

*An investigation into the Implementation of
Social Customer Relationship Management in
the Dublin Hotel Industry*

By

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Abstract

The tourism industry in Ireland generated 7.3 billion euros for the economy in 2015 and it accounts for 11% of Ireland's total employment. Dublin hotels have grown in the past couple of years which has brought Dublin into the top 10 cities with good revenue per room which shows that the city represents a good value for people travelling around Europe. The growth of the hotel industry in Dublin isn't stopping there because there are additional 5,000 rooms or 30 new hotels to be developed within 5 years in the city and while the development is underway, the industry have to depend on the use of Social Customer Relationship Management to stay relevant in other to continue developing and challenging other European cities.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin Hotel industry, key areas that the research explore were social media, customer relationship management and social customer relationship management. These areas were important because they represent value to the industry.

The research also includes interview from chosen hotels in the Dublin area and interviews from independent digital marketers in order to gain valuable insight into the investigation.

The hotels that participated in this research were all based in different areas in Dublin, ranging from 2-stars to 4-stars hotel. The investigation will examine how they convert social media customers into paying customers, how they measure social media effectiveness, how social media contributes to their hotel goals and their challenges and benefits in implementing of social customer relationship management. In addition to interviewing hotels, the research opts to interview people working in digital marketing too for a more profound understanding of the research.

The researcher has chosen qualitative methods of researching and exploratory in nature. Here, the researcher utilised a well-structured interview where probing was only done during an interview when interviewees give answers that the researcher isn't familiar.

The final result of this research should be able to provide future researchers a starting point on their research.

Key Words: Social Customer Relationship Management, Hotel, Dublin, Customer Relationship Management, Social Media, Qualitative Research.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The introduction chapter will provide an overview of the investigation that the author carried out as well as academic justification of the investigation and also this chapter contains a brief highlight of the chapters that are covered in the paper.

Social Customer Relationship Management is a strategy that evolved from Customer Relationship Management and this new strategy is used by organisations to improve their relationship with their customers with the use of social media while also extending their brand to the customers and it is currently more efficient and effective than the traditional Customer Relationship Management because it enables the organisation the power of interacting with their customers any time of the day on any choose platform of WEB 2.0.

In the age of technology social media has manipulated customer service because the traditional Customer Relationship Management of communicating with customers via surveys and helpdesks just isn't working any more as this new strategy is a straight forward interaction between the organisation and their customers over social media.

This investigation is going to show the importance of Social Media to the chosen industry as it enables the author to know how important communication between the organisation and the customers is vital to their success.

The diagram below illustrate how Social Customer Relationship Management tends to convert an organisation's content into an eloquent relationship with their customers.



- Converting **content** into **conversations**
- Extending **conversations** into collaborative **experiences**
- Transforming **experiences** into meaningful **relationships**

Source: Leary (2008)

Since businesses are flooding the internet with marketing, advertisements, and fan pages, how are consumers answering, exercising, liking and clicking (Patterson, 2012). There has been couple of research carried out on the topic of hotels, social media and social customer relationship management but none has been conducted focusing on Dublin despite the fact that some researches has been conducted in areas like Las Vegas, London and Paris.

With information technology constantly improving the way we live and how businesses are conducted means they have to be constant updates on this kind of studies so that people can be constantly informed.

The hotel industry has finally entered the digital world where they just don't conduct businesses online but also use social media platform to convert people into paying customers and entering a digital relationship with people and with the hotels in Dublin been the focus of this research, the visitor numbers in the city are project for a mammoth of increase which currently stands at 7% annually which would reach 6.2 million visitors by 2020 (Walsh, 2015).

The use of social media by hotels in Dublin has allowed them to accomplish the common goal that this platform provides for the business as Social media's common business objective is increasing awareness for consumer destination and to build engagement with consumers (Hudson and Hudson, 2013).

By investigating this research, the author will look at other studies already conducted in this area but from Dublin perspective. In this paper, the author will investigate the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin hotel industry.

The Hotel industry is one of few industries that interest the researcher but since the industry is making a great leap in consumer management with the aid of information technology, so conducting the study on this industry seems reasonable as the information gathered on four years of undergrad and one year of post grad would be used appropriately which can also help further the researcher's knowledge in the management field.

1.2 Dissertation Organisation

This research paper consists of six chapters and they are all listed below with a brief description of what is in those chapters.

1.2.1 Introduction

Introduction Chapter is the primary chapter of the investigation and it contains the background of the investigation including both the personal justification of the author carrying out the research and also an academic justification of the research.

1.2.2 Literature Review

Literature Review consists of four headings, social media, customer relationship management, social customer relationship management and Irish hotels where we looked at the past discussions on those topics.

1.2.3 Research Methodology

Research Methodology shows the method in which the author gathers information pertaining to this research whereby the chosen method is Qualitative method in form of an interview.

1.2.4 Research Findings

Research Findings the result gathered from the interview are presented in this chapter where the findings are meant to support the objectives set out in the previous chapter.

1.2.5 Discussion

Discussion in this chapter, the researcher discusses further on the findings from the previous chapter by elaborating more on the findings and what was discussed in the literature review.

1.2.6 Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendation

Conclusion and Recommendation, in the final chapter of the research, the author concludes on what has been found during the course of the investigation and also offers some recommendation for future academic research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This review is an investigation into the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin hospitality Industry. The literature review would be narrative in nature. There is a need to explore why hotels in Dublin implement Social Customer Relationship Management, knowing how they measure the effectiveness of the system, how to convert followers into paying customers and the challenges and benefit of doing so.

When hotels are using social media, their strategy should be to focus on using the platform to identify and rectified customers' problems (Booking hotels via Facebook 2011).

This literature review is going to be split into three headings as insinuated earlier in the introduction chapter. The aim is to gain an insight into the hotel industry. Specifically, the use of social media in this industry. The three headings of the literature review are going to be in depth with the aid of academic sources and previous research, with the sole aim of providing the readers with an understanding of the topic.

The following are the three headings of the literature review

- Social Media
- Customer Relationship Management
- Social Customer Relationship Management

In the first section of the literature review there is a general overview of social media which will cover factors that influence hotels into using the platform in the first place, factors like social media having a large pool of audience, the speed of it reaching their customers, the technology advancement and the fact that social media is now a global phenomenon. The second section will cover the reason behind the use of Customer Relationship Management and knowing the four main principles of Customer Relationship Management from the previously conducted studies like how the system is contemporary, customer centric, information technology in the business environment and value enhancement. The final section will cover Social Customer Relationship Management; under

this heading, the paper will discuss the meaning behind the new business concept, how it has improved on Customer Relationship Management and how it brings in additional value to a business.

All three sections of the literature review will be written in depth focusing on previous published academic sources and papers with the sole aim of giving the readers a strong understanding of Implementing Social Customer Relationship Management.

2.1 Social Media

Social media are basically accessible communications devices that are equipped with internet which turns communicating devices into interactive interchange platforms that allow the users to post comments, create and view images and video via websites or apps (Smith and Mader, 2015). The use of social media as a method of connecting and communication has dramatically improved over the last couple of years because of the advancement of technology and low cost providers.

Web 2.0 is the second evolutionary stage of the World Wide Web that collaboratively connects the collective intelligence of its users and developed soon after the turn of the new millennium (Montalvo, 2016).

The quality and speed has Improved greatly when social media in relation to ideation (Mount and Martinez, 2014). With an overload of current digital devices in modern society, there is a thin line between the boundaries between people and machines which has made things extremely blurred. Social media is now part of our everyday communication (Spencer, 2014), Few hospitality businesses take benefit of the prospects offered by Social Media platforms to improve their businesses' profitability status (Sigala, 2011). With over 2.4 million people living in Dublin using Facebook (Statista, 2014) and since recent research shows that businesses tend to communicate with customers that are members of online communities, it is more beneficial than one-on-one interaction (Woodcock et al., 2011). The age of technology and advancement of innovation in the hospitality industry, has led competition in the hotel industry to become more turbulent (Geissemann, Plankand Beunnee-Speedin, 2012).

When it comes to the hospitality industry, competitive advantage has been the foundation of the industry for years (Deegan, 2005). The vigorous and prompt changes in the business environment that the hospitality sector operates in has resulted in the need for businesses in the industry to be actively competitive and to also stay competitive in order to tackle any form of urgency from their competitors (Blum, 2003). The pace of change in this industry has made heightened competition which has led to the importance of competitive advantage for survival and not just for the purpose of increasing productivity (Atkinson and Brown, 2001).

According to the study conducted by Keating and Harrington (2003), the hospitality industry lacks communication and teamwork when it comes to management involvement and also a study that was conducted in 2010 by Deloitte which was titled 'Hospitality 2015' shows that the use of technology advancement and social media are going to play a pivotal role over the next couple of years on the increase of productivity in the hospitality industry.

Despite the fact that social media platforms are something of a global phenomenon the use of the platform to gather information can be sometimes misleading (Heller Baird and Parasnis, 2011) because when businesses use the platform it is mostly a one-way means of communication. It was only discovered in the past couple of years that price and the quality of hotels are no longer the deciding factors for competitive advantage in the industry (Ivens, and Shaw, 2005) because the focus is now on customer experience (Bigam, 2008) and the hospitality industry can provide this experience in the form of adding value to customer experience by engaging with them where the experiences are created (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

It is impossible to ignore the effects of social media on communication (Isaacs, 2014). According to Heller Baird and Parasnis (2011, p.35) "the power of the social community's endorsement and influence can be felt each time someone "likes" a company on Facebook or re-tweets a company's message on Twitter". The decision for a person to be committed in interacting with businesses on social media can be influenced by other people in their lives and also it can be used to influence others in their lives. As social media platforms continue to grow, Qualman (2013) argues how the

revolution of the platform has driven businesses in continuing to use the platform to communicate and connect with people and vice versa.

If they cannot monitor social media activities for signs of discomfort from their target audience or even respond to the problems that arises from their service (Coyle, Smith and Platt, 2012), In this new age of technology, we live our lives through social media and the workings of social media seemingly influences the way we act (Lövheim et al., 2013) which can be described as mediatisation. According to Hepp et al. (2012), Mediatisation is the process whereby technical media gradually inundates our everyday life, hence becoming 'part of the very fabric' of society. Which is why many new prospects for hotel industry have developed, enabling active and rigorous interaction with existing and potential customers (Sigala, 2012).

The implementation of Social media was based on the purpose that brands will be able to fulfil two primary roles for their organisations and those roles are research & development and communication (Mount and Martinez, 2014). With the advancement of social media and the term mediatisation it is now said that the public doesn't belong to one public sphere but instead everyone is now part of an online community organised on Facebook or YouTube or part of a community on twitter that is based on lifestyle and interests (Lövheim et al., 2013).

Organisations can have direct access to their customers through the use of social media because of the acts of following and friending (King, 2012) because when a customer evaluates a product, consumers tend to value objective endorsement from outside their own social group more than endorsement from their family and friends (Schulze, Scholer and Skiera, 2015).

Where studies on the hospitality industry have been carried out, Social Media platforms in marketing applications further research (Line and Runyan, 2012). Adding value to conversations in a timely fashion is the best use of social media showing that social media platforms are a powerful tool (Gennaro, 2015). When well implemented, social media can be extremely useful (King, 2015). Social media is a platform that is capable of producing the intermediation of user generated content, the interaction between users and producers with content and the faculty for an individual to make

coherent connections with other users (DeNardis and Hackl, 2015). When using social media platform, the ubiquity of the attendance is conditioned by social networking platforms' technical attributes (Almeida, Cordova and Doneda, 2016).

