EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMPONENTS ON CUSTOMER CHOICE OF SELECTED HOTELS IN NAKURU TOWN, KENYA

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by Student

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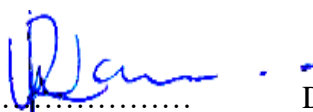**Declaration by the Supervisors**

This research thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Kipronoh B. Malel and mum, Martha Malel for her support, mentorship and encouragement throughout my study period.

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ABSTRACT

In the modern world, social media has emerged to be unavoidable source of information for the various decisions that people make. Social media, through diverse channels and social networks, has given rise to a high level of interactivity and information to hotel customers. Previous studies on customers' hotel choice mainly focused on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Consequently, there is little information on whether social media components shape customers choice of hotels. Furthermore, little research has empirically investigated the effects of social media components on customer choice of hotels especially in Kenya. Hence, the specific objectives were to investigate the effects of social media reviews, social media interactivity and social media informativity on hotel choice and to assess the importance of social media accounts in the hotels. The study was guided by the social exchange theory and social media components model. Anchoring on both explanatory and descriptive research designs, the study targeted 40 town hotels in Nakuru where 5 hotels were selected and targeted 640 hotel guests and 40 managers. The sample size comprised of 246 guests and 5 managers. The guests were selected using simple random sampling while the managers were purposively selected. Self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the guests and managers respectively. Multiple linear regression was used to analyze quantitative data while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. The regression analysis established that social media components explained 59.3% (R^2 = .593) of the variance in hotel choice. Further, the results revealed that social media reviews (β =.239, P =.007), social media interactivity (β =.299, P =.001) and social media informativity (β=.277, P=.001) all had a positive and significant effect on hotel choice. Furthermore, findings from interviews conducted revealed that hotels used Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as main social media accounts. The study thus concluded that social media components are important elements of customer choice of hotel. Hence, customers should make the most of the social media reviews that can support their choice. Hotel managers are encouraged to show how visual and inviting their properties are through their social media accounts, or better yet through influencer marketing with online content creators. Finally, hotels should make the most of social media platforms, as their use is only expected to increase.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Customer choice: It refers to the decisions that consumers make with regard to products and services (KWHS, 2012). In this study, it refers to selection of hotels which is perceived as having the greatest utility and pleasurable experience from a collection of alternatives, to fulfill specific needs and desires.

Online community: Is a virtual group, the members of which communicate mainly via the Internet (Zhu, Uddin, Venkatasubramanian, Hsu & Hong, 2018). In this study, it refers to a group of individuals who share their customer experiences via social media, including engaging with other members or the organization about their interests and views and criticizing the services provided.

Social media: It is the online communication channels in which the users create and exchange information and interact with each other in different ways (Fuchs, 2017). It is conceptualized in the present study as the means by which hotel customers and managers communicate in virtual communities and networks in order to connect and create or share knowledge and ideas.

Social media accounts: Any platforms, profiles, websites, feeds, registrations and other presences in or connected to social media or social networking website or similar online service; or forums or microblogs (Han, Wang, Xu & Zhang, 2016). In this study, social media accounts refers to online platforms on which hotels can find and add customers and contacts; send messages to customers and update hotel profiles (e.g. Facebook and Instagram).

Social media components: Attributes used for social media measurements among various virtual communities (Arum & Sung, 2018). In this study, it refers to aspects of social media such as reviews, interactivity, informativity and social media accounts.

Social media informativity: The extent to which social media seeks to educate the masses about the issues involved (Lundgren, 2018). In this study, it was used to refer to content on social media platforms that hotel customers can access and allows them to store and share pictures, videos, photos, audio and text messages.

Social media interactivity: The degree to which two or more communications parties can act on each other, on the communication medium and on the messages and the degree to which such effects are coordinated (Qiao, 2019). In this study, it refers to two or more hotel clients exchanging information on social media platforms concerning the hotel attributes.

Social media reviews: A person's words and observations in describing his or her peer-generated product and service evaluation (Xiang, Schwartz & Uysal, 2017). In this study it refers to people's opinions and experiences that are posted on social media platforms about people, businesses, products or services.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ICTs: Information and Communication Technologies

KAHC: Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers

KMO: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

MICE: Meetings Incentives Conferences and Exhibitions

NACOSTI: National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation

NCDIP: Nakuru County Integrated Development Plan

SM: Social Media

SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Sciences

UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization

VIF: Variance Inflation Factor

WOM: Word of Mouth

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

The chapter presents background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research hypotheses and research question, significance of the study, scope of the study, assumptions of the study and ends with limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Hotels which include small owner-operated bed and breakfast businesses to highly rated, multi-room luxury and/or stated premises (Xia, Vu, Law & Li, 2019) are ranked as the leading enterprise in hospitality industry (Teck & Karuppiah, 2020). The exact statistics of the size of the hotel industry has not been precisely determined, or subjective and/or seldom published (Stylianou, Xuan, Shende, Brandt, Souvenir & Pless, 2019a). Most estimates are often based on data from the 'International Hotel Industry' Survey (2018) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which estimated that there are about 1.2 million hotels worldwide, with growth rates estimated at 2.2% over the past 30 years (Romero & Tejada, 2020). The statistics reveal that the entire hotel industry is likely to accommodate approximately 870 million people globally (Bu, Xu, Zhong & Xiao, 2019). Due to the sheer number of customers and other stakeholders in the hotel industry, there is intense competition in the industry (Veiga, Ambrósio & Ferreira, 2020).

Customers' behaviors towards hotels are largely unpredictable as far as choice is concerned (Mehta & Sharma, 2019; Park, Kang, Choi & Han, 2020). Due to the presence of increasingly more knowledgeable customers, the hotel choice decision has continued to be more complex (Donnelly, Ruiz, Blei & Athey, 2019; Alharethi,

2020). Customers prefer hotels that overflow with essential functional attributes and easily substitutable services (Ahani, Nilashi, Yadegaridehkordi, Sanzogni, Tarik, Knox, Samad & Ibrahim, 2019b). Customers selection of hotels may be guided by location of the hotel (Masiero, Yang & Qiu, 2019), brand name (Sürücü, Öztürk, Okumus & Bilgihan, 2019), brand imaging (Sürücü *et al.*, 2019), different amenities like swimming pool, golf course and fitness facilities (Wongpradu & Panichpathom, 2019), service quality (Hu & Yang, 2019), price (Soler, Gemar, Correia & Serra, 2019), loyalty program (Pesonen, Komppula & Murphy, 2019), or all of this choice mix (Zhang, Cui, Cheng, Zhang & Li, 2020).

Traditional methods of choosing hotels including brochures, mass media, print media, word of mouth and travel agents are still common for some customers in hotels (Nie, Tian, Wang & Chin, 2020). Although these traditional marketing tactics cannot be overlooked due to loyalty of the customers to certain hotels (Smironva, Kiatkawsin, Lee, Kim & Lee, 2019), advancements in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), have relegated these traditional methods to more modern approaches key of which is the internet and social media.

Social media remain a key component of the internet that has gained popularity among hoteliers as one of the important marketing channels to build loyal customer relationship (Lian & Yoong, 2019). Consumer use of social media in hotels has increased significantly (Chaudhary, 2019; Wang & Law, 2019). Social media platforms include a variety of social networking sites and content-sharing communities that customers use to share their travel and holiday experiences (Theocharidis, Karavasilis, Vrana, Kehris & Antoniadis, 2019).

The most widely recognized components of social media include online social media reviews, interactivity of social media, social media informativity and social media accounts (Ghose, Ipeirotis & Li, 2019). Customer reviews include comments on the social media, customer experience, customer views, customer suggestions and posts (DeAndrea, Van Der Heide, Vendemia & Vang, 2018; Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi & Nerur, 2018). Social media interactivity covers aspects such as engagement, discussion, inquiries, expression and exchanges on social media platforms (Patel, 2019). Besides, social media informativity includes images and photos, video displays, audio and text message often form part of educational functions on the social media users (Ntale, Mathenge & Gikonyo, 2020). There are social media platforms including a range of social networking sites and content-sharing communities that customers use to share their travel and holiday experiences (Theocharidis *et al.*, 2019). Participation in social media platforms can take the form of social media accounts such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram to attract their customers via social media networks and accounts (Kim & Chae, 2018; Diffley & McCole, 2019). The use of social media platforms and accounts is well established, including blogs, content communities, forums and bulletin boards (Hashim & Fadhil, 2017; Busalim, Hussin & Iahad, 2019). However, among these, components of social media, the way and the reasons why hotel guests use social media and how social media components affect their choice, specifically in the hospitality context, still remains little understood (Gohil, 2015). Based on this premise, this research aimed at investigating the effects of social media components on customer choice of hotels, contributing towards a better understanding of importance of social media to the hotels and its effects on customer choice.

In Kenya, social media use is on the rise in many parts of the country (Mwanyika & Mberia, 2017). In addition, there are increasing numbers of studies in Kenya that surveyed the use of social media in hotel industry, including the provision of services in hotels (Yator, 2014), usage of social media as a marketing tool for tourism (Cheruiyot & Maru, 2012) and building brand equity in star hotels (Kilonzo, 2012; Nyairo, 2016). There is, however, a currently limited study that looked at the social media reviews, social media interactivity, social media informativity as well as social media accounts on the hotel choice among customers, which makes the linkage between these components with hotel choice among customers important. Based on the above, this study was formulated to determine the effects of social media component on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The choice of hotels in Kenya has remained a challenge for many customers desiring the best experience having forfeited alternative hotel destinations (Fredrick & Authority, 2019; Zipporah, Macharia & Kibe, 2019). This problem persist despite the knowledge that there are numerous hotels in Kenya providing food and beverage, accommodation, conference facilities and recreational service (Bukirwa & Kising'u, 2017). While there are studies in Kenya that have reported choice of hotels, they concentrated more on attributes of hotels (Bor, Kieti & Rotich, 2018), hotel management (Kiunga, Maranga & Kamau, 2019; Mutuku & Wambua, 2019), quality of hotels (Makau, Lagat & Bonuke, 2017; Kiunga *et al.*, 2019) and revisit intention or satisfaction (Githiri, 2018). Studies on customers' hotel choice decision dwelled more on customer satisfaction (Mutuku & Wambua, 2019) and/or loyalty (Ali, 2018). However, with the fast growth of the internet and the increasing importance of social

media in recent years, consumers are accorded endless opportunities to explore, compare and contrast numerous characteristics of the services they receive in hotels.

Social media is shown to influence decision-making process for hotel customers in developed countries (Gupta, 2019; Liu, Mehraliyev, Liu & Schuckert, 2020). Yet, not much has been studied about how social media components affect hotel choice in developing countries like Kenya. Few Kenyan hotel studies examined the effects of using social media in hotels. Nevertheless, these studies primarily depended on descriptive statistics (Nyairo, 2017; Omodho, 2019) in deducing their outcomes which is sometimes described as subjective in discerning relationships between variables. Hence, using descriptive, multiple regression and thematic analysis may yield a more reliable alternative for deducing outcomes. In the hotel industry, there are important components of social media including online reviews, interactivity, informativity and social media accounts for the hotel business that help drive the hotels customer preference (Leung, Sun & Bai, 2019). However, in the absence of studies on the effect of social media components on hotel choice, it is not clear how such social media components shape the customers' choice of hotels. Therefore, most clients who would have visited the hotels on the basis of better choice tools may not select hotels that would enhance their overall experience.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study was to determine the effects of social media components on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

  i.   To examine the effect of social media reviews on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

 ii.   To determine the effect of social media interactivity on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

iii.   To establish the effect of social media informativity on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

 iv.   To assess the importance of social media accounts in selecting hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

H_{01}: Social media reviews have no significant effect on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

H_{02}: Social media interactivity has no significant effect on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

H_{03}: Social media informativity has no significant effect on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya.

1.5 Research Question

  i)   What is the importance of social media accounts in selecting hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are envisaged to benefit the hotel owners who are keen to attract more customers in their hotels. This can be accomplished through an understanding of the use of information technology in enhancing marketing. In this case, the contents of the social media that may be influential in determining hotel

choice may be much needed in the hotel industry. The findings here may inform policy choices by hotels that would address strategic direction in the hotel industry in terms of using social media as a marketing tool.

The study findings may also benefit hotels and customers that are regular social media users. The findings will inform the hotels about their ability to influence hotel choice through social media. Importantly, the study makes contribution to understanding the effects of social media components on customer choice in Kenya's hospitality industry and hence helps integrate social media components into the modeling of hotel choice to better understand hotel selection behavior. Additionally, the findings will provide information to the hotel management who aim at improving customer choice by availing information on social media aspects to understand customer hotel choice behavior.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Although social media and hotel choice issues are broad in scope and diverse in their impact, this study's research scope focused on the effects of social media components on hotel choice in five hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya. The components of social media were restricted to social media reviews, social media interactivity, social media informativity as well as social media accounts. The research was conducted in Nakuru Town hotels as regards geographical scope. In terms of time period, the research was carried out between May and June 2019. Lastly, the study was limited, in terms of methodological scope, to explanatory and descriptive research design.

Additionally, the respondents for the research were drawn from Nakuru town hotels and included hotel guests and hotel managers. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures were employed. Quantitative data was

analysed using Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPPS). Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis.

1.8 Assumptions of the Study

The study was based on the following assumptions:

i) That all the hotel guests under investigation had used social media in selecting the hotels

ii) That the respondents freely expressed their opinions and feelings about the selected social media components during data collection and shared how it affected their hotel choice.

iii) That most hotel guests use social media to communicate with their peers more often than face to face.

iv) That all the hotels under investigation had subscribed to at least one social media platform and are regular users.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

The researcher encountered some challenges while trying to gather the relevant information. The study involved gathering information from guests within hotels, which brought many challenges of limited access to these respondents as most of the hotels were very strict to allow any access to their guests. However, the researcher assured them that the information was for academic purposes only.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

The chapter discusses literature relating to the concept of hotel choice and social media components. It also presents and discusses the theory and model which guides the study and the conceptual framework underpinning the study.

2.1 The Concept of Hotel Choice

Whenever people travel outside their home range to other destinations, they tend to seek accommodation in an hospitality establishment (Moliner, Monferrer, Estrada & Rodríguez, 2019). "As a result there are numerous forms of hospitality establishments such as motels, apartments, bed and breakfast, holiday homes, guest houses, home stays, holiday parks, farm stays, hostels and hotels (Ionel, 2016; Calveras, 2019). Among these hospitality facilities, hotels remains the most important due to their availability, sheer numbers, status and guests they accommodate (Arbelo-Pérez, Pérez-Gómez & Arbelo, 2019). Most hotels provide accommodation, meals, and other services for guests, travelers and tourists (Burešová, Mrkvová & Dudić, 2019). The 'International Hotel Industry' Report (2018) and UNWTO estimate the number of hotels globally to be around 1.1 to 1.2 million which have varied functions depending on their locality and purpose (Stylianou, Xuan, Shende, Brandt, Souvenir & Pless, 2019b)). As the world becomes more open and interconnected with an even greater number of people on the move, hotels will play a key role in its customers.

Customers choose to stay in hotels when on business trips, vacations, forums and a special family gathering (Anggraeni & Wijaya, 2019). The clientele of the hotel consists of clients who actively engage in a wide variety of hotel and hospitality

sector (Zygourakis, Rolston, Treadway, Chang & Kliot, 2014). As such, extensive research has been carried out to examine the general consumer behavior and the hotel industry (Mehta & Sharma, 2019; Leung & Wong, 2020). Customer needs within the hospitality have been constantly shifting in focus (Xu & Li, 2016). The expected clients always seek to make the best choice to free and smooth their stay.

In hotels, it is the unique satisfying customer experience that counts above meals and accommodation (Bravo, Martinez & Pina, 2019). Nevertheless, hotels face competition for facilities with other hotels, which makes customer-centered marketing in hotels more popular (Lai, 2019). Due to this, the behavior of hotel clients has been extensively studied (Wu & Gao, 2019; Lo, 2020; Mehrez, 2020). An insightful conclusion of these studies is that the customer values assorted hotel attributes from the location, physical facilities, surroundings, hygiene, security and exemplary customer experience (Wu & Gao, 2019). The superior attributes enticing customers include the architecture, inbuilt facilities, the atmosphere, staff courtesy, pricing and institutional soundness with security and communication at the core (Li, Liu, Tan & Hu, 2020).

Classical scholars have given their take on hotel choices. From these alternative classical studies, qualities like the splendor of the physical appeal, personalized service, picturesque scenery, price, serenity and relaxation opportunities carry supremacy to clients (Grønholdt & Martensen, 2019; Nicholls, 2020). The main determinants of customer preference in hotels in another study are concerns such as corporate identity, service staff, physical environment, accessibility and quality of services (Nguyen & Luu, 2018). There are discrepancies encountered from one hotel to another that encompass: employees attributes, cleanliness, neatness, service quality,

employee knowledge among others (Buehring & O'Mahony, 2019). From the abovementioned studies, it is evident that there is wide divergence in the hotel attributes which may be of significant concern to the clients.

Hotels that enhance their strategic qualities will increase the appeal of their customers; redefine their reputations by raising them above their competitors (Njite & Schaffer, 2017; Mandić & Petrić, 2020). Although hotels attempt to package their attributes appropriately, there is no agreed-upon package of attributes for universal application to satisfy customers (Trang, Lee & Han, 2019; Baek, Choe & Ok, 2020). These hotel attributes affect customer choice collectively. However, hotel should be in touch with real-time consumer needs, that keep changing and market research is crucial for any hotel to stay ahead of the pack in satisfying customer needs (Tran *et al.*, 2019a; Tran, Ba & Huynh, 2019b).

While the choice of hotel customers is well known, the classical literature shows that customers can select a hotel based on subjective and intrinsic values (Masiero *et al.*, 2019). The subjective nature of choosing a hotel is clear and real (Wongpradu & Panichpathom, 2019). Hotel guests have a preference for serene location, clean room, price and security, while leisure guests think about safety, comfort of mattresses, pillows and towel quality hotel name and reputation, cleanliness, personal contact but rarely on the hotel prices (Hu & Yang, 2019; Mukhtarom & Prasetio, 2020). The elements that navigates customers' subjective hotel choices suggest that hotel guests prefer an excellent location, spotlessly clean room, fair prices and security (Isa & Nayan, 2020). Free-spirited leisure seekers often enjoy cozy beds, pillows and standard towels, the hotel's brand and prestige of personal contact with prices most often and the bottom of the score (Radojevic, Stanisic & Stanic, 2019). Intrinsic and

interest requirements for customers also depend on a hotel's preference (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017). The analysis of customer choice on hotels needs to consider both subjective and the intrinsic view of customers.

There are intrinsic factors for customers that affect their overall hotel choice like emotional considerations for customers (Wang, 2019). In this context, hotel customers engage in good judgments and feelings and/or something that brings fun, excitement and pleasure (Fitrizal & Limakrisna, 2019). There is plethora of research examining the intrinsic attributes of customers that affect hotel choice. The most studied ones are customer satisfaction (Prabhakar, Yeong & Knox, 2020), booking (Park *et al.*, 2020), hotel preference (Liu & Hung, 2020), recommendations (Sepula & Bello, 2019), repeat visits (Talón-Ballestero *et al.,* 2018), willingness to pay (Namkung and Jang, 2017), experience (Toscano, Cabello Eras, Viviente, Gutierrez & Gomez, 2019), loyalty (Lee & Park, 2019) and perceived value (Xie, Guan & Huan, 2019).

However, in most hotel choice studies, consumers focus on the important and/or determinant attributes of hotel selection such as satisfaction, revisit intention (Masiero *et al.*, 2019), but they are limited in identifying true real trade-offs among different attributes in the context of hotel choice. Other existing research into hospitality choices is primarily focused on revealed choice studies and/or reviews of consumer revisit after a hotel stay or experience (Coba, Rook & Zanker, 2020). Customers who are emotionally bound clients will return, offer referrals and disregard prices as they do while making the hotel's ultimate choice. Clients are on the lookout for something that tickles their sensual balance when they sign up with fun, excitement, and enjoyment (Kim, Kim, King & Heo, 2019).

Kenyan hotel selection data are commonly exclusive to customer experience (Chepngetich, Ouma & Aila, 2019a; Chepngetich, Ouma & Aila, 2019b), hotel brand image (Nyairo, 2016; Zipporah *et al.*, 2019), customer satisfaction with hotels (Kiprop, Rotich & Chepkwony, 2017), customer loyalty (Kangu, Wanjau, Kosimbei & Arasa, 2017; Kangu, 2017), physical attributes of a hotel (Bor *et al.*, 2018; Miricho & Adedipe, 2018) and customer perceptions of hotels" (Mutuku & Wambua, 2019). However, so far little research has attempted to understand the hotel choice in relation to the cognition of customers with several attributes of hotel preference, recommendations, repeat visits, willingness to pay, promotion, hotel selection and preference in Kenya. (Zhang et al.., 2020)

2.2 Use of Social Media among Customers

In the past, business organizations have used traditional methods of interacting with customers, including brochures, print media, television, newspapers, radio, magazines, word of mouth, travel agents among others (Law, Bai, Ip & Leung, 2011; Mustafa & Al-Abdallah, 2020). "However, many consumers no longer trust the traditional hyped marketing because of disadvantages such as being costly, slow and rarely reaching more people over a given period of time (Halawani, Soh & Halawani, 2020; Xie & Shi, 2020). It has been established that print media like magazines and newspapers provide expensive content to customers whereas marketers pay for advertising privileges in the content (Fortunati & O'Sullivan, 2019). These apparent disadvantages of traditional ways of communication and business strategies have seen more drastic changes over the last decade (Mahnam & Ashoka, 2011). More recently, a plethora of new communication channels have emerged that provide consumers with opportunities to actively provide information on services and products (Wang, Ying, Lyu & Qi, 2019).

