THE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE HOTEL INDUSTRY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE PARK PLAZA CARDIFF AND THE VALE RESORT

HARRIS STONE

B.A. (Hons) International Hospitality and Event Management

May 2017
Declaration

“I declare that this Dissertation has not already been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. It is the result of my own independent research except where otherwise stated”.

Student Name in Print .................................................................

Student Signature .................................................................
Abstract
The aim of the research was to identify the impacts that social media had on the hotel industry, with emphasis on two organisations in South Wales. The reason for the research was due to a gap in the knowledge of a relatively new platform, very little research has been conducted in the field of social media and the hotel industry, therefore giving the researcher an opportunity to delve into some of the factors that are prevalent in previous studies. The choice of focus on two organisations was due to the researcher previously and currently working for the businesses and having a strong knowledge of the marketing and online applications of both establishments.

The study holds a range of research methods, firstly looking at secondary research and the various theories and models available to help determine the uses of social media. Although finding no models specifically directed toward social media, the researcher instead used models such as TAM (Technology Acceptance Model), originally created to determine why people use technology and the accepting of new platforms, and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954), concentrating on the personal needs of users. Followed then by three methods of primary research; a questionnaire, a focus group with social media users and two semi-structured interviews with industry professional, which the researcher aimed to use a form of gathering a diverse range of data to answer the research question and to raise more questions within the field. With the aim of determining what impacts social media has on the hotel industry, the research concluded that communication between business and users is essential, and elements such as reputation and reliability are dependent on it.

The original aim of finding the impacts of social media on the hotel industry was maintained throughout, however, the study highlighted the reasons users follow hotels online, and the benefits that follow, this is reflected in the literature review and the results. Aside from the results of this study, the research concludes that further study is needed in the field and in particular the development of a specified model determining the reasoning for using social media.
Acknowledgements

Finally, being able to hand in my dissertation is an achievement I once thought impossible, having completed the first year of university, the realisation that achieving a degree was possible had then become reality. Although a few obstacles have been present throughout the journey I have thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience my university degree has provided.

This dissertation was written and based on two specific organisations, therefore special thanks goes to Molly Mann, E-Commerce Executive at The Vale Resort and Lubna Anani, Marketing Assistant at Park Plaza Cardiff, without their support this project would have been far more difficult to complete.

I would like to thank my supervisor Andrew Roberts, who has been so helpful, not pressuring me but allowing me to have the space to complete this piece of work, and being available whenever I’ve needed his guidance. A huge thank you to my Mum and Dad who have supported me from day one, and constantly tell me to keep going. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends, without whom the past three years of study would have been much harder, they have kept me grounded and have always been there for me when I need to ‘vent’ or talk.
Contents
Declaration ........................................................................................................................................ i
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... iii
List of Abbreviations ................................................................................................................... viii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................ ix
Introduction & Aims and Objectives ............................................................................................ 2
2.0 Literature Review .................................................................................................................. 5
  2.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 5
  2.2 Definitions of Social Media: ............................................................................................... 5
  2.3 The Theory ........................................................................................................................ 5
    2.3.1 Technology Acceptance Model .................................................................................. 5
    2.3.2 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in Relation to Social Media ....................................... 6
  2.4 Organisations and the Social Media Platform .................................................................. 8
  2.5 The Consumer Experience ............................................................................................... 10
  2.6 Social Media and Customer Loyalty .................................................................................. 11
  2.7 Online Feedback: Response, Action and Result ............................................................... 12
  2.8: Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 13
3.0 Methodology ......................................................................................................................... 15
  3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 15
  3.2: Ethics ................................................................................................................................ 16
  3.3 Semi Structured Interviews: ............................................................................................. 16
    3.4 Focus Groups .................................................................................................................. 17
  3.5 Questionnaires .................................................................................................................. 18
  3.6 Validity of Methods used ................................................................................................... 19
  3.7 Issues Raised and Impediments ........................................................................................ 19
    3.7.1 The Semi Structured Interviews ................................................................................ 19
    3.7.2 Questionnaires .......................................................................................................... 19
    3.7.3 Focus Groups ............................................................................................................ 19
  3.8: Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 20
Chapter 4: Results and Analysis of Primary Research .............................................................. 21
4.0: Results, Analysis and Discussion of Findings .................................................................. 22
  4.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 22
  4.2 Questionnaires .................................................................................................................. 22
    4.2.1: Q1 ............................................................................................................................ 22
    4.2.2: Q2 - What age bracket do you fall in? .................................................................. 23
4.2.3: Q3 - Which of the following social media platforms do you use regularly? (Please tick all relevant) ................................................. 24
4.2.4: Q4 - For what reasons do you use these platforms? ......................................................... 24
4.2.5: Q5 - Have you ever taken advantage of an organisations social media site? What for? .................................................................................. 25
4.2.6: Q6 - Have you heard of the Park Plaza and/or The Vale Resort? ............................................. 25
4.2.7: Q7 - If yes, do you follow any of their online domains, which ones? (Select all relevant) ............................................................................................ 26
4.2.8: Q8 - Why do you follow these specific platforms? ....................................................................... 26
4.2.9: Q9 - Is social media a good thing for the hotel industry? ............................................................... 26
4.2.10: Q10 - Is the increase of social media usage limiting the range of customers being able to take advantage of hotel services. .......................................................... 27
4.2.11: Q11 - Would you consider Trip Advisor a form of Social Media? ........................................... 27
4.2.12: Q12 - Is social media being used to it's full potential by organisations? ............................... 27

4.3 Focus Group .............................................................................................................................................. 29
4.3.1: Topic 1: Has Social Media enabled hotels to better sell/promote themselves or has it made them a bigger target................................................................. 29
4.3.2: Topic 2: Do you follow either of the organisations online domains? i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, (Park Plaza, The Vale Resort)? .................................................. 30
4.3.3: Topic 3: Is social media just another way to complain? ................................................................. 30
4.3.4: Topic 4: Does gender play a large part in the complaints and feedback process? ............ 31
4.3.5: Topic 5: Is social media being ageist? Some users who frequent hotels often, not being able to use one of the main methods of communication. Are other methods of communication still used ..................................................................................... 31
4.3.6: Topic 6: What's good/bad about Park Plaza’s social media presence? ...................... 32
4.3.7: Topic 7: What's good/bad about The Vale Resort’s social media presence? ............. 32
4.3.8: Topic 8: What do you think Social media could be doing in the future, to help better the platforms used .................................................................................................................. 32
4.3.9: Topic 9: Trip Advisor... using it as a social media platform what are the benefits, conversing with other users? ........................................................................................................... 33

4.4: Semi-Structured Interview: Park Plaza ......................................................................................... 35
4.4.1: Topic 1 ................................................................................................................................................ 35
4.4.2: Topic 2 ................................................................................................................................................ 35
4.4.3: Topic 6 ................................................................................................................................................ 35
4.4.4: Topic 7 ................................................................................................................................................ 36
4.4.5: Topic 3 ................................................................................................................................................ 36
4.4.6: Topic 4 ................................................................................................................................................ 36
4.4.7: Topic 5 ................................................................................................................................................ 36
Interview Topics/ Questions: Appendix 6 .......................................................... 59
Focus Group Topics/ Questions: Appendix 7 ..................................................... 59
Park Plaza Interview, Sample Transcript: Appendix 8 ..................................... 60
The Vale Resort’s Interview, Sample Transcript: Appendix 9 ......................... 62
Focus Group, Sample Transcript: Appendix 10 .............................................. 65
References ...................................................................................................... 69
References ...................................................................................................... 70
List of Abbreviations

PAR = Participant (Used primarily in the results and discussion section and used when transcribing the focus group.)
List of Figures

Figure 1: TAM Model ................................................................. 6
Figure 2: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs ............................................... 8
Chapter 1: Introduction
Introduction & Aims and Objectives

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is” (Cook, 2012) cited in (Sayler, 2012). This dissertation will explore the impacts of social media on the hotel industry, with special emphasis on two organisations in South Wales, The Vale Resort and the Park Plaza Cardiff.

The aims and objective of this study were to:

1. Critically review previous literature with reference to social media, marketing.
2. Commence primary data collection focussing on industry managers and customers.
3. Critically evaluate the findings of primary data and compare to secondary data found.
4. Make recommendations based on the findings the author collected to enhance and aid future researchers and the establishments in question.

In order to complete these aims, the author will conduct three methods of primary research, both qualitative and quantitative

Social media is an ever-growing application on the web, it is vastly used around the globe and in many cases, a free tool. The use of social media is due to a “simple basic human desire: the need to connect with other humans, to be part of a group” (Leiter, 2014). The focus of this study is to determine the major impacts that social media has on the hotel industry, as well as the two organisations in question. The reader will find discussions on various types of social media platforms, and the reasons that both individuals and businesses use these applications.

The purpose of the research was to better understand the role of social media, with it being a relatively new platform for interaction, the theory is limited, although this document doesn’t answer all questions in regard to social media usage, the focus on two organisations gives the work an individual perspective. The reason that this subject should be explored further is due to its current and growing influence within the hotel industry. The parties that will benefit from this study, are future researchers of social media use and industry professionals, with the discussions in the focus group being centred around the social media platforms of the two organisations mentioned.

The reasons for choosing this subject was to further develop understanding of the use of social media in regards to hospitality, and further explore its parameters. Having worked in the hotel industry for several years and being an avid social media user, this is a combination that greatly interests the researcher.
Social media usage varies, dependant on platform, as is discussed later in this document. An online author listed the various forms of social media platforms and the reasoning behind using them, (Leiter, 2014) suggests the following about social media platforms: Facebook, being the largest social platform is used to keep up to date with a user’s network of contacts, whereas Twitter is used to connect with an immediate niche network. Pinterest is used for being inspired by others and their ideas. LinkedIn a network to connect on a more professional level with potential career prospects or professional endorsements, and Instagram being described as a more visual platform, being able to view photos and videos. Although the above web publication is from 2014, the concepts have not changed drastically, and as the reader will find in this document, the opinions expressed about these applications only differ slightly.

The layout of this document is designed to be as easy as possible for the reader to read. Following this introduction will be a literature review, a study and analysis of the secondary research looked at for this document, followed by a methodology which explains and clarifies the choice of research methods used throughout this study. The document will then turn to the data collected by the researcher during his primary research and analysis of those methods, turning then, into a discussion about the results of the data and highlighting links and patterns found in relation to the theory identified in the literature review, concluding with the final chapter giving the reader a summary of the research document and the recommendations given by the researcher.
Chapter 2: Literature Review
2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

“A good literature review gathers information about a particular subject from many sources. It is well written and contains few if any personal biases. It should contain a clear search and selection strategy” (Cronin, Ryan and Coughlin, 2008).

The purpose of literature review is to show understanding and in depth knowledge of the topic being discussed. Undertaking a literature review will enable the author to gather the knowledge from previous work and to successfully use that information when analysing the results of his own research, comparing and draw conclusions to present to the reader. The information gained will aid the author in the comparative study between the Park Plaza Hotel and The Vale Resort. The researcher will look at two models in this chapter, these being; TAM & Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954).

