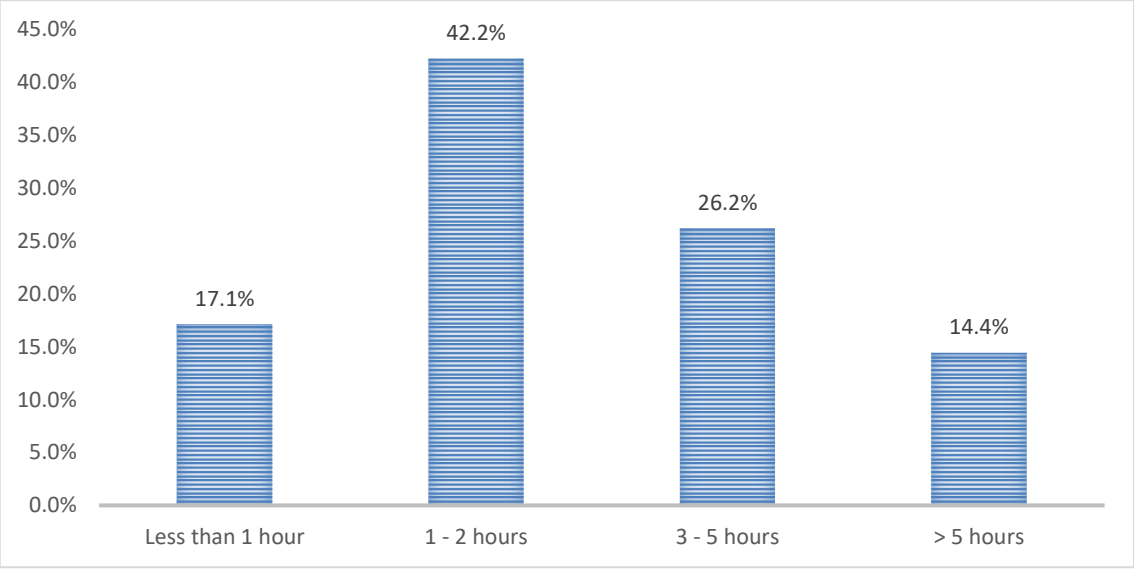


Figure 13: Respondent time spent on social media

Figure 13 shows the results of the time spent by respondents on social media platforms they selected in the previous question. 17.1% of the respondents indicated that they spend less than 1 hour on social media in a day, while 42.2% of the respondents stated that they spend between 1 to 2 hours. Another group of respondents which contributed 26.2% of the total participants indicated that

they spend about 3 to 5 hours a day on social media while the 14.4% of the respondents said they spend more than 5 hours a day on social media. The Global Digital Growth DataReportal (2023)showed that South Africa is the leading country globally in terms of amount of time spent online with a contribution of 0.9hours 38 minutes per day. Hence we have more respondents spending more hours on social media.

4.3.4.6 Customer reviews by respondents

The participants were asked if they read customer reviews posted or written by other customers on different social media platforms. From the below figure results it shows that 54.5% of the respondents indicated that they read customer reviews on social media platforms when making a purchase intention. 27.8% of the respondents stated that they probably read the customer reviews before making a purchase intention, while the 12.3% was not sure if they do read reviews or they don't read them, they were in-between. The other 2.1% and 3.2% are the respondents that probably and definitely don't read customer reviews on social media respectively.

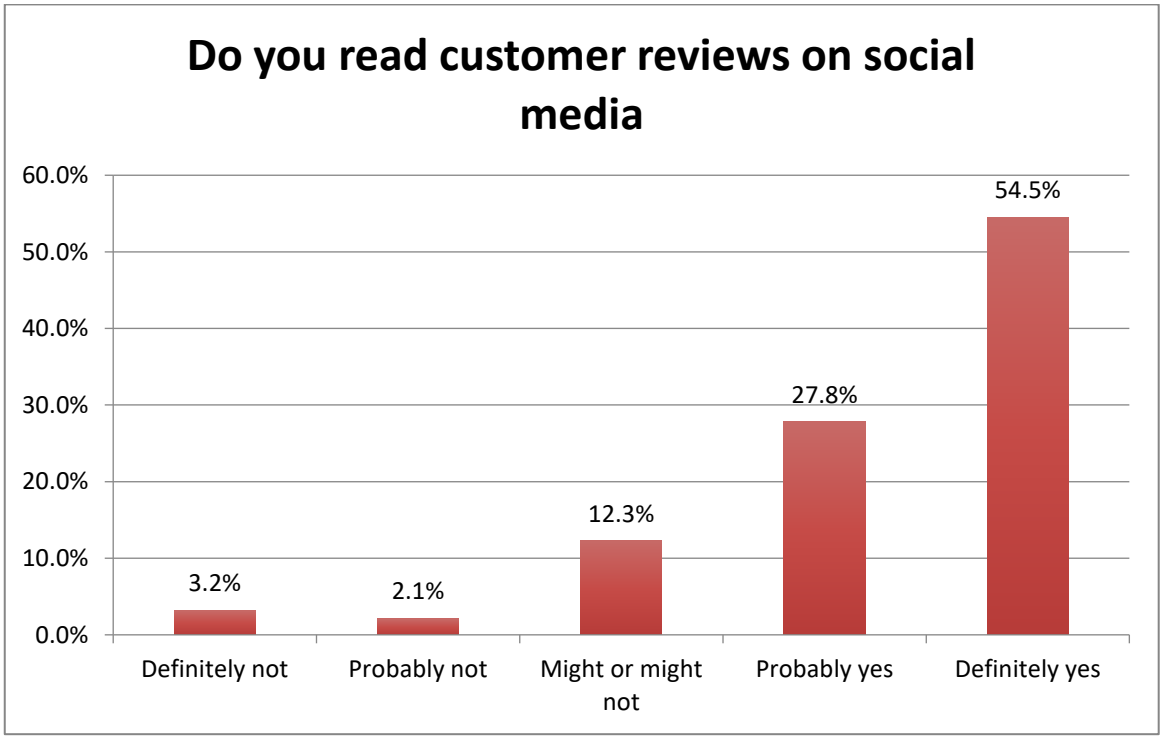


Figure 14: Do you read reviews on social media

4.8 Measures

This section focused on explaining the key variables for the study that are used for assesisng the proposed hypotheses mesaured. The study used 5 point likert scale to measure the varables such as Facebook comments and reviews, customer trust, brand awareness and consumer purchase intention.

4.8.1 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis refers to variety of statistical methods that have an intention to signify a set of variables in form of a small number of theoretical variables (Kim & Muller, 1978).

The factor analysis is founded on the essential supposition that some underlying factors, which are smaller in number than the number of experimental variables, are responsible for the covariation between the observable variables (Hanif, 2015). Factor analysis is a collection of techniques used to investigate how fundamental constructs influence the responses on a number of measured variables (DeCoster, 1998). This technique is mostly adopted or utilised for valuation of convergent and discriminant validity in multi-item measurement scales in social science research (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

This study will use the conformatory factor analysis to measure the hypotheses. Confirmatory factor analysis is a technique that is commonly used in the organisational literature. Thus, there are a form of factor analysis that represents correlation among observed indicators such as items in a scale and the latent factors which there are meant to measure (Nye, 2022). These are a subgroups of a structural equation modelling and are commonly utilised to measure the theorized factor structure of a measure. The CFA model results are presented on Figure 14 in the model fit section discussed below.

4.8.2 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

In this study the researcher used the SEM method to represent casual relationships among multiple relationships for dependant and independent

variables. This structural equation model comprised measuring of the variables of the study namely, consumer purchase intention(CPI), Facebook reviews and comments (FRC), customer trust (CT) and Brand awareness (BA).

The tool observed the structure of the strong matches stated in a sequence of equations that are similar to a sequences of multiple regression equations (Hair et.,2012). The below table present the results of the reliability and validity measures which are discussed and analysed in the following section.

Reliability and Validity Measures

Research Constructs Mean		Descriptive Statistics				Cronbach's Test		C.R. Value	AVE Value	Factor Loading
		Mean Value		Standard Deviation		Item - total	α value			
FRC	Q12a	3.958		0.821		0.680				0.738
	Q12b	3.846		0.981		0.742				0.805
	Q12c	3.965		0.907		0.662				0.724
	Q12d	3.888		1.015		0.646				0.691
	Q12e	3.671		1.131		0.734				0.815
	Q12f	3.874	3.867	0.795	0.942	0.481	0.862	0.866	0.717	0.526
CT	Q13 _1	3.881		0.736		0.639				0.697
	Q13 _2	3.895		0.802		0.684				0.767
	Q13 _3	3.713		0.793		0.706				0.786
	Q13 _4	3.741		0.748		0.782				0.838
	Q13 _5	3.902		0.744		0.583				0.641
	Q13 _6	3.469	3.767	0.785	0.768	0.396	0.846	0.855	0.699	0.463
BA	Q17 _1	3.951		0.685		0.699				0.773
	Q17 _2	3.951		0.695		0.830				0.902
	Q17 _3	3.902		0.715		0.769				0.843
	Q17 _4	3.860		0.869		0.710				0.728
	Q17 _5	3.832	3.899	0.805	0.754	0.701	0.892	0.898	0.797	0.741
CPI	Q18_1	3.748		0.892		0.856				0.877
	Q18_2	3.790		0.804		0.798				0.828
	Q18_3	3.762		0.839		0.824				0.849
	Q18_4	3.678		0.869		0.795				0.824
	Q18_5	3.811		0.822		0.813				0.847
	Q18_6	3.860		0.793		0.818				0.837
	Q18_7	3.706	3.765	0.903	0.846	0.841	0.946	0.947	0.847	0.868

FRC-Facebook Reviews &Comments; CT-Customer Trust; BA-Brand Awareness; CPI-Consumer Purchase Intention

α value – Cronbach alpha value; C.R – Composite reliability value; AVE – Average variance extracted value

Table 2: Accuracy Analysis results (*Compiled by Researcher from SPSS & Amos 28, 2024)*

The results of the factor loading score show the values that are acceptable as the majority of the values are above 0.5. Kaiser (1974) recommends that a value of 0.5 as a minimum score is barely acceptable, while the values between 0.7 to 0.8 are acceptable and the values above the 0.9 score are excellent. The above table shows only one variable with a factor loading score of 0.463 which is closer to the 0.5 score and therefore this can be barely accepted based on Kaiser and

Bartlett's test. The factor loading results show that there is stronger relationship among the variables tested. The two items with Cronbach 's alpha value which are shown with less than 0.7 is explained in the following section under Cronbach's alpha results.

