



Digital Marketing Mix Strategies in the Tourism Industry in Zimbabwe: A Masvingo Tourism Destination Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Digitalization is considered as the veritable vehicle of transformation for the tourism industry marketing in this age of the internet economy. It influences all business marketing processes before, during and after a tourism trip in a profoundly revolutionary way. Information distribution is quicker, better, and cheaper regardless of geographical and time limitation due to digitalization. The digital marketing mix, which consists of eproduct, eprice, eplace, epromotion, eprocess, epeople, and ephysical evidence, is a powerful tool in revolutionizing tourism marketing management globally including in Zimbabwe. The aim of the study was to examine the level of use and adoption of digital marketing mix strategies in the tourism industry's accommodation sector in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. This study adopted a qualitative research design approach with twenty purposively selected key informants from the tourism industry in and around Masvingo Urban. The sample had managers and marketing managers of hotels and lodges who were respondents in the study. Interviews and analysis of digital platforms were the data collection methods. Data was thematically analyzed. The major finding is that the level of adoption and use of digital marketing mix strategies is varied and generally low. Most players still rely more on the traditional analogue marketing mix strategies. The paper recommends the tourism industry in Masvingo to fully adopt and utilize digital marketing mix strategies for them to achieve customer satisfaction and profitability.

Keywords-- Digital Marketing, Digital Marketing Mix, Digital Marketing Strategy, Internet Marketing

American Marketing Association defined digital marketing as activities, institutions, and processes facilitated by digital technologies for creating, communicating and delivering value for customers and other stake-holders. Both definitions emphasize the use and adoption of digital technologies in the marketing of products and services to acquire customers, build customer preferences, promote brands, and retain customers and increasing sales and profitability (Kannan & Hongshuang, 2016). Several terms have been ascribed to digital marketing in theory and practice. Digital marketing is also referred to as online marketing, web marketing and internet marketing. Sathya (2017: 866) defined digital marketing as "an umbrella term for the marketing of products and services using digital technologies, mainly on the internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising and any other digital medium".

Digital marketing is now more common and prevalent especially in the new millennium as people now spend most of their time online. Organisations including those in the tourism industry need to adapt and adopt as well as incorporate digital marketing for their marketing to be profoundly effective and efficient, hence yield positive tangible and credible results (Ibid). Digital marketing has no size restrictions as both small and large tourism businesses can incorporate it with astounding positive results. The other positive aspect of digital marketing is that an organization can effectively use any device including email, social media platforms, digital television, digital billboards, laptops, desktops, and electronic media such as radio, smart phones, ipads and tablets. Organisations are spoilt for choice with regards to devices and tools that can be used under digital marketing.

Digital marketing focuses on the customer by providing personalized information and instant response to his or her query thus enhancing relationship marketing as well as customer relationship management. Digital

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is defined as "an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders" (Kannan & Hongshuang, 2016: 23). The

marketing promotes effective customer and market orientation philosophy thus enhances the firm's ability to delight customers profitably. In the tourism industry digital marketing has helped to improve the operations of the industry through addressing the problems associated with tourism industry characteristics such as heterogeneity, invariability, intangibility and perishability leading to sustainable growth and development of the industry.