2.2 Definitions of Social Media:

- “Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Social Media, 2016).
- “A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)
- Internet users access to an array of user-centric spaces they could populate with user-generated content, along with a correspondingly diverse set of opportunities for linking these spaces together to form virtual social networks. (Obar and Wildman, 2015)

The above definitions describe a platform in which users can share content and participate in social interaction through the web.

2.3 The Theory

The author has looked at various models in regards to social media, however it being a relatively new platform no model has specifically been created, (to the researchers knowledge) for that reason, this is supported by Kent (2015) “However, on the other hand, social media are a completely new phenomenon that goes beyond the established broadcast media and should be informed by their own unique theories” his article underlines the rise of the internet and social media and the lack of exploration undertaken by organisations, instead organisations merely use it as a another form of communication between themselves and
users. This argument is somewhat accurate and supports the lack of models and strong theories to define social media usage. This study will look at the TAM model created by F.D. Davies in 1986 to measure the usage and influences of users on new technology. Models such as these have been adapted to attempt to suit social media. Therefore the results found in this dissertation can be related but not compared to findings which include this model.

2.3.1 Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was developed by F.D. Davies in 1986 to determine the usage behaviour of users and computer technology. The model was adapted from The Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1967 which looked into the psychology of the mass community and the attempt to foresee someone’s behaviour based on their already existing attitudes and behavioural traits. (Davies, 1986) saw to adapt this by introducing the element of technology into the model, its aim is to theorise the behaviour of users toward technology and the norms of a group of people toward a similar use. A study published in the Journal of Enterprise Management found that “continual voluntary usage and engagement with social media related activities will continue if and only if the perceived benefits from such usage behaviours lead to a positive attitude toward social media” (Rauniar et al, 2014). This model has been adapted to attempt to suit social media, however the date in which it was founded, (1986), social media had not yet been created, therefore it can be related but not fully applied and theorised to the topic.

**FIGURE 1: TAM MODEL**

As the reader can see the TAM model is thorough in its theory, “one’s actual use of a technology system is influenced directly or indirectly by the user’s behavioural intentions, attitude, perceived usefulness of the system, and perceived ease of the system” (Park, 2009). (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000) published their study and new model whereby they added
theoretical variables involving “social influence processes (subjective norm, voluntariness, and image) and cognitive instrumental processes (job relevance, output quality, result demonstrability, and perceived ease of use)” (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000).
2.3.2 Maslow’s Hierarchy or Needs in Relation to Social Media

Social media users require some form of recognition and self-worth, “In terms of social uses of technology, Boneva and Kraut suggested that women are more likely to use online tools to maintain or extend their social networks than their counterparts” (Stefanone, Lackaff, and Rosen, 2011). An article published in the New York Times researched the need to use social media and the power it holds over them, “What social media exacerbates is the satisfaction of feeling part of a group, and the pain associated with feeling excluded from a group” (Feiler, 2015). This can be identified with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, in particular the fourth level of the pyramid, Self-esteem, according to Maslow people require either achievement, strength and prestige or recognition, attention and appreciation. In line with Social media and the above statement by (Feiler, 2015) it would be apparent that users are looking for the latter, recognition, attention and appreciation. Users don’t post online content for no reason, there is a motive, and in regards to using the social media platform with hotels, one is likely looking for either a response, recognition or some kind of attention from the organisation. The third level of the pyramid can also be applied, with users wanting to be part of a group. “He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal” (Dirt, 2017) however using this particular level is linked with love, it also refers to belonging and in this case an online community can satisfy that need.

**Figure 2: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**
2.4 Organisations and the Social Media Platform

“Social media has become a preferred inexpensive marketing tool that encourages two-way communication between the business and the consumer” (Seth. 2012). Being inexpensive and in many cases free, this platform for advertising is ideal for marketers.

Social media has grown significantly, becoming more popular for personal, professional and corporate use, hotels are no exception to this, employing teams or designated employees to manage their social media.

“Hotels just don’t seem to be taking it seriously and haven’t embraced it yet. They usually get someone junior in the hotel to look after their social media channels, who often doesn’t have the expertise or know how to represent the voice of the hotel and engage with hotel users” (Larsen, 2015) cited in (TheBigHospitality, 2015) this statement expresses concern over the management and lack of experience employees have dealing with social media platforms, however a study by (Knowles, Dieck & Jung, 2013) found that hotels are aiming to build relationships with their users, instead of talking at them, rather talk with them and converse. This would require a fresh perspective, as many social media users are middle aged or younger, perhaps having those ‘junior’ members of the organisation manage media channels will prove beneficial and rewarding to the establishment. “If a hotel can use social media to associate in the mind and heart of the consumer, the consumer’s wishes for or actual achievements to the brand of the hotel, then loyalty will be generated” (Pricewatercoopers, 2015). This is supported by the editor in chief of Hotels Magazine Jeff Weinstein who commented “customer loyalty toward a hotel chain or property can be influenced within seconds through a posting on one of those sites” (CustomerAllianze, 2016)

The impacts of social media can be both harmful and advantageous to an organisation, an article by Andy Beohar states that “76% of vacationer’s upload photos from their travels to social media” (Beohar 2016) underlining that positive aspects would result in free promotion and marketing for the business, negative posts would cause friction and possible. “There is no better way to take advantage of their free promotion than liking, sharing, and engaging. They’ll remember the personal interactions, and their friends and followers will be more likely to get a recommendation” (Beohar, 2016), this supports the fact that businesses are aiming to build relationships and converse with users. However, negative comments and reviews can similarly impact an organisation.

An online strategist and former industry professional claims that social media should be used in more creative ways to make the process more visual and personal. He states that using a
website like Pinterest is a great way to interact, creating boards and pins based on travellers’ experiences and expectations. “It shows that social media can be leveraged not just for broadcasting information” (Craig, 2013) Pinterest is a form of social media that focusses on the posting of ‘pins’ which can photos, videos and blogs all categorised into specific genres/subjects. “Pinterest is an online pinboard, a visual take on the social bookmarking site, you can’t share something on Pinterest unless an image is involved” (Carr, 2012). The use of more visual aids is important in an organisation’s social media presence, photos and videos are what consumers are looking for “people want to see photos and videos, content” (Guinn, 2017), visual aids not only benefit the consumer but also the organisation. In regards to Pinterest, an article by (Martinson, 2016) reiterated the fact that the creator and designer of Pinterest insists that the application is not social media, and that it does not resemble any of the characteristics of a social media site such as Facebook.

2.5 The Consumer Experience

“An individual’s subjective evaluation and undergoing (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioural) of events related to his/her tourist activities which begins before (i.e., planning and preparation), during (i.e., at the destination), and after the trip (i.e., recollection)” (Tung and Ritchie, 2011). This theory can be related to the hotel experience. The booking process could be, on the phone, face to face or via online/social media channels, researching the booking process can be an experience in itself. Following a destinations online profile to gauge ambience and relatability of the venue is an important step, consumers and businesses need to ensure that the booking method is easy and enjoyable in order for it to progress to the next stage. Online booking has increased extensively in recent years, sites such as Booking.com, Laterooms and Expedia, converting their services into apps, giving users the flexibility to book wherever they are, in turn giving hotels a higher potential business rate.

Lobbyfriend is an application relatively new to social media. According to its creators, LobbyFriend is a temporary social media platform, only accessed when the user checks in or connects to the host’s Wi-Fi, it then becomes inaccessible when the user leaves the establishment. This application exists solely for hotel users, its allows, both guests and employees to connect “Users can remain anonymous, fill out a profile, sign in with Facebook or even create an avatar” (Cable, 2015), linking in with other social networks certainly ensures this platform is genuine. The app boasts the ability to bring users together and share experiences, claiming it would be beneficial for events such as in house conferences and large local events where, hotel guests may want to connect or arrange outings or even as simple as ordering a taxi together. Despite the reasons stated above the application could be used for
other reasons, it allows strangers to connect online, very much like a dating site, “Guests can find someone with common interests to find a meal, watch a game, have a drink, and yes, a temporary social network can be used to form a temporary dating relationship, which is certainly going to appeal to some people as well” (Rice, 2015, Cited from Cable, 2015) despite acknowledging this, the CEO of the company has assured that precautions and safety barriers are in place in order to keep users safe.

Applications are growing in popularity in the hotel industry, hotel chains have designed their apps to encourage online booking or mobile booking and offer enticing rewards for regular users, in particular those who have brand loyalty, “Download the Club Carlson mobile app. You’ll earn 1,000 Bonus Gold Points® when you use the app to book and complete your first stay!” (Carlson, 2017). Hilton have gone so far as to introduce the digital key, for Hilton Honours members, the application acts a key to their hotel rooms as well as using it to book, and pay. Apps are making the consumer experience more accessible for those who are wanting to use the technology offered, “Hotels using mobile apps can improve marketing outcomes by using tracking and reporting tools, making better versions, expanding features, and ensuring differentiation” (Chen, Hsu, andWu,2012).

2.6 Social Media and Customer Loyalty
Posting updates online about travelling and tourism is affecting the industry, “89% of millennials plan travel activities based on content posted by their peers online” (Hospitality Technology 2012).

Millennials: “The term Millennials generally refers to the generation of people born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s” (LiveScience, 2013)

With more users sharing their experiences through photos, videos and tags, the industry is using this to their advantage, to market themselves through their customers, essentially for free. “97% of millennials share photos/videos of their travels online” (Hospitality Technology 2012). Many establishments use campaigns and competitions to market themselves, using real life events and captions they are then able to connect to their audience on a more personal level, instead of using staged events and models.

Using social media is a potential way for businesses to maintain customer satisfaction and turn it into customer loyalty “Social media is a good opportunity for the hotelier to convert satisfied guests into loyal guests by maintaining the link created during the stay, so that the guests come back” (CustomerAllianze, 2016) supporting this, using social media as a form of booking, communicating and feedback has a strong benefit to the hotel industry. When using
these applications, users can benefit through incentives, discounts and other useful online information. Carlson Rezidore use incentives such as extra loyalty points when booking through the app, entitling the user to additional benefits, such as free upgrades and complimentary breakfasts (Carlson, 2017).

2.7 Online Feedback: Response, Action and Result

Feedback from guests is both beneficial and expected, although not always positive, “Negative comments, if not acknowledged and followed up with remedial action, can be devastating to the reputation of the company” (Begwani, Pal, and Solutions, 2015) however, “effective service recovery can actually increase customer loyalty, as it conveys the perception that the company cares for its customers” (Begwani, Pal, and Solutions, 2015) ensuring the correct strategies and responses are in place can ensure return custom and retain customer loyalty toward the organisation.