4.8.3 Reliability Testing

Reliability refers to the "extent to which the measure of a construct is constant or dependable" (Bhattacherjee, 2012 p57). To put it in another way, reliability indicates consistency and replicability over time but not accuracy. In addition, reliability is seen as the degree to which a test is free from measurement errors, subsequently the more the measurement errors occur the less reliable the test (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, 2006; Moss, 1994; Neuman, 2003). The researcher used the Cronbach's Alpha(CA), the Composite reliability(CR) and Average variance extracted (AVE) to evaluate and assess the reliability of the measurement instrument. The three reliability tests tools are discussed below and the results of the study.

a) Cronbach's Alpha (CA)

The researcher used the Cronbach's Alpha to measure the internal reliability of the constructs. This reliability measure was designed in 1951 by Lee Cronbach and is calculated using the following formula;

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N-1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

Source: Lavrakas, P. (2008).

In the above formula N is the number of items in the measure,
$\bar{c}$ - is average covariance between item-pairs
$\bar{v}$ - is average variance

Based on the results shown for reliability of values on the Table 2 above, the Cronbach Alpha values are as below; Facebook review comments = 0.862,

customer trust = 0.846, brand awareness = 0.892, and customer purchase intention = 0.946. Looking at all these values all the constructs are deemed acceptable as there are above the lower limit (cut off) value of acceptability 0.70 suggested by (Hair et.,2012). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient values shows that the questionnaire was accepted and admissible. In other words, the questionnaire is reliable, showing some consistence and is free of any measurement errors, though there are two questions which had lower values below the accepted 0.70 value and these questions are; (Q12f – "Based on your visit to this hotel how satisfied were you with the overall experience of the hotel, if you made your purchase decision based on the good reviews posted on the Facebook?" and Q13.6 – "Based on my previous experience, Facebook reviews are honest and reliable"). These 2 lower values will not have major impact on the reliability of the results as the overall Cronbach value for that variable is above 0.70. According to Bonnett and Wright (2015), much smaller reliabilities can be tolerated as long as the effect size results are interpreted accordingly, especially in situations where the population standardized mean the difference will be reduced by the square-root population value of response variable (see Hedges & Olkin, 1980, p. 135).

b) Composite Reliability (CR)

Composite reliability is based on the congeneric model that does not need corresponding factor loadings across items (Cheung, Cooper-Thomas, Lau & Wang, 2023)

$$CR = \frac{(\sum \lambda_i)^2}{(\sum \lambda_i)^2 + \sum (1 - \lambda_i^2)},$$

Source: (Cheung, et al.2023)

Whereby λ_i is the completely standardized factor loading, (for which both indicators and latent constructs are standardized) of item (i). Hair et al. (2009)

stated that CR values of 0.7 or higher represent good reliability, which means that is recommended that the reliability of a construct is at least 0.70 score. Below table shows the results of the latent variables test;

Composite reliability (CR)

				Composite reliability (CR)			
					summation of error terms		CRη=(Σλyi)2/[(Σλyi)2+(Σεi)]
			Estimate	(∑λYi)²	ɛ̀i	∑ɛ̀i	CR
	<---	Q12a	0.738		0.455		
	<---	Q12b	0.805		0.352		
	<---	Q12c	0.724		0.476		
	<---	Q12d	0.691		0.523		
	<---	Q12e	0.815		0.336		
FRC	<---	Q12f	0.526	18.481	0.723	2.865	0.866
	<---	Q13 _1	0.697		0.514		
	<---	Q13 _2	0.767		0.412		
	<---	Q13 _3	0.786		0.382		
	<---	Q13 _4	0.838		0.298		
	<---	Q13 _5	0.641		0.589		
CT	<---	Q13 _6	0.463	17.573	0.786	2.981	0.855
	<---	Q17 _1	0.773		0.402		
	<---	Q17 _2	0.902		0.186		
	<---	Q17 _3	0.843		0.289		
	<---	Q17 _4	0.728		0.470		
BA	<---	Q17 _5	0.741	15.896	0.451	1.799	0.898
	<---	Q18_1	0.877		0.231		
	<---	Q18_2	0.828		0.314		
	<---	Q18_3	0.849		0.279		
	<---	Q18_4	0.824		0.321		
	<---	Q18_5	0.847		0.283		
	<---	Q18_6	0.837		0.299		
CPI	<---	Q18_7	0.868	35.165	0.247	1.974	0.947

FRC-Facebook reviews comments; CT-Customer Trust; BA-Brand Awareness; CPI-Consumer purchase intention

Table 3: Composite Reliability (CR) *(Compiled by Researcher from SPSS & Amos 28, 2024)*

From the above results the values for Composite reliability are all above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, the values are ranging from 0.855 to 0.947 for all the constructs. According to Cheung et al. (2023), the high composite reliability is very good sign that all items are constantly measure the corresponding construct. Alternatively, the overall error difference should consist of less than 30% of the variance of the unmeasured variables (Cheung et al. 2023). The

coefficients of 0.855 to 0.947 shows a satisfactory and excellent results as suggested by (George & Mallery, 2003).

4.8.4 Validity Testing

Validity is defined as the degree to which research is precise (Hair et al. 2010). It deals with the accuracy of the measurement and how honest are the research results. In this study the researcher used the following validity tests which are Convergent validity and Discriminant validity.

a) Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is stresses the internal consistency of the indicators assessing the same construct (Bagozzi, 1981). Convergent validity is referred to the items that are indicators of a specific construct should converge or share a high proportion of variance common (Hair et al. 2010). The researcher examined the convergent validity through SEM by first conducting a CFA in which all the indicators are associated to the constructs which are meant to measure and are not directly linked to constructs they are not intended to measure as recommended by Fornell & Larcker (1981); & Hair et al. (2009).

All homogenous factor loadings should be at least 0.5 to be acceptable and preferably to be at least 0.7 as suggested by Hair et al. (2009). This means that the construct clarifies at least 25% or ideally at least 49% of the difference of each measure (Cheung et al. 2023). The standard factor loadings result as shown in the Table 4 indicate above 0.5 score which is a minimum acceptable requirement. Only one item from those factor loading scores has 0.46 which is closer to 0.5 and can be accepted as suggested by Stevens (2002), who stated that the factor loading value should be greater than 0.4 for interpretation purposes (Cheung et al. 2023). This means that there is internal consistency of the indicators measuring same constructs and they converge well.

b) Discriminant Validity

Bagozzi and Phillips (1982) argued that the first situation for discriminant validity is setting up the convergent validity, which is what the researcher did in this

current study. Discriminant validity is the degree to which a measure does not discriminate from other constructs, that it is not intended to measure (Malhotra & Peterson, 2006, p.275). It is established by indicating that the indicators of one construct have a low correlation with other constructs. The researcher used the Average variance extracted (AVE) and the inter-construct correlation matrix to measure test the discriminant validity.

i) Average Value Extracted (AVE)

Hair et al. (2019) defines average value extracted as a summary measure of convergence among a set of items representing a latent construct. In other words, it represents the average amount of variance that a construct clarifies in its indicators relative to the overall variance of its indicators (Cheung et al. (2023). Here the researcher was interested in knowing how much variations on average in his items can be explained by a construct or latent variable. For construct X it is defined by the below formula;

$$AVE(X) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{p} \lambda_i^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{p} \lambda_i^2 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} Var(\varepsilon_i)} = \frac{1}{p}\left(\sum_{i=1}^{p} \lambda_i^2\right),$$

Source: (Cheung et al.2023)

Where *p* is the number of indicators of constructs X, and X is the standardized factor loading of the i^{th} indicator (both indicators and the constructs are standardized) (Cheung et al. 2023). The AVE should not be lower than 0.50 score in order to demonstrate an acceptable level of convergent validity (Cheung et al. 2023). This means that the latent constructs explains the no less than 50% of the indicator variance (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Mohan et al. (2013) and Floyd & Widaman (1995) suggested that the average value extracted score of 0.4 is also accepted even though it is less than 0.5 threshold.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Average Variance Extraxted								
			Estimate	**λyi²**	**∑λyi²**	**ε̇i**	**∑ε̇i**	**∑λyi² / (∑λyi² + ∑ε̇i)**
	<---	Q12a	0.738	0.545		0.262		
	<---	Q12b	0.805	0.648		0.195		
	<---	Q12c	0.724	0.524		0.276		
	<---	Q12d	0.691	0.477		0.309		
	<---	Q12e	0.815	0.664		0.185		
FRC	<---	Q12f	0.526	0.277	4.299	0.474	1.701	0.717
	<---	Q13 _1	0.697	0.486		0.303		
	<---	Q13 _2	0.767	0.588		0.233		
	<---	Q13 _3	0.786	0.618		0.214		
	<---	Q13 _4	0.838	0.702		0.162		
	<---	Q13 _5	0.641	0.411		0.359		
CT	<---	Q13 _6	0.463	0.214	4.192	0.537	1.808	0.699
	<---	Q17 _1	0.773	0.598		0.227		
	<---	Q17 _2	0.902	0.814		0.098		
	<---	Q17 _3	0.843	0.711		0.157		
	<---	Q17 _4	0.728	0.530		0.272		
BA	<---	Q17 _5	0.741	0.549	3.987	0.259	1.013	0.797
	<---	Q18_1	0.877	0.769		0.123		
	<---	Q18_2	0.828	0.686		0.172		
	<---	Q18_3	0.849	0.721		0.151		
	<---	Q18_4	0.824	0.679		0.176		
	<---	Q18_5	0.847	0.717		0.153		
	<---	Q18_6	0.837	0.701		0.163		
CPI	<---	Q18_7	0.868	0.753	5.930	0.132	1.070	0.847

FRC-Facebook reviews comments; CT-Customer Trust; BA-Brand Awareness; CPI-Consumer purchase intention

Table 4: Average Variance Extracted *(Source: Compiled by Researcher from SPSS, 2024)*

In this study and results shown in table 4 the AVE values are all above 0.5 which is an acceptable threshold as suggested by Cheung et al 2023.The AVE values shown in the results of the study as ranging from 0.6 to 0.8. reflects that the strength of the constructs and individual variables are very high (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This high score offers proof that the constructs are unique.

ii) Inter-Construct Correlation Matrix

Correlation matrix “is a table showing the correlation coefficients between a set of variables, and it is used to determine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two or more variables” (Pallant, 2010 p129). According to Hair et al. (2012) this technique is adopted in order to decide how distinct and or less comparable the constructs were from one another. Inter-construct correlation matrix offers a useful start in this effort to a degree that the constructs are expected to connect to one another (Hair et al. 2019. Below table 5 shows the

results with all the values of the constructs are below the recommended 1.0 threshold as suggested by Hair et al. (2010) which support the prediction of the relationship between the constructs.

