

# The efficacy of social networks as marketing tools in the South African and Zimbabwean accommodation sector

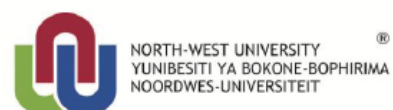
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Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree *Philosophiae Doctor* in *Tourism Management* at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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May 2015

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**Proof of language editing**

**Claire Brear**

**Editing & Proofreading**

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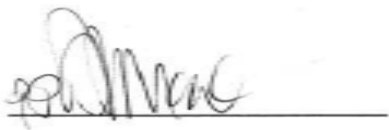
To whom it may concern:

This letter confirms that the manuscript detailed below was edited by a professional English-language editor.

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## **The efficacy of social networks as marketing tools in the South African and Zimbabwean accommodation sector**

*Abstract:* The advent of social media has transformed the way in which tourism businesses operate especially in the marketing of tourism services. One major tourism sector which has been influenced by social media is the accommodation subsector. Hospitality businesses are now compelled to adopt social networks for marketing purposes to keep pace with changes in consumer behaviour. Previous research has indicated that, although social media is a new phenomenon in marketing, hospitality businesses such as accommodation facilities have embraced it for marketing purposes and the usage varies from one country to another. Prior studies have also shown that social networks are now considered a major source of information for tourists and influence their decision making process. Evidence from the literature shows that little work has been done to investigate the effectiveness of social networks in marketing accommodation services in Sub-Saharan Africa. Studies on adoption and usage of social networks in the accommodation sector in South Africa and Zimbabwe are limited. This study was done to address these knowledge gaps identified in literature.

The aim of this research was to determine the effectiveness of social networks in the marketing of accommodation services in South Africa and Zimbabwe. To achieve this, two literature chapters provided an in-depth discussion on social media marketing as well as the influence of these networks on tourists' decision-making process. For the empirical survey, the study used an electronic questionnaire which was mailed to South African accommodation establishments. The same questionnaire was hand delivered by field workers in Zimbabwe from June 2013 to July 2014. A total of 129 and 134 were completed from South Africa and Zimbabwe respectively.

Factor analysis was used to identify the dominant factors influencing usage of social networks and their effectiveness. The dominant factors were further tested using t-test, chi-square test and effect sizes calculation. The results from t-test and effect sizes computation revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in both the usage of social networks and the effectiveness of social networks in the two countries. Chi-square tests results further revealed that accommodation establishments in both countries were not extensively utilising social networks for marketing purposes and

social networks were effective marketing tool in the accommodation sector. The major challenges highlighted by most accommodation establishments from both countries were, time constraints, lack knowledge on the use social networks for marketing and lack of commitment to sustain social media marketing efforts. Power cuts were also another challenge for the Zimbabwean accommodation establishments.

This study did not only present theoretical contributions to accommodation establishments but practical recommendations were also made. Based on the results, this study made the following invaluable contributions: firstly a social media marketing framework was proposed. This framework contributes to the body of literature that could be used for future references in the field of social media marketing. The framework provides some necessary steps that can be followed when implementing social media marketing not only by accommodation establishments but with other similar businesses. Secondly, the study addresses the gap in literature by providing evidence from a developing country's perspective on the usage and effectiveness of social networks an area which has received little attention in hospitality research. Findings of this study can be used as a future reference by other researchers in the field of social media marketing on the African continent. Lastly, the study also shed light on how social networks can be utilised to influence tourists' decision-making process.

**Key words:** accommodation establishments, decision making process, marketing, marketing mediums, Social media, social networks, South Africa, Zimbabwe.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT, OBJECTIVE AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction of social networks has attracted millions of users worldwide and attracted the attention of many researchers as well (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2011; Asssenov & Khurana, 2012), many of which have integrated these sites into their daily practices. In less than five years, sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have shifted from a niche online activity to a phenomenon in which tens of millions of bloggers are engaged (Cachia, 2008:3). According to Salkhordeh (2010:1), social networking sites, first introduced to the online community in 2003, have recorded an extraordinary increase in the number of users resulting in changes to the economic, social and political landscapes by facilitating the sharing of ideas, pictures, videos, recommendations, and experiences while developing relationships with family, old friends, and new virtual friends (Chan & Guillet, 2011:345).

Businesses across all sectors of the economy including the hospitality sector are now compelled to adopt these new sites for marketing purposes in order to keep up with changes in consumer behaviour. For a business in the hospitality sector, this goes beyond having a website and means reaching out to potential customers across the changing online landscape (Chan & Guillet, 2011:346). It means engaging people using a variety of newly developed social media platforms. Hence, strategic marketing of a tourism-based business must harness the potential of online social networks (Lim, 2010:10). Since the hospitality sector is one of the most customer interactive industries, it would seem reasonable that establishments competing in this space would be interested in using social networks for marketing their businesses to increase brand awareness and facilitate direct feedback from their customers (Ernstad & Henriksson, 2010:3). Academic literature shows that social networks are of great importance and interest to the marketing fraternity due to their popularity, their ability to communicate quickly and widely and their apparent influence on users (Friebe & Campell, 2009:6; Pradiptarini, 2011:235). Thus, social media, if used for hospitality marketing can lead to an increase in brand awareness as well as in business sales. However, while social networks are becoming increasingly important in the marketing of hospitality services, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the usage and effectiveness of social

networks in the marketing of hospitality services, especially in the accommodation sector in developing nations. In addition, there are fewer academic studies on marketing via social media, with limited focus on social networking marketing (Assenov & Khurana, 2012:325). To date, there is little formal consensus as to which type of social media marketing framework is appropriate for hospitality businesses.

It is against this backdrop that this study was conducted in two developing countries with different levels of technological advancement namely, South Africa and Zimbabwe, to establish the usage of social networks for the marketing of accommodation services specifically and to determine their effectiveness as marketing tools. South Africa and Zimbabwe provide a valid platform to study social media marketing which will produce a partial replica of social media usage in Sub-Saharan Africa since they are at different levels of technological advancement and internet penetration. A comparison will then be made on the state of social networks usage in these two developing nations both in the Sub-Sahara Africa region. The “big four” social networks in Africa (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn) suggested by Keim (2012:3) will be included in this study together with TripAdvisor and MySpace which have also gained momentum during recent years (Mangold & Faulds, 2009:357; Yazdanifard, Obeidy, Yusoff & Babaei, 2011:577). The reason for including these social networks is that they are also the more popular social networks in the countries being studied (Goldstuck, 2012; Tech Zimreport, 2012).

Callon, Miles and Muniesa (2007:21) indicate that accommodation is one of the primary sectors in the tourism industry. In other words, accommodation is by far the largest and most ubiquitous sub-sector within the tourism industry (Friebe & Campell, 2009:6; Van Der Merwe 2003:28). This was also supported by Statistics South Africa’s 2014 report which state that, the hospitality sector makes up 67% of all tourism in South Africa. With very few exceptions, tourists normally need a place to stay and sleep when arriving at a destination. Thus, the accommodation sector complements the tourism service by providing an essential support facility in destination regions (Nelwamondo, 2009:2). Apart from the aforementioned fact, accommodation also contributes a reasonable percentage to overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of South Africa. For instance results from Statistic South Africa’s 2014 report indicate that wholesale, retail and catering and accommodation sectors contributed 14.4% of the GDP. However, the

report did not show the specific contribution of the accommodation sector. In Zimbabwe, the hospitality sector is the third highest contributor to the country's Gross Domestic Product with a growth rate of 6% in 2011 (Zunga, 2011:3). Thus, the importance of the accommodation sector to the tourism industry as well as the country cannot be underestimated. In this respect, it is crucial for the sector to expand its knowledge on social media marketing in order to market effectively to visitors worldwide.

This chapter discusses the research process followed in this study. This was realised by providing a brief background of this study which was followed by analysing the problem statement. The goals and objectives of the study were clearly stated together with the research methodology and definitions of key concepts. The chapter concludes by highlighting chapter classification.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

This background is divided into two sections, where the first section explains how social networks influence decision making and marketing while the second section focuses on the use of social networks specifically for marketing accommodation establishments.

### **1.2.1 Social networks and decision making**

Social networks have been described as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007:1; Miguens, Baggio & Costa 2008:136; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012:195). They can also be defined as applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004:2; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:58). Although social networks are relatively new social media platforms which have emerged in recent years, they are popularly used around the world (Arkvi & Bairakimova, 2010:2; Chan & Guillet, 2011:347). According to ComScore (2011), social networks reached a penetration of 78%, 68%, 62%, 55%, 42% and 16% in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, United States of America, France and Japan respectively with a global penetration of 52%. In South Africa, according to the South

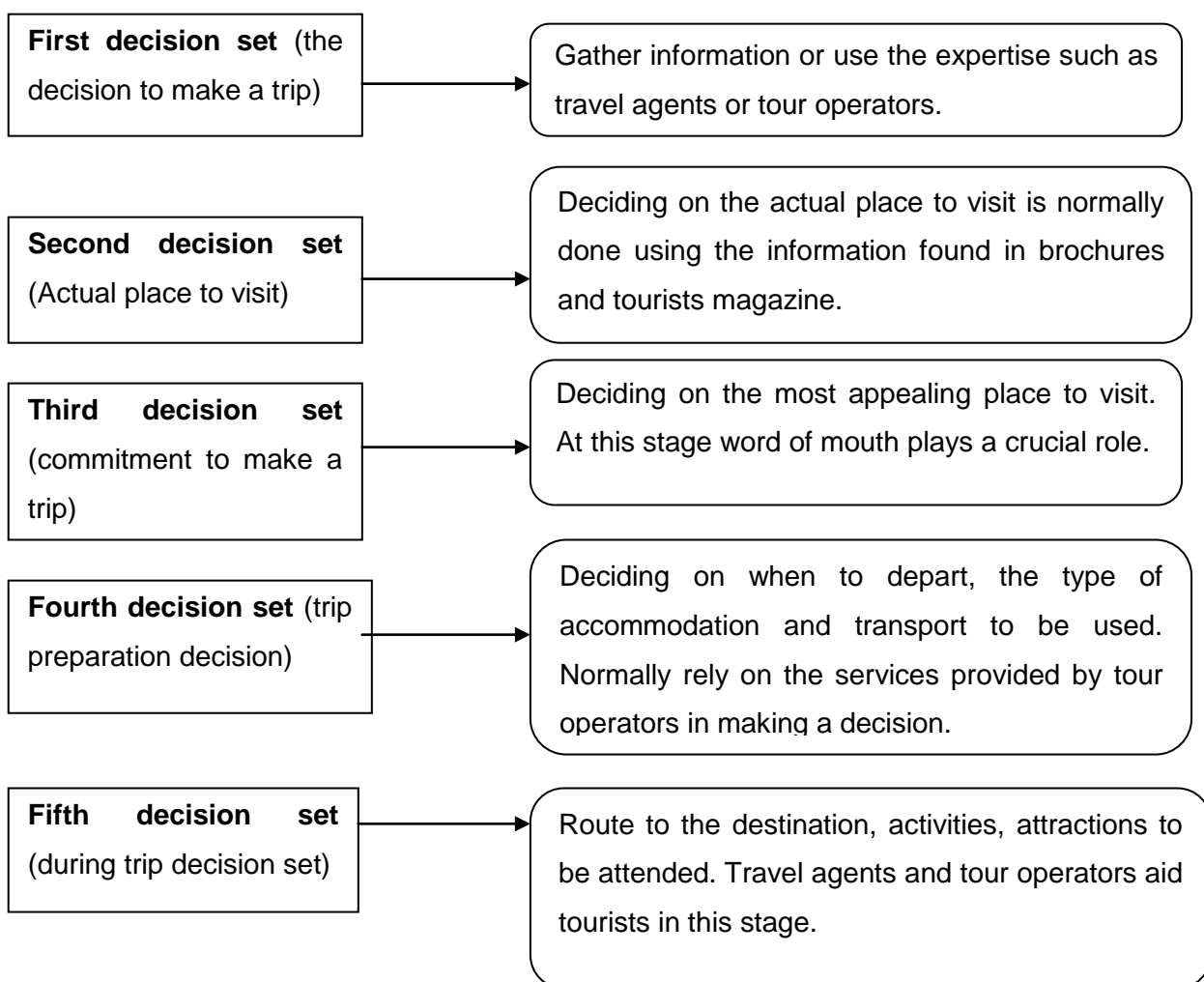
Africa Social Media Landscape survey conducted in 2011, sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn lead the way in user numbers, with approximately 4.2 million Facebook users by August 2011 (Goldstuck, 2011). The same survey was conducted in 2012 and the results show that large corporate brands in South Africa have embraced social media following in the footsteps of their customers with First National Bank and Woolworths being the top users (Goldstuck, 2012). The South African hotel sector is following suit as the Tsogo international hotel group and the Southern Sun hotels also offers potential guests the opportunity to check availability and directly reserve rooms via their Facebook page (The Sowetan live, 2011). The growth of social networks shows no sign of slowing down. Unfortunately, literature on social media penetration in Zimbabwe is grey; there is no published literature from reliable sources. However according to the TripAdvisor site in 2013, the Holiday Inn hotel group has a Facebook page where guests can view their services. There is no academic research conducted thus far to establish how accommodation facilities in Zimbabwe are performing in social media marketing. The latter emphasises the importance of this study.

While the social networks penetration statistics are impressive, it is more important to consider their role and the implications for hospitality business marketing and tourist decision making. Social networks can be considered as a new tool for marketing which has gained popularity in the last couple of years and is one of the fastest growing tools (Hughes, Rowe, Batey & Lew, 2011:561). According to Mangold and Faulds (2009:358), social media must be integrated into the company's promotional mix as a new hybrid element. Evidence from the literature shows that social networks have revolutionised the way hospitality businesses market their services. Recent research (Assenov & Khurana, 2012; Owyang, Bernoff, Cummings & Bowen, 2009; Lim, 2010; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Park & Oh, 2012; Gaurav, 2012) has shown that many hospitality businesses are shifting from traditional marketing strategies to social media marketing and the social media spending is increasing even during recessions.

In addition, in tourism and hospitality, social media seems to play a pivotal role in information search and decision-making behaviours, primarily due to the experiential nature of tourism and hospitality products (Yazdanifard *et al.*, 2011:577). Information search is potentially the greatest factor involved in tourist pre-travel experience (Jenkin, 2010:3). Evidence from literature (Xiang, Wöber & Fesenmaier, 2008:137; Lanz,

Fischhof & Lee, 2010:4) shows that, though traditional mediums such as travel agents, tour operators, brochures, magazines and word of mouth are still prevalent in tourist decision making, social networks are slowly replacing them. In other words the introduction of social networks has taken tourists decision making process (DMP) to a new level not previously witnessed. The following section gives an illustration of the decision making process and how social networks can influence it.

According to Kotler (1993:135), the decision making process model is characterised by five stages which are illustrated in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1: Trip decision-making process**

**Source: Adapted from Page and Connell (2009:76)**

The process recognises that the decision to make a trip is characterised by five stages where the first stage is when a tourist gathers information on different destinations. During this phase, a number of sources of information are available to the tourists which

include travel agents, tour operators, magazines, brochures and the internet. Although, tourists are still booking through travel agents( ABTA Travel and Trends Report, 2015), when it comes to searching for travel information (Schmallenger & Carson, 2008:236; Jenkin, 2010:4; Fuller, Wilde, Hanlan & Masson, 2007:7) some tourists are now bypassing other information sources such as travel agents and tour operators to social networks. A more recent study by Lyu and Hwang (2015:61) in Korea shows that the use of internet and its related technologies to search for travel information decreased the demand quantity of traditional information centres by 27.6% and dropped the probability of visiting a facility by 18.5%. This is mainly due to the ability some internet related technologies such as social networks to display visual pictures where someone can actually see what a destination can offer, for example, with YouTube, a hotel can upload videos showcasing their culinary skills and by the fact that people can access internet on their mobile devices. According to the Digital IQ Index Travel Report (2011), within sixty seconds millions of videos are viewed on YouTube, meaning that an establishment and its services or products have a greater chance of capturing customers' attention when marketed through this site. The next stage is when a tourist decides on the actual place to visit. Instead of looking for traditional expertise, tourists now rely on information obtained from social networks because it is considered to be more reliable than what travel agents and tour operators can provide. Many tourists nowadays prefer to have the reassurance of other users with similar profiles that the trip and itinerary that they have scheduled is the best one for them (Schmallenger & Carson, 2008:101; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012:196). A study by Treer (2010:78) on social media usage for tourism destination promotion has shown that 68.3% of tourists claim to use information posted by others on social networks for trip planning - the most predominantly used site being TripAdvisor. Thus, when deciding on the actual place to visit tourists normally consider comments posted by others on social networks as their bases to make a decision. Twitter and TripAdvisor become the common sites to use at this stage. The third stage is where a tourist makes a commitment to make a trip. This is when one decides on the most appealing destination. A tourist's decision at this stage is likely to be influenced by what they see or hear. Unlike traditional sources of information (tour operators, travel agents and brochures), social networks continue to play a vital role as they have the ability to spread electronic word of mouth by allowing people to post and share their travel-related comments, opinions, and personal experiences,

which then serve as a basis for choosing a particular destination (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012:196).

The fourth stage of decision making is where a tourist will be making preparations for a trip which is also influenced by social networks. At this stage one decides which transport to use as well as the type of accommodation. Social networks such as MySpace and YouTube have the ability to display videos of destinations showing exactly what a destination can offer including the type of accommodation available. Instead of going through a brochure provided by tour operators, tourists can just access those sites directly to decide on the type of accommodation that is most appealing to them. The same applies to the fifth stage where tourists will be deciding on the attractions to attend. Social networking sites also play a role as they can show videos and pictures of attractions a destination can offer, for example sites such as YouTube and MySpace. Facebook and Twitter on the other hand provide a good platform for tourists to post and comment on different attractions a destination can offer. Social networking depends very much on the concept of word-of-mouth (WOM) or in this case, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) which involves consumers' comments about products and services posted on the internet which will continue to play a pivotal role in tourists' decision making (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012:197). Thus, the role and influence of social networks in decision making cannot be ignored by hospitality marketers. It is therefore essential for hospitality marketers to understand the sources from which customers draw their information if they are to influence the decision making process and enhance their marketing efforts (Jenkin, 2010:4).

### **1.2.2 Usage of social networks for marketing the hospitality sector**

From the discussion above, it is clear that social networking sites have become a powerful interface that serve as the gateway for travel-related information as well as an important marketing channel through which destinations and accommodation units can reach and persuade potential visitors (Xiang *et al.*, 2008:136). They can be used as a valuable tool to collect consumer feedback which may be used to attract new customers and retain current customers by creating strong and effective customer relationships that strengthen the loyalty to the brand (Qualman, 2009:78; Salkhordeh, 2009:3). Kassavana, Nusair, Teodosic (2010:69) also add that the trend towards social

networking presents an unprecedented opportunity for hospitality establishments especially the accommodation sector to garner a competitive edge by analysing submitted feedback, contemplating constructive advice, and determining how best to enhance a guest's experience. Analysing submitted feedback will help accommodation units to improve their services by addressing negative feedback and showing users that the organisation recognises the issue and will work on it (Gaurav, 2012:2). This will not only augment their marketing campaigns, but will also help to protect their reputation.

Today it is no longer enough for hospitality businesses especially those in the accommodation sector to rely solely on traditional media (Chan & Guillet, 2011:346) such as shown in Figure 1.1. They have to explore how to utilise the social media mentioned to communicate with their customers. Social networks provide a platform for communication that relates perfectly with marketing in the virtual world (Lim, 2010:3). For a business in the hospitality sector, adopting the use of these sites is no longer a choice but an obligation. As a result, the use of social networks for marketing in the hospitality industry has attracted the attention of many researchers in recent years. A study conducted in London shows that 66% of hospitality marketers indicate that Facebook and Twitter are the most useful social media channels for marketing their businesses (Friebe & Campell, 2009) while 79% of the top 100 companies in the Fortune Global 500 index make use of at least one social media platform (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) (Burson-Marsteller Fortune, 2010). Lanz *et al.* (2010) report that 80% of international hotels in New York use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube to market their services. A study by Pradiptarini (2011:240) reveals that some tourism businesses have gained certain advantages from social media marketing. The study observed that the Desert Gallery in the United States of America increased visits by 20% per month after its Facebook fans jumped from 383 to 817 in 2011. Unfortunately, most of these studies are limited to hotels only; the author is unaware of any study which focused on the entire accommodation sector.

The benefits of social media marketing are well documented by several researchers, but most of them focus on brand awareness and direct customer communication feedback. Some of the numerous benefits include: generation of more business exposure, increased traffic, improved search rankings, increased brand awareness, new marketing leads and reduced marketing expenses (Liu, 2007:132; Riese, 2010:3; Stelzner, 2011:3

Yazdanifard *et al.*, 2011:577; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012:197). The 'free marketing service' benefits offered by social media cannot be underestimated particularly given the costs associated with traditional advertising and marketing campaigns which could be less effective in capturing the target market in comparison with the scale of exposure a social network can potentially achieve (Liu, 2007:132; Lincoln, 2009:4; Ernstad & Henriksson, 2010:236; Salkhordeh, 2010:1). Social media marketing allows for a faster response and a lower cost investment than is typically achieved with traditional marketing. Razzaque (2009:5) adds that social networks offer marketers the opportunity to advertise or undertake public relations activities through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), seen by many as the most powerful application of social networking.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

South Africa and Zimbabwe are two developing countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region with different levels of technological advancement. Zimbabwe has faced enormous economic and political challenges that have seriously hindered the adoption and use of internet technologies over the past decade. The challenges include the provision of basic internet services and a thin internet bandwidth which made it almost impossible to use the internet. It was only in 2012 that 3G internet mobile (use of cell phone SIM cards with modems to access internet) was introduced in Zimbabwe allowing many people to access the internet easily (Tech Zim report, 2012). To date, Zimbabwe is engaging in different marketing campaigns to resuscitate its tourism industry which has been on an unstable path during the last decade. Though, Zimbabwe was previously affected in terms of internet connectivity the study at hand seeks to determine the effectiveness of social networks after the introduction of the 3G internet mobile. Results from the Tech Zim report (2012) confirm that internet usage increased rapidly after the introduction of the 3G internet facility. It is important to establish how social networks can be effectively integrated in these marketing campaigns for the country to increase its awareness in both regional and international markets. South Africa, on the other hand has experienced a boom in the usage of internet technologies especially prior to the soccer world cup tournament held in 2010. Furthermore, South Africa is a developing nation with rapid technological advancement. To date, it is the nation with the highest tweet rate in Africa (Karanja, 2012). Despite this, the researcher is unaware of any previous study to date concerning social networks usage and effectiveness in marketing accommodation establishments in South Africa. There is

therefore a need to establish how the accommodation sector has embraced these social media platforms and how effective they are in marketing accommodation establishments in both countries.

In spite of the fact that studies have been conducted on social media marketing (Razzaque, 2009; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Abedniya & Mahmoudi, 2010; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Yazdanifard *et al.*, 2011), there is still little research that focuses on the phenomenon of marketing through social networks and their effectiveness as marketing tools. The challenges which hospitality businesses, such as accommodation establishments, are facing in integrating these sites in their marketing strategies in developing nations also needs further investigation. There is a lack of empirical evidence regarding what is currently happening in the accommodation sector in developing nations especially in South Africa, a leading giant in social media usage in Africa (Goldstuck, 2011) and Zimbabwe which is embarking on massive marketing campaigns to resuscitate its tourism industry. As far as the author could determine, there is no previous research on the state of social networks usage in the Zimbabwean hospitality sector. Despite the fact that social media usage statistics are increasing even in developing nations, there are still a number of unanswered questions concerning the utilisation of social networking sites in developing nations, especially in the accommodation sector. There is therefore a need to address the following questions:

- To what extent are accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe utilising social networks for marketing their services?
- Which accommodation establishments are using social networks and what are the reasons behind using them?
- What are some of the challenges faced by accommodation establishments in using social networks for marketing?
- How effective are social networks for marketing accommodation establishments as compared to traditional marketing media?

Most importantly, previous studies (Ernest & Henriksson, 2010:1; Abedniya & Mahmoudi, 2010:139) have shown that the transition from traditional marketing strategies to social media marketing is not straightforward, but more complex. It therefore implies that there is a need to establish a criterion for effective implementation or effective integration of these sites in hospitality marketing strategies in the context of

a developing nation. In short, how accommodation establishments can perform marketing campaigns using these sites is still an unexplored area in developing nations. This is also supported by Assenov and Khurana (2012:3) who state that there is very little guidance offered to marketing managers for incorporating social networks with integrated marketing strategies.

Thus, the reason for undertaking this study is to provide answers to the following question: How effective are social networks in marketing accommodation services in South Africa and Zimbabwe? Regarding the aforementioned questions, the study will make use of the accommodation managers' perceptions to get a clear picture pertaining to the issue of social media usage in the accommodation sector of these two developing countries.

#### **1.4 THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

This study seeks to achieve the following goal and objectives in order to address the gap revealed in the literature:

##### **1.4.1 Goal**

The main goal of this study is to determine the effectiveness of social networks in the marketing of accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

##### **1.4.2 Objectives**

The following objectives were set for this study:

###### **Objective 1**

- To conduct a literature analysis on strengths and weaknesses of different marketing mediums and how these mediums compare to online social networks.

###### **Objective 2**

- To investigate the role of different marketing mediums on the decision-making process in the broader hospitality industry by means of a literature analysis.

### **Objective 3**

- To test accommodation managers' perceptions with regard to the use and effectiveness of social networks for marketing purposes and draw a comparison on the usage of social networks in the two developing nations by means of an empirical survey.

The following two main hypotheses were formulated in order to achieve the main goal of the study:

- *H<sub>0</sub>: Accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe do not extensively use social networks for marketing.*
- *H<sub>1</sub>: Accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe use social networks for marketing extensively.*
  
- *H<sub>0</sub>: Social networks are not effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments.*
- *H<sub>2</sub>: Social networks are effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments.*

### **Objective 4**

- To draw conclusions and make recommendations with regard to the effective use of social networks for marketing purposes by accommodation establishments.

## **1.5 METHOD OF RESEARCH**

Research methodology refers to the overall logic of the general strategy or basic plan of the approach used to obtain and analyse the information; this includes the method of selecting the subject of the phenomena studied by McDaniel and Gates (2001:31). The method of research to be used in this study involves a literature study and a survey.

### **1.5.1 Literature study**

The literature study is based on a qualitative study and includes thesis, research papers, published articles, the internet and sources on tourism growth economics and growth trends. Online scientific databases such as Emerald, Science Direct, Ebscohost,

Sabinet and Google scholar are used to search for relevant information. The database of all accommodation establishments in South Africa used in this study was obtained from the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa and Federated Hospitality Association of South Africa (FEDHASA) and Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA). ZTA is the only organisation in Zimbabwe which captures information about tourism organisation and can provide reliable information, Thus the database of all registered accommodation establishments was obtained from the ZTA database officer. On the other hand The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa was contacted and but could not release the data base and referred the researcher to their website or the website of FEDHASA. The researcher then individually selects the establishments and gets their contact details. The main keywords used in this study are: *Accommodation, Accommodation manager, Marketing, Decision-making process, Social media marketing and social networks.*

### **1.5.2 Empirical survey**

Data concerning the number of accommodation facilities used in this study were obtained from the websites of FEDHASA, TGCSA and from the ZTA database officer.

#### **1.5.2.1 Research design and method of collecting data**

Research design is a blueprint or the plan used to realise the research objectives and answer the research questions (Hair, Ortinau & Bush, 2006:45). The study used quantitative research together with descriptive statistics. Descriptive research can be conducted in two ways, namely longitudinal or cross-sectional (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:45). This study used the cross-sectional approach where data is collected from the respondents. The questionnaire is the main instrument for data collection because it is one of the easiest ways of collecting data under survey research.

#### **1.5.2.2 Sampling**

Sampling is the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population (Hair *et al.*, 2006:48). In this study, data was

obtained from accommodation establishments in the two countries. Only registered accommodation establishments were included as the target population. The total population of all registered accommodation establishments in Zimbabwe according to ZTA is 300 while South Africa has 930 registered accommodation establishments ([www.tourismgrading.co.za](http://www.tourismgrading.co.za)). FEDHASA and TGCSA have a database of all hospitality establishments but for the purpose of this study only registered accommodation establishments were used.

To calculate the appropriate samples Krejcie and Morgan's (1970:607) sampling formula was used:

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P)}{[d^2 (N-1) + X^2 P (1-P)]}$$

Krejcie and Morgan's (1970:607) formula indicates that  $s$  is the required sample,  $X^2$  the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841),  $N$  the population size,  $P$  the population proportion (.50), and  $d$  the degree of accuracy, in other words the confidence level, expressed as a proportion (.05). The required sample for a population of 900 (South Africa) according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970:608) should be 269 and for a population of 300 (Zimbabwe) should be 169.

### **1.5.2.3 Development of the questionnaire**

The study focused on the supply side hence the questionnaire was developed for accommodation establishments only. The questionnaire was developed based on previous research in related areas (Teo, 2005; Au, 2010; Guillet & Chan, 2011; Stelzner, 2011; Friebe & Campbell, 2012). All these studies examined the use of online marketing tools and web 2.0 technologies in tourism businesses and tourism related businesses. Teo (2005) examined the extent to which business-consumer firms used online marketing tools as well as the effectiveness of these tools as perceived by the managerial staff in these companies. Guillet and Chan (2011) investigated the extent to which hotels in Hong Kong perform in marketing in social media websites, while Au (2010) investigated the adoption of Web 2.0 by tourism businesses. Friebe and Campbell (2012) carried out a social media survey in the hospitality and leisure industry. All these studies were considered when developing the questionnaire for this study. Thus, this study has adopted some of the questions from previous studies and modified them to suit its objectives.

The questionnaire is divided into four sections (see Appendix A). The first section highlights the demographic information of the establishment, the second section covers the current usage of social networking sites where both multiple choice and Likert type questionnaire are used, the third section concentrates on the effectiveness of social networks where Likert type questions are used to assess the effectiveness of social networks and the last section focuses on the benefits and challenges of using social networks. This section comprises of open ended questions where respondents were asked to state the benefits and challenges of using social networks for marketing.

#### **1.5.2.4 Pilot testing**

Pilot testing can be described as the process of conducting a simulated administration of a design questionnaire to a small representative group of respondents (Hair *et al.*, 2006:660). It is an important step in the development of a questionnaire because it sheds light on possible improvement of the questionnaire's wording, structure and format. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, 10 questionnaires were administered to different accommodation establishments in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This helped the researcher make possible adjustments to the measuring instrument.

#### **1.5.2.5 Survey**

The survey was conducted mainly through electronic method, in other words by means of e-mails. The questionnaire was designed in Adobe Forms Central and the URL link along with instructions was mailed to the various accommodation establishments. In South Africa the questionnaire was then completed online and sent back to the researcher while in Zimbabwe the questionnaire was hand delivered by field workers. The questionnaire was directed to the general manager or the marketing manager of each accommodation establishment. Data were collected from June 2013 to July 2104 in both countries and after all efforts to increase the number of returned questionnaires 150 questionnaires were obtained from the Zimbabwean establishments and only 129 questionnaires from South Africa were obtained. The research made several efforts such as resending the link several times until some establishments blocked her e-mail address such that it was not possible to continue sending the link. In Zimbabwe it was difficult to continue sending the field workers to the establishments due to financial cost. Therefore the researcher had to perform analysis using the returned questionnaires.

### **1.5.2.6 Data analysis**

The data obtained from the electronic questionnaires were captured in Adobe Forms Central and exported to Microsoft Excel. Data analysis was done in the following manner: The first part concentrates on descriptive statistics where graphs and tables are used to show the findings of this study. Factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of the questionnaire. Factorial validity refers to whether the factor structure of the questionnaire makes intuitive sense. This is followed by assessment of the validity of the variables in the study which is done using Cronbach alpha test. The alpha coefficient value ranges between 0 and 1 with higher values indicating higher reliability amongst indicators. Cant *et al.* (2005:68) have indicated 0.7 to be the accepted reliability coefficient, but lower thresholds are sometimes used in literature. The cut-off point is generally known as 0.6 (Hair *et al.*, 2000:89). Thus a cut-off point of 0.6 is used for this study. The Chi-Square test was used to test the hypotheses for this study. Finally T-test analysis was performed. There are three types of *t*-tests: one-sample *t*-test, independent samples *t*-test and paired samples *t*-test. This study used independent sample *t*-test because of its ability to compare two means from two different groups of respondents (South Africa and Zimbabwe). The main software package used for data analysis is the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17.

## **1.6 DEFINING THE KEY CONCEPTS**

The following concepts are used throughout the study and therefore need some clarification:

### **1.6.1 Accommodation manager**

Accommodation manager can be described as any person holding a management position within an accommodation establishment. Management titles vary from one company to another. In large hotels the general manager will be referring to the overall and main manager. Some managers will include the front office manager, rooms' division manager, reservations manager, food and beverage manager and some establishment also have their own marketing managers (Ruthford & Fallon, 2006:12). For the purpose of this study, general manager, marketing manager, reservations

manager and rooms' division manager will be targeted because these managers are able to tell how the establishment communicates or market its services.

### **1.6.2 Accommodation**

Accommodation refers to the temporary home of a tourist (Keyser, 2002:168). It is also defined as an essential support serviced facility in tourism destination areas where tourists rest and refresh themselves during their travels or a place to stay when arriving and engaging in tourism related activities (Rogerson, 2002:5). Page (2003:3) describes it as a focal point for the hosting of guests and visitors, where a guest may pay a fee in return for a place to sleep and relax. According to the Italian National Agency for the Protection of the Environment and for Technical Services (2007), tourist accommodation is "the provision, for a fee, of sheltered overnight accommodation in appropriately equipped rooms, including at least a bed, offered as a main service to tourists, travellers and lodgers". The provision of overnight sheltered accommodation may include the provision of food services, fitness activities and/or green areas. Examples of the most popular accommodation establishments are: hotels, guesthouse, self-catering/lodge, bed and breakfast and back-packers (Stats SA, 2006).

### **1.6.3 Decision making process**

Decision making is the process of sufficiently reducing uncertainty and doubt about alternatives to allow a reasonable choice to be made from among them. This definition stresses the information-gathering function of decision making (Haris, 2012:1). It is the process of generating and applying criteria to select from, among seemingly equal alternatives (Jenkin, 2010:2). It is defined by Fuller *et al.* (2007:3) as a cognitive process that leads to the selection of a course of action among alternatives. Every decision making process ends with a final choice. It can be an action or an opinion. Efficient decision-making involves a series of steps that require the input of information at different stages of the process, as well as a process for feedback.

### **1.6.4 Marketing**

American Marketing Association defined marketing as an organisational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for

managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders (Marketing news, 2004). Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others (Kotler, 1999:2). It is the process through which a company first anticipates consumer needs and then manages to satisfy those needs in order to achieve sales (George, 2001:2).

### **1.6.5 Social media**

Social Media is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and which allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:2). Social media describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers' intent on educating each other about products, brands services, personalities, and issues (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004:2).

### **1.6.6 Social networks**

These are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. The most popular sites are Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube and TripAdvisor (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:138). Boyd and Ellison (2007) describe social networks as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. It can also be defined as websites which allow members to construct a public or semi-public profile and formally articulate their relationship to other users in a way that is visible to anyone who can access their file (Hutchison & Rapee, 2007:1558).

## **1.7 CHAPTER CLASSIFICATION**

This study consists of six chapters. The following section gives a brief outline of what the reader can expect from each of the chapters.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and background**

This chapter gives an introduction to the study as well as the background of the study. The goal and objectives of this study are clearly stated. The problem statement is discussed followed by the methodology used in this study.

## **Chapter 2: An analysis of social networks as a marketing tool**

This literature chapter explains some of the theories, models and frameworks of social media and social media marketing. It further explains different marketing mediums highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. The advantages of social networking sites over other marketing mediums are also considered in this chapter. The history of popular social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube and TripAdvisor are provided along with an exploration of the benefits of social media marketing. The chapter concludes by highlighting lessons emerging from previous research on social media marketing.

## **Chapter 3: Social Networks and decision making process**

This chapter reviews literature on how social networking sites can influence the decision making process. The effect of social networking sites on both tourists and services providers are furthermore revealed.

## **Chapter 4: Research methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodology to be followed in an endeavour to achieve the objectives of this study. The research design, targeted population and sample size are stated. The development of the questionnaire and how data for this study was collected are also explained. The chapter concludes by clearly stating the statistical methods used for this study.

## **Chapter 5: Research findings**

This chapter presents the findings of this study. The results provide empirical findings on the extent and effectiveness of social networking sites in marketing accommodation services in both countries, challenges faced by hospitality marketers in using these sites for marketing and the benefits of using social networking sites. This is done with the aid of graphs, tables and figures. Results from inferential statistics also explain clearly how the objectives were achieved.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter marks the end of the study by drawing conclusions from the findings of this study. It also gives possible recommendations to hospitality marketers and managers on how to effectively integrate social networking sites when formulating marketing strategies. Recommendations for how social media is used are made to accommodation establishments in order for them to fully enjoy its benefits. The benefits of social media marketing are also unveiled to hospitality marketers for them to appreciate it. Small or start-up accommodation establishments will be informed on how to use social media marketing in order to compete in the online driven market place. Recommendations will be made to management regarding the training of current staff or employment of new people who are skilled in using the internet since social media marketing is a new concept. Recommendations will also be given to policy makers to encourage the provision of devices through which people can access the internet. The chapter concludes by highlighting areas for further research.

**Table 1.1 Glossary of social networks terms**

| <b>TERM</b>     | <b>DEFINITION</b>   |
|-----------------|---|
| Social media    | Social media describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers' intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities and issues. |
| Social networks | These are online communities that enable individuals with shared interests to communicate with one another via a multitude of horizontal networks. For example Facebook, Twitter, MySpace.                                      |
| Facebook        | Facebook is a social network site that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and co-workers. It has applications such as photos, notes, groups and events.                                       |
| YouTube         | A platform which allows users to upload, share and view videos online and messages are spread quickly and efficiently.  |
| MySpace         | A site which provides many ways for users to express their tastes. Textually, users can complete forms to provide demographic details and lists of cultural interests; they can also write about themselves in free text.       |
| LinkedIn        | A professional social network that connects one to trusted contacts and enables one to exchange knowledge and opportunities with a network of professionals.  |
| TripAdvisor     | A travel website that assists customers in gathering travel information, posting reviews and opinions of travel-related content and engaging in interactive travel forums.  |
| Blog            | A website where entries are made in the style of a journal. Blogs often comment on a particular area of interest. They can be used to convey various types of information, such as personal, public, and commercial.            |
| Twitter         | Twitter is a micro-blogging social network service, where one updates an audience with regard to what an individual is up to without the need to spend a lot of time writing an entire post on the subject.                     |

## **CHAPTER 2: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A MARKETING TOOL**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The goal of this chapter is to analyse existing literature regarding social networks. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section provides an insight into the concept of marketing and different forms of marketing mediums which can be used in the hospitality sector including social media marketing. The strengths and weakness of each marketing medium are highlighted as well. The second section explains some of the theoretical frameworks of social media. The aspect of social media marketing will be briefly discussed and the history and growth of popular social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, and TripAdvisor is provided. The usage of social networking sites around the world is discussed in this section as are the benefits of social media marketing. The last section provides information on how hospitality businesses use social media marketing and highlight some lessons emerging from previous research on social media marketing in the hospitality sector. The chapter concludes by illustrating a proposed model for social media marketing in the hospitality industry.

### **2.2 WHAT IS MARKETING?**

The term marketing has been defined by various authors but all the definitions revolve around the aspect of identifying and satisfying consumers' needs profitably. It is defined as the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit (Meldrum & McDonald, 2007:3; Kotler, 2009:3). Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires, defines, measures and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential. It pinpoints which segments the company is capable of serving best and it designs and promotes the appropriate products and services. The American Marketing Association in 2008 defined marketing as an organisational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders (Marketing News, 2008:28).

### 2.2.1 Categories of marketing techniques

When performing marketing activities businesses usually employ different types of marketing techniques which can be grouped into four distinct categories: direct marketing, indirect marketing, above-the-line and below-the-line marketing. For the sake of clarity an explanation of each of these four marketing techniques is provided below and where possible examples of each technique are given.

According to Kirtis and Karaham (2011:263), **direct marketing** is an interactive system of marketing that uses one or more advertising media to achieve a measurable response at any location. Unlike mass-media communication, direct marketing targets individuals (Cant *et al.*, 2010:330). It gives the hard-pressed, time-conscious consumer the most convenient method of purchase. Examples of direct marketing are telemarketing, e-mail marketing, newsletters and the use of postcards and coupons. **Indirect marketing**, on the other hand, is any form of promotion that does not attempt to sell products/services directly to consumers but rather allows business to build relationships with customers. Shimp (2000:655) posits that indirect marketing techniques help pave the way to perform direct marketing campaigns later. Examples of indirect marketing include the use of store displays, use of third part websites to promote your products, blogging and the use of social media platforms. Although it is considered an inexpensive way of marketing, it is more difficult to measure than direct marketing.

**Below-the-line marketing** refers to business sales actions where the business contacts a customer and attempts to make a sale (Cant, Gebernel, Nel & Kortze, 2005:336). This is naturally a part of direct marketing efforts, but requires the business to treat customers as individuals. Kirtis and Karaham (2011:261) indicate that below-the-line marketing initiatives act like traditional direct marketing efforts. Below-the-line marketing is performed through database marketing, email, direct mail, event sponsorship and social networks targeting individuals. On the other hand **above-the-line** marketing refers to widespread branding, general advertising, mass e-mails or mailed flyers designed to raise product awareness. In other words above-the-line marketing uses mass media to promote brands and reach to target audiences (Brookins, 2012:10). This is communication that is targeted to a wider audience, and is not specific to individual consumers. Above-the-line marketing normally uses

conventional media such as television, radio, magazines, newspaper, billboards and the internet (webcasting). The major difference between these two marketing techniques is that the former normally targets individuals and the latter targets the general public. A business can use one or all of these marketing techniques depending on its objectives.

For a business to achieve its marketing objectives a series of processes are involved. These processes, through which an organisation engages with its various customers in order to achieve its marketing objectives, are termed Marketing communications (Fill & Jamieson, 2011:14). Marketing concepts cannot be explained without including this aspect of marketing communications which is an integral part of marketing. The concept of marketing communications is also central to this study since the study's focus is on the efficacy of social media in marketing. Social Media is one of the marketing communication elements which will be explained later in this chapter. This leads to an explanation of the term marketing communications as discussed in the next sub-section.