Hotel review sites provide the management of a hotel with essential market information that wouldn't be directed by researchers but would be voluntarily contributed by hotel guests which tends to be an opportunity that can allow a hotel to benchmark itself in the industry (Jeong and Jeon, 2008), With the growth of social media, the numbers of marketers using the platform has increased significantly from previous years. According to research conducted by Putnam Investments (2015), they found out that more than 80 percent of advisers were using social media for business in 2015, compared to 75 percent in 2014. In the past couple of years, the Social Media platform has improved electronic Word of Mouth platforms and has helped in creating a more collective intelligence with flexible, collaborative, democratic and dynamic attributes (Chalkiti and Sigali, 2012).

Kirby (2010) didn't see the significance of using social media to measure revenue because of the advice on how return of engagement is the best way of measuring return on investment and with the aid of social media, hotels in Dublin now have a way of communicating effectively with their customers. Social Media is part of the business strategies of hotels in terms of online bookings, communication and customer needs (Leung et al., 2013). Social Media tends to offer a lot of business opportunities for hotels, regardless of their size and potential to sell themselves to millions of consumers (Syed-Ahmad and Murphy, 2010).

An example of these opportunities would be swapping expensive brochures for pictures that were uploaded by customers which can help create an everlasting impression of a hotel (O'Connor, 2010). it can be inferred that hotels in the industry are not using social media to its full prospective, and in many cases are using it incorrectly (Rosman and Stuhura, 2013).

In a relevant article, Sigala (2012) the author reveals some benefits of Social Media usage for the hotel industry regardless of their size. These include:

- understanding their customers;
- increasing the effectiveness of marketing;
- constant monitoring of hotel's reputation and image;
- enticing new customers;
- increasing hotel presence online and engagement with customers;
- responding to customer inquiries as quickly as possible;
- customer contribution in terms of reading reviews;
- face-to-face communication; and
- enhances traffic to a company website.

“Many social media issues raise questions about the governance structures and how existing structures will adapt to handle new issues that are related to the growing public impact of social media” (Almeida, Cordova and Doneda, 2016 p96).

2.2 Customer Relationship Management

According to Greenberg (2009) Customer Relationship Management is a philosophy and a business strategy aided by technology designed to advance human connections in a business environment and understanding the ability of enticing and operating both social media and social networking, is important to the later generation of marketing and customer relationship management (Carlson and Lee, 2015).

Customer Relationship Management can be viewed as a strategy deployed in the business environment to preserve present customers and entice new customers since customer retention is an essential aspect for growth and sustainability of the business (Almunawari and Anshari, 2011).

This strategy represents the core business strategy that implements internal and external processes used in creating and delivering unique value to targeted customers of an organisation (Chuang and Hu, 2014). Customer Relationship Management can also be used to extend other services or products to the customers (Almunawari and Anshari, 2011) but result show that almost half of the firms that adopt the system end up not been successful in adapting the strategy (Ismail et al., 2007).

However, when it comes to the customer services rendered to the customers by the firm via the relationship they have already established, this would add value to the service beyond what has been provided by the core offering (Zineldin, 2006).

Customer Relationship Management includes loyalty programs that would enable hotels to persuade their loyal customers into continuing their loyalty towards the hotel (Aref, Modarres and Vaeztehrani, 2015). According to the studies conducted by Nguyen et al. (2007), their definition of Customer Relationship Management is the ability of using advanced technology that involves databases and data mining which aid in increasing retention of customers and also increases a firm's profitability.

Following the above discussion, it seems that Customer Relationship Management is a vastly challenged notion and subsequently there is no unanimous conformity on what it is (Reijonen and

Laukkanen, 2010). Regardless of the potential positive outcomes of adopting a Customer Relationship Management system, firms still need to be aware of staff concerns (Shum et al., 2008). These have been expressed because of doubts over an employee's job security, and the prospect of knowing that the new system might not even improve the business (Anderson and Huang, 2006).

Customer Relationship Management should be considered as a major business strategy with the sole purpose of the strategy underling the integration that it provided for business and their customers (Wang and Bowie, 2009), despite the fact that various studies have been conducted on the importance of Customer Relationship Management in the hotel industry (Sin et al., 2005). The companies that operate in the industry only aim to maximize their benefits from management and serve the needs of their guests (Sigala, 2005).

According to Thompson et al., (2007) companies must attempt to gain competitive advantage with the use of differentiation as they examine their customer needs and behaviours in order to understand what is most important and valuable to them. This corresponds with Porter (2004) when it was suggested that with the use of differentiation firms could be able to charge premium prices with the increase of their unit sales that could lead to an upsurge in customer royalty.

According to Anton (1996), Customer Relationship Management's ultimate goal is retaining customers for their firms and also to increase the loyalty of their customers which can ultimately result in the list of below benefits:

- Purchases of existing product increases
- Cross-purchases of other firm products
- There is a price premium because of added value services
- Familiarity with the system is going to reduce operating cost
- Referring customers to the firm because of positive word of mouth

It's clear that when a firm fails in their adoption of a Customer Relationship Management system, the failure is down to the fact the firm lacks an understanding of what the system entails (Chen and Popovich, 2003). Despite the fact that firms have been frequently warned that it would be a fiasco if the firms consider Customer Relationship Management to only be a technology solution (Goldenberg, 2000) and with the increase in Irish tourism which accounts for almost 4% of the country's GNP (Connolly, 2016) would mean that this strategy is essential for the industry.

Customer Relationship Management has quickly become a significant important competitive advantage for businesses in recent times with the involvement of administrative efforts to deal with customers (Alem-Mohammad, Bin-Rashid and Bin-Tahir, 2013). From the studies already conducted on the field of Customer Relationship Management, the system has to be viewed in four principal ways. Firstly, the system is a contemporary response of the emerging climate of extraordinary customer blend where brand loyalty is common (Cockburn, 2000). Secondly, Customer Relationship Management can be central to making a firm customer centric (Gamble, Stone and Woodcock, 2000) as Customer Relationship Management can be used in assessing revenue per available customer over a given period of time (Wang, 2012). Thirdly, Customer Relationship Management tends to be the symbol of embracing information technology in the business environment (Gordon, 1998) and finally the fourth feature of Customer Relationship Management is that the system is largely assured to enhance value to the customer and increase the firm's profitability (Reichheld, 1996).

According to Chen and Popovich (2003) Customer Relationship Management is a comprehensive approach that promises to maximize relationships with all customers, including Internet or "e-customers", distribution channel members, and suppliers.

2.3 Social Customer Relationship Management

Social Customer Relationship Management is a strategy that combines the power of online communities with Customer Relationship Management strategy in order to encourage consumers in playing a role alongside the business where they can help with making decisions that would be deemed important to customers (Askool and Nakata, 2010).

Social Customer Relationship Management is the new way of engaging consumers because there is no room for managing customers anymore as it has been replaced by having opening dialogues (Heller Baird and Parasnis, 2011) and with hotels in Dublin accounting for over 80% occupancy in 2015 (Connolly, 2016) this strategy is essential to make them return. This new way is substantially more efficient and effective than the old Customer Relationship Management method (Woodcock et., 2011). However, Social Customer Relationship Management shows the merit in obtaining the knowledge of this method as it brings both challenges and benefits to a business that utilises the method.

According to Jacewicz and Cho (2015) Social Customer Relationship Management can be perceived as the next chapter of Customer Relationship Management. The strategy has created a two-way interaction between the businesses and their consumers which has infused them with the right of having a relationship with the businesses (Nitu, Tileaga and Ionescuu, 2014) as one of the biggest problems facing the hotel industry in Dublin is their inability to cater for an increase in tourism because there is an immediate need for new hotels in the city (Connolly, 2016).

It's the technology that enables Social Customer Relationship Management with opportunities in collecting data and the ability to interact in different ways with the consumers (Archer-Brown, Piercy and Joinson, 2013). The best thing is that hotels and social media platforms are made for each other because hotels are in the information gathering business and are always trying to encourage repeat business with their consumers (Rosman and Stuhura, 2013).

In this new age of technology, the hotel industry is using the Internet to promote their products and services while also using it to gather material (Murphy et al., 2003). Since web 2.0 it has been accepted as an important tool by businesses in order to form a relationship with the consumers and when you use Web 2.0 partially with the traditional Customer Relationship Management businesses, it tends to improve their ongoing relationship with their customers (Askool and Nakata, 2010). It is now clear that for businesses to remain in a competitive industry they have to obtain a presence in the digital world which is why the hotels have to engage with their potential consumers, usually through social media platforms, whilst building relationships and expanding their brand.

When we take into account the definition of strategy by one Michael Porter, it's said that strategy is the involvement of different activities to create something unique (Porter, 1996). However, with that definition of strategy it can be said that Social Customer Relationship Management is a strategy adopted by companies to create something unique that would differentiate them from their main competitors (Bradley, Hirt and Smit, 2011). Social Customer Relationship Management functionalities are composed of activities such as Marketing, Customer Service and Sales which are manoeuvred to accomplish the business strategy of any firm (Almunawari and Anshari, 2011).

Social Customer Relationship Management is still in its early stages because it has all the capabilities of Customer Relationship Management with some superfluous competences in terms of fast interactivity and consumer empowerment (Almunawari and Anshari, 2011) But according to computer weekly news (2014) over the past couple of years there has been An increase in the adaptation of Social Customer Relationship Management in small and medium sized enterprises which can be attributed to the development of information and communication technology.

A hotel's presence on social media can allow them to learn more about their customers, which can allow them to gain valuable knowledge in the market which can in turn enable the hotel to gain ground in effective markets and also be able to promote new products and services that their customers might enjoy (Buhalis and Law, 2008).

Almost every organisation has integrated social tools into the way of conducting day to day business and relatively new organisations that are adopting the strategy are using it to pioneer their services in a way that helps their company to spawn better communication with their consumers and potential customers as the concept of Social Customer Relationship Management is only now being fully utilized in assisting organisations in building long-lasting relationships with their customers (Leary, 2013).

The uniqueness of the value created with the adaptation of Social Customer Relationship Management is the proficiency to create content from both the firm and their customers (Almunawari and Anshari, 2011). With the advancement of Web 2.0 it has become easier for firms to know a lot about their customers by analysing what they are saying on social media which is why Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) mentioned in their study that companies should do whatever it takes to find out what their consumers would like to talk about, hear and what is considered interesting to them. Then, the company should be able to avail of all this by posting content that would fit consumer expectations.

With the rise of social media, firms now know the benefit of embracing the concept of social integration with Customer Relationship Management software as well which has enabled Social Customer Relationship Management as their new channel in today's society. Hence the reason why the Social Customer Relationship Management market is expected to increase in productivity from \$2.22 billion in 2014 to \$17.92 billion in 2019 (Social Customer Relationship Management, 2015) and with the Dublin hotel industry currently operating at over 80% occupancy level and also with the addition of new hotels in the city there would be an immense rise (Connolly, 2016) once this strategy is implemented correctly.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature reviewed both current and old literatures on the research, articles and journals that has been conducted on areas that contributed to the evolution of Social Customer Relationship Management. Traditional Customer Relationship Management is a strategy that has been aided by technology which was designed to advance human connections in a business environment according to Greenberg (2009) and with the importance of social media in the latter stages of marketing has added value to the service beyond what has been provided by the core offering (Zineldin, 2006).

