

**Assessment of the performance of online marketing platforms used by hotels in uganda
during covid-19 pandemic: A case study of 4 Selected Hotels in Mukono**

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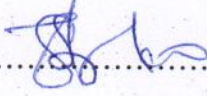


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APPROVAL

This is to certify that this research report has been produced by Racheal Kisakye under my supervision and submitted to Uganda Christian University in partial fulfillment for the award of Bachelors of Tourism and Hospitality Management.


Signature  Date. 15 / 09 / 2023

MR. JUUKO JULIUS

DECLARATION

I, Racheal Kisakye declare that this project is my original work and it has not been submitted in this form or any other form to this or any other institution for examination purposes. Any quotation made has been referenced accordingly.

Author

Signature  Date 15th / 09 / 2023

RACHEAL KISAKYE

DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this project to my dad, Mr. Saka Samuel, my mum Mrs. Norah Saka and all my siblings.

With the following heartfelt words

“Your guidance, support and love will always be treasured”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Completion of this research has been a result of both direct and indirect support of many people to whom I owe acknowledgement.

First, I thank the almighty God for sustaining my life and seeing me through this program at Uganda Christian University. He showed me that I can do all the things through Christ who empowers and strengthens me. I would not have achieved all that I have done without His mercy, grace and provision.

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH AND MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALL

ACRONYMS

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Sciences

LTD. – Limited

UCU- Uganda Christian University

Asst - Assistant

IT – Information Technology

F and B - Food and Beverages

E-commerce- Electronic commerce

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the performance of online marketing platforms used by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic basing on the following objectives; to increase utilization of online marketing platforms and strategies by hotels in Uganda, to identify the online marketing platforms used by hotels in Mukono town during COVID-19 pandemic, to assess the challenges faced by hotels in using the online marketing platforms during COVID-19 pandemic and to suggest mechanisms that may improve online marketing in Ugandan hotels. The research was descriptive in nature involving quantitative methods which was administered through questionnaires. The total sample comprised of 90 respondents of all the hotel managers, clients and hotel management software companies. Simple random sampling was used whereby the researcher went to hotels and interviewed sampled or selected clients plus hotel management software developer companies. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 23 and frequency distribution tables were run to show the results and interpretations from the field according to the questionnaire that were filled by the hotel managers to collect data. This dissertation has 6 chapters in total and findings revealed that hotels remained using the online marketing platforms that had been used before the outbreak of Covid-19 though they emphasized using them to post pictures and videos to show hotel operations and SOPs that had been introduced by the hotel during the pandemic. The most commonly used platforms were social media platforms like facebook, twitter, YouTube, Instagram and others included software applications like Karibu, central management system, sales management system, booking.com, trip advisor, hotel.com. According to the study, challenges that were faced by hotels in using the platforms were clients being used to the traditional ways so they had limited knowledge on how to use online platforms. Other challenges included network and connectivity issues, security issues and language problem as explained in chapter 4 There were mechanisms that were raised up in order to improve online marketing by the hotels in Uganda for example more participation in online events and discussions, educating and training both employees and clients on how to use the online platforms, creating useful and interesting content and partnering with complementary brands. It was concluded that to a larger extent, the online platforms used during covid-19 pandemic helped to improve the performance of hotels especially when SOPs like quarantine, lockdown were lifted by the government for example more hotel bookings, kept hotels presence online, promoted relationship between clients and hotels and improved branding.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Performance, in a business context, refers to the measurable outcomes achieved by an organization in pursuit of its goals. It encompasses various dimensions such as operational efficiency, financial success, customer satisfaction, and market reputation. Within the hospitality industry, particularly in the context of hotels, performance encompasses the overall effectiveness of a hotel's operations and its ability to meet the expectations and demands of its guests. This includes factors such as occupancy rates, revenue generation, guest satisfaction levels, service quality, and the hotel's overall reputation in the market. The Hotel Performance Analysis identifies issues and opportunities, makes recommendations, and proposes specific strategies to maximize revenue, financial performance, and operational efficiencies, while allowing the asset to provide the most appropriate quality and service levels. (Mulnix-Morris, 2023).

In the realm of hotels, an inherent challenge of performance arises when establishments fail to effectively connect with their target audience and fulfill their expectations. Poor marketing practices can significantly contribute to this challenge. The hotel industry is highly competitive; and inadequate marketing strategies can lead to underutilized resources, lower occupancy rates, reduced revenue, and diminished brand recognition. This challenge has been highlighted in various studies. Foroudi et al. (2020) emphasized that a hotel's performance is intricately linked to its marketing efforts and the way it presents its offerings to potential guests. Beeton (2016) also underscored how the strategies employed to advertise and market hotel experiences directly influence visitation rates.

The aforementioned challenge, brought about by suboptimal marketing practices in the hospitality industry, compelled me to delve into assessing the role of online marketing in enhancing hotel performance. With the advent of digitalization and the widespread use of the internet, online marketing has emerged as a crucial avenue for hotels to connect with their target audience in a more personalized, timely, and cost-effective manner. Leveraging various online platforms such as websites, social media, and email marketing, hotels can efficiently communicate their unique value propositions and engage potential guests. As the world becomes increasingly digital, with over

66% of the global population actively using the internet (Joseph, 2022), the significance of online marketing in driving hotel performance cannot be overlooked.