### **2.2.2 Marketing communications**

Marketing communications is defined as a management process through which a business engages with customers or communicates with its customers (Fill & Jamieson, 2011:15). Businesses engage or communicate with their customers through a variety of ways which are normally grouped together under the umbrella term "marketing communication mix". Traditionally marketing communication mix comprises five elements: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling and public relations (Fill & Jamieson, 2011:15). Currently, with the introduction of social networks, marketing communication mix now comprises six elements with social media marketing being the sixth element. All these activities were traditionally performed through traditional marketing media such as print media, broadcast, and display media, but with the advent of the internet the whole marketing process has been revolutionalised. Digital Marketing is now playing a bigger role in the marketing fraternity, with social media being the major online marketing tool used. Social media platforms such as social networks and blogs are slowly rendering traditional media obsolete as they can perform all the activities carried out by different traditional media using minimal financial resources. Figure 2.1 illustrates how the three aspects of marketing, marketing

communications and marketing communication mix are linked and where social media fits in.

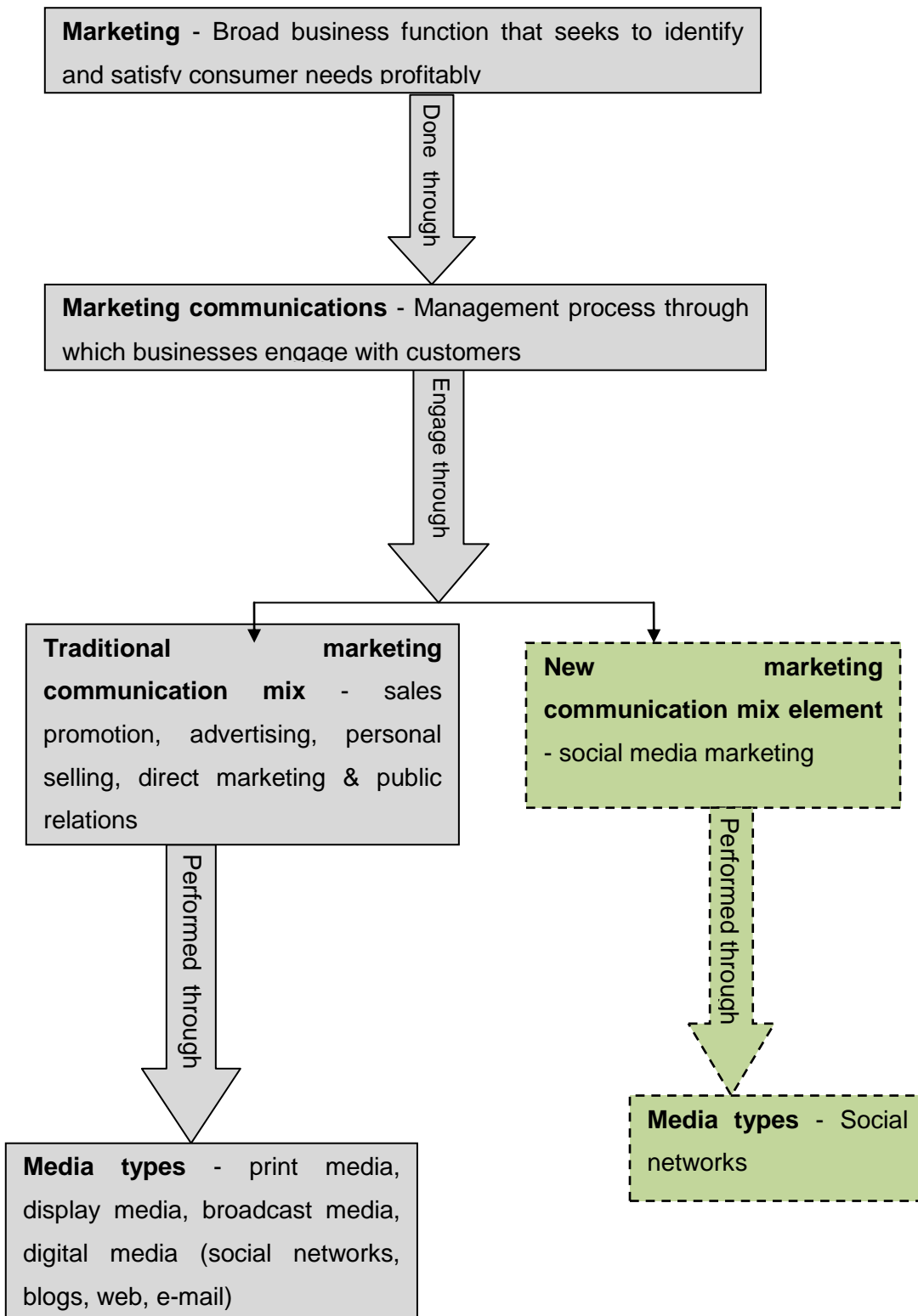


Figure 2.1: The relationship between social media and marketing

Source: Researcher's own compilation

As shown in Figure 2.1, social media platforms such as social networks and blogs can be used to perform all the elements of the marketing communication mix. As illustrated in Figure 2.1 both traditional and new marketing communication mix elements can be performed using social media platforms. The way in which social media platforms can be used or the way in which they influence traditional marketing mix elements (advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations) is explained in the following sections.

### **2.2.2.1 Advertising**

Advertising is defined by Ghauri and Maqsood (2011:86) as the means of providing the most persuasive possible message and the right prospects at the lowest possible cost. It is one of the most visible manifestations of a marketer's communication effort. The theory of advertising holds that advertising is capable of effecting change in the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of targeted audiences (Cant *et al.*, 2005:329). It is believed that advertising can generate long term purchasing behaviour and increase sales. Marketers previously focused on advertising their products or services through traditional media such as television, radio and newspaper. Now, with the advent of social media, their future appears to be digital as social networks have become an important part of their daily lives (Ghauri & Maqsood, 2011:87). The advent of the internet and its features, especially social media, has revolutionised the way businesses communicate with their customers. Thus instead of advertising through traditional media which offers only one way communications, some businesses are now using social networks such as Facebook and YouTube to advertise their products and services. As an example, Debonairs Pizza typically advertises their new products via their Facebook page because of the reduced cost involved, the speed at which it reaches their target audience, and the opportunity Facebook allows for customers to 'share' this information with their network of friends.

### **2.2.2.2 Sales promotion**

Sales promotion is defined by Cant *et al.* (2010:335) as a below-the-line marketing communication element. It is the promotional activities companies carry out in addition to advertising, personal selling and public relations in order to make a sale. Through this

method, marketers communicate with their customers by means of media that are not regarded as traditional. These include, among others, point of sale material and coupons as well as competitions. It is typically done on a special day or holiday in order to attract larger numbers of customers.

### **2.2.2.3 Personal Selling**

This is a form of person-to-person communication in which the seller attempts to persuade prospective buyers to purchase his/her products (Shimp, 2000:652; Cant *et al.*, 2010:331). Personal selling normally allows a dialogue to take place between a customer and the marketer (Ghauri & Maqsood, 2011:88). The main focus of personal selling is to develop a relationship with a potential buyer. It also allows for a greater flexibility since it is a two-way communication, the marketer can tailor make the message to suit the needs of the customer (Van Der Merwe, 2003:134). Social networks such as Twitter and Facebook offer a very good platform for two-way communication. With these platforms one can also attend to individual or group questions within a short period of time and can share the responses with a wide audience.

### **2.2.2.4 Public Relations (PR)**

Public Relations (PR) has been defined by Cant *et al.* (2010:331) as the management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organization and its internal and external stakeholders. PR started as a tool to tell a story, to defend companies against bad publicity, to use propaganda or to achieve reciprocity and to build stakeholder relationship (Cant *et al.*, 2010:331). The main goal of PR is not to market a company's products or services but to help the marketing efforts by good publicity stories about a company's products or services. These efforts are also part of marketing strategy. It is regarded as a popular communication tool in Tourism because of the credibility of the message (Gorge, 2001:62). Traditionally PR was done through print media, especially using newspapers, but currently companies can achieve the same means using digital media.

The new element of marketing communication mix - social media marketing - will be discussed separately in the next section highlighting all the forms of social media which can be utilised for marketing. It is essential to start by defining what social media is before explaining social media marketing in order to give the reader a clearer picture.

## **2.3 WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?**

Social media may be interpreted in different ways depending on what approach one takes, but generally social media relies on internet and web-based tools such as Google docs and project2manage (Lim, 2010:7). Managers and academic researchers seem to have a challenging task in defining the aspects of social media and how social media differ from the seemingly-interchangeable related concepts of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (Lim 2010:8; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012:194; Tuominen, 2011:4). Hence coming up with a universally accepted definition is problematic (Chan & Guillet, 2011:347). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:59) suggest that a formal definition of the term social media first requires a clear differentiation of the two related concepts that are frequently named in conjunction with it: Web 2.0 and UGC. In a bid to clear this confusion, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:59) described Web 2.0 as a new way of utilising the World Wide Web by software developers and end-users; a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion. The same authors, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:59), on the other hand, define User Generated Content (UGC) as all the ways in which people can make use of social media. In line with this definition, Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012:195) defined UGC as the means by which people use social media and the way they share ideas and collaborate. Examples of the content include the actual photos, blogs, micro blogs and videos that users share publicly.

After making this clarification Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:60) further defined Social media as “a group of internet–based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of UGC”. Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2004:2) described social media as a number of new sources of online information that are designed, initiated, circulated and used by consumers to spread information about products, brands, services, personalities and issues. Combining all the definitions provided by the abovementioned researchers social media

can be defined as a group of internet based applications that exist on the Web 2.0 platform which allow internet users around the world to interact, communicate, and share ideas, thoughts, experiences and information about products, brands and services. Social media started as early as 1980 before the advent of internet.

According to Lapsley (2010:135) cited in Ernestad and Henriksson (2010) the social media wave started when so called 'phone phreaks' used homemade devices that could link up to the telephone system. BBS or electronic 'Bulletin Board Systems' were very popular from around 1980 to 1995. These boards were connected to a small server where a person could dial in and promote their message. However, social media sites are evolving by the year and to date, there are different social media platforms and most of them are online social networks that permit people to become members and take advantage of the opportunities of the network (Arkvi & Bairakimova, 2010:3). These online social networks, according to Porto (2007:3) are the "big fish" in the social media ecosystem. The most popular and most influential social networks that shape the business, cultural, and research landscape include Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, TripAdvisor, YouTube, and LinkedIn (Boyd & Ellison, 2007:4). Thus, this study's focus will primarily be on these mainstream platforms of social media.

### **2.3.1 Social media marketing and marketing communication mix**

Social media marketing is defined as the process that empowers individuals to promote their websites, products or services through the online social channels and tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional channels (Weinberg, 2009:76). It is regarded as a new form of marketing which has gained momentum in the last few years and is slowly transforming the way marketing is traditionally done. Suh and Park (2010:3254) further indicate that social media provides an opportunity for timely dissemination of information in a simple and informal manner and also enables customers to participate in spreading the information.

Social media is classified into specific categories according to Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010:56). These categories include collaborations, project blogs, content communities, virtual game worlds, virtual social worlds and social networks. Although all of these social media platforms can be utilised for marketing purposes, social networks have

been widely recognised as the most important category of social media for marketing purposes (Lin & Lu, 2011:125). Khan (2011:17) also grouped social media into three categories namely social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace), creative works sharing sites, and blogs.

Fridolf and Arnautovic (2011:19) indicate that social networks possess some unique properties that make them a powerful marketing tool. These properties include immediacy, connectedness and openness (Suh & Park, 2010:3254; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011:1155). Suh and Park (2010:3254) indicate immediacy as one the properties of social media that allows dissemination of information faster than typical offline mass media. The second property which was suggested by Michaelidou *et al.* (2011:1155) is connectedness which allows interaction between customer and business through online networks. Lastly, Suh and Park (2010:3254) suggest openness as the other unique property which provides anyone with easy access to information.

Due to these unique characteristics which are rare if not absent in traditional marketing communications approaches, social media have the ability to fit in with and influence each element of the marketing communication mix illustrated in Figure 2.1. Marketing communications coordinate the elements of marketing communication mix to produce a customer focused message (Mangold & Faulds, 2009:56). Traditionally, marketers used to buy space on fixed media in a controlled context (Khan, 2011:17) but today, instead of broadcasting one way message to audiences, marketers are compelled to engage in a conversation. With the growth of multimedia sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr that facilitate the storage and sharing of large volumes of information, marketers are slowly abandoning traditional advertising tools and making use of these newly developed sites to post videos and photos of what they can offer to customers and prospective customers (Qualman, 2011:134). These videos and photos can be reviewed every millisecond helping companies to maximize their brand exposure (Kirtis & Karaham, 2011:264).

Public Relations (PR) is another element of the marketing communication mix where social media provides a good platform for sales personnel to augment the marketing efforts of a company. Since the main aim of PR is to generate positive reviews relating to the company as well as to defend a company against bad publicity, blogs are now

being used instead of the internet and other traditional tools. Blogs can be used to convey various types of information such as public, personal and commercial (Lee, Cheung, Lim & Sia, 2006:290). Khan (2011:28) adds that a blog can be used in various tasks such as customer service, managing reports as well as public relations. It can also be used for research and development to get feedback on products and services (Kirtis & Karaham, 2011:265). Thus blogs can be effectively used to share positive information about a company in ways which are far less expensive than traditional tools.

Personal selling by dedicated sales staff used to be a very effective means of increasing sales leads. However customers often become annoyed with the nagging insistence of sales people (Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2011:106). With the introduction of social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs, sales people can reach out to a set of people and engage with them in way that a conversation develops almost naturally between them. In this conversation, prospective customers have the opportunity to develop an affinity for the brand, without the brand coming across as pushy and annoying (Kirtis & Karaham, 2011:266; Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2011:6). Thus, personal selling can now be easily done without having a face to face conversation with customers or prospective customers.

In direct marketing, social media can also influence how marketing is performed, for instance direct marketers are able to identify right fit customers and prospects through social behaviour and are ensured that their message is being delivered to a carefully targeted audience. From the clicks and likes posted on social networks like Facebook and Twitter, direct marketers are able to paint a better picture of their target market (Brookins, 2012:2). The introduction of Facebook Graph Search has made the lives of direct marketers easier than ever before. The graph collects information about every user, page, place, and photograph and correlates these pages with interactions such as friendships, likes, tags and relationships which help not only in creating comprehensive customer profiles but also to show who is interacting with this user as a means of additional prospect targeting (Kirtis & Karaham, 2011:266). Using this information, a direct marketer will know who to approach depending on the online activity of the user. Thus social media facilitates indirect marketing which in turn can pave a way for direct marketing campaigns.

Marketers today, instead of distributing coupons to customers using traditional methods, use social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to send coupons to fans that in turn refer these to their friends, thus allowing the company's customer base to grow organically. Sales promotion activities can now be performed through social media sites instead of using conventional ways which are relatively expensive and tiresome. From this, one can safely conclude that social media marketing has the ability to fit in the whole marketing communication mix since it affects each and every element of the mix. It can also be used when performing both below-the-line and above-the-line marketing initiatives.

### **2.3.2 Social media marketing advantages and disadvantages**

Researchers such as Jothi, Neelamalar and Prasad (2011:235) have highlighted some of the benefits of using social media for marketing. The benefits include: popularising your brand, idea or service to your target group, informing target audiences about your brand or service's presence in the market, encouraging healthy competition in the market, providing social benefits for the brand, and encouraging the audience to interact with the brand. Traditional marketing such as the use of television and radio commercials only allows information exchange in one direction whilst social media based marketing enables interactive communication with customers (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009:92; Fridolf & Arnautovic, 2011:19). Another advantage that was suggested by Cant *et al.* (2010:332) is that when using social networks a company can involve the customer in product development hence the product will suit the exact needs of the consumers.

Supporting the abovementioned benefits, Withiam (2011:3) states that one great advantage of social media is that customers are willing to share information about their likes and dislikes and this helps give hospitality businesses a sense of what customers want and how they react to a particular business. In the same vein, Guarav (2012:6) indicates that social media marketing, unlike traditional channels, allows consumers to participate and propagate their views. This in turn gives updated real time facts about a business such as the number of Facebook fans and likes, Twitter followers and You Tube views (Guarav, 2012:6). This information is vital to hospitality businesses as they can track the number of conversations taking place over a new product or service they

offered and can immediately respond to reviews, comments and feedback all of which is impossible when using traditional marketing channels such as magazines, brochures and television advertisement (Trusov *et al.*, 2009:90).

Carraher, Buchanan and Puia (2010:380) note that social media has become a tool that allows interaction and gives companies an opportunity to address the problems and concerns of their customers, which if done effectively, contributes to building the brand. Social media, according to Kirtis and Karahan (2011:263), is an ideal marketing tool for hospitality businesses because of its time, audience, relations and cost advantages. Costs can be reduced as the distribution necessary for mass media is omitted. Chandler (2013:2) states that the four main benefits of using social media marketing include building a reputable brand, community, repeat exposure and website traffic.

With regard to building a *reputable brand*, a social media company can decide how to position itself and what to show its customers. Thus with consistent effort and great content a company can build a reputation for its brand around its values (Jothi *et al.*, 2011:236). *Community* refers to a company's followers becoming part of its community. The company has instant access to these followers, meaning that the company can engage in ongoing dialogue that is more valuable than that of paid market research, *Repeat exposure* refers to the opportunity a company has within its built network to remind customers of products, sales and services over and over again, reducing the timeframe of the sales cycle dramatically which cannot be done with traditional media (Chandler, 2013:3). When a company shares blogs, videos and other content from its website, the company gives its audience a reason to click through to the company website, thus providing opportunities for visitors to take action by inviting them to subscribe to a mailing list, make a purchase, or call to schedule a free consultation (Hsu, 2012:971). This refers to *website traffic*. Social media can also be the ultimate tool for word of mouth promotion, allowing a company's best customers and strongest advocates to share their experiences with other potential customers. This type of communication is perceived by the audience as a more trustworthy source of information than communication generated via traditional marketing tools.

Though social media marketing has received a considerable amount of praise from both academic researchers and business practitioners (those institutions offering vocational

qualifications in business and internet usage), it has its own shortfalls just like any other marketing tools (Withiam, 2011:5). As with any other medium, social media marketing has some limitations which businesses should be aware of before incorporating it into their marketing strategies. Kasavana (2009:23) indicates that although social networking sites can help strengthen guest loyalty, they can also lead to unfair negativity, inaccurate information and undue criticism. For instance, since there is so much freedom to comment publicly on the services offered by a company, the company is open to more negative feedback which in turn affects customer perceptions. Bodnar (2010:1) argues that one big misconception that social media marketers have is that social media marketing is free. While most tools are free or low in cost, they take a substantial amount of time to learn and use (Bodnar, 2010:1). Since the cost of sharing information is reduced to practically zero, the internet is continuously crowded with spam or irrelevant information, which makes it difficult for marketers to reach target prospects and for messages to resonate with audience. Another factor Bodnar (2010:2) highlighted is the aspect of online gluttony, where most marketers overdo their social media marketing which is detrimental to their marketing goals. Instead of using both online and offline marketing tools, most marketers are now placing all of their efforts and attention on online endeavours, even though offline events and marketing still drive results that supports important sales and marketing relationships (Hsu, 2012:973). Some authors (Lanz *et al.*, 2010:351) argue that though social media is an effective marketing tool, with no room to control what is being said about a company as information goes live immediately, many companies end up doing more damage control than publicity management (Withiam, 2011:8). It is also argued that social media marketing is difficult to measure, for instance one can measure the number of Twitter followers a business has, but that does not necessarily translate into sales. Hence, when using social media marketing, a business needs to understand all of these elements in order to fully reap the benefits of it. The next section reveals possible ways of employing social media for business marketing as suggested by several researchers.

### **2.3.3 Applying social media for marketing purposes**

According to Riese (2010:3), although marketing using social media platforms will bring in more business and increase customer satisfaction to some degree, there is no guarantee that every business will enjoy these benefits. There is a need for businesses

to take time to put together an effective social media marketing campaign to get positive results. This being the case, Riese (2010:3) proposes six tips for a successful social media marketing campaign which are:

- *Knowing why you are online* - the actions one performs on social networks should support the reason you are online, be it to increase customer base or build customer loyalty. Knowing the target market will help select the most effective social media platform (Riese, 2010:3; Chandler, 2013:2).
- *Present a complete picture* - being transparent with customers by showing them the product and benefits offered to them will save customers' time when searching for information about your company.
- *Being active* - social media marketing does not end once an account has been created. Marketers need to be active and the best way to be active, according to Riese (2010:4), is to start conversations. This can be done by posting comments and tracking feedback to see what followers are saying. Responding to customers' comments quickly will help to manage negative comments which might be harmful to a company's reputation (Jothi *et al.*, 2011:5).
- *Provide value* - display quality content consistently usually attracts customers and prospective customers to social media accounts and earns a company the customers' trust. Value, according to Riese (2010:4) and Lanz *et al.* (2010:351), can be seen as links to other resources, pictures, videos and product reviews. Merely participating in social media marketing will not guarantee immediate sales; a company needs to take time to develop its image and message to win the hearts of customers.
- *Build credibility* - after earning trust from customers, a company needs to build credibility which can be done through five ways suggested by Riese (2010:6) which are: consistency in providing information; building relationship in the community by finding others in the industry to connect with; providing high quality content in order to win the respect of your readers and customers; interaction with participants on your site and being involved in conversations occurring in related groups and businesses; and lastly being transparent by explaining motivations if necessary.
- *Stay informed* - since new social media platforms are emerging every day or are constantly evolving, it is essential for social media marketers to stay up to date

with current trends and new social networks in order to keep pace with customers.

In addition to this, Chandler (2013:2) indicates that before embarking on social media marketing a company has to establish its target market, the message to be sent and the site/s to use. The marketing channel is normally determined by the type of message and the target market. For instance, YouTube is ideal for video content while Twitter is ideal for short, pithy messages (Kwak, Changhyun, Park & Moon, 2010:45). To sum all this up Kirtis and Karahan (2011:264) suggest that companies need to take into consideration their business and marketing goals and use the appropriate social network for that particular goal.

Evidence from previous research (Michaelidou, 2011; Dunay & Kruger, 2010) shows that though hospitality businesses are embracing social media marketing they still find it difficult to measure the real contribution of social media marketing (Parson 2009 in Crofton & Parker, 2012; Trusov, *et al.*, 2009:92). This has led to the development of some methods through which marketers can establish the contribution of social media marketing to a business entity. Lewis (2012) proposed ways in which social media marketing can establish the value and contribution of social media marketing to an establishment using two aspects which are: Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI); and Return on Marketing Objective (ROMO). The former measures the overall social media marketing contributions to the business over time, which is obtained by dividing the total number of leads and sales by social media investment (social media marketing budget + resources + technology investment). The latter measures how well marketers are generating interest from social engagement campaigns. It specifically evaluates social media campaigns aimed at new customer acquisition and marketing campaigns based on existing customers. It is calculated using a) *social reach* which is the total number of followers across all social platforms, b) *growth* - month over month or quarter over quarter, c) *engagement* - number of likes + shares + retweets + blog + comments divided by number of published poster pieces of content (Lewis, 2012:4). This is very helpful to companies which really want to establish the value of their social media marketing efforts.

Since marketing can be performed using different types of media, the next section will highlight the different forms of communication tools including social networks and will explain in detail the advantages and disadvantages of each medium.

### **2.3.4 Forms of marketing communication mediums**

A company can communicate its marketing message in a variety of ways depending on its target customer and the product or service it is promoting. Some methods may be more effective than others hence successful marketing plans integrate several communication mediums. These mediums range from traditional marketing tools such as radio, television and print media to online marketing mediums such as the internet and the newly introduced social media platforms. All these mediums will be briefly described in the section below starting with print advertising. Social networks will receive more attention as it the focus of this study.

#### **2.3.4.1 Print media**

A common traditional marketing medium is print advertising. Millions of people read newspapers and subscribe to magazines, thus placing advertisements in newspapers and other publications ensures heavy exposure of your product or service. Print media comes in different forms which include brochures, magazines, newspapers and pamphlets (Duncan, 2002:387). Print media is still relevant in today's marketing campaigns and is being used by different tourism businesses to market their services. The newspaper is one form of print media used by different tourism organisations. When using a newspaper for marketing purposes, the marketing message can be placed within different sections of the paper which increase its chances of being seen by audiences. It also offers more geographic selectivity than any other medium (Belch & Belch, 2001:491). Newspapers, however, have a short life span which is a major disadvantage when compared to social networks. In addition, companies have no guarantee that everyone who buys a newspaper will see the advert. As a print form, magazines are highly subject specific - for example advertising in tourism magazines is likely to target the right market since magazines typically have strong reader involvement (Van Der Merwe, 2003:174). Monthly magazines, however, have a long lead time meaning that advert has to be prepared well in advance. Lack of frequency is another disadvantage of using magazines (Weaver & Oppermann, 2000:236).

Brochures are the most well utilised form of print marketing media across the tourism industry. A well designed brochure can attract the attention of people and can act as a sales tool for many tourism businesses (Weaver & Oppermann, 2000:236). The main advantage of a brochure lies in its ability to package all the necessary marketing elements into one booklet, though it is criticised for static, one-way communication.

#### **2.3.4.2 Broadcast media**

Television and radio are part of broadcast media. They are considered to be similar as they produce fleeting messages (Duncan, 2002:388). Television advertisements are considered the most expensive method of advertising. The message appears and once complete it disappears and cannot be seen or heard again until it is rebroadcast, which is one of the major weaknesses of broadcast media. The other weakness of broadcast media is the issue of channel hopping - viewers can change from station to station, looking for their favourite programs and can easily miss the advertisement (Van Der Merwe, 2003:174). When comparing broadcast media with online advertisement it is worth noting that, unlike online media, broadcast media does not allow for two way communication, which is one of its weaknesses. However, some authors argue that television advertising also has furthest reach as millions of people tune in to their favourite programs every day (Shimp, 2000:375).

#### **2.3.4.3 Display media**

Display media include billboards (poster panels and painted bulletins) and transit advertising (Shimp, 2000:373). Poster panels are typically placed along highways or in heavily travelled locations while painted bulletins are hand painted directly onto the billboard by artist. Transit media, on the other hand, are vehicles which usually have stickers with the company name, logo and contact details on the outside the vehicle. This form of advertisement, according to Van Der Merwe (2003:175), is extensively used in the tourism industry. The main advantage of display media is that it is geographically flexible since outdoor advertisements may be placed along highways, near stores, on mobile billboards or anywhere that the law permits (Belch & Belch, 2001:491). Despite this, display media has its own disadvantages. Exposure time is short and limited because of the speed at which people drive past billboards. Shimp (2000:375) also indicates that advertisements fight for attention with other background features such as attractive buildings or beautiful scenery. Display media is a glance-

medium (Van Der Merwe, 2003:178) - it only has a brief window to attract the viewer's attention, meaning that the message needs to be concise as well as creatively appealing. It is impossible to use billboards to post information heavy content due to limited space on billboards, thus billboards are best used as a foundation for other marketing mediums.

#### **2.3.4.4 Online media**

Online or internet channels include e-mail, web, search engines and social networks. Online media are the various internet channels that are used to support brands, which, in essence are the sum of the characteristics of a product or service as perceived by the user. Explained below are various forms of online media.

##### **2.3.4.4.1 E-mail**

This is another form of online advertising. It is regarded as an effective way to market to target customers. By collecting e-mail addresses of interested parties, one develops a list of people who are interested in a particular service. They may want to learn more about the company, new products and upcoming promotions or events. This is a relatively inexpensive way to reach customers. E-mail marketing uses a variety of techniques (Duncan, 2002:428), namely advertisements, discussion lists and newsletters. These forms of e-mail marketing are briefly discussed below.

- *Advertisements:* an e-mail advertisement can be sent directly to targeted clients instead of using mass media (such as broadcast or print media), thus making the message tightly targeted to specific clients (Van Der Merwe, 2003:87).
- *Discussion lists:* hundreds to thousands of people can be included in a discussion list. Every time someone sends an e-mail, advertising messages are added to the bottom of each message sent out by persons on the list. It is therefore possible to spread the message to many people at a low cost (Lacovou, 2004:45).
- *Newsletters:* marketers are able to send e-mails set as newsletters on brand related topics. Newsletters are useful because they keep people informed and keep the company name at the foremost in customers' minds. They also have the potential to generate sales on a monthly or weekly basis (Sterne & Priore, 2000:26).

#### **2.3.4.4.2 Web advertising**

This involves the posting of information about a company's products on a website for customers to read. Due to its current structure and design web advertising provides an excellent avenue for last minute discounts and offers, a part of shorter periods of planning designated and post posted to specific customer segments (Briggs, 2001:65). Advertising through submitting specific key words to a mixture of search engines that potential customers may look for is another tactic used in web advertisement. Companies can also purchase banner advertisements, which are online advertisements that stretch across a website, and will bring visitors to a site when they click on the banner (Van Der Merwe, 2003:147). These advertisements are placed on websites that a target market may visit.

#### **2.3.4.4.3 Search engines**

This is a form of internet marketing that seeks to promote a website by increasing its visibility in search result pages through the use of paid placement (Lacovou, 2004:10). In order to receive maximum exposure and eliminate the possibility of any potential customers not locating the establishment's main website, it becomes necessary for a hotel to be registered with a number of possible search engines and directories (Lacovou, 2004:9). When people enter particular keywords into search engines which are relevant to a particular business, the company's advertisement appears. The main advantage of search engines is that it delivers an active, targeted message to online customers. Examples of popular search engines are Google, Bing, Yahoo, Aol search and Ask. The last online medium to be discussed is social networks.

#### **2.3.4.4.4 Social Networks**

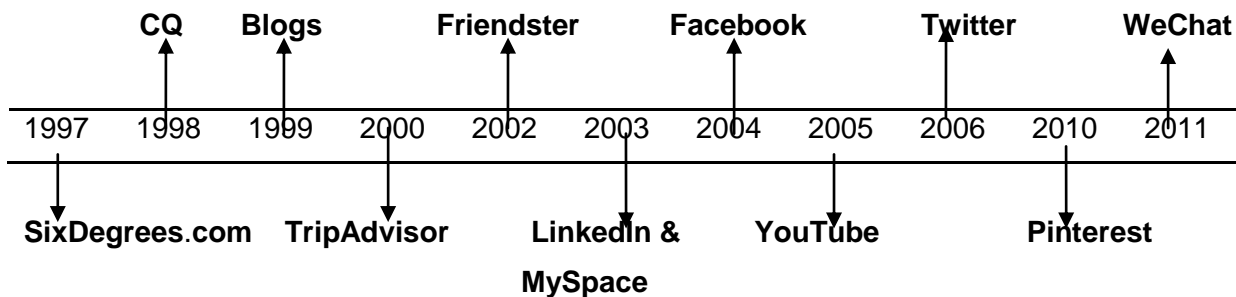
Social Networks can be defined as any Web site that allows users to create public profiles within that Web site and form relationships with other users of the same Web site who access their profile (Weinberg, 2009:149). These are social media platforms that have recently gained popularity and are changing the way in which businesses are marketing their products and services. Some refer to them as a staple in any business' marketing mix (Mangold & Faulds, 2009:358). Social networks are the newest method of marketing a product or service. Millions of people worldwide use the internet and

have at least one social network account, such as Facebook or Twitter (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011:1154). Many companies can gain exposure to their target market by using these sites to their advantage (Crofton & Parker, 2012:1). They can set up profiles that potential customers visit to learn about products, they can join forums and participate in promotions. Companies can also purchase customised advertisements that appear on the pages that their customers visit. Remarkably, the power of this new communication medium lies not only in the possibility for many to share a significant amount of information, but also to participate in the structuring of this information (Fridolf, 2011:18). By harnessing this social network, information, organisations can better identify their most influential consumers, drive participation in product development, and improve brand sentiment (Hvass & Munar, 2012:45). While social media and social media marketing have been explored above, it is also important to provide a history of social networks as this will provide a clear picture of where social networks originated.

### **2.3.5 The history of social networks**

Social networks came into existence a little over a decade ago (Joldrichsen, 2009:76). They can be regarded as new marketing tools that have seen exponential growth during the past few years. Boyd and Ellison (2007:3) indicate that the introduction of social networks can be traced back to 1997 when the first social network, SixDegrees.com was launched in 1997. It allowed users to create profiles, list their friends and, beginning in 1998, surf the friends' lists. Profiles existed on most major dating sites and many community sites. AIM and ICQ buddy lists supported lists of friends, although those friends were not visible to others. Classmates.com allowed people to affiliate with their high school or college and surf the network for others who were also affiliated, but users could not create profiles or list friends until years later. SixDegrees.com was the first to combine these features (Boyd & Ellison, 2007:3). This kind of interactive social web application style became popularly known as 'Web 2.0', which is a term describing a new generation of web applications, sites and companies that emphasise openness, community and interaction (Ernestad & Henrikson, 2010:240). The current trend of social networking can therefore be seen as a return to the roots of the internet - that being a platform to facilitate information exchange between users (Fridolf, 2011:18). As of today the most recently introduced social network is WeChat, as shown on the timeline of social networks on Figure 2.2. Only those popular social networks are

included in the timeline. Social networks such as Mxit, Skype and WhatsApp are not included on the time line since there are rarely used by business entities.



**Figure 2.2: Social networks timeline**

**Source: Researcher's own compilation**

In 2002, social media gained momentum with the introduction of Friendster which was followed by MySpace in 2003, and Facebook in early 2004 (Boyd & Elisson, 2007:3). Many other social networks such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Mxit, YouTube and bebo were introduced thereafter. At the same time, the number of social networks users also gained momentum. According to the statistics provided by Henrikson (2011:5), in September 2005, 16% of 18-29-year-old internet users were social networks users, by May 2010, this number had grown to 86%. Likewise between September 2005 and May 2010 the number of 30-49-year-olds, 50-64 year-olds, and 65+year-olds internet users using social networks has risen from 12% to 61%, 7% to 47%, and 5% to 26% respectively. In the following section, the most popular social networks chosen for this study will be described in brief.

### **2.3.5.1 Facebook**

Facebook, one of the giant social networks was created in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes as a site for Harvard students only. Within a short period of time, access was expanded to any college student with a Harvard edu E-mail account. During the period of 2005 and 2006, Facebook spread to high school networks, professionals inside corporate networks, and eventually, to everyone (Boyd & Elisson, 2007:4). It is a site that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and co-workers. Facebook allows users to create a profile where they can post information about themselves ranging from their occupation to their religious and political views to their interests. On this profile, both the user and

their 'friends' can post web links, pictures and videos of interest (Hughes *et al.*, 2012:562). In terms of business marketing, Facebook has been exploited by many businesses in all sectors of the economy. Facebook has approximately 835 525 280 users worldwide (Internet World Statistics, 2012) and continues to grow with more than 37% increase in active users (Bullas, 2013:2). According to the Global Web Index study (2012:6), Facebook maintains its top spot at over 60% penetration of all internet users globally. During the first quarter of 2014, Facebook had 1 393 000 monthly active users (The Statistical Portal, 2014). According to the South African Social Media Landscape survey (Goldstuck, 2012) Facebook has approximately 6.8-million users in South Africa, while in Zimbabwe, an estimate provided by Technology Zimbabwe shows that there are approximately 2.7 million Facebook users (Tech Zim report, 2012) and it is ranked as the most used social network by both business entities and individuals.

### **2.3.5.2 Twitter**

Joining the social networking trend in March 2006, Twitter has become one of the fastest growing social media platforms with more than 40% increase in active users over the last year (Bullas, 2013). It was launched following a brainstorming session by its founder Evan Williams (Johnson, 2009:66). Huberman, Romeno and Wu (2008:4) and Kwak, Changhyun, Park and Moon (2010:1), regard Twitter as the most interesting social network as it focuses on the sharing of opinion and information, not on reciprocal social interaction. Unlike other social networks, users can follow others without being followed back. It permits users to update their account using short statements with a maximum of 140 characters which are referred to as "tweets" (Hughes *et al.*, 2012:563). Huberman *et al.* (2008:3) added that Twitter is different from Facebook in that it offers the opportunity to restore some of the anonymity previously sought in online communication. In their study of topological characteristics of Twitter and its power as a new medium of information sharing, Kwak *et al.* (2010:321) revealed that, if a message or topic is retweeted, it will reach an average of 1000 users allowing for quick diffusion of information. With Twitter, information is shared quickly which makes it possible to gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners and others who care about your business. Customers can use Twitter for immediate notification of special offers. It has become a self-promotional tool used by businesses as well as celebrities (Johnson, 2009:67). World Wide, Twitter has

288 000 000 users by December 2014 (Wall Street Journal, 2015:1). In South Africa, Twitter is one of the fastest growing social networks following behind Facebook (Goldstuck, 2012). In Zimbabwe Twitter has also gained some momentum in the last two years, this is evident from the statistics provided by the Technomag (2014), which shows that Twitter has over 17 000 users as of February 2014.

### **2.3.5.3 TripAdvisor**

TripAdvisor was founded in February 2000 by Stephen Kaufer and is considered the largest travel community on the web (TripAdvisor Fact sheet, 2008). TripAdvisor, according to Miguens *et al.* (2008:135), is a site where most of the information posted is freely generated by its users. Users post reviews, comments and ratings on a destination, an attraction or any other tourism services. Miguens *et al.* (2008:136) further mentioned that it is possible to post multi-media elements (photo and videos) or travel maps of previous trips on this site which makes it an ideal site for the distribution of travel information. From 2007 to 2012, a number of new features were incorporated into TripAdvisor including *travellernetwork.com* which allows users to add acquaintances to their travel maps by connecting to pre-existing sources (Tuominen, 2011:4). Recently (May 2012), TripAdvisor launched a connection to Facebook that lets users select reviews from people in their social graph. TripAdvisor is one of the most used sites in tourism businesses, especially for marketing (Miguens *et al.*, 2008:136).

### **2.3.5.4 YouTube**

YouTube is one of the fastest growing of the social networks. Having launched in 2005, the site has attracted a number of users. According to Sue (2011:4), the site was originally created for dating purposes but has evolved into much more. It is a platform which allows users to share videos online and messages are spread quickly and efficiently through a variety of mediums including Facebook and Twitter, as well as being embedded in websites, and sent via e-mail. Sue (2011:5) further indicated that from amongst 400 tweets per minute a YouTube video is mentioned, and YouTube's search bar is the second most used search bar on the internet, second only to Google. Approximately 2.9 billion hours are spent on YouTube every month. This implies that if a

hospitality business posts videos showing what it offers on YouTube it can reach millions of people within a few hours.

### **2.3.5.5 LinkedIn**

LinkedIn started in May, 2003 and is less focused on social networking. It is used to network within a professional sphere and allows individuals to build professional career-oriented relationships. It is the most business-oriented of the “four big social networking sites” (Wilson, 2009:85). Today LinkedIn is the most used tool by companies in the recruitment process. This is due to the fact that LinkedIn allows users to post their qualifications, experience, skills and also provides a platform for others to endorse certain skills of their peers.

## **2.4 THEORETICAL MODELS OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

The introduction of social media as a new hybrid in the marketing mix has attracted the attention of many researchers (Khan, 2011; Di Pietro & Di Virgilio, 2012; Sood, Kattiyapornpong & Miller, 2011; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Gurav, 2012) not only in the tourism sector but in many other sectors. How social media can be integrated in a company's marketing strategy is a cause of concern for many hospitality practitioners; hence a number of theories and frameworks were proposed in order to understand the nature of social networking. Social networking theories are crucial as they enable researchers and businesses to understand and take advantage of this media. According to Pan and Crofts (2012:45), theoretical frameworks are relevant as they can help interpret and make sense of data, aid in the discovery of new opportunities in the field, and assist in avoiding technological dominance over our lives and society. Fast development of technologies could easily overwhelm users, both as business managers and consumers. For the reasons mentioned above, this study reviewed some of the major theoretical frameworks which may be applicable to the study and understanding of social media. These frameworks according to Pan and Crofts (2012:45), can be divided into three categories: micro-theories dealing with the study of the dynamics of the contribution of information online and communication of individual social actors; macro-theories looking at the structure and dynamics of social actors and social media content through global or abstract views; and pseudo-theories which include the recent conceptual frameworks in marketing and social media proposed mostly by non-

academics. These theories and frameworks contribute to the understanding of the nature of social media. Unfortunately there are no agreed upon theories which are directly linked to social media marketing since it's a new phenomenon which has recently joined the marketing fraternity, hence theories borrowed from other disciplines such as psychology are widely used.

Theories such as Word of Mouth/Psychological Ownership Theory, Social exchange theory and Social penetration theory are classified under micro-theories (Pan & Crotts, 2012:45). Theories such as the social networking analysis and McLuhan's Media Theory fall under macro-theories. On the other hand pseudo-theories are developed by non-academics in a bid to explain how social media can be leveraged for marketing purposes, thus social media and online marketing agencies are the major players in the formulating of these theories. Examples of these theories include social graphics framework and Social Feedback Loop. These theories will be reviewed in brief in the following subsections.

### **2.4.1 Micro-Theories**

These theories deal with the study of the dynamics of the contribution of online information and communication of individual social factors. There are a number of theories which fall into this category but for the purpose of this study only the most fitting ones will receive attention. The next sub-sections will briefly highlight some of the major aspects of each of the three micro-theories and will look at how they can be linked to social media marketing.

#### **2.4.1.1 Social penetration theory**

The social penetration theory was conceptualised by Altman and Taylor (1973), illustrating a particular pattern of relationship development that is identified as social penetration. West and Tuner (2009:56) defined it as a process of relationship bonding whereby individuals move from superficial communication to more intimate communication. It focuses more on the individual and dyadic levels. Altman and Taylor (1973:109) indicated that relationships progress from non-intimate to intimate and that relational development is generally systematic and predictable. The theory emphasises

that relationships are like onions, they have different layers (outside layer and inside layer) which relates to the public self and the private self (Altam, Vinsel, Brown & Leonard, 1981:110). Relationships start with public, visible, and superficial information, such as gender, clothing preferences, and ethnicity; slowly, as the relationship progresses, one starts to share feelings; at the deepest level, one will expose his or her goals, ambitions, and beliefs (Gudykunst, Nishida & Chua, 1987:173). This theory was criticised as being too linear, not taking into account that relationships are embedded in other relationships and thus cannot proceed in such a linear fashion (Altam, Vinsel, Brown & Leonard, 1981:116).

Linking it to today's social networking world, people or companies may be able to design social networks in a way which separates these different layers of information. By default, certain information will be disclosed to the public, while private and semi-private information remains confidential. There might be ways to determine the levels of relationships from the mode and frequency of communications, which could easily be tracked online through social media sites (Pan & Crotts, 2011:10). According to Gaudin (2010) cited in Pan and Crotts (2012), a privacy lawsuit against Facebook highlighted the importance of following the layered intimacy levels of social penetration when disclosing one's information. It therefore implies that firms which choose to engage in social media marketing must first understand the type of information to make available to the general public before conveying their marketing messages.