“Managing conversations on social media has become pivotal to maintaining the brand image of a company and how negligence on this front can be potentially devastating for a hospitality businesses reputation” (Begwani, Pal, and Solutions, 2015). Ensuring that responses are dealt with efficiently and professionally is important for any business, hotels are under constant review online, with a website such as TripAdvisor with over 75 million user reviews (TripAdvisor, 2017) attracting countless visitors to read and review thousands of destinations, “75% of travellers use social networking sites to look for shopping-related deals and 30% specifically look out for travel deals; 35% of TripAdvisor’s new reviews are derived from its Facebook connected members” (Forbes, 2013)

(Begwani, Pal, and Solutions, 2015) encourages when finding a negative comment online, it should be acknowledged as soon as possible and the sender thanked for its feedback, regardless of its nature, the recipient should show empathy toward any situation and if not appropriate to deal with on a public domain, to provide the sender with a direct email or telephone number so they are able to discuss the grievance further, and ensure the problem is solved where both parties are satisfied with the outcome. “Social media is not a substitute for the conventional feedback mechanism of guest experience, such as surveys and forms” (Begwani, Pal, and Solutions, 2015), the reason social media is available is to help with accessibility however, ceasing other forms of feedback such as surveys would be disabling many consumers to be heard, due to the social media platform not being completely accessible or useable for some customers
2.8: Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a range of theory in-regards to social media, with the focus on specific forms of usage and relevant theoretical models to help justify theory. This chapter aimed to define social media, providing scope as to the various forms it can take.
Chapter 3: Methodology
3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Methodology: “This should be a detailed and transparent chapter giving the reader sufficient information to make an estimate of the reliability and validity of your methods, and trustworthiness of your findings” (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012 p.604)

To complete the primary research element of this project, the researcher was required to undertake an ethics application to be approved and passed by an ethics board within the academic institution. The reason for this ethics application was to ensure the validity of the study and the safeguarding of all participants. Ensuring that no ethical issues are raised or if they have been highlighted, that they are dealt with correctly. “Ethics is concerned with moral values, principles and actions, such as honesty, integrity, transparency, obligations to others, responsibility and trust. In short behaving in the ‘right’ way” (Brotherton, 2015, p. 62)

Various methods are available when conducting a project inclusive of human participants, the methods chosen for this project have been selected as they best suited the needs of the research.

In this chapter, the reader will understand the methods used, and the key reasons the researcher had chose them, including the positive and negative aspects of each methodical process and how those methods suited the project when undertaken.
3.2: Ethics

“*It protects the researchers, as they can demonstrate that their research has external approval, and it can improve research. In addition, it protects the various organizations involved in the research (funders, care providers, universities) as they can have assurance that their money, facilities or reputation are being used appropriately*” (George, 2016)

In accordance to University policy, each researcher must obtain approval from an ethics committee to ensure the research being conducted is viable and ethically correct, in regards to safety of all participants including the researcher and that the methods used are appropriate. The reader will see in the appendices (appendix 1) that Ethical approval was granted for this research, the comments made on the form were taken into consideration and the researcher had amended the minor imperfections in order to complete the three vital methods of primary research needed for this piece of work.

3.3 Semi Structured Interviews:

This method of research is ideal if the researcher needs to connect and build a form of relationship with the participant. It allows the researcher to ask in depth questions to a knowledgeable source and use the answers provided to strengthen an argument or statement within their work, this will contribute to a clearer understanding of the subject matter. “*The researcher will have a list of themes and possibly some key questions to be covered, although their use may vary from interview to interview*” (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012, p. 604).

Once the subject was decided, the use of semi structured interviews was quickly confirmed, having contacts within the industry, the researcher felt this would be a beneficial and strong choice toward his research project. The principle of using this method of research would provide the researcher with strong first hand industry knowledge of the subject and professional opinions of the topic.

A list of the topics discussed can be found in the appendices (appendix 6)

The reason the author used this method of research was to enable him to gain an in-depth opinion of an industry professional, conducting an interview on a one to one basis allowed for this. The use of semi structured questions was used due to the author not wanting the situation to be too professional and structured, instead wanting discussion to occur and flow freely. Both interviews were held at the respective establishments. The first interview conducted was with Molly Mann, the E-Commerce Executive at The Vale Resort. The interview lasted approximately 1 hour, and was agreed some time prior to this project being started, due to the already standing professional relationship. The second interview with Lubna Anani, Marketing Assistant at the Park Plaza Cardiff, enabled the researcher to collect data on a more
professional level, benefiting the researcher as his aim was to reach a two-sided opinion from both consumer and Industry. To conduct these interviews, participants were asked to complete a consent form to allow the researcher to use the information and for the interview to be recorded. Participants were also given an information sheet prior to the interview to give them an overview of the research, readers can see a blank sample of the consent form as well as the information sheet in the appendices (Appendix 2 & 3).

3.4 Focus Groups

Facilitating a focus group allows for a range of people to come together and discuss a specific topic, “a group interview that focusses upon a particular issue, product, service or topic by encouraging discussion amongst participants and the sharing of perceptions in an open and tolerant environment” (Krueger, Casey 2009) cited in (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012, p. 402). Controlling the topic is vital as to not lose perspective, and for it to prove most beneficial toward the research. The use of one group with eight participants was used, hosting a mixed age group, ensuring more rounded and diverse conversation.

A list of the discussed can be found in the appendices (appendix 7)

“A focus group comprised of very similar people (A homogenous composition) would not reflect a sufficient variety of views, opinions and reactions and the ensuing discussion may turn out to be limited and rather sterile” (Brotherton, 2015, p. 190), the focus group comprised of an assortment of participants, varying in age, job roles and financial standing. The author chose this method to gain the public’s opinion and using it as a base for a comparison with industry professionals. Having a group of people ranging in background, age and gender was vital in gaining balanced opinion. The form of recruitment undertaken for this method of research was published on social media and shared to other user’s social walls, as well as through professional channels. The focus group was held in Starbucks, where a table had been booked and reserved, unlike some focus groups advertised, the researcher had no financial incentive to offer, however the advertisement stated that each participant would benefit from a drink of their choice, a small expense for the researcher and incentive to help ensure participation. All attendees were asked to complete a consent form prior to the focus group starting, and were informed that the discussion would be recorded, as well as this, participants were given an information sheet giving an overview of the research.

Readers can view a blank sample of the consent form and the information sheet in the appendices (appendix 3 & 5)
3.5 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a quick and easy way to gain data from potentially large samples. “Questionnaires are more rigid than interviews. The respondent can only choose from the range of answers you have given. You therefore have to make sure that you have designed your questionnaire well” (The Open University, 2017). Questionnaires provide space for participants to answer in text, however the author used minimal space to allow for the questionnaire to be more fact based and less descriptive, this not only makes the results easier to analyse but keeps the responses more concise. The sample used for the questionnaire was originally sourced online, the questionnaire, created through Qualtrics was published on the authors social media page and shared over fifteen times, the responses from this first sampling reached 65, more than the author had anticipated through social media. The second publishing of the questionnaire was distributed around the authors workplace, via email.

The reason the author decided on this method of research was to gain a basic knowledge and understanding of the publics. After researching the possible methods, the author settled on questionnaires as an easy but beneficial way to gain a wealth of data. With the expectancy of gaining between 70-90 respondents, the author would then be able to have an idea of the views of the public with regard to social media. It being a regularly used form of research, the author saw it as an ideal way to gain the data needed, with limited human interaction and participation. Also allowing participants with less disposable time to complete as the questionnaire is small and very basic, designed specifically to gain the information needed with little extra information.

Using this method due to its simplicity and desired effect of obtaining simple data in a relatively fast manner “Questionnaires provide a relatively cheap, quick and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of people” (McLeod, 2014) this is exactly what was needed, gaining basic data on the issues covered. All participants were advised prior to undertaking the questionnaire that data collected is anonymised.

A sample of the questionnaire can be found in the appendices (appendix 5)
3.6 Validity of Methods used
The methods used were chosen due to their relevance. The use of these methods allowed the researcher to gain vital data to present his findings. The data collected needed to be from relevant sources that would benefit the project, otherwise it does not support or help the research in any way “Data collected may be reliable but at the same time may not pose any value to the research” (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008) Cited in (Minor, 2010).

3.7 Issues Raised and Impediments
As with any type of research conducted, certain constraints surface and can take effect on the research. Below, the reader will find the impediments the researcher had identified and dealt with while conducting his research.

3.7.1 The Semi Structured Interviews
The first interview with The Vale Resort, presented no issues, the researcher arranged a date and time to suit both him and the interviewee, and it was conducted at The Vale.

The second interview with Park Plaza, presented some difficulties, due to the busy time of year (2017 Rugby Six Nations) the interview had to be re scheduled several times. The interview with Park Plaza was considerably shorter in duration, due to time constraints, the interviewee was only granted a twenty-minute window. Although the interview was completed and all questions answered, it didn’t have the same informal ‘chatty’ flow as did the first.

3.7.2 Questionnaires
The questionnaires proved successful, based on the number of respondents, however the researcher had hoped for approximately ninety-five replies, reaching only eighty-three, it proved enough to gain an understanding of the public view.

3.7.3 Focus Groups
The original proposal in the ethics application outlined two focus groups to be conducted, this was later shortened to the one focus group, due to the lack of respondents to advertisements or them not being able to attend closer to the time, one of the main reasons the author believes this was prevalent was due to there being no financial incentive, which is a popular form of attracting participants. For future research this would need to be addressed and suitable incentives offered. Fortunately, the one group used was diverse enough in age and background to warrant the method still being used, however the majority of participants were
female, presenting a possible imbalance. The reason for the lack of male participants is however, unknown.

3.8: Conclusion
In conclusion to the methodology chapter, the research methods have been identified, defined and a justification of why the researcher used them to complete his research. Aside from this the researcher has identified the validity that these methods have offered as well as the impediments and constraints that had become apparent in using them. Following from this, reader will find in the next chapter the outcomes of these methods and the data analysis of the research.
Chapter 4: Results and Analysis of Primary Research
4.0: Results, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Introduction
This chapter will present and analyse the data collected, the researcher undertook three methods of investigation:

- Questionnaire
- Two semi structured interviews with industry professionals
- One Focus Group with a sample of 8 participants

Starting with the qualitative methods used, the questionnaire results will be presented, and each image will be discussed and cross referenced with the remainder of the survey. The semi structured interviews section will draw on main discussions and quotes from the interview, a sample of the interview transcript can also be found in the appendices. Much like the interviews, the focus group section will draw on the main topics discussed and the conclusions of the group conversations, again a sample of the focus group transcripts can be found in the appendices

4.2 Questionnaires

4.2.1: Q1 - Gender

The respondents of the questionnaire totalled 80, all completed through social media as a distribution channel and the use of email contacts of the researcher. Nineteen respondents were male (less than 25%), leaving 60+ respondents being female, (almost 80%) an unfortunate gap in gender participation, although previous studies show that
women participate in online surveys more than men, according to a study by (Smith, 2008) who undertook research on survey participation in reference to different factors such as age, gender, social standing etc.

4.2.2: Q2 - What age bracket do you fall in?

The age range of respondents was more diverse than the gender bracket, however still a large proportion was allocated to participants under the age of thirty-five, (63%) a statistic supported by a study carried out by (Goyder, 1986) stating that younger people are more likely to participate in surveys. An indication of the large number of younger participants could be due to the distribution channel used, relying on social media and other forms of electronic distribution, it may be seen that potential participants of the older generation would be less inclined or unable to participate, due to accessibility or knowledge of the platforms used.
4.2.3: Q3 - Which of the following social media platforms do you use regularly? (Please tick all relevant)

This question allowed participants to select multiple answers. Facebook a clear winner with 97% of respondents using it leads the table. Google+ followed by Instagram seen as popular platforms. Much to the researchers surprise, Twitter was significantly lower than expected with only 23 respondents using it, along with Pintrest, which is supposedly the new and upcoming form of social media interaction “Pinterest, an online bulletin board for your favourite images, launched in 2010 and is already experiencing wild growth. The site registered more than 7 million unique visitors in December” (Falls, 2012), an article underlining the key points of Pintrest and the reasons both consumers and businesses alike are taking advantage of the platform.