The internet has gained wide recognition among people and with business entities in nearly all aspects of human interactions (Gupta, 2019). In fact, the latest reports indicate that more than four billion people (54%) worldwide can access and use the internet (Lal, Ismagilova, Dwivedi & Kwayu, 2020). This is mainly due to the use of internet for several issues pertaining to information search, retrieval, sharing, discussion, and making inquiries (Lapatinas, 2019; Ferreira & Sousa, 2020). This has seen the internet transform the way customers connect worldwide to overcome existing constraints (Scaglione & Murphy, 2020). In the process, the internet has created online communities that connect to each other for sharing information, discussing issues and making inquiries (Kelechi, Akujuobi, Sadiku, Chouikha & Alam, 2020). In fact, the number of internet users has increased by approximately 5000% over the last 10 years (Statistics, 2018) and continues to expand worldwide due to its versatility (Othman & El-Mousa, 2020). In the past, the creation of new internet applications has improved the level of user engagement with other target audiences (Martínez-Torres & Gámez, 2019). However, it is the Web 2.0's second generation development that has revolutionized internet actions (Faulkner, 2020).

Currently, web 2.0 is a new mode of business communication (Mariani, 2020) which involves linking social networking with collective knowledge (Orenga-Roglá & Chalmeta, 2019) to facilitate participatory information distribution, interoperability and customer-centered design (Harris & Rea, 2019). The network comprises a technical framework that enables the social phenomenon of collective media and includes a range of technological advances that promote cheap content creation, interaction, collaboration, and community participation in the World Wide Web (Pollacia & McCallister, 2019). Web 2.0 usage enable customers to work together and join forces via social media (Mariani, 2020).

Social media is described as a group of Internet-based applications that build on technological foundations of Web 2.0's ideology and allow the interaction, collaboration, creation and sharing of user-generated content (García-Morales, Martín-Rojas & Garde-Sánchez, 2020). It entails "electronic modes of communication through which users create online communities that exchange knowledge, ideas, personal messages and other content" (Fuchs, 2017; Morris, 2020). A more widely accepted social media has penetrated the public virtual square with resources that allow user feedback compared to web 1.0 diaries (Martín-Rojas, García-Morales, Garrido-Moreno & Salmador-Sánchez, 2020). The revolution gave users new engagement tools like wikis, podcasts, photos, video tags, instant feed and blogs (Nguyen, Calantone & Krishnan, 2020).

Using social media has radically transformed the internet into an enormous space for social networking, information exchange and user communication that allows people to connect at the personal and community levels (Etter, Ravasi & Colleoni, 2019). While social media, originally designed as online networks for individual, private use and not intended to function as organizational tools, has withered external pressure and a global acceptance that finds its way into business organizations as ways of communicating with customers (Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi, Rana & Islam, 2019). Therefore the sheer magnitude of different types of business organizations adopting social media as their customer engagement platform is currently increasing (Ahmed, Ahmad, Ahmad & Zakaria, 2019). More significantly, the use of social media in hotels remains an important consideration.

Hotels can use social media communities to establish customer relationships and lay the foundation for unconditional loyalty (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016). The power

of the relationship between active online communities lay in the capacity for trust and loyalty of past, present and future customers to the brand (Garrido-Moreno, Lockett & García-Morales, 2018b). The understanding of the online world has motivated researchers and practitioners to understand these emerging business communication models through social media (Jung, Dieck & Chung, 2018). There are, however, few empirical studies on the effect of social media on the actions of online communities on hotel choice (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017; Hajli, 2018).

From the above mentioned studies, Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017, established that the way consumers search hotel information have changed, as social media play an important role influencing their decision-making process. Furthermore, social media has been recognized as an informative venue in that it assists the relationship among customers by sharing their experiences, which can provide valuable information for others (Halji, 2018). Social media has emerged as a dominant digital communications channel and has significantly influenced the marketing communications environment as it not only allows interaction between customers and companies (Muresan and Sinuraya, 2018) but also among customers (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

The use of social media in hotels has been growing internationally, regionally and locally (Kucukusta, Perelygina & Lam, 2019; Pacheco & Moreira, 2020). Hotels have incredible greater opportunities, including enhanced marketing strategy, consumer knowledge and invaluable instant direct customer input using social media (Garrido-Moreno, García-Morales, Martín-Rojas & García-Sánchez, 2016). Social media provides hotels with several benefits including enhanced brand identity, customer awareness and valuable feedback on hotel services (Giglio, Pantano, Bilotta & Melewar, 2019; Tanford, Kim & Kim, 2020). The continued use of social media in

hotels in developed countries has been reported more than in developing countries (Högberg & Olsson, 2019; Padma & Ahn, 2020). In the hospitality industry, there is now a movement towards online social media interactions, which has altered the way travelers check, rate, assess, buy and consume products and services on the web (Kim & Chae, 2018).

Hotel guests use different social media for online information depending on each travel stage, it has been argued that social media unfolds its most important function in the pre-travel stage, when guests use social media for travel planning, information search and pre-booking (Halawani *et al.*, 2020). From a practical perspective, online marketers should establish marketing strategies to keep active online communities alive by defining what benefits group members seek in participating and keeping members willing to participate in a long-term community relationship. Customer gives the raw facts about a hotel on social media space that offers clients better up-to-date information to influence their choice (Ramdin & Naraidoo, 2020). The internet via social media has changed the way hotels communicate with their customers in customer relationships, incorporation into their business processes and real-time interaction (Boubaker & Dauxert, 2020). Social media has provided customers a range of feedback and counter-check deals for adverts and real customer experience (Nadeem & Al-Imamy, 2020).

Hotel consumers make choices based on information obtained from various service provider brands (Liu *et al.*, 2020). Since the introduction of feeds for social media information, the customer preference paradigm is fundamentally changing their nature of their decision making. Studies suggest that hotel guests use multiple social media sites, depending on their level of travel (Al-Msallam & Alhaddad, 2016). Social

media is gaining the trust of customers in this crucial information fact-finding missions that reshape the entire travel experience in hotels (Castro & Ferreira, 2018). It is not only what the hotel is says but also what past customers post on social media. By sharing content, guests are influenced by following conversations, video footage and photos of past online customers (Alrawadieh & Law, 2019).

Currently, social media has become a major study subject in many overlapping fields, such as organizational communication, marketing, advertisement and public relations (Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder & Yau, 2019; Testa, Massa, Martini & Appio, 2020). Social media can affect prospective guests, since the content of other travelers can form, guide and redirect their initial decisions (Barkemeyer, Faugère, Gergaud & Preuss, 2020). However, the reasons hotel guests use social media, and how social media actually impact customers in the hospitality context, remain little understood." Although large amount of research has been published on use of social media in organizational contexts, these studies are primarily concerned with limited use of social media such as social media enterprise or social media marketing (Zhang et al, 2020).

2.3 Effects of Social Media Components on Hotel Choice

The Internet has led to a generation of greatly knowledgeable and tech-savvy consumers (Thangavel, Pathak, & Chandra, 2019). It is nearly impossible to imagine a world without the presence of social media (Chayko, 2019). In addition to influencing the lives of various individuals, they likewise influence many industries, especially the hospitality industry, in aspects such as promotion, business administration, and study purposes, based on their long-lasting international growth (Katsikeas, Leonidou & Zeriti, 2019). The internet has empowered consumers to be highly capable of

impacting the creation and conveyance of information compared to the ability of the businesses themselves (Uotinen, 2020). As a result of the immense utilization of social media sites to share and comment on various issues, consumers have become very influential in recent years.

Customers have the ability of searching, organizing, sharing, and expressing their travel experiences via an immense quantity of distinctive forms of social media platforms, which a large number of individuals utilize as they plan for their trips (Gretzel, 2018). Therefore, a growing number of consumers is considering digital word-of-mouth to be a trustworthy information source, especially for brands that could be explored, booked, and acquired through the internet (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

In social media accounts, consumers have the choice of spreading their viewpoints, inquiries, and requests (Dedeoğlu, Taheri, Okumus, & Gannon (2020)). These social media platforms have been described to be ubiquitous in internet-based travel information searches since their usage is global (Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). Particularly, review platforms are anticipated to rise in prominence in the forthcoming years as they have the potential of becoming the most essential internet-based tourism information sources (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). Since social media platforms are easy to use and are highly embraced by the Kenyan consumers, it can be argued that the hospitality industry has to constantly watch out for any emerging innovations in the digital world (Ferrar & Musimbi, 2018). Nevertheless, some studies have suggested that a large number of hotels is yet to fully utilize social media extensively (Prebensen, Chen, & Uysal, 2018).

The role of social media in consumer behavior in relation to the hotel industry is now well known (Wang *et al.*, 2019). "A wealth of opinions suggest that hotels seem to use considerable time and resources to draw more customers in social media packaging, either in terms of interaction or in terms of online customer relationship (Lal *et al.*, 2020). Clearly, social media is increasingly being used in hotels to harmonize social, business and personal undertakings (Kross & Chandhok, 2020). This has enhanced interactions among individuals and groups in the industry (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi & Algharabat, 2017) which ultimately affect their conceptions and behavior (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy & Goodman, 2016). Moreover, the development of social media and its online social networking sites has changed the way in which hotels communicate with their clients (Garg & Pahuja, 2020).

Social media's role in hotel marketing is now huge (Mosweunyane, Rambe & Dzansi, 2019). Indeed, one of the main advantages of social media marketing is the ability to reach a wide audience that goes beyond geographical borders (Boaria & da Cunha, 2020). Marketing aspects in hotels such as customer involvement, contact with and from businesses, as well as linkages to business goods now rely more on social media content (Adeola, Hinson & Evans, 2020). As a result, many hotel ventures conduct complete marketing functions using social media to facilitate interactivity between hotel and customer, promoting and purchasing behaviours (Ferreira, Michaelidou, Moraes & McGrath, 2017; Park *et al.*, 2020).

The way hotels package their content through social media will determine the success of their operation in terms of customer choice behavior (Gil-Soto, Armas-Cruz, Morini-Marrero & Ramos-Henríquez, 2019). This is due to hotels' ability to present their content visually, verbally or textually to the customer via social media, or

through a combination of textual, visual and verbal content (Dedeoglu, 2019). Hotels have developed collaborative strategies and mechanisms for enhancing their brand identity and marketing efficiency to achieve quality social media content (Yang, 2020).

Additionally, hotels use social media to strengthen their business relationship with clients (Boaria & da Cunha, 2020) by leveraging user relationships between customers and hotel managers, resulting in improved relationship outcomes, such as online credibility and relationship strength (Shareef *et al.*, 2019). However, even with the progress that has been made, there is still a gap in evaluating hotel choice's performance based on the social media content. The reality that many hotels still fail to fully embrace social media (Gupta, 2019) has resulted to more literature looking at social media strategies and how they achieve their goals (Shareef, Kapoor, Mukerji, Dwivedi & Dwivedi, 2020). However, given the ability of social media to influence customer preference, some scholars have urged greater caution in their assessment of the role that social media can play in improving customer choice for specific hotels (Hou, Wu & Du, 2017).

The way in which hotels can package their products or services using social media can determine the performance of their operation with regard to the actions of customer preference (Gil-Soto *et al.*, 2019). This is due to the ability of hotels to present their content visually, verbally or textually to the customer through social media, or use a combination of textual, visual and verbal content (Dedeoglu, 2019). Hotels have developed collaborative strategies and mechanisms to boost their brand identity and marketing efficiency in order to achieve quality content on social media (Ban & Kim, 2019; Yang, 2020).

There is still a substantial gap in the awareness and use of social media in achieving the hotel selection results. As an example, it was reported that "… we have … barely scratched the surface of what is to come and what is feasible… the conceptualization of the interest in social networking and its benefits remain major challenges." (Aral, Dellarocas & Godes, 2013) that called for scrutiny of the direct effects of social media and of the strategy used to maximize its impacts. It was also argued that empirical evidence of social media evaluation in relation to consumer preference is scarce and principally unreliable (Al-Shami *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, the need to establish a framework that entangles social media and hotel choice remains a priority.

The role of social media in hotel customer decision-making process is a new paradigm for consumer behavior in hotels (Gupta, 2019; Yang, 2020). Consequently, numerous studies attempted to outline the role of social media in the actions of customers to choose from (Saeed & Shafique, 2019; Ferreira & Sousa, 2020). Most of these studies showed that social media has a positive impact on consumer decision-making. Positive influence of customers occur due to trust and brand loyalty through social media (Ramdin & Naraidoo, 2020). Many studies also found no compelling evidence of social media on hotel choice behavior suggesting more nuanced (Maria-Irina & Istudor, 2019). However, some researchers have also found that social media can mislead customers about choosing hotels by exaggerating their services (Sheng, 2019).

In Kenya, there are several studies on the use of social media in the general population (Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017; Ogaji, Okoyeukwu, Wanjiku, Osiro & Ogutu, 2017). However, the majority of the available information points to the use of social media in politics (Kamau, 2017; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017), governance (Mwanyika &

Mberia, 2017; Agalo, Nyamari & Kinya, 2018), and education (Simiyu, Bonuke & Komen, 2019). There are hotels which have taken up social media in marketing (Nyairo, 2016; Omodho, 2019; Otieno, 2019).

There is increasing recognition that social media can make it easier for clients to interact, engage and participate with each other in different ways (Jung, Yang & Kim, 2020). However, there is still a limited understanding of the detailed components of social media which form the consumer travel decision. It is in recognition of the fact that there are many ways in which clients can communicate with the hotels through social media for instance (Dann and Dann 2011) broadly categorized such components of social media as social networking sites, social news, media sharing, blogs and microblogging. The findings indicated that individuals pursue an active role in information search on social media as compared to mass media. As a result, this research borrowed from Dann and Dann, 2011's idea and focused on four distinct components of social media including; social media reviews, social media interactivity, social media informativity and social media accounts. However, few researchers have empirically studied the effect of social media components on customer choice behavior and yet these aspects need to be clearly identified to determine how they affect the behavior of choosing a hotel.

2.3.1 Social Media Reviews and Hotel Choice

Consumers can effectively influence each other's decision in hotel marketing literature based on their past experiences with certain products (Jain, Aagja & Bagdare, 2017; Lin, Zhang & Gursoy, 2020). "Most often than not, customers who are extremely satisfied or extremely dissatisfied with services always want to share their joy or frustration respectively for other customers to understand their point of

view (Wu, Lee & Liao, 2018). Customers have traditionally expressed these feelings through interactive mass media, print media and word of mouth (Wei, Lu, Miao, Cai & Wang, 2017; Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, Morgan & Teerling, 2018). However, the advances in information technology and the presence of platforms such as the internet, has improved this interaction through online reviews (Kim, Li & Brymer, 2016; Kesgin & Murthy, 2019).

There is a plethora of research and reviews documenting on the reviews used in hotel industry (Cheng, Fu, Sun, Bilgihan & Okumus, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). In the hotel industry alone, over 100 million reviews were written over the internet in 2019 (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Key online reviews in the hotel industry that have attracted research attention include comments, ratings, rankings, feedback on the hotel and general consumer experiences that have brought social media reviews to the forefront (Boo & Busser, 2018; Cheng *et al.*, 2019). Currently, a wide body of literature has established the use of comments, expressions, views, suggestions, numerical ratings and verbal reviews in the hotel industry (Zhao, Xu & Wang, 2019).

The contributions made through these reviews can facilitate the interaction between customers who share marketing interests and provide social media leadership in marketing (Perez-Aranda, Vallespín & Molinillo, 2019). Indeed, due to perceived trustworthiness of other customers, it is an established fact that consumers are more inclined to rely on peer reviews online than on information given by business entities (Korfiatis & Poulos, 2013; Tan, Lv, Liu & Gursoy, 2018). It is generally accepted that reviews have either positive or negative effects on the image of the hotel and ultimately improve or detract potential clients from a hotel (Ahani, Nilashi, Ibrahim, Sanzogni & Weaven, 2019a; Jayathilaka, Dharmasena, Rezahi & Haththotuwegama,

2020). As such, numerous studies are dedicated to examining the causal relationship between the motives and actions of online reviewers and travelers. These reviews are used constantly to consider the customers' needs (Salehan & Kim, 2016).

Previous studies identified various effects of positive, negative and neutral reviews on customer behavior (Kim *et al.*, 2016). Online reviews may also be subdivided into quality and volume, each of which is relevant for consumer decisions (Rose & Blodgett, 2016; Nie *et al.*, 2020; Piramanayagam & Kumar, 2020). Although there has been comprehensive research into the quality of online reviews, (Boo & Busser, 2018; Piramanayagam & Kumar, 2020), it has received less attention. By examining quality of reviews, a number of hotel research shows that (Mate, Trupp & Pratt, 2019), negative reviews are stronger, more influential and difficult to avoid than positive reviews due to the negativity effect (Amatulli, De Angelis & Stoppani, 2019; Marasinghe & Liyanage, 2019) and thus influence the decision-making of customers more than positive reviews (Meng, Dipietro, Gerdes, Kline & Avant, 2018; Sherif, 2018).

The online reviews are used by many hospitality companies as a new tool to attract information seekers and ultimately bookers (Piramanayagam & Kumar, 2020). They distribute travel-related information on online travel forums and review sites, proactively encourage virtual interactions among consumers, publish travel reviews and feedback, and sometimes allow review functions in edited testimonials on their official websites (Chen, Gu, Ye & Zhu, 2019). Social media reviews help hotels get along well with their guests, boost their brand image and give them a touch of modernity, gain customer awareness and gather good feedback to develop new products and customized services (Djafarova & Deluce, 2018). This enables hotels to

handle anonymous and brief views of others, which requires new skills to collect, evaluate, interpret and maintain social influence online (Dolan, Conduit, Frethey-Bentham, Fahy & Goodman, 2019).

It was established that hotel bookings by a customer, are influenced by adverse or positive customer reviews skewing their choice and brand awareness (Antonio, de Almeida, Nunes, Batista & Ribeiro, 2018; Xu, 2020). Overall, most previous studies have found a positive relationship (Tan *et al.*, 2018) and some minor relationships (El-Said, 2020). Although a large body of research has examined the impact of online reviews or specific platforms on customer decision-making, studies on social media platforms are still lacking in hotels particularly in developing countries such as Kenya.

Previous research focused on the influence of online recommendations and reviews on the various stages of the decision-making process when purchasing a product (Salehan & Kim, 2016) and that influence depends on the type of source of recommendation. The underlying assumption behind these approaches is that online user ratings and reviews will make a major contribution to building brand loyalty and influence purchase decisions by customers. (Zhang et al, 2020). There are limitations in hotel industry to the use reviews. Previous studies found that online ratings and reviews are fairly small as a source of information for consumers (Liang, Schuckert & Law, 2017; Chao, Hsu, Cheng, Lei, Huang, Ko, Prassida & Huang, 2018). Firstly, online reviews can merely reflect the preferences of consumers. Second, the reviews are not a random selection of the population of users. (Anderson 2019) found that clients who are extremely satisfied and extremely dissatisfied are more likely to initiate reviews. (Li & Hitt 2018) established a possible bias in consumer reviews

during early product release periods. Empirical evidence showed that prior ratings can bias future ratings based on a positive social impact (Aral & Walker, 2019). Third, the online forums can easily be manipulated by interested parties. As a result, any online review may be heavily discarded by potential customers. But none of these arguments seems to alter customer's reliance on reviews. However, none of these points tend to alter the dependence of consumers on feedback. Nevertheless, in the absence of these challenges, customer trust in increased online reviews and has become as relevant as personal recommendations when making purchase decisions (Bright, 2018) that may eventually affect customer behavior.

Although online customer reviews communication with service providers is an iterative interaction that co-creates tacit information, empirical research into such communication is scarce in the context of co-creation of knowledge value (Brodie *et al..,* 2013; Park & Allen 2013). Much of the online review of tourism and hospitality research has focused on methodologies (i.e., big-data analysis, text analytics, machine learning, etc.) for attribute assessment and sentiment analysis (i.e., Schuckert, Liu & Law 2017). Extant research focused largely on the influence of online reviews on prospective customer perceptions and decision-making habits (i.e., Park & Nicolau 2015) and on market performance (i.e., Xie, So, & Wang 2017).

In a comparative study which examined three major online review platforms, TripAdvisor, Expedia, and Yelp, Xiang *et al..,* (2017) investigated the effects of online reviews on customer attitudes. Their findings showed that representation of the hotel industry on these platforms showed massive inconsistencies. Similarly, (Anderson, 2012) analyzed the impact of online review and found that the number of

consumer reviews consulting before booking has increased over time and that there is a relationship between the rating of the hotels and the price.

2.3.2 Social Media Interactivity and Hotel Choice

The concept of interactivity has been defined and measured from a technological perspective. Interactivity is described in most research as the capability of the device to exchange information between users and the interface (Huang, Liao, Wang & Lin, 2018). Some researchers, however, suggested that psychological factors would describe and quantify interactivity. Combining these two description paths, interactivity involves the probability of interaction involvement, the perceived ease of interaction and the degree of relationship that is enabled (Margarita, Mabell & Elizabeth, 2017). Previous literature findings suggest that individual users appear to trust information when they perceive a high degree of interactivity within a social media network (Kim & Lee, 2019). Consequently interactivity is believed to be closely related to medium credibility. An individual who has experienced a high degree of interactivity on a medium is more likely to consider the media information as credible.