Social media are basically accessible communications devices that are equipped with internet which turns communicating devices into interactive interchange platforms that allow the users to post comments, create and view images and video via websites or apps (Smith and Mader, 2015). As social media platforms continue to grow, Qualman (2013) argues how the revolution of the platform has driven businesses in continuing to use the platform to communicate and connect with people and vice versa.

Social Customer Relationship Management is a strategy that combines the power of online communities with Customer Relationship Management strategy in order to encourage consumers in playing a role alongside the business where they can help with making decisions that would be deemed important to customers (Askool and Nakata, 2010). The age of technology and advancement of innovation in the hospitality industry, has led competition in the hotel industry to become more turbulent (Geissemann, Plankand Beunnee-Speedin, 2012).

With the research focusing on Dublin hotels, which currently have the highest growth in revenue per available room across European cities in 2015 (Connolly, 2016) highlights the importance of this research as there is a gap in the literature because of fewer studies been conducted on this topic and the author hopes this changes because of social media engagement growth and the pending growing of Dublin hotels in the next five years.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

Research methodology is a logical way to solve problems when it comes to investigating or conducting a research. It can be said that methodology is the way a research is carried out with a means of supporting the assumptions that comes out from the project (Quinlan, 2011). Knowing the methodology of a research carries the same weight of the research objectives.

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin Hotel Industry. Within this investigation, a numerous topic would be discussed in the research methodology chapter. These topics include, research objectives, the reason behind the selection of the chosen method and its definition, the reason behind the author choosing such methodology, the method in which the data would be collected. It's essential to thoroughly describe these topics in other to complete this research.

According to Horn (2009) one should state their research problem with an intent statement.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to conduct an investigation into the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin Hotel Industry.

3.1 Research Purpose and Objectives

With this investigation, the research objectives have to be clear; it had to be a specific statement that clearly identifies what the author tends to accomplish from undertaking the research in the first place (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill. 2009).

The purpose of carrying out a research is to find a solution to a give problem. The research problem tends to serve as the starting point for all researches (Ellis and Levy, 2008). This is an exploratory research as it's a means of finding out what is happens when implementing Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin Hotel Industry. With the flexibility that comes with exploratory research there could still be time for a change in direction as a result of a new date (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill. 2009).

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) the objectives derived from the research questions are likely to influence the researcher in obtaining specific information on the chosen topic. Within this investigation, the author has created couple of objectives that will aid the overall investigation and they are as follows.

1. To investigate the methods of measuring the effectiveness of Social Media activities
2. To discover how Social Media Contributes to meeting hotel goals
3. To discover the most important Social Media networking site for hotels
4. To discover how hotel convert social media followers into paying customers
5. To investigate the challenges and benefits of implementing Social Customer Relationship Management

3.2 Proposed Methodology

The aim of the research is to investigate in a qualitative manner the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in Dublin Hotel Industry. Although the researcher is a novice when it comes to carrying out investigation but still want to achieve the best possible result with this research hence the reason why the researcher would be adopting couple of characteristics from the “Research Onion” model that was proposed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009).

This model is made up of six layers, the first layer is the research philosophies, the second layer is the research approaches, the third layer is the research strategies, the fourth layer is the research choices, the fifth layer is the time horizon and finally the sixth layer is the techniques and procedures use in data collection.

All of the six layers are necessary in to attain efficient research, with all of the layers combined then the researcher can analysis the data gathered. Thus, producing a valid and well gathered conclusion for the investigation.

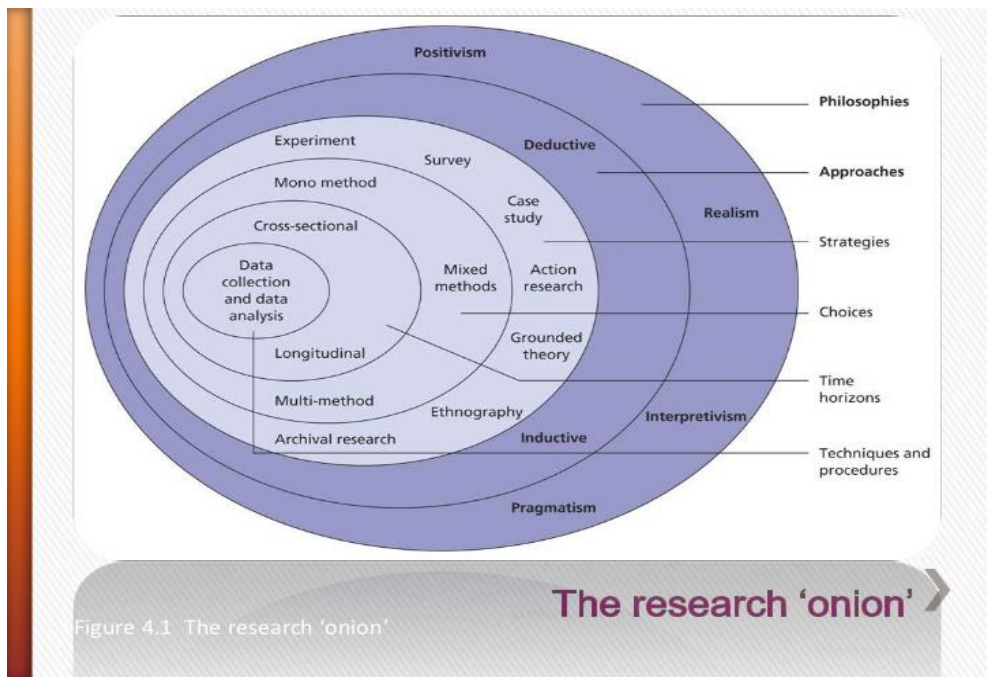


Figure 4.1 The research 'onion'

The Research 'Onion' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

3.2.1

Layer 1 Research Philosophies

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) Research Philosophy is an *“over-arching term relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge”*. Research philosophy is the external layer of the research onion model.

With the aid of research onion, the research has options when it comes to choosing the way to carry out the research because the research onion contains important assumptions on how to carry out a successful research. This layer is without a doubt holds one of the most important elements in carrying out a successful research. By following the first layer of the research onion model shows that the researcher understands they are more than one way to gather and analysis data when it comes to conducting a research.

They are different number of philosophies offer to the research by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) and it's just a matter of picking the right one for the investigation that is been conducted.

These include;

- Realism
- Interpretivism
- Pragmatism
- Positivism

The Realism philosophy has been selected for the purpose of this research. This philosophy relates to scientific enquiry. The assumption behind the use of Realism philosophy is that it underpins the collection of data and the understanding of those data during the course of an investigation. This philosophy is objective as it exists independently of human thoughts and beliefs or knowledge of their existence (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

Although with the use of this philosophy the researcher might be biased by world views, cultural experiences and upbringing because of the researcher's background with a degree in Information Technology, these might impact on the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

The method chosen must fit the subject matter which is why this philosophy is best used in conjunction with qualitative research approach when it comes to gathering data for this investigation.

3.2.2

Layer 2 Research Approaches

With the external layer completed, it's time to move onto the next layer of the research 'onion' model where the researcher would be deciding on which research approach to select when gathering data for the investigation. There are only two options in this layer and they are deductive and inductive approach. The decision in this layer has to correspond with the decision already made in the previous layer in order for the author to conduct a cohesive investigation.

A deductive approach will make the author of the research start of the investigation with a statement that has been used to develop a hypothesis upon pre-existing theories then proceeds in formulating a research question around it (Silverman, 2013). While an Inductive approach is a way of

researching to create a theory which oppose the method behind deductive approach but nevertheless this a difficult approach to follow if the research intends to be successful with the research which is why it would be in the researcher best interest to opt for a more grounded approach by not starting the research with an already defined framework but should instead try identifying the relationships between data and proceed in developing questions to test them (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

3.2.3

Layer 3 Research Strategies

With the conclusion of the second layer, the research would need to determine on what sort of strategy to take when conducting the research as the third later on the research 'onion' model is the research strategies as the research is presented with numerous choices of strategies that includes;

- Experiment
- Survey
- Grounded Theory
- Action Research
- Ethnography
- Archival Research
- Case Study

With these options provided in the research strategy layer, it can be emphasised more than one strategy can be used by the researcher while designing the research (Saunders and Tosey, 2012).

The best strategy for this research is Grounded Theory which is best suited for an inductive approach of investigation and qualitative method.

By choosing a grounded theory strategy, the author can use the strategy to explore a wide range of business and management issues (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) which is an area we can relate the research to in the first place.

3.2.4

Layer 4 Research Choices

In the fourth layer of the research 'onion' the research has to decide on what research method to use in the gathering data for the study. The research is presented with the three choices in this layer; a mono-method, a multi-method and a mixed method.

A mono-method is the use of one single data collection technique corresponding analysis procedures while a multi-method is the use of multi data collection techniques corresponding analysis procedures. Finally, the mixed method is when quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures are used in a research design (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

A mono-method is the appropriate choice for this investigation which is what the research has opt to use. Since this is an exploratory qualitative research, the use of interview would be the right way to collect data for this research.

3.2.4.1 Interviews

Interview is a primary data collection technique when using qualitative methods (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). In this study, the interviews would be conducted face-to-face and not over the internet or the phone. There are couple of responsibilities that the interviewee has to carry out in other to attain the best possible answers during the course of the research. These responsibilities are listed out according to Cooper and Schindler (2014).

- Recommend questions and topics
- Control interview and plan to manage location of interview

- Find a way to draw out sample participants
- Prepare research tools the interview (i.e. written statistics, pictures, notes)
- Carefully analyse the data to draw a conclusion
- Write or direct the writings of the client report

The use of qualitative methods in this research would allow the author to be more flexible as the method to be used in this interview would be structured as it would allow the interviewer to be in total control of the interview.

3.2.4.2 Interview Guide

This will provide the interviewer with a list of topics that needs to be carried out during the course of the interview as it ensures that all topics are carried out. The interview guide would allow the interview to be of free flow while maintaining the structure of the interview because the last thing is for the interview to turn into an unstructured interview.

3.2.4.3 Questions

Since a research can choose out of three types of questioning approach, it's wise for the author to decide on what kind of questioning approach the research will take in order to set up a structured interview.

The three types of questioning approach are open questions, probing questions and closed questions.

Open questions are the questions designed in encouraging an interviewee to provide extensive answer (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). With open questions, the interviewee gets to give their perspective on the topic. Probing questions are used in correspondent to open questions as it explores the answer that has been given by the interviewee in which the interviewer wants to explore because it's considered relevant. Finally, closed questions are mainly used to collect

comparative data because of the way the questions are asked since there is usually a yes or no attached to the questions and doesn't allow room for exploring.

In other for this research to be successful, the author would be making use of open and probing questioning methods because it's going to allow the interviewees to express and explore their answers and also gives room for answers to be clarified.

Probing questions would also give the interviewee room to give an answer in depth while not been interrupted by the interview and also dissolve any ambiguity.