#### **2.4.1.2 Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory emanated from sociology studies exploring exchanges between individuals or small groups (Emerson, 1976:336). Emerson (1976:336) indicated that social exchange is limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others. According to Homans (1958:601), the theory uses a cost-benefit framework and comparison of alternatives to explain how human beings communicate with each other, how they form relationships and bonds and how communities are formed through communication exchanges. Cook and Whitmeyer (1992:110) argued that the social exchange theory increasingly has involved explicit consideration of social structure, as both product and constraint, typically in the form of networks of social relations. The theory argues that individuals engage in behaviours they find rewarding and avoid

behaviours that have too high a cost (Pan & Crofts, 2012:79; Homans, 1958:606). Social exchange theory's fundamental premise is that human behavior is an exchange of rewards between actors (Zafirovski, 2005:240). Homans (1958:606) suggested that the reasons people engage in social exchange are: an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, an anticipated reciprocity on the part of others, altruism and direct reward. Pan and Crofts (2012:73) indicate that the first three reasons appear to have particular relevance to the reasons people participate in social media given that participation in social media is not compensated.

Though the theory has received support from many authors (Cook, 1990; Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992; Emerson, 1976; Pan & Crofts, 2012), it has also received some criticism from other authors as well. Miller (2005:170) argued that human interactions are too complicated to be defined by economic concepts, such as the reward versus cost scale. Miller (2005:20) further indicated that others aspects like previous relationships play a role in present relationships and that individuals make psychological assessments of their current relationships and compare those assessments to the past. However, despite the fact that the theory has received some criticism, it still provides a framework that many researchers have used and are still using profitably.

Pan and Crofts (2012:78) note that travel blogs and social networks have long recognised that there are far more people consuming information than generating it. They use the example of YouTube where subscribers have uploaded over 2 billion videos and audio tracks to the site since its founding in 2005, while these clips are accessed by more than 10 million unique visitors daily, indicating that there are far more viewers than contributors (Pan & Crofts, 2012:75). Global web index (2009) segments social media users into four groups which are; a) watchers, those who consume content only to help in decision making, b) sharers, those who upload and forward information to others in order to help others and demonstrate knowledge, c) commenters, those who review and rate products and comment on those who do in an effort to participate and contribute and d) producers/ evangelists, who create their own content in effort to express their identity and garner recognition.

When linking the social exchange theory to today's social media phenomenon, watchers consume but do not necessarily produce, or put differently they take but don't give,

suggesting that they consider the cost of posting or commenting too high, or fear offering their opinion or raising their profile (Pan & Crotts, 2012:76). It therefore implies that firms which want to engage in social media marketing must observe and understand the hierarchy of these segments in order to effectively deploy their marketing campaigns. Thus, businesses must understand the participation of each segment and the type of site used in order to communicate effectively in that sphere.

#### **2.4.1.3 Word of mouth/ Psychological ownership theory**

Given the experiential nature of tourism services, tourism researchers have found that information obtained from other people is the most used type of information when making travel decisions, more so than a company's marketing campaigns (Schmallenger & Carson, 2008:237). The information communicated by friends and relatives is construed as more credible, honest, and trustworthy than that generated by marketers, since the communicators are not compensated for the referral (Pan & Crotts 2012:77). With the introduction of social networks such as Facebook, TripAdvisor and Twitter, tourists can easily get information from friends as well as strangers freely and without much effort needed to search for it.

Jalilvand and Samiei (2012:593) indicated that the word-of-mouth theory (WOM) is applicable to service businesses and plays a particularly important role for service organisations, as intangibility makes the pre-purchase trial of services impossible. Thus WOM is particularly important as when services are complex or have high-perceived risk because it is seen as a highly credible information as the sender is usually independent of the organisation providing the service and doesn't stand to directly from advocating the service (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996 cited in Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012:595). With the introduction of social networking sites, consumers can freely post a company's products and services on the internet for other to see and hence can unknowingly market the services of a company. A study conducted by O'Neil, Palmer and Charters (2003) in Australia revealed that visitors' WOM recommendations boost wine sales when vacationing opinion leaders return home and tell others of their experiences. WOM also works closely with the Psychological Ownership theory (PO). According to Asatryan and Oh (2008:366), certain customers are so attracted to a company that they can be considered owners who believe that they

have a stake in the company and who stand to support the company's sustainable development. Those loyal customers tend to post positive comments about the company to the general public and direct negative comments to the company. It therefore implies that firms should enhance the perception of psychological ownership and control among their customer base through loyalty, guest feedback and service recovery programs; they should keep more negative evaluations internal and positive feedback external. On the other hand, firms that do not emphasise customer loyalty or guest feedback should expect customers to both reward and punish their performance through social media (Pan & Crotts, 2012:78).

## **2.4.2 Macro-theories**

Macro-theories look at the structure and dynamics of social actors and social media content through global or abstract views. Two major theories which fall under this category according to Pan and Crotts (2012:74) are the social networking analysis and McLuhan's Media Theory. These two theories are consequently discussed.

### **2.4.2.1 Social networking analysis**

In a study on how the social structure of relationships around a person or organisation affects behaviour (West, 2001), social networking analysis views social relationships in terms of network theory consisting of *nodes* and *ties* (also called *edges*, *links*, or *connections*). Nodes are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. Those ties can be communication nodes of frequency, friendship, kinship, financial exchange, sexual relationships, or common interests or beliefs. Together they form a complex graph structure (Pan & Crotts, 2012:74). In its simplest form, a social network is a map of specified ties, such as friendship, between the nodes being studied. The nodes to which an individual is thus connected are the social contacts of that individual. The network can also be used to measure social capital – the value that an individual gets from the social network (West, 2001:60).

According to Pan and Crotts (2012:75) and Bonacich (1987:1172), mathematical calculation on many indices could be performed on the complex graph structure including: *Betweenness*: the extent of a node lying between other nodes; *Centrality*:

how connected a node is to the network; *Closeness*: how one node is near other nodes in the network, *Density*: all the ties in a network in proportion to all the possible ties; *Structural hole*: the hole which connects other nodes, those nodes are disconnected with the first node. Knowing these calculations, according to Pan and Crotts (2012:76), can help businesses to study the social networks, improve the network structure and help increase information flow within the network. Linking this to the line of research of this study it implies that when social media content is treated as nodes, one could perform mathematical calculations on those artefacts such as asking questions such as what are the important pieces of information shared by many people on social networks and how can one connect users through artefacts. The accuracy and speed of information passing is affected by the structure of the network and the mental sets of individual actor in the network (Buckner's 1965 theory of rumour transmission). Understanding this according to Pan and Crotts (2012:79) will help to inform hospitality businesses of the best methods of promoting themselves through online word of mouth.

#### 2.4.2.2 McLuhan's media theory

McLuhan (1997) was one of the first theorists to recognise the importance and consequence of scale in medium or technology (Bobitt, 2012:65). The theory is based on the idea that the media rather than its content will transform society and that it has turned the world into a global village (Pan & Crotts 2012:78). McLuhan proposed four laws of media that businesses or marketers need to recognise in order for them to utilise social technologies effectively. The four laws are presented in Table 2.1 on the next page.

**Table 2.1: McLuhan's Law of Media**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Enhances</b></p> <p>Extends, amplifies, enhances some human capacity - body parts, previous medium, emotion</p> | <p><b>Reverses into</b></p> <p>When pushed into extreme reverse into opposite intention</p> |
| <p><b>Retrieves</b></p> <p>Retrieves experience or medium from the past</p>   | <p><b>Obsolesces</b></p> <p>Makes an older medium obsolete</p>                              |

**Source: Bobbit (2012:5)**

McLuhan argued that marketers need to know the human traits or experiences which are enhanced by media, in this case social media. They also need to know the pre-existing technology, media or system obsolesced for them to develop an effective marketing strategy. Pan and Crotts (2012:76) add that businesses need to understand the changes in behaviour caused by the usage of new social media technologies and adopt an attitude of acceptance towards them. Applying McLuhan's theory to today's social media era, it can be seen that social media platforms extend the scale, production and distribution of information to a degree that far exceeds traditional media. The simple transmission of information that social media allows, reduces the physical limitation placed upon it as compared to linear mediums such as magazines, books or brochures (Bobbit, 2012:66).

### **2.4.3 Pseudo- theories**

As mentioned before these theories were developed by non-academics in a bid to make sense of the social media landscape. Since the social media landscape is rapidly changing, even practitioners not in the academic field are compelled to come up with frameworks and strategies to explain social media. Two major frameworks that were proposed under the category of pseudo-theories are the social feedback loop framework and social graphics framework which will be explained in the following subsections.

#### **2.4.3.1 The social feedback loop framework**

The social feedback loop frame links consumer purchase cycle with social media. The traditional purchase cycle according to Dave (2008:8) comprises three main stages at which marketers can influence a consumer's purchase decision. These stages are; awareness, consideration and purchase. After purchase, according to Pan and Crotts (2012:76) a customer will use the product or service to form opinions and talk about it at a later stage. Some of the experience will be posted on online social networking sites and loop back to other customers. Harris (2011:10) suggested that in order for businesses to effectively utilise social networks, a solid process is needed to support the feedback loop. Harris (2011:10) further mentioned that if the loop is not properly functioning, is underdeveloped or unorganised, the company's public perception will be

at risk and all the marketing efforts will be in vain. Customers should not be left hanging, all questions and queries must be answered as quickly as possible in order to add value to social media marketing initiatives. The social feedback loop cycle is facilitated mostly by electronic word of mouth which is further driven by actual use or trial. Therefore harnessing the social feedback loop might be even more important and effective than using mass media marketing channels (Pan & Crotts, 2012:77).

#### **2.4.3.2 The social graphics framework**

Social graphics is defined by Owyang (2010:5) as a way to measure how customers use social technologies, where they are online, and how it influences them in the context of the customer life cycle. The framework is based on the idea that instead of only studying the demographic, geographic or psychographic profiles of customers, marketers also need to develop a social strategy (Owyang, 2010:3). Li (2010:8) also adds that the social graphic framework provides a way to understand customers in addition to traditional demographic and psychographic information. Since customers are now adopting social technologies marketers must measure social graphics which measure how customers interact with each other.

Owyang (2010:6) indicates that for marketers to fully utilise social media technologies they need to know their customers' social behaviour online, what social information or people their customers rely on, what their customers' social influence is, and how customers use social technologies in the context of your products/services. This information according to Pan and Crotts (2012:78) will help marketers to separate customers into layers of engagement from curating, producing, commenting, sharing to watching. This is essential for marketers to provide platforms to facilitate their particular social interactions.

#### **2.4.4 A synthesis of social media theories**

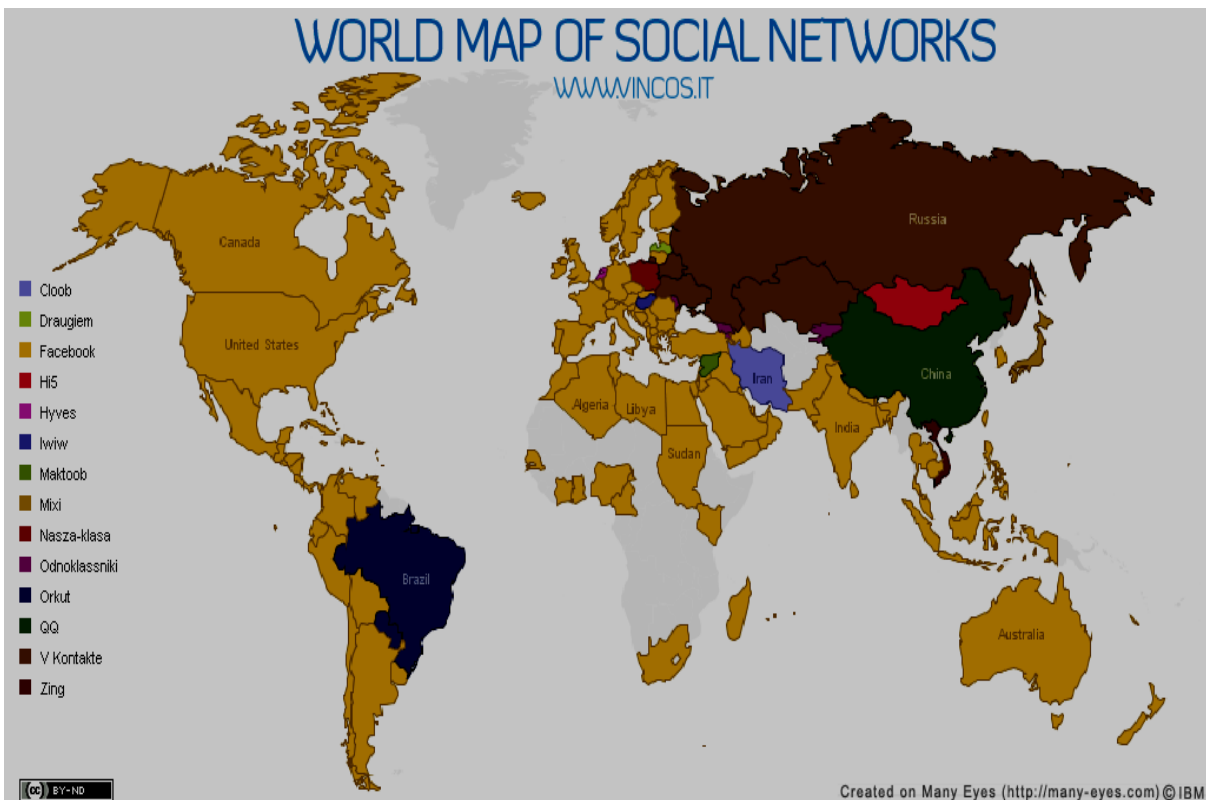
From the afore-mentioned discussion on social media theories proposed by different authors and researchers, some important aspects that social media marketers need to understand to be successful in social media marketing are highlighted. From Micro-theories to Pseudo-theories developed by non-academics it can be deduced that developing an intimate relationship with customers' needs some extra effort. Marketers need to identify and understand their targeted audiences and stay engaged in order to

stay in contact with their customers. This alone is not sufficient for a company to perform effectively within social media marketing. Giving feedback and controlling customer base through loyalty and service recovery programs will also help marketers to reap the full benefits of social media marketing as proposed in the psychological ownership theory. Monitoring changes in behaviour of customers influenced by social media and knowing the social information customers rely on can assist marketers to craft effective social media marketing campaigns. This can be done through following customers on social networks and check what they post and how do they share information.

Apart from these explained theories one most popular framework which can be used to understand the use of online tools such as social media for marketing is the Digital Marketing Framework which was first proposed by Kierzkowski *et al.* (1996) and later on modified by Chan and Guillet (2011) to suite online marketing. The framework according to Chan and Guillet (2011:348) is developed around five stages which is to attract customers, to engage customers, to retain customers, to learn about customers and to relate back to customers. The frameworks emphasises that for marketers to be successful in their marketing efforts they need to be able to perform good in all the stages (Kierzkowski *et al.*, 1996). Chan and Guillet (2011) adopted the model to social media marketing and emphasises that for hospitality marketers to perform better in social media marketing, they need to find ways of handling customers at each stage of the framework. This framework was adopted for this study when constructing part of section (B) of the questionnaire.

## **2.5 WORLDWIDE SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE**

Social media usage in the world is increasing rapidly with Facebook being the most used social network. From the world map of social networks on the next page it is observed that in countries such as Australia, Egypt, Germany, India, Spain, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States of America to mention a few, Facebook remains the most used social network. According to Cohen (2013:23) Facebook is the most dominant social network in 127 of the 137 countries analysed in the June 2013 edition of the world map of social networks (see Map 2.1). (However in some countries like China, Qzone is the most dominant social network and Russia is dominated by Vkontakte).



**Map 2.1: The world’s 2013 map of social networks**

**Adapted from: Vinco’s blog (2013)**

Africa has also joined the worldwide trend that has seen mobile internet outpace the growth of fixed line internet. According to the Internet World Stats (2012), Africa has 14.45% of mobile traffic as a share of internet traffic. This, according to Casey and Davies (2012), has resulted in a vast uptake in social media platforms; Facebook has become the highest visited site in the continent, with African users of the world’s largest social networking site standing at an estimated 44.9 million people. The growth of subscribers in Africa has prompted Facebook to specifically cater to the expanding African market by starting to roll-out language versions of the site beginning with Swahili (Casey & Davies, 2012:5).

Social Bakers and World Bank survey (2012) carried out a survey to establish Social media penetration in Africa focusing on Facebook solely as this is considered to be the most used social network in Africa. The results of the survey show that in terms of percentage, Tunisia has the highest penetration rate, while Egypt has the highest number of people on Facebook followed by South Africa. The results of the top ten

countries investigated by Social Bakers and World Bank's 2012 survey are shown on Table 2.2 below.

**Table 2.2: Social media penetration in Africa**

| <b>Country</b>      | <b>Facebook membership</b> | <b>Population</b> | <b>Penetration</b> |
|---------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Tunisia</b>      | 3 113 840                  | 10 673 800        | 29%                |
| <b>Morocco</b>      | 4 715 940                  | 32 272 974        | 15%                |
| <b>Egypt</b>        | 11 468 320                 | 82 536 770        | 14%                |
| <b>Algeria</b>      | 3 690 840                  | 35 980 139        | 10%                |
| <b>South Africa</b> | 5 231 020                  | 50 586 757        | 10%                |
| <b>Senegal</b>      | 665 020                    | 12 767 556        | 5%                 |
| <b>Ghana</b>        | 1 367 820                  | 24 965 816        | 5%                 |
| <b>Kenya</b>        | 1 523 320                  | 41 609 728        | 4%                 |
| <b>Nigeria</b>      | 5 057 660                  | 162 470 660       | 3%                 |
| <b>Congo</b>        | 754 960                    | 67 757 577        | 1%                 |

**Adapted from: Social Bakers and World Bank (2012)**

While the usage of social media in Africa is hampered by some obstacles such as price of data, it has prompted the likes of Facebook to start structuring deals where users can use their applications for free in Africa (Casey & Davies, 2012:5). If hospitality businesses can take advantage of this they will reap the 'free' benefits of social media marketing.

Focusing on the two countries being investigated in this study, it was noted that South Africa is found in the top five categories of countries with highest Facebook penetration and Facebook membership. As of this writing the researcher is unaware of any academic published literature on Social media penetration and membership for Zimbabwe but has to rely on literature provided by Tech Zim Report compiled by pseudo-researchers. Social media market share figures published in South Africa and social media landscape survey by Goldstuck (2013) show that from March 2012 to March 2013 Facebook still dominates the market share in South Africa, followed by Pinterest and Twitter. On the other hand the most dominant social network in Zimbabwe

is Facebook (Zim Tech Report, 2012). Statistics for social media penetration in Africa have been provided; the next section focuses on the usage of social media within the hospitality industry. The literature is not focused on Africa alone; it focuses on global social media usage within the hospitality industry.

### **2.5.1 Social media usage within the tourism industry**

Social networks with their ability to facilitate two way communications are ideal for tourism marketing as it is an experiential product. To date almost every major tourism authority or tourism related business maintains some form of social media presence be it a Facebook page, a Twitter feed, or user blog and YouTube video channels (Crofton & Parker, 2012:47). Different sectors of the tourism industry have taken hold of social media with both hands since its introduction. It is used for various purposes including marketing, recruitment and personal relationship building with marketing being the dominant purpose.

Several studies have been conducted on social media usage within the tourism industry (Salkhordeh, 2009; Lim, 2010; Chan & Guillet, 2011; O'Connor, 2011; Lanz *et al.*, 2012; Park & Oh, 2012; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012; Guarav, 2012; Assenov & Khurana, 2012; O'Neal, 2012). These studies focused on different sectors of the tourism industry but most work has been done in the hospitality sector, though some authors such as Park and Oh (2012) and O'Neal (2012) studied the usage of Social media marketing by travel agencies and tour operators in Korea and usage of social media marketing in marketing wine companies in Australia respectively.

In South Africa the tourism sector is riding the social media marketing wave as well; this is evident by the SMITTY award that was recently given to the South Africa's Cape Town Tourism. According to Trade news (2013), Cape Town Tourism has been recently recognized for its e-marketing strategy and the social media digital marketing campaign. Among the social media milestones are: the creation of a virtual fan park for Cape Town on Facebook, the page has 280 000 fans and has been recognised as one of the top brand Facebook pages in South Africa; and the creation of a new Cape Town toolkit which offers diverse itineraries, high quality images and information about Cape Town as well as the use of tweets and blogs to market Cape Town tourism (Trade news, 2013). Much attention will be given to previous studies in the hospitality sector since this

is the focus of this study. Thus the next section focuses on previous research done on the usage of social media in the hospitality sector.

### **2.5.2 Previous research on social media usage in the hospitality sector**

The explosive growth of social networks and their influence have resulted in a stream of research especially in the business sector. Due to the rapid increase of social networks, hospitality researchers and enterprises are continuously searching for ways to make sense of these sites and manage them for their benefit. How social media marketing can be integrated in business marketing has become a hot topic not only to hospitality researchers, but to all researchers in the business environment. The following sections will review literature on social media usage in the hospitality sector in both developed and developing countries and conclude by highlighting some of the lessons that have emerged from these studies.

Most of the previous research on social media marketing was done in developed nations (Assenov & Khurana, 2012; Gurav, 2012; Lanzet *et al.*, 2010; Milano, Bagio & Piatelli, 2011; Salkhordeh, 2009; Stankov, Lazic & Dragicevic, 2010). Little work has been done to unravel the implications of social media marketing in the hospitality sector in developing countries.

Previous research (Assenov & Khuran, 2012; Vidovic, 2012) on social media marketing in the hospitality sector has shown that most hospitality business, especially chain and boutique hotels in developed nations, have embraced the idea of social media marketing. Stankov *et al.* (2010:106) argue that most tourism businesses are beginning to realize the importance of using social media marketing. In fact, most hospitality businesses have already established a presence on social media websites. A study conducted by Assenov and Khuran (2012) on the use of social media marketing in Thailand in the tourism sector shows that for many hotels in Phuket social media is still a new marketing communication tool. It was found that most hotels were not effectively using social media marketing, with Facebook and TripAdvisor being the most dominant and popular sites amongst hotels in Phuket. Assenov and Khuran (2012:10) further observed that most hotels, while not effectively utilising social media marketing, still recognise its importance for brand awareness and exposure. This was also observed by Gurav (2012:11) in the study of the effects of social media in the hospitality industry

when he argued that most hospitality businesses in Las Vegas have embraced social media but that the wave of social media marketing is still new to them. In support of this, Withiam (2011:5) argued that many hotel chains have embraced Facebook and other channels for marketing purposes while others are hardly represented at all in the social media sphere. Vidovic (2012:100) studied the use of social media in Vienna tourism sector and noticed that Facebook and TripAdvisor were the most used social media platforms amongst hotels. Vidovic (2012:102) further revealed some interesting findings, namely that boutique hotels use a number of social media platforms for marketing while chain hotels are often limited to Facebook only. Hsu (2012:979) investigated the effectiveness of Facebook as an international e-marketing strategy in Taiwan hotels and discovered that hotels were effectively using Facebook marketing for the domestic market but in the international market they were failing.

Social media in the hospitality industry trend report (2012) shows that 93.8% of hospitality businesses investigated indicate that they currently use social media particularly Facebook to connect with customers and were planning to increase allocation of resources in terms of time and budget to social media marketing. A study by Salkhordeh (2010:78) revealed that out of ten largest hotel operators in the world, seven were using Facebook to communicate with their customers but they were not actively using it. Salkhordeh (2010:79) further indicated that most of the hotels have limited knowledge on how to use social media platform for marketing. Supporting the findings of the abovementioned researchers, Chan and Guilet (2011:366) studied the use of social media marketing by hotels in Hong Kong and found that Twitter and Facebook were the most widely used social networks in the hotel industry, but were not extensively used. They argued that there was lack of commitment amongst hotels to sustain social media marketing efforts and they also highlighted inability to use social media to disclose their identity as some of the factors limiting the usage of social media marketing by hotels. In line with Chan and Gullet (2011), Walsh (2010:3) argued that though the number of hotels using Facebook and Twitter is growing by the day, the main challenge facing all hotels is how to effectively engage customers to their benefit.

Contrary to what other researchers observed, Friebe and Campbell (2012) noticed that the majority of hotels investigated in the study of social media usage in the hospitality and leisure industry in United Kingdom indicate that they actively promote their

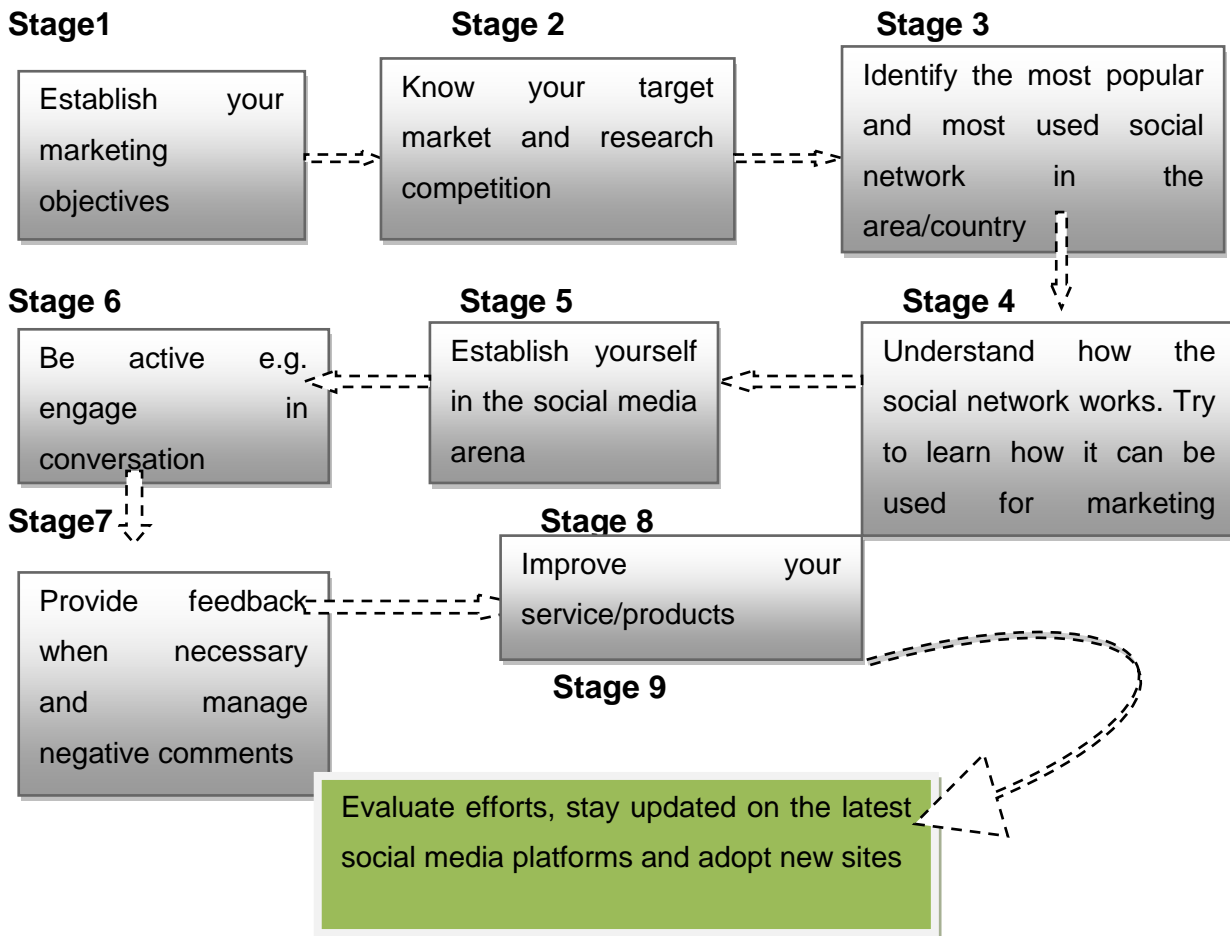
businesses through social media marketing and are realizing the benefits of using social media marketing. Most of the hotels indicated that the major benefits of using social media marketing is that it is a direct and 'free' marketing tool. Previous authors (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Walsh, 2010; Salkhordeh, 2011; Vidovic, 2012; Gurav, 2012; Assenov & Khuran, 2012; Witham, 2011) seem to concur on the notion that though most of hospitality businesses are present on these sites, they are not effectively using them.

From a review of literature on several studies (Assenov & Khuran, 2012; Witham, 2011; Friebe & Campbell, 2012; Walsh, 2010; Hsu, 2012) conducted on social media marketing in the hospitality sector, the researcher has noted some interesting aspects regarding social media usage. Although social media marketing is a new phenomenon in the marketing arena, hospitality businesses have started to adopt it for marketing purposes (Gurav, 2012:3). The adoption and usage varies from one country to another. Some hospitality businesses, especially in developed countries, have grabbed social media marketing with both hands and are effectively utilising it for their benefit (Vidovic, 2012:70). However, this trend is not uniform in all hospitality businesses; some have joined the social media marketing wave while others hospitality businesses are not even represented at all in the social media wave. Of importance is the fact that usage of social media marketing in developing countries' accommodation sector, especially in Africa, is not well researched such that it is difficult to compile a well-documented literature review for developing countries in Africa. Equally important is the fact that since social media is a new phenomenon which has recently joined the marketing fraternity, there is little formal consensus as to which type of social media marketing model is appropriate for hospitality businesses. Researchers are continuously proposing different models for instance, the Social Media Marketing Maturity Model by Camiade and Claisse (2012) which shows the main stages of a company evolution faced with a given problem, to try to explain how social media can be effectively incorporated in a company's marketing strategy. Hence, the following section illustrates the proposed model for social media marketing compiled after reviewing the literature.

## **2.6 PROPOSED SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING FRAMEWORK**

Having presented an analysis of the literature and a review of models proposed by other researchers, this study presents a framework crafted from combining various ideas from other models on how social media marketing can be effectively utilised for hospitality

marketing. The model shows the path or the steps which need to be followed for successful implementation of social media marketing. This model (Figure 2.2) might be useful to the sub-Saharan African hospitality sector and any other businesses with similar structures.



**Figure 2.3: Proposed Social media marketing framework**

**Source: Researcher's own compilation adapted from existing literature**

The proposed model takes into account the pre-adoption and post-adoption factors which can influence the successful implementation of social media marketing in hospitality businesses. It has been observed from a review of literature that establishing marketing objectives will help businesses to select an appropriate social network to adopt (Kirtis & Karahan, 2011:6). After the establishment of marketing goals a company has to know its target customers as the usage of a particular social network is dependent upon the age and the profile of particular people as well as the language used by its target audiences, for instance if a hotel is targeting youths then Facebook will be an ideal social network to use, especially in Africa. A company has to identify the most used or prevalent social network in the area it operates in as this will provide an

opportunity to reach out to a number of customers. While in countries such as Russia and China, Qzone and Vkonakte are the most used social networks (World map of Social Networks, 2013); the most used social network in Africa is Facebook (Social Bakers and World Bank survey 2012:2). It is therefore essential to understand how the social network operates (Hsu, 2012:972). This can be done by using the services of skilled personnel. After all this a company has to establish itself in the social media arena by joining any social networks that suits its objectives.

The other factor which significantly contributes to successful utilisation of social media marketing is regular activity within the network. Opening an account alone cannot guarantee you an increase in the number of followers. It is essential to continuously post what the company is offering on its profile page, engage in conversation related to your company and to provide quality content to capture the attention of your audiences (Riesse, 2010:6). A number of researchers (Jothi *et al.*, 2011; Haris, 2011; Riesse, 2010; Kirtis & Karahan, 2011) highlight the issue of feedback, - a company needs to be alert all the time and try to provide feedback regarding all issues raised by followers as well as manage negative comments before their reputation is tarnished. Not all negative comments are detrimental to the organisation's well-being, thus a company has to consider those comments and try to improve its products/services to enhance its image to achieve a competitive edge. There is a need for a company to then evaluate its social media marketing efforts, which can be done by measuring social media marketing contribution towards achieving marketing objectives using Return On Marketing Objective formula proposed by Lewis (2012). The evaluation process can help a company to make some adjustment where ever necessary. Lastly since social networks are evolving on a daily basis, it is vital for social media marketers to be up to date with current trends in social networks (Jothi *et al.*, 2011:243). For instance Facebook has recently introduced a new feature where photo albums can be shared amongst friends, providing all users with the ability to edit or add any photo in that shared album (Tech report news, 2013). Again, a new social network called Pinterest has joined the South African Social media arena recently and is attracting a number of users as well.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

The chapter has briefly explained the marketing concept and has explained some different forms of marketing mediums by highlighting their advantages and

disadvantages. Much attention was given to social networks as this is the focus of this study. The history of social networks was provided and a timeline of the most common social networks was provided starting with the Six Degrees. Com and the last social network include was WeChat. The benefits of using social networks as marketing tools were also highlighted together with their limitations. The main benefits as suggested by the literature were the ability to share information without geographic boundaries and the ability to offer a platform for electronic Word of Mouth. Some of the limitations obtained from the literature include the problem of how to manage negative comments and over reliance on social networks. The aspect of social media marketing was defined. The chapter gave a detailed explanation of some of the social media theories and how they can be linked to this research. These theories include the Social Penetration Theory, The Social networking analysis, McHulan's media theory, The feedback Loop theory to mention some of them. The last part of the chapter focused on social media usage globally and how hospitality businesses are utilising social media marketing. The literature shows that hospitality businesses have adopted social media for marketing business, though the scale varies from country to country. The most social networks adopted for marketing according to the literature are Facebook, Twitter and Trip advisor. The chapter then ended by illustrating a proposed integrated social media model for hospitality businesses. This proposed model has nine staged which hospitality business can follow in order to effectively perform in Social media marketing.

The next chapter will review literature on how social networks can influence tourist decision making. The usage of social networks for information search will be explained as well as the implications of social networks for hospitality businesses. The decision making process presented in Chapter 1 will also be explained in detail in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE TRAVEL DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

From a review of theories and models proposed by various authors on social networks in the previous chapter, it was noted that for hospitality marketers to succeed in their use of social media marketing, they need to know their customer's social behaviour online, as well as knowing how they use social technologies when making travel decisions and how social media platforms influence this behaviour. Tourist's online behaviour is considered as an essential issue for all marketing activities aimed at promoting and selling tourism products (Fratu, 2011:125). Supporting this, Owyang (2010:56) posits that monitoring and understanding tourist behaviour influenced by social networks is a key to successful implementation of social media marketing. In other words, understanding the tourist's behaviour is the foundation for developing a successful marketing strategy. It also helps hospitality marketers to forecast future behaviour and develop new tourism products or services with a clear view of what tourism consumers like. This has triggered a need to review literature on how tourists behave online and how social media platforms like social networks influence their travel decision making. This chapter will also review literature on the implications of this behaviour for hospitality marketers concentrating on how hospitality marketers should respond to these changes in behaviour in order to craft effective social media marketing strategies.

This chapter starts by examining decision making models proposed by various authors and looking at the strengths and criticisms of each model. The complexity of consumer behaviour in the tourism industry is explored, and the influence of social networks on information search, planning and decision making is explained. The chapter concludes by highlighting lessons which emerged from previous research as well as the implications for hospitality marketers.

### **3.2 TOURIST DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND MODELS**

The field of tourist behaviour has been studied by a number of researchers (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012; Mauri Minazzi, 2013; Zeng & Garritsen, 2014; Pirnar, Icoz & Icoz, 2010; Di Pietro, Di Virgilio & Pontano, 2012) and due to the complexity of the field,

models have been developed in order to understand tourist behaviour (Rodriguez, 2009:18). Jenkin (2010:37) adds that there has been a great deal of literature on tourist decision making models (Wahab, *et al.*, 1976; Schimol, 1977; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Page & Connell, 2009). Due to the unique nature and characteristics of the tourism product (intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability) arriving at an accepted model which explains how a tourist behaves when purchasing a tourism product is a challenge. The first model proposed to explain tourist behaviour towards tourism products was developed by Wahab, *et al.* (1976). Table 3.1 shows some of the models proposed by various authors in a bid to explain the behaviour of tourists during the trip planning process.

**Table: 3.1: Decision making models**

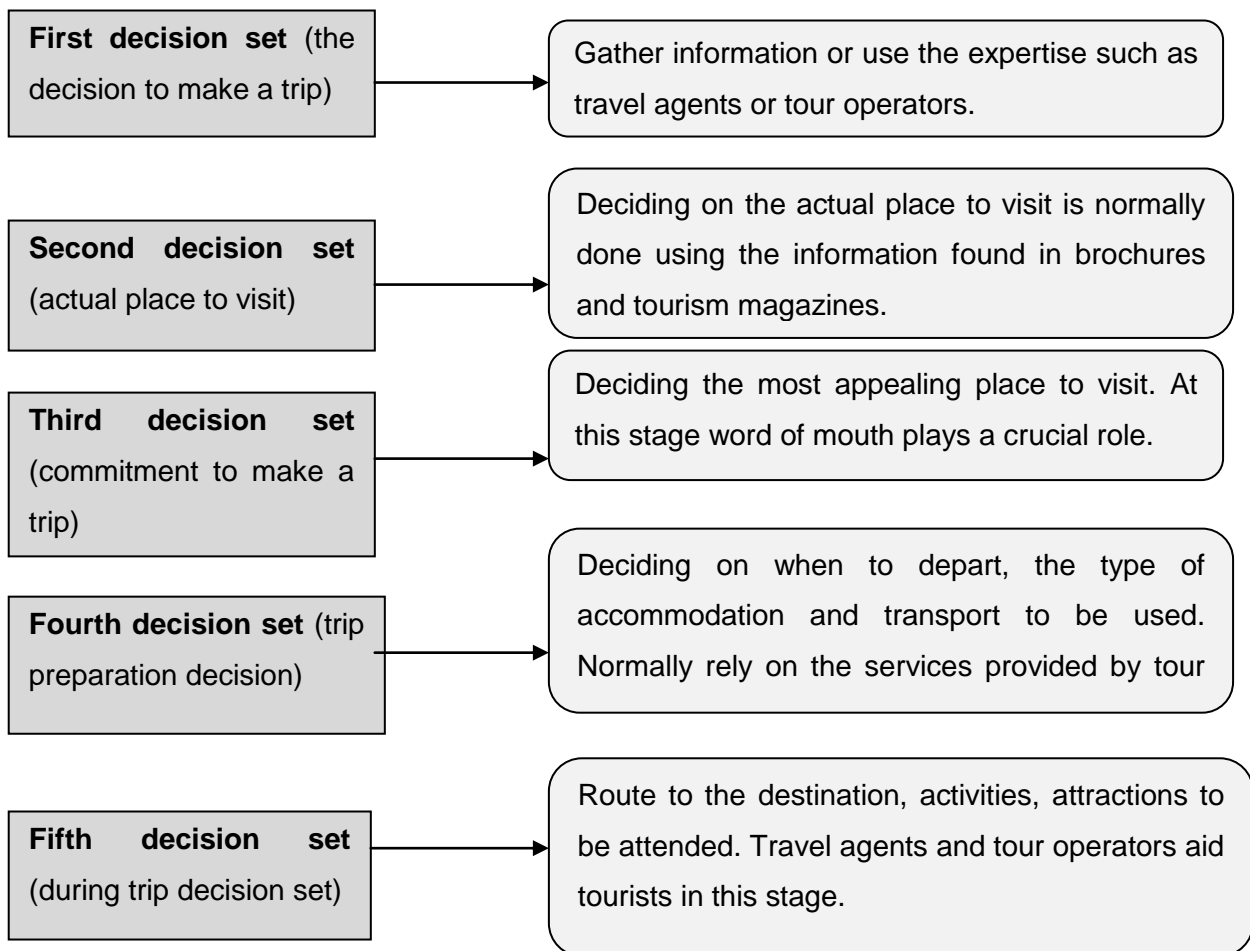
| Author(s)                                   | Model concept  |
|---|--|
| <b>Wahab, Campon &amp; Rothfield (1976)</b> | <p>The authors developed a basic model based on the classic grand theories/model and models of behaviour upon the identification of the singularity of tourism products. The model posits that behaviour is rational and can be explained. The model is based on the notion that consumers are active information seekers who limit the amount of information taken in and that they move over time from a general notion to more specific criteria and preferences for alternatives. The model views tourism consumer behaviour as multi-stage, triggered by individual's expectation that a product will satisfy their needs.</p> <p>The model was criticised as it fails to predict and identify the behaviour of tourist or markets as well to recognise the diverse types of tourist or tourism being purchased (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, Wanhill, 2005:102)</p> |
| <b>Schimol (1977)</b>                       | <p>The model was based on the determinants of travel behaviour influenced by travel stimuli, image, confidence, cost and time constraints. No recognized steps were formulated for the model, it merely emphasised that the decision to travel is influenced by the image, time and travel stimuli.</p> <p>It was criticised for being a static model as there are no inputs or feedback loop (Cooper &amp; Gilbert, 2008:87).</p>   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Mayo &amp; Jarvis (1981)</b></p>    | <p>This model was based on the Howard and Seth Model of 1969. It is based on the notion that decision making is a sequence of stages where the consumer is seen as a problem solver. At the first level the consumer has no basic knowledge about the brand and no product preferences. The consumer will seek out information about all the different brands in the market before purchasing. The second level is limited problem solving. This situation exists for consumers who have little knowledge about the market, or partial knowledge about what they want to purchase. In order to arrive at a brand preference some comparative brand information is sought. The third level is habitual response behaviour, where the consumer possesses information regarding different, is able to differentiate between the characteristics of each product, and makes a decision to purchase a particular product.</p> <p>Mayo and Jarvis (1981) examined cognitive and effective drivers and social influences and also addressed the role of perception, learning, personality, motivation, attitudes and group influences when making decisions. They pointed out the special characteristics of tourism products and highlighted the importance of the information and evaluation stages. This approach was criticised as it fails to explain the complex consumer behaviour derived from a series of past experiences. It was also criticised for failing to provide an active based theory (Cooper &amp; Gilbert, 2008:87).</p> |
| <p><b>Mathieson &amp; Wall (1982)</b></p> | <p>Mathieson and Wall (1982) proposed a five staged linear model based on four interrelated factors: tourist profile, travel awareness, destination resources and characteristic of trip features. The model comprises five linear stages which are felt need/travel desire, information collection and evaluation, travel decision, travel preparation and experience and lastly</p>   |

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
|                                  | <p>travel satisfaction, outcome and evaluation.</p> <p>Though the model covers all the stages that a tourist goes through when planning a trip it was criticised for taking a product based perspective rather than a consumer based perspective (Cooper &amp; Gilbert, 2008:73).</p>       |
| <b>Page &amp; Connell (2009)</b> | <p>Page and Connell (2009) propose a five stage model which covers the all the activities that tourists take part in before and after making a final decision regarding a trip. This model will be discussed extensively in the next section together with its strength and weaknesses.</p> |

**Source: Researcher's own compilation based on literature review.**

The tourist decision making process proposed by Page and Cornell (2009) is considered to be an important model as it provides an ideal process followed by a tourist when making travelling plans. The main reason this model has been chosen to explain the stages followed in the tourist decision making process is that other models tend to treat tourists in the same way as other consumers, with little reference to the factors influencing tourism behaviour in specific. Unlike with other models Page and Cornell (2009) tried to treat the tourist as a different type of consumer who follows specific stages that are different from normal decision making process. In Figure 3.1 the five stage model proposed by Page and Connell (2009) to explain consumer behaviour towards tourism products/services is explored.