Interactivity emerged as a key component of collaborative relationship building research (Kelleher, 2009). Many public relations scholars used the conceptual classification of interactivity by (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown 2003): functional and contingency. Functional interactivity involves site-specific features that allow users to interact in a variety of modes. Contingency interactivity occurs when the roles of users are interchangeable and "interactants" respond to one other (p. 35). Twitter provides organizations with the opportunity to engage in contingency interactivity with publics and offer the kind of relationship-building contact that has

been missing from websites. (Lovejoy *et al..,* 2012) suggested that the potentially contingent interactive messages such as replies and mentions from Twitter can help organizations communicate with other users.

The ultimate consensus arising from recent (Karampela, Lacka & McLean, 2018). Three dimensions of interactivity include cognitive, affective and behavioural (Xu, Yao & Sun, 2019). Specifically, cognitive engagement is similar to the overall mental activity focused on something, involving attention and absorption (Madej, 2016). Affective engagement is composed of enthusiasm and enjoyment with regard to an engagement object.

Last, behavioural engagement represents the active manifestations of the concept, including sharing, learning and endorsing behaviours. Social media interactivity is a context-specific occurrence of consumer engagement worth considering since interactivity varies across online media (Lee & Lee, 2019). Social media engagement comprises community engagement and brand engagement, and therefore understanding how these two focuses of engagement coexist becomes important (Brodie *et al.,* 2013). Their specific dynamic might in fact contribute to the creation, sustenance and vitality of the communities and affect customer relationships and brand management strategies (Hennig-Thurau *et al.,* 2010). Despite a lack of research on the interplay between community engagement and brand engagement (Dessart *et al.,* 2015, 2016), conceptual studies suggest that community engagement leads to increased levels of brand engagement (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). This observation is in line with other community studies that prove the positive impact of community practices on brand engagement (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009).

The social media is the most apparent component for interactions among customers and business owners (Kim & Lee, 2019). This can only happen when individual, firm or corporate entity, really participate and engage with others on media platforms. Interactivity in social media refers to a motivation for social media users to connect and engage with others (Huang *et al.*, 2018). In this regard, social media is used to engage with online communities with a view to developing new business models that include a new product marketing platform and creating strong customer relationships by overcoming timing constraints (Xu *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, online communities engage with marketers to gather information from their profiles about potential or current consumers, infer needs and preferences of consumers based on their community history, and obtain direct responses from consumers (Kim & Lee, 2019).

The presence of numerous social media networking sites has more interactive features than other online communication platforms (Phelan *et al.,* 2013). These networking sites can facilitate online social a one on one and arm length interactive experience with other customers online (Phelan, Chen, & Matthew, 2013). The interactivity has changed the working of online marketing with the practitioners being driven and improvised by the customer conversations improving their authenticity from the real-time and evolving experience of customers (Sigala, 2003). The interactive sphere is the edge of social media available for hotel marketers. Feedbacks from online participation in the social media space have necessitated the creation of new products and radical business models (Ulusu, 2010).

Though contents on social media may stimulate consumers to inquire information about the hotels from the each other, studies have shown that social media provides

new avenues of user-generated content with the hotel provider having limited power other than to respond and improve their internal offerings based on customer reviews (Hajli, 2013). Customers dream locations can be matched to their aspiration from customer insights, sublime photos, video content and satisfied comments (Florendo, 2018). The liberalized and interactive information sharing on social media is preferred by most clients.

Social media interactivity is vital in the travel, tours and hospitality industry. According to Scott and Orlikowski (2010), interactivity impacts the management and the bottom line of hotels by providing unsolicited inputs from clients. Actually, in the hospitality industry, interactivity can decide the fate of an entity as a going concern. The social media interactive space is the ultimate arena for information dissemination. Experts and hotel marketers pivot on the social media interactive platform to share knowledge and best practices and engage customers in their journey through the hotels' choices (Panahi, Watson & Partridge, 2012). The internet-savvy millennial are coming of age with their obsession with handheld smart devices as the tool to find the experience they want in their travels (Briana, 2019). Social media offers real-time experiences fending for the authenticity of products and services by customers (Briana, 2019). Social media curbs damage to the brand by giving timely responses and redress to complaints by clients (Jones, 2014). Social media conversation is informative to users, products and service providers.

With regards to the hotel industry, it has been shown that the degree of interactivity in hotel influences the effect of interactivity on business operation (Blal & Sturman, 2014). Focusing upon the effect of interactivity for certain hotel attributes, Xie, Zhang & Zhang (2014) showed significant associations with hotel performance. The

importance of analyzing the components of interactivity in more depth has proven useful as differences were found in relation to volume, variance and valence. Yet, investigating the impact of interactivity on hotel choice and hence adopting a strategic management perspective, has received less attention, probably due to the difficulty of matching interactivity to actual hotel choice.

The social media interactive edge is indispensable today and the future to come. Modern consumer decisions on choice are influenced by ongoing interactive engagement with other consumers of products and services online through blogs and review sites (Fotis *et al.,* 2012; Hudson & Thal, 2013). With the emergence of the web 2.0 extensions experience like social media, power on choice and the metrics of choices became the prerogative of the online-savvy consumers (Haywood 1989). It has become the conventional norm that hotel experience is determined by the online interactive conversations by past travelers (Ayeh *et al.,* 2012; Fotis *et al.,* 2012).

To date, research into the antecedents and outcomes of social media engagement is high on the agenda of engagement practice and scholarship. This goal is evidenced in recent special issues (e.g. Journal of Marketing Management, 2016) and by the call for dedicated research on how 'social media and other marketing activities create engagement' (MSI, 2014). Hollebeek *et al.,* (2016) prove the lack of research in this domain and the existing research's limited scope for generalizability. Specifically, existing studies have restricted contextual scopes (e.g. Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012), focus on a small set of variables (e.g. Malthouse Calder, Kim, & Vandenbosch, 2016), or include too few brands or products (e.g. Hollebeek *et al.,* 2014), calling for an extension of the generalizability of this stream of research (Hollebeek *et al.,* 2016).

Studies exploring the antecedents and outcomes of engagement on social media from the last few years have opened avenues. Theories of regulatory fit, for instance, can help determine engagement types and levels on Facebook, and personality traits of consumers also affect engagement formation (Sharma, 2017). Other exploratory work also suggests that consumers engage in online community settings to reduce information search and perceived risk (Brodie *et al.,* 2013). In terms of outcomes, social media engagement is a trigger for buying intentions and decisions (Brodie *et al.,* 2013; Malthouse *et al.,* 2016).

Despite these interesting advances, knowledge is still lacking, specifically on the role of consumer engagement on brand relationship development across contexts. Much conceptual and exploratory work exists on the role of consumer engagement in brand-relationship formation (Ariel & Avidar, 2015), but this work is still to be validated in social media environments.

Kietzmann *et al..,* (2018) suggest that identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups are the seven fundamental building blocks of social media. Borrowing from Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) suggestion that social media provide people various reasons to connect including searching for and sharing information, discussing communal issues and making inquiries this study therefore looks into expressions, engagements, exchanges, inquiries as well as discussion as attributes of social media interactivity.

2.3.3 Social Media Informativity and Hotel Choice

Social media typically includes a main object, stored in one of the different types of media (e.g., text, image, audio or video), as well as a variety of other object-related information sources (Derczynski, Yang, & Jensen, 2013). Information quality refers

to the precision, completeness, clarity, comprehensibility, usefulness and reliability of data outputs from the information system. Park and Kim (2006) suggested that consumers place a high value on reliable information products online. "Consumers place a premium on information quality in the face of huge amounts of unpredictable reliability online information and the availability or lack of quality information can affect the shopping experience and intention of consumers to buy products and services online (Ghasemaghaei & Hassanein, 2016). "Buyers are more likely to trust websites which provide authentic consumers with what users consider to be objective product and service reviews. Providing reliable, timely and trustworthy information creates a sense of trust on the part of potential consumers (Xie *et al..,* 2017).

As social network services become more universal, social media advertising emerges as a new tool for enhancing advertising effectiveness. A social network sites (SNSs) is a virtual platform that gives individuals a great opportunity to interact interpersonally online. On it, they can share a plethora of personal information with relatives, friends and acquaintances, and the amount of information can have a great impact on social relationships, which can meet the needs of social involvement in the online community (Zhang, Zhao, Lu & Yang, 2016). This is conceptualised as informativeness, which implies making information available online for the public (Chakraborty *et al..,* 2005). In fact, informativeness is connected with SNSs as it was positively related to consumers' attitudes towards advertising on SNSs (Taylor *et al.,* 2011). Brown and Stayman (1992) found that when predicting brand attitude, the informative factor was the most essential factor. The importance of information as a positive aspect of advertising is also highlighted by Shavitt *et al..,* (1998), who found that consumers pay much attention to information available online when they intend to buy new products, learn about their specific benefits or compare products. Luo

(2002) found that if a website offers a rich amount of helpful information, this can result in a positive feeling regarding users' general attitude towards the Web.

Social media platforms are rapidly gaining grounds as go-to conduits in marketing, from creating awareness to influencing consumer purchasing behaviour (Batra & Keller, 2016). On well-known platforms social media platforms, consumer-distributed (rather than consumer-generated) content can critically increase the reach of brand-generated messages (Napoli 2017). However, even as brands increasingly join social media conversations, the impact on consumers remains distressingly low; an average brand tweet is viewed by just 0.1% of followers and likely gets buried in the vast expanse of big data (Horst & Duboff, 2015). The daunting challenge for companies is to produce appealing brand messages with content that is less likely to be buried and more likely to be shared by consumers. Yet few brand managers have expertise in composing effective online brand messages that prompt consumers to share the content (Kim, Lee, Lee, Lee & Straub, 2018). Social media is currently offering a variety in message, audio and visual content to drive their agenda which are reported to be driving consumer behavior (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Therefore, it is critical to determine how the use of available texts, messages, audio, video elements encourage consumer to get informed about the hotels on social media.

Social media informativity refers to the degree to which a social media interaction is new or unforeseen towards the recipient (Kraul *et al*., 2019). In other words, the extent to which social media is intended to inform the audience about the arising issues. Informativity may influence the activity, because the role of analysts is to convey information through their analysis, as well as the ability to use this disclosed information (Thaker, Mohamad, Kamil & Duasa, 2020). With the upsurge of social

media as a vital source of information (Hsieh-Yee 2001), information search for making informed decision has emerged as the most dominant task performed by Internet users (Byrne, Ruth, & Alessandra 1999). Most of the information is obtained from images or photos, video clips, texts, messages, GPS signals, and other forms of data are collected about the travel destinations (Alkhaldi *et al.,* (2017).

In fact, in 2018 alone, approximately 3.5 Exabyte of text, images, sensor readings, GPS signals, and other forms of data were collected by websites on a daily basis on customers' search of hospitality (McAfee, Brynjolfsson, Davenport, Patil, & Barton, 2012). An in-depth appreciation of information search behavior is thus imperative to guide customers make decision about hotels. A number of recent studies have attested to the notion that websites can utilize information scent to guide users' information search behavior. For instance, Pirolli and colleagues (Fu & Pirolli 2007; Pirolli, Card, Weg, 2005, 2001; Pirolli & Fu 2003) demonstrated that information scent can boost the efficiency of information search, especially in visually dense informational environments. Users rely on information scent (e.g., hyperlinks) to evaluate the utility of accessed content, and in turn determine how to proceed with their information search. Moody and Galleta, (2015) also observed that information scent helps users to better orientate their search for information, which in turn increases the likelihood of locating relevant information. Prior research has focused on exploring how websites can employ information cues to direct users' information search as two distinct mechanisms by which search features direct users' information search behavior.

Social media messages are generally multimodal, such that they contain both text and images (Mazloom, Robert, Stevan, Marcel, & Willemijn 2016). Both elements can signal message intentions. As evidenced by Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala, (2017),

considering text as the only driver of sender intentions in social media messages ignores that images can also convey intentions. Thus, similar to speech acts, images acts can be used to convey people's intentions through their performative function (Bakewell 1998; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Image acts can range from offering information that allows for multiple interpretations to directing specific actions (Ordenes *et al.*, 2019). For example, a tweet that simply shows information images of food items leaves the interpretation to the viewer. In contrast, action images portraying a person pointing to a food item require the viewer to direct his or her attention to that particular object. In line with the hypothesized link between (directive vs. assertive and expressive) speech acts and consumer sharing, we posit that information images, rather than action images, facilitate social media conversations and are more prone to be shared.

Beyond their individual effects, text and image message acts are frequently combined within the same brand message (i.e., tweets or posts), warranting further investigation into their joint effect on consumer sharing. Previous research confirms that textual and image elements within the same advertisement are interdependent, with distinct explanatory power (beyond their individual effects) for consumer attention and reactions (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). Similar to the hypothesized phenomenon of cross-message consistencies, conveying the same act through both image and text within the same message is likely to be perceived as consistent and therefore less novel (Ordenes *et al.*, 2019). For example, if the text of a brand tweet calls consumers to action, including an action image as well likely is unsurprising to consumers (Dillard & Zhen, 2005). If the text and visual acts instead are complementary (e.g., assertive text accompanied by action image), their combination may evoke greater attention and promote consumer sharing (Ordenes *et al.*, 2019).

There are several research studies that have reported that customer can gain valuable knowledge or context of hotel industry. Varkais and Neuhofer, (2017) covered the content sources in social media and consumers' evaluation-decision behavior. Dieck *et al.,* (2017) reported that accessibility, trust, social influence and perceived benefits influenced perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, which affected consumers' attitude and satisfaction, and ultimately continued usage intentions in the context of hotels. Phelan *et al.,* (2013) limits their investigations to hotel content features, property information and interactions in evaluating how hotels utilized Facebook to engage customers.

In its early days, the majority of social media posts (e.g., on Facebook, Twitter) were text. Soon, these platforms allowed for the posting of pictures and then videos, and separate plat-forms dedicated themselves to focus on these specific forms of media (e.g., Instagram and Pinterest for pictures, Instagram and SnapChat for short videos). These shifts have had demon-strable consequences on social media usage and its consequences as some scholars suggest that image-based posts convey greater social presence than text alone (e.g., Pittman and Reich 2016). Importantly however, a plethora of new technologies in the market suggest that the future of social media will be more sensory-rich.

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difficult to evaluate how social media informativity exerts an influence on hotel choice by customers.

The use of social media for travel planning purposes and their impacts on travel decisions in the pre-trip stage has been a major focus in the literature on social media in tourism (Leung *et al.,* 2013). With growing use of mobile devices in the context of travel (Wang *et al.,* 2012), decisions are increasingly postponed, such that, with the help of social media, planning also occurs during the trip itself. Restaurant and attraction reviews, location-based social media, live streaming and video sharing apps can feed travellers with context-relevant information and immediate feedback for their decision-making on the go. As such, social media inform not only where tourists go but also what they do at the destination, and often provide travellers with real-time and location-specific information when making en-route decisions (Fotis *et al.,* 2011).

Balomenou and Garrod (2019) suggest that the changes in photo-taking and photo-sharing practices brought about by social media have important implications for the circle of representation, with the projected image of a destination now being constructed to a much greater extent by consumers, in addition to conventional media and marketers. This has repercussions for destination marketers, who are increasingly losing control over their brands (Gretzel, 2006).

Social media not only frame destination images, they also influence the relative importance of the destination in the visuals and the visit experience (Gretzel, 2018). Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, and Lebherz (2014) studied factors which potentially influence the consumer audiences' reaction to travel agency company social media posts. Such factors included social media messages including photo(s), or video(s) correlated against posting time (day of the week and time of day), and

message length. The study determined that the "richness"" of social media posts has direct correlation of potential positive and negative levels of influence on intention of consumer engagement on Facebook fan pages. While social media were largely text-based in the beginning, they quickly evolved to include audio and visual content which this study sought to look into (Gretzel, 2019). In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards more visual and live content, with short video "stories" becoming popular across several platforms (Gretzel, 2019; Huertas, 2018). In general, the social media landscape is highly dynamic, with new features and platforms/applications emerging on a regular basis and others disappearing.

2.3.4 Importance of Social Media Accounts in the Hotel Industry

Marketing in the hospitality industry has always been an important component in driving hotel revenue, but since the advent of digital technology, hotels need to evolve in order to reap the benefits (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015). Social media has promptly become an indispensable platform for marketing and a significant factor brand communication (Tharp, 2012). Social media as the internet-based applications that carry consumer generated content related to past experiences or any source or online information issues (Blackshaw, 2006). Consumers create experiences themselves, based on product and service experience and share it with each other to inform about the products and services (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009). This can be seen as word of mouth (WOM) extension, a very effective tool that affects consumer choice behaviors.

The 21st century is witnessing an explosion of Internet-based messages that are being transmitted through social media. Such media have become a major force in shaping different aspects of consumer behavior from perception to actions after

purchase (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The marketing patterns have now shifted and customers can now interact with other consumers using social media instead of businesses communicating to their consumers. Many customers see social media as the most credible source of product and service knowledge than communications derived from the corporations (Assenov & Khurana, 2012). Unfortunately, the marketing managers are given very little guidance for intergrating this media with integrated marketing communication strategies (Killian & McManus, 2015).

There are various types of social networking sites, such as facebook.com, MySpace.com, Twitter.com; customer review sites such as tripadvisor.com and business sites such as Linkedin.com (Verma & Verma, 2017). Trip Advisor is one of the popular sites where customers share their experience through reviews and it has become a very strong WOM communication (Ramsey, 2006). In order to be successful in marketing communication across these accounts, marketers need to monitor and improve the positive WOM through focusing on relationship management (Payne & Frow, 2005).

Consumers who have never been to the destination depend heavily on accepting the information provided by other people through word of mouth and social networking sites on the internet, given the intangible nature of tourism and hospitality services (Verma & Verma, 2017). Social Media also serves as cost cutter because it is a low cost tool for interacting and showing insight into the desires, emotions, feelings and behaviors of people, in a way that is more straightforward and efficient than using a research company to find out this information (Li & Bernoff, 2008). Social media also has a huge effect on hotels that use them to attract new customers, retain existing ones and increasing their online presence as well (Leung, Law, Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013).

Hotels cannot disregard the rising popularity of social networking sites and UGC content or the role they play in the conduct of travel planning (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto & Buultjens, 2009). Hotels are increasingly using Facebook and Twitter to publicize new events and deals, as well as keeping customers up to date. The many types of social media and the peer and guest reviews that have proliferated across these platforms are rapidly influencing hotel bookings (Astbury, 2011).

Social media accounts play a critical and widespread role by enabling people to socialize, interact, share and communicate everyday (Luttrell, 2018). By simply creating an account, users can post, share and face-time with one or several others at the same time (Alostad *et al.,*, 2018). Several hotels seem to prefer modern social media applications that perform multiple tasks (Noone, McGuire & Rohlfs, 2011). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Skype are the most common social media accounts used for these purposes (Alostad *et al.,*, 2018). It is worth noting that YouTube has become a real-people debate where others do not find it a social media account and others are arguing whether it has all the functions and features of social media (Khan, 2017). These accounts allow users to communicate in different ways: manually adding people by searching a user's business name or number or scanning a pin code; interacting with peers and benefiting from their networks and connections; sharing important news and events among contacts and friends; announcing and promoting personal or business products; developing personal or professional channels; posting jobs and/or career hunting information; to name a few (Alostad *et al.,*, 2018).

Social media accounts profiles individuals and corporate entities for online interactions. According to Weber (2009), social media offer anonymous identities

online for individuals, profit and non- profit-making entities. Zarrella (2010) expounds that we have a variety of social media: blogs, microblogs, social networks, video-sharing sites, social bookmarking and voting sites (Digg, Reddit), review sites (Yelp), forums, virtual worlds. There are wide variety of social media with more emerging by the day (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014)." The social media brand becomes the face of people and organization worldwide at a click of a button.

The online community is the goldmine made up of social media accounts. The web of accounts is the new unlimited marketing sphere. Companies get massive data feedback of account users and analytical embedded tools can gather intelligence to improve their marketing standing (Madupu, 2006). The network of signed up account holders engagements can create new market trends to influence internal operations to meet market demands. The company's social media account is the looking glass to see the business offering in the eyes of consumers (Kozinets, 2002). With the feedback their feedback, customers become insiders shaping the attributes of the customer experience of subsequent products and services (Sawhney & Prandelli, 2000). Social media account users are the movers, shaker and product innovators of today.

Social media is a modern world of anonymous networking generated over the internet by individuals and businesses (Weber, 2009). According to Zarrella (2010), there are many types of social media: blogs, micro blogs (Twitter), social networks (Facebook) media-sharing sites (YouTube), social bookmarking and voting sites (Digg, Reddit), review sites (Yelp), forums, virtual worlds (Second Life) (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009).Currently there are a large number of social media applications, with new onlin e networking platforms and resources continuing to develop (Sigala *et al..,* 2012; Mua

r & Jacobsen,0020 2014). Some researchers have mapped out dominant social media account networks in an effort to redress uncertainty relevant to them.

Classification by Constantinides and Fountain (2008) includes content aggregators, websites, social networks, content communities, forums, and bulletin boards. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) structure social media according to social presence level, media richness, self-presentation level, self-disclosure level. In Kenya, social media account is preferred to add to customer engagement (The Marketer, 2011). A research by Stelzner (2011) concluded that business use of Facebook and Twitter accounts enjoyed superior advantage over the rest of the accounts options.

Social media interactive accounts allow customers to make choices based on the information offered, purchaser reviews and engagement with a service provider online (Bilro, Loureiro & Guerreiro, 2019). A customer's perception of service is simulated or visualized through the other social media account holders generating content (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege & Zhang, 2013). Social media's vast network of account users is the climax of the rise and pre-eminence of web 2.0 with consumers and products and service providers. Post the millennia, more customer choices are driven by social media hype and pitching by online account holders from all over the world (Marshall & Rahmat, 2019).