3.2.5

Layer 5 Time Horizons

This is the fifth layer of the research 'onion' model, making the time horizons layer the penultimate layer which specifies that the research is coming to an end. In this layer, the model presents two types of time horizons in form of cross-sectional (snapshot) and longitudinal (diary).

A cross-sectional study is the study of a particular phenomenon (or phenomena) at a particular time (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). While longitudinal study is the process whereby the researcher continuously gather data over a period of time. This study is going to be a cross-sectional study.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) a cross-sectional study is mostly suited for a survey study but it can also be used for interviews as every interview would be conducted at specific period of time and date making it a phenomenon.

3.2.6

Layer 6 Techniques and Procedures (Data Collection and Analysis)

This is the inner layer and the final layer of the research 'onion' model where it's the layer that shows the process in which we collect and analysis the final research data as it contributes greatly to the

successful or failure of the investigation. They are two types of methods in gathering of data over the course of an investigation and they are primary and secondary research.

3.2.6.1

Primary Research

Primary data is the data collected from an original source (Collins and Hussey, 2009). The original sources include; survey, interview, focus group and questionnaire. Interviews will be the sole primary data gathered in this research. Since the interviews would be recorded and stored on a secured USB there will be no opportunity for the research to be biased with the results of the findings.

With the interviews been recorded there will be no chance for the research to alter the findings as the questions would be recorded on the interviews too. A tape recorder would be used in every interview which will allow the research enough time to transcribe every interview as it would help against information overload and allow the research to concentrate on gathering right information.

These interview recordings will document the data for this research on the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in Dublin Hotel Industry. The primary data would allow the research to visit the interviews as much time as possible in order to draw accurate conclusion on the investigation.

3.2.6.2

Secondary Research

Secondary data is the data that has been collected by others in previous research. It's not a data that was gathered by the research so it might not be necessary for the current investigation. Secondary data can be presented in the form of newspapers, academic journals and publications. Reviewing previous studies will give the research an insight into what has been done in the past and also the things that need to be done in relation to the research (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

The data that was gathered by other authors to accomplish their research can still be proven useful to other researchers. Some potential sources of secondary data could be government statistics, publications, past surveys and publications.

Advantage of using secondary data is that it would aid the investigation when accessing quality data while the complexity of the data that has been collected could prove to be a disadvantage to the research. The problem is with it could be add to manage the information because of the high volume of data that were gathered in the previous investigation which could hinder the progress of the investigation.

The author would be gathering secondary data in form of government statistics, academic journals and publications.

3.2.6.3

Qualitative Approach

As previously stated early that this investigation is going to be a qualitative method in form of exploratory studies in other for the research to obtain the possible result. This form of method is used by researchers to understand people's behaviour, attitude, interaction and experience and it doesn't include any numerical data.

With qualitative approach, the researcher would be able to describe a phenomenon from the interviewee's point of view when conducting the interviews.

According to Cameron and Price (2009) easy to analyse, face value and reliability are advantages of conducting a qualitative research. While Anderson (2010) outlined that researcher's presence while collecting data can influence interviewee responses and anonymity can also be problematic

Despite the fact that qualitative methods have it flaw, it's still the best suited way for the researcher to conduct this investigation as it's the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing the objectives that has been set out. The results are gathered from different participants in order to

know the challenges and benefits of implementing Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin Hotel Industry.

Chapter 4 Research Findings

4.1 Objective 1 “To investigate the methods of measuring the effectiveness of Social Media activities”

In 2011, Blanchard and Solis proposed eight methods in order to be able to measure the effectiveness of social media precisely which is the reason why one of the objectives of the study is investigating the methods that hotels in Dublin use in measuring the effectiveness of social media activities.

From the proposed eight methods, it was discovered in during this study that the participating businesses only focus on four methods and those methods are the businesses establishing a social media baseline where they list what they are measuring, creating an active timeline, monitor the volume of mentions and measure transactional precursors.

This research findings section is developed to see the insights of the hotels on how they measure the effectiveness of their hotels social media activities, thus providing an overall view on their methods.

Previous literature was taken into consideration when it comes to the findings and it was only until then that the opinions gathered during the interviews would be reviewed.

From the secondary research carried out by researchers, it was argued that some managers were worried that social media platform would affect amount of customer or potential customers that would visit their main website because a lot of customers would tend to communicate on either Facebook or twitter but once the company can operate their social media campaign effectively the visitors on their websites wouldn't not be affected the growth (Neff, 2010) and with social media marketing hotels would be able to increase the traffic on their websites along with their e-commerce avenue.

One of the respondents that was interviewed expressed similar view that was outlined above. In relation to the hotel visitors using the website as it was believed that the success of their social media platform can be measured with the visitors on their website.

“There is a number of KPI’s (Keep performance indicator) that we use to measure the effectiveness of social media and one is the traffic that is driven to the website” (Charlie).

All of the respondent agreed they pay attention to their social media activities and when the researcher conducted the interview it was discovered that all the respondent have different methods of measuring the effectiveness of social media activities in their hotels.

“Facebook have their own targeting so specific, you set a goal, do you want more likes, do you want to connect with people closer to your business” (Person X).

Upon more interviews, it became clear that the larger the hotel, the more complex their methods of measuring social media activities can be because in this new age of technology advancement social media platform campaigns can still be driven by the old way of marketing and focus on short-term effect (Dumenco, 2011).

“A call to action is something that you request people to do in an ad – For example Call us and mention “Facebook comp” to receive 20% discount. This way we know that the lead came from Facebook” (Keith).

It is crucial for hotels to keep their marketing campaign relevant to their customers so they can be different from their competitors and use this campaign to build a strong relationship with customers and enhance it with brand loyalty (Rooney, 2011) while also using it to develop a strategy that would allow different social media platforms to work as a unit in other to connect with more customers and stay ahead of their competitors (Vaynechuk, 2011).

“We you a programme, well a website we signed up to call Revinat and Revinat measures how we are against our competitors in the area” (Michelle).

This is where the firm need to measure the non-financial outcomes that may indicate the changes in consumers' behaviours resulted from their Social Media activities such as number of fans, followers, shares, recommendations, RSS subscriptions, content downloads

The firm measures the non-financial benefits which would indicate the a positive or negative social media activities (Blanchard and Solis, 2011).

"There is a system that we use call TRUST YOU, it shows a lot of data that our team analyse along with data captures from all our social media platform" (Nicky).

With all the interviews conducted with businesses in the industry, it was necessary to get some feedback from digital marketers that know more about the issue and when it comes to this particular objective as they are very vocal because they know the use of measuring one's social media activities is essential to a business.

"If your only care is just trying to build awareness of your brand you can measure page likes, reach and impressions" (Aaron).

While another digital marketer view on the objective was more different from the first interviewee since the number of marketers using social media has been increasing dramatically from the past couple of years. Social media is a smart selling tool that should be used only when your prospect are on it and it's a gigantic waste of time if they are not on it.

"Increase in sales first and foremost, especially online booking for before and after a campaign; if using ad's tracking code can be used to see if they convert into a sale; traffic to website coming from social media is the basic one but can be a good measure of effectiveness" (Lorcan).

4.2 Objective 2 “To discover how Social Media Contributes to meeting hotel goals”

The second objective in the study is knowing how the phenomenon of social media contributes to meeting the hotels goals. The size of the hotels factor into how social media platform, this objective was derived from other studies that has been conducted in the hospitality industry because their focus has been primarily based on how the platform influences decision making (McCarthy et al., 2010) or investigation into the performance of social media on hotels (Chan and Guillet, 2011).

Hotels are recommended by organisations and business colleagues when you are conducting a business travel but with leisure travellers they are likely to consult all other sources like Facebook, Twitter, Expedia etc. (McCarthy et al., 2010).

From the above literature, there was a correspondent from one of the interviewee that correspond with it.

“Our thing, is just to engage with people, to share travel tips because obviously we are brand hotel, a lot of people travel and use our hotels all over the world so we like people to take pictures of our hotels and to share with their friends and just raise brand awareness and obviously to promote Dublin as well (Michelle)”.

Just like the previous section, all the participant in the study have similar answers to the questions but because of their hotel sizes and management strategy their views on and motive with social media platforms are different.

“It plays a big part as it helps us to promote our image, if we have rooms to sell last minute we can post a flash sale, if we have new perks or features we can let the masses know in real time (Keith)”.

One interesting point that was derived from conducting the research is finding out the correlation between hotel sizes and their opening dates which is why the next two respondents are similar in terms of the objective with social media goals concerning their hotels.

“The goal with social media is about driving traffic to the website, the business is coming directly to us because with the use of social media is more cost effective to business and social media helps in

doing that. People making enquiry about our rooftop or looking to come to Dublin and we can direct them to the website (Charlie)”.

“it generates traffic which is part of our overall inbound marketing plan, the reach through social media is huge so it’s really trying to optimise that reach, capture that audience, re market to that audience so they become your customer (Person X)”.

From all the participant, this was the only different respond compared to the other. This was a genuine respond to the objective and it Marketers have applied numerous means to maintain the brand loyalty of their customers with social media marketing (Keller, 2008).

“The goal is just for it to enhance our brand, make sure we are ahead of our customers and when It comes to musical concerts or festivals around the area, people normally use social media as their first mean of communication (Nicky)”.

4.3 Objective 3 “To discover the most important Social Media networking site for hotels”

Over the past couple years, we have seen a dramatic rise of social media which has allowed customers the ability to communicate and be reached at any given time of day and anywhere (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010) and with this platform the hotel industry has been able to differentiate themselves and their competitors.

Which is why knowing which social media platform is mostly important to all the participating subjects and to no surprise, all the interviewee answers to this objective were very similar as all of them mentioned the biggest social media platform in the world and as of March 2016, the monthly active pages on Facebook is 1.7 Billion (Zephoria, 2016).

“Facebook is quite important as it allows you to target specific audience, whether it is age demographic, gender, spend, location. Facebook is also vital as most people use it heavily in everyday life so if you hit the right note with competitions (Keith)”.

With 42% of marketers saying that Facebook is essential to their business (Zephoria, 2016), it is understandable why the next interviewee believes the platform means a lot to their hotel.

"I'd say it's Facebook, it still drives traffic as it has the most engagement. Facebook is the only social media channel that shows conversion in google analytic platform. In Google analytic platform you can see that Facebook grows more than anything and that's where the conversion is coming from (Charlie)".

Since Facebook is the most popular social networking sites which unlocked the internet's potential and has allowed others social media platform to be more proactive hence the reason why the remaining interviewees in the study opt for more than just Facebook.

"It has to be Facebook, I mean Instagram and twitter are great for the hotel too but with Facebook we are able to drive traffic. From using TrustYou we are able to get analytic result that Facebook brings to the business (Nicky)".

"Instagram, Twitter and Facebook would generally be the 3 biggest channels. They are all important to the hotel because they are used differently (Person X)".

"We preferred Facebook and Twitter but we do have a strong focus on tripadvisor as well, we are very conscience on feedbacks about the hotel otherwise we won't make ourselves better. Probably Facebook is the most important, we probably post about every second day or so and with twitter maybe every second or third day but Facebook is the preferred one (Michelle)".

4.4 Objective 4 "To discover how Hotel convert social media followers into paying customers"

In the new of technology, social media has become a huge part of our everyday life and communicating online with businesses is now one of the things that we tend to do while roaming the internet.