Inter-construct correlation matrix table

	FRC	CT	BA	CPI	AVE Value
FRC	**1**				0.717
CT	.701**	**1**			0.699
BA	.463**	.515**	**1**		0.797
CPI	.589**	.664**	.735**	**1**	0.847

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

FRC –Facebook reviews comments; CT-Customer trust; BA-Brand awareness; CPI-Consumer purchase intention.

Table 5: Inter-construct Correlations Matrix from chi-square

4.9 Model Fit Assessment

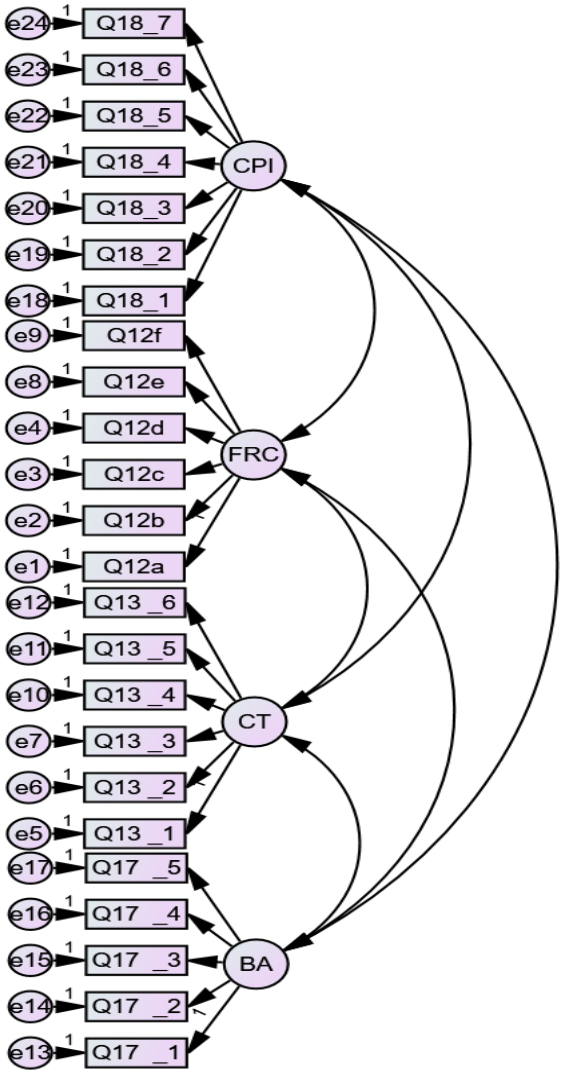
The study adapted the Two step SEM process which is an approach to SEM in which the measurement model fit and construct validity are first assessed using Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and then followed by testing the structural model consisting of an evaluation of the importance of relationships (Hair et al. 2019).

4.9.1 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

In order to assess the model measurement, the CFA was conducted using the Amos28 software. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), tests whether a specified set of constructs is influencing responses in a predicted way (DeCoster, 1998). Its main objective is to determine the ability of a predefined factor model to fit an observed set of data. CFA is also used to test whether a set of factors are correlated or uncorrelated. In other arguments, every time the correlation of the

items within the same construct is fairly high it is understood to have the construct validity (Ab Hamid et al. 2011). The below Figure 15 shows the CFA model for this study. The model is presented through latent variables or 4 factors in the circular shapes namely; CPI, FRC, CT and BA, while the relationship between latent variables is shown by the directional arrows, then the e with arrows from the small circular shapes represent the measurement errors. All the four values are interrelated and the inaccuracy or uniqueness terms connected with the item measurements are lacking a logical relation (Ab Hamid et al. 2011).

CFA Model



* CPI-Consumer purchase intention; FRC –Facebook reviews comments; CT-Customer trust; BA-Brand awareness; e-Measurement error *

Figure 15: CFA Model (*Source: Compiled by Researcher, 2024*)

Structural Model

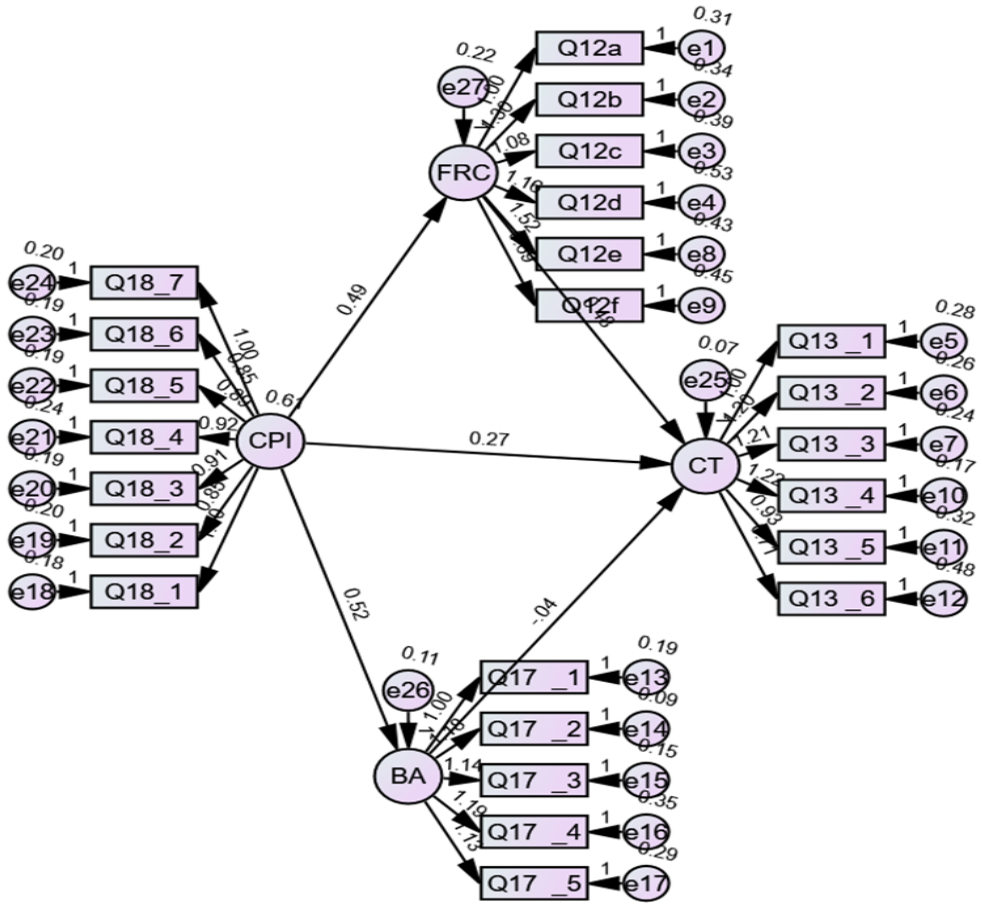


Figure 16: Structural Model (Source: Compiled by Researcher from SPSS, 2024)

4.9.2 Model Fit Assessment Results (CFA)

Four constructs of the study from the conceptual model are all included in measurement model as follows; hotel consumer purchase intention measured by seven item scale; Facebook reviews and comments by six item scale; customer

trust by six item scale and brand awareness by five item scale. Below summary table represent the model fit results;

CFA Model Fit

Model Fit Index	Acceptable Threshold	Results	Acceptable/Unacceptable
CMIN/DF – Chi Square Value - χ2/df	Less than 3	1.455	Acceptable
GFI - Goodness of Fit Index	Greater than 0.9	0.903	Acceptable
NFI - Normed Fit Index	Greater than 0.9	0.934	Acceptable
RFI - Reporting fit indices	Greater than 0.9	0.905	Acceptable
IFI - Incremental Fit Index	Greater than 0.9	0.960	Acceptable
TLI - Tucker Lewis Index	Greater than 0.9	0.950	Acceptable
CFI - Comparative Fit Index	Greater than 0.9	0.960	Acceptable
RMSEA - Random Measure of Standard Error Approximation	Less than 0.08	0.057	Acceptable

Table 6: CFA Model Fit results *(Source: Compiled by Researcher from SPPS 28, 2024*)

The results from Table 6 show a good fit of indices with the following scores; Chi square value of 1.455 which is acceptable and below the threshold of 3 (Kline, 2011). The value of Goodness of Fit index is 0.903 which is greater than the 0.9 threshold. Conventional a complete cut off point of 0.90 has been suggested for the GFI results (Neo, 2015). The other indices are showing values that are higher ranging between 0.905 to 0.960, for example NFI, IFI and RFI. Values for these statistics range between 0 and 1 and the values greater than 0.90 are indicating a good fit as recommended by Bentler and Bonnet (1980) . The Root mean square residual (RMSEA) values range from zero to 1.0 with a well-fitting model obtaining values less than 0.5 (Byrne,1998; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000), nevertheless Hu and Bentler, (1999) recommend that the model fit values as high as 0.08 are believed to be acceptable in a study.. The results of the analysis

indicate that the proposed measurement model is significantly fit and the common method variance was not a major issue in this current study (Ketokivi, 2015).

4.9.3 The Structural Equation Model

Structural models are described by several terms including a theoretical model or occasionally a casual model (Hair et al. 2019). This is the second model. After completing the measurement model through CFA as the first process of the SEM the structural model testing was then tested through IBM AMOS version 28 with maximum likelihood estimation. Furthermore, this model is the most helpfully model and is used by many researchers in demonstrating the interrelationship of variable between constructs (Hair et al. 2012). They further argue that, structural models in SEM differ from CFA models because the prominence changes from the correlation between latent constructs and experimental variables to the nature and the level of the relationship between constructs (Hair et al. 2012). The latent constructs of the study are measured by the measured indicator variables (from e1 – e27). The schematics presentation of the structural model is shown above in the **Figure 16**with all the values of variables.