Online marketing, a subset of direct marketing, employs interactive technologies to establish a direct connection between hotels and potential guests in the digital realm (Kotler and Armstrong, 2009). This form of marketing enables hotels to tap into the vast online user base, thereby fostering many-to-many communication and facilitating targeted outreach. Furthermore, online marketing's ability to provide timely, relevant, and personalized communication aligns well with the contemporary preferences of consumers seeking tailored experiences (Bains, 2011). In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely impacted the hotel industry (Nathan, 2021), the migration of customers from offline shopping to online markets (Chen, 2021) underscores the pressing need for hotels to embrace effective online marketing strategies.

Considering the dynamic digital landscape and the challenges posed by the pandemic, the hospitality sector's adoption of online marketing has taken on heightened significance. This research seeks to investigate how hotels can strategically harness online marketing tools and techniques to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic on their performance. By analyzing the effectiveness of online marketing initiatives in maintaining guest engagement, driving bookings, and enhancing overall hotel performance, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can guide hotels in their quest for resilience and recovery in the face of unprecedented challenges.

1.2 The research problem

For a long time, hotels have used traditional marketing methods such as use of billboards, handouts, brochures, direct mail, fliers, print ads magazine adverts, talking to old clients through visiting them, keeping their contacts and bidding to advertise (Mugizi et al., 2021). However, with the outbreak of COVID-19, it has become difficult to continue using the same methods due to restrictions imposed by government to limit the spread of the virus. In this regard, online marketing platforms have been used to continue marketing hotels (Mahmutović, 2021). The role of using digital marketing in mediating the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the performance of hotels has been reported by Giantari et al., (2022), the extent to which hotels have used this approach needs to be examined in order to promote the application of digital technologies and online platforms in marketing of hotels. In the case of hotels in Mukono, limited information is available on the extent to which they have used the post-COVID-19 pandemic approaches in use

of digital and online platforms (Mugizi et al., 2021). The need to provide this information and assist in guiding the hotel managers to use digital methods of marketing to their best advantage motivates the present study.

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 General objective

The general objective of this study is increase utilization of online marketing platforms and strategies by hotels in Uganda.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives are:

- i. To examine the performance of hotels in Uganda
- ii. To examine online marketing platforms usable by hotels
- iii. To assess the performance of online marketing platforms in hotels

1.4 Research questions

- i. What is the performance of hotels in Uganda?
- ii. What online marketing platforms are usable by hotels?
- iii. What is the performance of online marketing platforms in hotels?

1.5 Justification of the study

This study is significant to minimize the knowledge gaps by analyzing the newly adopted online marketing platforms used in the hospitality industry and how they have played a key role in performance of hotels during COVID-19 pandemic. So that, this study can provide information to hospitality authorities, policy makers, hotel academic institutions, hotel online marketers, hotels and clients concerning the most effective platform to invest into in the day to day operations of the business and address challenges in online marketing.

The study will also create a clear and better understanding and detailed analysis of online marketing and it's role which will enhance professional performance and development of hotels

and they will be ready in case of any destruction in the normal operations by planning for best ways of coping up with situations like COVID-19 pandemic.

The study will also allow hotels to accurately track their return on investment and increase sales thus giving a hotel more visibility through allowing potential customers to search hotel products and services online. It will also improve on hotel brand image by ensuring that customer reviews and the glitzy marketing have the intended effect on enhancing reputation.

The study will contribute towards partial fulfillment of my academic award of Bachelor's degree of Tourism and hospitality management at Uganda Christian University.

1.6 Scope of the study

It is essential to make an inquiry into the performance of online marketing platforms and understand them in the wider context of hospitality professionalism. But, conducting such a comprehensive study needs considerable budget, manpower and time. Thus, the researcher will only focus on undertaking the study of online marketing platforms adopted by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic through interaction with the hotel management on how they have used these newly adopted platforms and some challenges that have been faced. Given the qualitative nature of this study, selected respondents will be required to answer structured and semi-structured questions to gather the relevant information on the topic of study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The concept of online marketing

There are several stages to online marketing. Muhammad (2011) the process begins with the creation of a business strategy, continues with understanding market opportunity, creates a marketing strategy centered solely on the guest experience, creates a marketing program by creating a customer interface, and evaluates the marketing program as a whole. 2011 (Robert).

The hospitality sector has unquestionably benefited from the internet's quick uptake, increased accessibility to E-commerce, and rise in online bookings. Hotels are using Internet marketing to promote their services as more and more visitors from around the world use the internet to book rooms and make travel plans. As a result, hotels are able to promote to a wider audience because they are no longer constrained by geography or local areas for their marketing activities. 2019 (ZhanWang).

The amount of time people spend online is increasing at such a rapid rate that they now find it easier to plan their vacations online than in person. This presents a chance for hotels to engage in online marketing, and a plan has been proposed for facilitating the shift from the traditional to the digital business ecosystem. Kruse (2002). With the rise of globalization, distance became obsolete as the internet connected service providers and customers regardless of their locations or preferred venues for conducting business. Similar to this, hotels that use online marketing have access to customers all over the world, enabling tourists and business visitors to book hotel rooms worldwide without any restrictions.

By knowing customer needs ,brands become less powerful as customers get information through online to know hotel facilities, products and services like rooms, restaurants, breakfast, lunch and dinner buffet, Spa, banquet hall, fitness center, bar and coffee shop(Kim, 2012.)which encourages sharing of information, opinions advertisement and evaluation in turn thus enhancing business capabilities. (Angella, 2012.)