The need to adapt, adopt and incorporate digital marketing mix strategies is supported by empirical statistics the world over. Online shopping has taken over the buying sphere by storm as more and more people now spend a greater part of their daily time on the internet. The world over, 3.5 billion people used the internet in 2016 as compared to only 400 million in the year 2000 representing a 875% growth rate (Istvanic, Milic & Krpic, 2017). In America and Europe marketing spending on digital marketing platforms has dramatically increased eclipsing the traditional marketing forms. Digital marketing platforms that have witnessed growth rate averaging 55% in spending include email marketing, social media marketing, online display advertising and mobile marketing (Taimo, 2017). The traditional marketing strategies that have witnessed a decline averaging 20% include direct mail, tradeshows and events, print advertising, radio and television advertising (Taimo, 2017). These statistics show that digital marketing is both the present and the future given the continuous information and communication technological advancements that are taking place on a daily basis. Internet use among college and university educated and higher income adults is almost 100%. This trend is also similar among the young people, the next generation of consumers, who spend most of their time online and mostly on social media (Stephen, 2015). Social media especially Facebook has fuelled digital marketing with over two billion people being active users of social media on a daily basis. Facebook alone has over one billion daily active users. This huge number of online internet users gives the full justification for tourism firms to invest in digital marketing. Incorporating digital marketing mix strategies by hotels and lodges in Zimbabwe and particularly in Masvingo is no longer a choice but a real business imperative for achievement of sustainable growth and development of the tourism industry. The digital marketing mix strategies of hotels and lodges in Masvingo is not known as there is a dearth of empirical studies on digital marketing in the tourism industry in Masvingo. This study attempt to address that gap in literature and practice.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To identify the digital marketing mix strategies elements in use and level of adoption by hotels and lodges in Masvingo tourism industry

- To examine the benefits of the digital marketing mix strategy to the Masvingo tourism industry players
- To provide digital marketing mix strategy recommendations to hotels and lodges in Masvingo

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Marketing in the Tourism industry

Digital marketing is the use of internet enabled media platforms such as facebook, websites, twitter, whatsapp, in anticipating, identifying as well as satisfying customer needs profitably. Yasmin, Tansneem & Fatema (2015) posit that digital marketing 'extends beyond internet marketing' to include mobile phone marketing such as SMS and MMS, social media marketing, search engine marketing, display advertising and many other forms of digital media. Digital marketing is a revolutionary marketing force with the ability to transform the tourism industry by addressing the tourism product service characteristics of intangibility and variability, intangibility as well as perishability. Advantages of digital marketing includes increased convenience to consumers in terms of information access. The tourism industry is information intensive and the easy availability of information which is enabled by digital marketing platforms is very strategic in promoting the growth and development of the industry. Digital marketing makes information accessibility easier anytime and at any place. Chaffey (2002) defines digital marketing as "application of digital technologies online channels such as web, e-mail, databases and mobile /wireless digital television to contribute to marketing activities aimed at achieving profit acquisition and customers retention by improving customer knowledge and further delivering integrated communications and online services that match customers' individual needs". According to Yasmin, Tasneem & Fatema (2015:70) digital marketing "refers to various promotional techniques deployed to reach customers via digital technologies... embodies an extensive selection of service, product and brand marketing tactics which mainly use Internet as a core promotional medium in addition to mobile and traditional TV and radio". Atshaya & Rungta (2016: 29) remarked that digital marketing "is one of the most convenient and effective way of marketing these days and with the development in technology, its technique and scope is also developing."

Digital and internet marketing are not the same though some scholars use them interchangeably. Digital marketing uses both online and offline digital technologies and internet marketing uses online technologies. Simply put internet marketing is a subset of digital marketing (Atshaya & Rungta, 2016). Digital marketing channels include SMS marketing, MMS marketing, digital print adverts, television marketing, radio advertising, email

marketing, search engine optimization, social media marketing, pay per click, display adverts on websites, gaming advertising, search engine marketing, call back or hold on mobile ring tone. Thus digital marketing channels are divided into two parts, that is, internet marketing and non-internet marketing (Ibid). Internet marketing (online) channels include search engine optimization, pay per click, social media marketing, email marketing, web banners, digital online advertising, online marketing platform, mobile marketing. Non internet marketing (offline) channels include game advertising, video marketing, television, radio advertisement, SMS marketing, MMS marketing, banners, placement in movies, placement in TV shows and print adverts