**Figure 3.1: Trip decision-making process**

Source: Adapted from Page and Connell (2009:76)

According to Page and Connell (2009:76), a tourist normally makes five major decisions when embarking on a trip. The first decision, involving the issue of where to travel to, is normally referred to as the pre-experience phase (Jenkin, 2010:34). At this stage the tourist has no onsite experience, has and must consult a number of information sources in order to make a choice on which destination to visit. The choice of destination and the mix of activities to be undertaken during the trip involve a complex and time-consuming set of decisions prior to departure. The desire to make a trip is normally induced by information available to a person (Rodriguez, 2009:10). In the study of cognitive approaches, Stewart and Vogt (1999:80) conclude that information is needed when making travel decisions and decisions change through the formation of preferences. At this stage tourists gather information about different tourist destinations. Travel agents and tour operators used to play a critical role on this stage by providing information to tourist through issuing brochures or pamphlets on different destinations. However in the current e-commerce era, the internet and its related technologies, especially social

media platforms, are playing a major role in the pre-experience decision making stage. Today, TripAdvisor is perhaps the leading travel review site, serving more than 50 million users per month seeking advice on travel plans (TripAdvisor, 2011). Jenkin (2010:34) further highlights the key questions which aid the understanding of pre-experience behaviour which are:

- What information sources are consulted?
- What information is considered by tourist?
- If internet sources are used, what type of sources are these?

Information search is the greatest factor involved in tourist pre-travel experience (Nothi, 2013:116). According to Bonera (2008:4) at this stage the tourist's behaviour is particularly unique, especially when compared to most retail products. The tourist's pre-experience stage tends to occur in advance and frequently involves making travel decisions at great distances. It involves making travel decisions between intangible and highly symbolic alternatives, the information search is deeper than for other products, and the decision is centred on personal sources such as family, friends or colleagues (Bonera, 2008:4).

After a tourist gathers all relevant information on different destinations, he/she is faced with a task of choosing the actual place to visit. The tourist's decision on this stage is influenced by the particular destination they desire to visit. According to Vogt and Fesenmair (1998) cited in Jenkin (2010:37), tourists who intend to visit familiar destinations use a high level of information supplied from friends, families and past experience, whereas those who intend to visit further flung destinations search for high volumes of information in their decision making. At this stage tourists rely most on sites such as TripAdvisor to read reviews posted by others concerning their desired destination.

At the stage where a tourist makes a commitment to make a trip, he/she gathers everything that is needed for that particular trip depending on the transport and accommodation required. For instance if a tourist is using their own transport they will have to make sure that everything, including fuel and extra tires, are all in order. If the tourist is making use of self-catering accommodation facilities they need to ensure that enough food is provided for the entire trip. It is at this stage where the booking activities are settled. In most cases, tourists rely on Word of Mouth information before making a

commitment to take a trip in deciding on which type of accommodation to use. Previously, tourists used to get information from friends, relatives or colleagues who had taken similar trips before. Today, however, tourists can simply search for information across social networks or online communities before making a commitment to take a trip (Greenleigh, 2012:3).

Travel agents and tour operators used to play a crucial role in decision making regarding transport choices as well as accommodation booking processes, but with the evolution of the internet and social media this is no longer the case. For instance, Facebook offers a platform in which one can book hotel accommodation by providing a link which directs one to the company's booking channels on its website. Tourists can now turn to TripAdvisor to get advice on the ideal transport and accommodation facilities to use. As long as one has a decent internet connection, all of these activities can now be performed in a very short period of time without visiting travel agents in person. In addition, the advancement in mobile phone technology allows tourists to plan entire trips using their mobile devices.

The final stage according to Bonera (2008:5) represents the core benefits for the tourist. This is the stage at which a tourist actually experiences the trip which is referred to the moment of truth. A trip, according to Bonera (2008:8), is very high in experiential and hedonic characteristics and is complex in terms of the number of individual interdependent activities that create the overall trip experience. At this stage a tourist is faced with a challenge of choosing the activities to undertake or attractions to visit. In this social media era, social networks play a crucial role at this stage as tourists use sites such as Facebook to chat with friends and colleagues who have visited similar destinations before to consult on the types of options available. During this stage, tourists take photos or videos of all the activities undertaken during the trip.

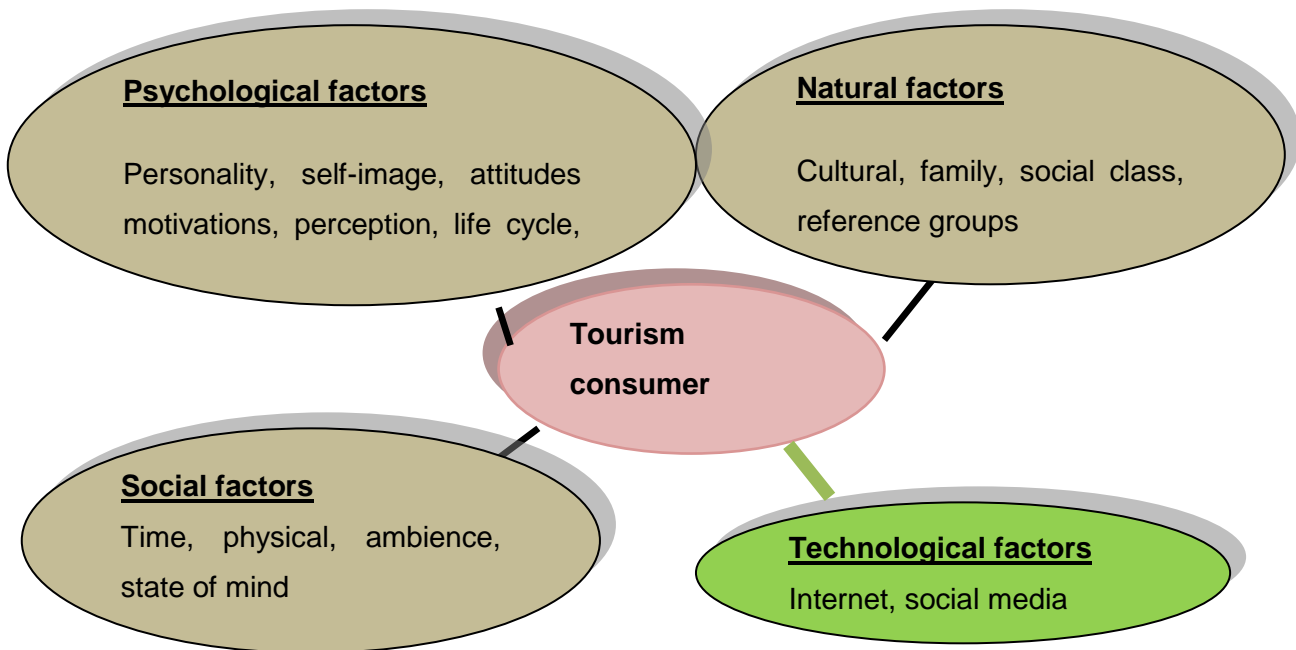
Although Page and Connell (2009) formulated an essential model which clearly explains the tourist decision making process, the model has one notable shortfall. It does not include the post-purchase phase activities. A study conducted by Fotis *et al.* (2012) shows that social networks are extensively used by tourists after the trip to share pictures of accommodation and attractions visited during the trip. It therefore implies that the same information posted by friends will be used by other tourists when deciding on which attractions to visit during their trip. As mentioned by Gros (2012:75), tourists

value information posted by other travellers who have used the same route previously, thus tourists tend to use such information to make their final decision on which attractions to visit and which transport to use. Bonera (2008:9) also argued that the information search is also vital at the post-purchase phase as tourists look for confirmations of the decisions they have made.

The tourist travel decision making process has been explained along with all the activities involved. Several researchers in tourism, however, agree that consumer behaviour in tourism is more complex than in any other sectors (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007:10; Fratu, 2011:124; Nair & Subramanian, 2012:6). All the above explained models were developed before the aspect of social media and social networks came into play, not providing opportunity for the influence of these new internet technologies to be considered at the time. Thus, the following section will review literature on the complexity of consumer behaviour in tourism highlighting the influence of internet technologies such as social networks on the behaviour of tourists.

### **3.3 THE COMPLEXITY OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN TOURISM**

Tourism consumer behaviour is defined by Fratu (2011:123) as “the ensemble or set of its acts, attitudes, and decisions regarding choosing, buying and consuming of tourism products/services and also its post-consuming reactions”. Consumer behaviour in tourism is affected by a number of factors which are grouped by Fratu (2011:123) into three different categories: psychological factors, social factors and natural factors. However, this grouping omitted one of the most important categories: technological factors. Technological advancement, especially the advent of the internet and its related features (Web, 2.0) is affecting the way in which tourists behave before, during and after the purchase process. As indicated by Nair (2012:15), in this current digital era social networks have become a vital factor influencing consumer purchase decisions. These factors, as suggested by Fratu (2011) are shown in Figure 3.2, along with the newly introduced factor. The newly introduced group is shown in green in order to differentiate it from other groups.



**Figure 3.2: Factors affecting tourism consumer behaviour (*modified*)**

**Source: Adapted from Fratu (2011:124)**

The complexity of tourism consumer behaviour originates in the fact that it is affected by a number of factors which are not interrelated. Because of this complexity, devising effective marketing strategies for tourism services is a challenging task for both hospitality marketers and hospitality service providers.

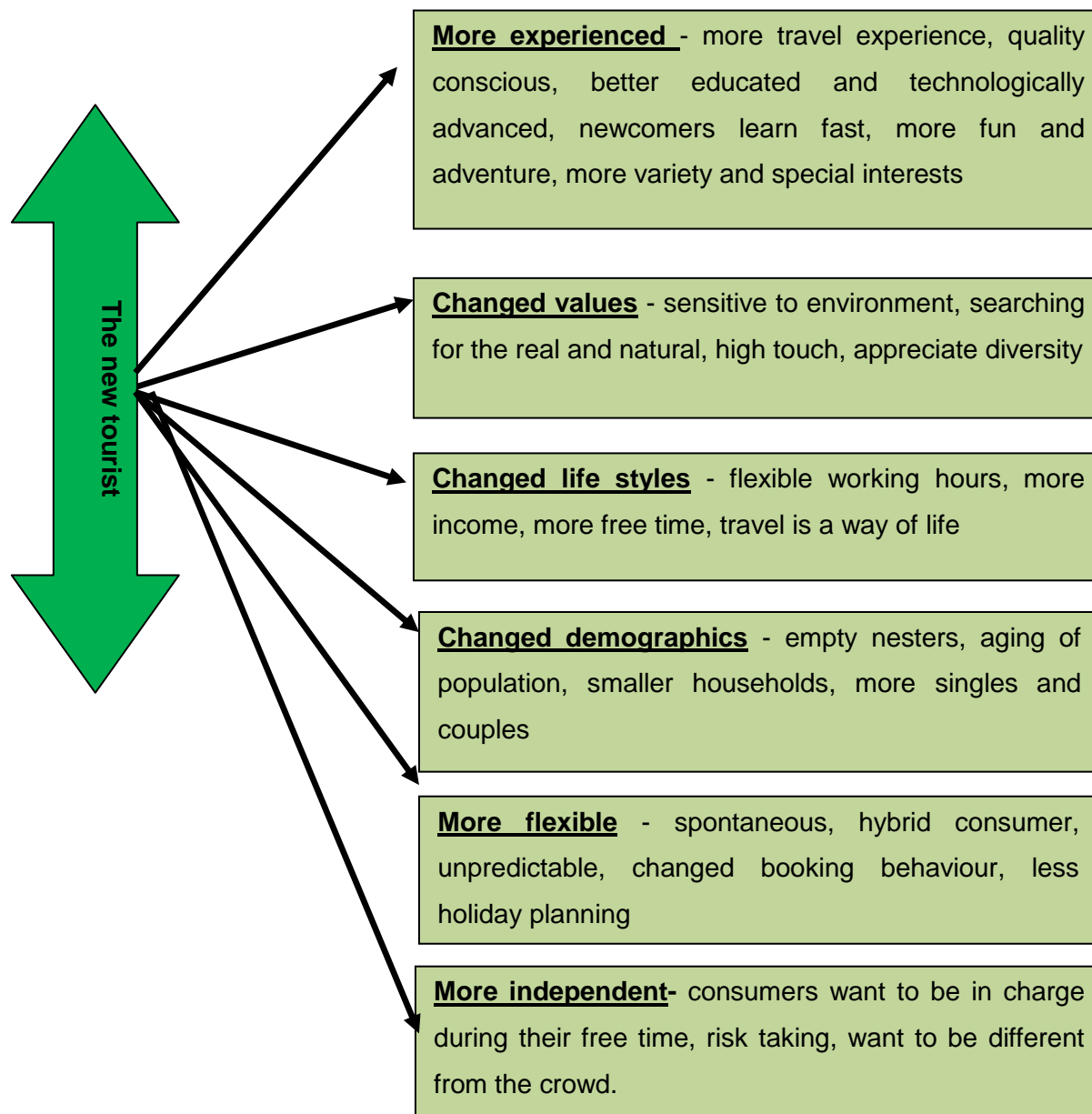
With regard to the abovementioned factors which influence consumption of tourism products, Swarbrooke and Horner (2007:69) presented a model which tries to explain the complexity of tourism consumer behaviour. In this model Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) highlight some of the issues which make tourism consumer behaviour more complex than the behaviour of general consumers when purchasing manufacturing products. Swarbrooke and Horner (2007:70) mention that since the tourism product is unique due to its characteristics, tourism consumers' decisions display the following characteristics:

- High involvement in purchase decision and high consumer commitment;
- Strong influence by others;
- Long term decisions;
- Considerable emotional significance;
- High level of information search; and
- High levels of insecurity due to the intangible nature of the product.

Due to the nature of tourism products/services, tourists commit themselves to information searches in order to reduce the risk associated with purchasing a tourism product. Thus tourists tend to gather extensive information before making a destination based decision (Gros, 2012:25). Furthermore tourist's decision are highly influenced by others who have had a similar experience since information from friends and family members is considered as more trustworthy than an advertisement campaign provided by a company. The decisions tourists make are long term in nature, they involve gathering extensive information, and hold emotional significance for the decision maker (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007:12). Since the tourism product cannot be touched or felt before purchased, there is a high level of insecurity. Tourists are very careful before purchasing or consuming the product as evidenced by extensive research (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007:34). Today, the way in which tourists behave when searching for travel information is quite different from what tourists used to do a decade ago. Today's tourists in now called the *new tourist* whose characteristics contribute to making tourism consumer behaviour more complex.

### **3.3.1 The new tourist**

In this new era of e-commerce, communication technologies are continuously evolving forcing tourism consumers to adapt to the new technologies and emerging technological trends. The new tourist is more sophisticated, more demanding, has a wider understanding of destinations, is environmentally sensitive and most of them are technologically skilled, thus able to make comparisons when selecting a particular destination. Pirnar, Icoz and Icoz (2010) described some of the characteristics of the new tourist which make tourism marketing more complicated than marketing of other manufacturing products. These characteristics are presented in Figure 3.3.



**Figure 3.3: Characteristics of the new tourist**

**Source: Adapted from Pirnar, Icoz and Icoz (2010)**

Today tourists no longer rely on travel agents and tour operators to package the tourism product for them, rather they actively seek information on the internet and social media sites for tourism destinations to visit as well as for accommodation facilities to use (Fortis *et al.*, 2011:12). The new tourist according to Pirnar, Icoz and Icoz (2010:5) wants to be involved in the purchase process, is more technologically educated than ever before and can easily search for information on different internet sites to find other tourists' past experiences, opinions and videos they post on social networks such as YouTube (Gross, 2012:33). The fact that the new tourist has more free time as suggested by Pirnar *et al.* (2010:8) implies that he/she has enough time to compare

alternatives before making a final purchase or deciding on the actual place to visit using sites such as TripAdvisor. Previously, tourists used to make bookings through travel agents but that trend has shifted. Tourists now complete their travel purchases online. Nothi (2013:119) indicated that the new tourist now has more control over travel decision making and companies or marketers have less control over their target audience. Rathonyi (2012:106) added that the new tourism consumer has become more sophisticated and requires more specialised media when seeking or communicating with destinations. Pirnar *et al.* (2010:6) add that traditional marketing strategies which were used by hospitality establishments are no longer effective in targeting the needs of this growing segment.

### **3.4 THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON TRAVEL DECISION MAKING, PLANNING AND INFORMATION SEARCH**

Tourism decision making is to a certain extent influenced by changes and developments in information communication technologies (Buhalis, 2002:87). The advent of the internet and its related features such as social networks has changed the way in which tourists search for information, select travel destinations as well as how they make final travel decisions. Buhalis and Law (2008:136) also indicate that web 2.0 technologies have changed the way individuals plan and consume travel significantly. It has also reduced the amount of time spent searching for information with a vast amount of information being accessed at any time for most destinations around the world. Sood, Kattiyapornpong and Miller (2011:2) share the same opinion and indicate that it is generally accepted that social networks have become much more influential among tourists as they change the way tourists gather and share information on travel experiences. Social media according to Mangold and Faulds (2009:359) have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of tourist behaviour including needs recognition, information acquisition, opinions and attitudes, purchase behaviour, post-purchase communication and most importantly evaluation. Thus, Gretzel, Yoo and Purifoy (2008:253) indicate that the impact of social networks on the travel industry is tremendous as it influences several components of tourist behaviour such as awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour and post-purchase communication and evaluation. Di Pietro and Di Virgilio (2012:63) support this

by stating that the internet now plays a new role as intermediary by overcoming the traditional role of tour operators and travel agents and providing tourists with the option of searching destination information on their own. Ruzic and Biloz (2010:179) state that tourists often use the internet, particularly social networks, for destination research prior to decision-making and that these are becoming critical elements in the travel planning process. This was also discovered by Gursoy and McCleary (2004:354) when they mentioned that more and more consumers are utilising the internet and online resources for their information needs. The popularity of this medium has had a strong impact on the cost-benefit ratio between internal and external search. It is becoming easier for tourists to gather information about a destination from the internet and its related technologies than to try to remember past experiences, even for people highly familiar with the destination.

Holiday travel purchases are considered complex due to the composite and experiential nature of the holiday travel product – it involves high risks thus requiring risk reduction strategies such as extensive information search (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005:816). Risk reduction is considered important to non-routinised and extensive decisions regarding acquirement of expensive and complex products such as holiday tours (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010:41). Social media decreases uncertainty and increases the exchange utility on one hand, and provides users with a sense of belonging to a virtual travel community via storytelling on the other hand (Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley, 2013:3; Zeng & Garritsen, 2014:28). This being the case tourists rely most on information from other travellers as a way of reducing the uncertainty associated with holiday travel purchases Rheingold (1993) cited in Fortis *et al.* (2002:2) state that content posted by people on online communities is perceived as similar to recommendations provided by friends, family and other travellers (Ruzic & Biloz, 2010:179; Fridolf & Arnatovic, 2011:19; Trusov *et al.*, 2009:93; Chan & Guillet, 2011:348). Gros (2012: 20) further indicated that online brand communities also generate significant changes in tourist behaviour because tourists appeared to refer to other consumers' opinions and recommendations during purchase decisions. Hence social networks become vital information sources to potential travellers (Gros, 2012: 20) and are taking on an increasingly significant role during the travel planning process as they provide access to the experiences of other tourists (Yoo, 2008:38). Sonnier, McAlister and Rutz (2011:705) further indicate that regardless of uncertainty in the quality of peer information, it is indisputable that online

word of mouth is a powerful source of tourist purchase decision making. In the same line of thinking, Fortis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012:3) indicate that influence from social networks, particularly from reputational areas, will strongly affect final decisions in holiday planning.

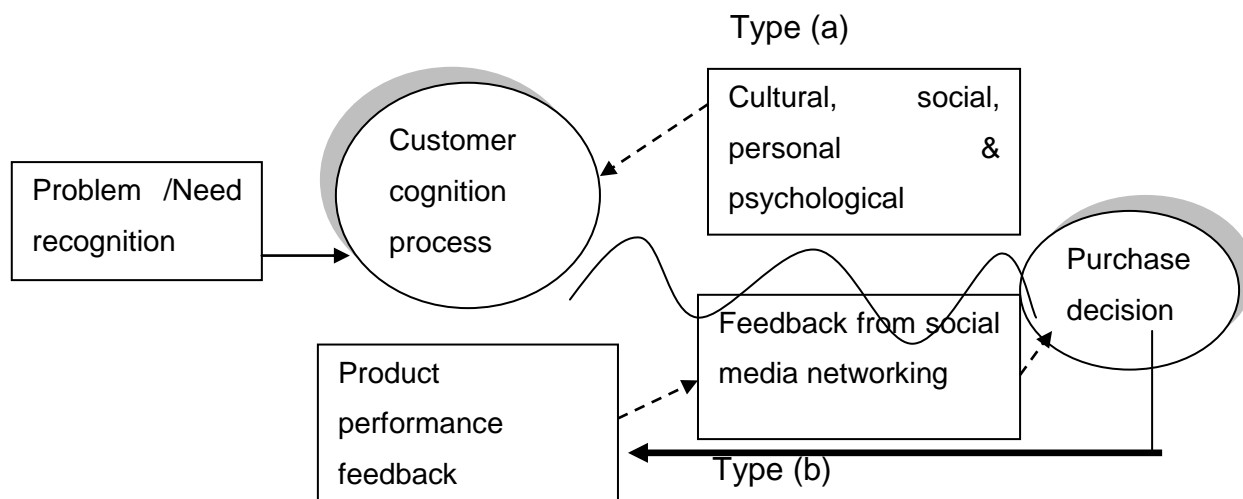
Previously, the need to travel was influenced by traditional word of mouth from friends, family and other tourists who experienced a certain destination. In today's social media era, tourist needs can now be influenced by social networks. When surfing sites such as Facebook and YouTube, tourists are able to view pictures and products posted on other tourist's profiles and 'like' particular destinations and brands (Gros, 2012:20). Social media users can consult friends and others available within the same community as well as getting information from people who reside in the chosen destination without any hassles (Sood *et al.*, 2011:4).

Parker (2011:263) argues that before the introduction of the internet and its related features, tourists used to consult people with prior knowledge about a particular destination when faced with a situation of choosing where to visit. Today with the introduction of social media platforms, digitally empowered tourists can access a wider range of online networks to search and choose the actual place to visit.

Using sites like TripAdvisor, tourists are able to review ratings posted by friends and relatives who have visited similar destinations and make a final decision using these ratings (Miguens, Baggio & Costa, 2008:136). TripAdvisor is the largest site used by millions of tourists when seeking advice about travel plans. Online reviews of a destination or region not only possess the ability to attract or detract a traveller, but also develop consumer expectations. Social networks are becoming popular tools in tourism information searching because they add value to the tourist through their ease of access and navigation (Jenkin, 2010:20). Thus instead of physically visiting a travel agent, most tourism consumers now use mobile devices such as cell phones, tablets or notebooks to search for information at a lower cost. Social networks are now considered as new platforms for word of mouth in the tourism and travel industry due to their ability to allow people to communicate about products and services online.

Nair and Subramaniam (2012) in a bid to give a clear explanation of the influence of social media on tourist decision making, presented a diagram illustrating how the

decision making of tourists today is influenced by social media. Nair and Subramaniam (2012:4) indicate that in the past, consumers were influenced by type (a) factors (see Figure 3.4). However, with advancement in technology and with the growing number of influential social networks, the tourist's decision making process is not only dependent on the conventional method, but also on being empowered by social networks and feedbacks along with post-purchase reviews of type (b) (see Figure 3.4).



**Figure 3.4: Influence of social media on trip purchasing decision**

**Source: Adapted from Nair and Subramaniam (2012)**

According to Nair and Subramaniam (2012:6), when a need to travel arises, tourists typically begin to develop knowledge and understanding of a particular. This understanding is influenced by factors which are cultural (religious beliefs, norms and values), social (time, ambiences and state of the mind), personal (personality, profession), and psychological (age, attitudes and motivations). After developing this knowledge a tourist can now make a decision regarding which destination to visit. On the other hand these researchers also indicate that after a need to travel is recognised, a tourist normally searches for product performance feedback, in this case trip experience feedback. This information will be used when making travel decisions. Thus, instead of relying on social or psychological factors, tourists review feedback on social networks to arrive at their decision. Information posted by other travellers who have embarked on a similar trip is used by those who want to follow the same route. Thus, according to Nair and Subramaniam (2012), social networks are now playing a crucial role in travel decision making.

### **3.4.1 Social networks as a new platform for Word of Mouth (electronic-WOM)**

WOM was defined as an oral person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator, whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial regarding brand, product or service (Arndt, 1967:291; Koenig, 1985:37). As explained by Mauri and Minazzi (2013:100), it involves the exchange of ephemeral or spoken messages between a contagious source and a recipient who communicate directly in real life. However with the advent of social networks as a new source of information, marketers have qualified them as effective platforms for Word of Mouth (e-WOM). According to Bristor (1990) cited in Rodriguez (2009), e-WOM network is a social network consisting of a set of people who engage in WOM, plus the relationship between them. This combination of networks and interpersonal relationships turn social platforms into the new word of mouth - the electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) (Rodriguez, 2009:20). E-WOM was defined by Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008:459) as all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers. The interpersonal relationship is not necessarily pushed by marketers but by consumers who communicate among themselves about a company's products or services. In most regards it is similar to traditional WOM, however there are three main differences. Firstly the exchange of information is not produced synchronically, in other words the receiver of the information does not receive immediate feedback; although this information can be "accessed, linked and searched" (Litvin *et al.*, 2008:359). Secondly, it is established in a one-to-the-world information platform instead of a one-to-one platform characteristic of traditional WOM. Thirdly, sender and receiver do not have to know each other, a fact which poses questions of credibility of the information (Rodriguez, 2012:56). This new form of word of mouth has become an indispensable marketing tool for promoting tourism services.

### **3.5 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DESTINATION DECISION MAKING**

Academic literature evidences a vast number of studies that attempt to explore the role and impact of social media in tourist behaviour and more specifically on the decision making process (Fotis *et al.*, 2011:4). Previous studies have presented inconsistent findings on the impact of social media on tourist behaviour especially on travel decision

making. Some studies found that tourists rely most on social networks when deciding on the destination to visit (Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy, 2007:10; Aymankuy, Soydas & Sacli, 2013:12; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010:185; Sood *et al.*, 2011:8; Di Pietro & Di Virgilio, 2012:75; Greenleigh, 2012; Mantika, 2012:102; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013:106) and others concluded that social networks are the least used media by tourists when searching and making decisions on which destination to visit (Mack, Blose & Pan, 2008; Rathonyi, 2012:13; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012:45). Further previous studies conclude that tourists use social networks, but not during all stages of trip decision making (Forties *et al.*, 2011:13; Cox, Burgess, Selitto & Buultjen, 2009:764).

Gretzel *et al.* (2007:12) conducted a comprehensive survey in connection with the impact of online travel reviews (user-generated content) on consumers. In order to find out the role and impact of online travel reviews in pleasure trip planning behaviour they surveyed 1480 users of tripadvisor.com. The key results of their study showed that other travellers' opinions on online travel review sites were the most frequently used sources of information (Gretzel *et al.*, 2007:12). They further indicated that travellers read accommodation reviews throughout the various stages of the travel planning process. Similarly, Aymankuy *et al.* (2013:3) and Lyu and Hwang (2015 61) found that social networks influence decisions of tourists about holiday resorts and accommodation facilities. Di Pietro and Di Virgilio (2012:76) in the study of the use of social networks on destination choice concluded that tourists use social networks extensively for both general purposes and for choosing their holiday accommodation. Supporting this Xiang and Gretzel (2010:185) also found that social networks constitute a substantial part of the online tourism domain and play an important role within the context of trip planning when using search engines.

Similarly, Sood *et al.* (2011:10) in the study of social network usage within travels to Australia found that 51% of the travellers used social networks to plan for their trip, with Facebook being the most used site. In line with the findings of Sood *et al.* (2011), Sema (2013:) discovered that 52% of leisure travellers investigated in the study of effects of social networks on consumer decision making have used social networks on their trip to share their travel experience. Greenleigh's (2012) investigation on how social networks influence millennials' (mid-teen to mid-30s) shopping decisions discovered that they are more likely to seek advice from online communities for purchases involving hotels and major electronics. It was found that 84% of millennials included in the survey turn to

online communities before making purchase decisions. Mantika (2012:102) also discovered that 54% of the respondents investigated in the study of how social media communities impact on consumer behaviour used Facebook when making trip arrangements. A study conducted by Sonnier, McAlister and Rutz (2011:134) on the effects of online communications on firm sales revealed that tourists make travel planning decisions based on online word of mouth more than previously assumed.

On the other hand, Cox *et al.* (2009:129), upon investigating the role of user-generated content in tourist travel planning behaviour, concluded that social networks are mostly used before the trip, while during and after the trip the use is very limited. They further concluded that social networks were perceived as less trustworthy than traditional sources of information (Travel agents and official tourism websites). Forties *et al.* (2011) discovered that social networks were predominantly used after the holiday for the purpose of sharing experiences and photos with friends and relatives. During other stages of the trip social networks are not extensively used. Jacobsen and Munar (2012) in the study of tourist information search and destination choice in digital age discovered that only 24% of the respondents used information from social networks such as Facebook to make their trip decision. The respondents further indicated that electronic social networks are not generally important for tourist destination choice. Jacobsen and Munar (2012:45) further investigated the views of tourism businesses and discovered that although many tourism businesses have adopted social networks, their promotional efforts on such sites have not resulted in much impact on destination decision making. Supporting this, Mack, Blose and Pan (2008:135) indicated that travel blogs are significantly less trustworthy than traditional word of mouth, since receiving information from strangers is less trusted than word of mouth coming from sources with which viewers have strong social ties. A survey conducted by Di Mauro and Bulmer (2010) on the role of social media in decision making by business professionals, showed that information obtained from offline networks still have higher levels of trust with a slight advantage over online networks.

Evidence from the literature reviewed above shows that tourists do not solely rely on social networks when searching for travel information as well as when making their final purchase decision. Even though most studies show that social networks are being used for trip planning, traditional sources of information are still relevant and are being actively used by tourists when making trip decisions. It shows that although social

networks can provide information quickly without much hassle, some tourists are still skeptical of relying on such information.

### **3.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR HOSPITALITY MARKETERS**

Social networks have been recognized as an important information source for tourists and as such have more and more influence on the trip planning process nowadays (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008:67). It is therefore critical for hospitality marketers or business owners to understand tourists use and adoption of online social networks for travel purposes; all the more as these collaborative behaviours on social networks are more likely than not to influence tourists' decision making with regard to every element of a trip (destination, hotel, accommodation, activities, restaurants,). Noti (2013:120) suggested that for tourism marketers to be successful in social media marketing there is a need to increasingly identify tourist needs and to interact with prospective clients using comprehensive, personalized and up-to-date communication media for the design of a marketing message that can lure tourists. The phase in which marketers have the control over what is said about their companies has lapsed, and today the digitally empowered tourist has a bigger say in the marketing of tourism products.

Di Pietro and Di Virgilio (2012:70) further indicate that being present on the social networks can play a critical role for hospitality marketers to attract new tourists and maintain existing ones. This in turn shows that hospitality marketers need to be present in social networks for them to be in touch with tourism consumers as well as to be able to see and hear negative feedback concerning the offered services. They also indicate that information concerning destinations will be available on sites such as Facebook, so it is vital for hospitality operators and marketers to take advantage of this and promote their services in an entertaining way, including customised content, games and applications. In order to successfully do this hospitality marketers need to understand the technological dynamics for them to reach out and promote their businesses and destinations to online tourists. Social networks are continuously evolving such that there are a number of sites which are making inroads into the territories that used to be dominated by traditional sources of information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010:187). Hospitality marketers can no longer ignore the role of social networks in distributing travel-related information without risking becoming irrelevant. Jenkin (2010:4) adds that it is essential for hospitality marketers to understand the sources from which customers draw their

information if they are to influence the decision making process and enhance their marketing efforts. An important idea was also suggested by Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu and Tichindelean (2013:68) when they mentioned that marketers have to understand and segment online customers in order to examine their online shopping behaviour for them to develop an appropriate marketing strategy. Thus, marketers should be aware of the importance of social networks in influencing online buying behaviour by identifying and targeting different types of customers and taking initiatives to recognise and highlight customers' interests. Vinerean *et al.* (2013:68) further indicate that marketing managers need to create a buyer persona and then develop and consistently adjust the online strategy according to the interest of customers for long term success. This alone does not guarantee success for hospitality marketers, as indicated by Colliander (2012:52); marketers should use social media platforms to market hospitality services but with caution. Hence, Colliander (2012:52) suggests that to be successful in using social media marketing, hospitality marketers should be capable of reacting and responding to individual customer's feedback rapidly codifying the acquired information for future improvement in customer dialogue.

### **3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter provided an insight into the aspects of tourism consumer behaviour. Related consumer decision making models were discussed in this chapter. The complexity of tourism consumer behaviour in relation to tourism marketing was also touched on. The literature shows that due to the nature of tourism services (Intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability) understanding the behaviour of tourist is difficult. The chapter provides an illustration of the factors that affect consumer behaviour in tourism and the factors include natural factors, psychological factors, social factors and technological factors. The characteristic of the new tourist and how this influences the tourist decision making process. The influence of social networks on information search, trip planning and decision making also received attention in this chapter. It was discovered that, with the introduction of social networks most people are now searching for travel information online. It was also revealed from literature that social networks offers a platform to share information and emerging as a form of e- WOM which makes them ideal for sharing information. Literatures also show that tourist trust information from others when making travel planning process. From this chapter one can deduce that the majority of previous research on the influence of social networks on decision

making shows that information posted by others on social networks continues to play a crucial role in each stage of the travel decision making process. However, there are a few studies which present contradictory findings on this topic. Thus, although social networks are crucial, not all tourists rely solely on them but rather prefer to use a combination of both online and offline sources of information implying that even in this social media era, offline sources of information are still relevant. The major lesson learned from this chapter is that the behaviour of tourist online is unique and complex and provides both challenges and opportunities to hospitality marketers. For hospitality marketers to craft effective social marketing strategies they need to understand tourist's use and behaviour on online social networks when making travel decisions. There is also a need for hospitality marketers to constantly interact with prospective customers in order to create a powerful marketing message.

The next chapter will explain the methodology used in order to achieve the research objectives of this study. The population and the target population will be discussed as well as the sample size used in this study. The statistical procedures followed in this study will also be discussed in detail.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous two chapters presented the background and theories related to the research at hand. This chapter describes the research methodology most appropriate for the attainment of the specific research objectives of the study. Research methodology is defined as the master plan that clearly outlines the methods and procedures to be followed when collecting data and, for analysing the research findings. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:53) describe it as the framework that outlines the methods to be followed when doing research. In other words the chapter outlines the exact steps undertaken by the researcher to address the objectives and the research questions formulated for the study.

This chapter emphasises the focus of the study, the research methods, scope of the survey, the measuring instrument used, as well as the data analysis procedures followed. A detailed description of how the instrument of this study was constructed is given. The last part of the chapter focuses on the reliability and validity of the research instrument. Finally, limitations to the study and the ethical considerations of the study at hand are also described.

### **4.2 FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

The focus of the study refers to the boundaries and margins which physically and conceptually delineate the location and sources of the elements of the study which are supposed to provide the required data (Hair *et al.*, 2006:79). This study concentrates on two countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region, namely South Africa and Zimbabwe. These two countries were selected because they are situated in the same region, yet are at different levels of technological advancement. The researcher felt that the information obtained from these two countries could provide satisfactory information on social media usage in Sub-Saharan Africa. The area of accommodation sector were selected for this study because they dominate the hospitality sector and because most previous studies focused on one type of accommodation facility (hotel) and on graded facilities excluding other accommodation facilities such as lodges, bed and breakfasts, chalets and some other forms of accommodation which are not graded. Thus, this study

seeks to cover these gaps and this will to a certain extent provide a partial replica of social media usage in the Sub Saharan African accommodation sector.

This study is employee-oriented, with special attention given to marketing managers, reservation managers and general managers. These employees were asked to state their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of using social networks in marketing accommodation facilities. To achieve the objectives of this study, information was obtained from the abovementioned accommodation facilities' employees. Therefore data collected for this study reflects the view points and facts about social media marketing usage and effectiveness of accommodation employees in the above mentioned positions.

### **4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology refers to the way in which data are gathered for a research project. It is the blue print for the collection, measurement and analysis of data in order to achieve the objectives of a research project (Krauss, 2005:760). It is defined by Spangenburg and Moser (1999:56) as a systematic way to solve a problem or as a science of studying how research is to be carried out. Research methodology comprises the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena (Bruce, 2007:45). The choice of research methodology is typically determined by the research objectives and information requirements (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:38). Methods of research have been generally classified into two categories, namely; quantitative and qualitative research. These two categories are sometimes referred to as research paradigms (Bruce, 2007:78; Tewksbury, 2009:42; Patton & Cochran, 2002:76). Following, is an explanation of these two types of research paradigms.

#### **4.3.1 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is concerned with the subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Research in such a situation is a function of the researcher's insight and impressions. This type of research generates results either non-quantitative forms which are not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis (Patton & Cochran, 2002:4). Normally techniques such as focus group interviews, projective techniques and in-depth interviews are used. Qualitative research methods, according to Patton and Cochran

(2002:5), are associated with small samples which are not necessarily representative of the broader population, and whose results which are difficult to generalise. Results from qualitative research may also be strongly biased by the researcher's own opinions. In the next section, the concept of quantitative research is discussed in more depth, since this was the chosen methodology for this study.

#### **4.3.2 Quantitative research**

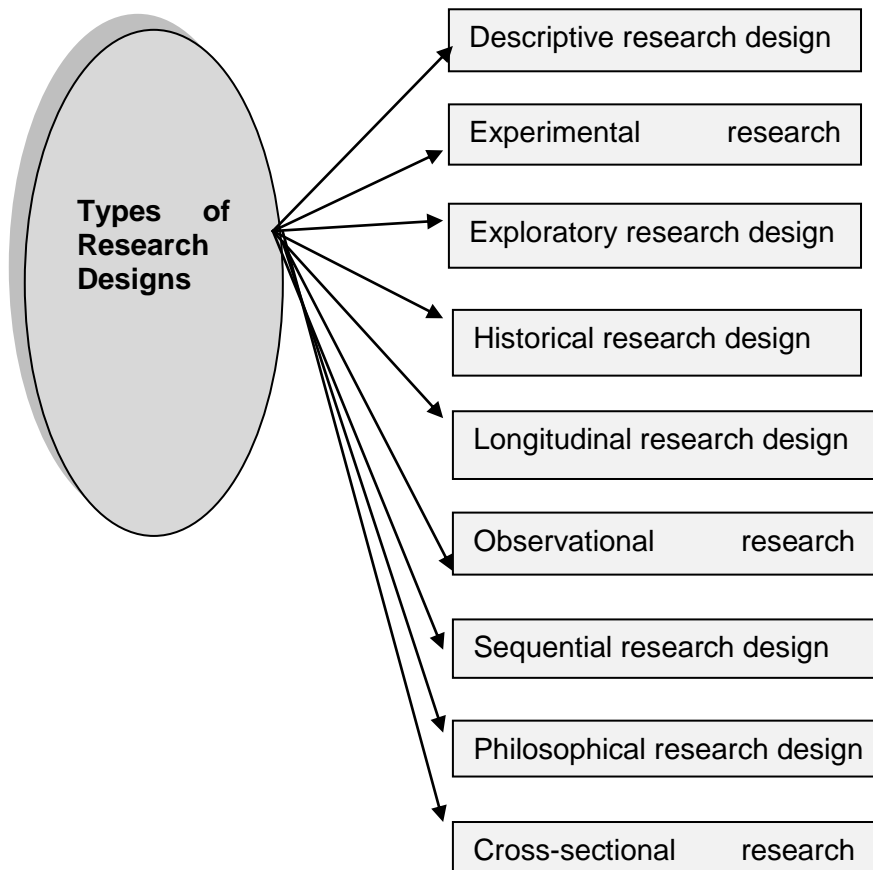
Quantitative research involves the generation of data in a form which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal or rigid fashion (Patton & Cochran, 2002:4). It is considered to be the more scientific approach to doing social science research (Bruce, 2007:45). It relies on the collection of quantitative data, for example numeric data. Tewksbury (2009:39) indicates that quantitative research involves counting and measuring of events and the performing of statistical analysis of a body of numeric data. The results obtained from quantitative research can be generalized to other elements outside the study population. Cassell and Saymon (1994) cited in Tewksbury (2009), assert that the main concerns of the quantitative paradigm are the measurement of reliable, valid and generalisable data. This is supported by Matveev (2002:62) when he mentions that one reason why quantitative research is more common in social sciences studies is that it gives the researcher the ability to make correct predictions.

A number of authors (Matveev, 2002; Bruce, 2007:70; Tewksbury, 2009:40; Creswell, 2007:71; Trochim & Donnelly, 2007:176) concur that the main strengths of quantitative research include eliminating or minimising subjectivity of judgment, achieving high levels of reliability of gathered data due to mass surveys or other forms of research manipulations, and stating the research problem in very specific and set terms. Krauss (2005:760) notes that when using a quantitative method the research study can usually be replicated or repeated given its high reliability. Because of the abovementioned strengths this study used quantitative methods where data were collected from accommodation establishments using a structured online questionnaire specifically related to their use of social networks to market their services.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design is defined as the blueprint or the plan to realise the research objectives and answer the research question (Chisnal, 2005:18). It is a structure in

which a specific problem needs to be solved. Selecting a design may be complicated due to the availability of a variety of methods, procedures and sampling plans. Determining the appropriate research design is a function of the research objectives and the specific information requirements (Krauss, 2005:761). Research objectives can be achieved by using nine types of research designs, all of which are explained in the next subsections starting with descriptive research design. Much attention was given to cross-sectional design since it is the one selected for this study.



**Figure 4.1: Types of research designs**

**Source: Researcher’s own compilation based on existing literature**

Each of the research designs indicated in Figure 4.1 is consequently discussed.

#### **4.4.1 Descriptive research design**

Descriptive research designs help provide answers to the questions who, what, when, where and how associated with a particular research problem. A descriptive study cannot conclusively ascertain answers to the question ‘why?’ Descriptive research is

used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and to describe "what exists" with respect to variables or conditions in a situation (Jeane, 1999:3). Descriptive designs use a set of scientific methods and procedures to collect raw data and to create data structures that describe the existing characteristics of a defined population or market structure (Hair *et al.*, 2006:38).

#### **4.4.2 Experimental research design**

Experimental research design is a blueprint of the procedure that enables the researcher to maintain control over all factors that may affect the result of an experiment (McDaniel & Gates, 2001:29). Experimental research is often used where there is time priority in a causal relationship (cause precedes effect), there is consistency in a causal relationship (a cause will always lead to the same effect), and the magnitude of the correlation is great. The classic experimental design specifies an experimental group and a control group. The independent variable is administered to the experimental group and not to the control group, and both groups are measured on the same dependent variable (Jeane, 1999:3).