According to a digital marketer expert that was interviewed in the hope of giving this research a view from both the hotels and no biased digital marketers.

"I think this is the problem most if not all businesses face when it comes to social media marketing. They try to sell too much. In my opinion social media should not be used as a sales tool, but as a way to build relationships with your target audience "(Aaron).

From the above statement that was made by a digital marketer, one of the interviewee was also on board of using social media for building relationship because the use of social media as a constant selling tool is going to be problematic with customers.

“For us with social media, we like to engage with the customers and not just push our promotions. So, we like to post real stories like if it’s our General Manager’s anniversary of how long they have been here so we use it for more of customer outreach than actually getting paying customers because what would happen with people is just giving brand awareness” (Michelle).

While the other participants in the study are more focused on the selling part than the relationship building. Before putting an offer out on the table, make sure you demonstrate how your product or service provides value to your audience (Social media today, 2011).

“We use remarketing ads to secure sales, we also offer promotional codes and run flash sales” (Keith).

“what we do is that we run competitions on social media platforms which would direct them back to our website, then once we have the data captured and inserted into our database” (Charlie).

While other participants in the study are more focused on more than selling and building a relationship but are instead paying attention to both factors.

“There are couple of ways in which we convert social media followers into paying customers, it’s not just about the hotel engaging in a conversation with the followers but we want them to experience what we have to offer first-hand” (Nicky).

“The most important way is through our website and booking engine & Social media platforms and through partnerships with affiliate partners” (Person X).

But one of the digital marketer that was interviewed thought that “it is nice when the businesses that your research is focused on are building an emotional connection between their target market and the business, by Building a marketing funnel using social media as one of the entry points would be very beneficial to them and their shareholders” (Lorcan).

4.5 Objective 5 “To investigate the different targets through different channels”

Segmentation is an important aspect of any businesses and during the course of the research it became apparent to the researcher that since they are different type of hotels they all have their own target markets from leisure, corporate and tourist because with segmentation it’s all about communicating with someone rather than communicating with no one.

With this objective, the researcher was hoping to limit the demographic of every participant in the study but since it’s the hospitality industry all participant was basically targeting everyone but since they are different types of social media they could be using them to target different groups.

With Facebook boasting an amazing 1.7 billion users and nearly 1/3 of those users engaging with brands online (Walters, 2016) makes sense to why most of the participant main social media channel is Facebook and with one of the participant specifically focusing on the social media channel to attract customers.

“We target leisure guests via Facebook and corporate guests via LinkedIn” (Keith).

While others are mostly targeting everyone on all their active social media channels as they aim on creating a more effective advertising messages to their audience on any social media platform (Wang, 2009).

“ We find that Facebook and twitter are the most important ones, I know Instagram has grown a lot more in the past couple of years. We could focus more on Instagram as we can be taking pictures of food and cocktails. With Facebook and twitter, we can directly talk to our clients, so we could private message if we needed to, we with Facebook and twitter, they are the ones we have been focusing on in the past four years” (Michelle).

“Again this is based on different audiences we create for different markets because we won’t be targeting a corporate retreat on Facebook since our location already mean something to them so targeting them on twitter and using Facebook for the tourist but overall, I wouldn’t say we target specific group on social media” (Person X).

“ Everyone is our target, we like updating all of our social media channels from posting pictures on Instagram, updating our status on Facebook in support of the boys in green at France or tweeting about our BBQ event. We are just reaching out to everyone since we have a lot to offer as a 4 hotel in Dublin” (Nicky).*

“ We don’t have specific targets on social media, the hotels target audience are people with interest in food and wine, design comfort, trying something new, people who know value in premium products. We put a lot of energy into our beverage, restaurant and roof top as well which is popular” (Charlie).

4.6 Objective 6 “To investigate the challenges and benefits of implementing Social Media Customer Relationship Management”

It has been mentioned earlier on how this concept is no longer new but since there isn’t a lot of research done on this study means the tenets has changed drastically as Kierzkowski et al., (1996) once points out that the retention of customers is just the perquisite for building relationships with them then Chan and Guillet (2011) went on by adding to that point by proving that valuable and interesting social media contents is very important for that same reason.

Knowing the benefits and the challenges of social customer relationship management is one of the most important objectives of the whole research and getting responses from both the hotels and digital marketers really aid the success of the study and with every hotel different from each other in sizes and location makes this objective more crucial to the study.

“ Another benefit is that you can personalise your interaction rather than just rolls out a generic response as this only irritates people and makes them feel like just a number. Challenges are that it takes up valuable time to do it properly and usually this is the sales and marketing manager who could be spending time on more important hotel business” (Keith).

There is a need for Special consideration needs to be given to facilitating swift responsiveness to issues at hand (Rohra and Sharma, 2012)

“The main challenge is time, it’s a very time consuming exercise, firstly time creating fresh, original content on a daily basis and secondly, because we are a 24-hour business, we can get interaction 24 hours via our social media channels. As the nature of social media is quite instantaneous, people expect responses very quickly” (Charlie).

“The challenge with Social Customer Relationship Management has to be the time and cost that goes into it, it’s time consuming when you are creating contents on daily basis for your potential customers and people expect you to do that and also reply to their demand which is understandable because we are a 24/7 business” (Nicky).

“I suppose the challenge is engaging the customers with the right contents, so not just sale all the time but actually engage with them and chat with them” (Michelle).

Almost all participants were facing the same challenges of implementing Social Customer Relationship Management and the digital marketers that were interviewed also had this to say about the system.

“Challenge is time and cost. Takes time to find the right one and train those who need to use it” (Lorcan) and “There are many challenges, the first that come to mind for me would be clearly defining your target audience, as you cannot build a relationship with everyone, you need to know exactly who you are targeting” (Aaron).

The Designers of Management Information System has been focussing on finding the correct means and technologies which would aid them in collecting, monitoring, analysing and processing the vast amount of information derived from social media (Olszak and Bartus, 2013).

“While the benefit of it is the wide spectrum of your targets, you can reach as much people as possible which is why the benefit outweighs the challenges” (Nicky).

“The benefit is the potential reach on social media, we can reach target markets that wouldn’t have been previously possible and also with Facebook, we can segment down our targeting so specifically

to ensure we are reaching the right markets, something that you just can't do with traditional media"
(Charlie).

Social media's common business objectives are their effort in increasing awareness for consumer destination and to build engagement with consumers (Hudson and Hudson, 2013).

"The benefit would be having your brand out there, showing what we can do, we would also try to show the offers we have on with our bars and push it through for couple of weeks" (Michelle).

"Social Media is such a huge part of everyone's lives, it is a space the hospitality industry need to be in to keep up with their competitive set, the tracking and results you can get from social media are also huge so it's is easy to see what platforms you need to focus more of your energies on. The challenge is the time we put into creating contents online" (Person X).

"Benefits are long term; Easier to manage multiple social channels, schedule multiple posts and tweets at once, build more conversations, create more engagement and exposure, keep track of those most likely to buy" (Lorcan).

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this penultimate chapter of the research, the research aims to have a discussion that overlooks the objective of the research and how those objective was answered. The sole aim of the study is to investigate the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin Hotel industry. Factors such as how the effectiveness of Social media activities are measured, how social media followers are converted into paying customers and knowing the challenges and benefits of implementing Social Customer Relationship Management were all taken into consideration.

The discussion is all about presenting the findings that were gathered during the course of the research relating to the chosen objectives that were presented in the previous chapter, while also looking at previous view of academia in collaboration with the data that was gathered from the participant interviews.

The overall purpose of this discussion chapter is simply to demonstrate the main gathered by the researcher during the course of the study.

5.2 Social Media Effectiveness

How the participants measure the effectiveness of their social media activities was one of the key revelations that was gathered during the course of this study because almost every single one was different. When queried about how they measure the effectiveness of their social media activities, the response from given by the interviewees shows that this was an aspect of their business that they pay huge attention to hence prompting the researcher to the notion of their company's creditability. With the participants knowing of the importance that this brings to their businesses with the transparency that was shown the interviews.

From this Solomon et al. (2013) proves that in this age of technology Marketers are tend to understand the crucial point of social media community, where it basically involves the contribution of people who have come together.

Interviewee 4 had mention how they use Facebook to set a goal whether they want more likes in their community or just want to connect with people closer to their business. Interviewee 2, used a number of keep performance indicator to drive traffic to their website, know how much engagement they are making on every social media the hotel is present on.

The professional marketers that were interviewed were able to contribute to this objective by mentioning the best way of measuring social media activity effectiveness is by measuring the reach of customers, also enlightening the researcher that there are built in analytics in some social media channels and how third party platforms can be helpful in measuring the effectiveness. Also other ways of measuring social media activities effectiveness is through brand exposure and brand engagement with customers.

5.3 Followers into Customers

How hotels in Dublin convert their social media followers into paying customers was another factor that was interesting throughout the interviews. When the researcher was trying to establish how to approach participants for the study it became clear that knowing how they can convert people online into their customers is one of the business biggest challenges because during the course of the interviews there wasn't any clear answer to the question which indicated to the research that there isn't a clear way to actually achieve this and the interviewees were asked how they convert social media followers into paying customers.

Social media comprehends many types of prospects to participate and may not suit everyone (Walaski, 2013) which is why some businesses tend to find they are a lot of challenges in managing their social media because it is not deemed appropriate or necessary to utilize the opportunities that these platforms bring to their business.

The reoccurring answer was that with converting followers into customers, interviewee 1 is all about sales and remarketing ad which are Basically ads that "follow you around" so if you look at let's say an Orlando holiday and then you leave the website because you thought that it was too expensive

but once you accept cookie on that site the ad is going to follow you everywhere. While interviewee 2 opt for a more sales area where it offered the followers discounts on rooms, drinks, food etc.

But the interview that was conducted with a professional digital marketer shows that businesses tries to sell too much on social media but instead by building a good relationship with their audience can lead to more business transaction.

5.4 Social Media Channels

Since they are couple of social media channels in the world now and people are finally moving on from just using Facebook, it was very important for this study to identify the hotels target through the use of different social media channels.

Technology isn't what it used to be anymore which is why technology advancement has greatly transformed communication henceforth influencing the manners of conducting business in the past couple of years (Etim and Huynh, 2015) and Social media users receive many recommendations without explicitly asking for them (Schulze, Scholer and Skiera, 2015).

When it comes to social media channel, the researcher has to mention consumer socialisation which is the use of social networking sites that provides effective online medium for individuals to communicate (Schiffman, 2008). Interviewee 1 of the research study revealed that they use Facebook to target leisure customers and LinkedIn to target corporate customers while the overall responses from the interviewees was that they target everyone via every available social media platform at their disposal but interviewee 5 uses Facebook and Twitter primarily for developing relationship with their customers and updating them on personal things like the anniversary of their general manager.

5.5 Challenges and Benefits

This is one of the most important aspect of the research if not the most important part of the whole research itself. Since they are not a lot of research or articles on Social Customer Relationship Management on Hotels, it was apparent to the research to discover the challenges and benefits of implementing this strategy.

