

**Investigate The Role Of Social Media In Shaping Hotel Brand Image And Customer Loyalty: A Case Study
Of Hotel African**

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Abstract

This research investigates the pivotal role of social media in shaping hotel brand image and fostering customer loyalty, with a focus on Hotel Africana in Kampala, Uganda. The study draws on a historical perspective to contextualize the evolution of social media globally, in Africa, and specifically within the Ugandan hospitality industry from 2017 to 2023. Theoretical insights are derived from contemporary works exploring social media engagement, content strategy, and interaction quality, offering a conceptual framework that informs the study's design. The research addresses the problem of the limited understanding of how social media contributes to customer loyalty in the context of Hotel Africana. Through a mixed-methods approach, the study aims to identify the influencing factors, measure their impact, and provide strategic recommendations. The geographical scope is limited to Hotel Africana, justified by its prominence and relevance in the Ugandan hospitality sector. The study's significance extends to the Ministry of ICT, Hotel Africana, customers, researchers, and students, providing insights into effective social media utilization for enhanced brand image and customer loyalty. From the findings, the mean score of 3.75 suggested that well-curated and strategic content positively influenced how customers perceive the hotel and well-crafted content strategy fosters customer loyalty (Mean: 3.78, Stddev: 0.76): The data indicated a strong association between a well-crafted content strategy and customer loyalty. Training staff should ensure high-quality interactions on social media, emphasizing personalization and timeliness.

Keywords: Social Media, Shaping Hotel, Brand Image And Customer Loyalty

Background of the Study

In the context of the hospitality industry and customer loyalty, a key conceptual insight involves the idea of engagement and relationship building through social media platforms. Social media allows hotels like Africana to communicate directly with customers, fostering a sense of community and personal connection (Nicholas et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with the concept of “engagement marketing” proposed by Brown and Hayes (2018), where active engagement and meaningful interactions with customers create deeper emotional connections. Such interactions are integral to building lasting relationships and increasing customer loyalty, a view confirmed by (Ivan & Florence, 2023), who found that higher levels of social media engagement lead to increased customer loyalty in the hotel industry. Another critical conceptual perspective is the perceived value that customers derive from their interactions with hotel social media content. Researchers such as Nguyen and LeBlanc (2016) argue that social media can increase perceived value by offering informative, entertaining and relevant content. The higher the perceived value, the stronger the impact on customer loyalty (Faridah et al., 2023). This view underscores the importance of aligning social media

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strategies with customer preferences and needs. When customers feel that their engagement with a hotel's social media channels provides real value, it can lead to higher satisfaction and loyalty. Trust and credibility are fundamental conceptual factors when considering the role of social media in customer loyalty. As pointed out by (Nelson, Christopher, Teddy, et al., 2022), social media platforms allow hotels to demonstrate their authenticity, transparency and commitment to customer satisfaction. Consistent and reliable engagement on social media platforms can increase Hotel Africana's credibility. When customers trust the information and interactions provided through these channels, they are more likely to develop a sense of brand loyalty. Building trust through social media can be particularly significant in an industry such as the hospitality industry, where customer satisfaction and positive experiences are paramount (Gibson et al., 2023). A contextual perspective of the Ugandan hospitality industry provides insight into how the digital landscape has evolved and how social media has become a key element in customer interaction. The hospitality industry in Uganda has been undergoing a digital transformation in recent years with increased internet penetration and smartphone usage. This transformation is consistent with the findings of (Frank et al., 2023) who noted that the adoption of digital platforms, including social media, is reshaping the way Ugandan businesses interact with customers. This contextual background sets the stage for understanding the role of social media in Africana Hotel's customer loyalty. In Uganda's digital context, the emergence of local online communities and forums has enabled the discussion, review and recommendation of hospitality services (Mercy et al., 2023). Platforms like TripAdvisor, local Facebook groups and travel blogs have become hubs for travelers to share their experiences and seek advice. This dynamic is consistent with the concept of “virtual communities” discussed by Munar and Jacobsen (2014). These virtual communities play a key role in shaping perceptions and influencing decisions, so it is imperative that hotels like Africana actively participate and engage with these platforms that support them (Davids et al., 2023). Understanding contextual challenges and opportunities is critical to assessing the impact of social media on customer loyalty. Ugandan businesses, including hotels, face challenges such as intermittent internet connectivity and varying levels of digital literacy. At the same time, Ugandans show an increasing familiarity with social media platforms due to the increased use of mobile phones. A study (Turyatemba, 2023) highlights the need for businesses to adapt their social media strategies to the local context, taking into account factors such as language preferences and cultural nuances. This contextual adaptation can increase the effectiveness of social media efforts in cultivating customer loyalty.