#### **4.4.3 Exploratory research design**

Exploratory research design focuses on collecting either secondary or primary data by using unstructured formal or informal procedures (Hair *et al.*, 2006). It is often used simply to *classify* problems or opportunities, and is not intended to provide conclusive information from which a particular course of action can be determined (Zhou, 2004:67). Design is a useful approach for gaining background information on a particular topic (Cuthill, 2002:6).

#### **4.4.4 Historical research design**

Historical research is the type of research that examines past events or combinations of events to arrive at an account of what has happened in the past. Historical research shows patterns that occur over time which helps researchers find solutions that may have been used in the past. Gall (2007:231) states that it uses secondary sources and a variety of primary documentary evidence such as, logs, diaries, official records, reports, archives, and non-textual information (maps, pictures, audio and visual recordings).

#### **4.4.5 Longitudinal research design**

A longitudinal study follows the same sample over time and makes repeated observations. With longitudinal surveys, for example, the same group of people are interviewed at regular intervals, enabling researchers to track changes over time and to relate them to variables that might explain why the changes occur (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010:98). Longitudinal data allow the analysis throughout the duration of a particular phenomenon.

#### **4.4.6 Observational research design**

McDaniel and Gates (2001:28) describe observation as a process through which primary data is obtained by observers (humans or machines) which observe the behavioural pattern of people, objects and occurrences. It is an effective method when specific behaviours can be observed, the behaviour is repetitive, predictable and frequent and the behaviour is short lived. Quinn (2002:120) asserts that observational studies are usually flexible and do not necessarily need to be structured around a hypothesis - data is emergent rather than pre-existing.

#### **4.4.7 Philosophical research design**

This type of research is understood more as a broad approach to examining a research problem than a methodological design. Philosophical analysis and argumentation is intended to challenge deeply embedded, often intractable assumptions underpinning an area of study. This approach uses the tools of argumentation derived from philosophical traditions, concepts, models, and theories to critically explore and challenge, for example, the relevance of logic and evidence in academic debates, to analyze arguments about fundamental issues, or to discuss the root of existing discourse about a research problem (Labaree & Scimeca, 2008:49).

#### **4.4.8 Sequential research design**

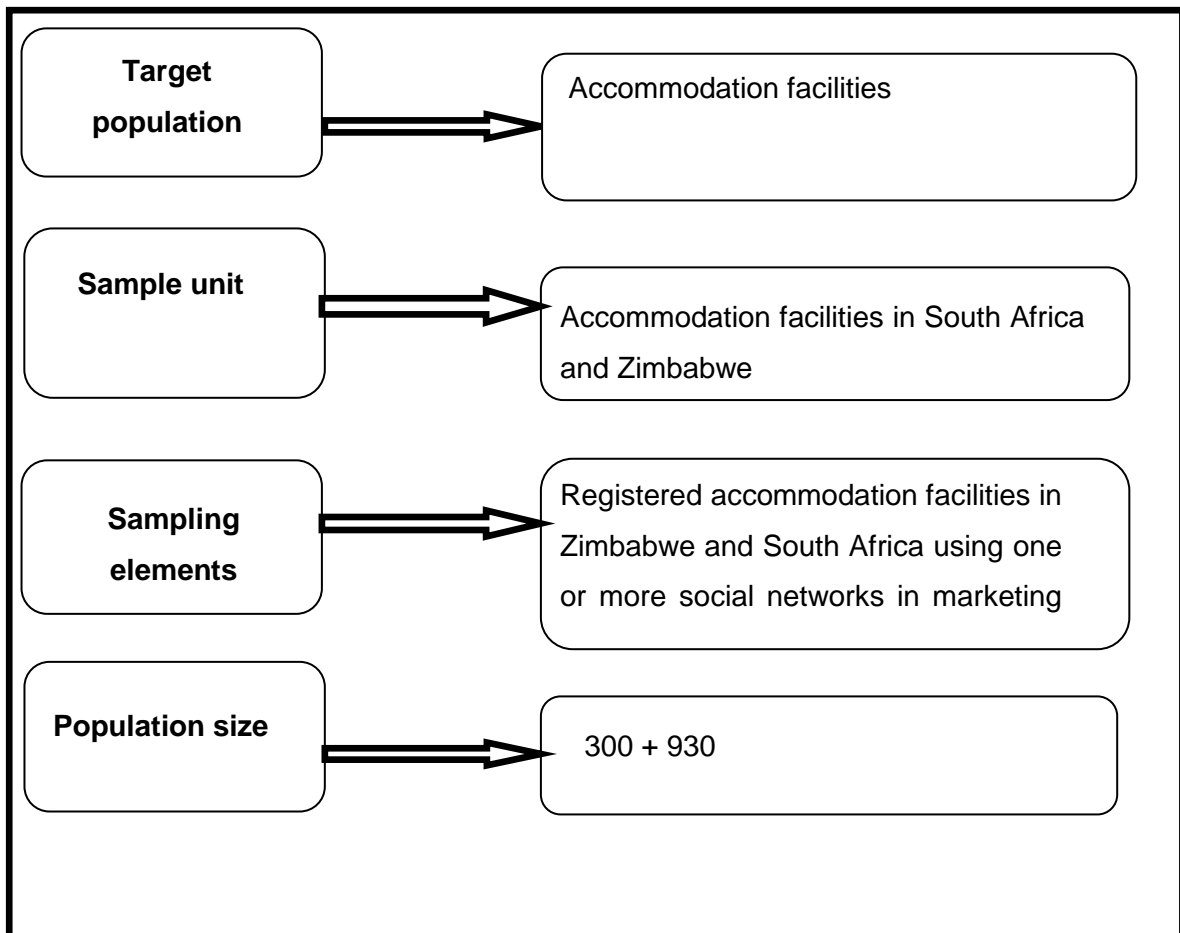
Sequential research is that which is carried out in a deliberate, staged approach where one stage will be completed, followed by another, then another with the aim that each stage will build upon the previous one until enough data is gathered over an interval of time to test one's hypothesis. The sample size is not predetermined (Ivankova, 2006:6).

#### **4.4.9 Cross-sectional research design**

The cross-sectional approach provides a snapshot of the outcome and the characteristics associated with it at a specific point in time. It is a study where exposures and outcomes are observed or measured simultaneously in a population (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010:95). In this design, a researcher examines the association between the exposure and the outcome, but cannot infer cause and effect (Chisnal, 2005:180). It entails collecting data at, and concerning one point in time. While longitudinal studies involve taking multiple measures over an extended period of time, cross-sectional research is focused on finding relationships between variables at one moment in time. Cross-section studies are capable of using data from a large number of subjects and, unlike observational studies, are not geographically bound. Cross-sectional studies can estimate prevalence of an outcome of interest because the sample is usually taken from the whole population. Because cross-sectional designs generally use survey techniques to gather data, they are relatively inexpensive and take little time to conduct (Barratt & Kirwan, 2009:6). Since in this study, data were collected from a large population of accommodation facilities at a point in time, the cross-sectional approach is deemed an appropriate design for this study. In this case data was collected from a large number of accommodation facilities at a specified period of time, meaning that information obtained from this study only shows social media marketing activities utilised by accommodation facilities at that particular moment.

#### **4.5 SCOPE OF THE SURVEY**

This section covers the survey population used in this study as well as the area(s) in which the survey was conducted. The sampling technique used to arrive at the actual target population is covered in this section. Figure 4.2 illustrates the scope of the survey at hand.



**Figure 4.2: Target Population, Sample Units, Sample Elements and Required Sample Size**  
**Source: Researcher's own compilation**

#### **4.5.1 Survey population**

The population used in this survey constitutes all the accommodation facilities in two developing nations namely Zimbabwe and South Africa. A stratified purposeful sampling was used for this study. According to Patton and Sachron (2002:12), a stratified sampling is used to illustrate some features of a particular sub-group of interest to facilitate comparisons. For instance this study includes different groups of accommodation facilities to see how they utilise social media marketing. All types of accommodation facilities in the two countries were included in the survey. According to the information obtained from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) there are only 300 registered accommodation facilities in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, 930 accommodation registered accommodation establishments were obtained from FEDHASA and TGCSA.

## **4.6 ORGANISATION OF THE SURVEY**

This section explains how the measuring instrument for this study was designed. A motivation for choosing a questionnaire is provided also in this section. The importance of good questionnaire design and the choice of questions used are also given attention.

### **4.6.1 Design of the measuring instrument (questionnaire)**

A measuring instrument is a set of questions designed to generate the data necessary for accomplishing the objectives of a research project (Mc Daniel & Gates, 2001:289). A questionnaire was chosen for this study because it is one of the easiest ways of collecting data. Another reason for selecting a questionnaire is that data for this study was collected from two different countries which made it impossible for the researcher to use other methods such as an observation or face to face interviews. According to Hair *et al.* (2006:441) a questionnaire should be skilfully and systematically designed in order to get the actual data required for the research. It is agreed by many authors (Hair *et al.*, 2006:442; Churchill & Brown, 2007:70; Bhattacharyya, 2006:102) that a well-designed questionnaire motivates respondents and minimises errors associated with data gathering, which eventually improves the research findings. Thus the questionnaire used for this study was kept simple in order to encourage maximum participation from the respondents.

This study focused on the supply side of the accommodation sector, thus the questionnaire was developed for accommodation establishments only. The questionnaire was developed based on previous research in related areas (Teo, 2005; Au, 2010; Guillet & Chan 2011; Stelzner, 2011; Friebe & Campbell, 2012). All of these studies examined the use of online marketing tools and web 2.0 technologies in tourism businesses and tourism related businesses. Teo (2005) examined the extent to which business-consumer firms used online marketing tools as well as the effectiveness of these tools as perceived by the managerial staff in these companies. Guillet and Chan (2011) investigated the extent to which hotels in Hong Kong perform in marketing in social media websites, while Au (2010) investigated the adoption of Web 2.0 by tourism businesses. Friebe and Campbell (2012) carried out a social media survey in the hospitality and leisure industry. All these studies were considered when developing the questionnaire for this study, resulting in a measuring instrument being developed to test the perception of managers on social media marketing.

The measuring instrument was divided into four sections (see Appendix A). The first section (section A) focused on demographic information. The questions on this section were constructed by the researcher including the information needed for demographic information. On the type of accommodation establishments, the questionnaire included, hotels, lodges, Bed & Breakfast, Guest house, Cottage/Chalets and Back packers establishments. Though back packers are not common in South Africa a few are found in Zimbabwe (Kariba town) and some in South Africa for instance, the Buccaneers backpacker hostel. Other forms of accommodation facilities like camping were also included and shown as other. However on the electronic questionnaire at the end of the study it is not appearing but in the hard copy which was sent to Zimbabwe the option was clear. McDaniel and Gates (2001:158) indicate that demographic information is needed to obtain basic information about the respondents. Information such as the location, star grading, type of establishment as well as the general knowledge of respondents regarding social networks was obtained from this section. Section B of the questionnaire concentrated on the usage of social networks for marketing purposes. When constructing the section, previous studies were considered. Chan and Guillet (2011) investigated the extent to which hotels perform in social media websites using the digital marketing framework. In their study Chan and Guillet (2011) grouped the activities performed when using social networks for marketing into five phases: attracting, engaging, retaining, learning and relating. All these phases were taken into consideration when constructing the measuring instrument, and respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the activities performed under each phase (see question 2G1 section B). Section C focused mainly on the effectiveness of social networks in marketing. Here the researcher relied on previous literature on how to measure the effectiveness of social media marketing suggested by Riese (2010) and Stelzner (2011). Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of social networks within twelve different areas: sales, business exposure, lead generation, business partnership, communication improvement, marketing expenses, traffic, existing market growth, acquiring of fans, growth of new market, and responding to customer queries. These questions were arranged on a five point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (see question 3A1 section C) adopted from Stelzner (2011). Additional questions were added in order to come up with a better way of judging the effectiveness of social networks when marketing, thus question 3D1 on the measuring instrument asked the respondents to state the

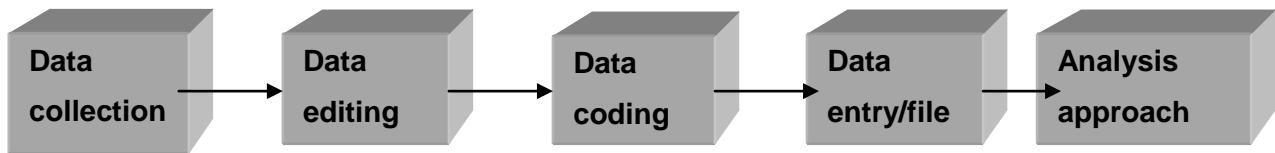
contribution in percentages of social networking marketing on business sales, exposure and marketing expenses reduction. In the same section respondents were also asked to rate the effectiveness of social networks against other marketing tools such as television, radio, email and print media.

The last section of the questionnaire (Section D) focused on the benefits and challenges of using social networks for marketing. The variables used to construct this section were adopted from Au (2010) and Friebe and Campbell (2011). The scales used on this section were adopted from Au (2010) Respondents were asked to state the challenges they face when using social networks for marketing. This section comprised both close ended and open ended questions.

The measuring instrument used five types of questions namely: multiple choice questions, open ended questions, close ended questions, dichotomous questions and Likert type questions. The five point Likert type scale was used in most of the questions and the scales were adopted from Au (2010). Data obtained for Likert type questions are easy to analyse. The researcher relied mostly on close ended questions because they provide the respondents with an easy method of indicating his/her answer and responses can be easily classified making analysis very straight forward. Open ended question were also included as they allow the respondents to answer in his/her own words with no influence by any specific alternative suggested by the researcher.

#### **4.7 DATA HANDLING PROCEDURE**

McDaniel and Gates (2001:58) define data analysis as the process of gathering and transforming data with the aim of highlighting useful information and suggesting conclusions. Data editing, entry and coding are integral parts of data analysis. Data obtained from the field goes through a number of stages. The stages are illustrated in Figure 4.3



**Figure 4.3: Data handling process**

**Source: Sonquist and Dunkelberg (1997)**

Each of the stages in the data handling process is discussed in the next section starting with data collection.

### **4.7.1 Data collection**

Data collection is a process whereby the researcher gathers and measures information on variables of interest in a systematic manner that enables him/her to answer the research questions and test hypotheses to achieve the research objective set for any particular study (Churchill & Brown, 2007:41). Data collection is common to all fields, be it social sciences, humanities, business and any other fields. The methods of collecting data, or the research techniques as they are sometimes called (Tashakkori & Teddie, 2003:303); vary from one field to the other depending on the nature of the study. All methods emphasise the issue of ensuring accuracy and honesty in data collection (Creswell, 2007:25). According to (Huck, 2008:126), there are eight methods that can be utilised when collecting data namely: surveys and questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observation, records reviewing - pre-test and post-test, community measure, participatory and creative. For the purpose of this study only surveys and questionnaires are investigated since this is the method which was employed.

A survey is defined as a data gathering method from a group of individuals using identical procedures for each individual (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007:89). Surveys can be conducted in writing, over the telephone, face-to-face or electronically. They are useful when one wants to compare different groups of individuals, and their main advantage is that it is possible to obtain information from a large number of respondents. It is because of these reasons that a survey was chosen rather than other data collection methods. The study used a survey together with an electronic questionnaire designed in Adobe Form Central. The link was distributed to the respondents in accommodation facilities in South Africa and hard copies of the questionnaire were hand delivered to

Zimbabwean accommodation facilities. This was done through the use of field workers who were given a brief training by the researcher. Only ten field workers were selected from third year students who were doing industrial attachment in different towns of Zimbabwe. Three field workers were selected to distribute the questionnaires in Harare and the surrounding areas. They were instructed to distribute the questionnaire to a list of accommodation facilities provided by the researcher. The electronic method was chosen for South African accommodation facilities because it was deemed to be the most convenient and appropriate method given the size of the country. This was done by the researcher. The electronic method was also chosen because of the following reasons:

- responses from web surveys are collated and can be easily downloaded into spreadsheets or even statistical packages (Adams, Khan & Raeside, 2007:130);
- it is easy to reach large number of potential respondents (Jansen, Corley & Jansen, 2007:4);
- they provide customised delivery of items and data can be captured directly in data base (Jansen *et al.*, 2007:4);
- it allows one to use multiple question formats; and
- it is less costly in comparison to other forms of data collection such as field survey.

Unlike the procedure followed for the South African surveys, the Zimbabwean based questionnaires were hand delivered to the accommodation facilities. Due to problems regarding internet connectivity in Zimbabwe, this approach made the most sense.

#### **4.7.1.1 Advantages of using surveys**

There are number of reasons as to why researchers prefer to use surveys as opposed to other methods of data collection. Some of the reasons presented by different researcher are as follows:

- surveys are a relatively inexpensive way of obtaining information (Hair *et al.*, 2000:89) because a number of questions can be asked;

- data can be corrected on the basis of current facts and opinion as mentioned by David (2003:60), and the data from surveys can also provide basic information regarding existing or changing market patterns;
- answers to survey questions can be represented in numerical form and subjected to various kinds of analyses;
- the use of standardised questions makes measurement more precise by enforcing uniform definitions upon the participants;
- surveys are useful in describing the characteristics of a large population. No other method of data collection can provide this general capability; and
- surveys are also considered as flexible research methods because they are standardised, easy to administer and free from various errors (McDaniel & Gates, 2001:30).

#### **4.7.2 Data editing**

Data editing can be defined as the process of checking and adjusting responses in the completed questionnaire for omissions, legibility and consistency and readying them for coding and storage (Huck, 2008:251). Editing facilitates the coding process and is an integral part of data handling. In most cases information obtained during data collection may lack uniformity, for instance data collected through the use of a questionnaire may have some questions unanswered, so it is the duty of the researcher to edit it before coding. In the case that there are some questions which are not answered, which is normally referred to as item non-response in research, the editor or the researcher may be tempted to insert a plug value - an answer that an editor plugs in to replace the missing value so as to permit analysis (Creswell, 2007:149) - if the relationship between the two questions is important. However, the risk of creating errors by plugging in a value is very high, thus it should be done with caution (Creswell, 2007:149). The other alternative is for the editor to impute a missing value based on the respondent's choices to other questions. For this study all questionnaires with a number of unanswered questions were removed to avoid the risk of creating errors.

### **4.7.3 Data coding**

Coding is a process of examining the raw data, which will be in the form of words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs, and assigning codes or labels (Gibbs, 2002:128). This is also supported by Gay and Airasian (2000:272), who state that coding of data often requires the transformation of data points on the research instrument into a set of numbers that can be read by a statistical program, in this case by Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The method of coding that one employs is dependent upon a number of aspects which include: the type of analysis to be used, the type of data and the requirements of the statistical program to be used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:326). Coding is a vitally important and sometimes difficult phase of quantitative data analysis. For the purpose of this study, collected data were coded by assigning numbers to each response, for example all questions with answers yes/no were replaced by 1 or 2 depending on the answer.

### **4.7.4 Data entry/file**

Data file explains the way in which a data set is stored in an electronic spreadsheet-like form in which rows represents sampling units and the columns represents variables used in the study. In most cases it is stored in an excel spreadsheet because this is one of the acceptable ways to store data file. Increasingly, statistical programs like SPSS, SAZ and others can work easily with an excel spreadsheet. Once responses are coded there are stored in an electronic data file (Trochin & Donnelly, 2007:176). Both quantitative and qualitative responses are stored for every respondent involved in a survey. When storing data in a file, normally a unique code is assigned to each possible numeric code for each response.

### **4.7.5 Analysis approach**

In order for the researcher to arrive at a conclusion concerning the objectives of a study, collected data has to be analysed. Data is normally analysed using descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, or a combination of two. Several authors advocate for the use of both methods when analysing data (Bhattacharyya, 2006; Matveev, 2002; Leedy & Omrod, 2005). The importance of incorporating the two methods (inferential and descriptive) is that descriptive statistics only analyse data that helps to describe, show or summarise data in a meaningful way such that examples or patterns might emerge

from the data. It does not, however, allow one to make conclusions beyond the analysed data (Renauld & Murray, 2005:933). In other words, descriptive statistics simply describe what is going on in the collected data and allow for simpler interpretation of the data.

On the other hand, inferential statistics, according to William (2006:1), help the researcher to reach conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data itself. For instance, in this study the researcher tried to infer from the sample data what accommodation managers might think about the use of social networks in marketing accommodation services. It is impossible to generalise results using descriptive statistics alone but with inferential statistics one can use a sample to make some generalisation about the population from which the sample was drawn. Thus, for the purpose of this study both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the data analysis.

#### **4.7.5.1 Descriptive statistics**

As previously mentioned descriptive statistics, though they do not enable conclusions, are essential in data analysis and presentation. Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2011:45) assert that descriptive statistics is at the heart of all quantitative. Data for this study was first subjected to a descriptive analysis in order to establish patterns before an inferential analysis was conducted. Graphs and tables were used to display the results.

#### **4.7.5.2 Inferential statistics**

The study at hand used a number of inferential statistics methods to analyse data. Firstly, data were subjected to validity testing which was performed through factor analysis. Factor analysis was used to assess the factorial validity of the questionnaire. Validity of a measurement instrument is the extent to which the instrument measures what it actually intended to measure (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:92). Factorial validity refers to whether the factor structure of the questionnaire makes intuitive sense (Renauld & Murray, 2005:933). External validity is another common aspect which is normally assessed in research. External validity of a research study was defined by Leedy and Ormrod (2005:99) as the extent to which its results apply to situations beyond the study itself. In other words it is the extent to which the conclusions drawn can be generalised

to other contexts. The three commonly used strategies to enhance the external validity of research as suggested by Leedy and Omrod (2005:99) and Adams, *et al.* (2007:70) are: using a real life setting, using a representative sample and replication in a different context. To enhance external validity the study at hand has used a large sample size so that the results obtained can be generalised to the accommodation sector in Africa; the samples were taken from two developing countries which are at different levels of technological advancement.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used to determine whether correlations between variables examined simultaneously do not differ significantly from Zero. This is normally used when performing factor analysis. If the test reached statistical significance, of 0.000, it implies it supports the factorability of the correlation matrix. On the other hand, to measure the adequacy of the sample, KMO test was performed. The sample is adequate if the value of the KMO is greater than 0.5 (Field, 2000:446).

#### **4.7.5.3 Reliability analysis**

Leedy and Omrod (2005:93) define reliability as the extent to which the measurement instrument yields the same or consistence results when the characteristic being measured has not changed. Reliability can be enhanced in two ways, firstly by administering the instrument in a consistent fashion, and secondly to the extent that subjective judgments are required (Leedy & Omrod, 2005:93). To ensure the reliability of the measuring instrument in the study at hand, the questionnaire was consistently administered to all accommodation facilities using an electronic method. Furthermore, Cronbach alpha test was performed to check the reliability of all the variables used for this study. Cronbach alpha test is used as a measure of the internal reliability of a measuring instrument (Bhattacharyya, 2006:90) and is the most widely used objective measure of reliability. Cronbach alpha test was developed in 1951 by Lee Cronbach to measure the internal consistence of measurement instruments and is expressed as a number between 0 and 1 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011:53). Computing Cronbach alpha test helps one to determine the reliability estimates which show the amount of measurement error in a test. The higher the value of the alpha coefficient, the lower the errors in the measurement instrument. There are different reports about the values of alpha, ranging from 0.70 to 0.95 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011:53). Bhattacharyya (2006:167) suggests that the most acceptable value of alpha coefficient in social

sciences research should be between 0.70 and 1. However, a lower threshold value such as 0.60 is sometimes used in literature (Cant *et al.*, 2005:68). Thus for the purpose of this study a cut-off point of 0.6 was used. The reliability of an instrument is closely associated with its validity hence an instrument cannot be valid unless it is reliable. However, Tavakol and Dennick (2011:54), assert that the reliability of an instrument does not depend on its validity. Both factor analysis and Cronbach alpha test was performed on the study at hand to ascertain the validity and the reliability of the instrument. After establishing these, data was further analysed using the T-test statistics which is explained in the next subsection.

#### **4.7.5.4 Chi square tests**

Chi-square tests were used to test the hypotheses formulated for this study. When using Chi test the null hypothesis is rejected when the value of  $p$  is greater than critical value of the chi square. The critical chi-square value in this case is 0.05% which is the significant level set for this study. It implies that when the  $p > 0.05$  the null hypothesis will be rejected and the alternative hypothesis will not be rejected and if  $p < 0.05$  the null hypothesis will not be rejected.

#### **4.7.5.5 T-tests**

The study used T-tests to assess whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. William (2006:1) indicates that the T-test is appropriate whenever one needs to compare the means of two groups. The independent T-test evaluates whether the mean value of the test variables for one group differs from the mean value of test variable for the second group (Bhattacharyya, 2006:126). One assumption underlying the independent T-test is that the data scores are independent of each other, which is the scores of one study unit are not systematically related to the scores of other unit or participants. For instance, this study used the independent sample T-test because of its ability to compare two means from two different groups, in this case South Africa and Zimbabwe. After the calculation of the t-test, data was further subjected to effect sizes calculation in order to establish the magnitude of the difference between the two countries' usage of social networks. The main software used for data analysis is the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 17.0).

## 4.8 RELIABILITY ERRORS

According to Cant *et al.* (2005:235) errors, especially the response and non-response errors can also pose a serious threat to the reliability of data and must be minimised by the researcher.

- **Response error**

Response errors are the estimated inaccuracies that could be introduced by the researcher, the interviewer or the respondent. Response errors can occur in two basic forms (Hair *et al.*, 2000:662), namely deliberately or mistakenly, providing false answers to the aspects of the survey which they feel is sensitive. Deliberate falsification or unconscious misrepresentations are also causes of response errors. Response errors were minimised in this study by structuring the measuring instrument in such a way that the questions were asked in a straight-forward manner so that respondents were not able to distort their views.

- **Non- Response error**

Non-response errors occur when the portion of the defined target population not represented or underrepresented in the response pool is systematically and significantly different from those that respond (Hair *et al.*, 2000:659). Non-response errors occur because people who participated in the survey may not have the same characteristics as those who did not. Non-response errors also occur when a person cannot be reached at a particular time (unavailable but willing), or when a potential respondent is reached but refuses to participate at that time (Bhattacharyya, 2006:253). In this research, process non-response errors were reduced by sending e-mail reminders every week to the respondents.

## 4.9 LIMITATIONS FROM DATA COLLECTION

There are some limitations which arise in data collection. For instance, some of the managers were reluctant to answer the questionnaires while others indicated that they were too busy. As a result, the data collection phase of the study took longer than anticipated, stretching from June 2013 to July 2014. It was also difficult for the researcher to send the questionnaire link to the Zimbabwean accommodation establishments, meaning that field workers had to be employed to collect data on behalf

of the researcher. Accommodation establishments situated in areas far from main towns were difficult to reach and field workers were not able to keep visiting to remind the managers to complete the questionnaire. Similarly, the link was continuously sent to South African accommodation facilities to remind the respondents to complete the questionnaire but some of these efforts were fruitless since some of the respondents either ignored the messages or blocked the researcher.

#### **4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

The consideration of ethics in research as well as in business is a growing concern. It is therefore essential that one understands the basics of ethical research and how it affects the outcome of the research results. Ethics, according to Churchill and Brown (2007:41), can be defined as morals, principles and values that govern the way an individual or group conducts its activities. The main ethical issues which need to be considered when conducting research are consent and confidentiality (Patton & Cochran, 2002:7; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:100). In addressing the issue of consent, Patton and Cochran (2002), indicate that respondents need to be protected from harm. Anyone who participates in a study should do so without being coerced or unfairly pressurised. It implies that respondents should be well informed about what participation entails. It is also essential to protect the identity of participants and ensure them that the information obtained will be used for academic purposes only. For the purpose of this study a letter explaining the intent of the research ensuring the safety of the respondents was sent together with the questionnaire. Additionally, the researcher adopted the following specific steps from Shammout (2007:140-141) in order to duly consider confidentiality and anonymity ethical requirements:

- The names of the respondents/establishments were not asked anywhere in the questionnaire;
- The anonymity of respondents was preserved by not asking the respondents their physical addresses;
- And finally raw data was exclusively used for the stated research purposes and not for any other purposes.

#### **4.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter clearly outlines the methodology which was followed by the researcher in an endeavour to achieve the objectives set for this study. The population for the study included all registered accommodation establishments in the two countries in the Sub-Saharan region, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Cross-sectional research design was used for the study and it was also explained. The development of the questionnaire for this study was based on previous research in a more similar setup. Thus a number of studies were conducted in order to come up with a questionnaire for this study. Justification of using a survey was also explored and the main advantages of using it were also highlighted which includes relatively inexpensive, answers to survey questions can be represented in numerical form and they are flexible to use. . Both inferential and descriptive statistics used in the study were explained for instance, the study used t-test for comparing means for the two countries, chi-square for testing the hypotheses for this study. The limitations from data collection were also highlighted and these include low response rate and failing to send the link to through e-mail to Zimbabwean establishments. The chapter concludes by explaining the importance of ethics in research.

The next chapter will focus on the research findings of the study. The chapter will present the findings of both inferential and descriptive statistics and link the results to previous studies in the same area.

## CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this study was to establish the effectiveness of Social networks in the marketing of accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Additionally the current study was designed to assess the extent to which accommodation establishments utilise social networks for marketing. Thus, the main goal of this study was to *determine the effectiveness and current status of social networks in the marketing of accommodation services over other marketing mediums in South Africa and Zimbabwe*. The study was not limited to this primary goal alone; other secondary goals with regard to the data analysis formulated for this study were:

- To identify the benefits of using social networks for marketing in the two developing countries.
- To draw a comparison on the usage of social networks in the two developing nations by means of an empirical survey.
- To identify the challenges faced by accommodation establishments in the developing nations in using social networks for marketing by means of an empirical survey.

In order to achieve these objectives, data were collected from two countries in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa, namely South Africa and Zimbabwe. The purpose of this chapter is to present the empirical findings of the study at hand. The presentation of findings will use a variety of graphical representations such as pie charts, graphs and tables. The chapter is organised as follows: the first part of the chapter reports the demographic information of the respondents for both countries starting with the response rate for both countries while the second part covers the usage of social networks in marketing accommodation establishments. The third part concentrates on the effectiveness of social networks in marketing accommodation establishments. The fourth section covers the benefits and challenges currently being faced by accommodation establishments in using social networks for marketing. The last section of the study presents empirical results from inferential statistics performed for this study. This section covers results obtained from a factor analysis, reliability analysis, chi-square tests and T-tests.

## **5.2 THE RESPONSE RATE**

As previously mentioned, the study was conducted in two countries, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Out of 300 questionnaires which were hand-delivered to Zimbabwean accommodation establishments, 150 questionnaires were returned after all the efforts to increase the number were exhausted. Thus, the response rate for Zimbabwe was 50%. However, after data sorting and screening, only 134 questionnaires were retained for analysis with the 16 being rejected due to a large amount of missing data. In the case of South African accommodation establishments, after questionnaires were repeatedly sent to 930 establishments only 130 questionnaires were returned after making several efforts to increase the number, making a response rate of 14%. It is very difficult to get a higher response rate when conducting an electronic survey. Response rates for external electronic surveys have an average of 10-15% (SurveyGizmo, 2014). Only 129 questionnaires from South Africa were subjected to further analysis since one questionnaire was discarded due to large amount of missing data. The researcher is aware of the unrepresentative sample. However, as this was exploratory research and taking into consideration the efforts made to increase the number of questionnaires; this research can still be considered as valid. The section below presents the demographic information of the accommodation establishments for both countries.

### **5.3 SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

This section presents the demographic information of the accommodation establishments of the countries included in the survey, that is: the location; grading level; size, which is measured by the number of rooms; type of the accommodation establishment; the number of social networks known by the establishment; and usage of social networks. Demographic information is essential in any research as it gives basic information about respondents, in this case accommodation establishments (Mc Daniel & Gates, 2001:158). The following sub-sections present the results obtained from the first part of the measuring instrument.

#### **5.3.1 Location and level of star grading**

Respondents were asked to state the location of the establishment and the level of star grading of the accommodation establishment. The information was necessary as it helped the researcher to make a clear comparison of usage of social networks in the

two countries. Additionally, the level of star grading can influence the adoption and use of internet technologies. The results obtained for this study are presented in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: The location and level of star grading of establishments**

| Location   | South Africa<br>(N = 129) | Percentage (SA) | Zimbabwe<br>(N = 134) | Percentage (Zim) |
|------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Grading    |                           |                 |                       |                  |
| 5 star     | 15                        | 12%             | 7                     | 5%               |
| 4 star     | 54                        | 41%             | 10                    | 8%               |
| 3 star     | 50                        | 39%             | 17                    | 13%              |
| 2 star     | 5                         | 4%              | 19                    | 14%              |
| 1 star     | 0                         | 0%              | 8                     | 6%               |
| Not graded | 5                         | 4%              | 73                    | 54%              |

The empirical results from Table 5.1 shows that from South Africa a large number of establishments who participated were 4 star establishments which constitute 41% of the total number of establishments. This was followed by 3 star establishments constituting 39% of the total number. Only 15% of the establishments were 5 star establishments and very few 2 star establishments participated in the survey as they constitute only 4% of the total number of the establishments. Lastly, a few ungraded establishments also took part in the survey and as indicated in Table 5.1, only 4% of the establishments were ungraded.

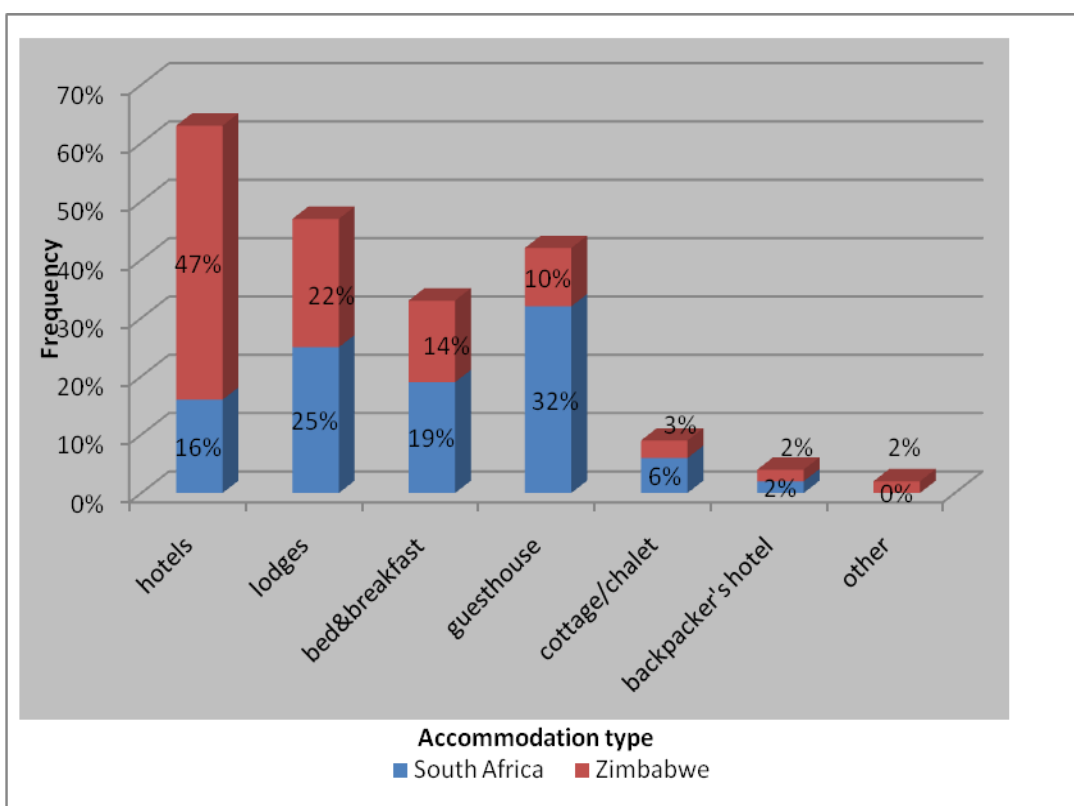
Unlike South Africa, Zimbabwe had a large number of ungraded establishment which participated in the survey, thus according to the results shown in Table 5.1, more than half of the establishments were ungraded (54%). The main reason may be that a number of establishments in Zimbabwe were stripped of their stars due to failing to meet the required standards by the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. Only 5% of the

establishments were 5 star establishments and 8% were four star establishments. Thirteen percent (13%) were 3 star establishments and 14% were 2 star establishments. Only 6% of the establishments had a 1 star grading.

As part of the demographic information, the size and type of establishments were also included this will be discussed next.

### 5.3.2 Accommodation type and size

Respondents were also asked to state the type and size of their accommodation establishments. The results obtained are graphically illustrated in Figures 5.1 and 5.2.

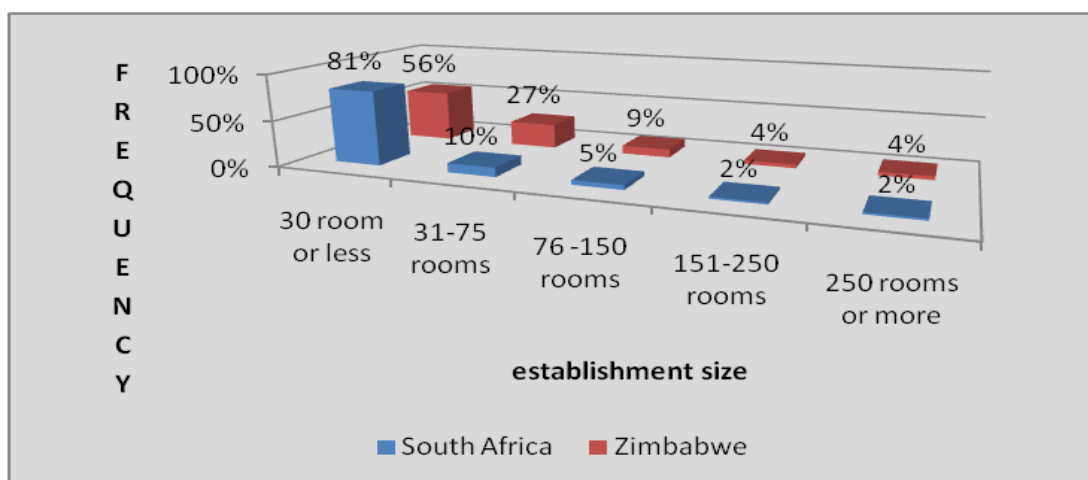


**Figure 5.1: Accommodation type**

Empirical results in Figure 5.1 show that 47% of the accommodation establishments in Zimbabwe were hotels while in South Africa only 16% were hotels. The lodges which participated in the survey for both South Africa and Zimbabwe were 25% and 22% respectively. From Figure 5.1, it is shown that the majority of South African accommodation establishments which took part in the survey were guesthouses as they constituted 32% of the responses while in Zimbabwe only 10% of the establishments were guesthouses. In South Africa, 19% of the establishments were Bed & Breakfasts while in Zimbabwe only 14% were Bed & Breakfast establishments. In South Africa, 6%

of the establishments were cottages and chalets whereas in Zimbabwe only 3% of the establishments were cottages and chalets. Only 2% of the South African establishments were backpackers' hotels, which was the same figure for Zimbabwean establishments. In Zimbabwe, 2% of the establishments were houseboats which are shown in Figure 5.1 on the item indicated 'other' (houseboats, hostels and any other accommodation establishments).

Results obtained pertaining to the size of the establishments are shown in Figure 5.2.



**Figure 5.2 Size of establishments**

The size of an establishment normally has an influence on the way in which it uses internet technologies (Ye, Rob & Gu, 2008:321). Thus respondents were requested to state the size (as measured by number of rooms) of their establishments. As shown in Figure 5.2, the majority of establishments from both countries can be classified as small establishments. Thus, 81% of the South African establishments fall in the 30 rooms or less category and for Zimbabwe 56% of the establishments also fall in the same category. Very few establishments from both countries fall in the largest range suggested for this study (250 rooms or more) with only 2% of South African establishments falling in this range and 4% of Zimbabwean establishments falling in the same range. Thus, the average room size of the establishments is 30 rooms or less. In short, most of the establishments which participated in the survey were small establishments according to the classification provided by Ye *et al.* (2008:182) which specifies that a hotel with 150 rooms and above is regarded as large, the one with 80-149 rooms is medium-sized and a hotel with 10-79 rooms is regarded as small.

Respondents were further requested to state all social networks they were aware of. The results obtained are explained in the following sub-section.

### **5.3.3 Social networks known by respondents**

Respondents were requested to state the social networks they are aware of. They were provided with a list of seven popular social networks in Africa to choose from, and an open ended question was also provided for the respondents to state any other social networks not provided for in the list. The list included Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor, YouTube, MySpace, Blogs and LinkedIn. From the results obtained it was noted that Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor were the most popular social networks selected by respondents from both countries. Facebook was selected by 100% of the Zimbabwean respondents implying that all accommodation establishments participated in the survey were aware of Facebook. TripAdvisor followed Facebook with 78% of the Zimbabwean establishment indicating that they are aware of TripAdvisor and Twitter was also selected by some Zimbabwean establishments (65%). A small number of respondents from Zimbabwe selected all the social networks (10%). It shows that although there are a number of social networks that can be utilised for marketing, Zimbabwean accommodation establishments are not very familiar with most of them.

Unlike Zimbabwean accommodation establishments, a significant number of South African establishments indicated that they are aware of all the listed social networks. Forty one percent (41%) indicated that there are aware of all the social networks listed on the questionnaire. The other accommodation establishments selected Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor and LinkedIn (70%). Other sites which were mentioned by respondents especially from South Africa, but were not included in the list were Google+, Pinterest and WhatsApp. The possible explanation as to why fewer Zimbabwean respondents are aware of a number of social networks is Zimbabwe's recent economic history which has hampered the rate of penetration of internet technologies, especially social networks.

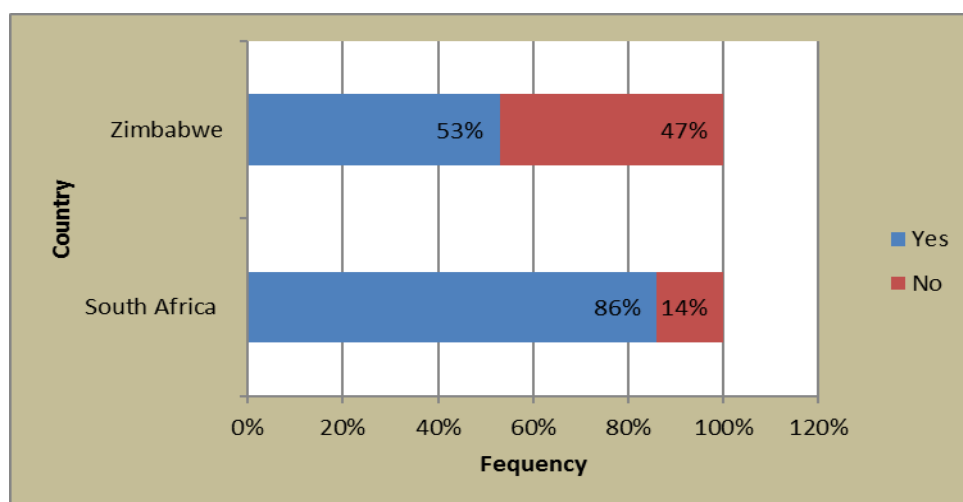
This finding is consistent with the findings of a number of studies on the use of social media in tourism (see Friebe & Campbell, 2009; Ernestad & Henrikson, 2009; Stelzner, 2011; Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). These studies concurred that the most popular sites amongst tourism related businesses are Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor. However, the finding is contrary to the results obtained by Lange-Faria and Elliot

(2012:208) which concluded that the most popular sites amongst tourism related businesses are blogs.