There are options to create advantages through microblogs. According to Chien-Lung Hsu, Chia-Chang Liu and Yuan-Duen Lee (2010) instant messages, photos and videos by a corporate organization or their clients on their microblog account can reach many people at a time. Recent studies that are relevant to hotel and hospitality have advanced the knowledge of microblogs. Analytics and facts finding on microblogs led by Twitter and consumer reviews and rating websites exemplified by TripAdvisor and

Internet fora are been availed by meticulous scholars for possible applications in business (Gohil, 2015).

The biggest microblog, calling for unique attention today, is Facebook. Hotel is increasingly taking advantage of Facebook by running its blog page like Facebook interacting with its customers (Chien-Lung *et al.,* 2010). Studies by Tiruwa, Yadav and Suri (2016) established a connection between sales and sign-ups to a brand with its social blogging appeal with its social media account. According to Toor, Husnain and Hussain (2017), blogging creates new markets and drive the demand for a product or service through social media blog platforms seamlessly. Interactive blogs coupled with intense engagement can build purchase intention from the web of followers online.

According to Mowat (2010) the adoption of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn has opened up a variety of avenues and opportunities to listen to the (hotel) guest. Owning a website is a form of marketing strategy; there has been a significant increase in marketing over the Internet these days (Thomaz, Salge, Karahanna, & Hulland, 2020). According to Burson-Marsteller Fortune Global 100 Social Media Study 2018, majority of global companies adopt a minimum of one source related to social media platform. To a certain extent, 79% of the top 100 companies in the Fortune Global 500 index are found to be applying at least one social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Corporate Blogs (Burson-Marsteller, 2010).

Burson-Marsteller (2010) compiled a report and states that there are some international companies that acknowledge the value of engaging in social media. Within the cluster of social media platforms, Twitter is the preferred media tool

among Fortune Global 100 companies, with two-thirds (65%) having a presence on the social network. With at least onehalf are reaching audience through Facebook (54%) and YouTube (50%). One–third maintains corporate blogs. Some of the very same organizations also see the value in the frequency and sustained engagement. The vast majority with active Twitter accounts (82%) have tweeted in the past week and at a high volume of an average of twenty-seven tweets each. Fifty-nine percent have posted on their Facebook fan pages, sixty-eight posted YouTube videos and thirty-six updated their blogsite (Burson-Marsteller, 2019).

Indeed, researchers (i.e. Dwivedi et al., 2015) have started paying a special interest in examining and exploring the main social media accounts at diverse contexts, cultures, regions, and from different standpoints. Noticeably, and according to Dwivedi *et al.,* (2015), the vast majority of social media account studies were observed to be within the marketing area. Worthwhile, diverse dimensions and many constructs have been tested and covered by researchers who have considered the social media marketing issues. Further, in their attempts to explore and examine such area, researchers have adopted different methods and techniques (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015). Accordingly, there is a need to determine the social media accounts in hotel marketing choice of the social media marketing.

Most firms worldwide are looking forward to benefiting by using such applications in their business to reach new customers or to enhance their current customer's experience and accordingly, generating more profit and sales revenue (Gulbahar & Yildirim, 2016; Yadav, Wang, Wang, & Wan, 2016). In light of their prevalence and leverages, most organisations worldwide have started thinking strategically how they can benefit from social media to make sure they reach their customers as well as

contributing to their customers' experience (Leung *et al*., 2015; Tuten & Solomon, 2015). In fact, in comparison with traditional communication platforms (i.e. TV, radio, newspaper), social media represents a more innovative and cost-effective communication channel providing customers with high interactivity and individualization as mentioned before (Leeflang *et al*., 2014). This is in addition to its ability to quickly and efficiently deliver the information required and receive feedback given by customers in a fast and accurate way (Shilbury *et al*., 2014). For instance, as stated by Abeza *et al*., (2013), using social media comprises of a number of benefits for the firms' brands such as expanding the customers' knowledge, engaging the customer more, and interacting efficiently with customers. Accordingly, organizations have spent a considerable effort and money in designing their marketing strategies using social media applications (Culnan, McHurg & Zubillaga, 2010).

Many companies view the use of online communities as a profitable marketing tool from which they can derive several benefits. First, companies can obtain vast amounts of feedback regarding their products and brands by monitoring consumers' online conversations, thus enabling them to resolve problems quickly and work to improve future brand performance (Madupu, 2006). Second, online communities provide a real-time resource regarding market trends and consumer needs. Companies can use these resources to modify advertising messages and develop special targeted features for future products. Third, companies can observe whether their brands are truly suited to consumers' lifestyles and can learn which features of their products make them special or unique in consumers eyes (Kozinets, 2002). Through online communities, companies allow consumers to become involved, directly or indirectly, in creating new products and brands (Sawhney & Prandelli, 2000).

Studies have advanced the knowledge by assessing the use of microblogs (e.g. Twitter), consumer reviews and rating websites (e.g. TripAdvisor) and Internet fora, some of which are particularly relevant for tourism related services (Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Fotis *et al.* 2012; Chung and Koo 2015; Gohil 2015). There are numerous social media sites; among the most popular are Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter (Jain, 2010). In 2010, Facebook announced it had over 500 million users; in the same year, Twitter reported 75 million users (Paris *et al.,* 2010; Owyang, 2010). "On average, consumers spend more than 5.5 hours per day participating on social media Websites (Nelsonwire, 2010). With their increasing use, these sites are perceived as tools for creating online communities of users who share interests, activities, and objectives (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2010). In the hotel industry, about 75% of hotels have used social media for marketing purposes (Hotelmarketing.com, 2011). Facebook and Twitter were also found to be the two most useful social media channels for marketing purposes in the hospitality industry (Friebe & Campbell, 2010; Hotelmarketing.com, 2011).

Hotel operators have increasingly used Facebook, the world's largest social media network, to provide latest information, connect actively and intimately interact with their target customers and to promote direct booking functions through their Facebook pages (Phelan, Chen & Haney, 2013). Purchase intentions are an important tool for predicting buying process. Tiruwa, Yadav and Suri (2016) found that there were relationships between consumer interaction on Facebook online brand communities and their intention to buy. In the context of social networking marketing, Toor, Husnain and Hussain (2017) confirmed that there is an effect of customer engagement on purchase intention. They highlighted that interaction; communication and sharing

of information on products and services between consumers has enhanced customer engagement which leads to purchase intention.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the social exchange theory and social media components model.

2.4.1 Social Exchange Theory

The theory of social exchange is a broad philosophical paradigm formulated to encompass a number of social science disciplines including management, social psychology and anthropology. It is not a single concept but is a philosophical model family (Dick & Henningsen, 2020). This theory implies that individuals make choices on the basis of certain outcomes. People prefer exchanges leading to the greatest possible levels of safety, social approval and freedom as well as alternatives leading to the least expense, consequences and social disapproval. Therefore, any decision on social exchange can be a complex decision requiring an individual to evaluate various costs and rewards.

The theory further pre-supposes that humans rely on interactions from others who share similar perceptions about their experiences (Raghunathan, & Corfman, 2006). In this case, people rely on exchanging information through social media platforms from other communities. Additionally, social media includes, among others, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter that people connect with each other and share information about their hotel experiences (Lipschultz, 2017). Consequently, it is important to consider the behaviours and motives of social media users. Generally, "social exchange theory assumes that humans can accurately anticipate the benefits of a variety of interactions" (Griffin, 1994, p. 198). People's

minds are comparable to computers. Like with computers, the human mind is only as good as the data it holds (Griffin, 1994).

Obtaining a lot of data allows comparison of many different situations, while getting little feedback allows comparison of a couple of different situations. Grefen and Ridings (2002) state that when people expect rewards, they engage in exchange relationships. In the social media analogy, human experiences with online communities are like one having various data sets for which activity of preference can be discerned. Therefore, social media interactivity involves discussion forums in which people engage each other online to inquire and express their views and even exchange ideas and news." Social media is also informative and involves sharing of information about videos, photos, audio-recordings and other media among social media users.

An individual may begin to consider possible alternatives from which to make choices as a result of reviewing, interacting and exchanging information on social media platforms, Therefore, the theory of social exchange is important to understand human interaction and decision making in this case, the interaction between and among the online community and hotel choice behavior.

2.4.2 Social Media Components Model

Social media has three linked components which must be available in order to operate properly online, these are: content and conversation, media sharing and social networks (Dann & Dann, 2011). Figure 2.1 shows how the components interact:
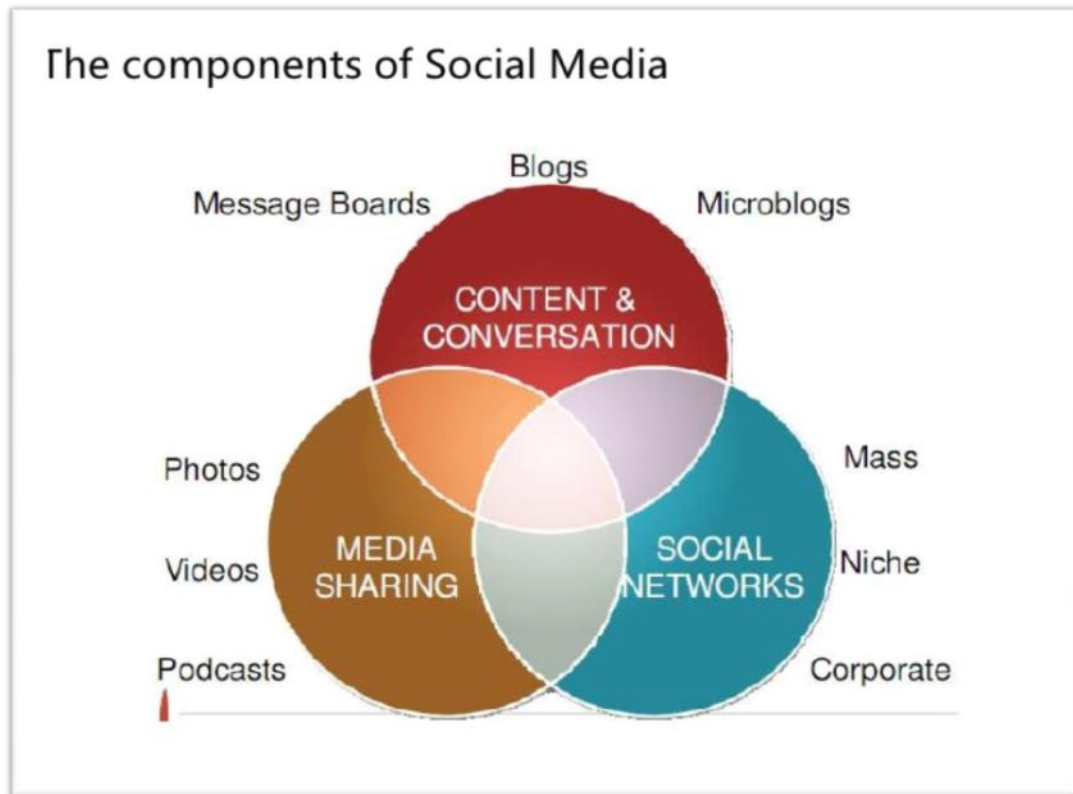
Figure 2. 1: Social Media Components Model
Source: (Dann & Dann, 2011)

Media sharing is the extent to which individuals connect, distribute and receive social media information through images/photos, videos and podcasts (Lee & Ma, 2012) where individuals use tweets, forums, status updates to exchange knowledge, meet new like-minded people or to create themselves as an opinion leader (Smith, 2007). In the current study these group of people constitute the customers in hotels. This envisages well with social media interactivity component of social media in the present study where customers contribute to sharing information among individuals in terms of photos, videos, messages and audio recordings. The social media component model helps in understanding of the sharing of information among individuals (Falstrup, Denick, McClain, Murray, Ambriz & Hadnagy, 2019). The sharing can be in the form of feedbacks or reviews in terms of comments, experiences and even

suggestions that people leave on social media platforms (Ham, Lee, Hayes & Bae, 2019).

On the other hand, content is what motivates the individual to visit certain social media environment, it can be photographs, music, social news or videos while conversation is the extent to which customers communicate with each another through social media. Conversation can therefore be interactive in nature in terms of exchanging messages, engaging, expressing themselves through blogs and making inquiries and exchanging opinions on social media platforms. In most social networking sites the main aim is to promote communication between individuals and interest groups (Kietzmann, 2011). Starting or engaging in social media discussion is a way to make a message understood and making an impact on subjects (Kietzmann, 2011). Moreover, organizations which are hotels in this case use social media networks to educate customers about their products (Kietzmann, 2011).

Lastly, social networks are platforms that allow content sharing and social interaction among users where social interaction is the contact one user may have with others through one of the various social media accounts. The present study was based on the social media components model as most of the social media components found in the model were similar to those that make up social media reviews, social media interactivity, social media informativity and social media accounts (Ghose *et al.*, 2019; Halawani *et al.*, 2019) which may affect hotel choice. Therefore, these components can be used to understand how the usage and functionalities of social media can be utilized and exploited to influence hotel choice by customers and by hotels.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a graphical structure that illustrates the natural progression of the studied phenomenon (Adom, Hussein & Agyem, 2018). It helps the researcher define and develop worldview on the phenomenon to be investigated (Grant & Osanloo, 2014)." Social media components can be used to understand how use and functionalities of social media can be utilized and exploited to influence hotel choice among customers. Figure 2.2, illustrates the conceptual framework for this study.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE   **DEPENDENT VARIABLE**

SOCIAL MEDIA REVIEWS
  ➢ Comments
  ➢ Experiences
  ➢ Views
  ➢ Suggestions
  ➢ Posts

H_{01}

SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIVITY
  ➢ Engagement
  ➢ Discussions
  ➢ Inquiries
  ➢ Expressions
  ➢ Exchanges

H_{02}

HOTEL CHOICE
  ➢ Recommendations
  ➢ Bookings
  ➢ Visits
  ➢ Selection
  ➢ Preference
  ➢ Use of hotel products

SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATIVITY
  ➢ Images/photos clarity
  ➢ Video display
  ➢ Audio/sound recording
  ➢ Texts
  ➢ Messages

H_{03}

Figure 2. 2: Conceptual Framework

Source: *Modified and adopted from DeAndrea et al. (2018); Kapoor et al. (2018); Patel (2019); Perez-Aranda et al. (2019); Ntale et al. (2020)*

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter covers the study area, research paradigm, research design, target population, sampling design and sample size, research instruments, research instrument validity and reliability, data analysis, data presentation and ethical considerations.

3.1 The Study Area

The research was performed in one of Nakuru County's main town, Nakuru. Nakuru County, as provided for in the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, is one of the 47 counties of the Republic of Kenya. "The county is situated between longitudes 35.410 East & 36.60 West and Latitude 0.230 and 1.160 South and covers an area of approximately 7,498 Km^2. It lies at an altitude of 1859 meters. It lies within the Great Rift Valley and borders eight other counties, including Kericho and Bomet in the west, Baringo and Laikipia in the north, Nyandarua in the east, Narok in the south-west and Kajiado and Kiambu in the south. The total population density in Nakuru County was 2,162,202 people, according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019).

Nakuru Town is located about 160 km northwest of the capital city of Nairobi and is connected to the west of the region by the Nakuru-Kisumu highway and the Mombasa Kisumu Railway line and to the north by Nakuru-Nyeri-Nanyuki-Isiolo-Moyale road system. It is Kenya's fourth largest town which is slowly dethroning major cities as tourist magnet (Mwakio, 2015). Through targeting local and international tourists visiting major attractions and sites, it has become an increasingly alternative hub for both tourism and business hotels outside Mombasa, Nairobi and Kisumu (Omare,

2016). In addition, the county conducts corporate meetings, incentives, conference and exhibitions (MICE) that are steadily rising as a result of devolution (NCIDP, 2018). In the wake of increased conference needs, hoteliers are tapping into the devolution by providing better hotel and conference facilities. Remarkably, Nakuru town boasts an excellent range of hotels offering a wide choice of accommodation including several well-appointed international standard hotels with full tourist and business traveler facilities. Hotels in Nakuru town were therefore appropriate to provide the researcher's required information.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The word paradigm can be described as "a way to see the world interpreting a research topic" and how researchers think about the topic (Hughes, 2010). The research study adopted a pragmatic research paradigm. Pragmatism, as a research paradigm, finds its philosophical foundation in the historical contributions of the pragmatism philosophy (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019) and as such accepts plurality of approaches. In addition, as a research paradigm, pragmatism is based on the premise that researchers should use the conceptual and/or methodological approach best suited to the specific research problem being examined (Veal, 2017). This is often associated with mixed methodology or mixed-approach (Parvaiz, Mufti & Wahab, 2016; Brierley, 2017), where the emphasis is not on the methodology but on the implications of study and research questions. Pragmatism is therefore a research philosophy founded on the assumption that since there are many truths, there is no single way but several alternative forms of thinking (Bryant, 2017; Powell, 2019). Knowledge of the different realities is thus obtained through the integration of multiple research methods including both qualitative and quantitative research methods incorporated into this study.

3.3 Research Design

This study adopted both explanatory and descriptive research designs. Research design is the overall plan to get answers to the questions being examined and also to address the problems faced during the study process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Lawrence, 2020). The explanatory research design analyzes the cause-effect relationship between two or more variables (Rahi, 2017). This design was adopted because the study investigated the cause and effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The cause was social media components whereas the effect was hotel choice. In addition, the explanatory research design is capable of minimizing bias as it allows the survey to be carried out in the natural settings and permits the study to employ probability samples thereby increasing reliability of the collected data (Reiter, 2017; Baran, 2020).

The descriptive research design, on the other hand, involves exploring, analyzing and explaining phenomena as openly as possible to gain insight into the sample population and the variables being studied (Goerres, Siewert & Wagemann, 2019). Descriptive statistics allow statistics to provide meaningful description of the distribution of scores or measurements (Binet, Gavin, Carroll & Arcaya, 2019). Furthermore, descriptive statistics help to explain big data amounts in a simpler way. This research used a mixed method approach, using data collection techniques and analytical procedures for both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Mixed-method studies are superior in that they provide a deeper interpretation of the research topic in order to provide more comprehensive answers to research questions, enhance participant enrichment, improve instrument accuracy, provide deeper inferences and have greater scope and depth (Froehlich, Rehm & Rienties, 2020). Accordingly, researchers collect and analyze data in the mixed method approach, integrate the results and draw

inferences in a single research study using both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Guetterman, Babchuk, Howell Smith & Stevens, 2019). Therefore, the researcher conducted a mixed method approach to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on the social media components and hotel choice at the respective target hotels. Both questionnaires and interviews were used as research instruments that allowed a relatively large amount of data to be obtained using questionnaires from hotel guests and interviews from the hotel marketing managers.

3.4 Target Population

A population is a full set of inferences from which all possible cases of interest are referred to in a study (Jacobsen, 2020). "The target population, on the other hand, refers to the entire group of individuals involved in generalizing the findings (Dawson, 2019). At the time of study, there were a total of 40 town hotels in Nakuru (NCIDP, 2018). However, the study selected 5 hotels in Nakuru town where 640 hotel guests were specifically targeted based on 60.18 % average occupancy rate recorded between May and June 2019. The study also targeted 5 marketing managers from five selected hotels in Nakuru Town.

3.5 Sampling

Sampling involves a method of choosing a subset of a population that represents the entire population to collect information about the phenomenon of interest (Kalton, 2020). A sample is a subset of a chosen population to undertake the study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015)." Throughout this research, the sampling involved choosing the sample size and sampling design, as well as techniques that allowed the researcher to reduce the amount of data needed by collecting data from a subgroup rather than all possible cases or elements of the population.

3.5.1 Sample Size

The sample size of a survey refers to the number of units selected from which data were gathered (Lavrakas, Kelly & McClain, 2019). Larger samples reduce sampling errors but may be expensive and small sample sizes may increase sampling bias and error variance (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs & Jinks, 2018). The sample size of the study was calculated by using the Slovins formula (Ellen, 2017) with a 95% confidence level as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} = \frac{640}{1 + 640(0.05)^2} = 246.003$$

Where:

n = Sample size required

N = Number of people in the population

e = Allowable error (5%) 0.05

Therefore, the sample sizes of 246 guests were determined based on proportionate sampling technique as demonstrated in Table 3.1

Table 3. 1: Sample Size Determination

Name of the hotel	Target population	Proportion	Sample size
Hotel 1	145	22.7	56
Hotel 2	94	14.7	36
Hotel 3	105	16.4	40
Hotel 4	164	25.6	63
Hotel 5	132	20.6	51
Total	**640**	**100**	**246**

Source: Hotel records (2019)

3.5.2 Sampling Design and Technique

The study employed sampling techniques from the target population at different levels of sample collection. A mixture of both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used. "In selecting the study area, Nakuru town and the 5 hotels which served as the sampling frame, purposive sampling was used. This approach was

chosen because information was gathered from the specific target group of people who can provide the desired information (Sarstedt, Bengart, Shaltoni & Lehmann, 2018).

Simple random sampling was used for the selection of the hotel guests. Simple random samples yield a sample that truly represents the population as each subject has an equal and independent chance of being selected (Robert, 2019). A total of 246 hotel guests were selected out of the 5 hotels. Due to the differences in the size of the hotel as regards the number of rooms vis a vis bed capacity, different sample selection from each hotel was considered to be more efficient. A list of guests was requested from each hotel in the study. All the guests' names that appeared on the guest list were given unique sequential numbers, which were then put in a basket and numbers drawn from the basket at random. The guests whose numbers were picked became the sample.