Hotel businesses whether small, large, starting as a freelancer, experienced or professional cannot be without a social media outlets or presence that markets their products and services. Mahmutović, 2021b). The key aspect that would determine the hotel success or failure lies in how

well it can promote it's business or service leveraging the presence that they have on social media like to first sign up as many early adopters as possible who can be asked to review products or services and leave ratings based on customers' satisfaction levels. (Prachi, 2001.)

The response times to queries on all outlets determine digital marketing success that is to say if a hotel responds to questions and both positive and negative feedback within time, then the individuals who have posted such feedback or have rated would immediately know that the hotel is serious about it's products and services offered.(Prachi, 2005.)

2.2 Online marketing platforms

Online advertising on Google and online magazines from intermediaries like travel agents, tour operators, and other tour operators as major sources for all hotels because they bring guests with the help of their advertisement media and their behaviors in determining their comfort levels has made a remarkable change in marketing and opened new channels for selling products (Guanting, 2015).

In order to boost hotel sales, hotels must identify new technologies that support maintaining their online presence, including with online retailers (OTAs) and social networking sites (Lorenzo, 2014). Indeed, online marketing offers website owners a way to convert the digital footprint of the visitors to the websites into monetary values thereby ensuring that they do not lose out on their low cost access and find new ways to convert clicks and eyeball views into product sales(Paul, 2011.)

Indeed, the key to successful online marketing is the complementarities that the website and the ads that are being placed on it have in common. This is the reason why many websites and the advertisers who place ads do so with view of attracting what are known as Click Through consumers. (Winarsih et al, 2017.)

2.3 Advantages of online marketing by hotels

Online marketing has many advantages most especially during COVID-19 pandemic since the world went into lockdown and since people had to eat food, hotels had to go more of online.

2.3.1 Improving hotel brand image.

This is through ensuring that customer reviews and glitzy marketing have the intended effect of enhancing the reputation of the hotels. For example favorable customer reviews of hotels on sites like Make my Trip, Travel Advisor, and other content aggregators has the effect of more customers booking rooms in the hotels that attract positive reviews from satisfied customers(Bulut, 2020.)Conversely, those hotels that are ranked below and have disgruntled customers writing bad reviews find themselves out of favor with new customers. This “electronic word of mouth” that happens because of travel websites and websites devoted to customers around the world who might be planning their trips to various destinations has greatly contributed to loyal customers and returning customers for the hotels that actualize customer delight and customer satisfaction. Returning customers are very valuable because the marketing effort can then focus on new customers hence leading to cost efficiencies which is a strong point in favor of hotels undertaking extensive online marketing.

2.3.2 Doing away with Intermediaries

Hotel service providers and customers interact directly .The airline industry was the first to phase out the intermediaries with airlines first reaching out to flyers online and the travel agents facilitating the process. This gradually phased out the travel agents with most bookings being done online. The hotels are following suit, which means that the costs entailed because of the intermediaries can now be saved leading to value addition to the customers who can avail of the discounts and the leading hotels now accept bookings directly on their websites. (Buhalis, 2012.)

2.3.3 Increasing incidence of guests booking hotel rooms

This has not only improved the booking rate of hotels but has also let them pass on hefty discounts to the customers which would otherwise had to be shared with the travel agents and other intermediaries. In other words, the advent of online booking has been a win-win situation for the hotels and the customers. (Leguma, 2013.)

2.4 Challenges of online marketing by hotels

Hospitality industry is one of the few industries that can offer exciting, challenging, and varied career (Mitchell, 2005) and several challenges hinder the role performance of hotels.

2.4.1 Tried and true methods becoming outdated

Even though email marketing is proven to be the most effective way to engage with customers and prospective guests and many stick by it. However, Two-thirds of the Baby Boomer generations are now online and the younger Generation already see email as a slow and boring way to communicate. For them, it's about video content, text messaging, and smart technology. If anything is certain, it's that the mobile revolution has now well and truly succeeded.

Emerging enthusiasm for, and knowledge in, technology opens up a veritable minefield for hotel marketers. Since there's less history to base results on, how do you know what the best strategy is. (Chowdhary and Prakash, 2008.) The future is even harder to predict with new ways to connect popping up seemingly each day. It's important to continue the trend of marketing to individuals rather than generalized groups of guests.

2.4.2. Hoteliers have less influence on guests than before

The unrelenting rise of travel sites and online travel agencies has the potential to limit the impact hotels can have on the decision of a guest. For example, Trip Advisor's website alone gets 20 million visits each month, with over seven million online reviews left for hotels. Each of those reviews has the power to influence the decision of another customer with very little input from the hotelier at all.

Hotels can also struggle to gain control of their profiles and Algorithms and ranking systems can restrict the visibility of certain property listings and there's also no guarantee on how much guest information will share with the hotel. Staying attentive to these channels will help, but it also positions direct bookings as an even more important challenge for hotel marketers to conquer (Prakash, 2008.)

2.4.3 Getting on top of data is a must

The more data you have, the more strategic you can be. That's the simple mantra for hotels, but it's not always so easy to analyse large volumes of data and make the right decisions.

Search engine algorithms are constantly changing and finding accuracy within keyword strategy results can be difficult. If a large proportion of revenue relies on search engine rankings, an inconsistent landscape, it's a dangerous position to be in.

It's also almost impossible to accurately track a visitor's experience throughout the buying process and without even mentioning the overwhelming presence of social media; it is unclear if any company has completely figured out a foolproof social media plan. Hotels must constantly ask themselves what content they should be producing, how they produce it, and who they're producing it for. Then, it has to be tailored slightly differently for every social channel they use.