4.2.4: Q4 - For what reasons do you use these platforms?
This question allowed for participants to give brief comments on the reasons they use these social media platforms, a large amount of responses returned stated that the main reason for using social media was for communication purposes, mostly between family, friends and peers, closely followed by the want to find deals and promotions for various things.
4.2.5: Q5 - Have you ever taken advantage of an organisation’s social media site? What for?

The researcher chose this question to determine what motivates users to use organisation’s social platforms. As seen above the leader would be communication, followed by deals and promotions and a smaller percentage is then used for complaints and feedback, the fourth section ‘other’ covered aspects related to advertising, and contained a small 4%.

4.2.6: Q6 - Have you heard of the Park Plaza and/or The Vale Resort?

The percentage of participants that had heard of the two organisations was high, with almost 88%, of those who didn’t hear of them, the larger percentage was men. This question proves that the organisations in question are well known in the public eye.
4.2.7: Q7 - If yes, do you follow any of their online domains, which ones? (Select all relevant)

This question was designed to gain a better insight into what platforms users follow in regards to the organisations in question. Overall 31% of users follow their Facebook pages, with Facebook being the leader across both genders, then followed by Instagram, then Twitter, a very small amount follow their Pinterest accounts. Despite the above platforms being followed, a high number of respondents don’t actually follow their sites.

4.2.8: Q8 - Why do you follow these specific platforms?
The most responded answer to this question was deals, promotions and offers, with the second highest being information and news on the organisations and to keep up to date with them. Less prominent ones were due to professional reasons, i.e. following them due to working in the establishment and using it to compare competitiveness.

4.2.9: Q9 - Is social media a good thing for the hotel industry?
Most responses were mixed or conflicting, giving yes and no answers, giving opinions on both positive and negative points. There was one response however which claimed he/she wouldn’t use social media in association with the hotel industry. Many claimed that the use of marketing through social media has opened businesses up and allowed to advertise to a wider and more diverse audience, on the other hand the negative comments being put on social media are therefore public and harder to control, which participants stated is a downside to these platforms.
4.2.10: Q10 - Is the increase of social media usage limiting the range of customers being able to take advantage of hotel services. This question was used partially as a hint to gain a response about age and the ages brackets using social media, however, the majority of the responses were in favour of social media. Many of the responses arguing that the social media platform is an additional not alternative use of communication, and that it has expanded the opportunities for users. On the other hand, some responses claimed that social media is disabling some demographics and not concentrating on original forms of advertising, such as print.

4.2.11: Q11 - Would you consider Trip Advisor a form of Social Media?

To the researcher’s surprise, many responses claimed that TripAdvisor is a form of social media, a website dedicated to the responses of users and feedback of organisations customers, it allows the public to converse with other users, perhaps not to the extent of Facebook and Twitter, but the option for communication is there. Almost 70% of responses believe that the platform is a form of social media.

4.2.12: Q12 - Is social media being used to it's full potential by organisations?
The final question in the survey was, do respondents believe that the hotel industry is using the social media platform to its full potential. A small 12% believed that the industry is using these platforms to the best of their ability, whereas 46% of responses answered no, and a 41% answered unsure.
4.3 Focus Group

The researcher had prepared a list of topics for the participants to discuss in the focus group. Firstly, please see the list of topics chosen for the group to discuss. A sample of the focus group transcription can be found in the appendix of this document.

Topics

- 1) Has Social Media enabled hotels to better sell/promote themselves or has it made them a bigger target? **DISCUSS** (Facebook, Twitter) The power of the hashtag?
- 2) Do you follow either of the organisations online domains? i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, (Park Plaza, The Vale Resort)? Why? **DISCUSSION**
- 3) Is social media just another way to complain? **DISCUSS**
- 4) Does gender play a large part in the complaints and feedback process? **DISCUSS**
- 5) Is social media being ageist? Some users who frequent hotels often, not being able to use one of the main methods of communication. Are other methods of communication still used> i.e. Emails offers? Mail Shots? Are they effective? **DISCUSS**
- 6) What’s good/bad about Park Plaza’s social media presence? **DISCUSS** What would you change if you were in charge?
- 7) What’s good/bad about The Vale Resort’s social media presence? **DISCUSS** What would you change if you were in charge?
- 8) What do you think Social media could be doing in the future, to help better the platforms used.
- 9) TripAdvisor... using it as a social media platform what are the benefits, conversing with other users? Discuss

4.3.1: Topic 1: Has Social Media enabled hotels to better sell/promote themselves or has it made them a bigger target

This question had sparked conversation; the consensus was that social media has ultimately enabled hotels. Participants stated that such a variety of people use social media that it can only possibly benefit businesses, as its enabling them to reach a wider customer base. One participant had mentioned that they wouldn’t go to a hotel without checking the hotels social media website, and their online reviews, commonly found on Facebook. When asked by the researcher to look at the opposite, has it made businesses more of a target? An instant response was that social media has made it easier for people to complain. A debate had erupted from this topic, saying that although people have easier access to complain, businesses have as much access to defend themselves. The topic of reviews being genuine and reliable also came into discussion, with any review, it’s just someone’s opinion and preferences differ from person to person. A few participants had agreed that customers are more likely to pick up on negative experiences and then review them, instead of positive ones.
and that unfortunately one bad review can undermine several good ones. It was also stated that review sites do not give a true representation due to reviewers only being motivated by excellent or poor reviews, not average ones.

4.3.2: Topic 2: Do you follow either of the organisations online domains? i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, (Park Plaza, The Vale Resort)?

This participants were asked to determine why people follow certain social media pages associated with The Vale Resort and The Park Plaza. Firstly, the answers all centred around the subject of promotions and deals in these establishments, and the competitions that the businesses share on their online pages, such as the share/like to win a prize offers. One participant had mentioned a current promotion on The Vale’s Facebook page that involved a luxury spa day prize with TempleSpa, the participant had mentioned that she and many of her Facebook friends had shared this competition, in the hope of winning. The discussion moved onto Instagram, where the consensus was, that participants use Instagram as a more visual platform, and ideal to gain a clear feel for a venue, perhaps for a wedding or function, being able to see past events and pictures. The fact that users are becoming lazier and that they don’t want to read something, they want visuals, pictures, short videos to see and move on. Participants mentioned that the organisations Instagram pages “put them in a very good light” and that the whole point, and something they do well is give an ‘instant’ impression.

The researcher has brought up the topic of Pintrest, the feedback received from participants when asked if they believed Pintrest is a form of social media was conflicted, the researcher stated that much like Instagram it’s a very visual platform. The response from the group was that its isn’t social media, and although you can converse with other users, the majority of activities is browsing ‘boards’ and ‘pins’

4.3.3: Topic 3: Is social media just another way to complain?

This question had sparked an interest within the group and they began to share their own experiences. One participant had said she would tweet anyone if she is annoyed with the service or product. The fact that using social media warrants a much faster response was brought to attention, and that consumer wouldn’t have to wait until the next day to complain. Another participant confessed that she believed that it should be the second choice to complain and that complaints should be done directly either by phone or face to face. The author had asked the group if everyone had used social media as a form to complain or give feedback, the majority had confessed yes. Although confessing their complaints, a few participants had mentioned they are equally likely to give positive feedback to businesses via
social media, and that you can share photos when you do so, which benefits other users. The majority of participants that would use social media to give feedback, good or bad, used Facebook, one participant mentioned she would use Twitter, this being one of the younger participants in the group. Another participant had mentioned that consumers often use it because “they don’t have the bottle to front up to the people who they are making the complaint to”, another member mentioned a ‘cowards way’ of complaining, which had a negative reaction from another participant stating that some people are merely anxious of face to face confrontation. It was mentioned that sometimes people aren’t always looking for a resolution but are “just looking for a way to rant”

4.3.4: Topic 4: Does gender play a large part in the complaints and feedback process? This topic was put across to participants, coming from a male (Researcher) it sparked a few laughs in the way it was worded and asked, and some gender jokes had been raised, however, one participant had noted that women are more likely to complain over social media, also, couples are more likely to complain via the woman. The researcher had asked a more direct question, who is more likely to give feedback, the answer was agreed that women would be. A participant had mentioned that although women are more likely to express their opinions via social media, it doesn’t automatically mean it’s a complaint.

4.3.5: Topic 5: Is social media being ageist? Some users who frequent hotels often, not being able to use one of the main methods of communication. Are other methods of communication still used

From this topic, the researcher wanted the opinions of participants on the effectiveness of other communication methods, and are they being replaced by social media, in effect limiting the range of customers due to technology uses. One participant stated that it was cheaper to do a status instead of sending out a mail shot, however some of the older participants had expressed that customers should be contacted by their preferred method of communication. In regards to competitions online, the question of does it set the older generation at a disadvantage when using technology and social media, the consensus was no. One participant had mentioned that in the process of marketing, it’s not their intention to leave people out, and social media is available to everyone, it’s an individual’s choice if they use it. A few participants had argued that more of the older generation use Facebook, and that it’s not as big an issue as people think.
These next two topics are more direct to the organisations in question, one of the stipulations to participants attending the group, was that they all had to be aware of Park Plaza and The Vale Resorts social media presence.

4.3.6: Topic 6: What’s good/bad about Park Plaza’s social media presence?
Park Plaza: Participants were impressed with Park Plaza’s social media, Facebook in particular, stating that their use of photos, offers, and upcoming events were updated regularly, minimum of once a day. The researcher had mentioned that one thing Park Plaza don’t want customers to believe is that they are a corporate machine, and they would prefer to interact with consumers instead simply feeding them information. One participant stated that Park Plaza’s Facebook page in particular goes a long way toward that goal, another stating that they make their posts relatable to others, for instance their TGIF posts on a Friday. Many were impressed with the amount it updates and maintains a public image online. One participant had pulled up the Park Plaza's Facebook and Twitter page to have a look through, identifying that they are funny and relatable, highlighting a post on a Sunday (Perfect Hangover Cure) and advertising their Sunday Lunch. Initially there were no immediate recommendations for the businesses online presence, except maybe to do more advertising of the product like focussing on the price of one night or two-night stays, although pointing out they do this for other departments i.e. spa and restaurant.

4.3.7: Topic 7: What’s good/bad about The Vale Resort’s social media presence?
The Vale Resort: It was identified by a contributor that The Vale is clearly trying to market itself as a venue more than a hotel, they concentrate more on the resort side, another participant had replied that being largely a weddings destination, The Vale market a lot on weddings due to it being much more popular. The same participant who had pulled up the social media pages for Park Plaza, did so for this venue as well, highlighting that unlike Park Plaza they advertise the prizes and packages more, which is something as a group they were looking for. A particular highlight to some of the participants was that The Vale post their positive feedback on their wall instead of leaving them in the review page, another member had highlighted it was promoting the venue further and easier for readers to find.