Below table present the summary results of the proposed model – structural model;

Model Fit Index	Acceptable Threshold	Outcome	Acceptable/unacceptable
CMIN/DF – Chi Square Value - χ2/df	<3	1.381	Acceptable
GFI - Goodness of Fit Index	0.900	0.901	Acceptable
NFI - Normed Fit Index	0.900	0.941	Acceptable
RFI - Reporting fit indices	0.900	0.903	Acceptable
IFI - Incremental Fit Index	0.900	0.967	Acceptable
TLI - Tucker Lewis Index	0.900	0.958	Acceptable
CFI - Comparative Fit Index	0.900	0.967	Acceptable

RMSEA - Random Measure of Standard Error Approximation	0.080	0.052	Acceptable

Table 7: Model Fit summary results : Structural Model (Source: *Compiled by Researcher from SPSS &Amos 28, 2024*)

From the above model fit results, it shows that the structural model had a good fit as explained by the below values; Chi square value = 1.381 which is less than 3 the acceptable threshold as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). The other indices are also acceptable as shown by their values which are above the acceptable minimum threshold (Hair et al. 2010) as per Table 7. GFI = 0.901; NFI = 0.941; RFI = 0.903; IFI = 0.967; TLI = 0.958, all these values show a good fit of the structural model for all the indices. RMSEA value is 0.052 which is closer to the 0.080 threshold and is ideally acceptable. MacCallum et al. (1996), state that RMSEA with a score less than 0.08 shows a good fit. The comparatively narrow range of RMSEA confidence limits provides further confidence in this model. Generally, these values offer a good first sign that the overall structure of the model fits the data (Norm & Hatcher, 2013).

4.9.4 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is a method of testing a claim or hypothesis about a parameter in a population, using data measured in a sample (https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upmbinaries/40007_Chapter8.pdf) The model fit test is considered as one of the key results of fitting a path model (Marshal, 2024). Subsequently to testing the theoretical measurement model and if it was valid, the researcher went on to assess if the model is a good fit for the study. The next step for the researcher was to test the hypothesis of the study from the conceptual model.

Proposed Hypothesis Relationship				**Estimate/Path Coefficient**	**P-value**	**Outcome**
FRC	<---	CPI	H1	0.634	***	Supported and significant

BA	<---	CPI	H3	0.772	***	Supported and significant
CT	<---	CPI	H4	0.407	0.001	Supported and significant
CT	<---	BA		-0.044	0.671	Not significant
CT	<---	FRC	H2	0.561	***	Supported and significant

Table 8: Hypothesis Testing Results and Path Coefficient (*Source: Compiled by Researcher from SPSS, 2024*)

The results from the above table 8 for hypothesis testing indicate that from the 5 hypothesis relationship that was being tested only one had a negative path coefficient value of -0.044 which was not significant. While the other hypothesis relationship had a positive values ranging from 0.407 to 0.772 which showed that the outcome was supported and significant.

4.10 Hypothesis Results Discussion

Below section discusses the hypotheses findings for the study.

Hypothesis 1: The comments and reviews found on Facebook influences hotel purchase intentions.

Table 8 results for hypothesis 1 show that there is a positive and significant relationship between the variable FCR (Facebook comments and reviews) and the CPI (consumer purchase intention). The path coefficient value presented by the results for the hypothesis 1 in the above table is 0.634 which i p is < 0. 01 as indicated by p-value. Both variables are seen to have a positive and strong relationships shown by that coefficient value of 0.634. This support the above hypothesis and it means that it is valid and significant. This is consistent with the previous studies which argued that comment and review posting on social media (Facebook) may impact purchase intention of consumers (Richard & Guppy, 2014). Mas'od et al. (2019) indicated that the potential consumers regularly look for some information in the Facebook comments section relating to the product or service they want to purchase before they make a final purchase decision. The comments on Facebook are found to be one of the powerful factor in relation to the purchase intention since consumers would want to see and know other

consumers' view reagrding the product they intend to purchase if it is good enough (Mas'od et al. 2019).

Hypothesis 2: The comments and reviews found on Facebook pages influence the customer trust in a hotel.

The results of hypothesis 2 reflects a positive and significant relationship between the variables, consumer trust and the Facebook comments and reviews. The path coefficient value for this relationship is 0.561, at a notable level of p is < 0.01 just as shown by p value of *** . Hence a very robust connection being reflected amongst the two variables tested. This indicates that both variables have found to have strong and positive relationship with each other (Mas'od et al. 2019). It was supported by the researcher as the consumers gain more trust on a brand that has been recommended by family or friend. These findings are consistent with the previous studies by Jung & Kim (2015); Landhari & Michaudi (2015) which suggested that, majority of consumers tend to mirror their own consumers as a trusted source of information, thus positive reviews or comments will likely strengthen the trust between consumers and brands (Cheung et al. 2009; Lee & Thandan, 2009). In addition, Landhari and Michaudi (2015), also support this hypothesis when they stated that the positive comment from Facebook friends will increase consumer trustworthiness towards a hotel.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between the customer trust and consumer purchase intention.

Hypothesis 3 testing results also reflects that the correlation between customer trust and purchase intention was discovered to be strong and supported. This is reflected by a co-efficient path value of 0.407 and p-value of 0.001. This result shows the positive relationship between these two variables though the relationship is not very strong as shown by a lower coefficient value, the relationship is still significant and supported. This is consistent with findings from Lien et al. (2015) when he stated that trust might not be directly influencing the consumer purchase decision as it might be already prevailing between consumers prior to booking a hotel. However, trust has a positive and an indirectly effect or influence on purchase intentions through other factors such as the

mediator of value, pricing and so forth. They further argued that strengthening the honest relationship with consumers, increases consumer's known value and thereby improving their purchase intention decision (Lien et al. 2015).

Various previous studies showed the presence of a positive and significant correlation among the social media movement of cormpanies and variables such as brand trust, barnd loyalty, evaluation and consumer purchase intention (Kim & Ko, 2012; Naylor et al. 2012; Schivinski & Dakabrowski, 2013). Customer trust in brand can be seen as a variable that has a major impact on purchase intention (Sung & Kim, 2010). These previous studies are supporting this relationship between customer trust on a brand or product and the purchase intention, majority of them concluded that the online customer or brand trust does influence the intention to purchase (Mansour et al.2014). According to Ibáñez et al. (2006), brand trust openly impact the purchase intention and is of great importance in a situation when customer decides to choose to altera a brand because of high unkown threat and insignificance levels. In addition, Ling et al. (2011), on their studies were also supporting this assertion of a positive and significant connection between customer trust on brands and purchase intention.

Hypothesis 4: Brand awareness will positively impact purchase intention

The results shows that the affiliation between brand awareness and consumer purchase intention was seen to be positive and strong. This is proven by the result that present the estimate coefficient value of 0.772 at a significant level of p is < 0.01, meaning that the correlation among the two variables is very strong and supported. This means that when consumers are very aware of the brand and have more information regarding the hotel prior to making a booking and this information tends to increase their purchase intention as they will have more trust on the brand. In addition, consumers tend to purchase a well-known brand or a brand that they know about and has been recommended by other people with their circles. This is consistent with the previous researchers and they support the statement when they say consumer prefer to purchase a brand that they know and its quality has been tested and has met their expectations (Kerse, 2023).

According to Kerse (2023) findings several studies are revealing that consumers have a favorite of brands which holds a solid place in the mind of the consumer at a purchasing stage (Aktepe & Mehmet, 2008). Another similar research done by Karaca, Sönmez Karapınar & Ata (2022), affirmed the findings for the current study, in their study which was focusing on people who buy or book holidays online found out that there is a positive relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention, and the purchase intention increased with the brand awareness increasing.

Last but not least the hypotheses results are showing one relationship that is not significant and is not supported. This is the relationship between two variables, customer trust and brand awareness which is not positive and significant. The coefficient value of -0.044 and p – value of 0.671 signifies the negative relationship between customer trust and brand awareness.

4.11 Conclusion

Chapter four (4) presented the research results and analysis of the results from the data collection through using SPSS and AMOS28 softwares. The statistical data regarding the influence of Facebook reviews and comments on purchase intention in the hotel accommodation sector was analysed and presented through tables and graphs. A detailed and in-depth analysis of the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument was carried out, which was followed by Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) that discussed the reliability and validity and model fit analysis. The chapter ended with testing of the hypothesis and presenting each hypothesis test results. Out of all 4 hypotheses that were being tested all were significant and supported. However, the results of the relationship between customer trust and brand awareness were found to be not significant and therefore the correlation between these two variables was not supported.

The following chapter will be discussing the results and linking them with the literature review.

5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.5 Introduction

This chapter critically deliberates and describes the research findings that were presented the previous chapter. The chapter observe how the research results relate to hypotheses of the study, research questions and the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and making comparison with the previous research literature. The chapter begin with discussing the demographic profile results from all the respondents and then succeed by the results of the hypothesis in relation to conceptual framework model and previous literature.

5.6 Demographic Profile Results

The researcher used gender, age and employement status of the respondents as the demographic variables of the study.

The results of the study indicate that in terms of the gender majority of the total respondents were females with a contribution of 58.8%, while the male respondents all comprised of 39.6% and the remaining 1.6% were the 3rd gender. Twumasi, Krüger and Amoah (2022) state that there are previous studies that have been done in the however, no precise research that could be recognized that manages the effects of demographics (age, gender and employment status) of the incoming tourist experience on accommodation services in South Africa. Another previous study argued male tourists are seem to be favouring travelling for business and sporting activities due to better in attention in business agenda, while women toursists on the other hand travell for different resaons such as family vacation, church, education purposes and so forth (Kara & Mkwizu, 2020). The recent census data report also supports these results as the South Africa's total population is dominated by female over male. According to the Statistics SA Censusreport (2022) females constituted 51.1% of the total population while men the remaining 48.5% were male. This shows that the majority of the population in South Africa are female.

5.6.1 Age Profile or Characteristics of Respondents

Majority of the respondent in this study are between the age group of 31 to 35 which contributed 24.1 % of the total respondents. The age group of over 40years contributed 21. % which was the second largest number of the respondents, while the 25 to 30 years old group were part of the 19.8% and the 18 to 24 years were part of the 15.5 %. The results of the study show that the respondents who are booking hotels a lot is the age group of 31 years and above (31 to 35 and over 40 years). This is because these are the age groups who are the typical working class who holds more disposable income and can afford travelling or booking hotels for accommodation, while some are involved in travelling because of work commitments. Patuelli and Nijkamp (2016) state that age is regarded as an important variable in determining tourist behaviour, especially as travellers visit tourist destinations. Furthermore, Talón-Ballestero et al. (2018) also found that age is significant for hotel accommodation services and thus exceptional attention should be provided to improve guest's satisfaction.