Technology has brought so many benefits and plays a vital role in improving the quality of products and services provided by firms in the tourism industry. Digital marketing media is taking over the marketing platform and has become the dominant force in marketing; thus provide an added advantage of keeping current and prospective market segments close to the business through continuous communicative engagements (Rowley, 2004). Digital marketing provides opportunities for firms to easily reach a global audience and the global audience can also follow the digital marketing platforms to get what other users of the same hotel facility have to say including peers, associations, and friends. The other key advantage of using digital marketing mix strategies are that a tourism firm can enjoy cost saving benefits as well as reaching a global

audience thus building and strengthening brand equity (Ibid). Digital marketing mix strategies platform is cheaper and more convenient than the traditional platforms such as middlemen selling or face to face marketing (Sheth & Sharma, 2005). Digital marketing mix increases visibility at all levels and help to increase reach to markets which would have been impossible to reach using the traditional analogue marketing mix.

Online shopping is taking over with higher rates of online shoppers being found in the developed countries of Europe and America and some parts of Asia. The same trend of online shopping is also taking the developing world by storm with vehicle online shopping from Japan by Zimbabweans taking centre stage. This trend is also taking shape in the travel and tourism industry with the development of online travel booking sites being popular due to their convenience in relation to travel planning and experience.

Tourism customer relationship management is made possible through the deliberate adoption and use of the digital marketing mix strategies thus enhancing customer loyalty, satisfaction and ultimately profitability as the digital marketing media provide opportunities to showcase products and services to diverse communities and individuals thereby building awareness and interest in the company offerings (Roberts & Kraynak, 2008). What drives change within organization is not purely technology but the planned and deliberate application of the technology.

Traditional Marketing versus Digital marketing

Traditional marketing	Digital Marketing
Traditional marketing includes print, broadcast, direct mail, and telephone	Digital marketing includes online advertising, email marketing, social media, text messaging, affiliate marketing, search engine optimization, pay per click
No interaction with the audience	Interaction with the audience
Results are easy to measure	Results are to a great extent easy to measure
Advertising campaigns are planned over a long period of time	Advertising campaigns are planned over short period of time
Expensive and time-consuming process	Reasonably cheap and rapid way to promote the products or services
Success of traditional marketing strategies can be celebrated if the firm can reach large local audience	Success of digital marketing strategies can be celebrated if the firm can reach some specific number of local audience
One campaign prevails for a long time	Campaigns can be easily changed with ease and innovations can be introduced within any campaign
Limited reach to the customer due to limited number of customer technology	Wider reach to the customer because of the use of various customers technology
24/7 year-round exposure is not possible	24/7 year-round exposure is possible
No ability to go viral	Ability to go viral
One way conversation, that is unidirectional communication	Two ways conversation, communication is bidirectional as customers can also give suggestions about products and services
Responses can only occur during work hours	Response or feedback can occur anytime

Campaigning takes more time for designing, preparing and launching	There is always a fast way to develop an online campaign and carry out changes along its development. With digital tools campaigning is easier
It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of a campaign	It is easier to measure the effectiveness of a campaign through analytics
It is limited to a localized audience in terms of its reach	It is best and ideal for reaching a global audience

Adapted from Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema (2015) and Sathya (2015)

IV. ADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL MARKETING FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The major advantages of this are,

- It is cheaper and reaches more customers within a short space of time.
- It has cost saving advantages and may enhance the profitability of tourism firms
- It help in keeping an accurate record of customer preferences as well as responses to products and services thus helping tourism firms in their marketing planning.
- It allows customers to interact with the tourism firms as well as promoting interactions among customers themselves sharing experiences.
- Digital marketing has got an empowering effect
- It eliminates geographic limitations and difficulties
- It produces traceable prompt results
- It is cost effective
- It has a global reach and reaches more people
- Results are quantifiable
- There is room for customization and personalization
- It makes it possible to build relationships with customers
- It has 24 hour seven days accessibility

V. DISADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL MARKETING FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

- There is high likelihood of harm by negative feedback or online word of mouth which might be very difficult to manage as it can go viral in seconds
- It is heavily reliant on technology including the internet meaning that areas without internet coverage would not be reachable
- There is intense rivalry and competition making it difficult to get the necessary attention from the market
- There is an excessive amount of information overload through adverts clutter

- There is unserious recognition
- There is rampant duplication of the product and unconformity to the commodity
- There is also deficiency or absence of trust
- And the messages through digital marketing may not be understood by all individuals

However the benefits of digital marketing in tourism far much outweigh the costs such that all tourism industry firms must adopt for daily use the channels of digital marketing.