2.5 Hotel bookings and reservations

Hotel booking is an act or arrangement that a client makes to reserve any product or service offered by the hotel for example a hotel room, a table at the restaurant in advance. A booking can have different conditions like payments upon arrival, non refundable and cash payment. (Smith, 2011.)

Reservation refers to blocking a particular room type for a guest, for a definite period of time, for a particular guest'. (Dave, 2011.) To ensure a safe and secure place to stay during their visit to another town, guests generally prefer to make advance reservations in hotels and other types of accommodation units.

Online hotel bookings and reservations are a popular method for booking hotel rooms. Guests book rooms on a computer by using online security to protect their privacy, financial information and by using several online travel agents to compare prices and facilities at different hotels. Nowadays, online travel agents have pictures of hotels and rooms, information on prices and deals. (Keller, 2009.)

Online hotel reservations are also helpful for making last minute travel arrangements. There are several websites that specialize in searches for deals on rooms. All hotels will readily accept advance reservations and booking in order to achieve high occupancy and to maximize their room revenue. (Dickinson, 2009.)

The competitiveness of the marketplace and the increased expectations of customers have made service providers recognize the importance of customer service for future repeat and referral business (Bowie & Chang, 2005).

In this context, regardless of the industry, business enterprises, which have become conscious of this necessity, have been trying hard to increase the satisfaction level acquired from the offered

goods and services and make up the portfolio of more loyal customer by having close communication with their customers (Bulut, 2011).

Customer perception is composed of hard tangible and soft intangible service. It is a combination of, on the one hand, the customers' anticipation and perception of the vacation, their expectation prior to the tour, their attitudes and behavior (past experience) and their perceptions of equity and unforeseeable events during service encounters (Bowie & Chang, 2005).

This research is basically for assessing online marketing strategies and platforms adopted by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic in relation to hotel booking and reservation.

Importance of online booking and reservation for the guests include ensuring room on arrival (Wong, 2009.), budgeting, plan holiday or rooms plus other facilities

Online booking and reservation is also important of to the hotel for example rate floating, forecasting, guest satisfaction and proper planning.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section presents the methods which will be used during the research. It presents study design, data collection techniques, data analysis and limitations that are likely to be faced during the study.

3.2 Study Design

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), research design is an outline plan or scheme that is used to generate answers to a research problem. It's basically the structure and plan of investigation. The study will adopt a descriptive research design, this design is chosen because the research is social in nature and it has the advantage of profiling and examining associative relationships among the category of subjects under study and helps different researchers to observe a similar phenomenon yet come up with different findings.

The study will employ both quantitative and qualitative research approach in order to describe the findings that would be collected through interviews and questionnaires.

3.3 Study Population

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), a population is a well-defined as a set of people, services, elements and events, a group of things household that are being investigated. The population of study will be limited to 4 selected hotels within Mukono that is to say; Ridar Hotel, Collines Hotel, Mars Hotel, Mukono Resort Hotel, and Hotel Alvers. These hotels are known to engage in online marketing with excellent reviews.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

3.4.1 Sample Size

Sampling is the process of selecting several individuals for the study in such way that individuals selected represent the large group from which they were selected (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The 45 employees at the hotels will form the sampling frame from which a sample of 40 will be selected using the Yamane (1967) formulae as seen below;

$$\frac{N}{1+N(0.05)^2} = \frac{45}{1+45(0.05)^2} = 40$$

3.4.2 Sampling Techniques

The study will utilize simple random sampling and Purposive to select the respondents. The employees will be selected through a simple random technique, simple random sampling is chosen because when used each individual in the large population set has the same probability of being selected, in this it carries the greatest potential for representing the larger group as a whole with limited bias (Melissa, 2019).

Purposive sampling will be used to determine the key informants' to give answers on the formulated structured questions about the study. For the respondents from the hotel management, purposive sampling method will be used because a researcher will only go to those people who in her opinion were likely to have the required information and will be willing to share. They will be so important in this research because they are well equipped with more knowledge and information about the ways in which they market the hotel online to attract customers and they know how their services are perceived by customers through their comments.

3. 5 Sources of data

The study will use both secondary and primary data. Secondary data refers to the information obtained from articles, books, newspapers, internet and magazines. Primary data which is the firsthand information collected directly from the respondents will be got from the employees.

3.6 Methods of data collection

The researcher will utilise questionnaires and Interview guides to collect information from the respondents. The use of the questionnaire method will be used to collect quantitative data due to its ease to use in the process of gathering information. It gives the respondents enough time to answer the questions since questionnaires will be distributed to the respondents and then collected after a week. It is also one of the important methods used in the study of social problems and the respondents have to answer the questions on their own (Amin 2005).

The questionnaires will have both open ended and close ended questions. Open ended questions refer to questions which give the respondent complete freedom of response. These questions permit the respondent to use his or her words. The amount of space provided is, however, a good indicator of whether a brief or lengthy answer is desired. Close ended questions are those

questions which are accompanied by a list of all possible alternatives from which respondents select the answer that best describes their situation.

Interviews

The researcher will write topic related interviews and discussions with key informants to collect data on research questions which were designed using structured and unstructured interview guides to add on the information that would be got from the main respondents. This tool will give the researcher a chance to interact and establish close contacts with the respondents giving a chance to the respondents to ask questions where clarification and explanation would be required. Respondents have a greater degree of freedom of expression and confidentiality during the exercise so the tool saves time since it can be done at one's own convenience but still within the set data collection period (Owens, 2010). The interview guides with pre designed questions will be read to the respondents face to face and their responses will be noted down. This will be influential in capturing the information that would not be captured by the questionnaire surveys. For this method to be effective the researcher will first organize by presenting a research letter from the University and asking them for permission to collect information from them.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Brewerton and Millward, (2001), Tashakkori and Teddlie recommend that a researcher should have a data collection strategy before embarking on the data collection exercise. The questionnaire will be administered using a drop and pick later method. The interviews will be conducted by recording and writing respondents' answers.