According to a South African tourism market analysis global data report for 2023, it indicates that the age group of 35 to 49 years is the most active demographic when it comes to travel in South Africa. Another report by Qwerty (2017) indicated that the most active age group on Facebook who have Facebook pages are the age group of 25 to 34 years and the frequent Facebook users are the ones who hold more disposable income which is 40 years and above. Pesonen and Tussyadiah (2017) argued that the age of a tourist was an important factor in influencing outbound tourism and plays an important role in creation of memorable experiences. Thus the age profile of the respondent was important for this study.

5.7 Social media usage and hotel purchase intention results

The researcher had qualifying questions and other relevant questions related to the study which were asked as part of the general questions and where not included in the hypothesis questions. The following results are discussed and their relevance to the study;

5.7.1 Hotel Booking

All the respondents were asked a qualifying question regarding their hotel stay in the last 2 years and the results were presented by the below pie chart. 91.6% of the total respondents indicated that they had recently stayed or booked a hotel. This question was very important as the study was focused and interested in the 91.6% which has stayed in a hotel. The 9.9% of the respondents was not relevant to the study.

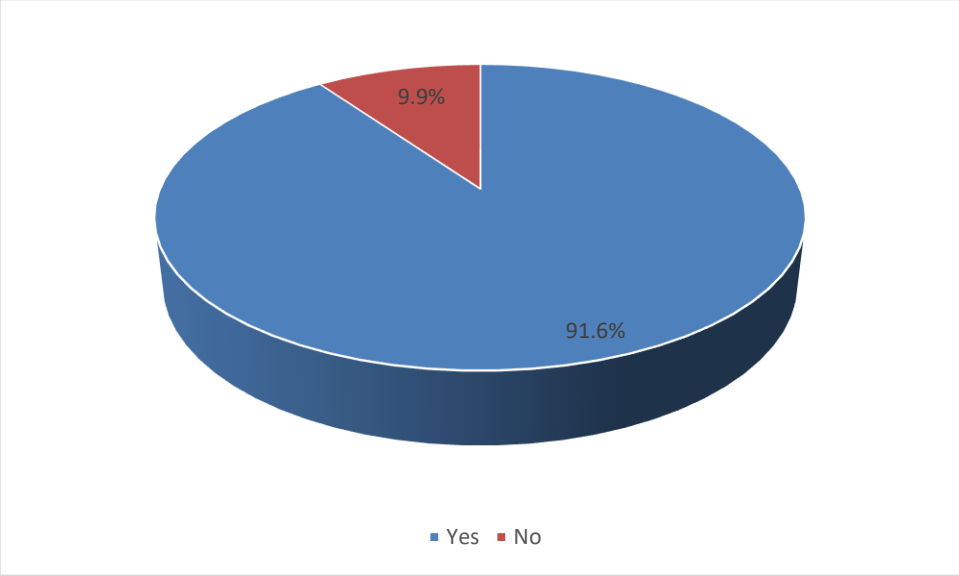


Figure 17: Respondents who stayed in a hotel

5.7.2 Facebook reviews and comments

The researcher asked the respondents if they do read customer reviews and comments posted by other customers on Facebook page regarding a hotel or a brand before making a purchase decision. This question was very relevant to the study as the problem statement of the research is related to the Facebook reviews and comments and if they have any influence on the purchase intention of the hotel. Therefore, it is important to have this information and results prior to testing the hypothesis. The results show that about 54.8% of the respondents said they definitely read reviews and comments on a product or brand prior to making a purchase intention as shown in Figure 12 in the previous chapter.

5.7.3 Social media usage and preference

In establishing the social media preference and usage frequency, the researcher asked general questions on which types of the social media platforms do the respondents use a lot and how often do they use these platforms. This information was very important to this study as it shows if the respondents are more active in social media or not and on which social media platform are there more frequent. The results on the question about the social media preference or choice show that majority of the respondents were more active on Facebook than other social media platforms. This was reflected by a score of 38% as presented on Figure 10 in the previous chapter. These results are supported by several studies and reports which proved that Facebook is currently the most used social media platform globally (Digital – DataReportal, 2024). Meta's third quarter 2022investor earnings reports demonstrate that Facebook platform now has about 2.958 billion monthly active users. This compares to almost 37% of the world's total population (Digital – DataReportal, 2024). Furthermore, Meta's advertising resources data report for 2024 January indicate that Facebook had 26 million users in South Africa as of January 2024 (Digital – DataReportal, 2024).

The researcher also asked the respondents on the amount of time they spend on social media in a day and the results shown that the majority of the respondents with 42.6 % spend 1 to 2 hours a day on each social media platform, while the 26.1% of the respondents spend 3-5 hours a day on different social media

platforms. These results are consistent with the Global Digital Growth 2023, DataReportal which indicates that 72.3% of the population of South Africa is online as of January 2023. This analysis report state that South Africa is the leading country globally when it comes to the amount of time spent online. The report reveals that on average South Africans now spend more than 2 and half hours per day using social media, which is the highest figure that was discovered in third quarter 2022 results.

5.8 Discussion of the results and the Conceptual Model

The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of Facebook reviews and comments on the purchase intention of hotel accommodation in South Africa. The research problem two; was to investigate the effect of Facebook comments and reviews on customer trust in relation to a hotel brand, while the research problem three was to investigate the relationship between Facebook reviews and comments with the brand awareness. The literature suggests that consumers make use of Facebook comments and reviews posted by other consumers or shared by friends regarding a product they are want to purchase. Such information helps them to make a purchase decision which has a big influence on the purchase intention. Richard & Guppy (2014) state that posting and sharing of comments on Facebook and other social media platforms can impact the consumer's purchase intention and consumer's choice during the information search stage of the purchase decision. According to this study's research conceptual framework there are about three variables that directly and indirectly influence consumer purchase intention and these include, Facebook reviews/comments, customer trust and brand awareness.

The below table demonstrate the summary results of the 4 hypotheses testing

Proposed Hypothesis Relationship			Hypothesis	Estimate/Path Coefficient	P-value	Results
FRC	<---	CPI	H1	0.634	***	Supported and significant
BA	<---	CPI	H3	0.772	***	Supported and significant
CT	<---	CPI	H4	0.407	0.001	Supported and significant

CT	<---	BA		-0.044	0.671	Not significant
CT	<---	FRC	H2	0.561	***	Supported and significant

Table 9: Research Hypotheses Results

Based on the hypotheses testing results for the study presented in the above table, all 4 hypotheses proposed and tested were found to be significant and their positive relationship being supported. On the other hand, one of the relationships was found to be not significant and the relationship between the customer trust and brand awareness variables was not supported. All four hypotheses are confirming that Facebook reviews/comments, customer trust and brand awareness influences consumer's purchase intention and choice of hotel accommodation. The results from the hypotheses testing are deliberated below;

5.8.1 Facebook reviews, comments and Consumer purchase intention (Hypothesis1)

The hypothesis 1 results from the hypotheses testing show a strong positive relationship amongst Facebook reviews and comments posted by other customers and the purchase intention. This is presented by coefficient value of 0.634 on a significant level of p is < 0.01. These results are consistent with the experts and other researchers such as Papathanassis & Knolle (2011); Xiang & Gretzel (2010) who argued that comments and opinions created by customers can impact the choice of the product or service and the preferences of other customers. This means that the positive comments on Facebook by followers or other customers can lead to some positive attitudes towards a brand and can consequently affect the purchase intention and a hotel accommodation being booked (Cheng, Lu & Lin .2020; Taeuscher,2019).

With regards to the hotel sector, it was discovered that the presence of a high percentage of customer's negative comments or reviews can result to a further negative attitude towards a hotel (Lee et al. 2008). This means that the more negative comments and reviews on a hotel the less likely is the potential of that hotel to be booked by customers. Therefore, the more positive comments and reviews will increase more trust on the brand and hotel and increase the purchase

intention. In addition, comments posted and shared on social media platforms like Facebook are recognised as credible sources of signal because of the perceived independence of the source of the message (Litvin et al.2008). Furthermore, prior to making a booking intention of a hotel or purchasing a product, Before making a purchase or a booking, majority of cosnumers now start by visiting social media comments, views and experiences shared by others as a way of getting more product and brand information and thereby increasing their acquaintance with diverse brands in any group of products (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

In summary, the hypothesis results support the previous literature and other studies who found that there is a significant and positive relationship between Facebook comments and reviews and the purchase intention.

5.8.2 Customer trust and Facebook reviews and comments

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Hypothesis 2 results show a positive and important correlation among customer trust and the reviews and comments posted on Facebook pages. This solid relationship is supported by the path/estimate coefficient value of 0.561 with a p –value signified by *** at a substantial level of p is <0.01 thus showing a positive correlation between these variables being tested here. The positive reviews and comments about a product or brand that are shared or posted by other customers give confidence to those customers who are the first user or buyer for the same product. The more positive information is being shared about the product and brand the high the trust around the product that stays in customer's minds and it gives them a confidence in purchase the same product due to the positive information they found online or on Facebook regarding the product. These findings are supported by other authors such as Ladhari & Michaud (2015), who indicated that when there is uninterrupted positive response and information shared by other online community members, the customer's faith and trust in the brand rises leading to a purchase intention.

Han et al. (2015) and Khadim et al. (2018) defined trust as the insight of dependability from the consumer's point of view founded on capability and knowledge, or further on a series of connections or interactions dsinstinguished by the accomplishment of product performance, customer expectations and satisfaction. This means that when consumers are satisfied by the performance of the product or a particular brand based on their perceptions or information shared by other consumers this will mean the product is highly reliable and can be recommended to others. Trust is a very significant variable in building long-term relationship between one party and another (Haudi et al. 2022). In other words, no long term relationship can be built without any trust element involved. Relationships stay stronger and longer because there is some sense of security and ability to keep promises and fulfil them.