4.3.8: Topic 8: What do you think Social media could be doing in the future, to help better the platforms used?
Participants were able to respond by linking it to social media in general, not just the hotel industry and the organisations in question. One participant had mentioned a major
supermarket chain that are very witty and have good ‘banter’ online, linking back to the talking with consumers instead of at them. A discussion ensued with participants acknowledging the fun element in social media usage humanises the experience conversing with them and actually listening to their replies and giving personal sometimes witty responses, instead of a generic one, they prefer that form of interaction. The researcher had highlighted that the social media sites for the organisations stated above are run solely by one person, and that they have access to these platforms, 24/7. Another form of social media had arisen in conversation, blogging. The opinions of blogging within hotels, was well received however one participant whose occupation involves writing blogs, stated that there is a way to do it and it needs to be short and sweet, however behind the scenes is beneficial for users to experience mentioning that behind the scenes blogging would give an element of transparency. The conversation then moved to bloggers using hotels and the influence they have on the writing they do, again said by the participant who blogs, readers want to read an experience not a review.

4.3.9: Topic 9: Trip Advisor… using it as a social media platform what are the benefits, conversing with other users?

The final topic was on Trip Advisor, and do the participants see it as a form of social media and is it a beneficial tool? The answer for this original question was no, it isn’t a form of social media, however is it’s a very useful tool, with every participant agreeing they use it or have used in the past. The discussion followed on to, reviews on Trip Advisor, after being asked do they purposefully look for the bad reviews, many admitted yes, due to the fact they are able to do it so easily, by filtering the ratings on the review and they like to read an all-round opinion of users, both excellent and terrible, giving examples such as a review complimenting almost every aspect of the venue, however perhaps it had one part that was a major downfall, the example was that it had a major concentration for children, which then gave the reader information they needed. It was sparked that users should be mindful that by filtering it needs to be done correctly, as you may be reading a review from previous years which although informative may be irrelevant due to changes within the business. After being told that users can converse on Trip advisor and view others profiles, the participants had still come to the conclusion that they have never or have no intention of conversing with a stranger about their experience via the platform. One of participants, however commented she might conduct research on a reviewer to see if they have stayed in similar places and if they are ‘serial complainers’ in which case she wouldn’t take any notice of their review. The researcher had given the group some definitions of social media, and one participant mentioned that by
definition Trip Advisor could be a form of social media, but she still personally wouldn’t consider it, this was agreed by the entire group, one of the premise was that you can’t build a network on it, i.e. make friends/contacts.

It was mentioned and agreed at the end of the focus group that the pro’s significantly out way the cons when social media is involved.
The researcher had organised two interviews with industry professionals to give a clearer perspective on industry views in regards to the social media platform. Samples of each interview transcript can be found in the appendix of this document.

A note to the reader, the interview questions had overlapped on some topics therefore the topics written below may not be in order to the original interview questions seen in the appendix.

4.4: Semi-Structured Interview: Park Plaza

The interview with Lubna Anani, the marketing assistant and social media operator at the Park Plaza had given her opinions on social media. (A sample of the transcript is available in the appendices, Appendix 8)

4.4.1: Topic 1

When asked how Park Plaza has adapted to the social media platform, the participant had replied that it has grown since the inception of its Facebook and Twitter accounts over 5 years ago, and that as a business they are still learning and they invest a lot of training and time into, what she describes as a powerful tool.

4.4.2: Topic 2

Although an obvious question to the researcher, when asked if the establishment employs a designated person to maintain the online business of the organisation, the participant had expressed it was her, the marketing department within the business is small, comprising of herself and the marketing director, and although they discuss many aspects of content to post online, the majority of the responsibility is left to her.

4.4.3: Topic 6

When asked if she can see her department needing to grow, the interviewee replied with if more could be done through the marketing department, then it would, she stated that she doesn’t solely deal with social media, and there are other aspects of marketing and promotions she cares for. The interviewee had expressed that at the moment social media is more of a point of contact, and perhaps in the future if the department were to expand, it could be a service as well, instead of directing users, helping them. Mentioning its dependant on what you use social media for.
4.4.4: Topic 7
When asked what’s the main purpose for Park Plaza using social media, Lubna answered with, it’s very much brand awareness, they want to ensure everyone knows their name, and to be able to control the content and results users see when googling Park Plaza and their branched departments i.e. spa and restaurant.

4.4.5: Topic 3
The researcher went on to ask has social media impacted on the Park Plaza both positively and negatively, to which Lubna answered: that it definitely has, commenting on most recent occasions, whereby users are realising the power social media has, in regards to threats of leaving a negative review on Facebook, Twitter or TripAdvisor, she had admitted however that if you offer poor service you’re going to get poor feedback, it’s not something that Park Plaza are threatened by she says, however in light of a bad review it’s a reflective process, they can then acknowledge they have done something wrong, investigate it, and internally amend the errors that caused that issue. Some people believe they can get a freebie if they complain online, but as a business she states that staff log everything so they then know how to deal with it, she states the business won’t bow down to users who try to take advantage.

4.4.6: Topic 4
When asked about if the business has developed any strategic measures, and how the Park Plaza have implemented these in regards to customer using social media to their advantage, Lubna mentions that they have implemented an adapted strategy to ensure all reviews are reviewed, and that every department or person relevant gets that information, Lubna mentioned it’s essential both positive and negative comments are passed on, she states that with positive comments, that enhances staff morale and gives them clarity that what they are doing its right, it’s a motivator. When users post photos or comments about a specific person, it validates them.

4.4.7: Topic 5
When asked about how social media has made Park Plaza more accessible, the interviewee had answered with a definite yes, especially in regards to communication, stating that there is so much communication through social media, and that even on weekends she is replying to queries and sharing posts, commenting it’s a 24/7 service. Lubna mentions that’s it all about timely responses and replying quickly, she admits she won’t reply to users at 3 in the morning, communication is key and reiterating the previous comment that that delegating the information to relevant departments and staff is paramount. She mentions it’s the response
and the communication that’s important. She acknowledges that Park Plaza’s social media is very friendly and funny, and they stay away from the strict corporate style postings about selling and promotions. She happily admitted that they are a hotel with personality, and that Park Plaza has its own voice.

4.4.8: Topic 8
When asked about the main objective of using social media, Lubna answered, making new relationships and creating more ways to interact. A major point the interviewee had mentioned was promotion, she used Facebook as an example, being able to post an advert on Facebook and boosting it for a small fee, will enable that post to be seen by so many users and the response, i.e. visitors to the site is huge she says. Admitting that for pure marketing, social media is so beneficial and cheap and using it reaches a range of demographics. Using Facebook, Lubna added that to advertise a certain product, she used the spa as an example, for a small fee she is able to target a certain demographic choosing specifics such as gender, age, location, and this paid ‘advert boost’ is able to attract the ‘right people’. Stating strongly again that they don’t want to be seen purely trying to sell to users, maintaining that friendly face is important.

4.4.9: Topic 9
When asked what the participant feels is the future of the social media platform in regard to the hotel industry, Lubna stated that it’s such a powerful tool, and that the usage of it will continue to grow, the fact that the amount of communication that can be done through social media on so many platforms is vast and hotels are able to utilise them all. When explaining how powerful social media is in the hospitality industry, she refers to Instagram and the amount of power or influence one photo can have. She mentions the various platforms the organisation uses and when asked about Trip Advisor she mentions she believes it’s a form of social media. When prompted about financial gain, Lubna mentions that social media is very cost effective for the hotel industry.
4.5: Semi Structured Interview: The Vale Resort

Molly, the E-Commerce Executive at The Vale Resort at given some of her opinions on Social Media. (A sample of the interview transcript can be found in the

4.5.1: Topic 1

The first topic asked to Molly was how has the Vale Resort adapted to the social media platform, to which she answered they have adapted very well, being on the major social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pintrest and Google+, mentioning they mainly use Pintrest for imagery of the recently refurbished Hensol Castle, being a strong platform it's important to maintain a presence there. Mentioning they don't currently have Snapcha, being too much for one person to handle and they don’t have a designated person on constantly to be able to man the application, she mentions if they were to branch into Snapchat they would firstly try their hand at Instagram stories, due to the already popular following on the application. Stating that Facebook works very well for them and its used strongly for promotions and last minute deals within the resorts departments, with emphasis on the spa and its last-minute availability. Molly mentioned an example of her putting a 50% off TempleSpa treatments on Facebook and within an hour all of those treatments had been sold. She mentions that the spa and the hotel are the main adverts processed on Facebook. Instagram is very popular due to the imagery especially for Hensol Castle, and The Vale’s Instagram page is benefiting from seeing behind the scenes imagery and snapshots. Twitter again being used for last minute deals. She states that Facebook is their strongest platform.

4.5.2: Topic 2

When asked if the business employs a designated person to manage and control social media, Molly sates that she herself is solely responsible for all online content being the E-Commerce Executive. With Facebook being a 24hr platform Molly mentions she has access to it constantly, through her personal devices, she mentions that she will answer queries if she feels they need to be answered quickly if not she will consult the relevant departments to help resolve any queries or matters arising. Molly also mentions that if a team were in place they would be able to do a lot more with social media, but with one person it has limitations, where they could be actively looking for future trends, and perhaps look at platforms such as snapchat, presently she concentrates on her strongest applications and doesn’t have time to experiment with possible new ones.
4.5.3: Topic 3

The researcher had asked about the positive and negative impacts that social media has on the business, to which Molly answered, Facebook is very strong, they do paid advertising through Facebook which enables businesses to reach a larger range of people, and they are able to analyse who likes and views these adverts (Gender, ages, location). Mentioning negative impacts, she mentions that it is an outlet for people to complain, and she agrees as to why they do it, as they do have a quicker response, or maybe they didn’t have the response or outcome they wanted by emailing or conversing with the hotel managers, she mentions its frustrating due to it being so public and they are unable to delete it. Although when issues are resolved they are able to ask users to delete their posts as it is harmful to the image. When asked if users are turning more to social media to complain instead of applications such as Trip Advisor, she believes they are, she mentions that people are realising that they are able to get a quicker response and a resolution, to which she elaborates that with her job being based on a computer she is able to acknowledge the complaint quickly and if needed ask the marketing manager or sales and marketing director for a resolution. Admitting that she herself has done this, she will turn to social media to gain a quick response. Being able to check in on social media is good for the business as it raises awareness.

4.5.4: Topic 4

When asked about strategic measures, she mentions they were developed naturally when she saw patterns in negative comments from users, she mentions quick responses help, it aids in any developments in the situation and potential ‘threads’ appearing where other users catch on and discuss in a public area. Despite the negative comments seen, she mentions that the users who follow them are privy to better deals and promotions which they wouldn’t have found elsewhere.

4.5.5: Topic 5

When asked has social media made the business more accessible, Molly answered that communication has increased, she has many questions posted to her on social media, and although she doesn’t know all the answers, she is able to find them and reply swiftly. Molly believes it’s a good relationship builder, and a good way to converse with users, making it more personal. She mentions that it’s a positive experience that the hotel replies or shares their comments and photos, it humanises them and shows they care. The speed in which she replies is always a benefit, knowing that they will get a response quickly is beneficial to them, she also identifies that although they could get the information online or on the phone,
sometimes users just want a quick answer there and then. Unfortunately, with the targeted comments, she mentions it’s inevitable and it’s the new way to complain.