3.8 Validity and reliability

3.8.1 Validity

The instruments will be developed by the researcher and first given to the supervisor, then other lecturers and fellow students for crucial scurrility. These will be requested to make comments on clarity of items and the ability of each instrument to gather the required data in order to meet the set objectives of this study. They will also comment on the length of the questionnaires and the time to be spent in answering the items, a practice recommended by Jacobs and Razavieh (1990).

The comments made by various experts and colleagues will help in making adjustments and refining the final research instruments which will be used in data collection.

The Content Validity Index (CVI) will be computed using the following formula:

CVI = $\frac{\text{Sum of agreement on a very relevant judgment}}{\text{Total number of questions}} \times 100$

Total number of questions

When the CVI = 0.5 and above, the instrument will be accepted as valid because instruments with valid coefficient of at least 0.7 are accepted in research, as noted by Kathuri and Pals (1993).

3.8.2 Reliability

In order to consider consistence of the results, the research instruments will be piloted. As Amin (2005) suggested, the researcher, in testing the reliability of data tools, will use an internal constancy method as it will be easy to administer and save time as administration will be done once. The Cronbach Alpha will be used in computation because respondents may present more than one response. The results obtained from the respondents will be measured and the value of the coefficient obtained to confirm whether the tools are reliable. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient equal to or greater than 0.7 is considered satisfactory (Amin, 2005).

3.9 Data Analysis

Completed data collection tools will be double checked by the researcher before data entry. Data will be entered in to SPSS version 20 for cleaning and analysis, data will be prepared for analysis by recording them as per the requirements for the analysis. Multiple linear regressions will be used to examine the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

Under qualitative data from the key informants, the researcher will first identify the main, then classify responses under the theme. Finally, the researcher will integrate the themes and responses into the text of the final report.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethics are the norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong (Bryman, 2016). These help to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. The researcher will ensure that this study is carried out within the legal framework by seeking permission to conduct the study by obtaining an introduction letter from Uganda Christian University authorities. The researcher will treat all responses obtained from the study with confidentiality, only for academic purposes and ensure that all the data is presented in aggregate form. The right of self-determination will be fully observed by the researcher and this will be

demonstrated by requesting the subjects to volunteer to participate in the study at their own free will.

Informed consent will be obtained from all those participating in the study. Those not willing to participate in the study will be under no obligation to do so. Respondents' names will not be indicated anywhere in data collection tools for confidentiality and the information gathered will be only used for the purposes of this academic study. The necessary research authorities will be consulted to seek for permission.

3.11 Anticipated limitations

There will be limited time since the researcher will be operating in a tight schedule of very few months. Some respondents may be non-responsive to some of the questions, as they may give an excuse that some questions are sensitive. The researcher will endeavour to elaborate on the intentions of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the results of the study that was undertaken to assess the performance of online marketing platforms used by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic using case study of four selected hotels in Mukono. The results have been presented according to the specific objectives already stated in Chapter One.

4.2 Demographics characteristics of respondents

According to the responses from 40 hotel managers, the study's findings showed that 52.5% of respondents were men and 47.5% were women, demonstrating that both sexes were given an equal opportunity to participate in this profession. 52.5% of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29; 42.5% were between the ages of 30 and 44; 5% were between the ages of 45 and 59; and 0% were over the age of 60. 47.5% of respondents reported being single, 52.5% reported being married, and 15% reported having completed high school as their greatest level of education, compared to 40% who said they had a diploma and 45% who said they had a degree or higher.

Table 1: Respondents ' profile (N= 40)

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	21	52.5
Female	19	47.5
Age		
18-29	21	52.5
30-44	17	42.5
45-59	2	5
Marital status		
Single	19	47.5

Married	21	52.5
Educational qualification		
High school	6	15
Diploma	16	40
Degree or above	18	45

4.3 Managers' period at the hotel

According to the results in the table below, 52.5% of respondents said they had been at the hotel for between one and three years, 22% said they had stayed there for between four and six years, and 7.5% said they had stayed there for seven years or more.

Table 2: Managers' period at the hotel

Period at work(years)	Frequency	Percent
1-3	21	52.5
4-6	16	22
7 and above	2	7.5

4.4 Position at the hotel

In accordance with the findings in the table below, 10% of respondents were front office managers, assistant sales and marketing managers, IT managers, food and beverage managers, engineering and maintenance managers, while 7.5% were sales and marketing managers, assistant front office managers, assistant IT managers, floor supervisors, and 5% were receptionists, business development managers, guests relations officers, and store managers. Table 3 shows the percentage of respondents who were receptionists, business development managers, guests relations officers, and store managers.