The main rule of Social Customer Relationship Management strategy is to be customer eccentric who allows the businesses to focus heavily on the consumers and their relationships with them instead of the products or services they are rendering (Askool and Nakata, 2010). Interviewee 5 challenges with this strategy is the engagement with their customers because they have to post the right contents at the right time which could be challenging to do at times while interviewee 2 and 4 faces the same challenges in finding the right contents to post and also along with interviewee 1 the challenges also includes the valuable time it takes in managing their social media.

While according to the interview conducted with professional digital marketer indicate that the challenges of implementing Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin hotel industry is finding the right target audience and not having to build relationship with everyone because it's not possible to engage with everybody on social media.

With the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management strategy in a business, they must be transparent when attracting consumers by shaping an existing interaction with the consumers which would ultimately lead to a profitable and valuable relationship (Acker et al., 2011).

The benefits derived from implementing this strategy in this industry according to interviewee 1 is that the business is now a listening business whereby they tend to listen to their customers rather than the businesses dictating the correspondent and according to interviewee 2 it's all about the potential of social media because with it they can reach a lot of people especially with Facebook having 1.7 billion active users which corresponds with interviewee 3 spectrum of targets as the benefit derived from using this strategy.

Social Customer Relationship is useful for firms because it can help in increasing sales and can decreased costs once it has been implemented correctly (Woodcock et al., 2011, p 55) sides with interviewee 5 brand awareness benefit of implementing this strategy.

Social Customer Relationship Management does aim to create eloquent conversation of a high value in relationship between a business and their consumers (Greenberg, 2009) sides with the interview conducted with a professional digital marketer that believes the benefit of this strategy is the long term business prospect it brings to the hotels and how it creates a valuable engagement along with exposure of brand.

Chapter 6 Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendation

This is the final chapter of the research study and the purpose of this chapter is to summarise every result that has been presented in the previous chapters while this chapter will conclude with some recommendation for future research.

The area of Social Customer Relationship Management still has a lot to offer the hotel industry because they haven't been a lot of research done on the area which is the reason why people still doesn't know the potential it holds and the challenges of successfully implementing it.

The hotels that took part in this research have either devoted teams of their staff into this area or simply outsourced it to another party like Trust You and Revinate but the best result that would be concluded from research would be the fact that businesses in this industry has come to terms in the shift in marketing practices.

With new social media channels joining the platform, the hotels have to start looking for a new avenue rather than focusing on just Facebook or Twitter because the likes of Instagram, Pinterest and Google+ are now growing in numbers in terms of usage which is making the Implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management a priority for hotels than ever.

The research has stated earlier that the research is an Investigation into the Implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin Hotel Industry and the objectives of the research were listed in chapter 3. These objectives were chosen in order to carry out a thorough investigation and hopefully a successful one. The conclusions on these objectives are stated below.

To investigate the methods of measuring the effectiveness of Social Media activities

The purpose of this objective was simply to investigate how the hotels measures their social media activities, it was discovered during the course of the investigation that they are a lot of ways of measuring the effectiveness of social media activities because all the hotels that were interviewed gave different answers and also the digital marketers gave different answer which confirms the fact

that once the hotels implement Social Customer Relationship Management they are many alternatives at their disposal in measuring the effectiveness of their social media activities.

It can be concluded that the size and hotel goals have everything to do with how they measure the effectiveness of their hotel's social media activities. This is especially with the case of the hotels that are using third party platforms like Trust you, Revinat, google analytics, google reviews, tracking how they are engaging with their customers by measuring the reach of their engagement shows that all the hotels that were interviewed are customer centric and weren't measuring the effectiveness of social media activities through sales or brand exposure.

To discover how Social Media Contributes to meeting hotel goals

The hotel's goal has to be taken into consideration when embarking in the world of Social Customer Relationship Management because they would be moving on from the traditional Customer Relationship Management and the people they engage with on social media may affect the goals. As stated earlier, the objective here is simply to discover how Social Media contributes to meeting hotel goals. Certain things were discovered while conducting this investigation like how effective word of mouth can still be in this new age of technology and engagement with customers is something that all the hotels that were interviewed have in common along with the fact that the main goal with social media and hotels is the brand awareness it brings to their business along with the spectrum of reach that the platform brings to their business because with it they can have paying customers.

It was concluded by the researcher that social media contributes a lot to hotel goals in the Dublin hotel industry and it would be wise for the businesses in the industry to embrace the potential that the platform offers their business but not to just focus on Facebook because of its user size.

To discover the most important Social Media networking site for hotels

Social media phenomena is an intriguing topic for anyone interested in technology and it played an important part in this research because of the fact that the platform has not only changed the way

we live our daily lives but also because it has revolutionised the way businesses in this industry operates.

There is a lot of power behind social media users with their ability to share and like contents hence contributing to the phenomena of the platforms. With the research, the objective was to discover the most important social media networking site for the hotels in Dublin.

In the course of the study, the researcher found out that Facebook is the most important social media networking sites for all the hotels which is understandable because the platform is the best of its kind in terms of usage, share factor, engagement and also with the fact that it comes with its own analytic tool but the research was able to conclude that hotels are neglecting other social media networking site. The reason why these businesses are neglecting other social media networking site is really baffling because while conducting the study every interviewee said they reply to messages on social media every day or two but the researcher had conversation dating back months that still haven't been responded to by hotels in Dublin so one might believe that their most important social media networking sites isn't really for networking.

To discover how hotel, convert social media followers into paying customers

Since the use of traditional customer relationship management is about to be obsolete if not already obsolete, which is why this objective is important to the study because knowing how the hotels in Dublin convert social media followers into paying customer is apparent to the research.

With social media making communications easier, it makes it a lot harder for hotels to convert lookers into paying customers because since they can engage with them anytime and anywhere. It also means trying to get customers into the business would be costly for the hotels and since most of them are only interested in selling on social media rather than developing a meaningful relationship as they don't know what they want from social media but just to have a presence on it by using the platform to create value so the hotels could use promotional codes and sales tactic to convert social media followers into paying customers.

It has to be concluded by the researcher that the methods of converting social media followers into paying customers still eludes hotels in Dublin but since there is a rise in the industry, it would be of utmost importance for the hotels to know how they can successfully manoeuvre this objective.

To investigate the challenges and benefits of implementing Social Customer Relationship Management

The final objective of this research is the most important aspect of the whole study, investigating the challenges and benefits of implementing Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin Hotel industry. Social Media is now a big thing that hospitality industry as a whole should be trying to conquer because the potential it has is immense and the industry can use this avenue to bring gain investment because with hotels having access to social media platform, engaging in a relationship with their clients virtually whether by posting about their new manager or attraction they have in the hotel they have to be able to commit to a 24/7 involvement else their customers would find business somewhere else.

The challenges that was discovered during the course of the study is that hotels in Dublin find creating original contents to post on their social media challenging, the valuable time that goes into maintaining an online relationship with customers could be spent somewhere else while defining their target audience is also a challenge but since they are used to the traditional Customer Relationship Management they could hesitate in venturing into the advance Social Customer Relationship Management.

The benefits of implementing Social Customer Relationship Management in the Dublin hotels is that you could outsource that area of business to professional rather than training new recruits to focus on that aspect of business and during the course of the study, the research discovers that once the system has been implemented its used to manage several social media channels which makes life a lot easier for the hotels as they can communicate and engage with their customers and potential customers but the only benefits that the businesses only concern themselves with is the potential

that their strategy brings to their business in terms of the amount of people they could reach, the brand awareness it brings to their business.

To the researcher's conclusion the benefits of Social Customer Relationship Management outweighs the challenges due to the money spent in implementing the strategy for the hotels.

Limitations and Recommendation

The following were some limitations that the researcher found during this research, the hotels and digital marketers that were interviewed for this study were from different areas in Dublin city. As Budget and time limited the researcher from travelling around to conduct the research and they were a lot of last minute cancellations along with hotels not replying emails, Facebook post and tweets.

This is the first time a research on the topic is conducted in Dublin or Ireland, so future research might replicate the research in another city in the country or just focus on specific hotels. Future researchers could also think about using quantitative analyse whereby they could be in a good position to gather more data and be in better position to assess more participants for the study.

The researcher found it very hard to commit hotels into participating in the study which is why the data pool is very small and almost all of the interview participants were in favour of using Facebook rather than other social media networking sites and finds it hard to conduct interviews on hotel properties because none of them could leave hotel premises as they are high valued personnel.

Social Customer Relationship Management is a big avenue that needs to be exploited and with more hotels been built in the Dublin area, it should be recommended by the Irish Hotel Federation for every hotel to have a team on site that primary focus would be on this matter only because this is an issue that concerns all the businesses in this industry and it's the only way to be progressive and productive.

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Appendix1-Interview Transcription

Interview 1

Olu: Have you read the consent form about this research?

Keith: Yes, Olu, I have read the consent form and i have signed it.

Olu: Can you tell me about your professional background and your position in this business.

Keith: I have 25 years' sales experience mostly in media and hotels working with companies like Newstalk, Radio Nova, Titan worldwide, Dalata group, Carlton group and now Prem group with this hotel. I have a digital marketing diploma which I received from the Digital marketing institute, Dublin. My role here is Sales & Marketing Manager.

Olu: how do you convert followers into paying customers?

Keith: We use remarketing ads to secure sales, we also offer promotional codes and run flash sales for a limited amount of time.

Olu: Can you please elaborate on the meaning of Remarketing ads?

Keith: Sure, remarketing ads operate with cookies. Basically they are ads that "follow you around" so if you look at let's say an Orlando holiday and then you leave the website because you thought that it was too expensive. When you were on the website you agreed to the use of "Cookies" and this means that the website can track you after you leave. The next step is to design a remarketing ad which they will use to "Bring you back" so when you are on a completely different website you will start to see ads related to the Orlando holiday maybe with a discount to see if you will click and return to book.

Olu: Thanks for that elaboration, the next schedule question is what are the methods of measuring the effectiveness of social media activities?

Keith: We use Google analytics and Facebook insight. We will also sometimes use a call to action so that people must mention something specific to get a deal and we record this.

Olu: Sorry, but what is a call to action?

Keith: A call to action is something that you request people to do in an ad – For example Call us and mention "Facebook comp" to receive 20% discount. This way we know that the lead came from Facebook. Another idea for call to action is a dedicated phone line so if you say "Please call us on 1890-665544 and this phone line is used for nothing else in the business only for this competition you can add up the phone calls to judge response and therefore return on investment.

The simplest call to action we see every day – "Please Like, Share and comment to win our prize" because you are asking people to take an action for reward.

Olu: Back on the agenda, what is the hotel most important social media and why?

Keith: Facebook is quite important as it allows you to target specific audience, whether it is age demographic, gender, spend, location. Facebook is also vital as most people use it heavily in everyday life so if you hit the right note with competitions or deals the “Share factor” offers you additional reach.

Olu: How does the hotel deal with TripAdvisor and third party rating sites?

Keith: We welcome all feedback to the hotel and work hard for as much positive as possible. We make sure to respond to all reviews good or bad as quickly as possible, this means that people feel that their opinion is valid and worthwhile to us. We understand the power of these sites when people are making their “Buying decision” so we keep track not only of our rating but the ratings of our competitor hotels locally and we track this weekly.

Olu: Can you please highlight the goal with social media?

Keith: The goal with social media is simple. Word of mouth is still the most effective form of advertising (whether we like it or not) so the reach that social media provides is invaluable. Therefore, you must make sure to be engaging, responsive, relevant and appeal to as many demographics as possible. Targeting is vital and measurement to ensure a good return on investment.