Respondents were further asked to state whether they use any social networks for marketing or to communicate with respondents. The next section explains the results obtained for this question.

### 5.3.4 Usage of social networks for marketing

After respondents were requested to state the social networks they are aware of they were further requested to state whether they use these social networks for marketing or to communicate with customers. The diagrams below show the empirical results obtained for both countries.



**Figure 5.3: Usage of social networks for marketing**

Results from Figure 5.3 shows that 86% of the South African establishments indicated that they use social networks for marketing or to communicate with customers and only 14% indicated that they do not use social networks for marketing or even to communicate with customers. On the other hand, 53% of the Zimbabwean establishments agreed that they use social networks for marketing or to communicate with customers whilst 47% indicated that they do not use any social network for marketing or to communicate with customers. From the results it can be deduced that a number of accommodation establishments in South Africa use social networks for marketing as compared to their counterparts in Zimbabwe. This is not difficult to understand as South Africa is technologically more advanced than Zimbabwe and has a

higher rate of social media penetration than Zimbabwe. The 3G internet facility (a modem which accesses the internet through a cell phone SIM card and works in conjunction with local networks), was only introduced in Zimbabwe in 2012. The 3G option promotes the use of internet more easily to both individuals and businesses (Tech Zim report, 2012). This may explain the results obtained for Zimbabwe.

The next section concentrates on the usage of different social networks by accommodation establishments. It also covers other marketing mediums being employed by accommodation establishments apart from social networks.

## **5.4 SECTION B: THE USAGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND OTHER MARKETING MEDIUMS**

This section covers the usage of different social networks by accommodation establishments. Only seven social networks listed in sub-section 5.2.3 were included. It also covers the usage of other marketing mediums apart from social networks.

### **5.4.1 The usage of Social networks**

From section 5.2.4 it can be noted that not all accommodation establishments use social networks for marketing. These establishments were further requested to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements provided to them using a five point Likert scale of agreement ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The seven social networks previously mentioned were included. The results obtained are shown in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Usage of social networks for marketing**

|             | Strongly agree |      | Agree |     | Neutral |     | Disagree |     | Strongly disagree |     |
|-------------|----------------|------|-------|-----|---------|-----|----------|-----|-------------------|-----|
|             | SA*            | ZIM* | SA    | ZIM | SA      | ZIM | SA       | ZIM | SA                | ZIM |
| Facebook    | 41%            | 61%  | 44%   | 34% | 9%      | 0%  | 1%       | 5%  | 5%                | 0%  |
| Twitter     | 14%            | 6%   | 22%   | 34% | 27%     | 35% | 12%      | 21% | 25%               | 4%  |
| TripAdvisor | 46%            | 77%  | 27%   | 20% | 9%      | 3%  | 5%       | 0%  | 13%               | 0%  |
| You tube    | 8%             | 0%   | 17%   | 8%  | 32%     | 13% | 12%      | 59% | 31%               | 20% |
| MySpace     | 2%             | 0%   | 2%    | 3%  | 28%     | 0%  | 17%      | 48% | 51%               | 49% |
| Blog        | 6%             | 0%   | 15%   | 14% | 31%     | 6%  | 15%      | 63% | 33%               | 17% |
| LinkedIn    | 4%             | 0%   | 16%   | 0%  | 29%     | 1%  | 14%      | 44% | 37%               | 55% |

**\*SA stands for South Africa and ZIM stands for Zimbabwe**

Empirical results in Table 5.2 show that the majority of respondents from both countries agreed strongly with regard to their use of TripAdvisor and Facebook for marketing their establishments. Thus, 41% of South African establishments and 61% of Zimbabwean establishments strongly agreed that they use Facebook for marketing. For TripAdvisor, 46% of South African establishments and 77% of Zimbabwean establishments also strongly agreed that they use TripAdvisor for marketing. Although Twitter is one of the most popular social networks, it seems as if it is not popular in marketing accommodation establishments in both countries with the majority of establishments from Zimbabwe were neutral (35%) and 27% of South African establishments were also neutral when requested to state the extent to which they use Twitter for marketing. The majority of establishments in South Africa express a very strong disagreement when it comes to the use of MySpace for marketing (51%). Similarly, the majority (49%) of Zimbabwean establishments expressed a strong disagreement in using MySpace for marketing. YouTube also seemed to be a less popular social network for marketing establishments for both countries, with the majority (59%) of Zimbabwean establishments disagreeing in using it for marketing while the majority (32%) of

establishments from South Africa were neutral. LinkedIn was also not popular amongst establishments from both countries as the majority (55%) of respondents from Zimbabwe provided strong disagreement when it comes to the use of LinkedIn for marketing. From South Africa, the majority (44%) of respondents also disagreed with using LinkedIn for marketing.

Thus, from these findings it can be deduced that the most popular sites used for marketing in both countries are Facebook and TripAdvisor followed by Twitter with the least popular being MySpace. The results are similar to the findings of Stelzner (2011) in a social media marketing report. The report concluded that Facebook and Twitter were the most used sites by tourism businesses in most developed countries in which the study was conducted.

Respondents were further requested to state the extent to which the networks are used for marketing using a scale ranging from most used to not at all used. The results pertaining to this item are explained in the next sub-section.

#### 5.4.2 The extent to which social networks are used

The same seven social networks used in the previous section were used again in this section and the results obtained are shown in Figures 5.4 and 5.5 respectively.

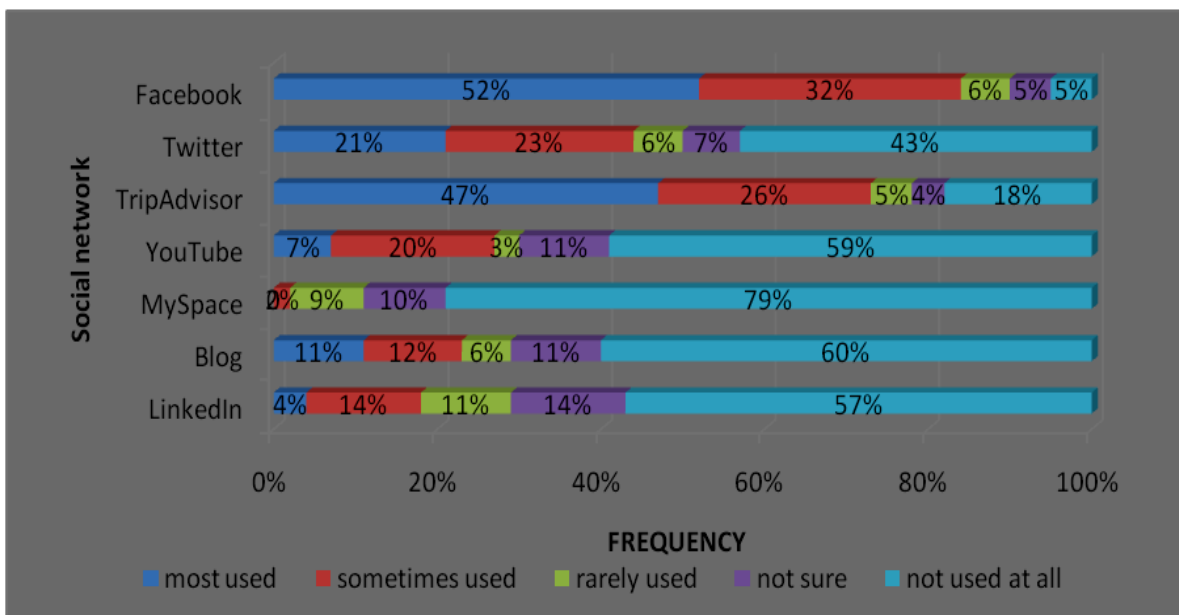
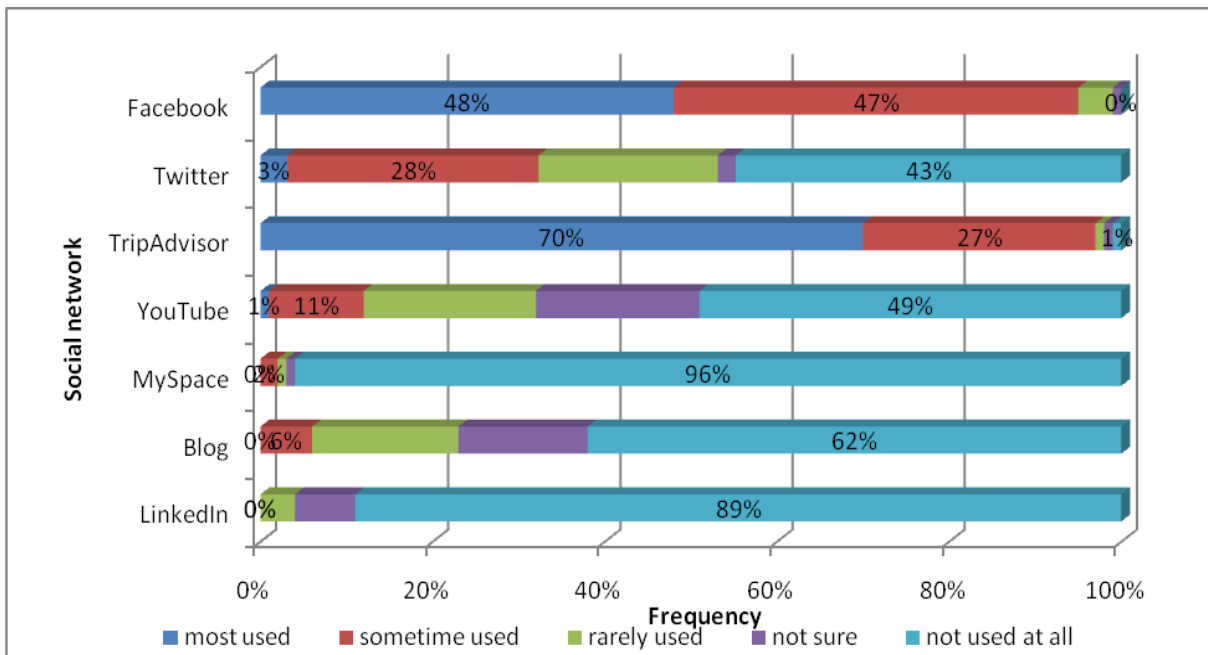


Figure 5.4: Most used social networks in South Africa



**Figure 5.5: Most used social networks in Zimbabwe**

When respondents were asked to state the most used social network for marketing, Facebook and TripAdvisor were the most popular sites indicated. This is clearly shown in Tables 5.4 and 5.5. From the South African side when respondents were given a scale of frequency (ranging from most used, sometimes used, rarely used, not sure and not used at all), out of 111 accommodation establishments that are using social networks, 52% of the respondents indicated Facebook as the most used site for marketing followed by TripAdvisor with 47%. Twitter was also selected by a few respondents (21%) as one of the most used site for marketing. Similarly, from the Zimbabwean side, Facebook and TripAdvisor were chosen as the most used sites. Out of 71 Zimbabwean accommodation establishments that use social networks, 70% indicated that TripAdvisor is the most used site for marketing followed by Facebook with 48%.

The results from both countries seem to concur that MySpace is the least used social network for marketing. When respondents were asked to state the extent of usage of MySpace as shown in Figure 5.4, 79% of South African respondents indicated that it is not used at all while 96% of the respondents from Zimbabwe also shared the same view. LinkedIn, YouTube and blogs are also not popular for marketing in both countries as this is shown by 49% of the respondents from Zimbabwe stating that YouTube it is not used at all and 60% respondents from South Africa indicating the same. From

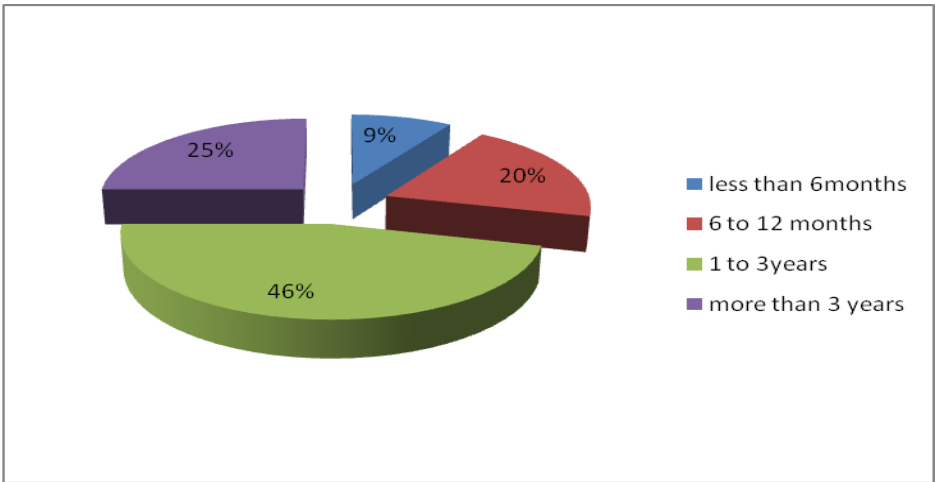
Zimbabwe, 89% respondents indicated that LinkedIn is not used at all for marketing whereas 57% of the South African respondents also indicate that LinkedIn is not used at all.

Although there are a number of social networks that accommodation establishments can utilise for marketing, the empirical results of this survey show that Facebook and TripAdvisor are the most dominant sites for marketing accommodations services in the sub-Saharan region. This result is consistent with the findings of Assenov and Khuran (2012), which concluded that Facebook and Twitter were the two most popular social network sites used by hotels in Thailand. Chan and Guillet (2011), and Stelzner (2011), also reached the same conclusion.

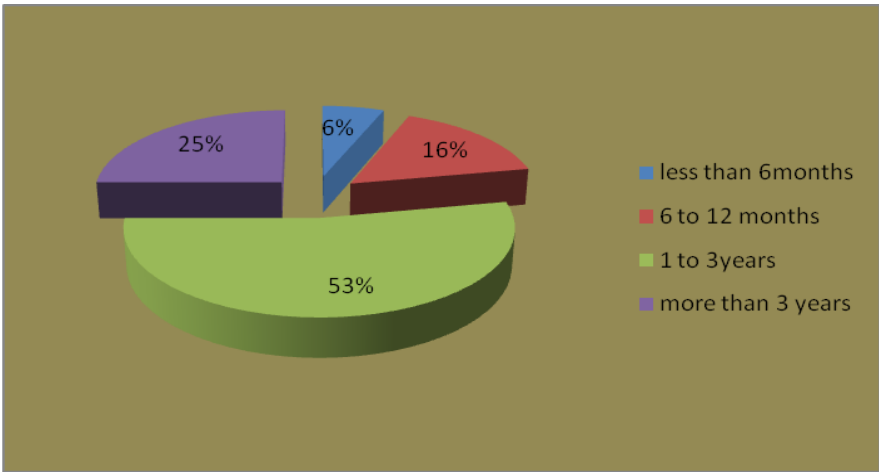
It was also considered necessary to find out from respondents the number of years their establishments have been using social networks for marketing and the time spent using social networks per week. These results are explained in the next sub-section.

#### **5.4.3 The number of years using social networks and weekly commitment**

The respondents were asked to state the number of years their establishments have been using social networks as it helps in providing a clear picture as to when social networks penetrated the accommodation sector in the Sub-Saharan Africa. It was also considered necessary to inquire from respondents the amount of time they spend on social networks per week to establish how committed they are to using social networks for marketing. Figures 5.6 and 5.7 illustrate the results obtained pertaining to the experience establishments have in using social networks for marketing.



**Figure 5.6 Experience in using in using social networks (SA)**



**Figure 5.7: Experience in using social networks (Zim)**

The results from Figures 5.6 and 5.7 show that 46% of South African establishments have been using social networks for marketing for a period ranging from 1 to 3 years and 54% of Zimbabwean establishments have been using social networks for the same period. Very few establishments from both countries indicated that they have been using social networks for more than 3 years. Figure 5.6 shows that only 25% of the South African establishments indicated that they have been using social networks for more than 3 years and 25% of the Zimbabwean establishments indicated the same. These results show that even though social networks are now prevalent and have been used by individuals and other sectors for more than five years in Africa, the accommodation establishments in the Sub-Saharan Africa were slow to adopt them for marketing purposes. A survey conducted by Stelzner (2011) also concluded that the

majority of tourism businesses participating in the survey indicate that they have used social networks for 1-3 years.

The next section explains the results obtained pertaining to the amount of time establishments spend on social networks per week. Table 5.3 shows the results obtained.

**Table 5.3: Time spend on social networks**

|                 | South Africa (n = 111) |     | Zimbabwe (n=71) |     |
|-----------------|------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| 0hrs            | 5                      | 4%  | 4               | 6%  |
| 1 to 5hrs       | 70                     | 63% | 47              | 66% |
| 6 to 10hrs      | 23                     | 21% | 14              | 20% |
| 11 to 15hrs     | 8                      | 7%  | 5               | 7%  |
| 16 to 20hrs     | 3                      | 3%  | 1               | 1%  |
| More than 20hrs | 2                      | 2%  | 0               | 0%  |

The majority of the respondents from both countries spent 1 to 5 hours per week on social networks. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the South African respondents indicated that they spend 1 to 5 hours a week on social networks and 66% of the Zimbabwean respondents indicated the same. Very few South African respondents (2%) indicated that they spend more than 20 hours per week on social networks while in Zimbabwe none of the respondents selected that time category. The results shows that although most accommodation establishments are present on social networks such as Facebook and TripAdvisor they do not spend most of their time on those sites.

This finding is not in isolation as Stelzner (2011), in the social media marketing report, also concluded that the majority of tourism businesses participating in the survey spend 1-5 hours a week on social networks.

#### **5.4.4 Performance of accommodation establishments on social media marketing**

In order to assess how accommodation establishments perform in social media marketing, a five phase Online Marketing Framework was adopted from Chan and

Guillet (2011) and the establishments were asked to state the activities they perform under each phase (Item 7I on the measuring instrument). The phases are: to attract users, to engage users, to retain users, to learn and to relate back. Respondents were then requested to answer questions pertaining to the activities done in each phase. This was included in order to determine to what extent establishments are utilising social networks for marketing. When presenting the results of this item responses with strongly agree and agree were treated as positive hence were combined and presented as the same response. Thus the percentages in Table 5.4 represent those accommodation establishments that gave a positive response.

**Table 5.4: Social media marketing performance under the five phases of Digital marketing framework**

|   | South Africa | Zimbabwe |
|---|--------------|----------|
| <b>Phase 1: To attract customers</b>                      |              |          |
| Present a profile page                                    | 89%          | 90%      |
| Show your website on Social network site page             | 87%          | 93%      |
| Promote discounted services on Social network sites       | 60%          | 84%      |
| Do you show videos capturing company's culinary skills?   | 41%          | 30%      |
| Do you provide company phone numbers on the wall?         | 86%          | 84%      |
| <b>Phase 2: To engage customers</b>                       |              |          |
| Answer guests' enquiries                                  | 93%          | 90%      |
| Handle guests' complains                                  | 90%          | 89%      |
| Introduce establishments' services to guests              | 86%          | 87%      |
| Present a discussion wall on the social network site page | 43%          | 33%      |
| Engage customers in lucky draws                           | 31%          | 45%      |
| <b>Phase 3: To retain customers</b>                       |              |          |

|   |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|
| Present games, contests and forums to users           | 48% | 24% |
| Provide hyperlinks to related sites                   | 59% | 56% |
| Have security features                                | 78% | 60% |
| <b>Phase 4: To learn about customers</b>              |     |     |
| Capture information about customers and prospects     | 59% | 49% |
| Support chat groups                                   | 23% | 35% |
| Perform market research using social networking sites | 38% | 25% |
| <b>Phase 5: To relate back</b>                        |     |     |
| Update customers about content change                 | 57% | 76% |
| Engage in real time interaction                       | 48% | 18% |
| Provide personalised responses                        | 86% | 60% |

### **Phase 1**

The empirical results in Table 5.4 shows that for the South Africa establishments which use social networks for marketing, the most common activities they use to attract customers are presenting a profile page (89%), showing their websites on social network site page (87%) and providing phone numbers on the wall (86%). Few establishments post videos showing their culinary skills on their sites for customers to view. This according to Chan and Guillet (2011:365) is another way of attracting customers to your establishments. Only 41% of South African establishments that use social networks for marketing post videos capturing their culinary skills on their sites. This is similar to the findings obtained from the Zimbabwean side, where 90% present a profile page on social networks, 93% show their websites on social networks page and 85% make their phone number available. Very few establishments post videos capturing culinary skills on their wall for customers to view, with only 30% performing this activity as a way of attracting customers. Although YouTube is an ideal social network for video posting, according to the results obtained for this survey (section

5.3.2) YouTube was not a popular social network site employed by accommodation establishments in both countries.

The findings are consistent with the results obtained by Chan and Guillet's (2011:366) study on the usage of social media marketing in the hotel industry in Hong Kong. The study concluded that hotels present a profile page and provide a link to their websites on their profile page.

### ***Phase 2***

The three most popular activities performed by establishments from both countries in this phase are: answering customer's queries, handling customers' complaints and introducing establishments' services to the customers. The results in Table 5.4 show that of South African establishments that use social networks, 93% answer customers' queries as a way of engaging with them, 90% handle customers' queries and 87% introduce establishments' new service to the customers to engage with them. In contrast, some activities such as presenting a discussion wall on the social network site page and engaging customers in lucky draws did not receive a good response from both countries. Only 43% of the South African establishments indicated that they present a discussion wall on the social network site page and only 31% engage customers in lucky draws. This is the same for the Zimbabwean establishments. It was discovered that 90% answer guests' queries on social networks, 89% handle guests' complaints on social networks and 87% introduce establishments' services to guests as way of engaging with them. A poor performance was noted when it comes to engaging customers in lucky draws and presenting a discussion wall on the site for customers to share their experiences or sentiments. Only 33% of the establishments present a discussion wall and 44% engage their customers in lucky draws.

For an establishment to invite feedback about their services, it is vital for them to have an online facility in the form of a discussion wall where customers can share their thoughts. Unfortunately establishments from both countries seem not to recognise the importance of using this approach. Additionally engaging customers in lucky draws helps establishments attract more customers.

### ***Phase 3***

The success of social media marketing efforts depends on the ability of a business to retain the attracted customers. Accommodation establishments from both countries seemed to perform poorly in this phase. Results in Table 5.4 show that 48% of the South African establishments' present games, contests and forums, 59% provide hyperlinks to related sites and 78% provide security features. From among the Zimbabwean establishments, only 24% present games, contest and forums to customers as way of retaining them, 56% provide hyperlinks to related sites, and 60% provide security features for customers.

This is contrary to the findings of Chan and Guillet (2011:366) who, in their study on the usage of social media marketing amongst hotels in Hong Kong, discovered that most of the hotels they investigated provide some links to other related sites for customers to explore other services they offer.

### ***Phase 4***

Social networks provide an excellent platform for businesses in the hospitality industry to learn about their customers (Suh & Park, 2010:325). In this phase, the accommodation establishments investigated performed relatively poorly. Among the South African establishments, only 59% captured information about customers, very few (23%) support chat groups and only 38% perform market research using social networks. The same applies to the Zimbabwean establishments that use social networks since less than half of them capture information about customers (49%), only 35% support chat groups and very few (25%) attempted to perform market research using social networks. This is similar to the findings of Chan and Guillet (2011) who discovered that very few hotels in Hong Kong attempted to perform market research through social networks.

### ***Phase 5***

While phases one through four aim to attract, engage, retain, and learn about customers, the key aim in phase 5 of the online marketing framework is for marketers to be able to relate back to customers (Chan & Guillet, 2011:358). Failure to do so can render all the online marketing efforts valueless. From the South African establishments that use social networks, 57% update customers about content change.

The study did not further investigate the frequency with which the content is updated so it is not clear whether the establishments were effectively doing this. Less than half of the establishments (48%) try to engage in real time interaction with the customers while the majority of the establishments (87%) provide personalised responses to customers. From the Zimbabwean establishments that participated on this question, 76% update customers about content change, only 18% of the establishments try to engage in real time interaction with customers and 60% provide personalised responses to customers.

Literature would suggest that since updating customers about content changes is vital in building strong customer relations, it would significantly aid marketing endeavours if accommodation establishments would make this a habit. However, the empirical results of this survey show that not all accommodation establishments realise this. This was also discovered by Chan and Guillet (2011:366) when they found that not all hotels in Hong Kong inform their customers about content change. Thus, accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe are not using social networks to their maximum advantage for marketing purposes.

These items were further subjected to factor analysis in order to retain those factors which are essential in explaining the usage of social networks (see section 5.7). The next item to be analysed is the extent to which accommodation establishments use other marketing mediums apart from social networks.

#### **5.4.5 Usage of other marketing mediums**

Accommodation establishments were requested to state the extent to which they use other marketing mediums. The respondents were requested to choose from a list of 7 marketing mediums (magazines, brochures, newspaper, TV/radio, telemarketing, e-mail/web marketing and video marketing) and rate them on a scale ranging from most used to not used at all. Respondents were also asked to state marketing mediums they use but that were not listed in the question. The results obtained are graphically presented in Figures 5.8 and 5.9.

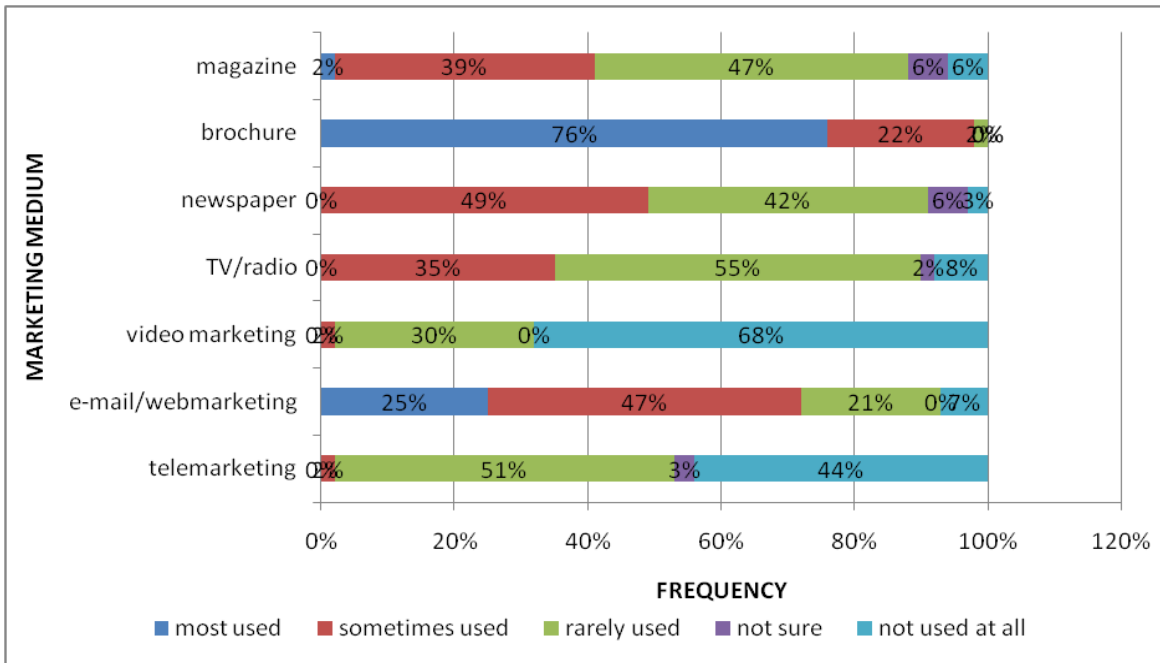


Figure 5.8: Usage of other marketing mediums by Zimbabwean establishments

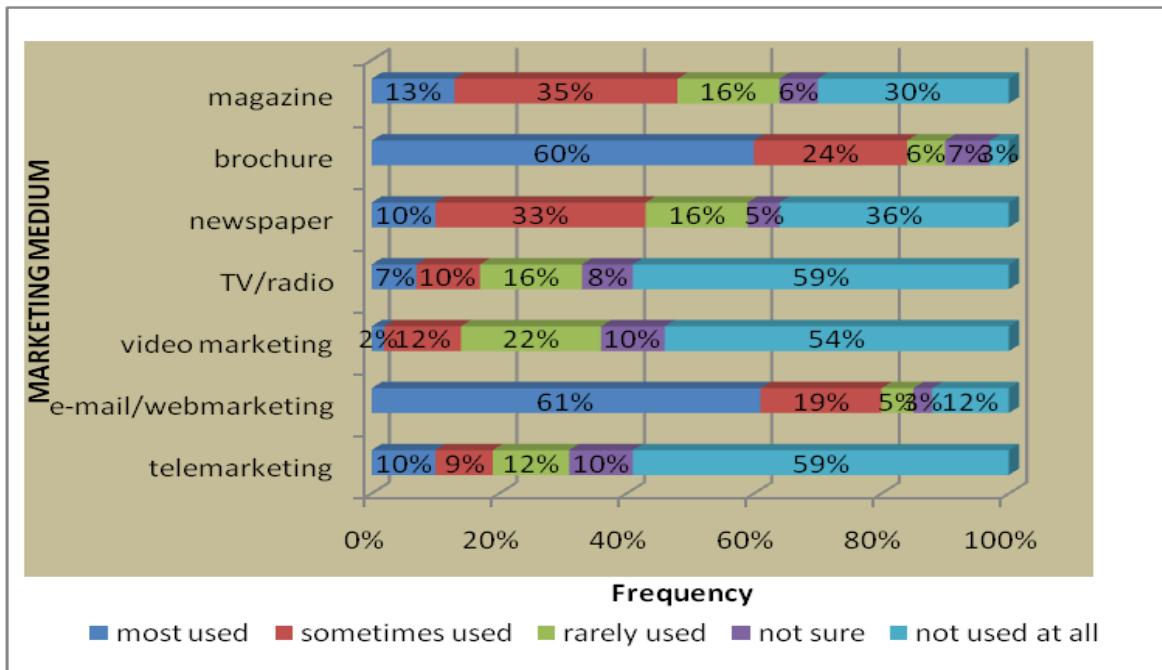


Figure 5.9: Usage of other marketing mediums by South African establishments

The empirical findings in Figures 5.8 and 5.9 confirm that apart from social networks, the most frequently used marketing medium is a brochure. Empirical results in Figure 5.8 show that 76% of the Zimbabwean establishments indicated that apart from social networks, brochures are the most commonly used marketing medium. This is followed

by e-mail or web marketing (25%). A large percentage of respondents indicated that Video marketing (68%) is not used at all. Newspapers are sometimes used by Zimbabwean establishments (49%) while television/radio (55%), telemarketing (51%) and magazines (47%) are rarely used. When looking at the South African establishments (Figure 5.9), 76% indicated that brochures are the most used marketing mediums apart from social networks, followed by e-mail/web marketing with 61%. Similar to the Zimbabwean results, video marketing was not a popular marketing medium for South African establishments with 54% indicating that it is not used at all. The majority of South African establishments (59%) also indicated that telemarketing and television/radio are not used at all. This is followed by newspapers with 36% indicating it is not used at all while 34% out of 129 respondents indicated that they sometimes use magazines for marketing.

These results show that even though most of the accommodation establishments have adopted social networks for marketing, brochures are still valued in the hospitality sector. Some establishments have make use of digital brochures, which still play a major role in the marketing of accommodation establishments. The next section presents the results obtained pertaining to the effectiveness of social networks for marketing.

## **5.5 SECTION C: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS**

In this section respondents were requested to state what their businesses experienced after using social networks, to rate the effectiveness of social networks against other marketing mediums and to state the approximate percentage they think social networks contributed towards some business aspects provided. Thus this section covers items 8, 9 and 11 in the measuring instruments and it was answered by those establishments that use social networks for marketing. The first sub-section presents the results obtained when respondents were asked to state the extent they agreed or disagreed with some statements provided to them. The results are shown in Table 5.5. The percentages in this table represent the number of respondents who gave a positive response to the statement provided.

**Table 5.5: The experience of establishments after using social networks**

| After using social networks our establishment experienced: | South Africa | Zimbabwe |
|--|--------------|----------|
| Improved sales   | 51%          | 39%      |
| Increase in business exposure                              | 78%          | 75%      |
| Increase in business partnership                           | 37%          | 39%      |
| Increase in lead generation                                | 45%          | 48%      |
| A reduction in marketing expenses                          | 40%          | 14%      |
| Increased traffic to the site                              | 69%          | 78%      |
| Growth in existing markets                                 | 54%          | 44%      |
| Acquired loyal fans  | 71%          | 83%      |
| Effective way to communicate with own markets              | 69%          | 86%      |
| Growth in new markets                                      | 57%          | 58%      |
| Immediate response to customer queries                     | 76%          | 86%      |
| Increased understanding of the market place                | 54%          | 83%      |

Empirical results from Table 5.5 show that most of the respondents from both countries experienced an increase in business exposure after the use of social networks with 78% respondents from South Africa agreeing with the statement and 75% of respondents from Zimbabwe expressing the same. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of South African establishments indicated that they experienced increased traffic to the site which was similar for Zimbabwean establishments (78%). Seventy-one percent of the South African establishments (71%) agreed that they acquired loyal fans after using social networks and 83% of Zimbabwean establishments indicated similar results. Another common experience which was highlighted by the majority of establishments from both countries is immediate response to customer queries with 76% of South African

establishments agreeing with the statement and 86% of Zimbabwean establishments agreeing.

More than half of South African establishments 54% indicated that they experienced an increased understanding of the market place which was similar for Zimbabwean establishments (83%). Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the South African respondents revealed that they experienced a growth in new markets after using social networks for marketing, and 58% of Zimbabwean establishments also experienced the same. With regard to the growth of existing markets, 54% of South African establishments agreed with having experienced a growth in existing markets while only 44% of the Zimbabwean establishments experienced the same. Again, 51% of the South African establishments agreed that they experienced an improvement in sales, while very few Zimbabwean establishments (39%) agreed with this statement.

Respondents from both countries showed little agreement on the aspect of business partnership. The results in Table 5.5 show that only 37% South African establishments and 39% Zimbabwean establishments agreed that they experienced an increase in business partnerships as a result of the use of social media for marketing purposes. Similarly very few respondents indicated that they experienced a reduction in marketing expenses (40% for South Africa and 14% for Zimbabwe). Finally, a few establishments from both countries agreed that they experienced an increase in lead generation after the use of social networks, thus 45% of South Africa respondents indicated that they experienced an increase in lead generation with 48% of Zimbabwean establishments sharing the same view.

Contrary to the findings of Park and Oh (2012), this study concludes that most of the establishments that participated in the survey did not experience a positive effect on sales after using social networks. Park and Oh (2012) concluded that most travel agents in Korea saw an improvement in sales revenue after using social media marketing. The possible reason for this contradiction may be that the studies were conducted in different tourism sectors (i.e. travel agents versus accommodation) where the usage of social networks differs from one sector to the other.

Respondents were further requested to rate the effectiveness of social networks against other marketing mediums. The results obtained are explained in the next sub-section.

### 5.5.1: Rating of social networks against other marketing mediums

As a way of establishing how effective social networks are, respondents were asked to rate them against print media (brochures, newspapers, and magazines), display media (billboards, car signage advertisement), television/radio and internet marketing (e-mail marketing, web marketing, online newsletters). Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of social networks on a five point Likert scale ranging from very effective to not effective at all. The question was answered by only accommodation establishment that use social networks for marketing. Table 5.6 and 5.7 show the results obtained from both countries.

**Table 5.6: Rating of social networks by South African establishments**

| <b>Social networks against print media</b>        |           |          |                |                      |
|---|-----------|----------|----------------|----------------------|
| Very effective                                    | Effective | The same | Less effective | Not effective at all |
| 36%   | 41%       | 12%      | 8%             | 3%                   |
| <b>Social networks against display media</b>      |           |          |                |                      |
| Very effective                                    | Effective | The same | Less effective | Not effective at all |
| 21%   | 40%       | 28%      | 10%            | 1%                   |
| <b>Social networks against television/radio</b>   |           |          |                |                      |
| Very effective                                    | Effective | The same | Less effective | Not effective at all |
| 21%   | 37%       | 25%      | 14%            | 3%                   |
| <b>Social networks against internet marketing</b> |           |          |                |                      |
| Very effective                                    | Effective | The same | Less effective | Not effective at all |
| 16%   | 35%       | 28%      | 16%            | 5%                   |

**Table 5.7: Rating of social media by Zimbabwean establishments**

| <b>Social networks against print media</b>        |           |          |                |                      |
|---|-----------|----------|----------------|----------------------|
| Very effective                                    | Effective | The same | Less effective | Not effective at all |
| 13%   | 56%       | 13%      | 18%            | 0%                   |
| <b>Social networks against display media</b>      |           |          |                |                      |
| Very effective                                    | Effective | The same | Less effective | Not effective at all |
| 42%   | 49%       | 8%       | 1%             | 0%                   |
| <b>Social networks against television/radio</b>   |           |          |                |                      |
| Very effective                                    | Effective | The same | Less effective | Not effective at all |
| 42%   | 48%       | 9%       | 1%             | 0%                   |
| <b>Social networks against internet marketing</b> |           |          |                |                      |
| Very effective                                    | Effective | The same | Less effective | Not effective at all |
| 21%   | 48%       | 24%      | 4%             | 3%                   |

Empirical results in Tables 5.6 and 5.7 confirm that accommodation establishments view social networks as an effective tool when compared to other marketing mediums. When asked to rate social networks against print media, 36% of the South African establishments that use social networks indicated that social networks are very effective and the majority (41%) indicated that social networks are effective. Only 3% of the South African establishments indicated that social networks are not effective at all when rated against print media. Similarly, the majority of Zimbabwean establishments (56%) indicated that when social networks are rated against print media, they are effective and 13% state that they are very effective. None of the Zimbabwean establishments indicated that social networks are not effective at all when rated against print media

The same applies to the issue of social networks against display media. The empirical results in Tables 5.6 and 5.7 show that the majority of respondents from both countries

concur that social networks are effective when compared against display media (41% for South Africa and 49% for Zimbabwe). In addition, a large proportion of respondents from Zimbabwe indicated that social networks are very effective when rated against display media (42%). A large proportion of the respondents from both countries agreed that social networks are effective when rated against television and radio. This is shown by 48% of Zimbabwean accommodation establishments (Table 5.7) and 37% of South African establishments sharing this view. The majority of respondents from both countries also indicated that when rated against internet marketing, social networks are effective. From the results, one can conclude that accommodation establishments, although not utilising a number of social networks for marketing, do recognise that social networks make for an effective marketing tool when compared to other traditional marketing mediums.

### 5.5.2 Contribution of social networks

Accommodation establishments that use social networks were requested to state the degree to which they think social networks have contributed towards increased understanding of the marketplace, sales improvement, business exposure and reduction of marketing expenses. Figure 5.10 and Figure 5.11 show the results obtained.

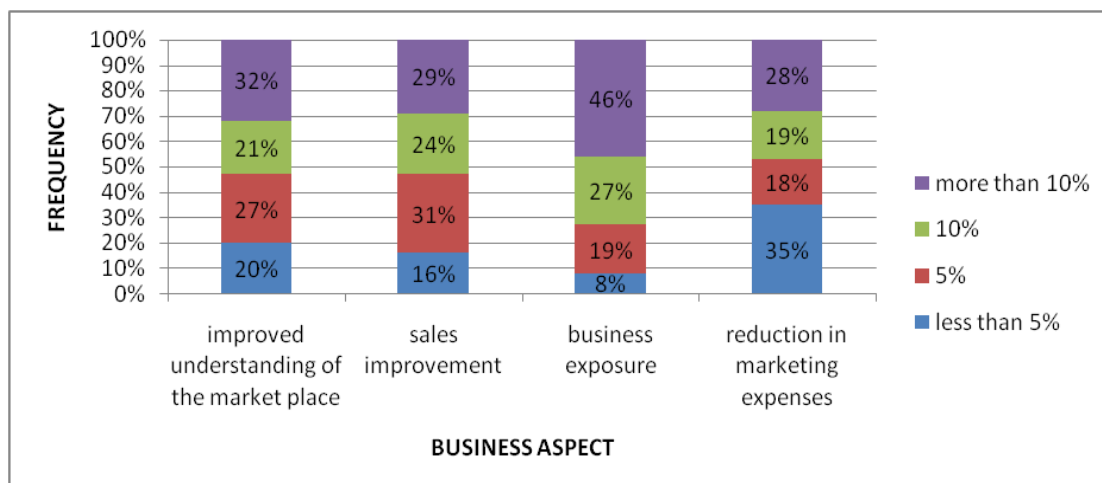
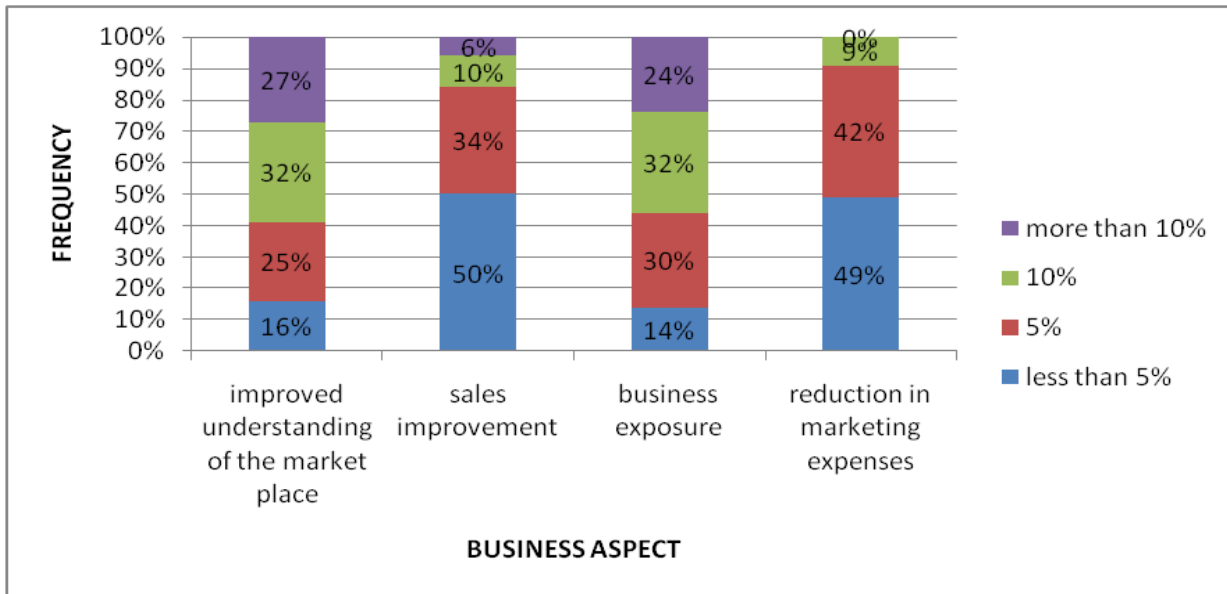


Figure 5.10: Percentage contribution of social networks (South Africa)



**Figure 5.11: Percentage contribution of social networks (Zimbabwe)**

Figure 5.10 and Figure 5.11 show that the majority of South African accommodation establishments (32%) believe that the use of social networks contribute more than 10% to the increase of understanding of the market place. In Zimbabwe the majority indicate that the use of social networks contributed 10% to the same aspect. When it comes to sales improvement, the majority of South African establishments (31%) indicated that the use of social networks contributed only 5% to sales improvement while in Zimbabwe 50% of the establishments pointed out that the use of social networks contribute less than 5% to sales improvement. Referring to South African establishments, 46%, which is the majority, stated that social networks contributed more than 10% to an increase in business exposure and in Zimbabwe the majority (32%) stated that social networks contributed 10% to an increase in business exposure. Lastly the majority of South Africa establishments (35%) indicated that social networks contribute less than 5% to the reduction of marketing expenses. The majority of Zimbabwean establishments (49%) pointed out the same.