Table 3: Position at the hotel

Position	Frequency	Percent
Front office manager	4	10
Assistant front office manager	3	7.5
Sales and marketing manager	3	7.5
Assistant sales and marketing manager	4	10
Information Technology manager	4	10
Assistant IT manager	3	7.5
Floor supervisor	3	7.5
Food and beverages manager	4	10
Engineering and maintenance manager	4	10
Receptionist	2	5
Business development manager	2	5
Guest relations officer	2	5
Store manager	2	5
Total	40	100

4.5 Roles performed at the hotel

Each manager had a variety of responsibilities at the hotel, including: 9% check in and out visitors, 8% produce daily reports, supervise the front desk personnel, 7% respond to emails, 6% deal with guests, and take phone calls, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Roles performed at the hotel

Roles performed	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Dealing with guests	6	6.0%	16.2%
Managing front office staff	8	8.0%	21.6%
Providing excellent and professional services to guests	9	9.0%	24.3%
Checking in and checking out guests	9	9.0%	24.3%
Receiving phone calls	6	6.0%	16.2%
Replying emails	7	7.0%	18.9%
Making daily reports	8	8.0%	21.6%
Supervision of departments	6	6.0%	16.2%
Contract negotiation	5	5.0%	13.5%
Taking clients to choose rooms	2	2.0%	5.4%
Maintaining safety and security of clients	3	3.0%	8.1%
Day to day support of all IT systems	7	7.0%	18.9%
Bringing in business	7	7.0%	18.9%
Providing training to staff	5	5.0%	13.5%
Network enhancement	2	2.0%	5.4%
Generating sales potential	3	3.0%	8.1%
Keeping hotel premises clean and organized	2	2.0%	5.4%
Controlling expenses and shortages	4	4.0%	10.8%
Ensuring safety of food and drinks given to guests	1	1.0%	2.7%
Total	100	100.0%	270.3%

4.6 Online marketing platforms used by hotels during COVID-19

According to the study, Facebook accounted for 72.5% of the hotels' use of online marketing platforms, followed by Twitter (60%), websites (57.5%), emails (55%) and Instagram (50%) and YouTube (47.5%). Booking.com, trip advisor, LinkedIn's Instagramtels.com (22.5%), LinkedIn's Instagramtels.com (10%), Whatsapp groups (7.5%), and Karibu (7.5%) were the least-used platforms. The results are displayed in the following table 5.

Table 5: Online marketing platforms used during Covid-19

Platform	Responses	
	N	Percent
Facebook	29	15%
Instagram	20	10%
Twitter	24	12%
Google	17	9%
Email	22	11%
Website	23	12%
Karibu	3	2%
Booking.com	10	5%
Hotels.com	6	3%
Whatsapp groups	4	2%
Trip advisor	10	5%
Linkedin	9	5%
Youtube	19	10%
Total	196	100%

4.7 Online marketing platforms used by hotels during COVID-19

The study found that Facebook (used by the hotels for 72.5% of their online marketing) was the most popular platform, followed by Twitter (used by hotels for 60%), websites (used by hotels for 57.5% of their marketing), emails (used by hotels for 55% of their marketing), Instagram (used by hotels for 50% of their marketing), YouTube (used by hotels for 47.5% of their marketing), Google (used by hotels for 42.5% of their marketing), Booking.com (used by hotels for 25% of their marketing).

Table 6 : Online marketing platforms used during Covid-19

	Responses	
	N	Percent
Facebook	29	15%
Instagram	20	10%
Twitter	24	12%
Google	17	9%
Email	22	11%
Website	23	12%
Karibu	3	2%
Booking.com	10	5%
Hotels.com	6	3%
Whatsapp groups	4	2%
Trip advisor	10	5%
Linkedin	9	5%
Youtube	19	10%
Total	196	100%

4. 8 Purposes of online marketing platforms

Different respondents indicated different purposes of online marketing platforms used by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic for example 16.4% indicated keeping hotel presence online, 14.7% of the respondents indicated ease and bring more hotel bookings and reservations and others are shown below

Table 7: Purposes of online marketing platforms

	Responses	
	N	Percent
marketing hotel products and services	11	10%
search engine optimization	15	13%
keep clients informed about new products and services	12	10%
ease and bring more hotel bookings and reservations	17	15%
keep hotel presence online	19	16%
make virtual pictures and videos showing hotel entities and operations	15	13%
better ratings and reviews	16	14%
bring in more business	11	10%
	116	100%

4.9 Sources of online marketing platforms

According to the results in the table above 20% of the respondents indicated play store, 20% indicated online booking platforms, 18% indicated tour and travel agents, 18% said that the platforms were developed by the hotel, 18% indicated hotel management software companies while 8% indicated search engines as their sources of online marketing platforms as indicated below;

Table 8: Sources of online marketing platforms

	Responses	
	N	Percent
search engines	3	8%
hotel management software companies	7	18%
developed by the hotel	7	18%
Play store	8	20%
tour and travel agents	7	18%
Online booking platforms	8	20%
	40	100%

4.10Performance of online marketing platforms

The study found that online marketing platforms performed well during the COVID-19 pandemic; specifically, 35% of hotel management respondents strongly agreed that more clients and increased business were realized, and others agreed that there were more hotel bookings and reservations, kept hotel presence online, improved branding, more sales, more experienced staff, more international market, promoted relationship between hotels and guests, and encouraged return visits.

Table 9: Performance of online marketing platforms

Performance	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
more bookings and reservation	13	10.6%	32.5%
increased business	14	11.4%	35.0%
more clientel	14	11.4%	35.0%
clientel still knew about the existence of hotel with products and services offered by the hotel	10	8.1%	25.0%
keep hotel presence online	9	7.3%	22.5%
branding	8	6.5%	20.0%
more sales	11	8.9%	27.5%
more experienced staff	11	8.9%	27.5%
more international market	11	8.9%	27.5%
promote relationship between hotel and clientel	8	6.5%	20.0%
return visits	6	4.9%	15.0%
creativity and innovation	3	2.4%	7.5%
minimized the spread of covid-19	5	4.1%	12.5%
Total	123	100.0%	307.5%

4.11 Results from hotel clients

In interviews with clients from various hotels in Uganda, it was found that a majority of them did not use online marketing platforms for booking hotel and conference rooms. Out of the 40 clients interviewed, only 25 made use of online platforms such as booking.com, trip advisor, hotels.com, facebook, instagram and youtube. The main reasons for not using online platforms were lack of knowledge, limited availability of electronic gadgets, language barriers and network connectivity issues. Additionally, some clients did not trust online platforms due to security and privacy concerns.