4.5.6: Topic 6
When asked if she thinks that social media will keep growing and the need for more of a team to run online domains, she agrees, stating that it’s constantly evolving and it will outlive print advertising, arguing that social media is not a fad and it will continue to grow. Molly states that for businesses and advertising its brilliant, being able to reach the level of users is so beneficial. Molly mentions that behind the scenes updates and comments from staff get some of the most likes, she mentions it humanises the business and it’s not just a corporate entity, mentioning that many wedding customers get to know their wedding coordinators, and being able to see them in their office having fun or participating in a charity event is enjoyable for them.

4.5.7: Topic 7
When asked the main uses for social media for this business, its noted that much of this has already been covered in other topics, however Molly mentions that showing that the business has a personality, this is an important tool when building relationships between business and user.

4.5.8: Topic 8
What is the aim of using social media for The Vale was answered with, being seen, creating awareness, offers and promotions, connecting with users, using it as a forum to converse, she mentions there is no official strategy for social media but the main focus is to raise awareness and connect with customers. Monitoring the increase of followers on Facebook and Twitter is important, they don’t have a goal or a set amount each month, as long as it rises. Mentioning that applications such as Twitter are hard, because it’s so fast paced, and a single tweet can be lost very quickly on someone’s timeline.

4.5.9: Topic 9
When asked if she would change or improve anything in regards to the Vale’s social media presence, Molly answered with this: time to plan, and develop structures. As social media is a current and present entity forward planning is hard, she emphasises this by acknowledging she is the sole person on hand. She mentions with a team they could develop structures for the entire year based on trends and it wouldn’t be as ad hoc posts. Being able to analyse photos and posts that have worked well in the past and researching future ways to post content would be helpful to her. She mentions that blogging is also another path to follow,
with it being so popular. But she admits than in order to write a blog you need time to research and post. When asked if she could see The Vale investing in a larger team for the potential of blogging she agrees it is something they are likely to look at, but they haven’t seen just how big blogging is yet. Its currently manageable with one person as long as they don’t expect the world, stating that perhaps when Hensol Castle has opened, they will look at developing more marketing strategies and ways to increase online presence. Mentioning paid advertising, Molly explained that they use Facebook as the major advert posting platform, being able to target specific users through previous likes, genders, ages, interests and location. Mentioning they don’t have a budget for these paid advertisements but admitting that future online growth would warrant a budget.

4.5.10: Topic 10

When asked about the future of social media in the hotel industry, Molly mentions it’s just going to get bigger, with so many people using it on their mobile devices, it’s a application that is constantly available. Stating that social media is essential for any business, as so many users go to social media before going on to booking a hotel. Discussing applications, she mentioned that the business has looked at potential apps in the future, but they aren’t there yet.
4.6 Discussion of Data

4.6.1: The Uses of Social Media

Social media has many uses in today’s society, as highlighted above in the analysis of the questionnaires, the main reasons were found to be communication, mostly between family, friends and peers, followed by the interest in finding deals and promotions. Communication between family, friends and peers can be linked to the theory highlighted in the literature review in regards to Maslow’s hierarchy, this meaning that communication between these groups is often done in the public domain for everyone to see, therefore users are looking for effects such as recognition, attention and appreciation from others who share the platform.

Finding deals and promotions online was the other strong factor in the usage of social media, referring to heading 2.4: The Consumer Experience, (Tung and Ritchie, 2011) highlighted that consumers link their experience from the offset of searching and booking the trip/stay, finding a promotion online would give many users a positive outlook, due to the opportunity of saving money, therefore increasing the potential for positive experiences thereafter. The use of promotions and offers on social media are accepted and approved by both consumer and business, both stating that its purpose of posting deals and offers is enticing and generates attention.

All methods of research had found that social media has become a platform to complain for users, it being so accessible and easy, the participants of the focus group stated they complain online, knowing they will get a response more quickly, this corresponds with a small number of questionnaire participants (23%) using social media for complaints and feedback, the answers from the interviews showed that that they believe the platform is naturally going to attract users to post negative posts, however both Park Plaza and The Vale mentioned that users are becoming more aware of the power of social media when complaining, both admitting that the good outweighs the bad, linking back to (Beohar, 2016) stating that good comments would equal free promotion however negative comments would incur possible damage and friction against the business. Pinterest was a subject that has been controversial in the results, of this project, with industry professionals seeing Pinterest as a form of social media however the feedback given in the focus group showed that because of its lack of interaction capabilities and ability to ‘make friends’ it shouldn’t be classed as the same kind of platform, this would be agreed by Pinterest creator as cited in chapter two (2.3).

4.6.2: Feedback and the use of Social Media

Both participants of the interviews stated that timely responses are key when using social media, both Molly and Lubna mention that being able to acknowledge and resolve a situation
online is beneficial to the image of the hotel, the researcher believes that businesses are only achieving this due to the access rights given to the staff running the social media accounts, they can access these applications constantly from their personal devices.

In relation to negative comments, Lubna from Park Plaza described them as opportunities not threats, explaining that negative feedback is a form of highlighting something that may need attention, therefore she mentions that all feedback is filtered down through the departments. Molly for The Vale Resort mentions that although negative comments are posted online, if the issue is resolved, businesses can request for comments to be removed, with it hindering the image of the business (Begwani, Pal and Solutions, 2015) cited in chapter two of this document argues that acknowledgment should happen as soon as possible, and if necessary dealt with immediately if needed via private correspondence. Luckily the businesses in question allow access rights to the designated employee out of office hours, however would this be the same in every organisation?

In the focus group, one participant mentioned that social media shouldn’t be used as a way to complain and it should be dealt with at the time, ‘face to face’, referring to (Begwani, Pal and Solutions, 2015) his statement would approve of the participants comments, stating that social media shouldn’t be substituting the common forms of feedback, therefore shouldn’t be the only thing relied upon, However, Molly for The Vale Resort admits that she ‘doesn’t blame them’ for using social media to complain, and that she herself does it, admitting that users do get a faster response, Lubna from Park Plaza stated that although you do get online feedback, users who are just after ‘freebies’ aren’t tolerated. In conclusion to this argument, some opinions say that social media shouldn’t be used as a tool to complain whereas others admit that it’s the quickest and most effective way to get a response, perhaps other forms of feedback need more attention?

One subject that is conflicting in the results produced is the question, is Trip Advisor a form of social media, the results of the questionnaire had showed that participants had strongly favoured that Trip Advisor was a form of social media, as did the interview with Molly and Lubna, however the results from the focus group, shown that due to the lack of resources to create relationships and interact with other users it shouldn’t be classed as a form of social media.

4.6.3: Building Relationships
In chapter two under heading 2.5 the researcher explored customer loyalty, through primary research he drew the following conclusion, building relationships between user and business
is likely to contribute to customer loyalty, previously mentioned, the interaction between customer and business is important from initial inquiry to departure of guest. Interviews with both Park Plaza and The Vale Resort showed the researcher that actively trying to build loyalty isn’t what’s happening in these establishments but rather communication between hotel and customer on a more personal level, both organisations are turning their backs on appearing as professional, corporate entities and instead trying to enjoy the social media experience, and interact with customers, both interviewees believed that this was a beneficial way of making customers feel valued and heard. As stated in chapter two, heading 2.3: Organisations and the Social Media Platform, a study conducted by (Knowles, Dieck & Jung, 2013) saw that hotels are attempting to talk with users of social media and interact with them and build relationships, the two establishments in which this work is based certainly fulfil that expectation, making it their key focus online. Referring to Maslow, as stated in chapter two, the interview with both organisations show that as a business they care about the experiences of their guests, in this case positive ones, it gives the user a positive boost and shows that sharing these comments and photos is appreciated, and this is in favour of Maslow’s theory. The researcher has found that social media is a strong device for any organisation, being able to utilise social media users a tool to market a business simply by interacting with them and building some form of relationship, the result being users liking, sharing and posting comments linked to the business, although some comments may be negative, it’s still raising awareness of the business and expanding online views, which according to Lubna form Park Plaza is one of the main focuses, to continuously raise awareness of the business and gain more following.

4.6.4: Adapting to the new trend
During the focus group, participants were given the topic of future trends they would like to see in social media, the general consensus was that communication and interaction between users was key. Blogging was a subject raised within the focus group, it was mentioned that blogging is complex and needs to be done correctly to be effective. The interview with Molly at The Vale Resort confirms that blogging is likely to be something used in the near future, however she stated that expansion is needed in order to fulfil this plan, and a workload so large would be too much for one person. When asked about Pintrest the responses from the focus group and the interviews varied, the focus group didn’t identify the application as a form of social media, whereas its treated as one by the organisations in question, perhaps the fact that interaction is less prevalent on the application is the major factor, which corresponds with the outcome of the other topics, that the use of social media is used and wanted for
mainly communication purposes. When asked about the future of social media in the hotel industry, Molly answered, the fact it’s constantly growing means new things will be developed. Referring to chapter two (2.4), applications have started to be used to incorporate the entire customer experience from booking, checking in, accessing rooms, payment and check out, although as she pointed out in the interview that is a future advancement for this organisation.

4.7: Conclusion
In conclusion to this chapter, the reader will have found an in-depth analysis of the data retrieved from the three methods chosen, followed by a discussion of the main factors raised and identified, then linked back to the academic theory discussed in chapter two. The discussion concentrates the findings into 4 points, as subtitled above. The reader will find following this chapter, a conclusion to this research document, discussing the impediments faced and recommendations for further research in this topic as well as recommendations aimed at the hotel industry.
Chapter 5: Recommendations, and Conclusion
5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1: Introduction

The aim of this research was to identify the impacts of social media on the hotel industry, with emphasis on marketing aspects. Various forms of data collection were undertaken, including secondary research and three methods of primary research. The research identified some key features in the marketing process of hotels, with emphasis on the two organisations in question.

This chapter will conclude this document, the reader will find a summary of the secondary and primary results and the main findings those results produced. The reader will find recommendations made by the researcher for further research to take place and more direct approaches that could be taken. The hotel industry will also benefit from reading that trends and advancement is expected of them, as highlighted by social media users.

5.2: Complications and Impediments Experienced

The researcher experienced some impediments when conducting this research, to begin: the topic being a relatively new area, the secondary research wasn’t as vast as one would have hoped, although rich with information on social media, the more in depth theory and usage of the application was less prevalent. The primary research conducted was substantial for the time allowed for this project, with regret the author would have liked a larger sample for his questionnaire as well as a more equal gender participation ratio. With regard to the focus group, the original intention was to hold two, however the researcher later decided to hold only one, as generating interest proved difficult, with more of a sample the author feels that more data could be recorded and analysed.

These complications to the research have not hindered the project, however as the reader will see below, this is an opportunity for future research with the hope that if larger samples are obtained greater results will be shown.

With further knowledge and a larger sample of participants and data, the researcher would look at studying the TAM model further and adapting it, as well as delving deeper into user’s needs, based on Maslow’s Hierarchy, resulting in the development of a future model on social media usage.