From these findings one can deduce that, although social networks are considered to be very effective marketing tools, accommodation establishments in the Sub-Saharan Africa believe that they do not contribute much towards sales improvement or to the reduction of marketing expenses. The contribution of social networks to the understanding of the market place and increase in business exposure is, however, valuable. It should be noted that it can be difficult to measure the contribution of social

networks in monetary terms when a business is employing a number of marketing tools simultaneously.

## **5.6 REASONS FOR NOT USING SOCIAL NETWORKS**

Those accommodation establishments that do not use social networks for marketing were requested to state the reason for not adopting social networks as a marketing tool and an open-ended question was provided for them to do so (item 6b in the measuring instrument). From the responses obtained from Zimbabwe's side it was deduced that the major reason as highlighted by a number of establishments was the lack of technical knowledge on how to use social networks for marketing with 33% of the establishments which do not use social networks citing this reason. This is understandable as most hospitality businesses, although present on various social networks are not active on those platforms. Another reason which was provided for a lack of use of social media was that of time constraints, with 19% of establishments indicating this. Respondents further indicated that most of them market their establishments through travel agents so they do not bother using social networks (16%). What is not clear is whether those travel agents use social networks to market those establishments or not. Lack of privacy and trust was also another reason which inhibits the usage of social networks for marketing by accommodation establishments with 13% of the establishments indicating this. This issue was expressed in a number of ways with some indicating that they do not know how to manage negative comments, some stating that competitors can easily copy marketing strategies and others indicating that they do not trust social networks. Other reasons which were also highlighted include: power cuts (8%) which affect the internet connectivity; establishments being unaware of the benefits of using social networks for marketing (6%), and the establishment being in the process of implementing social media practices (5%).

From the South African side most establishments indicated that the main reason for not adopting social networks for marketing is the issue of time constraints (33%), followed by lack of technical knowledge on how to effectively use it for marketing purposes and a lack of familiarity with social networks (24%). A third reason which was stated by only a few accommodation establishments was a lack of understanding of the value of social media for marketing (20%). Some indicated that they market their establishments solely through travel agents (17%) while others pointed out that it is very difficult to

differentiate themselves from competitors in this area. The issue of online scams was also raised as a negative factor by few establishments (6%).

## **5.7 BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF USING SOCIAL NETWORKS**

When respondents were asked to state the benefits of using social networks the common benefits which were highlighted by most respondents from both countries were rapid feedback from customers (60%), the provision of a direct way of interacting with customers (55%), provision of a good platform for Customer Relations Marketing (20%), rapid spread of the marketing message without geographic barriers (75%), increased exposure (54%) and less money spent in comparison with other forms of marketing (69%). The list of benefits provided by the establishments corresponds with some of the benefits found in the literature. O'Connor, Höpken, & Gretzel (2008:13). Yazdanifard *et al.* (2011:580) and Au (2012:10) indicate that there are a host of benefits for organisations who employ online tools for marketing which include an increase in business exposure, understanding of the market as well as a decrease in marketing expenses.

Establishments were also requested to state the challenges they face in using social networks. The question was answered by only those establishments from both countries which are already using social networks. Respondents were provided with a list of five possible challenges and were requested to state the extent to which those challenges affect their use of social networks. The results obtained are depicted in Figures 5.12 and 5.13.

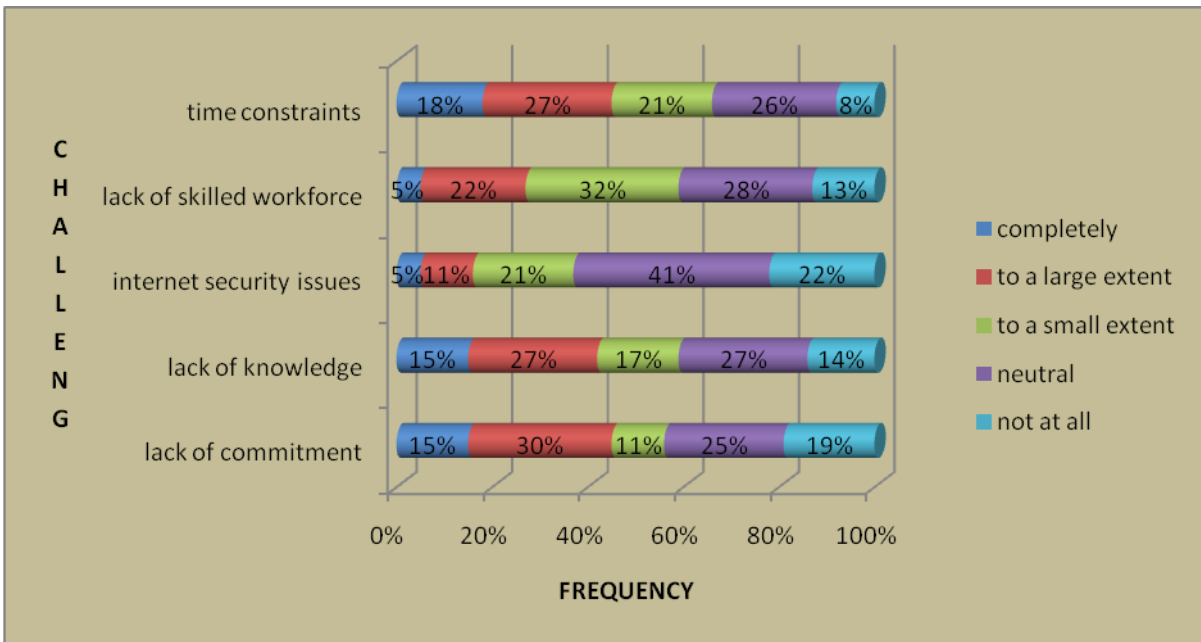


Figure 5.12: Challenges of using social networks for marketing (SA)

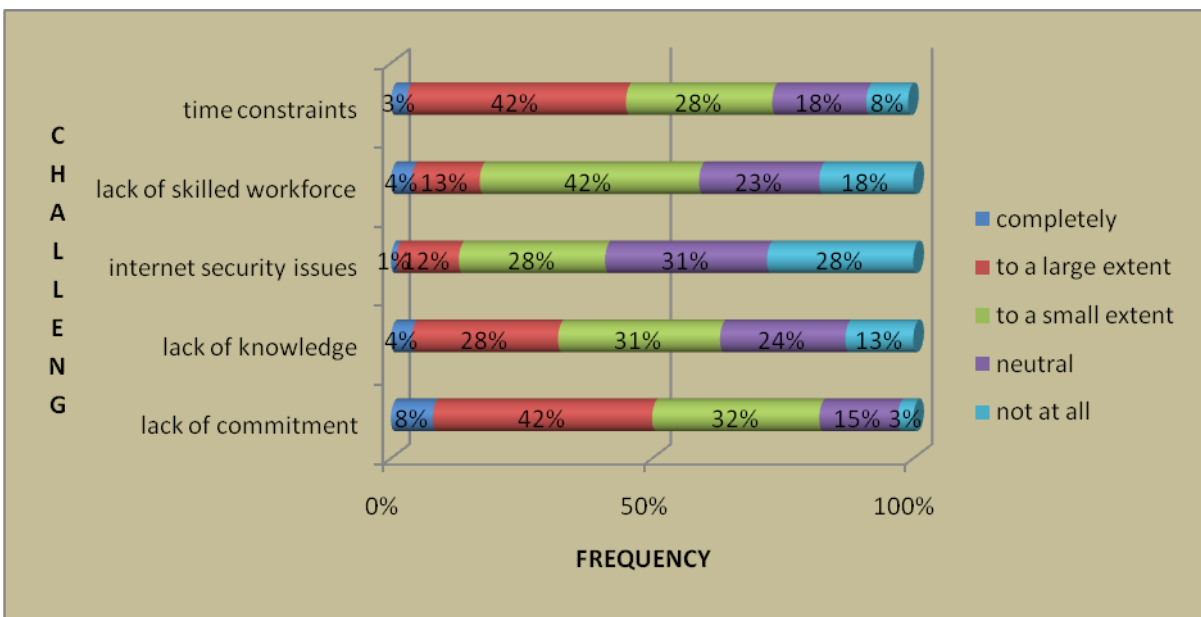


Figure 5.13: Challenges of using social networks (Zim)

Results from Figure 5.12 and 5.13 show that time constraints, lack of knowledge and lack of commitment to sustain social media efforts are the most common challenges faced by accommodation establishments from both countries. Lack of commitment to sustain social media marketing efforts was the dominant challenge noted in both countries, with 42% from Zimbabwean respondents and 30% from South African

respondents. The results reveal that even though accommodation establishments in Sub-Saharan Africa are tracking with the current wave of social media, they have yet to take full advantage of the opportunities that such platforms provide.

A study by Au (2010) on the adoption of Web 2.0 technologies by tourism businesses also revealed that time constraints and lack of understanding in the use of social media for marketing strongly hinder the use of these technologies by tourism businesses. These findings are consistent with the results obtained by Bruan (2014) and Salkhorhodeh (2009) which concluded that time constraints and limited knowledge on how to implement social media marketing strategies are the major hindrances faced by tourism businesses.

## **5.8 SOCIAL NETWORKS TO ADOPT AND FUTURE PLANS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING**

An open ended question was given to respondents to state social networks they plan to adopt in future and to highlight their future plans pertaining to social media marketing. The question was answered by all the establishments that participated in the survey. The results obtained showed that most respondents from both countries indicated that they plan to adopt the use of YouTube (70%), Blogs (55%) and Twitter (45%) which was also mentioned by a number of establishments from Zimbabwe. It was noted in section 5.3.1 that the most used sites from both countries are Facebook and TripAdvisor while Twitter was used in South Africa more than in Zimbabwe. Most establishments now plan to use those sites which they were not using before.

When respondents were asked about their future plans regarding social media marketing, most establishments stated a wish to increase their use of social networks for marketing by adopting some new social networks such as Pinterest, Instagram and Google plus (68%). Some also pointed out that they need to acquire more knowledge on how to use social networks for marketing (20%). Another aspect which was pointed out by other establishments is that they want to dedicate themselves to social media marketing (10%). Very few respondents indicated that they do not wish to increase the use of social network for marketing due to a lack of capacity (2%).

## 5.9 RESULTS FROM INFERENCE STATISTICS

This section presents research findings from the several inferential statistical techniques which were conducted to reach reliable conclusions on the information gathered. According to William (2006:1), it is not possible to reach a reliable conclusion using results from descriptive statistics alone; hence inferential statistics are essential in any research project. Before the data were subjected to reliability tests (Chronbach Alpha tests), factor analysis was conducted. Malhotra (2004:268) defines the Cronbach's alpha value as the average of all possible split-half coefficients resulting from different splitting of the scale items. The coefficients range from 0 to 1; 0 indicates lack of reliability whereas 1 indicates perfect reliability. The recommended cut-off score for a reliable measurement scale is at 0.6, otherwise it indicates unsatisfactory internal consistency reliability. The SPSS version 17.0 software package was used for these statistical analyses.

### 5.9.1 Factor analysis

Prior to calculating Cronbach's alpha values, Factor Analysis was conducted by using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). This is used for data reduction and summarisation; it is applied to obtain more sound judgment of structural relationships between indicators and constructs. It does this by seeking underlying observable (latent) variables that are reflected in the observed variables. Factor analysis technique, according to Malhotra (2004:268), requires a large sample size for the correlation to stabilise, thus for the purpose of this study data for South Africa and Zimbabwe were combined and factor analysis was conducted. Hair *et al.* (2006:77) describe PCA as a tool for assessing construct validity. Tables 5.6 and 5.7 show the results obtained.

**Table 5.8 Results of the Bartlett's Test, KMO Test and the Eigenvalue Scores**

| <b>Measure</b>           | <b>Bartlett's test</b> | <b>KMO test</b> | <b>Eigenvalue</b> | <b>Total variance explained (%)</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Social network activity* | 0.000                  | 0.966           | 13.456            | 89.011                              |

\*Average of the 5 variables used for the activities performed

According to the results in Table 5.8, the KMO average value for activities performed when using social networks for marketing is 0.966, meaning the sample is adequate. According to Field (2000:445), the sample is adequate if the value of the KMO is greater than 0.5. Field (2000:446) further indicates that prior to conducting factor analysis, measuring sample adequacy is crucial. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance, reflected by 0.000 for activities performed on social networks thus supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. Field (2000:445) also indicates that the SPSS intercorrelation can be checked using Bartlett's test of sphericity, where if the determinant is greater than 1 then there is intercorrelation of variables. In this case the determinant is 0.000 implying that there is no intercorrelation of variables. Table 5.7 shows the results of the factor analysis.

**Table 5.9: Factor analysis results on the activities performed on social media marketing**

| <b>Social media marketing activities</b>                  | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b><i>Phase 1: To attract customers</i></b>               |          |          |          |          |          |
| Present a profile page                                    | 0.90     |          |          |          |          |
| Show website on social network site page                  | 0.72     |          |          |          |          |
| Promote discounted services on social network sites       | 0.36     |          |          |          |          |
| Show videos capturing company's culinary skills           | 0.85     |          |          |          |          |
| Provide company phone numbers on the wall                 | 0.78     |          |          |          |          |
| <b><i>Phase 2: To engage customers</i></b>                |          |          |          |          |          |
| Answer guests' enquiries                                  |          | 0.91     |          |          |          |
| Handle guests' complaints                                 |          | 0.90     |          |          |          |
| Introduce establishments' services to guests              |          | 0.85     |          |          |          |
| Present a discussion wall on the social network site page |          | 0.36     |          |          |          |

|   |               |              |             |             |             |
|---|---------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Engage customers in lucky draws                       |               | 0.36         |             |             |             |
| <b>Phase 3: To retain customers</b>                   |               |              |             |             |             |
| Present games, contests and forums to users           |               |              | 0.28        |             |             |
| Provide hyperlinks to related sites                   |               |              | 0.73        |             |             |
| Have security features                                |               |              | 0.59        |             |             |
| <b>Phase 4: To learn about customers</b>              |               |              |             |             |             |
| Capture information about customers and prospects     |               |              |             | 0.57        |             |
| Support chat groups                                   |               |              |             | 0.43        |             |
| Perform market research using social networking sites |               |              |             | 0.21        |             |
| <b>Phase 5: To relate back</b>                        |               |              |             |             |             |
| Update customers about content change                 |               |              |             |             | 0.78        |
| Engage in real time interaction                       |               |              |             |             | 0.31        |
| Provide personalised responses                        |               |              |             |             | 0.85        |
| <b>Total variance explained</b>                       | <b>89.011</b> |              |             |             |             |
|   | <b>%</b>      |              |             |             |             |
| <b>Reliability coefficient</b>                        | <b>0.832</b>  | <b>0.734</b> | <b>0.68</b> | <b>0.73</b> | <b>0.64</b> |
| <b>Average inter-item correlation</b>                 | <b>0.46</b>   | <b>0.38</b>  | <b>0.41</b> | <b>0.36</b> | <b>0.42</b> |
| <b>Mean value</b>                                     | <b>4.61</b>   | <b>3.87</b>  | <b>2.99</b> | <b>2.25</b> | <b>3.01</b> |

Factor scores were calculated as the average of all items contributing to a specific factor in order to interpret them on the original five-point Likert scale of measurement. As shown in Table 5.9, five phases of social media marketing activities were identified which are: to attract customers (phase 1), to engage customers (phase 2), retain

customers (phase 3), to learn about customers (phase 4) and to relate back (phase 5). From the results in Table 5.9, it can be deduced that most of the activity carried out by accommodation establishments in both countries centres on *attracting customers* with the highest mean value of 4.61, reliability coefficient of 0.832 and an average inter-item correlation of 0.46. Following this is *engaging customers* with a mean value of 3.87, reliability coefficient of 0.734 and an average inter-item correlation of 0.38. The third activity undertaken by accommodation establishments from both countries is *to relate back* with a mean value of 3.01, reliability coefficient of 0.64 and an inter-item correlation of 0.42. *Retaining customers* is in fourth position with a mean value of 2.99 and a reliability coefficient of 0.41, and the least activity performed by accommodation establishments from both countries is *to learn about customers* with a mean value of 2.25, a reliability coefficient of 0.73 and an inter-item correlation of 0.36. Although this factor had the lowest mean value it was considered for further analysis since it retained an acceptable reliability result. In addition, all the variables in the five phases were subjected to chi-square test, the results of which are addressed later in this chapter. The next section presents results obtained from factor analysis on the effectiveness of social networks for marketing.

**Table 5.10 Factor analysis and reliability results of the effectiveness of social networks**

| <b>Factors on effectiveness of social networks</b> | <b>1</b>    | <b>2</b>    | <b>3</b>    |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b><i>Factor 1: Financial benefits</i></b>         |             |             |             |
| Improved sales                                     | 0.45        |             |             |
| A reduction in marketing expenses                  | 0.53        |             |             |
| <b><i>Factor 2: Market related benefits</i></b>    |             |             |             |
| Growth in existing markets                         |             | 0.56        |             |
| Effective way to communicate with own markets      |             | 0.78        |             |
| Growth in new markets                              |             | 0.58        |             |
| Increased understanding of the market place        |             | 0.89        |             |
| <b><i>Factor 3: Other business benefits</i></b>    |             |             |             |
| Increase in business exposure                      |             |             | 0.84        |
| Increase in business partnership                   |             |             | 0.41        |
| Increase in lead generation                        |             |             | 0.56        |
| Increased traffic to the site                      |             |             | 0.79        |
| Acquired loyal fans                                |             |             | 0.82        |
| Immediate response to customer queries             |             |             | 0.76        |
| <b>Total variance explained</b>                    | <b>63%</b>  |             |             |
| <b>Reliability coefficient</b>                     | <b>0.68</b> | <b>0.81</b> | <b>0.76</b> |
| <b>Average inter-item correlation</b>              | <b>0.32</b> | <b>0.38</b> | <b>0.45</b> |
| <b>Mean value</b>                                  | <b>2.56</b> | <b>3.01</b> | <b>3.89</b> |

Three factors were identified when measuring the effectiveness of social networks which were grouped as *financial benefits* (factor 1), *market related benefits* (factor 2)

and *other business benefits* (factor 3). Empirical results from Table 5.10 show that the greatest benefits experienced by accommodation establishments from both countries fall under *other business benefits* with the highest mean value of 3.89, reliability coefficient of 0.76 and 0.45 average inter-item correlation. *Market related benefits* with a mean value of 3.01, reliability coefficient of 0.81 and average inter-item correlation of 0.38 was the second most benefit experienced by accommodation establishments. The factor *financial benefits* obtained the lowest mean value of 2.56, reliability coefficient of 0.68 and average inter-item correlation of 0.32. Although financial benefits obtained the lowest mean value, it has been considered for further analysis for hypotheses testing as it helps most in determining the effectiveness of social networks. The next sections present results of hypotheses testing using chi-Square tests.

### **5.9.2 Results of hypotheses testing**

The main goal of this study was to determine the effectiveness and current status of social networks in the marketing of accommodation services over other marketing mediums in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Based on this goal two main hypotheses were formulated to establish the usage and effectiveness of social networks in marketing accommodation establishments.

#### First hypothesis

- *H<sub>0</sub>: Accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe do not extensively use social networks for marketing.*
- *H<sub>1</sub>: Accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe extensively use social networks for marketing.*

#### Second hypothesis

- *H<sub>0</sub>: Social networks are not effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments.*
- *H<sub>2</sub>: Social networks are effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments.*

### 5.9.2.1 Chi-square test results

When using the Chi test the null hypothesis is rejected when the value of  $p$  is greater than the critical value of the chi square. The critical chi-square value in this case is 0.05% which is the significant level set for this study. It implies that when the  $p > 0.05$  the null hypothesis will be rejected and the alternative hypothesis will not be rejected and if  $p < 0.05$  the null hypothesis will not be rejected. The first assumption of this study was that accommodation establishments in both countries do not extensively use social networks for marketing, which is the first null hypothesis formulated for this study. The retained components from factor analysis on the activities performed on social networks were subjected to chi-square test and the obtained results are presented in Table 5.11.

**Table 5.11: Chi-Square results of social media marketing activities**

| Factors                  | Chi-square          | DF | SIG (two sided) |
|--------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------|
| To attract customers     | 95.502 <sup>b</sup> | 5  | <b>0.000*</b>   |
| To engage customers      | 15.502 <sup>b</sup> | 5  | <b>0.002*</b>   |
| To retain customers      | 55.958 <sup>b</sup> | 5  | <b>0.001*</b>   |
| To learn about customers | 1.707 <sup>b</sup>  | 5  | 0.132           |
| To relate back           | 14.989 <sup>b</sup> | 5  | <b>0.013*</b>   |

$\alpha=0.05$ , confidence interval=95%

Empirical results in Table 5.11 show that 4 out of 5 factors used to test the usage of social networks for marketing retained a  $p$ -value which is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and only one factor retained a  $p$ -value which is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ) implying that the null hypothesis which states that *accommodation establishments are not extensively utilising social networks for marketing* cannot be rejected and the alternative hypothesis is rejected based on the chi-square rule which states that a null hypothesis can only be rejected when  $p > 0.05$ . It can therefore be concluded in this study that although accommodation facilities in both countries have adopted social networks for marketing,

there are not extensively utilising them. This is also supported by the descriptive results obtained in section (5.3.4) which show that although accommodation establishments perform some of the activities provided in the online marketing framework, some activities are not extensively performed. Even the results on the time spent by a majority of accommodation establishments confirm this. Chan and Guillet (2011:366) also conclude that hotels in Hong Kong have adopted social media marketing but are not fully utilising it.

The second assumption proposed for this study was that social networks are not very effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments. The identified factors from factor analysis on the effectiveness of social networks were tested using chi-square test again and the results obtained are shown in Table 5.12.

**Table 5.12: Chi square results on the effectiveness of social networks**

|                         | Chi-square          | DF | SIG (two sided) |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------|
| Financial benefits      | 0.610 <sup>a</sup>  | 5  | 0.212           |
| Market related benefits | 1.632 <sup>a</sup>  | 5  | 0.106           |
| Other business benefits | 65.721 <sup>a</sup> | 5  | <b>0.002*</b>   |

$\alpha=0.05$ , confidence interval=95%

Results from Table 5.12 show that out of the three factors identified in the factor analysis on the effectiveness of social networks, only one factor retained a *p*-value which is less than 0.05 ( $p<0.05$ ) and two factors retained a *p* value which is greater than 0.05 ( $p>0.05$ ), It is therefore implied that the null hypothesis which states that *social networks are not effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments* is rejected and the alternative is not rejected since the rule of chi-square state that if the *p* value is less than 0.05 the null hypothesis is rejected. It can therefore be concluded in this study that social networks are effective in marketing accommodation establishments in the Sub-Saharan Africa. Results from descriptive statistics on section 5.4.1 revealed that most accommodation establishments from both countries indicated that social networks are effective when rated against other marketing mediums.

Similarly Park and Oh (2012:103) found in their study of the use of social media marketing among Korean Travel agents that social media marketing is an effective tool for marketing tourism related businesses. When social networks are properly used and when accommodation establishments commit themselves to social media marketing these social media networks can facilitate excellent marketing results. The last inferential statistics performed was the T-test in order to ascertain whether there are statistical differences between the two countries usage and effectiveness of social networks.

### 5.9.2.2 T-Test results

In order to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the variables in the usage of social networks and effectiveness of social networks of both countries, South Africa and Zimbabwe, an independent T-test was performed. There is a significant difference between the mean scores when  $p < 0.05$  and when  $p > 0.05$  there is no significant difference. The results obtained are shown in Table 5.13.

**Table 5.13: T-test results on usage of social networks**

| Variables                | South Africa |       | Zimbabwe |       | SIG (2-Sided) |
|--------------------------|--------------|-------|----------|-------|---------------|
|                          | Std. Dev     | Mean  | Std. Dev | Mean  | P value       |
| To attract customers     | 1.001        | 3.456 | 1.043    | 3.371 | 0.176         |
| To engage customers      | 0.775        | 1.751 | 0.966    | 1.603 | 0.211         |
| To retain customers      | 0.832        | 4.351 | 0.861    | 4.102 | <b>0.001*</b> |
| To learn about customers | 0.754        | 2.312 | 0.891    | 2.223 | 0.101         |
| To relate back           | 0.998        | 4.121 | 1.002    | 3.891 | <b>0.015*</b> |

Confidence interval 95%  $\alpha=0.05$ ,

Table 5.13 shows that there are significant statistical differences in the activities performed within social media marketing between accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe based on *retaining of customers* ( $p=0.001$ ) and *relating back* ( $p=0.015$ ). South African accommodation establishments perform more activities

on the phase *retaining customers* (4.351) and *relating back to customers* (4.121) than Zimbabwean accommodation establishments. Regarding other factors such as attracting customers, learning about customers and engaging with customers, no statistical differences were founded. The next sub-section explains T-test results obtained on the effectiveness of social networks.

**Table 5.14: T-test results on effectiveness**

| Variables               | South Africa |       | Zimbabwe |       | SIG (2-Sided)  |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------|----------|-------|----------------|
|                         | Std. Dev     | Mean  | Std. Dev | Mean  | <i>P value</i> |
| Financial benefits      | 0.891        | 4.002 | 1.080    | 3.626 | <b>0.001*</b>  |
| Market related benefits | 0.716        | 3.866 | 0.881    | 3.645 | <b>0.021*</b>  |
| Other benefits          | 1.274        | 3.192 | 1.390    | 3.003 | 0.103          |

Confidence interval 95%  $\alpha=0.05$

Empirical results in Table 5.14 show that in terms of the effectiveness of social networks in marketing accommodation establishments a statistical difference exists between the two countries' experiences after using social networks based on two factors namely *financial benefits* ( $p=0.001$ ) and *market related benefits* ( $p=0.021$ ). South African establishments seem to realise more *financial benefits* (4.002) followed by *market related benefits* (3.866) than Zimbabwean establishments. The results show that South African accommodation establishments are experiencing more benefits of using social media marketing than Zimbabwean establishments. The next section presents results obtained after computing effect size.

### 5.9.2.3. Effect sizes

Effect size is simply a way of quantifying the size of the difference between two groups or to put it in another way, it is the magnitude of the difference between two groups (Coe, 2002:3; Sullivan & Feinn, 2012:279). It is therefore regarded as a true measure of the significance of the difference. Sullivan and Feinn (2012:279) argued that the  $p$  value alone is not enough when explaining the difference between two samples. The general guide developed by Cohen (1988) is normally used when interpreting the results of effect size; the rule is interpreted as follows:

- 0.1 = trivial effect
- 0.1-0.3 = small effect
- 0.3 -0.5 = moderate effect
- >0.5 = large effect

Size effect was used to further identify any significant differences between the two countries. The purpose of effect size is to establish differences which cannot be revealed by T-test exist. Table 5.15 shows effect size results for usage of social networks and effectiveness of social networks.

**Table 5.15: Effect sizes of usage and effectiveness of social networks**

| Variable                     | South Africa |         | Zimbabwe |         | P            | Effect sizes |
|------------------------------|--------------|---------|----------|---------|--------------|--------------|
|                              | mean         | St. Dev | mean     | St. Dev |              |              |
| <i>Usage factors</i>         |              |         |          |         |              |              |
| Attract customers            | 3.456        | 1.001   | 3.371    | 1.043   | 0.176        | 0.08         |
| Engage customers             | 1.751        | 0.775   | 1.603    | 0.966   | 0.071        | 0.15         |
| Retain customers             | 4.351        | 0.832   | 4.102    | 0.861   | <b>0.001</b> | 0.41***      |
| Learn about customers        | 2.312        | 0.754   | 2.223    | 0.891   | 0.106        | 0.09         |
| Relate back                  | 4.121        | 0.998   | 3.891    | 1.002   | <b>0.015</b> | 0.23**       |
| <i>Effectiveness factors</i> |              |         |          |         |              |              |
| Financial benefits           | 4.002        | 0.891   | 3.626    | 1.080   | <b>0.001</b> | 0.33***      |
| Market related benefits      | 3.866        | 0.716   | 3.645    | 0.881   | <b>0.021</b> | 0.25**       |
| Other benefits               | 3.192        | 1.274   | 3.003    | 1.390   | 0.103        | 0.14         |

*Statistically significant difference:  $p \leq 0.05$  (Sullivan & Feinn, 2012:281)*

*Effect sizes: \* $d=0.1$ : trivial effect; \*\*  $d=0.1-0.3$  small effect; \*\*\*  $d=0.3-0.5$ : moderate effect; \*\*\*\* $d>0.5$  large effect*

Empirical results in Table 5.15 show that there are statistically significant differences between South Africa and Zimbabwean establishments in terms of usage of social

networks in terms of *retaining customers* ( $p=0.001$ ; effect size=0.41) and *on relating back to customers* ( $p=0.015$ ; effect size=0.23). Based on mean values in both cases, South African establishments perform better than Zimbabwean establishments. The possible reason for this difference might be that Zimbabwe's Internet connectivity as mentioned earlier on in this study was affected by the poor economic conditions.

In terms of benefits of using social networks, there are statistically significant differences between South Africa and Zimbabwean establishments' experiences after using social networks in terms of *financial benefits* ( $p=0.001$ ; effect size=0.33) and *market related benefits* ( $p=0.021$ ; effect size=0.25). Also based on mean values in both cases, South African establishments seem to enjoy more benefits of using social networks than Zimbabwean establishment.

## **5.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results obtained for this survey. The main findings presented in this chapter are as follows:

- The majority of South African establishments who participated in this survey were graded whereas for Zimbabwe there was a significant number which were not graded.
- The majority of South African establishments who participated in the survey use social networks for marketing while a significant number of Zimbabwean establishments that participated do not use social networks for marketing.
- It was observed that most of the accommodation establishments from both countries do not spend much time on social networks.
- The majority of accommodation establishments have used social networks for a period of 1 to 3 years from both countries.
- The most used social networks for marketing by accommodation establishments are Facebook and TripAdvisor followed by Twitter.
- Apart from social networks the most used marketing mediums by accommodation establishments are brochures followed by e-mail/web marketing.
- Accommodation establishments in both countries believe that social networks are effective when rated against other marketing mediums.

- Popular platforms which accommodation establishments plan to adopt are YouTube and blogs.
- The major benefits of using social networks highlighted by most accommodation establishments from both countries are: an increase in business exposure, improved understanding of the market place, the ability to reach a large market without geographic boundaries and the provision of an easy way of engaging with customers.
- The challenges faced by accommodation in implementing social media marketing are time constraints, lack of knowledge on how to utilise social networks for marketing and lack of commitment to sustain social media use.
- Accommodation establishments in both countries are not extensively utilising social networks for marketing.
- Social networks are an effective tool for marketing accommodation establishments in both countries.
- South African accommodation establishments perform better in social media marketing than Zimbabwean establishments.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the usage of social networks by South African accommodation establishments and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments as well as the effectiveness of social networks in these two countries' accommodation sector.

The next chapter will conclude the study by giving recommendations, highlighting limitations of this study, providing areas for further research and noting the academic and practical contributions made by this study.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of social networks as marketing tools in the South African and Zimbabwean accommodation sector. Objectives and sub-objectives were set out in Chapter 1 and were achieved in subsequent chapters.

The first objective of the study was to conduct a literature analysis on the strengths and weaknesses of different marketing mediums and to look at how these mediums compare to online social networks. This objective was achieved in Chapter 2. From the literature review it was discovered that **social networks** have gained momentum in the last few years in Africa and are now dominating other marketing mediums. Recently, social networks have been widely embraced by businesses in the hospitality industry for marketing purposes. The main strengths of social networks lie in their interactive nature, cost advantage, repeat exposure, and ability to promote word of mouth. The use of social networks can also increase web-trafficking.

The second objective was to investigate the role of different marketing mediums in the decision-making process in the broader hospitality industry by means of a literature analysis. This was achieved in Chapter 3 of the study. The findings from the literature analysis revealed that social networks play a major role in the tourist decision-making process. Social networks have the ability to influence each stage of the decision making process as they provide an excellent platform for electronic word of mouth. From the review of literature it was also concluded that although other communication mediums such as brochures, travel agents and tour operators are still relevant in the hospitality industry and are widely used as sources of information by tourists, social networks are taking the lead.

The third objective of the study was to compare the usage and effectiveness of social networks in the two developing nations by means of an empirical survey. This was achieved in Chapter 5 while methodological considerations for the thesis were explored in Chapter 4. The challenges faced by accommodation establishments from both countries include lack of commitment to sustain social media marketing efforts, time constraints and lack of knowledge on how to use social networks for marketing. The

other challenge which was also highlighted by Zimbabwean accommodation establishments is the issue of electricity problems or power cuts which affect internet connectivity. From the results of Chi-Square tests it was concluded that social networks are effective in the marketing of accommodation establishments. It was also concluded that accommodation establishments from the two countries do not use social networks extensively for marketing purposes (refer to section 6.3.2 of this chapter). The results obtained furthermore revealed that South African establishments use social networks more than Zimbabwean establishments. Results from effect sizes calculation showed that there is a statistical difference in the usage of social networks in the two countries based on retaining customers and relating back to customers.

The last objective of this study was to draw conclusions from the study as well as to make recommendations based on the results of the study. This chapter will conclude the findings of the research and make use of the research results and findings obtained from the empirical analyses to make recommendations for accommodation establishments in the two developing countries i.e. South African and Zimbabwe to effectively use social media for marketing purposes.

## **6.2 Study contributions**

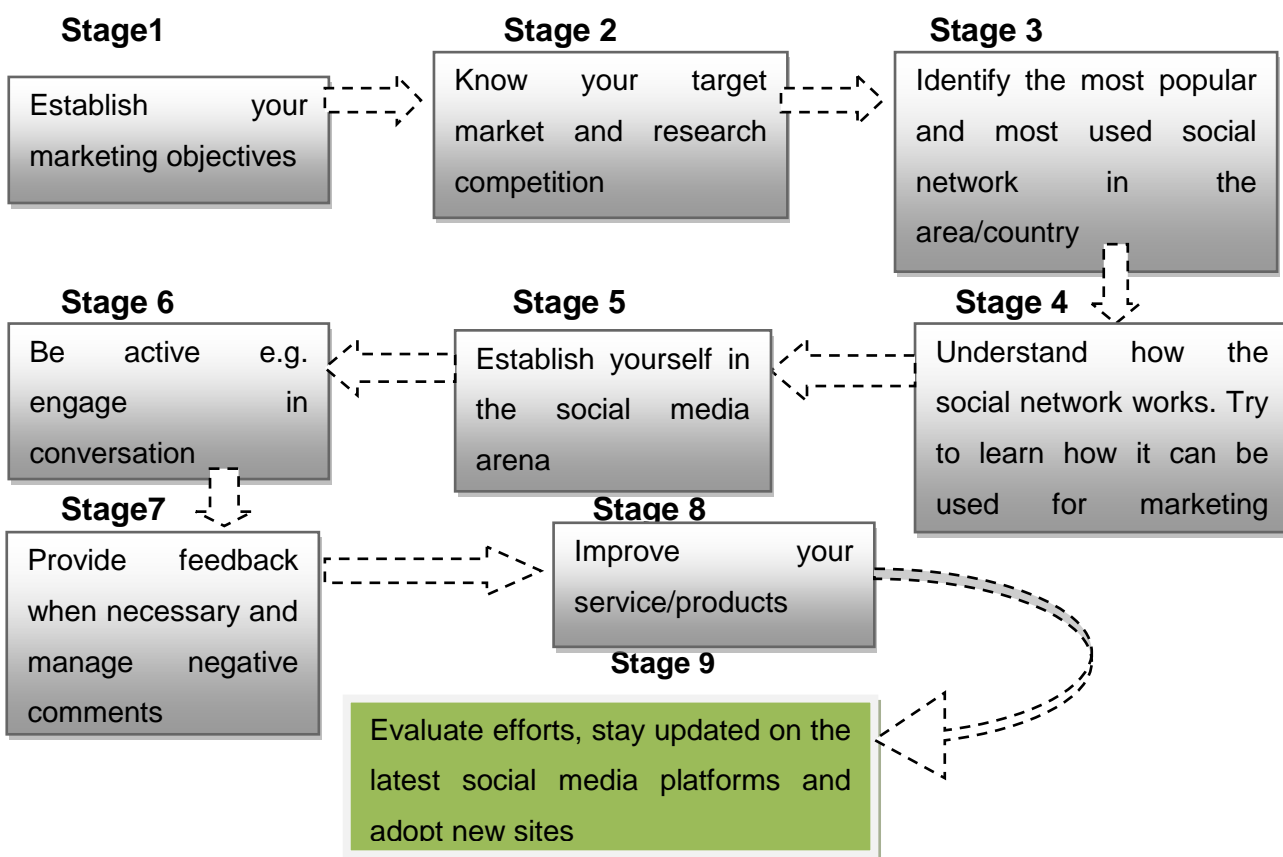
The contribution of this research is twofold. Firstly, the research contributed theoretically by providing baseline data on the effectiveness of social media marketing among accommodation establishments in Sub-Saharan Africa and by proposing a framework which can be followed in social media marketing. Secondly, the research also offers practical contributions to hospitality marketers. The two areas of contributions are explained in the following sub-sections.

### **6.2.1 Theoretical/Literature contribution**

Firstly, the study at hand provides empirical evidence on the usage and effectiveness of social networks in the marketing of accommodation establishments in Sub-Saharan Africa - an area which has to date received little attention in prior hospitality research. This study therefore addresses this gap in literature by providing evidence from the perspective of a developing country. In considering the two countries in the Sub-Saharan region, the findings of this study demonstrate that the usage of social networks

for marketing in the two countries is different. The study also finds that the contribution of social networks in the marketing of accommodation establishments differs from one country to another regardless of the location of the country. These results can be used as a future reference by other researchers in the field of social media marketing, especially in the African continent.

Secondly, this research made a contribution by proposing a social media marketing framework. This was done through a review of literature. Based on the results of the study, a nine staged framework is suggested (see Figure 6.1) which businesses in the hospitality sector, as well as other businesses with a similar structure, can follow for the successful implementation of social media marketing.



**Figure 6.1: Social media marketing framework**

**Source: Researcher's own compilation adapted from existing literature**

The proposed framework in Figure 6.1 contributes to the body of literature as it can be used for future reference in the field of social media marketing. The framework provides some necessary steps that can be followed when implementing social media marketing.

It clearly shows that the first priority for a business in the hospitality sector is to know their marketing objectives before embarking on social media marketing. Knowing the objectives will guide them throughout the process of implementing social media marketing. The framework also emphasises understanding your target market in order for the establishment to tailor made services according to the needs of the market. The application of this framework is discussed in detail in Section 6.4 of this chapter.

Thirdly, this study contributes to the understanding of the factors that influence tourists' decision-making process and especially how social networks can be utilised to influence the process. This study modified the factors provided by Fratu (2011) by adding technological factors such as social networks (refer to Figure 3.2) in Chapter 3. This can be used by future studies to establish factors which can influence tourist decision making in this social media era. The advent of social networks has changed the tourists' online behaviour, thus including online sites such as social networks as another factor which influence travel decision making is essential as it helps in revealing the most influential factors in the tourist decision-making process.

### **6.2.2 Practical contribution**

The framework provided in this research can assist hospitality marketers in crafting effective social media marketing strategies. The framework suggests that for hospitality marketers to perform well in social media marketing they must know their target customers and learn about their online behaviour. It is necessary for hospitality marketers to know the most used social networks in their area to be able to reach out to the maximum number of customers. It is also essential for hospitality marketers to study how the social networks function in order to use them effectively and actively in marketing. It is also suggested in this framework that hospitality marketers must provide feedback, manage negative comments, and keep up to date with current trends in social media marketing. The recommendations section (6.4) of this chapter will address most of the practical contribution of this research.

## 6.3 Conclusion

Conclusions will be discussed with regards to the literature reviews and empirical results as reported in Chapters 2 and 3.

### 6.3.1 Conclusions with regard to literature review

This section discusses the conclusions drawn from the two literature review chapters.

#### 6.3.1.1 Conclusions with regard to the literature review on analysis of social networks as a marketing tool (Chapter 2).

- The term marketing has been defined in various ways by different authors but all definitions revolve around the aspect of identifying and satisfying consumers' needs profitably (c.f.2.2).
- Marketing techniques can be grouped into four distinct categories: direct marketing, indirect marketing, above-the-line, and below-the-line marketing (c.f.2.2.1).
- **Print media**, especially brochures, are still being utilised for marketing across the tourism industry. The strength of brochures is that they package all marketing elements in one booklet, although they are criticised for being a static, one-way communication tool (c.f.2.3.4).
- **Display media** (billboards and transit advertising) is extensively used in tourism industry and is geographically flexible. The weakness of display media is its limited exposure time and the fact that advertisements fight for attention with other background features (c.f.2.3.4).
- **Broadcast media** are not commonly used by hospitality businesses such as accommodation establishments since the message is short-lived and it does not allow for two-way communication (c.f.2.3.4).
- **E-mail marketing, web marketing and search engines** are considered as the most effective marketing tools as there are relatively inexpensive (c.f.2.3.4).
- Marketing communications is defined as a management process through which a business engages or communicates with its customers (c.f.2.2.2). Businesses engage or communicate with their customers through a variety of means, which are broadly referred to as the marketing communication mix (c.f. 2.2.2).
- Traditionally marketing communication mix comprises five elements: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling and public relations. With the

introduction of social networks, the marketing communication mix now comprises six elements with social media marketing being the sixth element (c.f.2.2.2).