The selection of 5 marketing managers was also purposive in the sense that they have a wealth of experience in the fields of advertising and marketing, as they work at the frontier to deal with both private and business customers. They also have consumer ideas and insights, and know how to use social media platforms to draw customer interest. Moreover, they are individual consumers themselves, who can speak from the consumer's viewpoint.

3.6 Data Collection

This section discusses the sources of data and the instruments used in data collection, their importance and suitability for the study.

3.6.1 Data Sources

This study relied on both primary and secondary data. Secondary data are data obtained from studies, surveys or tests performed by others or for other reasons, while primary data is data collected by a researcher from first-hand sources using methods such as surveys, interviews or experiments that are intentionally collected with the study question in mind (Driscoll & Brizee, 2017). Secondary data were collected from previous work carried out by other writers on both published and unpublished sources, such as journal papers, library records, books, the internet and unpublished hotel reports the subject. The primary data was collected through survey questionnaires and interviews administered to the sample population.

3.6.2 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments used to collect data in this study were questionnaires and an interview schedule.

3.6.2.1 Questionnaires

A questionnaire was the preferred tool for this analysis as it allowed the researcher to obtain views from a larger number of respondents within a short time, making it easier to gather relevant information (Brace, 2018). The questionnaire was administered to the hotel guests and comprised of three parts; section A contained the background information about the hotel guests, section B gathered information about the social media components while section C gathered information on hotel choice measurements.

This approach involved data collection through pre-determined questions based on the objectives of the study in which a total of 246 questionnaires were administered during the field work. There was only one set of questionnaire. The questionnaires

were self-administered by giving out in person to the respondents and could be completed at the informant's own time. A five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was employed to increase response rate and response efficiency. A sample of this questionnaire is presented in appendix I.

3.6.2.2 Interview Schedule

Interview schedule collected information on the importance of social media accounts in the hotel. Coleman (2019) suggests that interviews are useful resources in qualitative research for data collection and that a face-to-face interview approach helps the researcher to interact with the participants and detect non-verbal cues during the interview process. As far as data collection methods are concerned, the conduct of the study included the use of a semi-structured interview guide that the researcher used to allow for an open, in-depth discussion of the research topic. The interview lasted for 30 minutes to one hour. This approach involved gathering data from the 5 selected Nakuru Town hotels via face-to-face interviews with 5 marketing managers.

Through using interviews as a method for data collection, the researcher gained a better understanding of the informants' views about the importance of social media accounts in hotels. The interviewing approach helped the researcher to seek clarification and explore a deeper understanding. Consequently, data collection and interpretation reflect participant views. A sample of this interview schedule is presented in the appendix II.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

Validity and reliability are key aspects of choosing an instrument for surveys. An instrument is valid if it tests what it is supposed to measure and if it yields the same results over several trials, an instrument is reliable (Hammer & Spiker, 2018).

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Relevant documentation and permissions were sought and granted prior to data collection. First approval of the research was granted by Moi University School of Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management (Appendix III). A research permit was then obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, NACOSTI (Appendix IV). Thereafter, the researcher visited the study area and planned on the appropriate date and time for data collection through the hotel management.

During the time of data collection, the questionnaires were distributed based on simple random sampling to the guests staying for at least a night or more. This was done through the front desk agents who acted as the link persons who coordinated the data collection from the guests. This is owing to the fact that they have the advantage of directly coming in contact with the guests and can request them to freely participate in responding to the questionnaire. The research used a self-administered questionnaire in which the hotel guests filled it out themselves without the researcher's intervention thus allowed the guests to fill the questionnaire at their convenience. The data was collected by the researcher using the "drop-and-pick-later" method of questionnaire administration at specified time in the sampling units. It took about four weeks for the data collection exercise.

Marketing managers were interviewed one-on-one by the researcher who guided the interview flow and ensured that the interview remained well within the study goals. The interview guide had 8 to 10 questions and was recorded on a voice recorder in which each interview took place in a single interview session.

3.8.1 Validity of the Research Instruments

Validity is defined as the accuracy and meaningfulness of inferences, based on the results of the research (Mochon & Schwartz, 2020). According to Roberta and Alison (2015), validity is defined as the extent to what degree a concept is accurately measured in a quantitative study. Three types of validity were checked. The first type was content validity. This type examined whether the instrument adequately covers all the content it should contain regarding the variable (Orodho, 2008). In other words, it is the degree to which the test sample fully represents the content to be evaluated by the test (Almanasreh, Moles & Chen, 2019). Validity of an instrument is enhanced by expert judgment (Demirpence & Putnam, 2020). Experts are asked their opinion on whether the intended concept is measured by an instrument. In this study, content validity was achieved by discussion with the university supervisors of the items in the instrument. Furthermore, experts made suggestions on the questionnaire's effectiveness by examining whether or not it was relevant to the study questions and gave feedback. Their recommendations were incorporated in the final questionnaire.

Secondly, the face validity of the research instruments was also determined to help assess the instruments' appearance in terms of viability, readability, consistency of style and formatting and the clarity of the language used (Shuttleworth, 2009). University supervisors checked the instruments; questionnaire and interview guide to check how well the questions would be understood, vocabulary, wording, clarity and overall flow where the study instruments were updated to reflect the adjustments accordingly. Finally the last type was construct validity which refers to how inferences about test scores relevant to the concept being studied can be drawn. This was done through factor analysis.

3.8.2 Reliability of the Research Instrument

Reliability involves the degree to which the researcher can comfortably rely on the information collected for analysis from various data sources (Ghauri, 2019). For this analysis, reliability was evaluated using the Cronbach alpha test. For Cronbach's alpha the commonly agreed lower limit is=>0.70, however in explanatory research it may decrease to =>0.60 and increase up to ≥0.80 in studies requiring more stringent reliability (Taber, 2018). The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small number of respondents in three Eldoret Town hotels using a sample size of fifteen respondents selected by random sampling to enhance data quality.

3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation

Data collected was checked for errors, cleaned and edited for completeness and accuracy. Data was then coded before statistical analysis was carried out. Version 23.0 of the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze quantitative data while thematic analysis was used to analyze the data from interviews. To quantitatively analyze hotel choice, social media reviews, social media interactivity and social media informativity, descriptive statistics were used such as frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis. The range of -1.96 to +1.96 for skewness and -3 to 3 for Kurtosis as suggested by Ghasemi (2012) was used to detect the existence of skewness and Kurtosis respectively. Before testing the hypothesis, factor analysis was carried out to determine the uni-dimensionality of the variable to the study and exclude items with factor loads below 0.5 to increase construct validity (Kim *et al*., 2005).

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to predict the value of dependable variable based on the variation of three independent variables in the study and to test

the hypotheses. Therefore, three hypotheses were tested which sought to establish effect of social media reviews;" social media interactivity and social media informativity on hotel choice respectively. In all the analysis significant level was set at 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected at $p<0.05$ level otherwise fail to reject at $p>0.05$ levels.

The multiple linear regression predicted the values between variables by testing hypotheses and drawing conclusions for objectives 1, 2 and 3. The independent variables were: social media reviews (X_1), social media interactivity (X_2) and social media informativity (X_3) while the dependent variable (Y) was hotel choice.

The multiple linear regression was as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e$$

Where:

Y= Hotel Choice

α = Y-intercept (constant term)

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ = Regression Coefficients

X_1 = Social Media Reviews

X_2 = Social Media Interactivity

X_3 = Social Media Informativity

e = Error term

Before running the regression, assumptions of multiple linear regression tested were linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity and autocorrelation.

Linearity refers to the degree to which the change in the dependent variable is related to change in the independent variables (Igusa, 2020). The linearity between the dependent variable and each independent variable was checked using scatter plots. The goal was to determine the strength of the relationships of linear variable.

Normality is the assumption that all variables have normal distributions (Mishra, Pandey, Singh, Gupta, Sahu & Keshri, 2019). For the test of normality, the values of skewness and kurtosis were checked. Skewness is used to measure a distribution's symmetry while kurtosis is used for measuring a distribution's peakness (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

The homoscedasticity (constant variance) of the errors refers to the assumption that dependent variable shows similar levels of variance across a range of values for independent variable along the regression line, implying equal distribution. This was tested by looking at a plot of residuals versus predicted values.

The autocorrelation test requires that the data contain little or no auto-correlation. "Autocorrelation occurs when the residuals are not independent from each other. This study utilized Durbin-Watson test for autocorrelation check. A value of between 1.5 and 2.5 is deemed appropriate to suggest a lack of serial correlation between the errors (Ding, 2019).

Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The interview questions were in the form of audio-recording, where transcription, re-familiarization with the data, first phase coding, second phase coding, third phase coding and finally introduction of the narrative were involved in the analysis. Five managers were interviewed from the

5 selected hotels where Hotel 1 interviewee was identified as MM01, Hotel 2 as MM02, Hotel 3 as MM03, Hotel 4 as MM04 and finally Hotel 5 as MM05.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical aspects include perspectives on subject protection and conducting ethical standards-based research (Pietilä, Nurmi, Halkoaho & Kyngäs, 2020). Ethical considerations in research usually consist of ethical principles aimed at protecting study subjects and professional ethical research standards with a view to ensuring good scientific practice and publicly accountable research (Mustajoki & Mustajoki, 2017). Ethical considerations were used to protect respondents' rights, dignity, and welfare; to obtain valid informed consent, to protect the study subject's privacy and to ensure the confidentiality of their personal data. This study incorporated the principles of responsible research (Resnik & Shamoo, 2017). These include: honesty, objectivity, carefulness, openness, confidentiality, respect for the respondents and intellectual property rights.

The researcher maintained honesty during the proposing, planning, performing and reporting of the research; and was able to disclose any potential conflicts of interest. The researcher also ensured during scientific communication that the findings were not fabricated, falsified and misrepresented. To ensure objectivity, the researcher was free from external factors such as personal interest, value obligations or group prejudice to ensure objectivity; pursued objectivity in research design, data analysis and interpretation and publication; the researcher ensured minimal interference from political, social, cultural, or economic influences. Carefulness was ensured by: conducting the research in a detailed manner to prevent mistakes and inconsistencies; researchers avoid self-deception, bias and conflicts of interest; in addition, all research

procedures, such as consent forms, data collection and data analysis, were well documented. The researcher maintained openness during the course of the research by: willingness to promote study progress through publication; sharing the data, resources and ideas with other researchers.

The researcher maintained the study's confidentiality by protecting the privacy of the research work, such as, research plan, personal records and proprietary information, as well as ensuring anonymity of participants' details. The research also valued intellectual property such as copyrights and the work of others, and did not use unpublished data or findings without permission." Plagiarism was also avoided by giving credit to whom it belongs by citing and referencing.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the result, analysis and interpretation of the data gathered during the study. It starts with a section on respondent response rate followed by demographic information and presentation of descriptive and inferential statistical results. Data was analyzed using frequency distribution, percentages, mean, standard deviation, multiple linear regression and thematic analysis.

4.1 Response Rate

The response rate represents the percentage of all questionnaires returned. The data contained responses from hotel guests and managers in the selected hotels in Nakuru town. A total of 246 self-administered questionnaires were distributed out of which 232 were returned resulting in a 94.3% response rate that was sufficient for the analysis. The response rate was considered appropriate compared with the recommended response rates when checking the accuracy of the measurements needed for more than 60% analysis (Patten, 2016). Consequently, the response rate of 94.3% was good for facilitating data analysis.

4.2 Reliability of the Instruments

The constructs were subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha. Social media interactivity had the highest value at ($\alpha = 0.906$), followed by social media informativity ($\alpha = 0.899$), while social media reviews was at ($\alpha = 0.851$). Hotel choice had the least value at ($\alpha = 0.645$). Sekeran (2003) posits that any value between 0.5 and 0.8 is adequate to accept internal consistency. The findings indicate that the reliability coefficient were above 0.6 for each instrument suggesting that the

indicators in the instruments are reliable (Nicewander, 2018). Furthermore, the results indicate that all the indicators used to measure the variables were reliable as all the coefficients of reliability were well above the recommended value of 0.6 (Butler, 2014) Table 4.1 summarizes the results of the Cronbach alpha reliability test of the constructs in the questionnaire.

Table 4. 1: Reliability Statistics of Items in the Questionnaire

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Social media reviews	5	0.851
Social media interactivity	5	0.906
Social media informativity	5	0.899
Hotel choice	6	0.645
Composite Reliability	21	0.950

Source: Data Analysis (2019)

4.3 Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographic information of hotel guests was analyzed in terms of; age, gender, education level, nationality, reasons for travel and status of stay. The findings revealed, in terms of age, that 27.2% of the respondents were aged between 31 to 40 years, followed by respondents aged between 41 to 50 years (23.7%), while 20.2% were aged between 21 to 30 years. Meanwhile, 15.1% of the respondents were above 50 years of age and 13.8% were below 20 years. The results show that in Nakuru Town hotels young people were in charge of the social media.

In terms of gender, 51.3% of respondents were male while 48.7% were female suggesting a relative gender balance of hotel guests. This shows that both men and women equally ventures as hotels guest in the hotels. The level of education of the respondents also showed wide disparity. Those with an undergraduate level of education were the most dominant group at 56.9%, followed by those with a

postgraduate level who were 25.0% and the least were guests with a secondary level of education at 18.1%. These results show that majority of the guest visiting the hotels were educated with undergraduate levels of education.

The study revealed that most of the guests (65.0%) were Kenyans followed by guests from foreign countries (35.0%). This suggests that most of the hotels in Kenya were receiving domestic guests. Among the foreigners, the majority at 11.2% were Europeans, while the least (6%) were Asians. The reason for visitation showed that the majority of the guests (40.1%) visit for recreation, followed by guests visiting for business (32.8%) while the least numbers visited family and friends (27.1%). This seems to suggest that hotels in Nakuru have recreational facilities that can accommodate the need of the guests.

The study also determined the status of stay in the hotel and found that: 41.8% of the respondents were on Bed and Breakfast (BB), 28.0% were on Half Board (HB) while 20.3% (47) were on Full Board (FB) and finally, 9.9% were on Bed Only (BO). A summary is as shown on table 4.2.

Table 4. 2: Respondents' Socio-Demographic Information

Variable	Range	Frequency	Percent
Age	Below 20 years	32	13.8
	21-30 years	47	20.2
	31-40 years	63	27.2
	41-50 years	55	23.7
	Over 50 years	35	15.1
	Total	**232**	**100**
Gender	Male	119	51.3
	Female	113	48.7
	Total	**232**	**100**
Level of education	Secondary	42	18.1
	Undergraduate	132	56.9
	Postgraduate	58	25.0
	Total	**232**	**100**
Nationality	Kenyan	151	65.0
	American	21	9.1
	Asian	14	6.0
	African	20	8.6
	Europe	26	11.2
	Total	**232**	**100**
Reasons for travel	Business	76	32.8
	Leisure	93	40.1
	Visiting family	63	27.1
	Total	**232**	**100**
Status of stay in the Hotel	Bed Only (BO)	23	9.9
	Bed & Breakfast (BB)	97	41.8
	Half Board (HB)	65	28.0
	Full Board (FB)	47	20.3
	Total	**232**	**100**

Source: Research Data (2019)

4.4 Usage of Social Media Platforms among Respondents

The social media platforms included in the study were: Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp, Google, Instagram, Microblogs, YouTube, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Vimeo, and Flicker. The findings indicate that among the social media platforms studied, the ones that demonstrated high daily use were WhatsApp which had the highest score with a mean of 4.89, followed by Facebook at 4.66, Google at 4.53, YouTube at 4.52, LinkedIn at

4.52, twitter at 4.04 and Instagram at a mean of 3.84. On the other hand, microblogs, Snapchat, Vimeo and Flicker indicate a low daily use with a mean of 3.42, 3.42, 2.65 and 2.48 respectively among social media platforms used. The social media platforms used by guests when seeking information on the hotel to stay in is as indicated in Table 4.3.

Table 4. 3: Usage and Frequency of Usage of Social Media Platforms by Customers in Hotels

Social Media Accounts	Usage		Never		Annually		Monthly		Weekly		Daily		Statistics	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
Facebook	151	95.6	7	4.4	0	0.0	5	3.0	16	10.0	130	82.0	4.66	0.910
Twitter	127	87.0	19	13.0	4	3.0	11	8.0	30	21.0	82	56.0	4.04	1.390
WhatsApp	155	98.1	3	1.9	0	0.0	1	1.0	4	2.5	150	95.0	4.89	0.590
Google	141	97.9	3	2.1	1	1.0	5	4.0	43	30.0	92	64.0	4.53	0.780
Instagram	114	80.3	28	20.0	1	1.0	8	6.0	34	24.0	71	50.0	3.84	1.530
Microblogs	88	70.4	37	30.0	3	2.0	4	3.0	33	26.0	48	38.0	3.42	1.690
YouTube	152	97.4	4	2.6	1	1.0	4	3.0	48	31.0	99	64.0	4.52	0.810
Snapchat	93	70.5	39	30.0	0	0.0	11	8.0	31	24.0	51	39.0	3.42	1.680
LinkedIn	113	80.1	28	20.0	1	1.0	12	9.0	39	28.0	61	43.0	4.52	1.510
Vimeo	63	50.4	62	50.0	4	3.0	7	6.0	20	16.0	32	26.0	2.65	1.760
Flickr	59	46.8	67	53.0	4	3.0	7	6.0	24	19.0	24	19.0	2.48	1.700
Mean ± SD													**4.05**	**1.270**

Source: Research Data (2019)

4.5 Descriptive Results

In this section, the study established the level of agreement between the respondents and various statements on how social media components have an effect during their hotel choice. All the variables of the study were discussed: social media reviews, social media interactivity and social media informativity as independent variables and hotel choice as the dependent variable." The respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements using a five-point Likert scale.

4.5.1 Descriptive Results for Hotel Choice

Based on the results, the overall mean score of hotel choice was 3.95 ± 1.04. Skewness was -.629 while kurtosis was -.280 which implies that the hotel choice rating was high among the hotel guests. The key attributes of hotel choice that elicited the most respondents was repeat visit as influenced by social media (4.35 ± 0.759), followed by use of hotel products as a result of social media (4.21 ± 0.99) and then preference of the hotels due to social media (4.06 ± 0.97). The least attribute of hotel choice was recommendation by other social media users (3.57 ± 1.16) and selection of the hotel based social media (3.63 ± 1.26) as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4. 4: Mean and Standard Deviation for Hotel Choice

Hotel Choice Items	SD		D		MA		A		SA		Statistics	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
Booking hotel based on SMP information	3	1.3	36	15.5	29	12.5	80	34.5	84	36.2	3.89	1.103
Information on SMP make me visit a hotel	1	0.4	6	2.6	16	6.9	96	41.4	113	48.7	4.35	0.759
SMP enables me recommend others to visit a hotel	7	1.3	44	19.0	53	22.8	65	28.0	63	27.2	3.57	1.164
Preference of hotel based on SMP information provided.	3	1.3	14	6.0	43	18.5	79	34.1	93	40.1	4.06	0.972
Use of hotel products consumed by other users on SMP	3	1.3	18	7.8	24	10.3	69	29.7	118	50.9	4.21	0.999
Selecting hotel based on SMP information	12	5.2	46	19.8	35	15.1	63	27.2	76	32.8	3.63	1.266
Mean ± SD											3.95	1.04
Kurtosis											-.629	
Skewness											-.280	

N = 232 *Five-point scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Source: Research Data (2019)

Keywords: SMP(Social Media Platforms); SD (Strongly Disagree); D(Disagree); MA (Moderately Agree); A (Agree);SA (Strongly Agree);SMP (Social Media Platforms); F (Frequency)

4.5.2 Descriptive Results for Social Media Reviews

The study established that the respondents rating for social media review with an overall mean of 3.76 ± 1.184 where Skewness was -1.102 while kurtosis was .874 which implies that social media review rating was high among the hotel guests. The social media review attributes that elicited the most rank was that hotel guests were able to make opinions with a mean of (3.99 ± 1.27) from hotel views on social media platforms. Hotel experiences ranked second on social media platforms with a mean (3.88 ± 1.03) while hotel comments on social media platforms ranked third with a mean of (3.81 ± 1.11). The respondents further indicated that social media platforms also enabled them get suggestions from other users about the hotels with a mean of (3.68 ± 1.22). The social media review attribute that resulted in the least response was hotel posts made by other social media platforms users with a mean of (3.42 ± 1.31). The findings are presented in Table 4.5

Table 4. 5: Mean and Standard Deviation for Social Media Reviews

Social Media Reviews	SA		D		MA		A		SA		Statistics	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
Interest in hotel comments on SMP	13	5.6	14	6.0	48	20.7	87	37.5	70	30.2	3.81	1.105
Accessible hotel experiences on SMP	11	4.7	8	3.4	46	19.8	98	42.2	69	29.7	3.88	1.026
Opinions of views of hotels on SMP	22	9.5	10	4.3	25	10.8	67	28.9	108	46.6	3.99	1.267
Suggestions from other users on SMP	29	12.5	1	0.4	43	18.5	101	43.5	58	25.0	3.68	1.217
Inspired by posts shared by other users on SMP	20	8.6	44	19	51	22.0	52	22.4	65	28.0	3.42	1.307
Mean ± SD											3.76	1.184
Kurtosis											-1.102	
Skewness											0.874	

N = 232 *Five-point scale: 1= strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Source: Research Data (2019)

Keywords: SMP (Social Media Platforms); SD (Strongly Disagree); D(Disagree); MA (Moderately Agree); A (Agree);SA (Strongly Agree);SMP (Social Media Platforms); F (Frequency)

4.5.3 Descriptive Results for Social Media Interactivity

Social media interactivity was measured using five items, each of which was captured on a Likert scale. Based on the findings, the overall mean score of social media interactivity was 3.84 ± 1.130. Skewness was 0.003 while kurtosis was -.926 which indicated that social media interactivity rating was high among the hotel guests. Among the attributes of social media interactivity that were ranked high by the hotel guests were user expressions on social media with a mean of (3.95 ± 1.13), followed by people engaging each other on the social media with a mean of (3.87 ± 1.13) while exchange of opinions on social media about hotels was the third with a mean of (3.83 ±0.87). Nevertheless, the rank of hotel guests for answers to hotel inquiries on social

media had a mean of (3.82 ± 1.19) and finally, social media discussions were low
with a mean rank of (3.75 ± 1.13). The results of social media interactivity are shown
in Table 4.6.