Olu: Who are your targets through different social media channels?

Keith: We target leisure guests via Facebook and corporate guests via LinkedIn, we also use LinkedIn to look for potential staff.

Olu: How does social media contributes to meeting the hotel goals?

Keith: It plays a big part as it helps us to promote our image/if we have rooms to sell last minute we can post a flash sale/If we have new perks or features we can let the masses know in real time/It also promotes the brand to friends of people that like our page & posts.

Olu: How often do you respond to reviews and ratings online?

Keith: We respond daily and believe that it is important to be very proactive in addressing reviews quickly and efficiently.

Olu: What are the challenges and benefits of implementing social customer relationship management?

Keith: The benefit is definitely that you give the impression that you are a “Listening business” which allows clients/potential clients feel that their business is valued and that any issues will be addressed correctly. Another benefit is that you can personalise your interaction rather than just roll out a generic response as this only irritates people and makes them feel like just a number. Challenges are

that it takes up valuable time to do it properly and usually this is the sales and marketing manager who could be spending time on more important hotel business.

If you choose to bring in someone to handle this role specifically to save your managers time there is an added staff cost. Also if they are at a junior level you have to be sure that they understand the protocol involved in social media interaction especially if there is a brand involved that could be damaged by a misplaced comment or a simple grievance which escalates in a back and forth manner because this is all in public view.

[Interview 2](#)

Olu: Have you read the consent form about this research?

Charlie: Yes, this form here (pointing at a printed copy of the consent form). What we are given here in terms of information is quite generic, it's relevant to the hotel but it's not specifically mentioning the hotel image.

Olu: Can you tell me about your professional background and your position in this hotel.

Charlie: My professional background is 25 years in the hotel industry, i started from hotel management background in college, Shannon hotel school and worked in various different places, France, UK, Switzerland the US and Ireland. My Current position is the General Manager, this is my third general manager position and my third hotel opening as general manager.

Olu: how do you convert social media followers into paying customers?

Charlie: They are couple of ways in doing that and what we do is that we run competitions on social media platforms which would direct them back to our website, then once we have the data captured and inserted into our database. Once in the database, we can use the database to segment them out and do specific campaigns through emails or specific campaigns at later stage to show our latest offers and promotions. The other thing is that we target guest based on where they are visiting us from, people coming from our social media channels, we market to them and also use YouTube for campaigning as well. We have a marketing department, specifically with two girls looking after all the marketing and the digital media because its relevant now because the days of sending brochures out are over as we rarely get responds back from that.

Olu: What are the methods of measuring the effectiveness of social media activities?

Charlie: There is a number of KPI's (Keep performance indicator) that we use, one is the traffic that is driven to the website, the most engaged posts or tweets reach or engagement, profile visits, increases in the number of followers as the past couple of months we have the highest social media followers on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram compare to our competition in the city. A data caption

from social media and conversions on traffic from social media that the team looks at as they are numbers of keep performance indicator that they look at not just monthly or weekly but daily while they keep me feeding the data on the hotels performance.

Olu: What is the hotel most important social media and why?

Charlie: I'd say it's Facebook, it still drives traffic as it has the most engagement. Facebook is the only social media channel that shows conversion in google analytic platform. In Google analytic platform you can see that Facebook grows more than anything and that's where the conversion is coming from. When we opened first, were engaged in social media from the start because when we opened in 2013, people were already engaged on social media compared to my previous hotel openings in 2005 and 2013. It was only in the latter stages that social media began making waves and once we opened in 2013 Facebook and Twitter were already before Instagram came along with other social media platforms.

Olu: How does the hotel deal with TripAdvisor and third party rating sites?

Charlie: With TripAdvisor, we have a dedicated manager that responds to all the reviews and all management team will look at the review but only one responds on my behalf. Recently for other third party sites, we have installed a new system call Revinate and it takes various different platform by bringing them together. i.e. I can look at the dashboard in Revinate at any given time at any time of the day and week to see where we are in terms of social media performance, guest performance, third party website, guest feedback, online surveys as it puts it all together and it gives you an average of where you are and also provides you with comparison in real time about how good you are or not good you are. We have invested in this system and the second phase is using it to aid our online marketing but categorising all our guests and how we can target that audience in selling to them.

Olu: Can you please highlight the goal with social media?

Charlie: The goal with social media is brand awareness, talking about your brand on daily basis to a large audience by measuring revenue, it assists in driving people to become aware of the hotel when it comes to nights away, spa day, concerts, events and it is all about converting lookers into bookers. It's really about keeping our brand out there and creating awareness.

Olu: Who are your targets through different social media channels?

Charlie: We don't have specific targets on social media, the hotels target audience are people with interest in food and wine, design comfort, trying something new, people who know value in premium products. We put a lot of energy into our beverage, restaurant and roof top as well which is popular.

Olu: How does social media contributes to meeting the hotel goals?

Charlie: The goal with social media is about driving traffic to the website, the business is coming directly to us because with the use of social media is more cost effective to business and social media helps in doing that. People making enquiry about our rooftop or looking to come to Dublin and we can direct them to the website.

Olu: How often do you respond to reviews and ratings online?

Charlie: We have a response team, it might a day or two for the reviews to go up in third party sides. Nothing is left longer than a day or two.

Olu: What are the challenges and benefits of implementing social customer relationship management?

Charlie: The main challenge is time, it's a very time consuming exercise, firstly time creating fresh, original content on a daily basis and secondly, because we are a 24-hour business, we can get interaction 24 hours via our social media channels. As the nature of social media is quite instantaneous, people expect responses very quickly.

The second challenge is constantly coming up with original content that can be rolled out on a daily basis, and also finding that fine line within content between engaging and being overly sales driven.

The benefit is the potential reach on social media, we can reach target markets that wouldn't have been previously possible and also with Facebook, we can segment down our targeting so specifically to ensure we are reaching the right markets, something that you just can't do with traditional media.

[Interview 3](#)

Olu: Have you read the consent form about this research?

Nicky: Yes, I have read the consent form, no problem with that and I have signed it

Olu: Can you tell me about your professional background and your position in this hotel.

Nicky: So my Professional background is that I trained in Hotel Management at the Shannon college of hotel management at county Clare and that's a four years' course which involve two years in the college, two years out getting industry experience so I spent a year Switzerland and my second year in Shannon training and back into college where I was the first person to become a general manager before graduating. I am the General manager of this establishment for the past three years, I have also worked in the UK with a career spanning over 22 years as Hotel General Manager.

Olu: how do you convert social media followers into paying customers?

Nicky: There are couple of ways in which we convert social media followers into paying customers, it's not just about the hotel engaging in a conversation with the followers but we want them to experience what we have to offer first hand. For example, today is Friday and we still have couple of

rooms to let so what we are doing now is trying to get leisure customers to come in for the weekend with our new BBQ event that's currently running on our social media platforms. We target people based on where they are visiting Dublin from and how we can make them feel welcome, We have a department that overlook this specific aspect of business with one manager and two assistant, this is a relevant department for the hotel.

Olu: What are the methods of measuring the effectiveness of social media activities?

Nicky: There is a system that we use call TRUST YOU, it shows a lot of data that our team analyse along with data captures from all our social media platform. With Trust You our hotel gains more Google reviews which can enable use measure the effectiveness that social media provides. We just launch our BBQ event last week and had a lot of bloggers here in the hotel which made the hotel trend for hours because they were all blogging about the event.

Olu: What is the hotel most important social media and why?

Nicky: It has to be Facebook, I mean Instagram and twitter are great for the hotel too but with Facebook we are able to drive traffic. From using Trust You we are able to get analytic result that Facebook brings to the business, personally I use twitter but Facebook has to be the most important one for the hotel as we also do sponsoring on Facebook so you don't have to like our page and our business would still show up on you feed from time to time. The platform is remarkable for business.

Olu: How does the hotel deal with TripAdvisor and third party rating sites?

Nicky: We have good rating on TA (Trip Advisor) with a certificate on excellence which is why there is one person that attends to the website and other rating sites like Expedia and booking.com and with Trust You there is a dashboard that Analyse and benchmark the hotel's performance against competitors to make sure that we are aware of everything as they happen with guest performance, third party website, guest feedback, online surveys as it puts it all together and it gives you an average of where you are and also provides you with comparison in real time.

Olu: Can you please highlight the goal with social media?

Nicky: The ultimate goal with social media has to be brand awareness, the spectrum that social media provides when talking about your brand a large audience by measuring revenue, It's really about keeping our brand out there and creating awareness for everyone we want to know about our hotel and what we offer for both leisure and corporate guest.

Olu: Who are your targets through different social media channels?

Nicky: Everyone is our target, we like updating all of our social media channels from posting pictures on Instagram, updating our status on Facebook in support of the boys in green at France or tweeting

about our BBQ event. We are just reaching out to everyone since we have a lot to offer as a 4-star hotel in Dublin.

Olu: How does social media contribute to meeting the hotel goals?

Nicky: The goal is just for it to enhance our brand, make sure we are ahead of our customers and when it comes to musical concerts or festivals around the area, people normally use social media as their first mean of communication and we make sure to get back to them as soon as possible, so the platform drives a lot of businesses our way.

Olu: How often do you respond to reviews and ratings online?

Nicky: There is a team that responds to the reviews every day, it might take another day to go up on the host site but we make sure we reply to all reviews on the day they are posted regardless of the contents whether it's a good or bad. We make sure we reply on that day.

Olu: What are the challenges and benefits of implementing social customer relationship management?

Nicky: The challenge with Social Customer Relationship Management has to be the time and cost that goes into it, it's free for non-business personnel to use it but when it comes to hospitality business like us the cost is expensive and time consuming when you are creating contents on daily basis for your potential customers and people expect you to do that and also reply to their demand which is understandable because we are a 24/7 business. While the benefit of it is the wide spectrum of your targets, you can reach as much people as possible which is why the benefit outweighs the challenges.

[Interview 4](#)

Olu: Have you read the consent form about this research?

Person X: Yes, I have read but I will still be liked to be recorded as anonymous in your final presentation.

Olu: Ok, that's understandable. Can you please tell me about your professional background and your position in this business?

Person X: I am 20 years working in hospitality from reception to reservations to sales to revenue management and now online marketing for one of the most popular hotel in Dublin.

Olu: How do you convert social media followers into paying customers?

Person X: We have many different methods for converting our social media followers into an actual paying customer but the most important way is through our website and booking engine & Social media platforms and through partnerships with affiliate partners.

Olu: what are the methods of measuring the effectiveness of social media activities

Person X: Tracking all elements of what you are doing so you can see what is working and what is not - social media especially Facebook have their own targeting so specific, you set a goal, do you want more likes, do you want to connect with people closer to your business. your marketing campaign is based on what you want to do, the tracking is also based around the campaign, if you want more newsletter signup, you run a campaign on Facebook and you ensure you have tracking on the signups button so you can track your results.

Olu: what is the hotel most important social media and why?

Person X: Instagram, Twitter and Facebook would generally be the 3 biggest channels. They are all important to the hotel because they are used differently.

Olu: how does the hotel deal with TripAdvisor and third party rating sites?