5.3: Primary and Secondary Research Findings

The secondary research undertaken was originally chosen to find a more general pool of information, however after some research the author found that he was leaning more
towards the communication and interaction through social media usage instead of concentrating on the marketing elements. Within the research, findings such as the use of sharing, both photos and statuses of hotel stays were identified. Interaction between user and business is a ‘want’ and need for approval, being linked with Maslow’s fourth level of self-esteem, seeking recognition, attention and appreciation, this was apparent from the comments given in the interview with Molly from The Vale Resort. The focus group had identified that both organisations clearly try and become part of the discussion, not just be the instigator, they highlighted that they involve comedy and loose discussion when participating with users and even incorporate this humour into their advertising, calling attention to specific adverts posted on social media by both organisations. Some results are conflicted and secondary and primary argued different opinions, an example of this would be the classifications of social media, in particular Trip Advisor and Pinterest, results of the primary research had clashed regarding Trip Advisor with the questionnaire showing participants agreeing that the application is a form of social media, as well as the interview from Molly however the focus group came to the strong consensus that it is not due to its lack of personal interactive qualities, the same was said for Pinterest.

5.4: Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the results of this research, the researcher’s recommendation for further study into this subject are:

- To delve deeper into the access rights and responsibilities of employees who deal with social media accounts, concentrating on the effectiveness of interaction between business and customer.
- Establish if traditional methods of feedback and communication are being replaced by social media or merely giving an alternative
- Attempt to determine the next step for successful social media usage for the hotel industry based on current trends.
- The development of a model on the usage of social media, based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as well as taking into consideration the TAM model discussed in this study.

5.5: Result Based Recommendations for Industry Professionals

Based on the results found in the secondary research, focus groups and questionnaires, the researcher has the following recommendations for hotel businesses including the two organisations included in this study:

- Continuing and adapting communication methods between business and customer
• Making all aspects of interactivity from beginning to then end of customer experience enjoyable, practical and accessible.
• Adapting ways in which to communicate and share with users, blogging is a strong upcoming trend that should be explored.

5.6: Summary
In summary, the reader will find a document that has researched the new and constantly growing trend of social media and the theory behind it, developing his own research into two organisations and highlighting key features into the uses and functions of certain applications. As well as concluding with recommendations for further research into this topic.
Appendices
## Appendices

### Ethics Approval Form: Appendix 1

![Ethics Approval Form](image-url)
 PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Interview)

Cardiff Metropolitan University Ethics Reference Number:
Participant name or Study ID Number:
Title of Project:
Name of Researcher:

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. [ ]

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. [ ]

3. I agree to take part in the above study. [ ]

4. I agree to the interview being recorded [ ]

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications or [ ] [ ]

6. I would like my organisations’ name to be anonymised in all publications [ ] [ ]

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Name of person taking consent ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Signature of person taking consent ___________________________

* When completed, 1 copy for participant & 1 copy for researcher site file
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Focus Group)

Cardiff Metropolitan University Ethics Reference Number:
Participant name or Study ID Number:
Title of Project:
Name of Researcher:

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. [ ]

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. [ ]

3. I agree to take part in the above study. [ ]

4. I agree to the focus group being recorded

Yes No [ ]

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications [ ]

______________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant          Date

______________________________  _______________________
Name of person taking consent     Date

______________________________
Signature of person taking consent

* When completed, 1 copy for participant & 1 copy for researcher site file
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Interview)

The impacts of social media on the hotel industry: A comparative study between the Park Plaza and the Vale Resort

Project summary

The purpose of this research is to determine the impacts of social media with emphasis on two hotels in South Wales. Using the data collected the researcher will be able to determine the main advantages and disadvantages of this ever-growing trend.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate in this study as you are a professional within the hotel industry and more so a professional with the social media sector of the industry. Conducting this interview will enable the researcher to gain a better understanding of hotel social media management, the impacts the social media platform has on your business and the day to day use of your organisation's social media sites and what strategies you have in place. Your skills and industry knowledge will benefit the researcher in his dissertation project.

Project risks

Your participation does not hold any obvious physical or mental risks, nothing strenuous or harmful will be asked of the participant at any time. The interview will consist of asking a series of questions in regards to social media and the organisation you represent, no inappropriate or personal questions will be asked of the interviewee. However, if the interviewee feels at any time that the question or discussion has become inappropriate they are encouraged to stop the interview without hesitation, and with no penalty. The interview will be recorded, solely for the reason of the researcher being able to return to the recording and extracting information, if the at any time the participant wishes to stop recording, they have every right to do so. The researcher will show full understanding and support if the participant wishes to withdraw at any time.

How we protect your privacy

All the information obtained in this interview will be solely for this research project, it will not be shared to anyone else and all contents including names and personal information will be kept on a security locked laptop (Only accessed by the researcher). All consent forms will be kept securely for the duration of the research project and 5 years thereafter, after they will be destroyed, the same applies for any recordings taken from the interview. Any quotes or comments taken from the interview will be referenced in the final project either by name or job title (participants preference)

YOU WILL BE OFFERED A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET TO KEEP

If you require any further information about this project then please contact:
Harris Stone, Cardiff Metropolitan University
Cardiff Metropolitan University email: st20075312@cardiffmet.ac.uk
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Focus Group)

The impact of social media on the hotel industry: A comparative study between the Park Plaza and The Vale Resort

Project summary

The purpose of this research is to determine the impacts of social media and marketing with emphasis on two hotels in South Wales. Using the data collected the researcher will be able to determine the main advantages and disadvantages of this ever-growing trend.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate in this research because you have either used the establishments in question or have used/seen their social media platforms, which will be helpful in gaining a public opinion on the above topic and will enable the researcher to obtain vital knowledge and outlook of the users point of view on the social media trend.

Project risks

This project does not carry any physical risks to the participants, the researcher is not looking to obtain any personal or sensitive data about participants lives and will not use any data collected for any reason other than this research project. Some questions will be expanded and discussions may move into other topics which could prove stressful for the participant, if this happens the participant is encouraged to say and ask for the question/discussion to end. The researcher will have full respect and support any participant if they wish to withdraw from the focus group.

How we protect your privacy

All the information obtained in this focus group will be solely for this research project, it will not be shared to anyone else and all contents including names and personal information will be kept on a security locked laptop (Only accessed by the researcher). All consent forms will be kept securely for the duration of the research project and 5 years thereafter, after they will be destroyed, the same applies for any recordings taken from the focus group. Any quotes or comments taken from the focus group will be referenced in the final project anonymously (no name will be given).

YOU WILL BE OFFERED A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET TO KEEP

If you require any further information about this project then please contact:

Harris Stone, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cardiff Metropolitan University email: st20075312@outlook.cardiffmet.ac.uk
Letters to Organisations: Appendix 4

From: Caroline Sims <csims@parkplazahotels.co.uk>
Sent: 24 October 2016 13:00
To: Harris Stone
Cc: Lubna Anani
Subject: RE: Interview

Hi Harris,

Thank you for your email and unfortunately I am very restricted on my time however your email was very polite so therefore I can agree that you interview my assistant Lu for a maximum of 15 - 20 mins if that is of any help to yourself?

Lu actually manages our social media accounts on a daily basis so probably would be very informative to you.

Kind regards,

Caroline Sims
Director of Sales & Marketing
Park Plaza Cardiff

029 20 111 125
www.parkplazacardiff.com
Click here to take a 360 Tour of the Park Plaza Hotel

---

Caroline Sims
To: Lubna Anani (LAnani@parkplazahotels.co.uk)

Photos

Hi,

No problem please contact Lu on the email address below to take forward when you are ready LAnani@parkplazahotels.co.uk

Kind regards,

Caroline Sims
Director of Sales & Marketing
Park Plaza Cardiff

029 20 111 125
www.parkplazacardiff.com
Click here to take a 360 Tour of the Park Plaza Hotel

---

Molly Mann
To: Harris Stone

Hello Harris,

Yes that’s fine, I’m still happy to do the interview.

Thanks,

Molly Mann
E-Commerce Executive

---

Click here to take a 360 Tour of the Hensol Castle
Questionnaire: Appendix 5

Questionnaire

The purpose of this research project is to collect primary information in relation to social media usage and its impacts on the hotel industry. The project entitled ‘The impacts of social media on the hotel industry: A comparative study between The Park Plaza and The Vale Resort’ depends on various forms of data collection including the completion of this questionnaire. If you would prefer to not to complete this short questionnaire, thank you for taking the time to consider it. If you do wish to participate, please answer the all questions in the below document to the fullest you can.

(All information will be kept confidential, if there are any queries regarding confidentiality please don’t hesitate to ask)

Q1 Your Gender

- Male
- Female

Q2 What age bracket do you fall in?

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-60
- 60+

Q3 Which of the following social media platforms do you use regularly? (Please tick all relevant)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Other

Q4 What reasons do you use these platforms?

- ______________________

Q5 Have you ever taken advantage of an organisation’s direct social media site? What for?

- Deals/Promotions
- Complaints and Feedback
- Communication
- Other.. ______________________
Q6 Have you heard of the Park Plaza and/or The Vale Resort?
   - Yes
   - No

Q7 If yes.. Do you follow any of their online domains, which ones? (Select all relevant)
   - Yes
   - Twitter
   - Instagram
   - Facebook
   - No

Q8 Why do you follow these specific platforms?
   - ____________________
   - I don’t follow

Q9 Is social media a good thing for the hotel industry?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Explain... ____________________

Q8 Is the increase of social media limiting the range of customers being able to take advantage of hotel services.
   - Yes
   - No
   - Explain.. ____________________

Q10 Would you consider Trip Advisor a form of Social Media?
   - Yes
   - No

Q11 Is social media being used to it's full potential by organisations?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not sure
Focus Group Topics/ Questions: Appendix 7

Focus Group Topics

- Has Social Media enabled hotels to better sell/promote themselves or has it made them a bigger target? **DISCUSS** (Facebook, Twitter) The power of the hashtag?
- Do you follow either of the organisations online domains? i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, (Park Plaza, The Vale Resort)? Why? **DISCUSS**
- Is social media just another way to complain? **DISCUSS**
- Does gender play a large part in the complaints and feedback process? **DISCUSS**
- Is social media being ageist? Some users who frequent hotels often, not being able to use one of the main methods of communication. Are other methods of communication still used? I.e. Emails offers? Mail Shots? Are they effective? **DISCUSS**
- What’s good/bad about Park Plaza’s social media presence? **DISCUSS** What would you change if you were in charge?
- What’s good/bad about The Vale Resort’s social media presence? **DISCUSS** What would you change if you were in charge?
- What do you think Social media could be doing in the future, to help better the platforms used.
- TripAdvisor... using it as a social media platform what are the benefits, conversing with other
Park Plaza Interview, Sample Transcript: Appendix 8

Researcher: How well would you say your organisation has adapted to the Social Media platform?

Lu: We have definitely grown, 5 years ago, we created our Facebook and Twitter accounts, however we are still learning, it is a learning process, we do try and get a lot of training done in social media, we invest a lot in it through learning, we do recognise it as a very powerful tool so we do try and invest as much as we can into it.

Researcher: So, you would say you’re still learning?

Lu: Yes, we have adapted well, but still learning.

Researcher: Obvious question but do you employ a certain member of staff to manage and control online and social image?

Lu: That would be me

Researcher: Is it just you then?