Furthermore, digital marketing keeps customers abreast of company products and services, promotes greater engagement, help to clarify product information quickly and conveniently, makes it easy for customers to make informed product comparisons and decision making, provides buying convenience by enabling all-time 24/7 shopping, share content of the products or services, makes pricing clear and transparent to consumers and digital marketing enables convenient instant purchase to consumers (Ibid). Digital marketing is best ideal and revolutionary for the tourism industry given the aforementioned benefits. Moreso given the fact that the tourism industry is largely a service industry as well as an export industry with services that are consumed at source, digital marketing increases arrivals to a destination as tourists are able via online platforms to sample products and services through analysis of fellow clients reviews as well as having to assess the services prior to making the visit. Digital marketing platforms enables clients to self-organize own itineraries with absolute correctness, hence gives total convenience in the tourism industry

VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: OUTLINE OF THE DIGITAL MARKETING MIX

Digital Marketing Mix

Digital Marketing mix represents the decision making variables or controllable tools available digitally and online to hotels and lodges to determine the satisfaction of their markets and influence demand for products and services (Ivy, 2008). Digital marketing mix refers to the controllable tools that marketers use to reach the target market via the internet platforms. Digital marketing mix is actually the transformation of the traditional marketing mix into an electronic platform based

on the internet technology with the primary objective of reaching the target market in a convenient way.

The digital marketing mix consists of the seven elements which are all in electronic format namely electronic product (eproduct), electronic price (eprice), electronic place (eplace), electronic promotion (epromotion), electronic people (epeople), electronic process (eprocess) and electronic physical evidence (ephysical evidence). Below is a brief explanation of each digital marketing mix element.

Eproduct

Product: is anything that can be offered digitally or online to a market to satisfy a want or need (Kotler & Keller, 2006). It is anything that is being offered online or digitally to a market such as goods, services, events, organisations, people and ideas. In the tourism industry, the product might be the destination, a specific attraction, a lodge, hotel, a room, a meal etcetra (Kotler, Brown, & Makens, 2010). The main concern in the tourism industry is to provide an appropriate bundle of benefits to consumers which meet their ever changing needs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004). The product in the tourism industry is the core variable of the marketing mix strategy.

Eprice

Price is money charged online in exchange for a product or service purchases online and is the only element that brings money for the organisation, whereas all other elements of the mix are associated with costs (Khan, 2014; Kotler, Brown, & Makens, 2010). Price is a key factor upon which customers focus more than other attributes when making a purchase and repurchase decisions. It acts as a weapon to counteract competitors as well as ensuring survival of the firm. Price influences demand.

Eplace

EPlace refers to digital distribution channels used to make services accessible and available to consumers in locations convenient to them ((Kotler, Brown, & Makens, 2010). Mahmood &Khan (2014:166) submit “that place allows the customer to gain access to the service when its convenient to them to buy”. Buhalis (2001) outlines the functions of distribution channels as provision of useful information for the tourists as well as bundling tourism products and putting mechanisms for consumers to make, confirm and pay for reservations. A tourism firm therefore should aim to deliver the right product or service at the right time and at the right place using the right channel to enhance performance.

Epromotion

EPromotion is “the digital means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers, directly or indirectly about the products and brands that they sell” (Kotler & Keller, 2006:536). It consists of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, exhibitions, sponsorships and direct mail options. Promotion in the tourism industry plays a decisively key role by being the brand’s voice that allows a firm to build

profitable relationships with customers (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Promotion helps to tangibilize the tourism product by instilling a sense of credibility, confidence and reassurance. Promotion develops awareness, arouses interest and desire towards a particular good or service, thus influence purchasing decision and business performance.