- Social media may be interpreted in different ways depending on what approach one takes, but generally social media relies on internet and web-based tools (c.f.2.3) and is generally defined as a group of internet based applications that exist on the Web 2.0 platform which allow internet users around the world to interact, communicate, and share ideas, thoughts, experiences and information about products, brands and services (c.f.2.3).
- The social media wave started as early as 1980 before the advent of the internet (c.f.2.3).
- The introduction of social networks can be traced back to 1997 when the first social network, SixDegrees.com was launched (c.f.2.3.5). TripAdvisor joined the social network in 2000, LinkedIn was started in 2003, Facebook was created in 2004, YouTube was launched in 2005, and Twitter joined the social networking trend in 2006 (c.f.2.3.5).
- A recent social network which is commonly used in Africa is WeChat, which was introduced in 2011 (c.f.2.3.5).
- Facebook is the most used social network in the world (c.f. Map. 2.1).
- With regard to social media penetration in Africa, Tunisia has the highest social media penetration rate (c.f. 2.5, Table 2.3) followed by Morocco, South Africa and then Algeria (c.f. 2.5).
- Social media marketing is defined as the process that empowers individuals to promote their websites, products or services through online social channels and enables them to tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional channels (c.f.2.3.1).
- Social media is classified into collaborations, project blogs, content communities, virtual game worlds, virtual social worlds and social networks (c.f.2.3.1). Social networks possess some unique properties: immediacy, connectedness, and openness (c.f.2.3.1) which allows them to fit in with and influence each element of the marketing communication mix (c.f.2.2.2). The main advantages of social media marketing over other marketing communication media are that they enable interactive communication with customers, they involve the customer in product development, they allow consumers to participate and propagate their views, they

allow for repeat exposure, they generate website traffic, and they are less expensive as compared to other marketing mediums (c.f.2.3.2).

- Disadvantages of social media include unfair negativity, inaccurate information and undue criticism (c.f.2.3.2).
- Six tips to be followed when applying social media marketing include: knowing your marketing objectives, presenting a complete picture, being active, providing value, building credibility, and staying informed (c.f.2.3.3).
- Social media theories can be divided into three categories: micro-theories dealing with the study of the dynamics of the contribution of online information and communication of individual social actors (c.f.2.4.1); macro-theories looking at the structure and dynamics of social actors and social media content through global or abstract views (c.f.2.4.2); and pseudo-theories developed by non-academics in a bid to explain how social media can be leveraged for marketing purposes (c.f.2.4.3).
- From micro-theories to pseudo-theories developed by non-academics it can be deduced that developing an intimate relationship with customers requires consistent effort (c.f. 2.4.4).
- Marketers need to identify and understand their target audiences in order to stay in contact with their customers (c.f. 2.4.4).
- Monitoring changes in behaviour of customers influenced by social media is another key issue to be considered by marketers (c.f.2.4.4).
- Several studies have been conducted on social media usage within the tourism industry (c.f.2.5.1).
- Most hospitality business, especially chain and boutique hotels in developed nations, have embraced the idea of social media marketing (c.f.2.5.2).
- Facebook and TripAdvisor were found to be the dominant social networks in hospitality sector (c.f.2.5.2).
- Limited knowledge on how to utilise social networks, and lack of commitment amongst hotels were some of the factors limiting the usage of social media marketing by hotels (c.f.2.5.2).
- Although social media marketing is a new phenomenon in the marketing arena, hospitality businesses have started to adopt it for marketing purposes. The adoption and usage varies from one country to another (c.f.2.52).

### **6.3.1.2 Conclusions with regard to social networks and its influence on the travel decision making process**

- Decision making models can be traced back to 1976 when Wahab, Campon and Rothfield (1976) proposed a model based on the grand theories (the form of highly abstract theorising in which the formal organisation and arrangement of concepts takes priority over understanding of the social world). To date the most used model to explain tourist behaviour online is that proposed by Page and Connell (2009) (c.f.3.2).
- According to Page and Connell (2009), tourists follow a five stage model when deciding on which trip to take (refer to Figure 3.1, c.f.3.2).
- Travel agencies and tour operators used to play a crucial role in each stage of decision making but social media is the now the dominant channel used by tourists to search for information (c.f.3.2).
- Tourism consumer behaviour is defined as the set of acts, attitudes, and decisions regarding choosing, buying and consuming of tourism products/services. It also includes post-consuming reactions (c.f.3.3).
- Tourism consumer behaviour is affected by psychological factors, social factors natural factors and technological factors (c.f.3.3).
- Characteristics of the new tourist include more experience, changed values, changed life styles, and changed demographics, greater flexibility and more independence (c.f.3.3.1).
- The new tourist now relies on the internet and its related technologies to make travel purchase decisions and to purchase holiday packages (c.f.3.3.1).
- Social networks influence travel decision making, planning and information search (c.f.3.4).
- Social networks influence several components of tourist behaviour such as awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour and post-purchase communication and evaluation (c.f.3.4).
- Tourists rely most on information from other travellers as a way of reducing the uncertainty associated with holiday travel purchases (c.f.3.4).
- Today, with the introduction of social media platforms, digitally empowered tourists are able to access a wider range of online networks to search and select a holiday destination, rendering traditional channels obsolete (c.f.3.4).

- E-WOM is a social network consisting of a set of people who engage in WOM (Word Of Mouth) plus the relationship between them (c.f.3.4). This form of word of mouth has become an indispensable marketing tool for promoting tourism services (c.f.3.4).
- Previous studies have presented inconsistent findings on the impact of social media on tourist behaviour especially on travel decision making (c.f.3.5).
- Some findings dispute the fact that tourists rely most on social networks when making travel decisions, while others found that social networks are the most used channels when making travel decisions (c.f.3.5).
- Although most previous studies conclude that social networks are the most used sources of information when making travel related decisions, other sources of information such as print media, travel agents and tour operators are still relevant to the tourism industry (c.f.3.5).
- Implications for hospitality marketers include the following (c.f.3.6):
  - Social networks have been recognised as an important information source for tourists (c.f.3.6)
  - It is critical for hospitality marketers or business owners to understand tourists' use and adoption of online social networks for travel purposes since they influence tourists' decision making with regard to every element of a trip (c.f.3.6).
  - Hospitality marketers need to be present on social networks for them to be in touch with tourism consumers as well as to be able to see and hear negative feedback concerning the offered services (c.f.3.6).
  - Hospitality marketers should no longer ignore the role of social networks in distributing travel-related information or they risk becoming irrelevant (c.f.3.6).

### **6.3.2 Conclusions with regard to empirical results**

An overview of the results obtained in this survey is presented in Table 6.1. It covers all the results obtained from the demographic information of the respondents to the effectiveness of social networks used by the accommodation establishments.

**Table 6.1: Overview of the results**

|  | <b>South Africa<br/>(N=129)</b>        | <b>Zimbabwe<br/>(N=134)</b>              |
|--|--|--|
| Response rate                            | 14%                                    | 50%                                      |
| <i>Demographic information</i>           |  |  |
| • Grading                                | 41% 4star                              | 54% ungraded                             |
| • Accommodation type                     | 32% guesthouse                         | 47 hotels                                |
| • Accommodation size                     | 81% 30rms or less                      | 56% 30rms or less                        |
| • Popular sites                          | 70% Facebook,<br>TripAdvisor, LinkedIn | 100% Facebook, 60%<br>TripAdvisor        |
| • Usage of social networks               | 86% Yes                                | 53% Yes                                  |
| <i>Social networks usage information</i> |  |  |
| • Extent of use                          | 52% Facebook                           | 70% TripAdvisor                          |
| Years using social networks              | 46% 1 to 3 years                       | 53% 1 to 3 years                         |
| Weekly time spend on social networks     | 63% 1 to 5hrs                          | 66% 1 to 5hrs                            |
| <i>Performance on social media</i>       |  |  |
| To attract                               | 89% present profile page               | 93% show website on profile page         |
| To engage                                | 93% answer guest queries               | 90% answer guest queries                 |
| To retain customers                      | 78% have security feature              | 60% have security features               |
| To learn about customers                 | 59% capture guest information          | 49% capture guest information            |
| To relate back                           | 86% provide personalised responses     | 76% update customer about content change |
| <i>Usage of other marketing mediums</i>  |  |  |
| • Most used                              | 61% e-mail/<br>Web-marketing           | 76% brochure                             |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><i>Effectiveness of Social Networks</i></p> <p><i>Social networks versus other marketing mediums</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effective</li> </ul> | <p>78% increase in business exposure</p> <p>56% against print media</p> | <p>86% effective way to communicate with own markets,</p> <p>41% against print media</p>             |
| <p>Contribution of social networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than 10%</li> </ul>  | <p>46% business exposure</p>  | <p>27% improved understand of the market</p>   |
| <p>Challenges of using social networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major challenge</li> </ul>  | <p>30% Lack of commitment to sustain social media efforts</p>           | <p>42% lack of commitment to sustain social media efforts and time constraints</p>                   |
| <p><i>Future plans</i></p> <p>Social networks to adopt</p> <p>General plan on social media marketing</p>  | <p>You Tube, Blogs and Twitter</p> <p>Adopt new social networks</p>     | <p>YouTube</p> <p>Acquire knowledge on how to effectively utilise social networks for marketing.</p> |

Results from Table 6.1 show that in terms of star grading, more establishments from the South African side were 4 star graded, whereas in Zimbabwe the majority were ungraded. The majority of Zimbabwean accommodation facilities were hotels while in South Africa the majority were guesthouses. The majority of establishments from both countries were small establishments with 30 rooms or less. It can also be noted from Table 6.1 that the most well-known social networks in South Africa are Facebook, TripAdvisor and LinkedIn while in Zimbabwe Facebook and TripAdvisor are the most popular sites amongst accommodation establishments. More accommodation facilities in South Africa (86%) utilise social networks for marketing than in Zimbabwe (53%).

The most used social network for marketing by South African accommodation establishments is Facebook while in Zimbabwe most establishments utilise TripAdvisor for marketing. Most accommodation facilities from both countries have the same amount of experience in using social networks (1 to 3 years). Similarly, accommodation establishments from both countries do not spend much time on social networks (1 to 5 hours per week). Differences also exist in the activities performed on social networks. In order to attract customers most South African establishments present a profile page, while Zimbabwean establishments provide links to websites. To engage customers most establishments from both countries answer guest queries. To retain customers, most establishments from both countries have security features. To learn about customers most South African establishments capture guest information while Zimbabwean establishments perform poorly in this regard. With regard to relating back the majority of South African establishments provide personalised responses whereas Zimbabwean establishments update customers about content change.

While South African establishments make wide use of e-mail or web-marketing, most Zimbabwean establishments still use brochures. Most South African accommodation establishments indicated that they experienced an increase in business exposure after using social networks, whereas most Zimbabwean establishments experienced social networks as an effective way to communicate with their own markets. Establishments from both countries agreed that social networks are effective when compared with print media. South African establishments indicated that the use of social networks contributes to increased business exposure while Zimbabwean establishments indicated that it contributed more in improving understanding of the market. The major challenges which were highlighted by establishments from both countries are a lack of commitment to sustain social media marketing efforts followed by time constraints. Most establishments from South Africa indicated that they plan to adopt YouTube, blogs and Twitter, while YouTube was the social network which most accommodation establishments from Zimbabwe planned to adopt.

Empirical results showed that lack of commitment to sustain social media marketing efforts, time constraints and lack of knowledge on how to effectively utilise social networks for marketing were the dominant challenges amongst accommodation

establishments from both countries. Internet security issues and power cuts were minor challenges raised by other accommodation establishments.

After all the descriptive statistics were performed, the data was then pooled for factor analysis to identify factors to explain usage and effectiveness of social networks in both countries. From the results obtained, five factors on the usage of social media marketing activities were identified, which were *to attract customers* (mean value=4.61) *to engage customers* (mean value=3.87), *retain customers* (mean value=2.99), *to learn about customers* (mean value=2.25) and *to relate back* (mean value=3.01). From the factor analysis results it was noted that *to attract* was the most important factor with the highest mean value and the least important factor was *to learn about customers* with the least mean value.

Three factors were identified on the effectiveness of social networks, which were *financial benefits* (mean value=2.56), *market related benefits* (mean value=3.01) and *other factors* (mean value=3.89). The most important factor was *other factors* with a highest mean value and *financial benefits* was the least one the lowest mean value.

In order to achieve the main goal of the study two hypotheses were formulated on the extent of usage and effectiveness of social networks for marketing. These hypotheses were;

- $H_0$ : *Accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe do not extensively use social networks for marketing.*  
 $H_1$ : *Accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe extensively use social networks for marketing.*
- $H_0$ : *Social networks are not effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments.*  
 $H_2$ : *Social networks are effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments.*

The main goal of the study was achieved through testing the two hypotheses above. Empirical results of this study show that accommodation establishments in the two countries are not extensively utilising social networks for marketing their services. This is shown by four out of five factors that were employed to test usage of social networks

for marketing retaining a  $p$  value which is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ) through chi-square tests. Only one factor retained a  $p$ -value which is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ) implying that the null hypothesis which states that *Accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe do not extensively use social networks for marketing* was not rejected.

The chi-square results showed that social networks are effective tools for marketing accommodation facilities. After computing chi-squares on the effectiveness of social networks, the null hypothesis which states that *Social networks are not effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments* was rejected since two out of the three factors which were used to test effectiveness retained a  $p$  value which is which is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ) and only one factor retained a  $p$  value which is less than 0.05. Thus it was concluded that social networks are effective in the marketing of South African and Zimbabwean accommodation establishments.

Another empirical objective of this study was *to compare the usage of social networks in the two developing nations by means of an empirical survey*. The empirical results revealed that there is a difference in the way in which the two countries use social networks. Results from descriptive statistics shows that South Africa uses more social networks for marketing than Zimbabwe and it performs more social media marketing activities than Zimbabwe. When data was subjected to T-test analysis, it was also discovered that there are statistically significant differences in the activities performed in social media marketing between accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe based on *retaining of customers* ( $p = 0.001$ ) and *relating back* ( $p = 0.015$ ). When interpreting the mean value, South Africa performs more activities in the phase of **retaining customers** (mean value=4.351) and **when relating back to customers** (mean value=4.121) than Zimbabwe. This was also further supported by the results obtained after calculating the effect sizes; there was a moderate effect on the difference between two countries' usage of social networks in retaining customers shown by an effect size of 0.41. This implies that there is significant difference in the usage of social networks for retaining customers by the two countries. A small difference was noticed in relating back to customers as this is shown by an effect size of 0.23.

## **6.4 Recommendations from the study**

The results of this study revealed that accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe are not extensively utilising social networks for marketing. Those establishments that do employ them, however, indicated that social networks are effective in the marketing of accommodation establishments and that there is a statistical difference in the usage and effectiveness of social networks in the two countries (South Africa versus Zimbabwe). From these discoveries, recommendations are given to accommodation establishments, hospitality marketers as well as policy makers.

### **6.4.1 Recommendations to accommodation establishments and hospitality marketers**

From the results obtained from this study, together with the review of literature, the following recommendations are suggested for hospitality marketers, accommodation establishments, the government and policy makers. The framework proposed in Figure 6.1 will guide these recommendations and recommendations are only made with regard to the main social media networks as referred to in the questionnaire. How hospitality marketers can follow the framework order to aid them to implement social networks effectively.

#### **6.4.1.1 Stage 1: Establish your marketing objectives**

It has been observed from a review of the literature that establishing marketing objectives will help businesses to select an appropriate social network to adopt. Social networks can aid in achieving any marketing objectives if establishments have the proper knowledge on how to implement them. Thus, establishments should keep social networks in mind when marketing objectives are formulated.

#### **6.4.1.2 Stage 2: Know your target market and competition**

Empirical results of this study showed that although most of the accommodation establishments in South Africa and Zimbabwe have adopted social networks for

marketing, there are not extensively utilising them. The results show that most establishments perform well when attracting customers but perform less well in learning and relating back to customers and very few establishments take the time to perform market research on social media. Thus, establishments are recommended to take the time to learn about their customers' online behaviour and to develop strategies of customer retention through social networks in order to achieve their marketing objectives. This recommendation is supported by Di Pietro and Di Virgilio (2012) as well as Vinerean *et al.* (2013) who agree that hospitality marketers need to stay in touch with their consumers online in order to be aware of customers' views on the services they provide. Here are some of the ways in which hospitality marketers can perform market research using social networks:

- Compile a list of 3-5 main competitors and examine how they are using social media. Follow these competitors on Twitter or Facebook, find out which social networks they use, and analyse their content strategy.
- Post questions on Facebook about how customers can view the services offered, check which of them have the most responses and try to answer all of the questions asked.
- Make use of the Facebook survey facility in order to ask guests about their expectations of their establishments, as well as their suggestions for improving services.
- Conduct hashtag searches on Twitter which relates to brands and services and set up instant notifications when customers or competitors use these key terms.

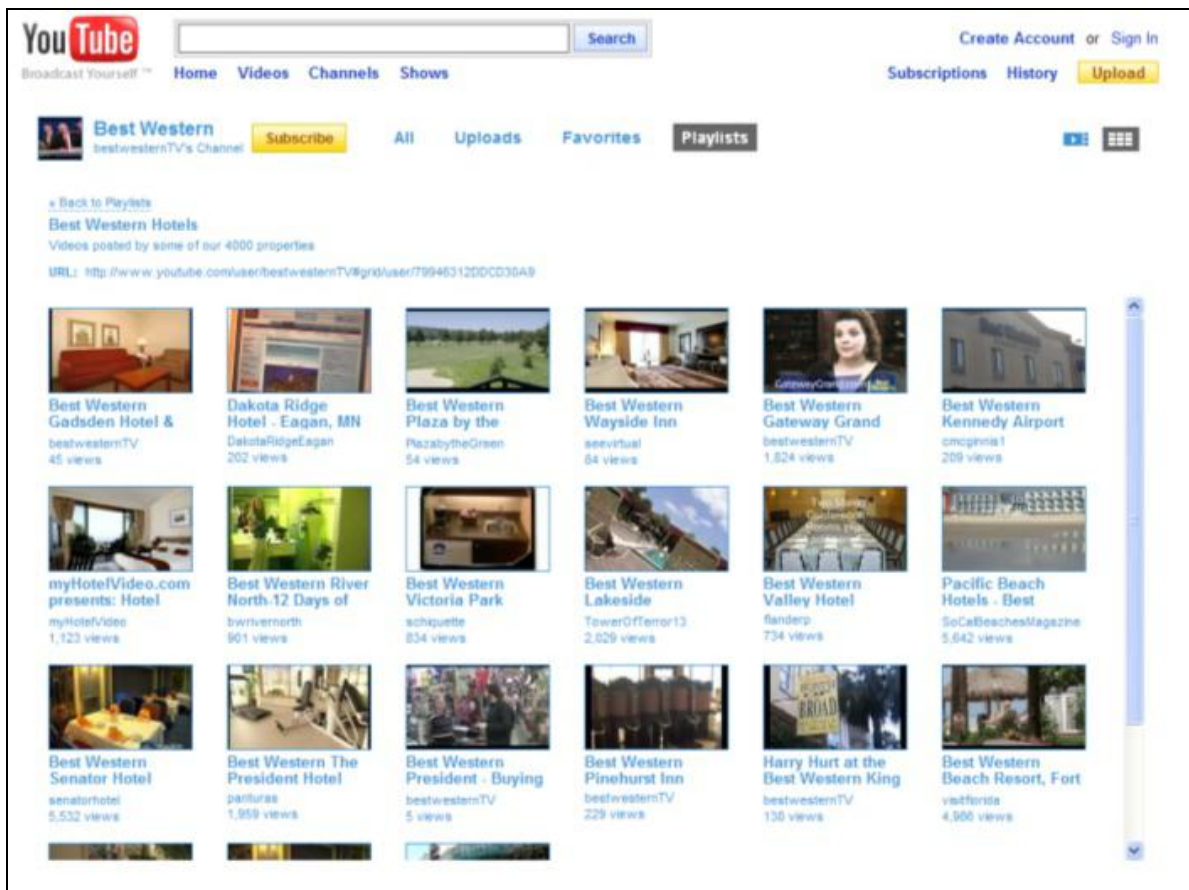
#### **6.4.1.3 Stage 3: Identify the most used social networks in your area**

An establishment can reach out to customers effectively by familiarising itself with the most used social network in the field and by studying the social networks used by the majority of its target customers. Although Twitter has gained momentum in Africa during recent years, the results of this study show that it is being used by very few accommodation establishments, especially from Zimbabwe. It is recommended that establishments should make use of this platform and should include their Twitter details on the company website and all marketing literature, as well as a link below employees' email signatures. Omni Hotels group, based in Texas, provide a good example of the use of Twitter for marketing purposes. Omni Hotels used Twitter to enhance customer service and customer satisfaction, increase brand awareness and establish rapport with

potential customers. Their success in social spaces, especially Twitter, comes from managing the account at the corporate level and then disseminating information to the various properties. Omni Hotels use their Twitter account to advertise specials and services daily, making information immediately available to their followers.

#### **6.4.1.4 Stage 4: Learn about how social networks work**

The results of this study revealed that one of the challenges that accommodation establishments face when using social networks is a lack of technical knowledge on how to effectively utilise them for marketing. This is also similar to the findings of other previous studies (see Braun, 2004; Au, 2010) which concluded that a lack of technical know-how with regard to using social media marketing is a major challenge of hospitality businesses. The main difficulty facing all hotels is how to effectively engage customers to their benefit (Chan & Gullet, 2011:366; Walsh, 2010:5). It is thus recommended that accommodation facilities need to devote their time to training staff on how to use social networks for marketing purposes. The responsibility for social media marketing related workshops or conferences for employees should be the responsibility of the management. Alternatively establishments can liaise with tertiary institutions to have them conduct the workshops or design short courses on social media marketing. Learning can also be done by imitating what other establishments do online. Example 1 shows how You Tube is being used by Best Western hotels. The picture below shows how a YouTube account can be used to post videos of the types of establishments that Best Western hotel group offers.



**Example 1: Use of YouTube to link to all establishments**

**Source: Adapted from Lanz *et al.* (2010)**

#### **6.4.1.5 Stage 5: Establish yourself in the social media arena**

The results of this study show that although accommodation establishments are aware of the benefits of social media marketing and are employing social networks for marketing, they do not spend sufficient time on social media marketing. It was discovered that most accommodation establishments from both countries spend only 1 to 5 hours a week on social networks, which is not enough time to attend to customers' queries. Social media marketing, unlike projects which follow a long term implementation strategy, requires daily attention to see results, since customers are online 24/7. One way of dealing effectively with this type of work is to appoint staffs who are responsible for social media marketing and managing the company's social media.

#### **6.4.1.6: Stage 6: Be active on social networks**

It is essential to continuously post what the company is offering on its profile page, engage in conversation related to your company and to provide quality content to

capture the attention of your audiences (Riesse, 2010:6). Provide a discussion wall for customers to interact, regularly follow the discussion and pick important suggestions from customers. Responding to questions and encouraging discussions on fan pages is another way of being active on social media platforms as well as being an effective way to generate word-of-mouth marketing. Following other establishments on social networks and joining their discussions helps to engage with a number of followers as well as tapping into what others are doing to attract customers.

#### **6.4.1.7 Stage 7: Provide feedback and manage negative comments**

A review of literature shows that if negative comments are not properly managed, they can damage the establishment's reputation, thus it is recommended that hospitality marketers manage negative comments as quickly as possible. Negative comments can serve as an indication of where services need alteration or improvement (Colliander, 2012:52). Setting up a social media account can be a simple and linear task, but merely securing an account cannot achieve a company's marketing goals, nor can it generate revenue for a business. Consistent input, engagement and adjustment is necessary to ensure success with social media marketing (Rautio, 2012:119).

To cite the example of the Omni Hotel group mentioned earlier, a dedicated social media team consistently posts tweets and responds to customer queries to ensure a positive experience for its Twitter followers. Rather than leaving its online reputation in the hands of its customers, Omni takes steps to immediately address any complaints or negative comments to avoid the spread of negative sentiment. Negative comments are used as opportunities to turn customers into brand ambassadors. For example a guest who was unhappy with the internet connection in one of Omni's establishments complained via Twitter and, in response, the Omni IT group quickly addressed the problem by improving the hotel's internet speed, leaving the guest suitably impressed and eager to share Omni's example when giving presentations on effective social media strategies (Mendez, 2010).

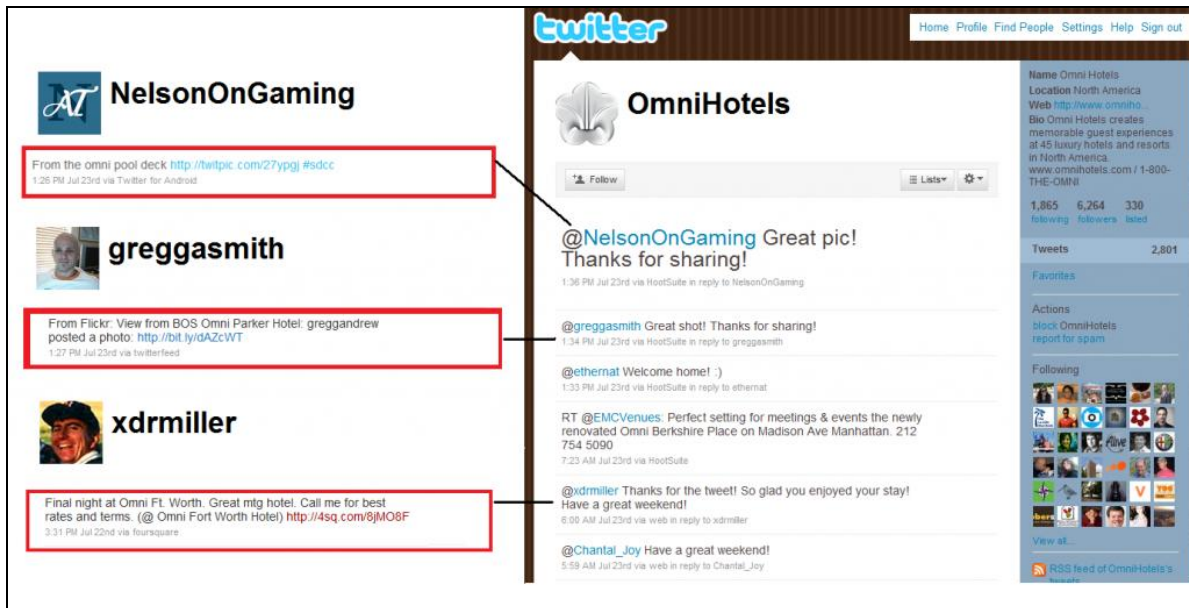
#### **6.4.1.8 Stage: Improve your service/products**

Offering quality service leads to customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers can act as ambassadors for a brand. Thus hospitality establishments must ensure that they offer quality services in order to attract customers. Satisfied customers post positive comments on social networks thereby enhancing the establishment's online reputation. This can also lead to an increase in fans which will result in increase in patronage and eventually sales revenue. Offering quality services requires extra effort from the management team as well as other employees. It is recommended that accommodation establishments train its staff in customer service practices through workshops or seminars, as well as offering them incentives for finding innovative ways to satisfy customers. Upgrading of services can also help to meet the requirements of guests. Establishments are also encouraged to take seriously customers' comments on social networks to improve or adapt their services according to the needs of customers, and subsequently to use those social networks to report back or market the improved services.

#### **6.4.1.9 Stage 9: Evaluate efforts, stay updated on the latest social media platforms and adopt new sites**

Keeping current with the newest campaign trends, latest social media platforms and technology in general has become a central part of a marketing professional's daily work. When hospitality marketers keep up to date with new trends in social networks they keep in step with their customers. It is the obligation of management to encourage employees to attend workshops on social media marketing, especially those in the marketing department. The study revealed that there are a number of benefits associated with using social networks for marketing which include: access to a new market segment, increased traffic to the website, increased understanding of the market place as well as an increase in sales revenue. Despite these clear benefits, the study showed that most accommodation establishments rely only on Facebook and TripAdvisor while neglecting video sharing networks such as YouTube. This study recommends that accommodation establishments embrace not only YouTube, but newer sites such as Twitter, MySpace, Pinterest and Google+ for marketing, in addition to using Facebook and TripAdvisor. Example 2 shows how Omni Hotels in Texas used

Twitter to market their services and shows how hotels can use other sites to link to YouTube.



**Example 2: How Omni Hotel use twitter for marketing**

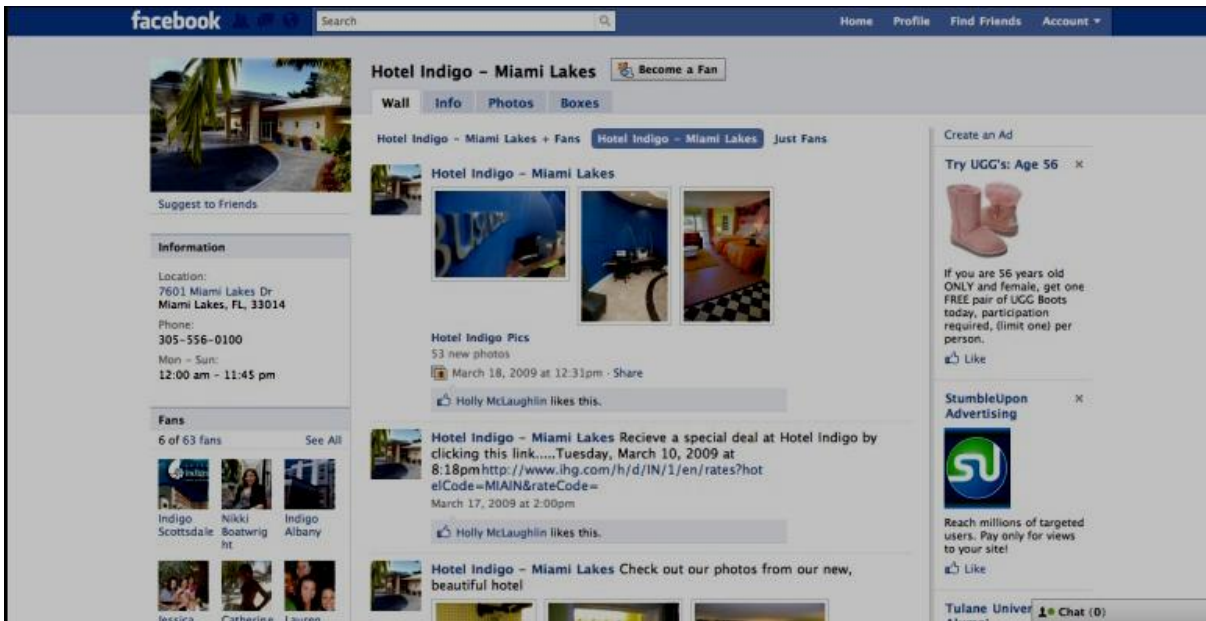
**Source: Adapted from Lanz *et al.* (2010)**

Example 2 shows the twitter activity of guests of the Omni Hotel group demonstrating how more followers might be attracted to the hotel's account.

The following recommendations are not based on the framework but on the literature analysis

**6.4.1.10 Offer some rewards or discounts to customers (special deals)**

Offering rewards or discounts on services, for example discounted charges for rooms, can help establishments to attract new customers (Lanz *et al.*, 2010). Fans spread the message to their online network of friends, thus adding numbers to the establishment's fan base. As an example, the Chicago-based Hotel Indigo offers discounts of up to 20% to followers and fans on Facebook (see Example 3).



### Example 3: Discounts on Indigo Hotel

Source: Lanz *et al.* (2010)

As can be seen from the picture, Hotel Indigo provided a link which guests follow to find special deals on at that particular time. Using this approach, accommodation establishments might see an increase in fan loyalty, brand awareness and eventually occupancy rate giving the establishment a competitive edge.

#### 6.4.1.11 Show your social responsibilities on social networks

Most people want to be associated with a brand which is socially responsible (Stelziner, 2011) and this is another way in which an establishment can market its services via social networks. Accommodation facilities are encouraged to take their social responsibility seriously and share these endeavours through social networks. Below is an example from the Protea Hotel Group in South Africa which supported breast cancer awareness through its Facebook page (see Example 4).



**Example 4: Protea Hotel supporting breast cancer awareness on its Facebook page**

**Source: <https://mbasic.facebook.com/ProteaHotels?v=timeline&timecutoff=1392281206&page>**

#### **6.4.1.12 Influence tourist decision making through social networks**

A review of literature shows that the new tourist spends most of his/her time on social networks looking for information relating to a choice of holiday destination, meaning that accommodation establishments have the opportunity to influence tourists' decisions in each stage of their decision making process through social media. It is vital that establishments make information available to tourists during their decision making process. In addition, providing quality service increases the chances of the satisfied customer sharing positive reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor. Such positive comments can improve an establishments' ranking on TripAdvisor, generating greater demand for services since the ranking is a reflection of the perceived value of the experience the establishment offers.

The Library Hotel in New York has maintained its ranking as one of the top seven hotels on TripAdvisor for the past three years. The vice president of sales, marketing and revenue at the hotel, Adele Gutman, stated, "We have managed to maintain our position on TripAdvisor ranking by hiring happy staff and training them to create a sense of pride in pleasing guests and encouraging them to look for innovative ways to delight guests" (see example 5). A satisfied customer always gives positive feedback which eventually leads to increase in brand awareness.



#### Example 5: Library hotel rating on TripAdvisor

**Note:** the stars on top symbolises the ratings the hotels has been given by guest.

**Source:** <https://twitter.com/libraryhotel>

The phase in which marketers have control over what is said about their companies has lapsed - today the digitally empowered tourist has a bigger say in the marketing of tourism products (Noti, 2013:117). Marketing through social networks is cost effective and for developing countries, this can be a very effective marketing medium if properly utilised. However, social networks should not be used as a standalone approach; rather it should be part of the promotional mix of marketing strategies since other marketing mediums like brochures remain relevant to the industry.

### 6.4.2 Recommendations to governments and policy markers

The following recommendations are made to governments and policy makers.

#### 6.4.2.1 Provision of ancillary service for ease of operation

Empirical findings of this study revealed that some accommodation establishments, in Zimbabwe particularly, are failing to maximise utilisation of social networks for marketing due to power cuts which affects internet connectivity. It is therefore recommended that the government should also strive to provide the necessary ancillary services needed for accommodation establishments to operate without these current inconveniences. The income received by these establishments also benefits the country through taxes so it is the duty of the government to see to it that the economy is stable for businesses to operate successfully.

#### **6.4.2.2 Create awareness of the need to embrace social media**

Hospitality stake holders such as the Ministry of Tourism should create awareness of the need for accommodation establishments to embrace, incorporate and integrate social networks into operations. This can be done through organising seminars and workshops which tourism and hospitality players can attend. The government can also develop a policy in which hospitality markets can be sent to training courses and workshops.

Alternatively, the government can make some recommendations to tertiary institutions to develop curricula to equip possible hospitality employees with social media skills, and ways to effectively use it for marketing from an early stage by including it in courses and degree programs.

#### **6.5 Limitations of the study**

Limitations are inherent in any academic work because a single study cannot cover all aspects and cannot cover everything perfectly (Hofstee, 2006:60). Thus, the following are the limitations encapsulated in the conduct of this study.

The study used a cross-sectional approach when collecting data and the usage might have changed during the period in which the study was conducted. The results of this study thus only reflect the usage and effectiveness of social networks at a particular time. Despite several efforts to increase the response rate, the researcher was not able to improve it, especially within South Africa, where the questionnaire link was sent through email. The decision to use an email-based questionnaire was made based on the size of the country and the corresponding difficulty in employing field workers for data collection in this instance. The data collection process took longer than anticipated (from June 2013-June 2014), resulting in the researcher analysing those questionnaires that were completed in this period. On the Zimbabwean side it was also expensive for field workers to continuously revisit establishments to solicit feedback, possibly resulting in a negative effect on the quality of the research findings.

Despite all these limitations, the results of the study are supported by previous research. The researcher is therefore suggesting that a qualitative approach be used in

future where selected accommodation facilities are included in the survey and interviews are conducted to ensure optimal results.

## **6.5 Recommendation for further research**

The following recommendations are made for future research:

- It was observed from this study that not all accommodation establishments, whether graded or not, are using social networks for marketing. It is therefore recommended that a study should be conducted to establish the factors which affect social media marketing adoption in the Sub-Saharan region and provide ways in which these issues can be resolved.
- Social networks are continuously evolving, some networks rose in popularity in Africa only after this study commenced and it was difficult to include them in the study. It is therefore recommended that a study be conducted which includes these new sites (Pinterest, Instagram and WhatsApp) to see how accommodation establishments are utilising them.
- It is also suggested that a study from the perspective of the consumer be conducted in order to establish gaps between what managers perceive as important when using social media and what guest requirements actually are in these two developing nations.
- From the researcher's experience in this study, it is suggested that a longitudinal approach be employed to examine how social media marketing is being used in the accommodation sector.

The study has managed to reveal the current status of usage of social networks in the two countries. The results revealed that although South Africa and Zimbabwe are in the same region (Sub-Saharan Africa) they are not on the same level when it comes to the use of social networks for marketing. It was also revealed that although accommodation establishments do not extensively utilise social networks for marketing, they support the notion that social networks are effective in marketing accommodation services. The study has also managed to reveal the major benefits of using social networks for marketing as well as the challenges faced by accommodation establishments in using social networks. The researcher concludes that within the hospitality field, customers

are influencing and are influenced by others through the use of online reviews. With the rate of permeation of social networks in this arena, social media marketing strategies are no longer a choice but a necessity. Having a social media marketing strategy is no longer a product/service enhancer but rather a product/service qualifier. It is thus critical for accommodation establishments to effectively use social media as a marketing tool.

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## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

### The effectiveness of Social Networking sites in marketing accommodation establishments



#### SECTION A: ESTABLISHMENT INFORMATION

1. Please indicate the country your accommodation establishment is situated in.

- South Africa  
 Zimbabwe

2a. Please indicate your type of accommodation establishment. (You can choose more than one establishment)

- Hotel  
 Lodge  
 Bed & Breakfast  
 Guest house  
 Cottage/chalets  
 Back packers' hotel

2b. What year was this establishment established?

3a. Is your establishment graded?

- Yes  
 No

3b. If YES in 3a, please indicate your accommodation establishments' type and level of grading (for example Automobile Association, 3 star grading)

4. Indicate the size of your establishment.

5. Which social networking sites are you aware of? Indicate all sites that you know.

- Facebook  
 Twitter  
 Trip advisor  
 YouTube  
 MySpace  
 Blog  
 LinkedIn  
 Other

**6a. Do you use any social networking sites (e.g. facebook, twitter, YouTube etc) for marketing or to communicate with your customers?**

- Yes
- No

**6b. If your establishment is not currently using social networking sites, please indicate why you do not currently make use of social networking sites for marketing purposes.**

**6c. Do you have any future plans of using social networking sites for marketing your establishment?**

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable, already using social networking sites

**6d. Please specify which social networking sites you plan to adopt in the future.**

- Not applicable
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Trip advisor
- YouTube
- MySpace
- Blogs
- LinkedIn
- Other

## SECTION B: USAGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

**7a) Please answer the following statements by using the appropriate scale.  
Our accommodation establishment uses the following social networking sites for marketing:**

|              | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Neutral               | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Facebook     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Twitter      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Trip advisor | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| YouTube      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| MySpace      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Blogs        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| LinkedIn     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**7b) Please indicate the extent to which the following social networking sites are currently being used for marketing by your accommodation establishment.**

|              | Most used             | Sometimes used        | Not sure              | Rarely used           | Not used at all       |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Facebook     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Twitter      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Trip advisor | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| YouTube      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| MySpace      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Blogs        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| LinkedIn     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**7c) For how long have you been using social networking sites for marketing your accommodation establishment?**

**7d) Please indicate your weekly time usage of social media marketing.**

**7e) Apart from social networking sites our establishment uses the following marketing mediums as well.**

|                      | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Neutral               | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Magazines            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Brochures            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Newspaper            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Television/radio     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Video marketing      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| E-mail/web-marketing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Telemarketing        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**7f) Please specify any other marketing mediums currently used not listed above**

**7g) Indicate the extent to which the following marketing mediums are used for marketing apart from social networking sites.**

|                      | Most used             | Sometimes used        | Not sure              | Rarely used           | Not used at all       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Magazines            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Brochures            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Newspaper            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Television/radio     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Video marketing      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| E-mail/web-marketing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Telemarketing        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**7h) Do you plan to increase or decrease the use of other marketing mediums in future (e.g. print advertisements, radio, TV etc.)?**

- Increase
- Decrease
- Stay the same

7i) The next question deals with some of the activities performed when marketing through Social Networking sites. Please indicate the activities that you perform when marketing using social networking sites.

|  | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Neutral               | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Do you present a profile page?   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Show your website on a Social networking site page?                                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Promote your accommodation establishment discounted services on Social networking sites? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you show videos capturing your establishments' products and services?                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you provide establishment phone numbers on the wall?                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you answer guests' enquiries?   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you handle guests complaints?   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you introduce company's services to guests?   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you present a discussion wall on the Social Networking site page?                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**7i) continued...**

|  | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Neutral               | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Do you engage your customers in lucky draws?               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you present games, contests and forums to users?        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you provide hyperlinks to related sites?                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you have security features?                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you capture information about customers and prospects?  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you support chat groups?                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you perform market research using social network sites? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you update customers about content change?              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you engage in real time interaction?                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you provide personalized responses?                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## SECTION C: EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

**8. Please indicate to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

**After using social networking sites our business experienced:**

|   | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Neutral               | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| An improvement in sales                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| An increase in business exposure                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| An increase in business partnerships                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| An increase in lead generation                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A reduction in marketing expenses                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Increased traffic to our site                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| An increased understanding of the marketplace         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Growth in existing markets                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Acquired loyal customers                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Effective way to communicate with own markets/clients | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A growth in new markets                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Immediate response to customer's queries              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**9. Please rate the effectiveness of social media marketing against each of the following marketing mediums?**

|  | Very effective        | Effective             | The same              | Less effective        | Not effective at all  |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| When rated against print media social networking sites are:  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When rated against TV/Radio social networking sites are:   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When rated against display media (billboards, in transit) social networking sites are:                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When rated against internet marketing (e-mail, website, newsletters and videos) social networking sites are: | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**10. Please answer the following question: The use of social networking sites for marketing is very important for our business.**

**11. What percentage do you think the use of Social networking sites for marketing has contributed to the following business aspects?**

|   | Less than 5%          | 5%                    | 10%                   | More than 10%         |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Increased understanding of the market place | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sales improvement                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Business exposure                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Marketing expenses reduction                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**SECTION D: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

**12. Please indicate the extent to which the following challenges affect your accommodation establishments' use of social networking sites for marketing?**

|   | Completely            | To a large extent     | Neutral               | To a small extent     | Not at all            |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Time constraints  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Absence of skilled and committed people                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Internet security issues  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Lack of in-depth knowledge on how to use the sites for marketing purposes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Lack of commitment to sustain Social Media Marketing efforts              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**13. Please list any other challenges you are currently facing.**

**14. What do you think are some of the benefits of using Social Networking sites for marketing accommodation services? Indicate all the benefits that you think.**

**15. What are your future plans for social media marketing usage?**

**Thank you for your co-operation and time completing the survey.**

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