According to studies by El Naggar et al. (2017) & Han et all. (2015) & Khadim et al. (2028), customer trust in a brad is the customer's wish to depend on a brand with the possibilities faced due to anticipations of the brand that will result to positive outcome and purcahse intention. Interactions and engagements online or through social media platforms like Facebook will remove uncertainties that may prevent customer from engaging with the brand and it will build trust on that brand and or product that the customer is engaging with. This is because social media has been viewed or considered by consumers as the most trusted source of information. When the customer develops that trust on a brand or product it becomes easier to purchase or book the hotel and also share more positive information about the hotel. Lien et al. (2015) also emphasised on the importance of trust in their studies by highlighting that trust has a positive, indirect effect on purchase intention. Which means that by upgrading the trust correlation amongst consumers enhances consumer known value which will ultimately strengthen consumer purchase intention (Lien et al. 2015).

Sanny et al. (2020) reflects that social media marketing has a positive impact towards brand trust, and these findings are consistent with what was stated by other authors in relation to social media, which states that social media has a positive impact on brand trust and an improvement in social media marketing variables will result to an high brand trust variables (Bernado et al. 2020).

Furthermore, Chahal & Rani (2017) argues that social media users with high levels of trust are more likely willing to take part on social media and denote high involvement in brand's social media activities which eventual contribute to the brand value. Such consumers or social media users are familiar with Facebook features such as Likes, commenting and sharing or posting of the same post posted by another consumer. These consumers are willing to take part in sharing their experience with the product or brand and post positive comments or reviews if they had a good experience. In addition a study by Richard & Guppy (2014) cited that the Facebook feature of posting comments and sharing posts can impact the consumer's purchase intention and a choice to be made. When Facebook users frequently see same posts and comments shared about a product or hotel brand, they may possibly develop solid purchase intentions toward that product or service (Mas'od, et al. 2019). In summary the previous literature is consistent and support the results of this hypothesis testing for a positive and significant relationship between the variables being tested. The more positive comments and reviews it increases the probability of booking a hotel accommodation.

5.8.3 Customer trust and Consumer purchase intention

Hypothesis 3 findings proves that there is a meaningfully positive relationship amaong variables (customer trust and consumer purchase intention) being tested and this is shown by 0.407 path coefficient at a 0.001 p- value at the significant level of $P<0.01$. These results reflects a solid indication which favours the proposed hypotheses in relation to consumer purchase intention and customer trust. The above mentioned result findings are consistent with the previous study by Matzler et al. (2006) who suggested that customer's trusts in a brand in a volatile environment when the customer lacks confidence on the outcome of a decision nonetheless that decision is still very important (Letshaba, 2018). Building trust on a brand requires a well-informed process of producing a connection among a customer and the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In other words, in order to create a trust on a brand, customers are required to create relationship with a brand as it is highlighted by other authors that trust is the key factor in creating long term relationships with consumers (Haudi et al. 2022).

In marketing customer trust can be refered as to be the substance for creating and keeping long lasting relationships. Respondents indicated that they would prefer to book or purchase a hotel brand that they trust and have a relationship with. This means that those brands that customers are not familiar with and there isn't much information available on social media about the hotel tend to be less booked due to high risk and uncertainty in terms of fulfilling their needs and expectations. For example, Doney and Cannon (1997) indicated that "if an airline company promises safety, honesty, and reliable services to its customers and accomplishes its promises, customers will ultimately will have more trust in the brand or company. Similarly, for the hotel company customers will place trust on a certain hotel based on what the hotel is promising to its customers". For example, Southern Sun hotels has earned the trust of their guests through exceptional quality.

5.8.4 Brand awareness and Consumer purchase intention

The results of hypothesis 4 reflects a strong positive relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention which is presented by the path value of 0.772 with the p value signified by **** at a substantial levele of p is < 0.01. These results of the study support similar studies result by Aberdeen et. al. (2016) who supported that the brand awareness has a huge and significant effect on purchase intention. According to studies by Shimp & Andrews (2013); Kotler & Keller (2008), defines brand awareness as the ability of a brand to appear in consumer's minds when they need a particular product that reflects consumer preferences, making it easier for consumers to come in mind when they need a certain product. In other words, this is the ability for a consumer to easily recall or recognizes the same product or brand when they do a repeat purchase. This means that the consumers/customers will prefer more of the brands or products that are easily remembered and are staying in their minds when they plan to book a hotel or purchase accommodation. This is because consumers have difficulties in trying new product or new brand. Various studies are consistent with these results by enlightening that consumers choose the brands that has build a strong presence in their minds during the buying stage (Aktepe & Bas, 2008).

Chi, Yeh and Yang (2009) argues that brand awareness perfoms a vital part in the purchase intention, this is due to brands showing low brand awareness and such unknown brands are less likely to be purchased by consumers (Avcılar, 2008). Furthermore, Karaca, Karapınar and Ata (2022) in their studies which involved collecting data from the online holiday bookers/travellers, also supported this relationship when they discovered that brand awareness has a positive influence on purchase intention, hence the purchase intention improved with the increasing brand awareness. The more customers are aware of a brand and there is more trust created with the brand or the product resulting in a decision to purchase the product. The results of this hypothesis showing in the above table, shows a very strong positive relationship between these variables through the high coefficient path value. In today consumers have to choose between many brands including the competing brands when purchase goods or services, in so doing they focus more on those brands that they are familiar with and are always in their minds. These are the brands they tend to purchase more as they have high brand awareness and are less risky.

5.9 Conclusion

In summary this chapter discussed the research findings in detailed comparing with the previous literature to ascertain if there is any consistent in the research results and the literature review. The proposed hypotheses of the study were discussed and all 4 hypotheses were found to be significant and supported which was showing a significant positive relationship between different variables of the study. The findings of the study reflected that there is a positive influence of Facebook reviews and comments towards purchase intention and there is strong relationship between Facebook reviews, comments and customer trust, brand awareness and the consumer purchase intention. The findings of the study were in line with previous researchers and literature review. Chakraborty and Bhat (2018) suggested that with the online reviews, cosnumers are exposed to several comments and reviews shared by other customers, hence they deduce reviews as brand messages thereby putting a brand image in the consumer's minds which result in influencing the hotel booking intention. The following chapter is the final

chapter which discusses the conclusion, limitations and recommendations of the study.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.5 Introduction

This following chapter provides an overview of the research and outline the contributions and limitations of the study as well as give suggestions and recommendations for future research.

6.6 Conclusion of the study

This research study examined the influence of Facebook reviews and comments towards purchase intention of hotel accommodation in South Africa. The key objective of the research was to decide if the positive or negative comments and reviews shared on Facebook, have any effect on consumer's purchase decision making (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). The study intended to fill the research gap in the customer reviews and comments posted on Facebook and its influence in consumer purchase intention. Lehto, Kim and Morrison (2006) state that the internet has developed into a significant marketing tool or channel in the hotel industry. A lot happens prior to making a purchase intention as consumers get exposed to more information and reviews online which influence their final purchase decisions. Therefore, it is imperative for hotel companies or businesses to analyse the main causes and mediators of the purchase intention so as to understand to positively impact customers during the pre-purchase stage (Lien et al. 2015).

Furthermore, social media has provided the platform and empowerment to customers to share their experience and feelings with other customers who cannot be controlled by marketers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The current study proposed 4 hypotheses which were tested against the data collected from different participants in South Africa through an online survey.

From the results of the study discussed in the previous chapter it can be summarised that Facebook reviews and comments have a positive and significant influence on the purchase intention (hypothesis 1). This relationship

between variables was tested and found to be significant and was also supported by the literature of the study. Many companies and businesses spend a lot of time deleting and getting rid of more negative reviews and comments that are posted and shared by other consumers on Facebook and other social media platforms, this is to ensure that customers don't form negative impressions about the brand and have a negative brand image which will eventually result in customer not purchasing the product or brand (Shaw & Coker, 2010). The researcher also concluded that Facebook reviews and comments positively and significantly influence customer trust on a hotel (hypothesis 2). This hypothesis was tested and found to be positive and significant to the study. Trust is a crucial factor in building long lasting relationships between the consumer and the brand (hotel). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) reflects that trust assist with lowering the nervousness, vulnerability and uncertainty related to the agreement, which leads to customer satisfaction and in turn influence the purchase intention. Customers develop trust on hotel brand based on the information posted or shared by other customers/travellers who had experienced the similar hotel services. If customer share more positive reviews and comments regarding a hotel, more trust will be build among customers and they will perceive the image of the hotel as a very good, trustworthy, reliable brand.

Furthermore, looking at the results and findings of the study it can be assumed that there is a strong positive correlation between the customer trust and the purchase intention (hypothesis 3). This relationship was found to be significant and consistent with previous studies and authors who researched about these variables on different sector or industry. This hypothesis is interlinked with the previously discussed hypothesis 2 as the customer trust on a hotel is created from the information that is available for the customers on social media (online) and also being shared by other customers on their Facebook profiles/pages. Ladhari and Michaud (2015) echoes that lack of faith towards a hotel could be a major hindrance towards booking a hotel room, which means the positive comments from Facebook users and friends will upsurge consumer's dependability towards a hotel, thereby increasing purchase intention. Therefore, customer trust on a hotel is associated with the readiness to book a hotel room by consumers. (Lou & Zhong, 2015).

The current study also intended to study the relationship between brand awareness and consumer purchase intention influenced by the comments and reviews on Facebook (Kerse, 2023). The results of the study tell us that brand awareness has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention in relation to the hotel accommodation in South Africa. Aktepe and Bas (2008) express that several studies discovered that consumers generally prefer brands with a strong place in the consumer mind during a purchase stage. From these findings of the study the researcher concludes the study stating that, the consumers will prefer to book a hotel that they are familiar with and know it very well. For a consumer to decide on which hotel brand to book, first they need to have an image of that brand in their minds and that awareness will make them recall and remember the brand when they are at a purchase stage. That image will stay in the consumer's minds for a long term.

In summary the researcher concludes the study by stating that Facebook reviews and comments have a huge influence and impact on the hotel purchase intention as that information is valuable for consumers when they decide to book a hotel. Those positive reviews and comments some positive beliefs, credibility on a hotel brand and the consumers easily recall the brand when they make a purchase intention.

6.7 Implications and Recommendations

This study offers some significant practical implications to the hotel companies, the marketing managers and practitioners in the hotel and accommodation industry who design strategic plans and implement those strategies in relation to the social media pages and accounts. The research also offers important perspectives on the growth of both theoretical and managerial facets within the social media marketing industry. The study aids the tourism and hospitality industry and hotel managers by helping them create efficient marketing plans to quickly handle negative feedback from unhappy customers before it damages their online reputation.