Eprocess

EProcess describes actual digital or online procedures, mechanisms, and flow of activities by which the service is delivered, that is, the service delivery and operating systems (Ziethamel, Bitner & Gremler, 2006). It is how the service is digitally assembled and presented to the consumer. Eprocess is fundamental to showcasing the efficiency and effectiveness with which the service is provided to the customer and it therefore influences consumer purchase decision making and ultimately satisfaction with the service. This calls for effective digital process management which ensures consistent availability and quality. Technological advances have transformed processes within tourism industry with regards to production and consumption of services (Buhalis, 2001).

Epeople

Epeople all digital human actors who play a part in service delivery and thus influence the buyer’s perceptions: namely the firm’s personnel, the customer, and other customers in the service environment” (Ziethamel, Bitner & Gremler, 2006). The interaction between an organisation’s employees and its customers within the digital services cape has strong influence on the customer’s perception of service quality. The view that customers are co producers of tourism service highlight the need for tourism firms to carefully select, educate and manage not only their employees but also their different customer segments to ensure that total quality service experience is achieved to enhance business performance (Booms & Bitner, 1981).

Ephysical evidence

Ephysical evidence describes the digital environment in which the service is delivered and where the the firm and customer interact digitally, and any tangible components that facilitate performance or communication of the service (Ziethaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2006). This brings the servicescape concept; servicescapes have several functions such “providing ease for employees and customers to move in, deliver and consume the service performance efficiently and importantly to communicate with customers” (Pomeroy et al., 2011). Ephysical evidence in tourism context is very important for both the firm and the destination and it influences image and perception of customers with regards to service quality and is a key determinant of demand. The components of the ephysical evidence include the exterior and the interior features of a facility as they appear digitally online via different digital marketing media platforms. Exterior features include exterior design,

signage, parking, landscape, vehicles, uniforms and surrounding environment and interior features include interior design, equipment, physical layout, air quality, temperature, comfort of seating and staff appearance (Mahmood & Khan, 2014). It plays a fundamental role in enhancing business performance.

Digital marketing mix strategy involves marketing efforts via the internet, social media, mobile phones, electronic billboards, digital television (Kwese Iflix) and radio channels primarily for communicating with target markets and other stakeholders. There are various elements of digital tourism marketing. Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema (2015) provided the following as the key elements of digital marketing, that is, online advertising, email marketing, social media, text marketing, affiliate marketing, search engine optimization, and pay per click. There is also need for operational change within the marketing department in terms of making deliberate investments towards digital marketing through training of staff, recruitment of digital marketing specialists, acquisition of computers and computer technologies to support digital tourism marketing.

VII. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design approach with twenty purposively selected key informants from the tourism industry in and around Masvingo Urban. The sample had managers and marketing managers of hotels and lodges who were respondents in the study. Interviews and analysis of digital platforms were the data collection methods. Data was thematically analyzed

Face to face interviews

Structured interviews with twenty hotel and lodge managers were conducted in order to gather data about digital marketing mix strategies of study organisations. The respondents were purposively selected. An interview guide was developed and used following Mapila, Chiliya & Chiliya (2014), Umeze & Ohen (2015). The rationale for this method is; the interviewer's presence assists the respondent to provide useful answers through provision of clarifications and follow up questioning. It yields large and complex data thus providing deep and rich understanding of phenomena under study. Moreso the researcher can build rapport with participants and therefore gains their cooperation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The drawbacks include lack of anonymity, safety concerns for the researcher especially on sensitive issues, and it requires more time to undertake (an average of 15-30 minutes per respondent) (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher emphasized the purpose and importance of the study and assured the respondents of the confidentiality of their responses to encourage honest and accurate responses.