Lu: Yes, our marketing department is small, we have our marketing director and im then her assistant, basically I manage all of social media, obviously, some element I discuss with the director, but for the most part, yes it’s just me. This would kind of link in to one of your other questions…

Researcher: Yes, in the future, would you see the need for your department to grow? Is social media growing so fast you’re going to need another person on your team?

Lu: As I don’t just do social media, I also do other marketing things, and although social media is huge part of my job, it’s not the only thing. I feel like with more and more people using us a first point of contact for bookings, or reservations, at the moment there is only so much you can help them, whereas with more people social media would be more than a point of contact it could be used as a service, we can’t currently do that because it too much work, and we’d end up doing other people’s/ departments work. It all depends what your using social media for. Sorry I think that cuts into one of your other questions

Researcher: its fine, don’t worry

Lu: Like for us, it’s very much brand awareness, and putting out name out there and being able to control the results users see if they google us, our spa, our restaurant.

Researcher: In your opinion, does social media have a large impact on your business, both positive and negative?

Lu: Yes definitely, especially lately where people are realising the power of social media more and sometimes you can get people kind of threatening to post a tweet or bad Trip Advisor, but at the end of the day if your offering poor service, you’re going to get poor feedback, so, its not something we necessarily see as a threat but it is a reflection that if we
have a bad review, it’s a reflection on something we have done wrong and offers that opportunity to internally amend any errors that may be happening in service, so in a way its good, but then some people know they could get a ‘freebie’ if they complain right, so it’s knowing the situation, and ensuring it’s all logged and we don’t tend to bow down to that, we’ll investigate and if we feel someone is trying to take advantage we will stop it there.

Researcher: So have you developed any strategic measures to deal with these instances?

Lu: Yes definitely, we have an adapted strategy of reviewing all reviews and comments we get, and sending that to the right person, whether it’s positive or negative. With positive comments that reinforces with staff, it reinforces that what they’re doing is right and it encourages them to keep going with positive customer service its motivating for them.

Researcher: I mean I’m guessing many staff follow the Park Plaza web pages.

Lu: Yeah and when they post photos, and mention people by name its reinforcing for them.

Researcher: has Social Media made your business more accessible?

Lu: More so on the pro’s, with communication, there is definitely a lot of communication and even on weekends I’m responding to people, you have to be getting back to people constantly

Researcher: So, it is 24/7

Lu: Yeah, 24/7, timely responses, I mean I’m not expected to reply at 3am, although some people do get annoyed when you don’t reply immediately at 3am, although he communication is key, you do have to delegate and say okay, contact this department or this person

Researcher: So, it’s not always the dealing with but the response in general

Lu: Yeah, with our social media, it’s very friendly, there is a lot of funny things on there and we really enjoy doing that. We’re not a strict corporate business who are just posting everything about you, and pushing, we try to stay away from that. We’re a hotel with a personality, it’s like Park Plaza has its own voice so to speak.
The Vale Resort’s Interview, Sample Transcript: Appendix 9

Researcher: How well would you say your organisation has adapted to the social media platform?

Molly: Yeah really good I think, we have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+, but we don’t tend to use Google+ much.

Researcher: Are you on Pinterest as well

Molly: Yeah, mainly I put stuff about Hensol Castle more than the Vale, because it’s more with Imagery. But yeah, we are on the major four social media sites, we’re not on anything like Snapchat, as it would be too much for one person to do, as it is just me. We are on the main ones, which works really well, and Facebook works really well, so we use that a lot.

Researcher: So you mentioned you’re not on Snapchat, is it because it’s a bit too modern or is it just too much work to maintain?

Molly: We don’t have enough people on all day to do it, I know other hotels that have done it, but they are a lot bigger, If I was to start with something like that, I would start with Instagram stories because we already have a good following on Instagram

Researcher: So, looking at your Facebook social media, what is the main use for it for The Vale?

Molly: Basically, anything we want to push quickly, any last-minute deals and promotions, for instance the spa might ring me and tell me the availability for tomorrow, I’ll post that onto Facebook, as a last minute advert. It’s definitely the quickest way to get something out there. The other day we did 50% off temple spa treatments, after I posted it to social media, all the appointments had been taken within half an hour, that would have only happened if I posted on Facebook.

Researcher: So, is it mainly spa, that’s advertised on Facebook? Or are other things like Golf?

Molly: Not so much golf, mostly the spa and the restaurant, and we do package deals in the hotel, so when we know where struggling, we can push those. We have done stuff on social media for the golf, but the pick up just isn’t as successful as the spa.

Researcher: So how about Instagram and Twitter?

Molly: Yeah Instagram is really good for us, we’ve recently launched Hensol Castle’s Instagram page, the filters are great for Hensol and it’s so easy to put them on, we have lovely images from the weddings that come here, and really inspirational photos. The Vale one is used as well, but it isn’t as widely followed as Hensol Castle’s page. Anything behind the scenes wise, people like to see on the Vale site but when it comes to imagery, I tend to use Hensol Castle.

Researcher: So, Twitter, is that very much the same as Facebook?

Molly: Yeah, like Facebook, handy for last minute offers and promotions, although we have a large following on there, Facebook is predominantly the one we use for sales.

Researcher: So, would you say Facebook is your strongest tool?
Molly: Yes Definitely

Researcher: So Pinterest, you said you use it mainly for Hensol Castle.

Molly: So, we have The Vale Resort as the overall brand, and then a board for Hensol Castle and then Hensol Castle Conferencing, the wedding one is the one that generates the most interest, I mean it’s mostly brides looking for nice ideas and photos on Pinterest. And when looking at analytics, I can see that Pinterest generates a lot of traffic to our website.

Researcher: Wait so you can track, where people are coming from to your site?

Molly: Yeah so you can go on Google Analytics and you can see exactly where they have come from and track that weekly or monthly. You can do that through Facebook, Twitter. And Pinterest is really growing, so it’s a good one to carry on with. It’s just getting bigger and bigger.

Researcher: Lastly you mentioned Google+?

Molly: Yeah, it’s not really that big, I went on a course the other day, and it basically said, that it’s better to have Google+ than to not have it, because basically Google controls everything.

Researcher: And you have a LinkedIn

Molly: Yeah, more from a professional point of view, I’ll use it when we are hiring or if we have any conference offers, it’s not really something I use daily though. It’s handy to have, better to have than to not have.

Researcher: So, a bit of an obvious question here, but do you employ a certain member of staff to manage and control online social image

Molly: Yes, it’s just me

Researcher: So, you manage all online accounts?

Molly: Yes, so anything online I manage and my manager manages all offline content.

Researcher: So, to manage it constantly, do you access it all the time through a work phone?

Molly: No through my personal devices, so out of hours, I mean if it’s a question I think can wait until the morning I will, but if I can answer it there and then, I will. Some queries I need to run past other departments. If it is urgent, I can email the relevant people and it can be resolved quite quickly.

Researcher: So your manager, she manages offline content?

Molly: yeah so print advertising, magazines, radio and things like that.

Researcher: Would you say its manageable for one person at the moment?

Molly: If you had a team, you would be able to do a lot more, but with just one person, you are a little restricted on how much you can do. If we had an assistant, we could be doing so much more on social media, looking at trends, new content, be able to do more videos and photos. But at the moment I prioritise Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, our strongest ones. So, I don’t really have time to be experimenting with other potential platforms.
| Researcher: In your opinion, has social media had an impact on your organisation, let’s start with the positive. |
| Molly: Yes, like I said earlier, with that offer we did, the spa offer where all the appointments were taken, that was only pushed on social media, and it has a huge effect on us. |
Focus Group, Sample Transcript: Appendix 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Transcription</th>
<th>Participant 1: 50yr Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 2: 53yr Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 3: 45+yr Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 4: 23yr Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 5: 23yr Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 6: 24yr Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 7: 53yr Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 8: 51yr Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 9: 24yr Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 10: 23yr Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researcher: Thank you all for attending, just to confirm, everyone has signed their consent forms and everyone is aware that the discussion is being recorded. So this is an informal chat, not structured or formal, I just have a list of topics and want you to talk about them as a group. If you have conflicting opinions, express them, and let’s talk why.

Par 5: Fight

All Participants: *Laugh*

Researcher: No fighting, thank you

Par 3: Heated debate?

Researcher: I’m happy with heated debates if they arise, if we keep it under control.

Researcher: So let’s begin, the first topic. “Has social media allowed hotels to better promote themselves, or has it made them a bigger target?”

Par 1: I think it’s definitely enabled them

Par 3: Definitely

Par 4: 100% it has

Par 1: Before I go to a hotel I always do a bit of research and look at their social media sites.

Par 5: Look at their reviews on social media as well

Par 3: I’ve only come across and then visited some places through social media, because I’ve seen them advertised on there.

Par 2: Like I said to ‘Par 1’ earlier, I saw a new afternoon tea advertised it was in a local pub, but same context. But they’ve reaised awareness of this new service through social media, and now I we want to go check it out *Laughs*
Par 1: Such a wide range of people are using social media now, they are reaching to a wider customer base.

Researcher: So does everyone think it’s enabled them then?

All Participants agree

Researcher: How about the other side then, do you think its made them more of a target?

Par 2: It’s made it easier for people to complain

Par 5: Potentially, but they can also defend themselves, they can prove their customer service skills on social media

Par 8: The thing is, out of 10 reviews, 1 bad review online can sometimes out way them all, and that’s the thing with reviews

Par 2: But you have to take them with a pinch of salt, people are going to leave a review if they’re not happy, or on lesser occasions if they are, but they don’t often leave a review for ‘an okay experience’

Par 4: Like ‘par 2’ said, you need to take some reviews with a pinch of salt

Researcher: Okay thank you

Researcher: So the Park Plaza and the Vale Resort’s social media pages, your all familiar with at least one of them. I think your all familiar with Facebook the most. So why do you follow these sites, or look at these sites?

Par 10: Offers and discounts

Par 3: Like + share to win a prize posts

Researcher: So prize competitions, yeah?

Par 2: Like Penderyn have done, if you like or share their post, you can win a bottle of whisky

Par 1: The Vale have recently done one on Facebook, to win a TempleSpa experience day, I know I have and a few people I know have shared that, and that’s popular, only because I really like the products though.

Researcher: So is this a good form of advertising for them?

Par 6: Massively, and it’s so cheap

Par 5: Well its basically free marketing for them

Researcher: Okay so these competitions are mostly done on Facebook and Twitter, Lets talk about Instagram

Pause

So its mostly if not all photos on Instagram, right? So why do you look or follow at Park Plaza/ the Vale’s Instagram pages?

Par 5: Instagram is good for looking at these places for weddings or something

Par 9: You can get a better feel for a place, and their style on Instagram
Par 1: It does what it says, you get an instant impression, very visual
Par 5: Also people are lazy, they don’t want to write stuff, they want to see and move on.
Par 2: The photos of both the venues on these sites, put them in a very good light
Researcher: Okay
Researcher: So I didn’t mention it in the beginning, but Pintrest, that’s a very visual platform, is it social media though?
Par 5: I never look at Pintrest to look at other people’s stuff
Par 10: I just use It to look for stuff, never to look at other peoples
Par 6: *Agree
Par 1: *Agree
Par 9: It could be argued that it is, as you can follow and like other people’s things
Researcher: So can you converse with them?
Par 9: yeah you can....
Turnitin Receipt: Appendix 11
References
References