Table 4. 6: Mean and Standard Deviation for Social Media Interactivity

Social Media Interactivity	SD		D		MA		A		SA		Statistics	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
Exchange of opinions on SMP about hotels	0	0.0	14	6.0	69	29.7	91	39.2	58	25.0	3.83	0.874
Responses to hotel inquiries on SMP	20	8.6	10	4.3	37	15.9	90	38.8	75	32.3	3.82	1.185
User expressions on SMP about hotels	14	6.0	9	3.9	43	18.5	74	31.9	92	39.7	3.95	1.133
Engagement of hotels on SMP	12	5.2	16	6.9	44	19.0	78	33.6	82	35.3	3.87	1.128
Discussions held on SMP	22	9.5	25	10.8	34	14.7	60	25.9	91	39.2	3.75	1.329
Mean ± SD											3.84	1.130
Kurtosis											-.926	
Skewness											0.003	

N=232 *Five-point scale: 1= strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree
Source: Research Data (2019)

Keywords: SMP (Social Media Platforms); SD (Strongly Disagree); D(Disagree); MA
(Moderately Agree); A (Agree); SA (Strongly Agree); SMP (Social Media Platforms);
F (Frequency)

4.5.4 Descriptive Results for Social Media Informativity

Social media informativity was measured using five questions. According to the
results, the overall score for social media interactivity was 3.87 ± 1.134; Skewness
was 1.581 while kurtosis was -1.329 which indicates that social media informativity
employed by hotel guests was moderate. Among the attributes of social media
informativity that the customers ranked high were hotel-related messages on social
media platforms with a mean of (4.01 ± 1.16) and views of hotel videos displayed on

than 0.6, as well as Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (completeness) used to test completeness of the sampling and was required to be significant at 5% level (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Furthermore, the study omitted items with factor loads below 0.5 to increase construct validity (Kim *et al*., 2005). Construct validity tests to what degree a scale measures what it intends to measure (Garver & Mentzer, 1999).

4.6.1 Factor Analysis for Hotel Choice

In order to assess the factor analysis for hotel choice, 6 items were tested with varimax rotation via principal component extraction. The study omitted any item that did not load a factor greater than 0.5 (Liao et al.., 2007). The KMO measures of sampling adequacy, load factor for Hotel choice is shown in Table 4.10. Two items were excluded as they did not meet the 0.5 threshold required. The loading factor of the remaining items was; 0.613, 0.795, 0.774, and 0.640, with Eigen values of 2.354 and percentage variance of 39.237. This means that more than 39 per cent of the variation can be explained by these 4 items. The KMO value of 0.724 with a significant Chi-square of 221.180 and *P*-value of 0.000 which implies that it is ideal for conducting further statistical test.

Table 4. 8: Factor Analysis for Hotel Choice

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.724		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Chi-Square	221.180		
	df	15		
	Significance	.000		
Items of Relationship Programs (n = 232)		Factor Loadings	Eigen Values 2.354	% Variance 39.237
Booking hotel based on SMP information		Omitted		
Information on SMP make me visit a hotel		.613		
SMP enables me recommend others to visit a hotel		Omitted		
Preference of hotel based on SMP information provided.		.795		
Use of hotel products consumed by other users on SMP		.774		
Selecting hotel based on SMP information		.640		

Source: Research Data (2019)

Keywords: SMP (Social Media Platforms)

4.6.2 Factor Analysis for Social Media Components

Table 4.9 displays the factor loading for social media reviews, the first independent variable. This variable had 5 items with a factor loading of; 0.814, 0.881, 0.864, 0.849, and 0.577 with Eigen values of 3.238. All factors were retained and explained 64.770% of the variance. The findings indicate that the KMO value of this variable was 0.851 which had a significant Chi-square of 556.058, p-value 0.000. The results imply that the values are all suitable for analysis

Table 4. 9: Factor Analysis for Social media Reviews

			Factor Loadings	Eigen Values	% Variance
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.851			
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Chi-Square	556.058			
	df	10			
	P value	.000			
Items of Relationship Programs (n = 232)			Factor Loadings	Eigen Values	% Variance
				3.238	64.770
Interest in hotel comments on SMP			.814		
Accessible hotel experiences on SMP			.881		
Opinions of views of hotels on SMP			.864		
Suggestions from other users on SMP			.849		
Inspired by posts shared by other users on SMP			.577		

Source: Research Data (2019)

Keywords: SMP (Social Media Platforms)

The factor loadings for items of social media interactivity are shown in Table 4.5, with loadings indicated as, 0.801, 0.891, 0.890, 0.834, and 0.867 with Eigen values of 3.674 and percentage variance of 73.486. All factors were retained and explained 73.48% of the variance. This means that these 5 items share or account for more than 73% of the common variance of this variable. This variable indicates KMO of .889 with a significant Chi square of 743.244, p-value of .000. This implies adequacy of the data to conduct further analysis.

Table 4. 10: Factor Analysis for Social media Interactivity

		Factor Loadings	Eigen Values	% Variance
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.889			
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Chi-Square	743.244			
df	10			
P value	.000			
Items of Relationship Programs (n = 232)		Factor Loadings	Eigen Values	% Variance
			3.674	73.486
Exchange of opinions on SMP about hotels		.801		
Responses to hotel inquiries on SMP		.891		
User expressions on SMP about hotels		.890		
Engagement of hotels on SMP		.834		
Discussions held on SMP		.867		

Source: Research Data (2019)

Table 4.11 indicates that there was a KMO value of 0.847 for social media informativity with a significant Chi-square of 694.071, p-value of 0.000. The social media informativity factor loadings were 0.725, 0.771, 0.713, 0.655 and 0.704 with Eigen value of 3.568 and percentage variance of 71.364 suggesting that the five items describe the common variance of this variable.

Table 4. 11: Factor Analysis for Social media Informativity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.847		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Chi-square	694.071		
df	10		
Significance	.000		
Items of Relationship Programs (n = 232)	Factor Loadings	Eigen Values	% Variance
		3.568	71.364
Texts on SMP helps form opinions about hotels	.725		
Images/photos obtained on SMP boost confidence	.771		
Reading hotel related messages on SMP	.713		
Watching videos displayed on SMP	.655		
Listening to hotel-related audio dialog	.704		

Source: Research Data (2019)

4.7 Multiple Linear Regression

The study was guided by three hypotheses: Social media reviews (H_{01}), social media interactivity (H_{02}) and Social media informativity (H_{03}) have no significant effect on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya. Using the correlation analysis the researcher determined the correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Multiple linear regression was used to test the hypotheses. In this section, correlation results of all the variables in the study are presented first, then the assumptions underlying the regression analysis and finally, the regression results are presented.

4.7.1 Correlation Analysis

The questionnaire was evaluated by multiple items, the multi-item average score was calculated for a construct and used in further study to test the relationship between variables, such as correlation analysis (Wong & Hiew, 2005) and multiple regression analysis (Wang & Benbasat, 2007). The correlation coefficient value between 0.10 and 0.29 is considered weak, 0.30 to 0.49 is considered medium and 0.50 to 1.0 is considered to be a strong positive relationship (Wong & Hiew, 2005). The Pearson's product moment of correlation coefficient evaluates the degree to which a sample links quantitative constructs linearly (Nikolić *et al.*, 2012). The greater the absolute value of the coefficient of correlation, the greater the relation. Pearson correlation test was used to assess the degree of relationship between the hotel choice which is the dependent variable and the social media components. In the subsequent discussion the resulting correlations were indicated by the prefix 'r'- where the degree of correlation was represented by a coefficient value (Katz, 2006).

The association between social media components and hotel choice demonstrated a positive and significant correlation with all of the test variables. The associated pair of social media interactivity had the highest relationship with hotel choice (r = 0.736, p <0.01) which was significant at 0.01 levels. This was followed by the relationship between social media informativity and hotel choice (r = 0.723, p< 0.01). The results further indicated that social media reviews had the least correlation with hotel choice (r = 0.721, p <.01). Thus the results imply that there is a linear relationship between social media components (independent variable) and hotel choice (dependent variable). Table 4.12 describes correlation effects of all variables of the study.

Table 4. 12: Results for Correlation Analysis

Predictors	1	2	3	4
1. Hotel choice	1			
2. Social media Reviews	.721**	1		
3. Social media interactivity	.736**	.855**	1	
4. Social media informativity	.723**	.818**	.838**	1

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

Source: Data Analysis (2019).

4.7.2 Assumptions of Regression Analysis

Regression assumes a normal distribution of the variable. Non-normally distributed variables or variables with highly skewed or kurtotic variables may distort significant relationships and tests. Linearity and normality were tested using linearity plots. The plot shows R^2 of 0.988 which means that the linearity assumption has been fulfilled in the analyses. The coefficient of determination is 0.988; thus, means that about 98.8% of the variance in the Hotel choice data is explained by social media components. The regression equation appears to have made predictions very useful because the R^2 value is close to 1. This depicts that the data in the distribution obeyed linearity.

Furthermore, the plot shows that the standardized residual regression is normally distributed whereby the observed and predicted values were found along the axis, with no major deviations from it, meaning that the assumption regarding normally distributed errors is assumed to be met. The skewness and kurtosis values were also checked for the normality test. Skewness is used to measure a distribution's symmetry while kurtosis is used to measure a distribution's peakness (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Based on the results, the skewness and kurtosis values shown in Table 4.9 revealed that the data were normally distributed where the skewness values were

within the range of -1.328 to -.629. In addition, the kurtosis value in the range of -0.280 to 1.581 was well within the -2 to +2 threshold.

Table 4. 13: Results for Normality Test

	Skewness	**Kurtosis**
Hotel choice	-.629	-.280
Social media Reviews	-1.102	.874
Social media interactivity	-.926	.003
Social media informativity	-1.328	1.581

Source: Data Analysis (2019).
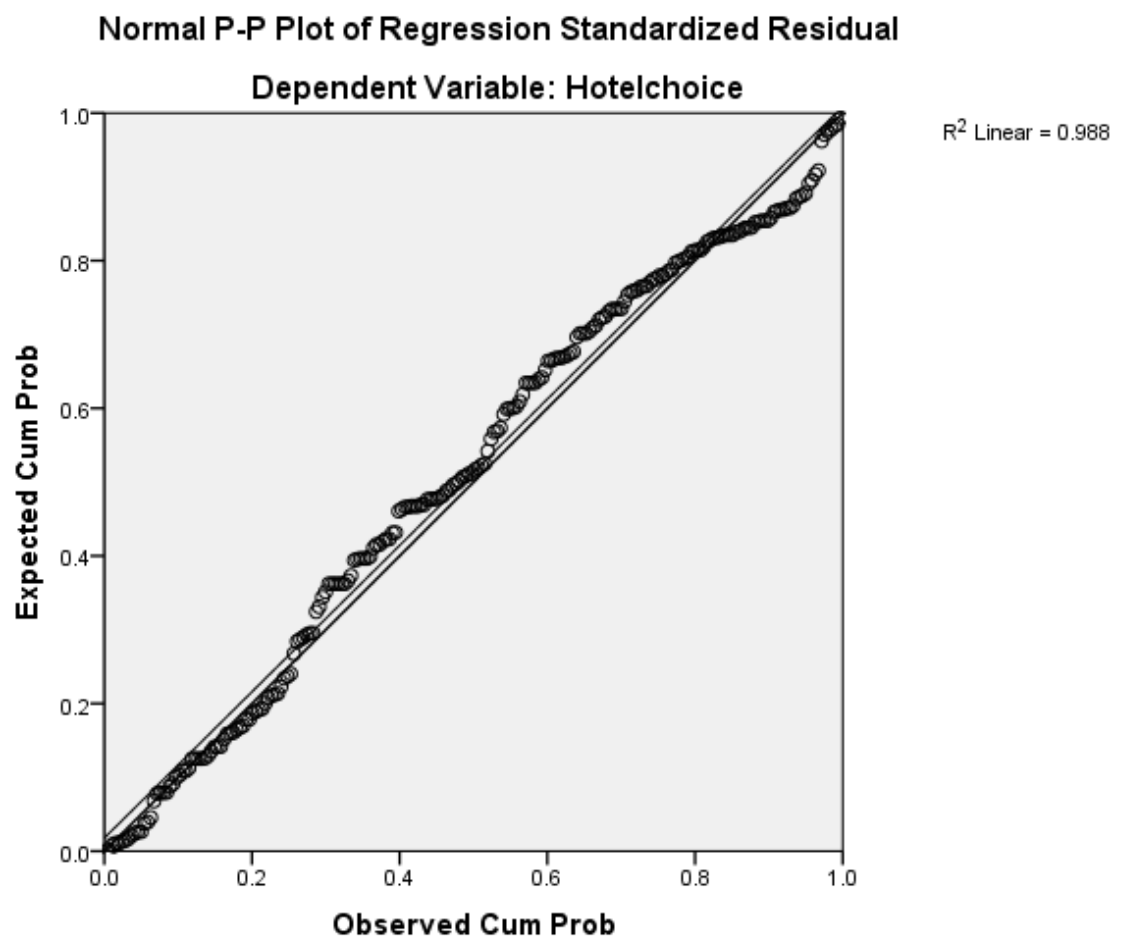
Figure 4. 1: Linearity and Normality Plot
Source: Research data (2019).

Homoscedasticity was tested using a residual scatter plot where the residual variance is considered equal or same for all of the dependent variables predicted value that supported homoscedasticity. Ideally, in the horizontal line, residuals are scattered at random around 0 which provides a relatively even distribution. According to Osborne & Waters, (2002), the residuals should lie between -2 and/or +2 scales. Hence, in this analysis, in Figure 4.2 shows that all the residuals are within the recommended threshold, thus the assumption of homoscedasticity in the analyses was fulfilled.
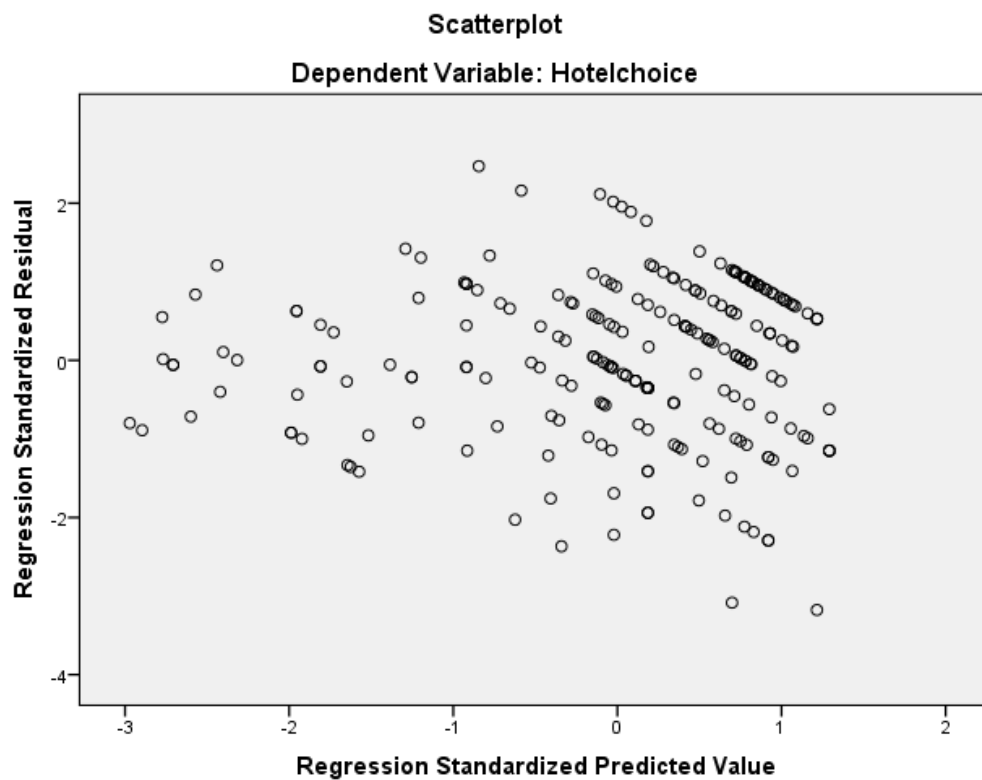
Figure 4. 2: Homoscedasticity Plot

Source: Research data, (2019).

Multi-Collinearity means two or more of the independent variables are highly correlated and this can have adverse effects on multiple regressions outcomes (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Multi-Collinearity can be observed using tolerance and its reciprocal variance inflation factor (VIF). The Multi-Collinearity cut-off point is a

tolerance value greater than 0.10 and a VIF value less than 10 (Hair *et al.*, 2006; Ghozali, 2005). The findings on Table 4.10 showed that the VIF values were less than 10, and the tolerance level of more than 0.10 meant that there was no Multi-Collinearity among the independent variables.

Table 4. 14: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance Table

Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Social Media Reviews	.234	4.267
Social Media Interactivity	.211	4.751
Social Media Informativity	.260	3.848

Dependent variable: Hotel Choice

Source: Research Data, (2019)

Test for Autocorrelation is based on a key assumption in regression is whether the terms of error are independent of one other. This section presents a simple test for determining whether there is autocorrelation or serial correlation between the residuals. The Durbin-Watson test was used to test autocorrelation among the residuals. The error independence of the errors requires that the errors in the prediction do not follow a pattern from case to case. As suggested by Tabachnick & Fidel (2007), a value ranging from 1.5 and 2.5 is considered appropriate to demonstrate lack of serial correlation between errors. The results showed that Durbin-Watson of 1.763 which is between 1.5 - 2.5. Consequently, the results indicate minimal autocorrelation that does not influence regression results. Therefore, the assumption was within the acceptable threshold.

4.7.3 Test of Research Hypothesis

The study formulated a 5% significance level hypothesis. The beta coefficients from the regression equation analysis results show the slope which explains the relation

between dependent and independent variables. The size of the coefficient shows the extent of effect.

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the effect of social media components on hotel choice in Kenya as the appropriate method for this research. This was in line with the study's three hypotheses. The model shows a goodness of fit as indicated by the F-statistics (F = 110.799) which was significant at 0.001% level and coefficient of determination R^2 with a value of 0.593. The R^2 of 0.593 implies that all the predictors in this model explain 59.3% of the total variation in hotel choice. The study variables findings are presented in Table 4.15.

Table 4. 15: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Results

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		Beta	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
(Constant)		1.661***	0.136		12.244	0.000
Social	media	0.187**	0.068	0.239	2.737	0.007
Reviews						
Social	media	0.226***	0.070	0.299	3.250	0.001
interactivity						
Social	media	0.213***	0.064	0.277	3.347	0.001
informativity						
Model Summary						
R		0.770ᵃ				
R Square		0.593				
Adjusted R^2		0.588				
Std. Error		0.47241				
ANOVA (F Stat)		110.799				
Sig.		0.000				

Dependent Variable: Hotel Choice

Source: Research Data, (2019)

The first hypothesis (H_{01}) postulated that social media reviews in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya, had no significant effect on hotel choice. The results indicate a

$\beta = 0.239$, $t = 2.737$, $p = 0.007$ for the social media reviews. The null hypothesis is rejected because the $p < 0.05$, and conclusion made that social media reviews have a significant effect on hotel choice.

The findings further show that social media interactivity with a $\beta = 0.299$, p = 0.001, and social media informativity, $\beta = 0.277$, p = 0.001 both positively and significantly affected hotel choice. Therefore, hypotheses, H02 and H03 were rejected and conclusion made that social media interactivity and social media informativity have a significant effect on hotel choice.

Table 4. 16: Summary of Hypotheses Tests Results

	Hypothesis	Beta	p-values	Outcome
Hypothesis H_{01}	Social media reviews has no significant effect on hotel choice	0.239	0.007	Rejected
Hypothesis H_{02}	Social media interactivity has no significant effect on hotel choice	0.299	0.001	Rejected
Hypothesis H_{03}	Social media informativity has no significant effect on hotel choice	0.277	0.001	Rejected

Source: Data Analysis (2019)

4.8 Qualitative Analysis

The data from the semi-structured interviews were thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis was appropriate because of its versatility, which allows researchers to familiarize themselves with the data, identify codes from the interview transcripts, generate and review themes from the coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.8.1 Importance of Social Media Accounts in Selected Hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya

The study's final objective was to assess the importance of social media accounts in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya. This objective was in the form of a research

question stating "How are social media accounts important in selecting hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya?" In order to address this question, an interview with five marketing managers was conducted. Five marketing managers were designated as: [MM01, MM02, MM03, MM04 and MM05].