It helps them to manage customer reviews, comments and what is posted by customers on their pages regarding their experience with the brand or the services they received from the hotel. Some of the implications of the study are explained and presented below;

- Lien et al. (2015) recommended that the hotels should dedicate more efforts and resources to preserving and improving its brand image. This will help the hotel to build more trust with the consumer base and community, because consumer purchase intention is positively impacted by the company brand image. The customers will gain more trust on the hotel brand and create a long term relationship with the brand which will increase purchase intention and improve customer loyalty. If the customer is satisfied with the brand and the service they received from the hotel they are likely to come back for another stay and also recommend the hotel to other people in their circles (family, friends and colleagues).
- The findings of the study will help the hotel management and marketers to better manage their Facebook pages and to be consistent in the quality of content that is posted regarding their brand. The research shows how important is the online information regarding the hotel brand and its services. This is important as it influences booking intentions and trust by tourists and hotel services consumers. The marketers should invest more on their social media management and have a credible information shared consistently. This will give more confidence and trust to the consumers who rely on such information to make a purchase decision. It is important to ensure that websites clearly communicate the efforts made to ensure the credibility of the information, so that the consumers feel confident in using and relying on online reviews when purchasing (Oliveira et al.2020).
- Furthermore, companies and marketers should pay more attention to other underlying factors for the purchase intention which needs to be managed better in order to increase the purchase intention or influence the purchase intention behaviour. There are other factors such as customer satisfaction and so forth which have a big influence on the purchase intention in relation to the social media platforms reviews and information found on social media.

- The study findings will also help the marketers and hotels to provide relevant product information on their social media platforms and website in order for consumers to get reliable and credible information which will help them in making a purchase decision and leading to buying a hotel room.
- The research findings for this current study will also help hotel companies and other companies to prioritize responding on negative comments and reviews and sharing those responses on all the online platforms. These will include those responses where specifically the 3 process was followed of explanation, an apology, and a pledge to correct the concern. Through placing more attention to these reviews will improve the purchase intetion chances in future particularly when consumers would want to view those reviews in future (Zinko et al. 2021).
- The research findings of the current study will also contribute to the marketers when developing an effective marketing or social media strategy which will manage and address the negative comments and reviews posted by other customers. This means that the companies need a strategic approach to managing the customer reviews and comments and ensure they have a budget set aside for that. Such negative comments should be managed as they have a big damaging impact and can cause a serious bad reputation of the brand if not addressed and handled properly. The company should not get rid of all the negative comments or reviews but they need to address those dissatisfied customers urgently to avoid the brand of the company being dragged on social media. It is recommended that the social media team closely monitor the content on social media and respond to consumer queries and complaints timeously (Shaw& Coker, 2012).
- It is also important for the marketers and hotel management to identify the brand ambassadors or someone who is very influential and has more social media followers. These opinion leaders will have a big influence in the brand and for the hotel to be booked a lot if it is well spoken about and more information about the hotel is shared by this brand ambassador. Ladhari and Michaud (2015) found that the opinion leaders have the

capability to positively impact the choices and opinions of those in their surroundings relatively to several product categories and services.

- The study is also important to the tourists or travel bookers who are Facebook users, to encourage them to express their views about their hotel experience and the services they received. It helps the hotel companies to understand that the opinion of the users or customers matters a lot especially due to the popularity of Facebook as a social media tool used by many businesses and individuals to communicate and engage with each other.

  Furthermore, the study also add to the growing literature and academic gap which requires further research in terms of expanding the focus to other social media platforms as well as focusing on accommodation online booking sites.

The findings extend to the understanding of the application of reviews on socila media platforms and their serious impact on the brand and intentio to purchase a product or service online. The study also offers marketers with new practical insights on how online reviews and comments impacts the future bookings and profits for the company if they are not addressed properly.

6.8 Directions for Future Research

The study encountered some limitations which resulted to the researcher to make suggestions on the future research in order to gain more insight on this subject and study area. The recommendations on the directions of the future research are discussed below;

- The study was focusing only on hotel customers and did not cover all other accommodation service providers to understand how the Facebook reviews and comments has an effect on their bookings intention. Therefore, further research and investigations are needed focusing on other accommodation service providers such as Guest houses and AirBnB holiday homes. This is because there are some consumers who prefer

self-catering accommodation which has a set-up of like a home, while some consumers find AirBnB and Guest houses as more affordable than hotels.

- Future research should be done using different data collection methods from the online survey. The researcher faced challenges in getting quick responses through survey and some not fully completing the survey. More research need to be done using methods such as face to face interviews or semi-structured interviews to get more responses as the researcher interact with respondents asking them survey questions.
- Future studies should consider obtaining information from other social media and online platforms such as hotel websites, bookings.com, TripAdvisor, etc. This will provide more insight and information as the current study only obtained data from the Facebook users.
- Further research to be done focusing on different industries or sectors outside the hotel and hospitality industry. This is because the hotel customers have different characteristics from other industries.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICE A: Participation Information Sheet

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Mbongeni N. Tshuma and I am a Masters in Management in the field of Strategic Marketing at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the effects of Facebook reviews under the supervision of Dr Yvonne Saini. The aim of this research project is to find out the role played by Facebook reviews, both negative and positive reviews and how they have an impact on the consumers that look for a hotel to book.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in a Survey by answering a survey questionnaire. This activity will involve completing an online survey questionnaire and will take around 10-13 minutes.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The survey will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you (optional). The data collected from this research project will be stored in a secure hard drive that is password protected and will be kept for 5 years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other

researchers. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Mbongeni Nkanyiso Tshuma

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APPENDICE B: Research Instrument - Survey Questionnaire

1. SECTION A: General Questions;

a) Have you stayed or booked a hotel in the last 2 years?

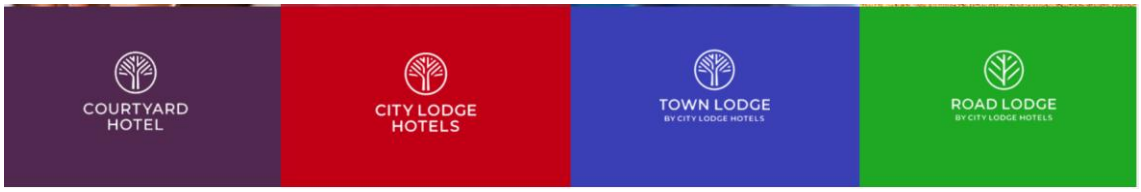
I. Yes
II. No

b) If "Yes" what level of star Hotel was it?

I. 1-star hotel
II. 2-star hotel
III. 3-star hotel
IV. 4-star hotel
V. 5-star hotel

c) Which hotel brand did you use from the below hotels;

I. City Lodge Hotel Group



(*Source: citylodgehotels.com*)

II. Southern Sun Hotel Group (Tsogo Sun)



(*Source:southernsun.com/hotel-search*)

III. Other hotel brands

d) In which Provinces did you book the services of these hotels?

I. Gauteng
II. Mpumalanga
III. Western Cape
IV. KwaZulu Natal
V. Eastern Cape
VI. Northern Cape
VII. Free State
VIII. Limpopo
IX. Northwest

e) What is your age group?

I. 18 years to 24 years
II. 25 years to 30 years
III. 31 years to 35 years
IV. 36 years to 45 years
V. 46 years and above

f) Please indicate your gender

I. Male
II. Female
III. Other

g) What is your current employment status

I. Studying Full time
II. Full time employed
III. Part time employed or freelancing
IV. Unemployed
V. Prefer not to say

h) Which of the following social media site do you use more frequently? (Select all that apply)

I. Facebook
II. Twitter
III. Instagram
IV. Tik Tok
V. Snapchat
VI. All of them

i) What is the average time you spend on the above social media platforms in a day? (select one)

I. Less than 1 hour
II. 1 – 2 hours
III. 3 – 5 hours
IV. > 5 hours

g) Do you read customer reviews on different social media platforms when you are making a purchase decision?

I. Yes
II. No

SECTION B

Question 2: Facebook Review and Comments Influence

2(a). “Staff members are professional and rooms are clean and neat”.

“The room and the hotel its very clean and nice”, (City Lodge Hotel Durban, 2022).

After reading the above reviews and comments on the hotel Facebook page, I can say that I like the hotel and I would recommend it to others. (Source: Ladhari, and Michaud, 2015).

1.Strongly Agree

2.Agree

3.Neither agree or disagree

4.Disagree

5.Strongly disagree

(b). Are you using any of these below sources of information on Facebook before taking a purchase decision;

- Reviews given on the brand pages by the followers;
- and content posted, forwarded or shared by friends on Facebook (Kudeshia and Kumar, 2015)

1.Strongly agree

2.Agree

3.Neither agree or disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

(c). Based on your visit to this hotel how satisfied were you with the overall experience of the hotel, if you made your purchase decision based on the good reviews posted on the Facebook? Rate your satisfaction levels from scale of 1 to 5 with, 1 being less satisfied and 5 highly satisfied.

1 2 3 4 5

(d). I pay attention to the review comments posted on Facebook. (Richard & Guppy, 2014).

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree or disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

(e). Posting review comments really interests and encourage me to make my hotel purchase (Richard & Guppy, 2014)

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree 5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(f). A product/brand recommendation through a former comment on Facebook platforms influenced making my own hotel purchase decision (Erkan & Evans, 2016)

1. Strongly agree 4. Disagree

2. Agree 5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(g). “We come back year after year and it is always the most magical experience. The chalets are comfortable and well appointed. The staff I should put at the top are wonderful. Thank you to you all” – Sabi River Sun Facebook Page, 2018.

Based on the above Facebook review from one of the clients that stayed in one of Southern Sun Hotels, how would you rate the overall customer service for the brand in a score of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least favourable and 10 the most favourable?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Question 3: Customer Trust

For these below questions, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements;

(a). I trust the information and reviews written by Facebook friends about the hotel and they were reliable (Sparks and Browning, 2011)

1. Strongly agree 4. Disagree

2. Agree 5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(b). The comments of my Facebook friends whom I trust has helped me to review this hotel (Sparks and Browning, 2011).

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4.Disagree
5.Strongly disagree

(c). Based on my previous experience, Facebook reviews are honest and reliable (Sun & Lin, 2010)

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

(d). Customer reviews and comments about a hotel that I read in the Facebook page of the hotel are generally trustworthy and were written by a consumer.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4.Disagree
5.Strongly disagree

(e). The trust in online comments affects their usefulness and the degree to which they are they are accepted by customers, and influences the decision-making process (Ladhari and Michaudi, 2015).