The clients who used online marketing platforms faced some challenges such as poor network connectivity and limited knowledge about the platforms. However, they recommended that hotels should work with the government to sensitize and educate clients on how to use online platforms to access their services. In general, the clients felt that online platforms were helpful in accessing hotel services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.12 RESULTS FROM THE HOTEL MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE COMPANIES

According to software developers, IT interns, and accounting interns from Wingersoft Technologies (Ltd) and Billbrain Technologies, they have developed software for hotels such as Sales Management Software, Tally ERPQ, Central Management System, and IDS to assist with the hotel's financial recording and booking processes. Furthermore, they have provided domain hosting, IT support, and online marketing services through platforms such as LinkedIn and Gmail.

Nonetheless, these professionals have encountered challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as network data issues, security concerns, and power supply problems. To address these concerns, they suggested working remotely from home.

To improve online marketing in Ugandan hotels, they recommended implementing a system that is user-friendly while hiring expert staff, promoting the benefits of online marketing, enhancing existing software, testing and maintaining it regularly, understanding clients' needs, and selling the business to potential clients.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the discussion of findings of the study as analyzed in Chapter four. The discussion is based on the specific objectives and research questions as stated in chapter one. However, in some cases the researcher's personal interpretation and understanding was used to discuss the results and findings of this study.

5.2 Online marketing platforms used by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic

In order to connect with customers, hotels used internet marketing strategies using a variety of digital media, including search engines, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. According to the study, Facebook accounted for the largest percentage of online marketing platforms used by hotels (72.5%), followed by Twitter (60%), websites (57.5%), emails (55%) and Instagram (50%) and Google (42.5%). Booking.com, trip advisor, LinkedIn's Instagramtels.com (22.5%), Whatsapp groups (10%), and Karibu (7.5%) accounted for the smallest percentages.

These online platforms were created with the intention of promoting hotel goods and services, improving search engine rankings, informing customers about new goods and services, facilitating and increasing hotel bookings and reservations, maintaining hotel presence online, and generating more revenue through higher ratings and reviews. Daily updates to the digital hotel marketing circuits help clients identify hotels more easily and draw them in with a variety of deals and amenities. By optimizing the website, also known as SEO, a business can achieve a high rating in a search engine. (Miller 2012, pgs. 125–126)

5.3 Performance of online marketing platforms

According to data collected from the field, online marketing helped hotels to a larger extent for example in establishing a brand identity, reaching out to millions of travelers, marketing rooms on a global platform.

According to the study, online marketing platforms performed highly during COVID-19 pandemic that is to say according to the hotel management respondents, 35% strongly agreed that more clients and increased business was achieved as lockdown started to lift and others agreed that there were more hotel bookings and reservations, kept hotel presence online, improved branding, more sales, more experienced staff, more international market, promoted relationship between hotels and guests, return visits and encouraged creativity and innovation and also reduced the spread of COVID-19 pandemic

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that hotels can enhance their visibility and attract more customers by implementing effective online marketing strategies. This includes outlining the online marketing platform, setting specific and measurable goals, maintaining consistency, and engaging with the audience.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are the most commonly used online marketing channels by hotels. This is because these platforms have a vast user base, which allows hotels to target a wide range of customers. However, proper knowledge and skills are required to develop the best social media marketing tactics to increase business.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, hotels did not adopt any new online marketing platforms, but instead, they focused on improving the use of existing platforms. For example, hotels increased their frequency of posting videos and pictures on social media platforms to engage with prospective customers.

Effective online marketing has numerous benefits for hotels, including an increase in direct bookings, better reach over consumer prospects, forming and strengthening relationships, and attracting talented individuals.

Lastly, in today's highly competitive hospitality industry, building close relationships with customers has become mandatory for hotels that want to remain viable and increase their market share. By utilizing effective online marketing strategies, hotels can develop strong relationships with their customers and outperform their competitors.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations should be implemented by hotels in Uganda to enhance effective online marketing:

1. Adopt a customer-centric approach where every member of staff including reception, housekeeping, restaurant service, and facilities management is trained to offer exceptional customer service.
2. Effectively market hotel products and services online by leveraging digital advertising, which has the potential to reach millions of potential customers online.
3. Re-evaluate online marketing strategies to take advantage of the ever-expanding online market.
4. Implement advanced technology-based solutions such as robust voice search optimization strategies to derive benefits from consumer behavior.
5. Work with reliable digital marketing companies to derive maximum benefits and get rid of ineffective marketing strategies that affect the hotel's growth.
6. Hotel managers should actively compete for guests in new channels and digital communities that emerge every day.
7. Closely manage online reputation due to the heightened sensitivity to cleanliness and preventative measures from guests coming out of the pandemic. Ensure that measures are put in place to prevent bad reviews.