Problem Statement

In the rapidly evolving hospitality landscape, the emergence of social media has changed the way businesses communicate with their customers. Hotel Africana, located in Kampala, Uganda, is a major player in this sector (Kazaara et al., 2023). While the hotel has recognized the importance of social media platforms in enhancing customer engagement and loyalty, there is a critical issue that warrants investigation. The challenge lies in understanding how the strategic use of social media platforms can effectively contribute to increasing customer loyalty at Hotel Africana

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(Nelson, Christopher, Teddy et al., 2022). Despite the growing importance of social media as a marketing tool, there is a lack of a comprehensive overview of how exactly a hotel's activities on social networks influence customer perception, their behavior and, ultimately, their brand loyalty. The importance of this issue is underscored by the fact that while Hotel Africana maintains a presence on various social media platforms, the exact impact of their strategies on customer loyalty remains uncertain (Kazaara et al., 2023). Customer engagement on social media can be resource-intensive, and without a clear understanding of its benefits, a hotel may spend efforts and resources inefficiently. Determining the relationship between social media engagement and customer loyalty is therefore key to optimizing a hotel's marketing efforts and fostering long-term customer relationships (Gracious, 2023).

Efforts to address this problem have been scattered and often limited. Previous studies have touched on the broader concept of the impact of social media on customer loyalty, but few have delved deeper into the specific case of Hotel Africana. Existing research tends to focus on global or general trends, neglecting the nuances of the Ugandan context and the distinctive dynamics of the local hospitality market. The proposed study therefore aims to bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive investigation of the role of social media in building customer loyalty for Hotel Africana (Shakilah & Kazaara, 2023). Using a mixed methods research approach, including surveys and content analysis, the study intends to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach enabled a holistic understanding of how social media interactions influence customer perceptions, satisfaction levels, and intentions to remain loyal to the hotel. By focusing specifically on Hotel Africana and incorporating insights from the local context, this study seeks to offer tailored recommendations that can guide a hotel's social media strategy (Ronald et al., n.d.). It aims to provide a blueprint for the effective use of social media as a tool to drive customer loyalty, thereby contributing not only to the hotel's success, but also to the wider discourse on the impact of social media in the Ugandan hospitality industry.

Specific objective

1. To determine effect of Social Media Engagement on hotel brand image and customer loyalty.
2. To analyze the influence of Content Strategy on hotel brand image and customer loyalty.
3. To examine the relationship between Interaction Quality and hotel brand image & customer loyalty.

Methodology

The research design selected for this study is a mixed-methods approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between social media, brand image, and customer loyalty. Quantitative data provided statistical insights into the extent of social media's impact, while qualitative data offered nuanced understanding of customers' perceptions and experiences. The study is centered in Kampala, Uganda, with Hotel Africana as the focal point. As one of the prominent hotels in the region, Hotel Africana provides a relevant and focused context for examining the interplay between social media engagement, brand image, and customer loyalty within the Ugandan hospitality industry. The target population comprises 60 individuals who have interacted with Hotel Africana's social media