Person X: We try and ensure the guest experience is as positive as possible and that why we don't have to deal with any issues. We view TripAdvisor as a partner, it is a huge respected brand and you need to work with these brands to get your product in front of as many people as you can. We do the same thing with other rating sites, our mission is to provide excellent services to our guests and hopefully they keep giving us positive reviews.

Olu: can you please highlight the goal with social media?

Person X: ultimately to get more paying business into all of our hotels and food and beverage outlet and build brand awareness across our portfolio of hotels and restaurants.

Olu: who are your targets through different social media channels

Person X: Again this is based on different audiences we create for different markets because we won't be targeting a corporate retreat on Facebook since our location already mean something to them so targeting them on twitter and using Facebook for the tourist but overall, I wouldn't say we target specific group on social media.

Olu: how does social media contributes to meeting the hotel goals?

Person X: it generates traffic which is part of our overall inbound marketing plan, the reach through social media is huge so it's really trying to optimise that reach, capture that audience, re market to that audience so they become your customer.

Olu: how often do you respond to reviews and ratings online?

Person X: all the time, daily, you have to make sure nothing slips past you in this business.

Olu: What are the challenges and benefits of implementing social customer relationship management.

Person X: Social Media is such a huge part of everyone's lives, it is a space the hospitality industry need to be in to keep up with their competitive set, the tracking and results you can get from social media are also huge so it's is easy to see what platforms you need to focus more of your energies on. The challenge is the time we put into creating contents online.

[Interview 5](#)

Olu: Have you read the consent form about this research?

Michelle: Yes, I read it but wasn't able to print it out on time for the interview but I'm ok with the consent form. It's quite straightforward and the hotel is happy to participate in your research.

Olu: Can you tell me about your professional back-ground and your position in this business?

Michelle: Yes, I have worked here for 6 years, I started off in our events department, I worked there for 3 years then I moved to sales for a more proactive side, on the road, trying to get new business and basically trying to get the phones to ring and then I moved from sales executive to sales manager which is a promotion within the sales department and now I'm actually going for the acting direction of sales, so I will be managing a team, so at the moment I'm still a sales manager but would be managing a team in couple of weeks, so yes I have been here for 6 years and in the hotel industry for 12 years in total.

Olu: How do you convert social media followers into paying customers?

Michelle: For us with social media, we like to engage with the customers and not just push our promotions. So, we like to post real stories like if it's our General Manager's anniversary of how long they have been here so we use it for more of customer outreach than actually getting paying customers because what would happen with people is just giving brand awareness. That's what we would use it for most of the time because then down the line they might become paying customers, so initially we might push things through that it but you might not get a booking for pushing hotel rooms on there but I think people like to interact with hotels on twitter and Facebook, so we do it to engage with customers more so because you wouldn't get a booking with a customer on social media all the time that interacts with the hotel.

Olu: what are the methods of measuring the effectiveness of social media activities

Michelle: We you a programme, well a website we signed up to call Revinat and Revinat measures how we are against our competitors in the area. This kind of measures feedback more so like the likes of booking.com and Expedia or TripAdvisor and we use Revinat to see and benchmark ourselves against our competitors of our the good of feedback we get from client after they depart. So that's how we would measure and more so we don't really measure Facebook or twitter, we just like

putting things out there, we don't actually analyse it that much to be honest, we analyse TripAdvisor more so because of the feedbacks.

Olu: what is the hotel most important social media and why?

Michelle: We preferred Facebook and Twitter but we do have a strong focus on TripAdvisor as well, we are very conscience on feedbacks about the hotel otherwise we won't make ourselves better. Probably Facebook is the most important, we probably post about every second day or so and with twitter maybe every second or third day but Facebook is the preferred one. We had interest in Pinterest and Instagram but we thought we might as well focus on Facebook and twitter and do them really well rather than us trying to do everything.

Olu: how does the hotel deal with TripAdvisor and third party rating sites?

Michelle: As I said, we used Revinatate to engage, we know how many stars we have. We like to respond back to the client by thanking them for the review and if they mention or highlight that they like the location, we thank them for that or if they find our staff friendly, we thank them again and also if they raise any issue we can pass it on to the appropriate department and also thank the guest for bringing it to our attention. So that's what we do and we have a target where we have to write back to every single review good or bad, so we can't just leave a review not written back to and also we have a 90% target to write back to all reviews even if they are really good ones but we definitely have to write back to all bad reviews.

Olu: can you please highlight the goal with social media?

Michelle: Our thing, is just to engage with people, to share travel tips because obviously we are brand hotel, a lot of people travel and use our hotels all over the world so we like people to take pictures of our hotels and to share with their friends and just raise brand awareness and obviously to promote Dublin as well. People like taking pictures of cocktails and stuff like that putting on social media and saying they were here, I mean getting someone to say they were here and had a fabulous time, it's so much more important than us just promoting. I mean it's more important because they are checking in on Facebook and stuff like that, so for us that would be a good thing for our social media.

Olu: who are your targets through different social media channels?

Michelle: We find that Facebook and twitter are the most important ones, I know Instagram has grown a lot more in the past couple of years. We could focus more on Instagram as we can be taking pictures of food and cocktails. With Facebook and twitter, we can directly talk to our clients, so we could private message if we needed to, we with Facebook and twitter, they are the ones we have been focusing on in the past four years.

Olu: how does social media contributes to meeting the hotel goals?

Michelle: It's hard to know what booking came through with social media but I do think it gives an awareness when you posting pictures of dinners or an high profile events, so it's nice that our hotel is associated with it. It's for brand awareness but you might not so it directly straightaway and down the line, they might know that the event was held here and they have seen it on Facebook but it's just for us to be proactive on it and for us to share ideas and travel trips, pictures. We are not necessary doing the hard sale on Facebook and twitter, we are not trying to get them to book a room, we are just saying look at our rooms, if you are visiting next year would you consider staying over here because I think hotels or businesses that uses Facebook to just do promotion all the time will prompt people to unlike your page and that's not what we want. We want people to start saying our contents is good not that we are just pushing things to them on social media.

Olu: how often do you respond to reviews and ratings online?

Michelle: With reviews, we look at them daily. I work Monday to Friday and look at them daily, the reception team would look at TripAdvisor over the weekend and I can respond to booking.com and Expedia just for reviews, so customers that have stayed and send their feedback form can respond as well. So do like to respond to all channels that have a feedback theme, so daily is when we respond.

Olu: What are the challenges and benefits of implementing social customer relationship management?

Michelle: The benefit would be having your brand out there, showing what we can do, we would also try to show the offers we have on with our bars and push it through for couple of weeks. We wouldn't put it up every day, you don't want overdo it. I suppose the challenges is engaging the customers with the right contents, so not just sale all the time but actually engage with them and chat with them. Telling them about our staffs, our anniversaries that we are having here and what type of items we have in the hotel and the features that we have. I suppose, the challenge is the good contents so that people don't unlike your page and the benefit is both brand awareness and the people we can reach because you never know who is looking as you might be thinking locally but with Facebook, Americans can be looking and they could be our potential customers, Australians, it's world-wide as you are on a global platform really and spreading your wings because you are not just emailing one person but spreading the word worldwide.

Digital Marketers Interviews

Interview 1

Olu: What are the methods of measuring effectiveness of social media activities?

Aaron: This would really depend on your objectives. If you care just trying to build awareness of your brand you can measure page likes, reach and impressions. If you are trying to boost sale you can measure reach / click through rate (to website) / purchases and calculate your cost effectiveness of advertising. This can all be tracked using cookies and tracking codes on ads. Most social media platforms come with built in analytics but there are also other 3rd party platforms such as Buffer, Hootsuite and Sprout Social to name a but a few that are all very useful.

Olu: How does businesses convert online followers into paying customers?

Aaron: I think this is the problem most if not all businesses face when it comes to social media marketing. They try to sell too much. In my opinion social media should not be used as a sales tool, but as a way to build relationships with your target audience. The better the relationship the more likely someone will be to buy from you. The goal is to stay at the front of the person's mind so when the time comes for them to need your product, you are the first that they think of.

Brands / Businesses should be doing this by creating valuable content that their users are interested in to engage them and start conversations, the more people talk about you the bigger your brand awareness will grow.

Olu: How social media can contribute to meeting businesses goals?

Aaron: Again, this depends on what the business goals are, and this is a mistake a lot of businesses make. They don't know what they want from their social media. Most businesses (SME's) don't have a social media strategy, they are all just doing it, or attempting to do it, because they have to. Therefor they fail at it... think they are getting no direct business from it and stop. The problem is not that social media doesn't work, it's that they did not know what they wanted form it.

Olu: What are the challenges and benefits of implementing social customer relationship management?

Aaron: There are many challenges, the first that come to mind for me would be clearly defining your target audience, as you cannot build a relationship with everyone, you need to know exactly who you are targeting.

Second, like the last question, clearly defining your business / social media goals and setting Keep Performance Index's so you can measure success.

Third I think any business that already has some form of CRM system in place are very hesitant about moving into an 'unknown' space. They may have already invested heavily in other platforms and don't want to use social, or maybe they just don't know how to integrate them together.

[Interview 2](#)

Olu: What are the methods of measuring effectiveness of social media activities?

Lorcan: Increase in sales first and foremost, especially online booking for before and after a campaign; if using ad's tracking code can be used to see if they convert into a sale; traffic to website coming from social media is the basic one but can be a good measure of effectiveness none the less, the obviously impressions (brand exposure), likes (brand engagement); shares and retweets (word of mouth (brand evangelists)

Olu: How does businesses convert online followers into paying customers?

Lorcan: it is nice when the businesses that your research is focused on are building an emotional connection between their target market and the business. By Building a marketing funnel using social media as one of the entry points would be very beneficial to them and their shareholders.

Olu: How social media can contribute to meeting businesses goals?

Lorcan: Depending on the business goals because they may be varied, some goals might involve just raising their customers and meeting target goals or increasing their brand awareness.

Olu: What are the challenges and benefits of implementing social customer relationship management?

Lorcan: Challenge is time and cost. Takes time to find the right one and train those who need to use it. Benefits are long term; Easier to manage multiple social channels, schedule multiple posts and tweets at once, build more conversations, create more engagement and exposure, keep track of those most likely to buy.

Consent Form

Dear Candidate,

My name is Oluwadamilare Rasheed; I am looking to interview a number of hotel personnel in order to gather research for my dissertation study. The focus of this study is on the use of social media by the hotels in Dublin.

Social Media: An investigation into the implementation of Social Customer Relationship Management in Dublin Hotel.

I believe that the only way for my dissertation to be successful is to gather opinions from these businesses on this topic.

I have prepared a number of questions that I will aid me with the research topic.

The Interview may take 15 to 30 minutes and it will be recorded so that the author can transcribe the interview.

All data provided will be anonymised and confidentiality is ensured as all data collected will be Stored securely.

Participants are not required to provide any personal information.

In accordance with The Freedom of Information Act the interviewee will have access to the information at any stage should they require it.

All candidates have the choice to opt out of the Interview process at all times.

The author is Oluwadamilare Rasheed and can be contacted at the following email address: x10360193@student.ncirl.ie or at olurasher@gmail.com should the participant have an additional queries or concerns.

Thank you for your participation and time,

Yours Sincerely,

Olu Rasheed.

Please indicate that you have read and understood the information above and that you hereby consent to participate in this research.

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____