By implementing the above recommendations, hotels in Uganda can enhance their online marketing efforts to attract more customers, improve their reputation, and gain a competitive edge.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire to hotel management

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is **RACHEAL KISAKYE** a third year student at Uganda Christian University pursuing a bachelor’s degree of Science in tourism and hospitality management. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am carrying out a study on the topic; **“Assessment of the performance of online marketing platforms used by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic.”** You have been randomly selected to take part in this study and I assure you that the research is purely academic and your contribution is very important, your response will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality.

Section I: Background information

Tick (✓) in the relevant block or writing down your answer in the space provided.

1.1 Gender: Male Female

1.2 Age: 18-29 30-44 45-59 60 and above

1.3 Marital status: Single Married Divorced

1.4 Educational qualification:

High school Diploma Degree or above

1.5 For how long have you been working at this hotel (years or months)?

.....

1.6 What is your position at this hotel?

.....

1.7 What roles do you perform at the hotel?

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.....
.....

Section 2: Online marketing platforms used by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic

2.1 What business related effects did your hotel face during the COVID-19 pandemic?

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.....
.....

2.2 Which online marketing platforms were used by the hotel during COVID-19 pandemic?

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2.3 Why were those platforms mentioned above chosen amongst others?

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.....

2.4 For what purposes were these online marketing platforms at the hotel?

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.....
.....

2.5 What are the sources of these online marketing platforms?

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.....

2.6 Which categories of clients use these online platforms?

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.....
.....

2.7 Have these online marketing platforms helped to solve the COVID-19 effects that were faced?

Yes No

2.8 What is the performance of online marketing platforms that are used by this hotel?

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Section 3: Challenges faced in using online marketing platforms

3.1 What challenges have you encountered when adopting and using online marketing platforms as hotel management and to what extent do you agree with each of the following statements? Please indicate your answer using the following. 5-point scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, and Strongly agree (Please mark only one option for each challenge)

Challenge	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
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Network/connectivity issues

Training staff and clients on how to use online platforms

Limited Knowledge about the adopted platforms

High costs of purchasing these platforms and maintaining them

Security and Privacy issues

Matching competition from other platform users

Time consuming

Content optimization

3.2 What other challenges have you faced in the process of adoption and usage of online marketing platforms?

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.....
.....
.....

Section 4: Mechanisms of improving online marketing

4.1 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements for improving online marketing.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Mechanism	1	2	3	4	5
More utilization and building email list.					
Boosting organic social presence.					
Optimizing site for Search Engine Optimization.					
Creating interesting and useful content					
Partnering with complementary brands.					
More participation in online events and discussions.					

3.2. What other mechanisms for improving online marketing can be adopted to boost hotel business in Ugandan?

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.....

Thank you for your cooperation and patience in completing this questionnaire.

Appendix 2: Interview guide to hotel clients

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Racheal Kisakye, a third year student at Uganda Christian University pursuing a bachelor's degree in tourism and hospitality management. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am carrying out a study on the topic; **“Assessment of the performance of online marketing platforms adopted by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic”** You have been randomly selected to take part in this study and I assure you that the research is purely academic and your contribution is very important, your response will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality.

Please answer the following questions

- 1) Background information like Gender, age, marital status and highest educational qualification
- 2) What is your place of origin (country or district)?
- 3) How many times have you been to this hotel?
- 4) How did you know the existence of this hotel?
- 5) Do you use the online marketing platforms to access hotel services?
- 6) Which online marketing platforms were introduced by the hotel and you used them to access hotel services during Covid-19 pandemic?
- 7) Why did you choose to use these online platforms?
- 8) For what purposes were these online platforms?
- 9) If you did not use these online marketing platforms, give reasons
- 10) To what extent have online platforms helped to improve services delivered by hotels?
- 11) What challenges have you faced while accessing hotel services using online marketing platforms?
- 12) How have you been able to overcome those challenges?
- 13) What mechanisms can be applicable to improve online marketing in Ugandan hotels?

Thank you for your co-operation and patience in completing this interview

Appendix 3: Interview schedule for Key informants (Hotel management software companies)

Dear Sir/Madam, My name is Racheal Kisakye, a third year student at Uganda Christian University pursuing a bachelor's degree of in tourism and hospitality management. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am carrying out a study on the topic; **“Assessment of the performance of online marketing platforms adopted by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic”** You have been randomly selected to take part in this study and I assure you that the research is purely academic and your contribution is very important, your response will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality.

Please answer the following questions;

1. Background Information like Gender, age, marital status and highest educational qualification
2. What is your Position at the company and for how long have you been working at this company?
3. What roles do you perform at the company?
4. What online marketing platforms were introduced by your company that were used by hotels during COVID-19 pandemic?
5. For what purposes were the online marketing platforms to hotels
6. What is the performance of the adopted platforms to hotels?
7. What platforms are most commonly used by hotels and why?
8. What challenges have you faced while introducing these online marketing platforms to hotels?
9. How have you been able to overcome those challenges?
10. How do you rate the developed platforms in usage and boosting business in the hotel?
11. What mechanisms can be applicable to improve online marketing in Ugandan hotels?

Thank you for your co-operation and patience in responding to this interview



UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

1st Aug 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Name: RACNEAL KISAKTE Reg. No.

A bachelor's student who is seeking permission from your office to collect data for his/her dissertation titled

"ASSESSMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF ONLINE MARKETING PLATFORMS USED BY HOTELS IN UGANDA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

We shall be grateful if you could render assistance to him/her in collecting the necessary data for his/her dissertation

The Uganda Christian University School of Business thanks you in advance

Mukisa Simon Peter
Research coordinator