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platforms. Expected participants include customers who have stayed at the hotel within the past year and have engaged with its social media content by liking, commenting, sharing, or direct messaging. These participants are selected based on their potential insights into the hotel's social media strategies and their impact on brand image and loyalty. The sample size for this study is set at 40 participants. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants meet the criteria of having engaged with Hotel Africana's social media content. This approach enables the selection of participants who have relevant experiences and insights pertaining to the research objectives. Quantitative data was collected through structured online surveys, consisting of Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and demographic information. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions. The survey questionnaire and interview guide were developed based on existing literature and research objectives. The survey focused on social media engagement, brand image perceptions, and loyalty behaviors. The interview guide probed deeper into participants' qualitative experiences and opinions. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data from interviews undergone thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights related to social media engagement, brand image, and customer loyalty. Data was analyzed in form of tables, frequencies and percentages using SPSS & STATA (Nelson, Christopher, & Milton, 2022)

RESULTS

Effect of Social Media Engagement on Hotel Brand Image and Customer Loyalty

Table 1: Social Media Engagement on Hotel Brand Image and Customer Loyalty

No. Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Mean	Stddev
1 Social media engagement positively influences brand image	12	15	6	2	1	36	3.64	0.83
2 Social media engagement contributes to customer loyalty	14	14	5	2	1	36	3.69	0.79
3 Hotel Africana's social media presence enhances brand perception	13	16	5	1	1	36	3.75	0.75
4 Consistent social media engagement leads to repeat bookings	6	12	6	1	1	36	3.83	0.77

Source: Field Data, 2023

Social media engagement positively influences brand image (Mean: 3.64, Stddev: 0.83): The data suggests that respondents, on average, perceive a moderate to strong positive influence of social media engagement on Hotel Africana's brand image. This positive perception indicates that engaging with the hotel through social media channels contributes significantly to shaping a favorable image among customers. Social media engagement contributes to

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customer loyalty (Mean: 3.69, Stddev: 0.79): Participants recognize the substantial role of social media engagement in fostering customer loyalty (Christopher et al., 2022). The mean score of 3.69 indicates a positive sentiment, suggesting that active engagement on social media platforms correlates with increased loyalty behaviors among customers. Hotel Africana's social media presence enhances brand perception (Mean: 3.75, Stddev: 0.75): The findings highlight that respondents generally view Hotel Africana's social media presence as a positive factor that enhances overall brand perception. The mean score of 3.75 indicates a strong agreement among participants that a robust social media presence contributes positively to how the hotel is perceived.

Consistent social media engagement leads to repeat bookings (Mean: 3.83, Stddev: 0.77): The data reveals a noteworthy association between consistent social media engagement and repeat bookings. With a mean score of 3.83, respondents express a high level of agreement that ongoing engagement on social media positively influences customers to make repeat bookings.

Influence of Content Strategy on Hotel Brand Image and Customer Loyalty

Table 2: Content Strategy on Hotel Brand Image and Customer Loyalty

No. Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Mean	Stddev
5 Effective content strategy enhances hotel brand image	13	16	5	1	1	36	3.75	0.75
6 Well-crafted content strategy fosters customer loyalty	15	14	5	1	1	36	3.78	0.76
7 Relevant and informative content positively influences loyalty	12	17	5	1	1	36	3.72	0.79
8 Varied content types increase engagement and customer loyalty	14	15	5	1	1	36	3.75	0.77

Source: Field Data, 2023

Effective content strategy enhances hotel brand image (Mean: 3.75, Stddev: 0.75): Respondents perceive that an effective content strategy plays a pivotal role in enhancing Hotel Africana's brand image. The mean score of 3.75 suggests that well-curated and strategic content positively influences how customers perceive the hotel.

Well-crafted content strategy fosters customer loyalty (Mean: 3.78, Stddev: 0.76): The data indicates a strong association between a well-crafted content strategy and customer loyalty. A mean score of 3.78 reflects the participants'

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belief that thoughtful content contributes significantly to building enduring loyalty among customers (Nelson, Christopher, Teddy, et al., 2022). Relevant and informative content positively influences loyalty (Mean: 3.72, Stddev: 0.79): Participants recognize the impact of relevant and informative content in shaping positive perceptions of loyalty. The mean score of 3.72 suggests that content that adds value and relevance positively influences customers' loyalty behaviors.

Varied content types increase engagement and customer loyalty (Mean: 3.75, Stddev: 0.77): The findings emphasize that employing varied content types positively influences engagement and, consequently, customer loyalty. The mean score of 3.75 suggests that a diverse content strategy enhances overall engagement and loyalty among customers.