Social media platforms used

In establishing which social media platforms the hotel use, different participants provided varied responses. However, three platforms, namely: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram emerged as the most commonly used social media accounts as evidenced from the five responses:

> *"Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Google. Why? To keep up with the trend. We are not currently on WhatsApp but developing an App for the hotel".*[MM01]
>
> *"Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram…"* [MM02]
>
> *"Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp…"* [MM03]
>
> *"Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn…"* [MM04]
>
> *"Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Trip Advisor, and Booking.com"* [MM05]

Reasons for use

In order to determine why hotels use different social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, respondents again offered various reasons, but all related to enhancing the marketing of the hotel products and services. According to the managers, social media accounts help …

> *"… To reach people and for marketing and to get feedback from the guests …"* [MM01]
> *"… To create awareness about the property and products offered, as a way of selling/marketing …"* [MM04]

One respondent suggested that social media accounts provide an opportunity to meet potential clients simply because …

> *"…90% (thereabout) of our customers are on social media, in reference to our clients/business suppliers …"* [MM03]

And social media accounts are further …

> *"… Used in collecting guest reviews …"* [MM05]

Benefits of using social media platforms

On further review of the benefits of using social media in the hotels, it was evident from the interviews that one of the main advantages social media accounts offer is a cheaper means of advertising their products and services by reaching out to more potential customers at lower real time prices**.** Participants of the interview said:

> *"… [Having a social media account] is one of our digital marketing strategies that allows us to reach more targeted people at a lower cost and hence improve bookings …"* [MM02]

> *"… Customers get to know about the products and services of our hotel and it has really sold out…* [MM04]

> *" … It has really paid off as far as marketing is concerned, we use Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn in advertising and eventually delivering lunches to the offices around town and even to the homesteads around. After one week of posting we got feedback from customers…"* [MM05]

Another participant further explained that they have:

> *"… sold out [the] Hotel because many people have got to know about the hotel through social media … Post a picture [of the hotel] and [you] find people asking for it … people ask/enquire and as marketers we engage them, and they end up visiting the hotel…"* [MM01]

On the aspect of promptness one participant said:

> *" … You reach a lot of people within a short time since most people are using social media today…"* [MM03]

Effectiveness of social media platforms

In assessing the effectiveness of social media platforms for business marketing, all respondents acknowledged that social media platforms are one of the most efficient means of communication used to communicate with and promote hotel products and services to potential or existing customers

> *"Very effective. One can sell or post on Monday and guests appear on Friday. During stop-overs for example, people request and inquire how much we sell our products especially on Facebook where one inbox and ask for any question and they get assistance"* [MM01]
> *"They are very effective with the dynamic nature of the business; we can communicate with our followers and potential customers of the ongoing activities at the hotel."* [MM02]
>
> *"In terms of effectiveness, I say it is 50-50. It is 50-50 in that when using social media, what market segment are we targeting and are we able to attract part of it or all of it. The challenge is that more than 50% of social media users are the young people who are economic and their income status may not enable them to come and spend especially in a hotel like the class of X hotel. They might end up seeing but might not come to spend their money. But all in all they are effective, we have a sub department under marketing management where we have a manager in charge of social media marketing where at the end of the year the manager sits down analyses the metrics; how many numbers were generated as a result of social media, how many leads did we get; how many sales were made and the numbers generated from the social media platforms used."* [MM05]

Frequency of usage

Upon examining the frequency of using social media for business growth, it was found that the hotels are using it on daily basis to keep in constant touch with their clients.

> *"Daily because there is someone appointed to do the follow up because marketing is continuous and needs consistency."* [MM01]
> *"Quite often we frequently post content (promotional or otherwise) to help push the brand. Most of the content shared has call to action which assist in creating interest amongst social media users."*[MM02]

How to address customer complaints

Customer feedback received on social media platforms were seen regarded as one way for hotels to receive complaints from their customers, thereby giving them an opportunity to take corrective action to address the complaints

> *"Is treated as normal complaints. Is attended to it. They are all replied; appreciate what is appreciated, any downside investigated and improved and rectified."* [MM01]

> *"Whenever the hotel management and staff find where the problem is, they respond using social media and then in addition reach to the reviewer in person using the guest number. In most cases, they would apologize and assure them that they have rectified the problem and invite the guests to come back and check out."* [MM02]

> *"We get to reach out to each customer individually."* [MM04]

Ways of motivating customers

Hotels were at the forefront in motivating their customers to communicate on social media accounts. In order to achieve this, the hotels run promotions and provide incentives or complimentary materials.

> *"Run promotions e.g. discount rates and give complimentary, branded diaries, pens etc."* [MM01]

> *"Giveaways (such as lunch rewards etc.); discounts for every enquiry and booking done through social media; use of relevant content that customers can resonate with."* [MM02]

> *"By giving discounted offers/tariffs on the guests who book e.g rooms by the social media platforms."* [MM03]

> *"The hotel has encouraged its customers to use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn to check their hotel facilities and even add pictures of the hotel. Using this method they are able to know if their customers were happy and satisfied or not."* [MM04]

> *"The front of office staff and the waiters have been delegated the duty of encouraged that the moment they are seeing off the guests the ask them to review them on the platforms like Trip advisor and Instagram and even Facebook."* [MM05]

Evaluation of the information on social media platforms

When asked how the information about hotels posted on social media sites is evaluated, respondents explained that:

> *"Sometimes it is not genuine but most of the time the bad ones are done by hotels competing with others. Have a group who critique and analyze and go back and write up something positive and give a feedback to the other users on social media."* [MM01]

> "*Research and review on facts before posting any reactions, treat every information shared with equal attention."* [MM02]

> *"By reaching out to the hotels directly, by the different reviews given on the platform by customers."* [MM03]

> *"If it's positive we will like it and make a positive comment on it as well, if its negative we will still comment on it but now carefully on how we comment because the world is looking at us and say now if this guest was dissatisfied because of this and this what are you people as hotel going to do about to rectify that and to redeem your image. It is usually now upon the General Manager to evaluate what is posted on social media sites and see how to react promptly but whatever is posted we have to evaluate it and respond to it because at the end of the day our customers won't take us seriously if they are posting information about us on social media and there is nothing we are doing about it."* [MM04]

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

The chapter presents a summary of the study's findings, discussion, conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 Summary of Research Findings

The main purpose of this study was to determine the effects of social media components on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya. The study covered effect of social media reviews, social media interactivity, social media informativity and importance of social media accounts on hotel choice. The study postulated four objectives, where the first three objectives were hypothesized and last objective was a research question. Preliminary analyses focused on assessing the respondents' characteristics and response descriptions of the study variables measurements. The three independent variable components explained 59.3% of hotel choice. Social media interactivity was the highest contributor among the media content attributes ($\beta = 0.299$) followed by social media informativity ($\beta = 0.277$) and the least was social media reviews ($\beta = 0.239$).

Based on the specific objectives, three hypotheses were developed and tested for this study. The first hypothesis H_{01} postulated that social media reviews have no significant effect on hotel choice. The regression results from the study shows beta coefficients of ($\beta = 0.239$, $t = 2.737$, $p = 0.007$). This finding reveals that social media reviews had a positive and significant effect on hotel choice. The second hypothesis H_{02} presupposed that social media interactivity has no significant effect on hotel

choice; the hypothesis was not supported by the data. Results depicted that social media interactivity had a positive and significant effect on hotel choice ($\beta = 0.299$, $t = 3.250$, p $= 0.001$). Finally, the last hypothesis H_{03} postulated that social media informativity has no significant effect on hotel choice in selected hotels; the hypothesis was not supported by the data. The results showed that social media informativity had a positive significant effect on hotel choice ($\beta = 0.277$, $t = 3.347$, p $= 0.001$).

The study's final objective assessed the importance of social media accounts when choosing hotels in Nakuru Town hotels. There were several conclusions based on thematic analysis of the qualitative data. Among the seven types of social media platforms identified for the study, WhatsApp, Facebook, Google and YouTube demonstrated high daily use. The important aspects of the social media accounts included, reaching people, promotion of the hotel products, creating brand awareness and advertising. Accordingly, hotel social media accounts were found to be very effective in enhancing marketing of the hotels to the customers.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

5.2.1 Effect of Social Media Reviews on Hotel Choice

The study's first objective examined the effect of social media reviews on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru town. The results showed high rating of social media reviews suggesting that they are used extensively in hotels. Online reviews are more important for the hotel industry now than in the past, since the ability to be perceived as a liked and trusted brand can be the difference between success or failure for the business (Shin, Perdue & Pandelaere, 2020). Consumers generally have confidence and consider these reviews as trustworthy, which may reflect how they

relate to the hotel industry (Jin, Ji & Gu, 2016; Xu, 2020). A previous report also found that online reviews ranked as the hotel industry's second most reliable source of brand knowledge relative to other sources recommendations (Qi, Zhang, Jeon & Zhou, 2016). Additionally, users are thought to have no patterns when posting reviews online (Xiao, Wei & Dong, 2016), with no known structured pattern of posting the reviews (Thakur, 2018). Online reviews, on the other hand, are an important resource for consumers that can allow them to determine prior product quality and service excellence before taking part in the important decision to buy the product or service from the business.

To understand the effect of social media reviews on hotel choice, the following attributes were explored: comments; experiences; views; suggestions and posts. The findings led to the rejection of the null hypothesis "Social media reviews have no significant effect on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town". The results indicate that overall social media review attributes significantly and positively influenced the hotel choice among hotel guests in the selected hotels. This agrees with previous findings that have established a high rating of social media reviews and influenced their decision to choose hotels (Garrido-Moreno *et al.*, 2018a; Bruno, Yang, Tian, Xie & Shao, 2019). It is possible for social media reviews to enhance customer choice behavior because hotel guests use social media reviews to seek experiences and suggestions of other users as well as review comments, posts and views before making their decisions to choose a particular hotel (Wang *et al.*, 2019). This is in line with studies that have indicated that while social media are primarily used to assist consumers for inspirations, limiting choices and verifying decisions, hotel reviews are used to form a 'consideration set' of possible choices (Gonçalves, Silva & Martins, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2020). Another possible implication of this result is

that the selected hotels in Nakuru Town proved a good social media review on their platforms that were impressive for the customers. These findings are in agreement with a study which established that hotels involve with their clients through social media reviews that will motivate the clientele to stay and spend more, have increased repeat clients and get more referrals from their clients which are all positive indicators of hotel choice (Tsiakali, 2018).

Among the social media reviews indicators, the most highly ranked was views followed by experiences and the third was comments while the least was posts. A number of studies have examined how much posting information on the social media could do a contribution for the standpoint of organizations. Most firms worldwide are looking forward to benefiting by using such applications in their business to reach new customers or to enhance their current customer's experience and accordingly, generating more profit and sales revenue. Indeed, social media seems to be more novel and less costly communication way to have more interactivity and individualisation with the targeted customers. These study findings suggest that online sites are fundamental for the gathering of consumer views and the analysis of these opinions in an independent way and that there is a huge amount of reviews where all possible subjects are discussed. In agreement with other studies, it was demonstrated that higher ratings of views and experiences are effective factors in making hotel visit decisions since customers reporting positive attributes about their experiences are likely to make return visits (Pérez Aranda, Anaya-Sanchez & Ruizalba, 2017; Ramdin & Naraidoo, 2020). Besides, most guests using social media reviews of personal experiences also help hotels to approach their clients, improve their brand image and gain customer knowledge of good feedback to evolve new products and personalize services (He, Tian, Tao, Zhang, Yan & Akula, 2017). It was evident that customers

took interest in hotel comments on social media platforms to allow them provide comments, which may likely make the hotel owners to be responsive to their requests and thus likely to book the hotel and even make return visits.

During the study, hotel posts were not among the impressive content of the social media reviews for customers. This contradicts with findings who established that hotel posts impressed the customers (Ray, Bala & Jain, 2020). Previously, it was established that hotel posts may be liked or disliked by the customers depending on the content of the posts (So, Wu, Xiong & King, 2018; Hu & Olivieri, 2020). Therefore, the lower rank for hotel posts may be a reflection of the poor quality of posts in the social media platforms. The posts made by other users on the other hand encouraged them and through that they were able to get hotel suggestions from other users on social media platforms. Also the idea corresponds to the results presented due to the fact that social media posts allow its users to find the best hotels, to look at the information about those hotels, find new hotels according to their tastes as well as comment and evaluate their hotel experience.

5.2.2 Effect of Social Media Interactivity on Hotel Choice

The study's second objective determined the effect of social media interactivity on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru town. The study showed high preference for social media interactivity which is recognized as an integral part of online communication (Kim & Lee, 2019). The reason for the high preference of social media interactivity could be related to its ability to create solid stakeholder relationships. Interactivity can also characterize the degree to which two or more communications parties may act on each other, on the communication media and on the messages and the degree to which those influences are coordinated (Hall, 2018).

Nevertheless, business professionals also use such words such as 'engagement', 'interactive communication' and 'social interaction' to refer to interactivity in an interchangeable way while ignoring their conceptual differences (Gleason & Murschetz, 2019). Interactivity provides a direct advantage to the ties between organizations and their audiences. Interactivity has been asserted to play a significant role in the degree of user satisfaction with their online experience on the Internet (Tajvidi, Wang, Hajli & Love, 2017). (Jo and Kim 2003) explicitly suggest that the different types of multimedia that appear on an organization's website may have a significant effect on public relations, because they are likely to be regarded by an organization that has a highly interactive multimedia website. This can thus contribute to positive outcomes for companies or boost credibility and raise revenue and customer satisfaction (Kim & Lee, 2019).

In particular, inquiries, expressions, discussions, engagement and exchanges were explored as attributes of interactivity. The study presupposed that social media interactivity has no significant effect on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town. Results, however, revealed that social media interactivity has a positive and significant effect on hotel choice. The findings showed that rating for social media interactivity was high which implies that social media interactivity employed by the hotel guests received above average rating among hotel guests. The current findings concur with those of Aluri *et al..,* (2016) who found that social media interaction among customers and between customers and hotels enable them share joyful or bad experiences from their hotel stay. Therefore, the findings of this study confirm that social media platforms are widely used by customers for engagement and socializing purpose which enhances interactivity (Whiting and Williams, 2013).

Among the attributes of social media interactivity that were ranked high by the hotel guests were user expressions on social media which implies that social media provides a platform for companies to engage with consumers or for consumers to interact with one another when making hotel choices. The findings of the current study are consistent with previous studies which suggests that user expression is mostly used by most of the customers who feel that they are not so satisfied with the services and want some changes (Neirotti, Raguseo & Paolucci, 2016; He *et al.*, 2017). This simply means that user expression by customers in hotels might be sufficient to influence thoughts and behaviors.

The second social media interactivity attribute explored was engagement. The overall results suggest that hotel guests engage, discuss and share information on social media. This is in line with Liu- Thompkins and Rogerson, 2012 who suggested that users can easily set up communities of special interests within which they can share their knowledge and experience and can also engage in conversations with other people or experts in the field. Engagement and exchanges of opinions among consumers also ranked highly. Therefore, the high ranking of these attributes in social media interactivity was not surprising and concurs with other studies on social media interactivity. Indeed, social media is a key platform that supports sharing knowledge through interactive engagement, open discussion policy, engagements and collaborative technologies such as networking and online discussion forums where consumers can express, inquire, engage, and exchange information (Abidi, Agur, & Frisch, 2015).

Nevertheless, customers' responses provided to hotel inquiries on social media and discussions held on social media were low. These results, however, disagree with

those of Lee, Hur, & Kim, (2019) who established that customers in some hotels in Hong Kong did not rate social media interactivity highly in the county, the differences may perhaps be due to the countries different approach or culture to social media use.

5.2.3 Effect of Social Media Informativity on Hotel Choice

The third objective of the study established the effect of social media informativity on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru town. The results suggest that there is medium rating for social media informativity. In the last decade, several research studies have been published on the importance of social media informativity in the hospitality and hotel industry (Baggio, Starcevic, Studer, Simon, Gainsbury, Gmel & Billieux, 2018). In a comprehensive study, the performance of 67 hotels in Hong Kong based on social media informativity ratings indicated that Hong Kong hotels benefited greatly from customers who rated the hotel as having a high informativity index (Chan & Guillet, 2011). Alameddine (2013) argues that improving the flow of information to their customers should be a key goal for companies when using social media. In another study, Kim, Spiller, & Hettche, (2015) attempted to demonstrate how a website's use of informativity attributes such as images and video clips may have beneficial marketing results.

Specifically, the attributes included: images/photos clarity; video display; audio/sound recording; texts and messages. The study presupposed that social media informativity has no significant effect on hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town. However, the results revealed that there was a positive and significant effect of social media informativity on hotel choice. Consequently, the hypothesis was not supported by the data.

The results indicated that social media informativity employed by the hotels received above average rating from the hotel guests. These findings are in agreement with those of Kim, Spiller, & Hettche, (2015) who tried to show how the use of informativity attributes such as images and video clips on a website could have positive marketing effects. They examined South Korean hotels and found that designing a website that includes the aforementioned attributes would inspire users to shop online and increase their chances of hotel visits.

The findings further suggested that audio recordings, texts and messages were very essential for hotel guests as it informed their decisions. The finding support the study of Okazaki and Taylor, 2013 that social media has the ability to present visually, verbally or textually shared content or use a combination of textual, visual, and verbal content. Additionally, another study suggests that although social media was largely text-based in the beginning; it has quickly evolved to include audio and visual content which can inform decisions (Gretzel, 2019).

It was also evident from the findings that hotel guests view hotel related videos which help them in making choice. This perhaps is due to the fact that there has been a noticeable shift towards more visual and live content, with short video "stories" becoming popular across several platforms (Huertas, 2018). However, one unanticipated finding was on images/photos whose guest perception was generally low. The results clearly attest that hotel images/photos obtained on social media platforms did not feature highly as important aspect that may drive customer choice. Nonetheless, these results indicate something contradictory to what Poor, Duhachek and Krishnan 2013 who claim that simply seeing a picture along with a message from a social media could be sufficient to influence thoughts and behaviors. Pieters and

Wedel 2007 further suggest that image exposure influences people's assessments and judgments of objects, such as brands and products.

Social media information is generally multimodal, such that they contain both text and images (Mazloom, Rietveld, Rudinac, Worring & Van Dolen, 2016). Both elements of exchanges on social media will indicate intentions of messages. Image activities may range from offering information that allows for multiple interpretations to directing specific actions (Ordenes *et al.,* 2019). For instance, a tweet that simply shows information images of food products leaves the interpretations to the viewer. These shifts have had demonstrable consequences on social media usage and its consequences as some scholars suggest that image-based posts convey greater social presence than text alone" (e.g., Pittman and Reich 2016). Furthermore, Balomenou and Garrod (2019) argue that improvements in the photo-taking and photo-sharing habits brought on by social media have important consequences for the representation circle, with users, in addition to traditional media and marketers now building the imagined picture of a destination to a far greater extent.

5.2.4 Importance of Social Media Accounts

Based on thematic analysis of the qualitative data there were several findings. First, the researcher established that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the most frequently used social media platforms by the hotels. "The results collated were consistent with what Moore, Hopkins and Raymond (2013), Raab, Berezan, Krishen and Tanford (2017) and Kim and Ko (2018) established that Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are the most frequently used social media accounts providing organizations with a platform to create brand awareness and loyalty.

Secondly, the findings of the study indicate that social media is used largely for marketing purposes. Previous studies have established that owning an account on social media is a type of marketing strategy which has created more tools for potential consumer feedback (Guynn, 2016). With influence taken from Sabate *et al*. (2014), company marketers and advertisers can utilize social media for a greater understanding of the influence of different types of social media messages for potential integration into their marketing mix. It was also clear from the findings that the hotel embraced social media to create awareness, gather guest reviews as well as opportunity to meet potential clients. This is consistent with Mowat's (2010) findings that using social media accounts such as Facebook has opened up a range of avenues and opportunities to raise awareness and listen to the hotel guests.

Thirdly, the results of the study indicate that there are several benefits of using social media accounts by the hotels for improved advertising, improved hotel booking and letting the customers know their products in real time, thus improved marketing. Obtaining new customers and retaining existing customers is of primary importance in the hypercompetitive hospitality industry. For instance, it was determined in one case study of nine service companies that a five percent increase in customer retention could bring a 25 to 85 percent increase in marginal profit (Reichheld & Sasser, 2017). These findings are also in line with those of Baird and Parasnis (2011) who determined that customers follow social media sites for discounts, purchasing, reviews and product rankings, general information and exclusive information. However, Baird and Parasnis determined that companies think consumers followed them because they want to learn about new products, general information, submit an opinion on current products/service, exclusive information, and seeking company reviews and product rankings. Additionally, researchers have established that most

firms worldwide are looking forward to benefiting by using such applications in their business to reach new customers or to enhance their current customer's experience and accordingly, generating more profit and sales revenue (Wu, 2016; Movsisyan, 2016; Yadav, Wang, Wang, & Wan, 2016).

The results further indicated that social media platforms are quite effective in enhancing marketing among the hotel owners. This is in line with the findings of Filo Lock and Karg, 2015 and Saxena and Khanna, 2013 that social media has been largely realized as an effective mechanism that contributes to the marketing objectives and strategy of the firms; especially in the areas of customer engagement, customer relationship management and communication. Furthermore, the study established that social media platforms help in communication and promotion of hotel products and services to potential and existing customers. These findings are in line with those of Raab *et al,.* (2016) noted that the use of social media has developed improved communication between companies to loyal customers and have positively increased the relationship with their members through social media communication quality and customized information. Garretson, 2008 further established that social media platforms not only enable the product or service company to convey their brand, culture and product but the platforms also offer them the opportunity to initiate and maintain communication pathways with their consumer. The platforms further provide the opportunity to increase the communication from business to consumer (B2C) and consumer to consumer (C2C), both of which may increase customer intention to purchase company products, an element that reinforces purchasing choices (Leung, Bai, & Stahura, 2017; Raab *et al.*, 2017).