Analysis of digital marketing platforms

Analysis of digital platforms involved the systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating digital

marketing platforms of hotels and lodges in Masvingo. The analysed digital marketing platforms were websites, facebook pages, whatsapp groups, twitter accounts, banners, radio adverts, TV adverts. It required careful examination and interpretation of data to draw relevant and useful findings. The merits of this data collection method are that; it is efficient, cheap and data is readily available. Its exactness, stability and coverage make it an attractive and useful qualitative method (Bowen, 2009). Moreso it helps in accessing data where interviews are not possible and may help in making comparisons and analysis. The demerits include; it can be time consuming and some material may not be helpful at all to the study due to insufficient detail, biased selectivity and time wasting (Yin, 1994; Bowen, 2009).

VIII. FINDINGS

Digital marketing mix strategies of Hotels and Lodges in Masvingo

Eproduct strategies

Respondents' product presence on digital marketing media is varied and generally limited to still pictures of hotel and lodge facilities in Masvingo. Yes some few facilities, the ones that are generally large, do have good websites with a positive presentation of their core products such as rooms, in their various categories, restaurants, cocktail bars. However, the relatively small and medium hotel and lodge facilities in Masvingo's online product presence is quite below expected standards. The quality of certain photos depicting the hotel and lodges facilities in Masvingo is substandard and taken and uploaded without due regard for the image communicated to the world via the digital marketing media such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram. Again, the eproduct of some hotels and lodges in Masvingo available on social media marketing networks such as Facebook, the pictures are not updated. It was really surprising to see pictures that were last uploaded in 2014 still dominating on the digital marketing platforms of the hotel and lodges facilities.

Eprice strategies

Epricing by the study organisations was found to have varied findings in that few hotels and lodges indicated the prices of their products and services on their websites on a static basis. Literature recommends that the key feature of eprice is that it is adjustable throughout the day thus giving the facility competitive advantage as well as enabling the lodge facilities to increase yield and revenue through yield management techniques (Kasavana, 2012). Yield management techniques are made more possible with epricing since price can be adjusted in response to demand and capacity issues. The prices on hotel and lodge websites were found to be the same for a long period of time. The rack rates were the same for a minimum of a year. Well, some respondents indicated that

they do custom pricing to clients who request for such tailor made pricing in line with client budgets. Some hotel websites were found to be non-interactive and very inconvenient to clients given that feedback on room status and availability is not timeously updated.

Eplace strategies

A greater number of study organisations have embraced and incorporated digital marketing distribution channels such as emailing, social media marketing and distribution through Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp, websites, search engine optimization in Masvingo. Some have even joined non-affiliate reservation systems, all in a bid to take advantage of the benefits of digital marketing. This is quite commendable. There is increasing disintermediation in the tourism industry due to digital marketing technologies. Hotels and lodges in Masvingo are able to directly communicate with target markets with great convenience. Moreso, clients regardless of their location are also able to make bookings, search for information directly on the hotel website or via emails and Facebook pages for the benefit of both suppliers and consumers.

Direct distribution which has been made possible by digital marketing technologies has led to cost reduction thus making products cheaper and competitive. Online distribution has brought advantages in that even small hotel and lodge operators now are able to reach a global audience and effectively compete at global scale thus bringing an increase in volume of sales and profitability. However the biggest letdown is that most of the digital marketing distribution channels in use by the hotels and lodges facilities in Masvingo is that, they are not updated, key information in some cases is missing and there is general lack of continuous monitoring of the channels. Feedback to clients is not provided timeously yet the major purpose of the online platform is to create an instantaneous two way communication channel between the clients and the hotel facility