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

(f). What the hotel says about its product/service is true (Lien et al. 2015)

1. Strongly agree
4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

Question 4: Brand Awareness

For this below question, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements;

(a). I am willing to recommend this hotel brand to others to book or purchase (Majeed, Owusu-Ansah and Ashmond, 2021)

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(b). I would do more business with this hotel in the next few years. (Zeithaml et al. 1996)

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(c). I would encourage my friends, family and colleagues to do business with this hotel when it comes to accommodation needs (Zeithaml et al. 1996)

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(d). This brand quickly attracts my attention and it comes into my mind when I make a purchase decision based on some good reviews I saw on hotel Facebook page. (Majeed, Owusu-Ansah and Ashmond, 2021)

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(e). When someone criticizes this hotel or their brand, it feels like a personal attacked or insulted. (Harrigan et al. 2017)

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(f). I am satisfied with the communication that is shared by the hotel on their Facebook page regarding their special deals, offers and promotions, and how customers react to those posts.

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

Question 6: Brand Awareness (Sasmita and Suki, 2015)

For these below questions, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements;

(a). I am aware of this particular hotel brand which is appearing on different social media platforms.

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(b). Social media platforms like Facebook are effective in creating brand awareness to consumers.

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree 5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(c). I know what this particular hotel brand looks like when evaluating available brands during purchase intention.

1. Strongly agree 4. Disagree

2. Agree 5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(d). I can recognise this particular hotel when comparing it to other competing brands when I ago on Facebook page

1. Strongly agree 4. Disagree

2. Agree 5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(e). I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of the particular hotel brand that appeared on Facebook.

1. Strongly agree 4. Disagree

2. Agree 5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

Question 6: Purchase intention

Source: Sparks and Browning, (2011); (Somohardjo, 2017); (Ladhari and Michaudi, 2015); (Prentice et al. 2019); (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee 2000)

For this below question, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements;

(a). Based on your recent review I saw on the Facebook page about the hotel, my intention to book this hotel would be;(Somohardjo, 2017)

Very low 1 2 3 4 5 Very high

(b). After having read the reviews on Facebook and visited the hotel website, I would purchase a room in this hotel (Ladhari and Michaudi, 2015).

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

(c). I would do more businesses with this hotel in the next few years (Prentice et al. 2019)

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

(d). I would book this hotel rather than any other hotel brand available

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

(e). I am willing to recommend that others purchase this brand (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee 2000).

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

(f). I would purchase or book the hotel brand recommended on Facebook (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee 2000)

1. Strongly agree
4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

(g). I will purchase products that are promoted and shared on Facebook regarding hotels in the near future.

1. Strongly agree

4. Disagree

2. Agree

5. Strongly disagree

3. Neither agree or disagree

APPENDICE C: Cronbach Coefficient Alpha

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.862	6

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q12a	3.96	0.821	143
Q12b	3.85	0.981	143
Q12c	3.97	0.907	143
Q12d	3.89	1.015	143
Q12e	3.67	1.131	143
Q12f	3.87	0.795	143

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q12a	19.24	14.257	0.680	0.836
Q12b	19.36	12.949	0.742	0.822
Q12c	19.24	13.859	0.662	0.837
Q12d	19.31	13.330	0.646	0.840
Q12e	19.53	12.096	0.734	0.824
Q12f	19.33	15.504	0.481	0.866

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.846	6

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q13 _1	3.88	0.736	143
Q13 _2	3.90	0.802	143
Q13 _3	3.71	0.793	143
Q13 _4	3.74	0.748	143
Q13 _5	3.90	0.744	143
Q13 _6	3.47	0.785	143

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q13 _1	18.72	8.710	0.639	0.819
Q13 _2	18.71	8.237	0.684	0.810
Q13 _3	18.89	8.199	0.706	0.805
Q13 _4	18.86	8.135	0.782	0.791
Q13 _5	18.70	8.888	0.583	0.829
Q13 _6	19.13	9.496	0.396	0.865

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.892	5

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q17 _1	3.95	0.685	143
Q17 _2	3.95	0.695	143
Q17 _3	3.90	0.715	143
Q17 _4	3.86	0.869	143
Q17 _5	3.83	0.805	143

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q17 _1	15.55	6.996	0.699	0.876
Q17 _2	15.55	6.560	0.830	0.849
Q17 _3	15.59	6.651	0.769	0.861
Q17 _4	15.64	6.177	0.710	0.877
Q17 _5	15.66	6.478	0.701	0.877

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.946	7

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q18_1	3.75	0.892	143
Q18_2	3.79	0.804	143
Q18_3	3.76	0.839	143
Q18_4	3.68	0.869	143
Q18_5	3.81	0.822	143
Q18_6	3.86	0.793	143
Q18_7	3.71	0.903	143

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q18_1	22.61	19.113	0.856	0.935
Q18_2	22.57	20.177	0.798	0.940
Q18_3	22.59	19.736	0.824	0.938
Q18_4	22.68	19.699	0.795	0.940
Q18_5	22.55	19.940	0.813	0.939
Q18_6	22.50	20.139	0.818	0.938
Q18_7	22.65	19.130	0.841	0.936

APPENDICE D: P-Values

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
FRC	<---	CPI	0.491	0.072	6.811	***	
BA	<---	CPI	0.523	0.06	8.756	***	
CT	<---	CPI	0.267	0.081	3.29	0.001	
CT	<---	BA	-0.042	0.1	-0.425	0.671	
CT	<---	FRC	0.475	0.09	5.307	***	
Q12a	<---	FRC	1				
Q12b	<---	FRC	1.304	0.139	9.382	***	
Q12c	<---	FRC	1.084	0.129	8.4	***	
Q12d	<---	FRC	1.158	0.145	8.006	***	
Q13 _1	<---	CT	1				
Q13 _2	<---	CT	1.2	0.143	8.41	***	
Q13 _3	<---	CT	1.214	0.141	8.596	***	
Q12e	<---	FRC	1.521	0.16	9.492	***	
Q12f	<---	FRC	0.69	0.114	6.029	***	
Q13 _4	<---	CT	1.221	0.134	9.101	***	
Q13 _5	<---	CT	0.93	0.131	7.106	***	
Q13 _6	<---	CT	0.709	0.137	5.186	***	
Q17 _1	<---	BA	1				
Q17 _2	<---	BA	1.184	0.101	11.715	***	
Q17 _3	<---	BA	1.138	0.105	10.829	***	
Q17 _4	<---	BA	1.194	0.132	9.073	***	
Q17 _5	<---	BA	1.126	0.121	9.271	***	
Q18_1	<---	CPI	1				
Q18_2	<---	CPI	0.851	0.064	13.244	***	
Q18_3	<---	CPI	0.911	0.066	13.912	***	
Q18_4	<---	CPI	0.916	0.07	13.123	***	
Q18_5	<---	CPI	0.89	0.064	13.837	***	
Q18_6	<---	CPI	0.848	0.063	13.512	***	
Q18_7	<---	CPI	1.002	0.069	14.521	***	

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	P	
FRC	<---	CPI	0.634	***	
BA	<---	CPI	0.772	***	
CT	<---	CPI	0.407	0.001	
CT	<---	BA	-0.044	0.671	
CT	<---	FRC	0.561	***	
Q12a	<---	FRC	0.738		
Q12b	<---	FRC	0.805		
Q12c	<---	FRC	0.724		
Q12d	<---	FRC	0.691		
Q13 _1	<---	CT	0.697		
Q13 _2	<---	CT	0.767		
Q13 _3	<---	CT	0.786		
Q12e	<---	FRC	0.815		
Q12f	<---	FRC	0.526		
Q13 _4	<---	CT	0.838		
Q13 _5	<---	CT	0.641		
Q13 _6	<---	CT	0.463		
Q17 _1	<---	BA	0.773		
Q17 _2	<---	BA	0.902		
Q17 _3	<---	BA	0.843		
Q17 _4	<---	BA	0.728		
Q17 _5	<---	BA	0.741		
Q18_1	<---	CPI	0.877		
Q18_2	<---	CPI	0.828		
Q18_3	<---	CPI	0.849		
Q18_4	<---	CPI	0.824		
Q18_5	<---	CPI	0.847		
Q18_6	<---	CPI	0.837		
Q18_7	<---	CPI	0.868		

Variances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
CPI	0.607	0.092	6.578	***	
e26	0.112	0.023	4.852	***	
e27	0.218	0.046	4.696	***	
e25	0.073	0.019	3.786	***	
e1	0.305	0.042	7.269	***	
e2	0.336	0.051	6.626	***	
e3	0.389	0.053	7.361	***	
e4	0.534	0.071	7.543	***	
e5	0.277	0.037	7.568	***	
e6	0.263	0.037	7.119	***	
e7	0.239	0.034	6.949	***	
e8	0.427	0.066	6.501	***	
e9	0.454	0.056	8.06	***	
e10	0.166	0.026	6.26	***	
e11	0.324	0.042	7.794	***	
e12	0.481	0.059	8.18	***	
e13	0.187	0.025	7.35	***	
e14	0.089	0.017	5.249	***	
e15	0.147	0.022	6.615	***	
e16	0.352	0.046	7.617	***	
e17	0.29	0.038	7.548	***	
e18	0.183	0.026	7.035	***	
e19	0.202	0.027	7.517	***	
e20	0.194	0.026	7.344	***	
e21	0.241	0.032	7.544	***	
e22	0.189	0.026	7.365	***	
e23	0.187	0.025	7.451	***	
e24	0.2	0.028	7.151	***	

Squared Multiple Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate
BA	0.597
FRC	0.401
CT	0.721
Q18_7	0.753
Q18_6	0.7
Q18_5	0.718
Q18_4	0.679
Q18_3	0.722
Q18_2	0.686
Q18_1	0.769
Q17 _5	0.55
Q17 _4	0.53
Q17 _3	0.711
Q17 _2	0.814
Q17 _1	0.598
Q13 _6	0.214
Q13 _5	0.411
Q13 _4	0.702
Q12f	0.277
Q12e	0.664
Q13 _3	0.617
Q13 _2	0.588
Q13 _1	0.486
Q12d	0.478
Q12c	0.524
Q12b	0.649
Q12a	0.544