The frequency of usage of social media by the hotels was also the focus of interest in this study. The findings on the level of social media usage in hotels were high; it was used daily to help push the brand. These results are in linet with those of Luo *et al.,* 2013 that accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, have millions of daily users and are said to capture the audience knowledge and Filo *et al*., (2015) who found that using social media accounts contributes more to businesses' ability to connect consumers to their own products more, a phenomenon that has gained significant attention in many marketing studies.

The results of this study revealed that the customer feedback received on social media sites was seen as one way for hotels to receive complaints from their customers. The hotels thus showed that they seek to ensure that concerns are addressed promptly by getting to reach out to the customers individually, acknowledging the issue, apologizing and assuring them that the problem will be rectified. This is in line with Ding and Lii (2016) who argued that complaints require explaining and apologizing to customers, providing reimbursement and courtesy. However, Sparks (2001) advises that if the service provider wants to compensate for the failure effectively, then clarification, apology, problem solving and customer compensation are needed. In addition, Bell and Zemke (1987) indicated that, when customers experience service failure, the service providers should resolve the failure as quickly as possible to prevent further harm. The study further asserts that customers were motivated by the hotels through promotions, discounts, providing incentives and complimentary products and services. However, Hoffman *et al.,* (1995) established that free food and a discount coupon could be offered to the customers.

Finally, the hotels analysed the social media posts by continuously reviewing the posts, sharing comments and direct outreach to the customers. It is important to note that social media is online tools/applications/networks/platforms/accounts that can give customers the opportunity to communicate with each other and exchange responses (Ali & Frew, 2013). From the findings, hotels critique and analyze the posts. Most of the time, this was accomplished by a single department or general manager who assesses what is posted and respond accordingly. If it is a good review, a positive response is made and if it is a negative review then it is assessed and responded to. This is consistent with Connor (2010) findings that social media accounts such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter allows hotels to respond to guests' comments to protect the reputation of the hotel. Xotels (2012) also mentioned that social media is aimed at inviting consumers to share their reviews, which can influence businesses' online reputation in the hotel industry. Hence, social media accounts contribute to the hotel industry.

5.3 Conclusions of the Study

It is evident from the study that social media components affect customer choice of hotel. The study determined that social media reviews, interactivity and informativity positively affect customers' hotel choice in selected hotels. Social media interactivity was the highest contributor among the social media components followed by social media informativity and the least was social media reviews.

Social media interactivity has an effect on customer hotel choice. This can be attributed to the fact that interactivity is concerned with how people communicate with one another to inquire, discuss and share information and opinions on social media. The present study has demonstrated that hotel guests engage each other on

social media to exchange their views on hotels as well as to express their opinions on hotels, thus there discussion can equally provide useful information leading them to make recommendations to each other thus choice.

Social media informativity has a significant effect on customer hotel choice since customers prefer to make decisions using hotel-related videos, images and photos as well as text messages from other users on social media. The nature of social media informativity helps create, guide and redirect customer decisions in selecting and visiting preferred hotels. This study observed that social media post with video or photo has an effect on customer choice since the message not only delivered the meaning on text but also delivered the meaning via visual or both visual and audio.

Social media reviews have an effect on customer hotel choice as customers seek hotel-related experiences on social media by viewing posts, comments and suggestions that users leave on social media platforms about other hotels before making bookings and visits to a particular hotel.

Wide varieties of social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Google, Instagram, Microblogs, YouTube, Snapchat and LinkedIn should be used by the hotels. Accordingly, hotel social media accounts were found to be very effective in enhancing marketing of the hotels to the customers as the important aspects of social media accounts included, reaching people, promotion of the hotel products, creating brand awareness and advertising.

5.4 Implications of the Study

5.4.1 Theoretical Implication of the Study

This study supports existing literature that social media reviews, social media interactivity and social media informativity have a positive and significant effect on customers' hotel choice. The results of the study add some new knowledge to the literature on social media components, hotel choice and their relationships which influence the development of the hotel industry in a developing country context. The findings further support social exchange theory that social media rely on information provided by users, an understanding of the interactions and motives of users is imperative which in this case is driven by interactivity, informativity and even reviews necessary to drive hotel choice." Furthermore, the study provides empirical evidence on the importance of using social media accounts in the hospitality field.

Finally, a suggested framework illustrating the integration of the model applied in the study was developed by the researcher which involves social media components and hotel choice in figure 5.1. This model may be adopted when studying social media and hotel choice.
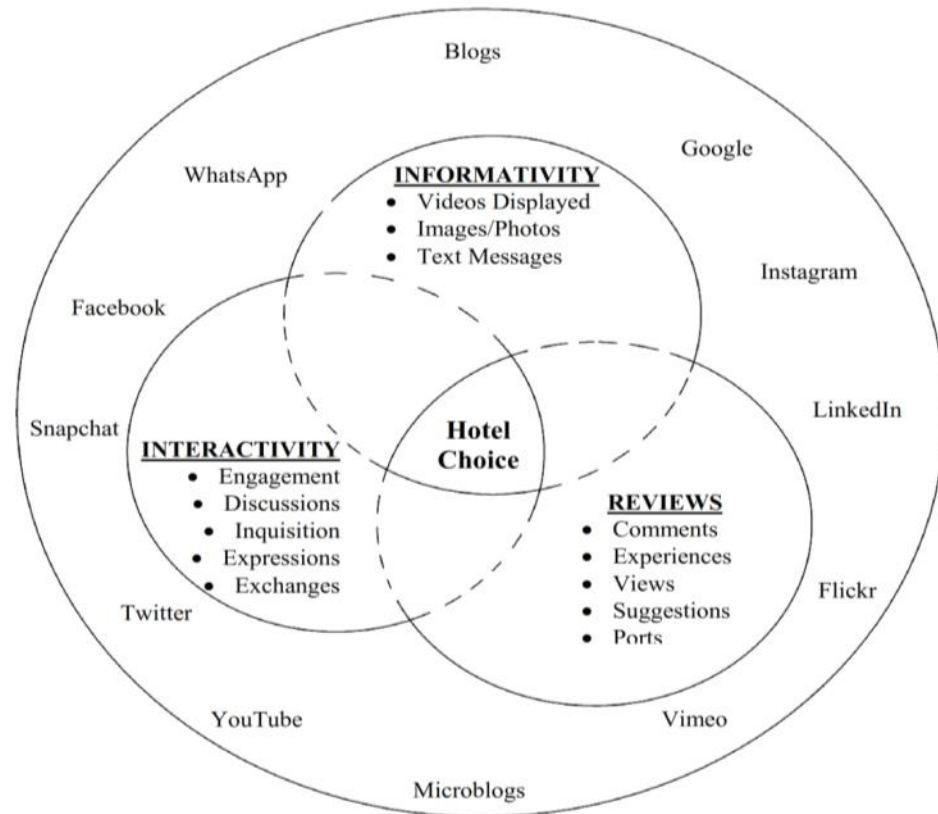
Figure 5. 1: Social Media Integration model

Source: Researcher (2019)

5.4.2 Managerial Implications of the Study

This study examined the effects of social media components on hotel choice and how social media accounts are relevant for customers to make purchases of hotel services. The result of this study can guide hotel managers to formulate policies and strategies to enhance social media reviews, social media interactivity and social media informativity. "In this context, hospitality marketers cannot ignore the role of social media in distributing hotel-related information without risking becoming irrelevant as social media is one of the most effective marketing instruments. Therefore, hotels should invest more on social media platforms since most of the customers take interest in reading other users hotel experiences accessible on social media.

Customers further feel encouraged by hotel posts and suggestions made on social media which consequently enables them to form opinions out of these views.

Since interactivity in social media also has a significant effect, managers can develop strategies that help achieve a high level of flexibility by tracking hotel inquiries, conversations, thoughts, expressions as well as how people engage with each other on social media platforms, thereby allowing them to get a thorough understanding of the needs of each customer. Currently social media offers a variety of texts, audio and visual content. In fact, social media informativity has an effect on hotel choice, with social media now offering a variety of messaging, audio and visual content to push their agenda. Managers should therefore decide how the use of available images/photos, texts, messages audio and video elements displayed allows customers to gain information on social media about the hotels.

Furthermore, this study can benefit researches to provide recommendations to the hotel sector and decision maker in the hospitality industry regarding the best social media accounts that can influence customers' decision making in hotel selection. Finally, marketers can use the study model as e-marketing strategy in order to achieve e-marketing objectives. Additionally, the current study can be expanded to be used for a wider range in the hotel industry.

5.5 Recommendations of the Study

From the findings, this study recommends that customers should utilize social media reviews in selecting their preferred hotels as they can get social proof from people who have been there before them which is a greater force for buying decisions.

Social media informativity sites enable users to use graphics and texts to share images, videos and information about customers via chats. Therefore, due to the changing media consumption habits, hotel guests are more likely to search for photos and videos on social media before making a booking, in fact a brand's social media presence and visual identity is often one of the final decision-makers for consumers when making a booking. Based on these findings, it is recommended that hoteliers should show their visual identity and show how inviting their property is through their social media, or better yet through influencer marketing with online content creators.

This study further recommends that hotels make the most of social media platforms, since their use is only expected to rise. Therefore, rethinking the use of social media and technology is critical for hotels not only to promote the business but also to enhance customer care and guest experience, which will help strengthen brands' reputation and drive growth. Social media accounts offer hotels the opportunity to build relationships with guests and strengthen the image of the hotel online. Additionally, it is an opportunity for a company to showcase what they have to offer and build guest expectations. Having an effective social media strategy and an active presence across as many networks as possible is absolutely essential for hotels to build relationships with and successfully market to past, current and prospective guests. In addition, apart from making social media an indispensable tool for hotel marketing, it is also important for hotels to create a public profile to show their products and services and engage with their guests, to build that authentic and human connection across their social media platforms in the same way that influencers do.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

1. This study adopted a direct effect model. Future studies on the relationships between social media use and customer choice could extend the framework by integrating it with potential moderators and mediators in relation to technology readiness and habits. This may give more robust results.

2. Social media issues are still in their early stage so the lack of well-established measures could be the main obstacle to examine the customer's perception and behavior toward the marketing activities over the social media platforms. Therefore, future researchers need to make further efforts in validating a robust scale to accurately have a valid and reliable results related to the consumer behavior in this emerging area.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Questionnaire

Serial No: ……

Dear Respondent,

I am a Master of Hospitality Management student at Moi University. I am currently undertaking a research work on: ***"Effects of Social Media Outputs on Hotel Choice in Selected Hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya".*** The study is being conducted for academic purposes and the information you shall provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality. You have been identified as one of the respondents and you are kindly requested to participate by filling in this questionnaire. Thank you for your cooperation.

PART A: General Information

Please put a "tick" in the spaces provided to indicate the most appropriate response:

1. **Indicate your age bracket:**

    Less than 20 years [ ] 21-30 years[ ] 31-40 years[ ] 41-50 years[ ]

    51 years & above [ ]

2. **Gender:**   Female [ ]   Male   [ ]

3. **Indicate your resident status:**

        Local Resident [ ]   Foreign Residence [ ]

4. **If foreign kindly indicate your nationality………………………….**

5. **State the highest level of your education:**

        High School [ ] College [ ] Degree [ ] Postgraduate [ ]

6. **Reasons for your travel:**

        Business [ ] Leisure [ ] Visiting family and friends [ ]

7. **Status of your stay at this hotel of your choice:**

        Bed Only [ ] Bed & Breakfast [ ] Half Board [   ]   Full Board [   ]

Which of the following social media platforms do you use when seeking information about this hotel? [Tick [√] where applicable].

a) Facebook   [ ]

b) Google   [ ]

c) Twitter   [ ]

d) WhatsApp   [ ]

e) Instagram   [ ]

f) YouTube   [ ]

g) Snapchat   [ ]

h) Flickr   [ ]

i) Vimeo   [ ]

j) LinkedIn   [ ]

8. Please indicate how frequently you use the below stated social media platforms when choosing a hotel to stay in (tick (√) where applicable).

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS	LEVEL OF FREQUENCY				
	Never 1	Annually 2	Monthly 3	Weekly 4	Daily 5
Facebook					
Twitter					
WhatsApp					
Google					
Instagram					
Microblogs					
YouTube					
Snapchat					
LinkedIn					
Vimeo					
Flickr					

PART B: Social Media Components

Please **circle** your answer to each statement based on the Key below:

(1) Strongly Disagree (SD); (2) Disagree (D); (3) Moderately Agree (MA); (4)

Agree (A); (5) Strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	SOCIAL MEDIA ONLINE REVIEWS	SD	D	MA	A	SA
S1	I take interest in hotel comments made on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
S2	I read other users' hotel experiences accessible on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
S3	I make opinions out of hotel views made on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
S4	I get hotel suggestions from other users on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
S5	I feel inspired by posts on social media platforms made by other users.	1	2	3	4	5

S/N	SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIVITY	SD	D	MA	A	SA
S6	I follow keenly when people exchange opinions about hotels on social media.	1	2	3	4	5
S7	Responses to hotel inquiries on social media are helpful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
S8	User expressions on social media help me to form opinions about hotels.	1	2	3	4	5
S9	I like when people engage each other about hotels on social media.	1	2	3	4	5
S10	Discussions held on social media help me make opinion.	1	2	3	4	5

S/N	SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATIVITY	SD	D	MA	A	SA
S11	I form opinions based on hotel information contained in texts on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
S12	I gain confidence from hotel images/photos obtained on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
S13	I read hotel related messages on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
S14	I watch hotel videos displayed on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
S15	I listen to hotel-related audio dialog on social media platforms.	1	2	3	4	5

PART C: CUSTOMER HOTEL CHOICE MEASUREMENTS

Please circle your answer to each statement based on the key below:

(1) Strongly Disagree (SD); (2) Disagree (D); (3) Moderately Agree (MA); (4)

Agree (A); (5) Strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	HOTEL CHOICE	SD	D	MA	DA	SA
C1	I book this hotel based on hotel information provided on social media.	1	2	3	4	5
C2	Through the information I get on social media, I am willing to make a visit to this hotel.	1	2	3	4	5
C3	I was recommended to this hotel by other social media users.	1	2	3	4	5
C4	I prefer this hotel to others based on social media information provided.	1	2	3	4	5
C5	I like the hotel products consumed by other users displayed on social media.	1	2	3	4	5
C6	I made selection of this hotel based on social media information.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for participating in this study

____ END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE ____

Appendix II: Interview Schedule

1. Which social media platforms does your hotel use? (If more than three) why do you use different social media platforms?

2. For what purpose do you use the above-mentioned social media platforms?

3. What do you think are the benefits of using social media in this hotel?

4. How effective are these social media platforms for business marketing?

5. How often do you use social media for the growth of the business?

6. What do you do with the customer reviews received from your customers on social media platforms?

7. How does your hotel motivate customers to engage with your social media accounts?

8. How do you evaluate information posted on social media sites about hotels?

Appendix III: Recommendation Letter from Moi University

MOI UNIVERSITY
ISO 9001:2015 Certified Institution
SCHOOL OF TOURISM, HOSPITALITY & EVENTS MANAGEMENT

Telephone: 0771-296270/0790850990	Box 3900
Fax: (053) 43047	**ELDORET**
E-mail: deansthe@mu.ac.ke	Kenya

Ref: MU/STHE/SGS/23   18th March, 2019

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RECOMMENDATION LETTER FOR WINNIE MALEL -STHE/PGH/002/18

The above named is a bonafide student of Moi University, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management. She is pursuing a Master of Hospitality Management degree in the Department of Hotel and Hospitality Management.

She has successfully completed her course work and has defended her proposal titled **"Effects of Social Media Outputs on Customers Hotel Choice in Selected Hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya."**. Ms. Malel has been allowed to proceed to the field for data collection.

Any assistance accorded to her will be appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

PROF. DAMIANNAH KIETI
DEAN, SCHOOL OF TOURISM, HOSPITALITY & EVENTS MANAGEMENT

Appendix IV: NACOSTI Research Authorisation Letter

**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,
TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

Telephone:+254-20-2213471,
2241349,3310571,2219420
Fax:+254-20-318245,318249
Email: dg@nacosti.go.ke
Website : www.nacosti.go.ke
When replying please quote

NACOSTI, Upper Kabete
Off Waiyaki Way
P.O. Box 30623-00100
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref: No. **NACOSTI/P/19/34014/29069**

Date: **12ᵗʰ April, 2019**

Winnie Chepkoech Malel
Moi University
P.O. Box 3900-30100
ELDORET.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on *"Effects of social media outputs on consumers' hotel choice in selected hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya"* I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Nakuru County** for the period ending **12ᵗʰ April, 2020.**

You are advised to report to **the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Nakuru County** before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit **a copy** of the final research report to the Commission within **one year** of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

GODFREY P. KALERWA MSc., MBA, MKIM
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO

Copy to:

The County Commissioner
Nakuru County.

The County Director of Education
Nakuru County.

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation is ISO9001:2008 Certified

Appendix V: NACOSTI Research Permit

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:
MISS. WINNIE CHEPKOECH MALEL of MOI UNIVERSITY, 0-40107 MUHORONI, has been permitted to conduct research in *Nakuru* County

on the topic: *EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA OUTPUTS ON CONSUMERS' HOTEL CHOICE IN SELECTED HOTELS IN NAKURU TOWN, KENYA.*
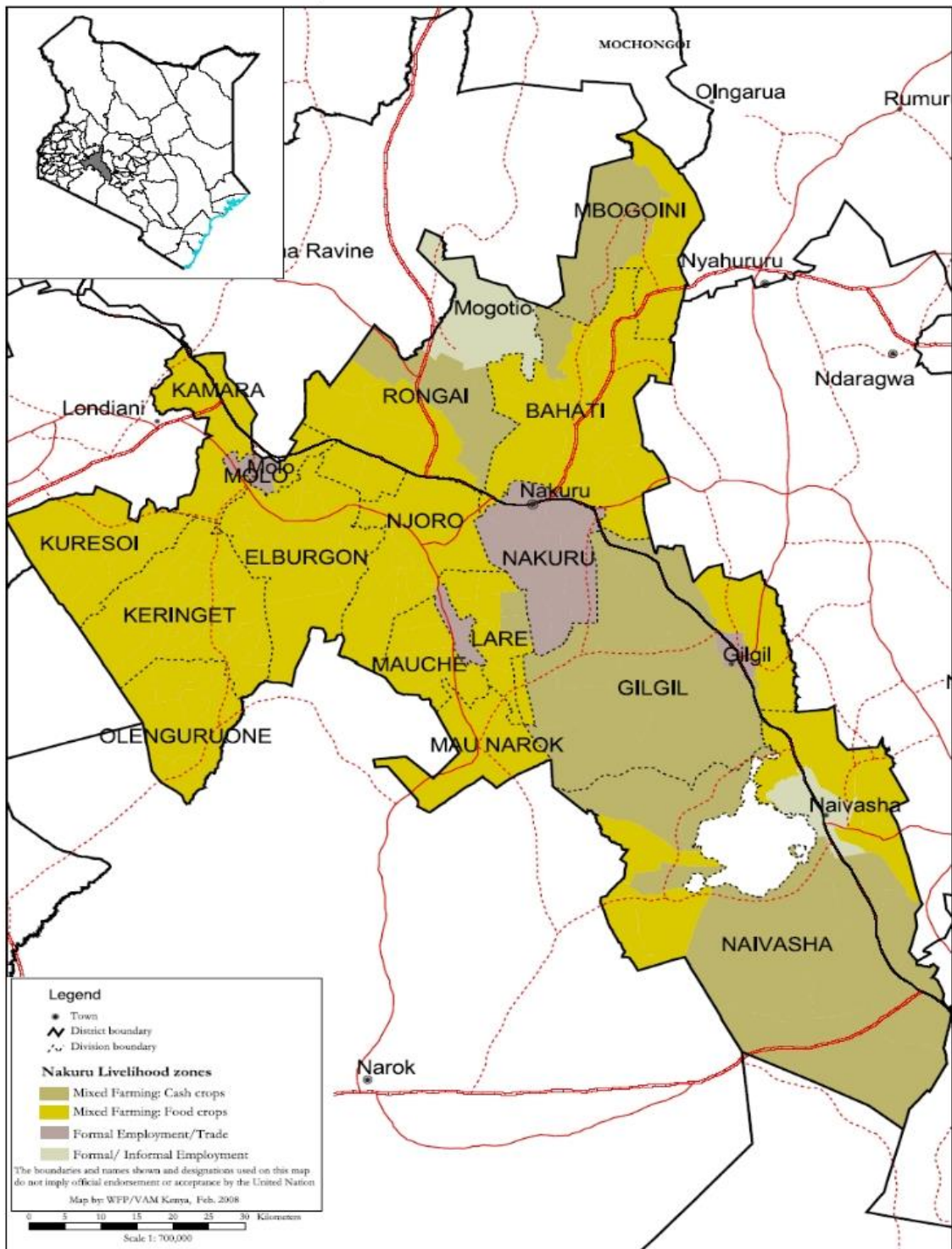
for the period ending:
12th April, 2020

Permit No : NACOSTI/P/19/34014/29069
Date Of Issue : 12th April, 2019
Fee Recieved : Ksh 1000

....
Applicant's Signature

....
Director General National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation

Appendix VI: Map of Nakuru County Showing Location of Nakuru Town

Appendix VI: Plagiarism Report

Malel Final

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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