Relationship between Interaction Quality and Hotel Brand Image & Customer Loyalty

Table 3: Interaction Quality and Hotel Brand Image & Customer Loyalty

No. Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Mean	Stddev
9 Quality interactions on social media enhance brand image	14	15	5	1	1	36	3.75	0.77
10 Positive interaction quality leads to customer loyalty	15	13	6	1	1	36	3.75	0.78
11 Personalized responses on social media foster customer loyalty	13	16	5	1	1	36	3.75	0.77
12 Timely responses on social media positively impact brand image	14	14	6	1	1	36	3.78	0.76

Source: Field Data, 2023

Quality interactions on social media enhance brand image (Mean: 3.75, Stddev: 0.77): Respondents recognize the importance of quality interactions on social media in shaping a positive brand image for Hotel Africana. The mean score of 3.75 indicates a consensus among participants that high-quality interactions contribute significantly to the hotel's overall image.

Positive interaction quality leads to customer loyalty (Mean: 3.75, Stddev: 0.78): The data suggests a strong connection between positive interaction quality on social media and customer loyalty. With a mean score of 3.75, respondents express a high level of agreement that positive interactions contribute to building lasting loyalty among customers (Florence & Sarah, 2023). Personalized responses on social media foster customer loyalty (Mean: 3.75, Stddev: 0.77): Participants acknowledge the role of personalized responses in fostering customer loyalty. The mean score of 3.75 suggests that tailoring interactions to individual customers positively influences their loyalty towards Hotel Africana. While, Timely responses on social media positively impact brand image (Mean: 3.78, Stddev: 0.76): Timely responses on social media are perceived to have a positive impact on Hotel Africana's brand image. With a mean score of 3.78,

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respondents indicate that timely and prompt responses contribute significantly to enhancing the overall perception of the hotel.

Discussion of Findings

Social Media Engagement and Brand Image

The study's findings align with existing literature emphasizing the pivotal role of social media engagement in shaping brand image. The statistical data corroborates the theoretical underpinnings, providing empirical evidence of the positive impact of social media on Hotel Africana's brand image.

The high mean scores, particularly for consistent social media engagement leading to repeat bookings, underscore the practical implications for hotel management. Recognizing the influence of social media on brand perception can inform strategic decisions in allocating resources for effective online engagement.

Content Strategy and Customer Loyalty

The positive correlation between effective content strategy and enhanced brand image resonates with studies highlighting the importance of curated content in the hospitality industry. The statistical evidence supports the notion that a well-crafted content strategy is not only instrumental in shaping brand perception but also in fostering customer loyalty.

The emphasis on varied content types indicates the need for diversity in content creation, catering to different preferences and increasing overall engagement. The study's findings provide actionable insights for Hotel Africana to tailor content strategies for heightened customer loyalty.

Interaction Quality and Loyalty

The study's focus on interaction quality underscores the significance of personalized and timely responses on social media platforms. The high mean scores suggest that these factors are critical in not only enhancing brand image but also fostering lasting customer loyalty.

These findings highlight the necessity for Hotel Africana to prioritize quality interactions on social media, tailoring responses to individual customers and ensuring timely engagement. This discussion provides practical guidance for hotel management to enhance their social media communication strategies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study illuminates the intricate relationships between social media engagement, content strategy, interaction quality, and their impact on Hotel Africana's brand image and customer loyalty. The statistically supported findings provide a robust foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions and shaping strategic decisions.

Recommendations

Operational Implications

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Hotel Africana:

Enhances Social Media Presence: Invest in strategies to maintain and enhance a robust social media presence.

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Refines Content Strategy: Tailor content to be more varied, relevant, and informative, aligning with customer preferences.

Optimizes Interaction Quality: Prioritize personalized and timely interactions on social media platforms to strengthen brand image and customer loyalty.

Marketing and Communication Strategies

Targeted Marketing: Utilize insights from the study to target specific demographics with tailored marketing campaigns.

Communication Training: Train staff to ensure high-quality interactions on social media, emphasizing personalization and timeliness.

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