Epromotion strategies

All study respondents agree that they have adopted and they use digital marketing technologies to promote their products and services online. The study found that respondents use online advertising, Facebook, Instagram, twitter and even LinkedIn to communicate their marketing messages online to the target markets. Some respondents reported that they maintain a Facebook presence and in some instances, some lodge and hotel facilities have created WhatsApp groups for their clients as a way of providing a communication platform. However the researcher, through an analysis of digital marketing platforms noted that most hotels and lodges facilities in Masvingo do not maintain a heavy presence online as they claim. For example their Facebook pages are not attended to on a regular basis creating feedback and response lags that are detrimental to the satisfaction of clients. The websites have outdated information and some were last

updated a longtime ago. Digital marketing's primary objective is bringing the market and the suppliers closer together in a very convenient way; however this requires a deliberate commitment to a digital marketing mix strategy by the hotel and lodges facilities. A hobbyist or casual approach to digital marketing can be a recipe for disaster given that any form of dissatisfaction by clients can easily spread through online word of mouth.

Epeople strategies

An effective digital marketing mix strategy requires planning and commitment to implementation. This requires that hotels and lodges in the tourism industry should have specially trained tourism digital marketing personnel dedicated to drive the online strategy if success is to be achieved. The study found out that a majority of the lodges and hotel facilities in Masvingo do lack a specialized digital marketing specialist dedicated to driving the online marketing mix strategy. There seems to be a belief that as long as one is able to operate a computer, a smartphone, open a website or is able to communicate on WhatsApp, then that somebody has the capacity to be a digital marketing specialist. One respondent remarked that, "here we let every member of staff post something on our Facebook page as well as our WhatsApp group as long as they have access to a computer or smartphone. It is a daily requirement that everyone must make sure posts something on those platforms". This clearly shows that there is no one who is really responsible for the digital marketing of the organization products and services. The net result of this is that the messages on the digital marketing platforms are not coordinated and are not well planned to give a good impression of the organization's service portfolio. However, another key finding under epeople was that hotels and lodges facilities encourage their clients to post their experiences on their digital marketing platforms in the form of photos, videos and comments as way of building customer relations as well as building a strong and positive image about the organization.

Eprocess strategies

An analysis of digital marketing platforms especially the websites showed that the majority of hotels and lodges in Masvingo do lack online payment channels such that clients have to make an extra effort to find alternative ways of making payments for rooms reserved in hotels and lodges in Masvingo. This inconveniences guests and clients and promote guest frustration to the detriment of the hotels and lodges. Moreso, information about the hotel and lodge products and services on the digital marketing platforms is largely outdated to such an extent that customers end up relying on inaccurate, irrelevant and incomplete information.

Ephysical evidence strategies

All study participants revealed that they do their best to portray a strong positive image about their hotels and lodges in Masvingo through ensuring that only the best

photos of their facilities, rooms, restaurants and other service environments are posted to social media marketing platforms such as Facebook, twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Even on their websites, they report that they take great care and consideration; selecting only the best photos of their facilities for use for website design and presence. However an analysis of the study organization's digital marketing platforms showed that some pictures of their facilities appearing on the platforms are of substandard quality and do not portray the best image intended. Some web pages, that is, Facebook pages and WhatsApp group discussions of some hotels facilities leaves a lot to be desired and an indicator of a lot of work that needs to be done.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

Digital marketing is the marketing strategy of the present and future. Hotels and lodges in Masvingo are not fully utilizing digital marketing technologies and channels. The commitment to digital marketing is half baked, hence the study organisations can not realize the full benefits of digital marketing. Hotels and lodges in Masvingo are still heavily reliant on analogue and traditional marketing mix strategies with physical paper brochures and paper business cards still dominating. There is still reliance on physical door to door personal selling. Hotels and lodges in Masvingo still need to do a lot in terms of full adoption and use of digital marketing technologies without which the study organisations will lag behind in terms customer satisfaction, business growth and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that hotels and lodges in Masvingo should fully adopt and fully utilize digital marketing technologies and channels. There is need for study organisations to increase commitment and investment in digital marketing technologies. More so digital marketing has no boundaries and hotels and lodges can use any devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, televisions, game consoles, digital billboards, and social media, search engine optimization, videos, content, e-mail to promote their products and services.

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